

Table 1

Results of the federal election in Canada by province, 14 October 2008.

Provinces	% Vote (seats)					
	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Bloc	Green	Others
Newfoundland & Labrador	17	47 (6)	34 (1)		2	
Prince Edward Island	36 (1)	48 (3)	10		5	1
Nova Scotia	26 (3)	30 (5)	29 (2)		8	7 (1)
New Brunswick	39 (6)	32 (3)	22 (1)		6	1
Quebec	22 (10)	24 (14)	12 (49)	38	4	(1)
Ontario	39 (51)	34 (38)	18 (17)		8	1
Manitoba	49 (9)	19 (1)	24 (4)		7	1
Saskatchewan	54 (12)	15 (2)	25		6	
Alberta	65 (27)	11	13 (1)		9	2
British Columbia	44 (22)	19 (5)	26 (9)		9	2
Northwest Territories	38	14	41 (1)		5	2
Nunavut	35 (1)	29	28		8	
Yukon	33	45 (1)	9		13	
CANADA	37 (143)	26 (77)	18 (37)	10 (49)	7	2 (2)

Total votes cast: 13,832,972.

Turnout: 59.1%.

Source: Elections Canada (www.elections.ca).

Given the focus on the economy and the developing global economic crisis, the Harper government began the new parliamentary session with an ‘economic statement’

that gave little credence to the seriousness of the economic situation. Claiming that Canada’s economy was “fundamentally sound” and that the forthcoming budget would show “a modest surplus”, the statement included several proposals (none of which had been mentioned during the election campaign) that could not but inflame the opposition parties. Signaling its intention to introduce measures to eliminate the public financing of political parties, suspend the right to strike for public service employees, and restrict pay equity claims for female public employees, the Conservative government suddenly found itself facing the prospect of defeat in the House of Commons on a motion of confidence brought by the three opposition parties. In addition, the three parties signed a formal coalition agreement providing for a Liberal–NDP coalition government, supported by the Bloc, to assume power if the government was defeated. To avoid such a possibility, the Prime Minister arranged for the Governor General to prorogue Parliament for nearly two months.

By the time Parliament resumed sitting, the Government had retreated from all its previous aggressive moves, and produced a new budget explicitly designed to attract Liberal support. The new Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, who had signed the coalition agreement with some reluctance, quickly announced his support for the budget, thereby ending the immediate parliamentary crisis. It is not known whether the Conservative government, chastened by its near defeat, will seek similar cross-party accommodation on other policies during this parliamentary session. It is perhaps equally possible that one of the two main parties, sensing electoral opportunity, will precipitate yet another election within a year or two. While recent trends in Canadian federal politics have made it clear that minority governments are no longer the exception, Canadian politicians have yet to develop a formula for making them work.

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The parliamentary election in Lithuania, October 2008

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The fifth regular parliamentary election in Lithuania, held on 12 and 26 October 2008, marks an extended period

of electoral activity. The 2004 general election to the *Seimas* had closed a political marathon: the referendum on EU membership, May 2003; the impeachment of the President, April 2004 and the preliminary presidential election; and the first European election, June 2004. Similarly, the 2008 parliamentary election inaugurated a period of

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heightened electoral activity, with the presidential election looming in May 2009 and the election for the European Parliament in June 2009.

The Conservatives won the 2008 general election and formed a right-of-centre coalition government with two liberal parties and a new populist party. Two leftish parties, the Agrarians (*Valstiečių liaudininkų sąjunga*) and the Social Liberals (*Naujoji sąjunga/Socialliberalai*) dropped out of the *Seimas*; and one new populist party, the National Resurrection Party (*Tautos prisikėlimo partija*), entered the *Seimas*. Voter volatility¹ plummeted after a steady increase in consecutive general elections in 1996, 2000, and 2004; and the fragmentation of the party system diminished slightly. Compared with the 2000 and 2004 ‘earthquake’ elections, the 2008 poll was much less ‘seismic’; the stabilisation of the Lithuanian party system, perhaps politics in general, is not just wishful thinking.

1. Background

The rightist Popular Front (*Sąjūdis*) had won a landslide victory in the 1990 Constitutive election but the leftist ex-communist Labour Democratic Party (*Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija*) enjoyed an absolute parliamentary majority after the 1992 election. The Conservatives (*Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai*), however, made a triumphant come-back at the 1996 election. The winner of the 2000 parliamentary election was the so-called ‘new politics’ block consisting of political neophytes, the Liberals and the Social Liberals (*Naujoji sąjunga/Socialliberalai*); at the 2004 election, another newcomer, the Labour Party (*Darbo partija*), appeared. As no party held 50% of the parliamentary seats, the compromises typical of coalition governments continued. Disillusionment with the frail governing coalition, often submerged in parliamentary infighting, gave rise to fears for the management of Lithuania’s affairs and eroded support for the ruling parties.

2. Electoral system

The 2008 parliamentary election was held in two rounds with a two-week break between the first poll and the run-off. The Lithuanian *Seimas* consists of 141 MPs elected for a four-year term. The electoral system is mixed: 71 mandates are contested in single-member districts and 70 mandates are based on a country-wide multi-member constituency. Electors have two ballots: one for a candidate in a single-mandate district and one for a party. In a single-mandate constituency, a candidate who obtains more than 50% of the vote in the first round wins the seat. Otherwise, the two front-runners contest a run-off, where a simple majority is decisive. In the multi-member constituency, a turnout of more than 25% is required for the election to be valid. The threshold for party lists is 5%; for coalitions, 7%.

In earlier elections, in the multi-member constituency, voters were required to rate five candidates from a party’s list. The voter ratings were then compared with party ratings, which reflected a candidates’ intra-party position, but party ratings took precedence over voters’ ratings. In April 2008, parliament ‘democratised’ the rating system by virtually abolishing party ratings. The amendment to the electoral law stipulates that only voters’ ratings matter; that is, the final candidate’s position on the list after a general election depends on the number of ‘priority votes’ received from electors’ ratings.²

3. Parties and coalitions

Altogether 15 parties and one coalition stood in the 2008 parliamentary election. The only coalition was *Dabo partija + jaunimas* (Labour Party and youth).

In February 2008, the Homeland Union swallowed a marginal Lithuanian Nationalist Union (*Lietuvių tautininkų sąjunga*) and merged with the Christian Democrats in May 2008. The right-wing Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats, colloquially called the Conservatives, is led by ex-prime minister Andrius Kubilius and represents traditional values: a market economy, moral conservatism, patriotism, the toughest position towards Russia, and religious predilections.³ The party has the most stable electorate among all the parliamentary parties.⁴

The Liberal Movement (*Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis*) and the Liberal and Centre Union (*Liberalų ir centro sąjunga*) had once been the same political organisation but, due to personal leadership feuds, the Liberal Movement splintered off and created a separate party in 2006.⁵ The Liberal Movement is headed up by Eligijus Masiulis, a politician in his early 30s; the Liberal and Centre Union is led by the controversial former mayor of Vilnius, Artūras Zuokas. The strength of the Liberals is in the cities, and both wings stand for the free market and liberal principles, although Zuokas’ party is more conservative on moral issues.

The Labour Party (*Darbo partija*) is the most ‘centre’ party on various conflict dimensions (*Ramonaitė, 2008*), and was headed up by the Russian-born business tycoon Viktor Uspaskich. The party’s support lies in rural areas and among Russian-speakers (*Mačiūnas, 2008*). This is a populist party, standing for regulation of the economy, the reduction of income tax, and the doubling of pensions. The Labour Party spoke of reforming the electoral and administrative systems by abolishing the multi-member district and the counties, and allowing mayors to be elected by

² But the party rating remained crucial if both candidates received the same number of ‘priority votes’.

³ After having emerged out of the *Sąjūdis* pro-independence movement in 1993.

⁴ Of the party’s voters in the 2004 general election, 87% voted for the Homeland Union in 2008 (*Mačiūnas, 2008*). Some 72% of these supporters are over 50 years (*Mačiūnas, 2008*) and the party’s strength lies in urban areas.

⁵ Both liberal parties have considered merging again, which would reduce the number of effective parliamentary parties.

¹ Voter volatility was calculated according to the formula: $V = \sum |p_i, t+1 - p_i, t|/2$ (Pedersen, 1979).

a direct vote. Whereas Labour was the largest party after the 2004 *Seimas* election, it was hit by financial scandals and subsequent legal investigation during the campaign.⁶

The Social Democratic Party (*Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija*), led by the current Prime Minister, Gediminas Kirkišas, was the second largest grouping in parliament. The Social Democrats based their electoral campaign on such leftist ideas as universal social justice, solidarity, progressive taxation, and technological innovation. The party enjoys support among women and older people, especially in rural areas, small towns, and municipalities with successful mayors.⁷

The radical Order and Justice Party (*Partija Tvarka ir Teisingumas*) was led by the impeached President, Rolandas Paksas. The party still possessed anti-establishment features in its rhetoric, being socially conservative and somewhat 'pro-Russian' in its stances, which places the party on the centre-right (Ramonaitė, 2008). The staunchest electoral support for Order and Justice comes from northwest Lithuania, the patrimony of Paksas.

The National Resurrection Party (*Tautos prisikėlimo partija*) was the principal newcomer at the 2008 general election. The party, established just half a year before the election campaign started and nicknamed 'clowns' and 'teletubbies', was led by a TV showbiz fat cat, Arūnas Valinskas and a group of his friends and relatives. Valinskas ridiculed politics with messages such as "the ship is sinking, at least with us it will be more fun" and dressed as mental patients in straitjackets. The party did not elaborate a programme; instead, Valinskas delivered a three-page manifesto with the message: "Clean politics for Lithuania". The party was very much a one-man show; it had no party branches and was led by a prominent TV personality.

4. Electoral campaign

The month-long electoral campaign started in a different legal milieu from the 2004 election.⁸ In June 2008, parliament banned political advertising on television and radio. The electoral law also prohibited commercials and advertisements free of charge and on the front pages of the print media. The Internet became a very important outlet for political advertising; for the first time ever, the Order and Justice Party made a movie for the election which was shown at cinemas across the country.⁹

The electoral campaign revealed the 'normalisation' of political conflict, since virtually all the parties discussed socio-economic issues in the wake of high inflation and the global economic downturn.¹⁰ The content of the left-right dimension was filled with traditional 'Western'

problems about economic management, levels of taxation, the redistribution of wealth, and the like. The right-wing parties, such as the Conservatives and the Liberals, emphasised reducing taxes, creating favourable conditions for entrepreneurs and enterprises, whereas the leftist parties such as the Social Democrats and Agrarians emphasised the role of the state by focusing on broad social entitlements, social justice, and progressive taxation. The old political conflict based on the communist/anti-communist cleavage dwindled (Ramonaitė, 2008). Some commentators (Kuolys, 2008) even regarded the electoral campaign as 'dull' due to the absence of colourful political advertisements and commercials.

The election was accompanied by a referendum on extending the Ignalina nuclear power station. The first reactor was closed in 2004 and the second is to be shut down by the end of 2009. However, all the parliamentary parties except the Conservatives called for a consultative referendum on extending the second reactor despite the binding EU accession treaty. The centre-left government aimed to both increase turnout and have additional reasons for further political consultations with the European Commission. Although the referendum was supported by 88.6% of the votes cast, it failed as it did not meet the required 50% of registered voters.¹¹

5. Election results

Turnout was 48.6% in the first round, and plummeted to barely 32.4% in the run-off. Voter turnout has been declining since 1992 for several reasons, but principally because of low trust in democratic institutions, which had failed to deliver the high living standards during the tumultuous post-communist transition to democracy and a market economy.¹²

Of the 15 parties standing for election, only six crossed the 5% threshold; and the only coalition, *Dabot partija + jaunimas*, crossed the 7% threshold. The Conservatives emerged as the victorious party with 19.7% of the vote and 45 seats, giving the party 32% of the seats in the *Seimas*. See Table 1.

The results from the multi-member constituency showed that although the Homeland Union's support rose to 19.7% (from 14.8% in 2004), the number of Conservative die-hard supporters remained much the same. The Conservatives increased their seats in the *Seimas* with 18 mandates in the first round and added another 27 seats in the run-off. The Liberals only just scrapped the threshold: the Liberal Movement won 5.7% of the vote whilst the Liberal and Centre Union won 5.3% (less than half of its vote in 2004). The Liberal Movement doubled its MPs after the second round, whereas the Liberal and Centre Union had to be content with only three additional mandates.

The result for the National Resurrection Party was truly astonishing; although basically a one-man show, it came

⁶ Uspaskich even fled to Moscow and unsuccessfully sought political asylum; afterwards, he returned to Lithuania.

⁷ The Social Democrats won the most seats and most of the mayoralties at the 2007 municipal elections. Some 58% of the party's electorate are women and 61% of its support comes from people older than 50 years (Mačiūnas, 2008).

⁸ When the Labour Party had swamped the media with video and audio commercials to canvass for votes.

⁹ Order and Justice built their campaign on whitewashing Paksas, despite being banned from public office following impeachment.

¹⁰ In August 2008, the inflation rate was 12%; in September, 11%; and in October, 10.5%.

¹¹ Only 48.4% of eligible voters took part in the poll.

¹² Turnout in the two rounds of the 1992 election was 75.3% and 64.8%, respectively; in 1996, it was 52.9% and 38.2%; before the 2000 election, the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats abolished the second round; before the 2004 election, the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals re-introduced it, with turnouts of 46% and 40.2%.

Table 1

Results of the general election in Lithuania, 12 and 26 October 2008.

Party	% vote (single-member districts)	% vote (multi-member district)	Seats	% seats	+/- cf. 2004
<i>Valstiečių liaudininkų sąjunga</i> (Agrarians)	5.2	3.7	3	2.1	–7
<i>Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai</i> (Conservatives) ^a	19.7	19.7	45	32	+20
<i>Darbo partija</i> (Labour Party)	7.5	9.0	10	7.1	–29
<i>Tvarka ir teisingumas</i> (Order and Justice Party)	12.0	12.7	15	10.6	+4
<i>Liberalų ir centro sąjunga</i> (Liberal and Centre Union)	7.7	5.3	8	5.7	–10
<i>Lietuvos Liberalų sąjūdis</i> (Liberal Movement)	6.4	5.7	11	7.8	–
<i>Tautos prisikėlimo partija</i> (National Resurrection Party)	9.5	15.1	18	12.8	–
<i>Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija</i> (Social Democrats)	14.2	11.7	25	17.7	+5
<i>Naujoji sąjunga/Socialliberalai</i> (Social Liberals)	4.5	3.6	1	0.7	–10
Others	12.0	13.5	4		

Registered electors: 2,696,090; Turnout: Round 1, 48.6%; Round 2, 32.4%. Source: Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania (<http://www.vrk.lt>).^a Merger between Homeland Union-Lithuanian Conservatives, Christian Democrats, and Nationalists.

second in the popular vote (15.1%). However, whereas it won 13 seats in the multi-member district, it failed to repeat the success in single-mandate districts, winning only 5 seats. Support for the party was largely based on a protest vote.¹³

The election was a rough ride for the Labour Party and the Social Democrats. The electoral performance of the once victorious Labour Party was a flop. Support for the party among 'young labourites' tumbled to 9% (compared with 28.4% in the 2004 election). After the fiasco, its leader, Uspaskich, joined the Social Democrats in the opposition. The Social Democrats increased its share of *Seimas*'s seats from 20 to 25, but, paradoxically, on a reduced vote: its electoral support shrank from 14.4% in the 2004 European parliamentary election to 11.7% in the 2008 general election.¹⁴ The Social Democrats won 15 of the single-mandate constituencies and added 10 seats from the proportional vote.

Political stardom became a mirage for the Order and Justice Party. Whereas the party increased its vote to 12.7% (from 11.4% in the 2004 election), it had dreamt of dozens of seats on which to form a government. In the event, Order and Justice had to make do with 15 MPs (still an increase from 11 deputies in the 2004 election). Volatility among the party's supporters was low: 76% of the electors voting for Order and Justice in 2008 also supported it in the 2004 general election (Mačiūnas, 2008).

Such voting patterns entailed a substantial reduction of new parties.¹⁵ No anti-system parties entered the *Seimas*, although the far leftist radical Front ("*Fronto*" *partija*), established in May 2008, finished the election on 3.2% of the popular vote. All in all, the centre-right coalition parties increased their share of parliamentary seats from 30.5% to 58.3%.¹⁶

¹³ See <http://politika.atn.lt/straipsnis/6238/politologai-regi-skirtingus-valdzios-dalijimosi-scenarijus>.

¹⁴ The exact number of votes cast for the Social Democrats is unclear since the party stood in a joint list with the Social Liberals in the 2004 general election, but voting patterns between the 2004 election to the European Parliament in June and the 2004 general election in October were strikingly similar.

¹⁵ By comparison, nearly half of the votes fell to the new parties in 2004. Opinion research shows that 31% of electorate who failed to vote in 2004 would have voted for the populists (Mačiūnas, 2008).

¹⁶ Virtually the same as the 57% centre-left parliamentary majority in the 2004 election, which fell to 27.6% in the 2008 election.

The electoral indices show the stabilisation of electoral politics. The number of parliamentary parties somewhat diminished from 6.1 to 5.6, despite a marked swelling of effective electoral parties from 5.8 to 8.9. Voter volatility ebbed from 50% to 29.3%, whereas the number of wasted votes ballooned from 9.0% to 20.7%. See Table 2.

Between the 2004 and 2008 general elections, the parties participating in the general election halved (from 35.5% to 18.3%) for the first time. Moreover, the share of parliamentary seats of parties that stepped over the thresholds dropped from 42.6% to 15.1%. The party configuration can be described as moderate pluralism with centripetal competition. Populist rhetoric, polarisation, and the fragmentation of the parliamentary parties all contracted.

6. Aftermath

The moderate fragmentation of the *Seimas* led to a coalition government between the Conservatives, both Liberal parties, and the National Resurrection Party. The Conservatives control the premiership and seven ministries; the National Resurrection Party holds the Chair of the *Seimas* and two ministries; the Liberal Movement secured three ministries; and the Liberal and Centre Union has two ministries. The ministries have increased from 13 to 14, since part of the Ministry of Economy was turned into the Ministry of Energy.

But first and foremost, the new coalition is set upon fighting the looming economic crisis. The budget deficit is estimated to be less than 3% of GDP, so by cutting spending, raising VAT to 19% (from 18%) and closing VAT loopholes, and adjusting income tax rates for certain groups of goods and services,¹⁷ the government expects to wipe out the deficit.

The 2008 general election showed only 'tremors' rather than the 'earthquakes' of the 2000 and 2004 elections. The configuration of parties, as well as politics in general, proved calmer: voter volatility, the seat share of new parties in the *Seimas*, and the number of effective

¹⁷ According to government plans, income tax will reduce from 24% to 20% and corporation tax will rise from 15% to 20%.

Table 2

Electoral indices following general elections: 2000, 2004, and 2008.

	2000	2004	2008
Effective electoral parties	5.6	5.8	8.9
Effective parliamentary parties	4.8	6.1	5.6
Volatility ^a %	41.2	50.0	29.3
Wasted votes ^a %	23.4	9.0	20.7
Invalid votes ^a %	4.5	2.7	5.6

Source: Author's calculations.

^a In multi-member constituency.

parliamentary parties all declined. Party competition became centripetal, anchored around the traditional left–right dimension. Even so, the global financial crisis is echoed in Lithuania's economy. Slackening growth, increasing current account and budget deficits, and alarming two-digit inflation raised worries about an economic recession — despite 5% GDP growth in the last three quarters of 2008.

Although social cleavages across post-communist Central and Eastern Europe are forming, it is becoming increasingly evident that political issues influence voting patterns. The most visible societal conflicts are still represented by centre-periphery, urban–rural, Soviet and anti-Soviet attitudes, and 'winners/losers' of the post-communist transition. The backing for right and centre-right parties emanates from the urban areas, among educated, religious, pro-Western oriented, and better-off electors. Electors in rural and provincial areas, losers in the post-communist transformation, and those longing for

social justice tend to opt for a leftist, protest, or populist party. 'Green' issues are absent from the political agenda and ethnic minority parties are not represented in the *Seimas*.

The Conservatives won the election convincingly, whilst the Social Democrats became the main opposition. The proportion of new parties in the *Seimas* has shrivelled considerably; the protest and populist parties failed to win any seats in the single-mandate constituencies and only 13 seats in the multi-member district. The Conservatives and the Social Democrats enjoyed the highest support in the run-off, signalling that the Lithuanian party system has acquired two solid centres of gravity. Even so, being exposed to global economic turmoil, underdeveloped cleavages, and the personalisation of politics remain challenges for political stability in the near future.

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The presidential election in the Dominican Republic, May 2008

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On 16 May 2008, the Dominican Republic held its fourth consecutive presidential election since major changes to the electoral system and electoral calendar were carried out in 1994. Incumbent president Leonel Fernández Reyna (1996–2000, 2004–2008) of the *Partido de la Liberación*

Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Party, PLD), in alliance with 11 minor parties, was re-elected with 53.8% of the vote and a comfortable 13-point margin over his leading opponent, Miguel Vargas Maldonado of the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD). The *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (Reformist Social Christian Party, PRSC), which had been losing support since the death of Joaquín Balaguer in 2002, declined even further, winning only 4.6% of the vote.

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