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## The parliamentary election in Lithuania, October 2012

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A parliamentary election was held in Lithuania on 14 October 2012, alongside a consultative referendum on a construction of a new nuclear power plant in the country. Where required, runoffs in single mandate districts were held two weeks later, on 28 October 2012. Lithuanian left-wing parties enjoyed strong showings. The winners, the Social Democrats (*Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija, LSDP*), took 38 out of 141 seats in the *Seimas* (parliament) and formed a left-of-centre coalition government with the

Labour Party (*Darbo partija*), Party Order and Justice (*Partija Tvarka ir teisingumas, TT*), and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (*Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija, LLRA*).

The Conservatives, the winners of the 2008 general elections, lost their status as largest party yet ended up with the second largest parliamentary faction of 33 MPs. This was considered by many as a good result for the main party of a government which led the country in the years of economic downturn and hence necessary and unpopular austerity measures. However, the Liberal and Centre Union (*Liberalų ir centro sąjunga*), a liberal party which had been in the ruling coalition in 2008–2012, lost its parliamentary representation, and the populist National Resurrection Party (*Tautos prisikėlimo partija, TPP*), which had also joined the government

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after the 2008 election, crumbled soon after and disappeared from the political landscape.<sup>1</sup> Of the two new parties entering the *Seimas*, the most popular was the Path of Courage (*Drąsos kelias*), a populist and radical motley crew which won 8% of votes cast (and was thus far from repeating the 2008 success of the earlier newcomer, TPP, which debuted with 15%).

Finally, the outcome of the referendum was negative: 62.7% of those who turned out voted against the construction of a new power station.

## 1. Background

The 2012 *Seimas* election was the seventh poll since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Back then, representatives of the national pro-independence movement, the Popular Front (*Sąjūdis*) took control of parliament in the 1990 Constitutive election, but the fragmentation of the Movement and squabbles in parliament paved the way for a snap election in 1992, after which the ex-communist Labour Democratic Party (*Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija*) enjoyed absolute parliamentary majority. The Conservatives (*Tėvynės Sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai*) then took over with their own majority in the 1996 election. Although the ex-Communists merged with the Social Democrats in 2000 and took over 30% of votes, the big winners of the 2000 parliamentary election were the new parties, the Liberals (*Lietuvos liberalų sąjunga*) and the Social Liberals (*Naujoji sąjunga/Social-liberalai*), who formed a ruling coalition. This lasted just a year, after which the Social Democrats lured the Social Liberals into a different coalition and thus took charge of the government in 2001. In 2004, another newcomer, the left-of-centre Labour Party, sliced off the largest share of seats. However, lying between Labour and the Conservatives, the main antagonists, the Social Democrats remained firmly in the saddle of power and headed coalition cabinets until 2008. The rule of the leftist parties was broken in 2008 when the Conservatives returned to head a government which became the first in Lithuania's history to serve a full four-year term in office.

## 2. Electoral system

The *Seimas* consists of 141 MPs elected for a four-year term. The electoral system is mixed-parallel: 71 mandates are contested in single-member constituencies and 70 mandates are distributed along the vote in a country-wide multi-member constituency. All parliamentary elections except 1990 and 2000 were held in two rounds with a two-week break between the first and the second. A voter has two ballots: one is cast for a candidate in a single-mandate district and the other for a party list. In the single-member constituencies, if 40% of registered voters turnout then the winner must have an absolute majority of votes cast. If fewer than 40% come to polling stations, the winner must have not only an absolute majority of those who voted but also at least 20% of the registered electorate. If neither condition is satisfied and there were at least two contenders, there is a

runoff round. In the proportional tier, an election is valid in the case that at least 25% of registered voters take part in the election. The thresholds are 5% for party lists and 7% for coalitions. When voting for a particular party in the multi-member nationwide district, voters are free to select up to five candidates from a party's list. A candidate's final position on his or her party's list after the election depends on the number of these 'priority votes' received.

For the referendum result to be valid, turnout needed to exceed 50% of the registered voters. Once that condition is satisfied, a simple majority is enough to determine the outcome. However, the results of this referendum were not binding on the government. The question in the referendum was the following: "I support the construction of a new nuclear power plant in the Republic of Lithuania".

## 3. Parties and coalitions

Eighteen parties and one *de jure* coalition (the National Association 'For Lithuania in Lithuania', consisting of the Lithuanian Centre Party, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Union, the Coalition of National Union and the National Unity Union) took part in the 2012 *Seimas* election.<sup>2</sup>

The main opposition force was the Social Democratic Party, led by the newly elected leader Algirdas Butkevičius. The party campaigned on increasing employment, universal social justice, solidarity, equal opportunities, green growth, reduction of VAT for certain goods, energy efficiency and progressive taxation.<sup>3</sup> Its core electorate is among inhabitants of small cities, public sector employees and the less well off (Gaidys, 2012). 79% of Social Democratic voters locate themselves on centrist and left-of-centre positions of the left/right axis (Duvold and Jurkynas, 2013).

The right-wing Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats, popularly known simply as the Conservatives, is progeny of the Popular Movement, headed by a former Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius. This party stands for the values of market economics, moral conservatism, close relations to the Catholic Church, patriotism, a pro-Western orientation and misgivings about Russia. Just 11% of those reporting themselves as supporters of that party describe themselves as having left-of-centre convictions (Duvold and Jurkynas, 2013). As the recent election confirms, the Conservatives' support base remains solidly among the over-60s, educated, better-off and urban residents (Gaidys, 2012).

The Labour Party has been led by the same notorious leader, Russian-born business mogul Viktor Uspaskich,<sup>4</sup> since its founding in 2004. The party rebounded from its poor performance in 2008, swallowing the stale Social Liberals in 2011 and grew to be the most successful political

<sup>1</sup> It split into two factions: the former stayed within the Conservative-led four-party government and later merged with the Liberal and Centre Union, whereas the latter re-formed as the Christian party.

<sup>2</sup> The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania was *de facto* coalition, since its list was comprised of members from the Russian Alliance (*Rusų aliansas*) and People's Party (*Liaudies partija*). Nonetheless, it was not considered as a *de jure* coalition and 7% threshold was not applied for the Electoral Action.

<sup>3</sup> LSDP rinkimų į Seimą trumpoji programa (<http://lsdp.lt/lt/straipsniai/268-lsdp-trumpoji-rinkimu-programa-2012.html>), accessed 4 December 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Uspaskich went into hiding in Moscow in 2005–2007 due to an ongoing investigation on his party's illegal financing and sought political asylum, yet he later returned to run for politics.

organisation in the proportional tier, scooping up around 20% of the votes cast in 2012. Labour is on the left on various conflict dimensions (Jastramskis, 2012) and attracts younger, less educated, blue-collar or unemployed voters living predominantly in provincial towns and the countryside (Gaidys, 2012). This is also a populist party, issuing contradictory promises such as the doubling of the minimum wage within one year, a non-deficit budget, freedom for business, competitiveness and the complete eradication of unemployment.

Liberal parties in Lithuania went through a series of mergers and splits in the last twenty years and currently two parties – the Liberal Movement (*Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis*) and the Liberal and Centre Union – aimed at the same younger, urban, better-off, Western-oriented and socially liberal electorate. The popularity of the head of the Liberal Movement, Eligijus Masiulis, a young politician in his late 30s, helped his party to retain a faction in the *Seimas* whereas voters said goodbye to the Liberal and Centre Union.

The Order and Justice Party has been clinging to its boss, the formerly impeached President, Rolandas Paksas, who was forbidden by the Constitutional Court from running for office in 2012. However, recently the party lost its radical edge of opposition to the 'corrupt system' and effectively became part of the political mainstream. The party presents an unusual combination of socially conservative, nationalistic, 'pro-Russian' and favouring a regulated market (Jastramskis, 2012). Its electorate is principally rural, less educated and less well off (Gaidys, 2012).

Two new parties made inroads into parliament in 2012: the radical Path of Courage and a party representing the Polish minority. The former, led by a judge, Neringa Venckienė, campaigned against a purported paedophile conspiracy and the latter, headed by a Polish patriot, Valdemar Tomaševski, mustered sufficient support from Polish and Russian speakers (who together comprise around 12% of the population), especially in the south-east where the Lithuanian Poles are most concentrated.

#### 4. Electoral campaign

The official electoral campaign begins a month prior to the general election. Changes concerning political advertising were introduced in 2012 and relieved restrictions imposed in 2008<sup>5</sup>: outdoor advertising was allowed everywhere and parties and candidates could order 30-s long commercials on TV and radio. Naturally, the virtual space, especially social media platforms, also buzzed with political marketing.

Similar to the 2008 campaign, socioeconomic issues as unemployment, taxes, pensions, the budget deficit, healthcare and welfare were at the centre of political debates. Academic pundits argue that the left/right dimension in Lithuania represents a traditional Western political conflict concerning the extent of regulation of the free market (Jastramskis, 2012; Duvold and Jurkynas, 2013). The right-wing parties – the Conservatives and the Liberals –

argued for retaining current taxation levels and sustaining entrepreneurial spirit, whereas the leftist parties, the Social Democrats, Labour and Order & Justice placed heavier emphasis on social justice, progressive taxation and an enhanced role for the public sector. Meanwhile, the salience of the formerly relevant communist/anti-communist cleavage diminished (Ramonaitė, 2012).

Neither Lithuania's economic performance nor the ongoing austerity policies did much to improve the image of the outgoing conservative-liberal government among the voters. In a nutshell, the election outcome was a vote against the way in which the economic recession has been handled. This was not simply a retrospective punishment vote against the government's economic management, however; it also had an ideological component. Opinion polls during the campaign revealed that voters' criticism of the government's crisis management was more about its perceived lack of empathy with the less well off, who grew rapidly in number during the crisis years.

Alongside the general election came the non-binding vote on a planned new nuclear reactor at Visaginas, a north-eastern Lithuanian city near the border with Belarus, aimed at lessening the country's energy dependence on Russia. The Social Democrats with the support of other opposition parties were the key initiators of this referendum opposing the Conservative-backed nuclear plant developed by a Japanese company Hitachi. LSDP argued that neither the costs of the project nor the future price of electricity were clear to the politicians, let alone the public. While the Conservatives had opposed the referendum, the Liberals had abstained.

#### 5. Election results

52.9% of voters came to the polls in the first round and 35.9% in the run-off. Even if this participation rate is far from those seen in consolidated democracies across Western Europe – due to weak civil society and low levels of trust in political institutions – it did mark an increase compared to the 2008 election. Turnout was slightly lower in the consultative referendum, at 52.6%. Of those, just 34.1% were in favour of the construction of the much-delayed nuclear facility, thereby sending a clearly negative signal about the current project to policy makers.

In the multi-member constituency, seven out of eighteen parties running for the election climbed over the 5% threshold. Four years after they had left office, the Social Democrats returned victoriously, electing 38 MPs – 15 elected after the first round and the remaining 23 in run-offs – which amounts to a 27% share of seats in parliament (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> This represented a considerable increase of 13 seats compared to 2008; in parallel, the popularity of the Social Democrats in the national tier also increased from 11.7% to 18.4%. Their chief rivals, the Conservatives, also performed rather well. They took

<sup>5</sup> A ban on political TV and radio advertising, including prohibited commercials and advertisements on front pages of the print media and allowing outdoor advertising only in specially designated areas.

<sup>6</sup> The Social Democrats were initially awarded 39 seats but the Constitutional Court decided that Biržai-Kupiškis, where the Social Democratic candidate topped the poll, was one of two constituencies (the other being Zarasai-Visaginas) in which the election should be rerun due to procedural violations on second-round polling day.

**Table 1**

Results of the general election in Lithuania, 14 and 28 October 2012.

Party	Multi-member constituency			Single-member constituencies			Overall		
	Votes	Valid votes (%)	Seats	First-round votes	Valid votes (%)	Seats	Seats	Seats (%)	+/- cf. 2008
<i>Labour Party</i> (Centrism, Social liberalism)	271,520	20.7	17	217,914	16.9	12	29	20.7	+19
<i>Lithuanian Social Democratic Party</i> (Social democracy)	251,610	19.2	15	222,953	17.3	23	38	27.1	+13
<i>Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats</i> (Conservatism, Christian democracy)	206,590	15.7	13	215,257	16.7	20	33	23.6	–12
<i>Liberal Movement</i> (Liberalism)	117,476	9.0	7	95,166	7.4	3	10	7.1	–1
<i>Path of Courage</i> (Radical, populist)	109,448	8.3	7	88,871	6.9	0	7	5.0	–
<i>Order and Justice</i> (National conservatism)	100,120	7.6	6	104,997	8.1	5	11	7.9	–4
<i>Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania</i> (Polish minority, Christian)	79,840	6.1	5	75,686	5.9	3	8	5.7	+5
<i>Lithuanian Farmers and Green Party</i> (Agrarianism and Greens)	53,141	4.1	0	61,981	4.8	1	1	0.7	–2
<i>Liberal and Centre Union</i> (Liberalism)	28,263	2.2	0	58,792	4.6	0	0	0.0	–8
<i>Others</i>	94,082	7.2	0	150,356	11.6	3	3	2.1	–1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,312,090</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1,291,973</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Registered electors: 2,588,418; Turnout: Round 1, 52.9%; Round 2, 35.9%. Source: Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania (<http://www.vrk.lt>).

15.1% (down from 19.7% in 2008) in the proportional tier and, despite the loss of 12 seats, ended up being the second largest parliamentary faction with 33 MPs. Meanwhile, the Labour Party recovered like a phoenix from the ashes. Despite its poor 9% showing in the 2008 elections being followed by non-stop scandals concerning the party's accounting practices<sup>7</sup> and colourful leader, Mr Uspaskich, Labour topped the poll in the multi-member constituency with nearly 20% of votes cast. However, its struggles to win single-member constituency seats meant that the party ended up only the third force in the *Seimas* with 29 seats.

Only one of the two parties vying for liberal votes had any cause for celebration. The Liberal and Centre Union's profile gradually receded after the departure of its leader Artūras Zuokas, the current mayor of the capital Vilnius. Having attracted just 2.1% supporters, the party vanished from the *Seimas* after enjoying two parliamentary terms in a row. In contrast, while the Liberal Movement lost one parliamentary seat, its popularity in the multi-member constituency increased from 5.7% to 8.6%. The Liberal Movement agreed to form an opposition with the Conservatives but nonetheless kept a distance from the Conservatives' anti-governmental zeal. The Path of Courage, an anti-system newcomer, took seven seats following its campaign based on a paedophile network and announced that it would be an "opposition within an opposition". However, the party then lost its main *raison d'être* after the courts ruled that there was no paedophilia case, and its MPs are anticipated to disperse among other factions. Order and Justice appears to be a dying breed, suffering the most serious setback among all parties – its popularity between the elections nearly halved from 12.7% to 7.3%.<sup>8</sup>

TT had had high hopes but it lost four parliamentary seats and was overtaken by Path of Courage who took nationalistic, religious, patriotic and morally conservative votes from both the TT and the Conservatives in the national tier. Last but not least, the Polish minority party crossed the threshold for the first time ever with 5.8% elected eight MPs.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, the centre-left coalition parties increased their share of parliamentary seats to 61.1% – similar to the 58.3% obtained by the right-of-centre coalition in 2008. Voting patterns disclosed a gradual reduction of new parties' share in the *Seimas* since 2004.<sup>10</sup> As noted, the one newcomer, the Path of Courage, quickly ran out of steam and now trails well behind in opinion polls. The effective number of parliamentary parties dropped slightly from 5.6 to 5.3 and the equivalent number of electoral parties fell from 8.9 to 8.3. Voter volatility remained virtually the same while the proportion of votes wasted (because cast for a party that did not clear the threshold) slumped from 20.7% to 12.8%. The party system in Lithuania can thus be described as moderate pluralism with centripetal competition.

## 6. Aftermath

Three parties – the Social Democrats, Labour, and Order & Justice – agreed to cooperate after the first round of 2012 elections by supporting each other's candidates in the run-off. After the election, the very same parties formed a left-of-centre majority coalition with 78 MPs. However, this alliance has been broadened to a 86-MP majority after having accepted the LLRA as a fourth partner, thus signalling to the President that the government can exert its

<sup>7</sup> The party itself and some of its top members are accused of tax evasion and false documentation.

<sup>8</sup> Initially, Order and Justice won eleven seats but one of its elected members passed away soon after the elections and another election was organized for that constituency in six months' time.

<sup>9</sup> This party benefits from an increasingly disciplined electorate, galvanised by linguistic issues such as an amendment of education law increasing the number of hours to be taught in Lithuanian at schools, and a court ban on the use of the Polish alphabet in street names and official documents.

<sup>10</sup> Next to half of the votes fell to new parties in 2004 and just below 20% in 2008 general elections.

influence and even amend the constitution. The formation of the coalition was the most protracted process since 1990 due to disagreements with the current kingmaker of Lithuanian politics, President Dalia Grybauskaitė, who had openly propped up the Conservative-Liberal government prior to the general elections. Although she admitted that the Social Democrat-led coalition had the right to propose a candidate, Mr Butkevičius, for Prime Minister, Grybauskaitė initially refused to approve the inclusion of the Labour Party into the cabinet, claiming that the party was under judicial review after some of its members had bought votes during the 2012 elections. Furthermore, she asked the Constitutional Court to ascertain whether election results in the national tier and several single-member seats had been rigged. The court confirmed that the elections had been fair, yet still the President rejected several candidates from the Labour party till all approved members of the cabinet were untainted by significant controversy. The Social Democrats hold the Prime Ministership plus seven ministries, the Labour controls the chair of the *Seimas* and four ministries, while Order and Justice and the LLRA secured two and one ministry respectively.

The first challenge for the ruling coalition was the scrapping of parliamentary immunity for Uspaskich and two of his party's foot soldiers, thereby allowing judicial authorities to proceed with the investigation of the party's book-keeping in the mid-2000s. The opposition and the Social Democrats together mustered sufficient parliamentary support to abolish this immunity. Nonetheless, the Labour party remained in the government and played its part in forming the budget for 2013. The coalition programme is left oriented, emphasising increased welfare provision, public sector job creation, progressive taxation, fiscal stability and envisaging the introduction of the Euro around 2015 or 2016. The outline of future activities is rather abstract, as the coalition foresees changes

only after thorough corporatist consultations with stakeholders like employers and trade unions. Nonetheless, the government has already decided to increase a minimal wage from 850 to 1000 Litas (290 Euros) from 1 January 2013.

*Summa summarum*, the 2012 general election gave an impression of the stabilisation of the party system and electoral behaviour. The vote share for new parliamentary parties shrivelled and political neophytes were a flop in the single-mandate districts. Party competition appears to be centripetal and embedded into the socio-economic left/right dimension, leaving the Social Democrats and the Conservatives as the key policy makers in Lithuania.

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# The 2012 parliamentary election in Burkina Faso

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## 1. Electoral system

Burkina Faso has a unicameral semi-presidential system. Its legislative body, the National Assembly, is composed of