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Lithuania Has Voted for Change

The outcome of this year's run-off election confirmed the election result of the first round of voting. While in the last election the seemingly clear-cut victory was lost during the 2nd round of voting, it was mostly representatives from the centre-right parties who prevailed in this election, even in the run-off. As a result, Lithuania will have a new government headed by Ingrida Šimonytė. The run-off election took place in 68 constituencies and only three candidates won their constituency during the first round of voting, including Šimonytė.

In the run-off election, the party of the prospective future Prime Minister was successful in 26 constituencies. With a total of 74 representatives from parties of a potentially centre-right coalition versus 67 of the then opposition parties, there are great prospects for a successful term of office.

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On 11 and 25 October, the first and second parliamentary elections took place in Lithuania. Six of the 17 parties who ran for election have been voted into the Seimas following the first vote. The former opposition party, Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) took the lead with 24.86 per cent following the first round of voting. The governing party Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) was the second strongest with 17.43 per cent. The Worker's Party (DP), the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) and two liberal parties - the newly founded Freedom Party (LP) and the Liberal Movement (LRLS) were also voted into parliament again. The current coalition partners, however, Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP) and the Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KŠS), failed at the five per cent hurdle.

The Parliamentary Election System

The Lithuanian parliament (*Seimas*), consisting of one chamber, is voted in for a duration of four years. According to a mixed electoral system, a total of 114 Seimas members are voted in: 71 of them as part of a direct election, a further 70 in a proportional voting system via party lists, whereby voters are afforded the opportunity to change the ranking of candidates on party lists at their discretion.

For a vote via party lists, in other words the first round of elections, a minimum turnout of 25 per cent of all registered voters is necessary for the election to be valid.

For the direct election of a candidate, 50 per cent of votes are required during the first round of voting, with a minimum turnout of 40 per cent of voters from the respective constituency. If no candidate were to achieve an absolute majority during the first round of voting, this results in a run-off election between both leading candidates during the first round of voting, which usually takes place 14 days following the first round of voting.

The Outcome

Following the second Round of elections, it soon became clear that the clear majority for a centre-right coalition, which many hoped for after the first round of voting, had been achieved. Agreements concluded between the former governing parties had an impact such that candidates from the former government coalition prevailed during the run-off election in 38 constituencies but were still unable to prevent the political change. The Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) was successful in the run-off election in 26 constituencies, including the acting party chairperson, Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė, who won a clear victory with 66.2 percent over the former Prime Minister with 31.5 per cent. This outcome was awaited with bated breath. As early as the first election, Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė had led with 30.14 per cent with the current Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis gaining merely 14.47 per cent of votes.

Outcome of the First Round of Voting

During the first parliamentary election in Lithuania, 17 party lists stood for election. Six of these parliaments were voted into parliament for a term lasting from 2020 to 2024. After the first round of voting, the former opposition party Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), who were supported by 24.86 per cent of voters, were clearly in the lead (Table 1). The previous governing party, the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS), which formed the largest Seimas faction in the last legislative period, became the second strongest party with 17.43 per cent. Even during the post-election analysis on the first round of voting, analysts agreed that the party would be unable to repeat the electoral success of 2016. Although the same parties secured most votes following the first round of voting, as was the case during the 2016 election, the lead that the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) experienced was far greater this year than in 2016, however: 87 333 votes in the lead with 23 parliamentary seats in 2020 versus a margin of 2,167 votes and merely 20 parliamentary seats in 2016. The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) had 16 parliamentary seats after the first round of voting compared with 19 seats in 2016; this resulted in a lead of seven parliamentary seats versus one following the first round of voting.

Table 1: Election results 2020 following the first round of elections

	Party/chairperson	Votes (total)	Share in per cent	Parliamentary seats
1.	Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD)/ Mr G. Landsbergis	292 124	24.86	23
2.	Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) / Mr R. Karbauskis	204 791	17.43	16
3.	Labour Party (DP)/ Mr V. Uspaskich	110 773	9.43	9
4.	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP)/ Mr G. Paluckas	108 649	9.25	8
5.	Freedom Party (LP) / Mr A. Armonaitė	107 093	9.11	8
6.	Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS)/ Mr V. Čmilytė-Nielsen	79 755	6.79	6
7.	Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KŠS)/ Mr V. Tomaševski	56 386	4.80	-
8.	Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP)/ Mr G. Kirkilas	37 197	3.17	-
9.-17.	<i>Other parties</i>			

Source: Central Electoral Committee of the Republic of Lithuania (VRK) 2020-10-20

The result of the proportional vote via party lists varied somewhat when compared with the data from opinion polls (find out more in the [pre-election report](#)). Hence, the last surveys carried out immediately prior to the vote demonstrated a far smaller margin between the two leading parties, Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), and the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS).

According to several opinion polls, the Social Democrats (LSDP) came third place prior to the election. Following the first round of voting, the Labour Party (DP), which failed at the five per cent hurdle during the 2016 elections, entered the Seimas as the third power with 9.43 per cent of votes and nine parliamentary seats. This is a far cry from what most experts and analysts predicted for the Labour Party one year ago. There were even doubts as to whether the party would reach the five per cent threshold. This result enabled the party to prove that they can still rely on wide support from their voters. Political scandals in which the party was embroiled (corruption, accounting violations), did not have the predicted effect. The analysis specifically connects the election outcome with the party chairperson Viktor Uspaskich (EP member), who succeeded in mobilising party sympathisers without directly participating in the election himself. Other important factors are an intense election campaign and intense activities conducted by the party, which secured its success.

The Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) led by the new party chairperson, had expected a better outcome. Having secured 9.25 per cent of votes and eight parliamentary seats, they came in at fourth place. According to Vladimiras Laučius, this is the worst result experienced by the Social Democrats in the 21st Century.¹ The chairperson of the Social Democrats, Gintautas Paluckas, explained that it is not least the result of a party division (some long-standing party members left the party in 2017 and founded the new Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP)).

The bad election result of the Social Democrats took many people by surprise. Another astonishing development during the first round of voting came in the form of the Freedom Party (LP), which was only founded one and a half years ago and entered parliamentary elections for the first time. The desired goal, to secure at least one hundred thousand votes, was more than achieved with 107,093 votes. With 9.11 per cent of votes, the party overtook the Liberal Movement (LRLS), which was voted into the Seimas several times, and has found itself in a difficult situation over recent years. The crucial factor here is the enmeshment of a former party chairman in a major corruption scandal shortly before the parliamentary vote in 2016. This inflicted immense damage on the party's reputation, claimed victims and made certain changes necessary (the party not only lost part of its electorate as a result, but also some party members who went on to found the above-mentioned Freedom Party (LP)).

Two additional parties, the Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KŠS), and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP), who are now partners in the government coalition, failed during the first round of voting at the five per cent hurdle and thus will not be represented in the Seimas. The former State President, Dalia Grybauskaitė, said about this electoral result that the Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families deserved not to be elected because they are a party that has always acted in the interests of the Kremlin as opposed to in the interests of Lithuania.²

President Dalia Grybauskaitė expressed concern in her commentary on the election outcome but also about the low voter turnout, yet she was delighted that constituents cast their votes for the freedom and future of the country as opposed to prohibitions and restrictions, as the current government introduced in many cases. The President also said that the election results bear testimony to a change of political generation: politics is

¹ <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/vladimiras-laucius-svarbiausia-zinia-ne-lsdp-nesekme-ar-laisves-partijos-suolis-bet-ts-lkd-triumfas.d?id=85476241>

² Dalia Grybauskaitė on the election results in InfoTV programme, 12-10-2020

increasingly shaped by younger people, who want to play a role in shaping the future of the country.

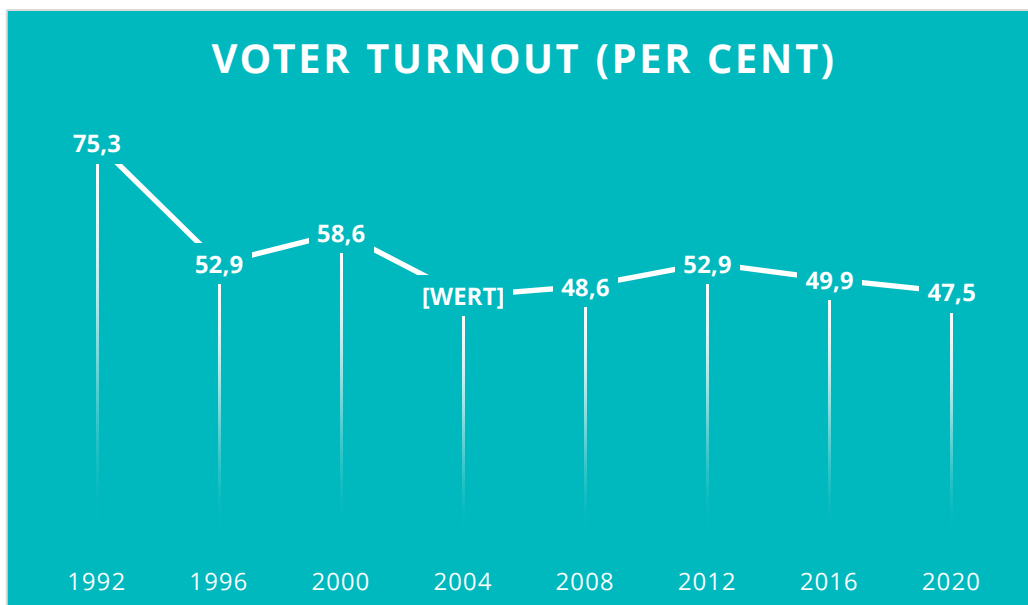
In her analysis, the political scientist Mažvydas Jastramskis observed that the centre-right powers in Lithuania were able to achieve over 40 per cent of votes for the first time since 1996. Remarkable is the fact that all three parties entered the parliamentary elections with lead candidates: Ingrida Šimonytė (lead candidate, TS-LKD), Aušrinė Armonaitė (LP) and Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen (LRLS). If the centre-right parties were to agree upon the formation of a coalition following this election result, we can expect that a government will be formed in Lithuania for the next four years that has a far more equal ratio of men and women than the government from the previous four years; for a while, this government was even responsible for a cabinet without women.

Voter Turnout

During the parliamentary election in 2020, 2 411 617 Lithuanian citizens were eligible to vote. The voter turnout during the first round of voting was 47.52 per cent and hence the lowest in the last twelve years (*chart 1*). The most active voter group were those aged 55-64 years old, the young voters aged 25-29 remained the most passive during the first round of voting. 11.64 per cent of voters had already cast their votes early. This figure is twice as high as the 6.69 per cent at the early voting in 2016.

The voter turnout amounted to 39.7 per cent during the second round of voting and was thus lower than during the first round.

Chart 1: Voter turnout during the parliamentary election (first round of elections)



Source: Central Electoral Committee of the Republic of Lithuania (VRK)³

Organisers were unable to resolve all of the problems caused by a parliamentary election overshadowed by the spectre of the corona pandemic. Some people in isolation had no opportunity to vote because nobody from the election commission visited them at home. As a result, some of those affected violated against the isolation regulations and went to the polling station to cast their vote there. The exact number of people who wanted to vote but had no opportunity to do so, is unknown. The organisers, “white gloves”, claimed to have received some 150 complaints about this following the first round of voting.

³ <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/rs/legalact/TAK/d8201ec118f411e7b6c9f69dc4ecf19f/>

Second Round of Voting

The second round of voting took place on 25 October and decided in 68 of a total 71 constituencies in a run-off election between both leading candidates following the first round of voting. The first round of elections determined victors in only three constituencies: Ingrida Šimonytė (TS-LKD), Česlovas Olševskis (LLRA-KŠS) and Beata Petkevič (LLRA-KŠS). After the first round of voting, the conservatives (TS-LKD) were not only in the lead with an important head start, but this was also the case in the run-off election with 54 representatives of which 36 were ahead in the race. Representatives of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) took the lead in 13 constituencies after the first round of voting, the Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS) in five and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP) in four constituencies (see table 2).

Table 2: Number of candidates at the run-off election (in leading position, parliamentary seats)

Number of candidates at the run-off election (in leading position)		Parliamentary seats
Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD)	54 (36)	26
Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS)	32 (13)	16
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP)	12 (4)	5
Freedom Party (LP)	12 (1)	3
Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS)	9 (5)	7
<i>Individual applicant/individual candidate</i>	6 (4)	4
Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP)	4 (2)	3
Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KŠS)	2 (1)	1
Labour Party (DP)	2 (1)	1
"Freedom and Justice" (PLT) party	1	1
Centre Party - the Nationals (CPT)	1	0
Party of the Greens of Lithuania (LŽP)	1	1
		68

Source: Central Electoral Committee of the Republic of Lithuania (VRK)

Vilnius. The parliamentary elections have already come to an end in one constituency: Ingrida Šimonytė, member of parliament, former Minister of Finance and lead candidate of the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) claimed victory already in the first round of voting with 61.17 per cent. In most other constituencies, a decision was made between candidates from the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and those of the two liberal parties, Freedom Party (LP) and Liberal Movement (LRLS). In the twelve remaining constituencies, candidates from the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) came out on top on eleven occasions, with the Liberal Movement doing so on one occasion.

Kaunas. Unlike the more liberal cities of Vilnius and Klaipėda, candidates from the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) came into the run-off election in most constituencies (six out of seven). Candidates from the conservative camp took the lead in all seven. The result of the parliamentary election in 2016 in Kaunas was disappointing for the conservatives. In the city, which has long been considered the fortress of conservatives, the party only won a victory in one constituency with its chairman Gabrielius Landsbergis. This year, Gabrielius Landsbergis already enjoyed a considerable head start with 38.04 per cent over the LVŽS candidate Audronė Jankuvienė with 12.77 per cent in Kaunas during the first round of voting. He was then elected during the second round of voting with over 59 per cent of votes. A further five constituencies were won by representatives of the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) in the additional constituencies in Kaunas. One constituency was won by the candidate of the Freedom Party.

The Constituency of Lithuanians Around the World. This year, for the first time, a single constituency was formed for Lithuanians living abroad. A total of 43 411 Lithuanians had registered to vote at the election, with just over 30 000 of them having voted during the first round of elections. The Supreme Electoral Commission considers this voter turnout to be sufficient for retaining the constituency for the upcoming election in 2024, too. For the run-off election, this constituency experienced an intense battle between the chairperson of the Freedom Party (LP) Aušrinė Armonaitė (34.29 per cent) and TS-LKD candidate Dalia Asanavičiūtė (25.86 per cent). It was ultimately secured by Aušrinė Armonaitė.

Whereas most parties prior to the run-off election did not make any clear statements about which candidates they wanted to support during the second round of voting, the Social Democrats and Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) announced from the outset that they would support their respective candidates during the run-off election, and would not run against them.⁴ However, it was already clear for the analysts that the chances for the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) in the second round of voting would be better than was the case four years ago. The fact that it was not possible to fulfil all expectations certainly had something to do with the rather unexpected strength of liberal parties.

Start of Coalition Talks

Even before the parliamentary election, we had to assume two power centres, the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS), both of which might be in a position to form corresponding centre-right or centre-left coalitions. In his commentary following the first round of voting, State President Gitanas Nausėda ascertained that each of both coalitions were possible following the second round of voting. Some experts also did not rule out the formation of unconventional coalitions such as the Liberal Movement (LRLS) aligning itself with a coalition led by LVŽS, or that a coalition formed by the centre-right parties would try to incorporate the Social Democratic Party (LSDP).⁵

Following the first Round of voting, the centre-right parties (TS-LKD, LP, LRLS) voted into the Seimas were reluctant to address the issue of coalition formation. Not least the experiences from the last vote contributed towards pointing out time and again that the election was not yet over and hence not yet won. The chairperson of the conservative Fatherland Union (TS-LKD), Gabrielius Landsbergis, observed that there has been a great deal of fragmentation and segregation over the past four years and, without addressing specific party names, discussed the option of a coalition on a broader party basis, which would meet the expectations of many voters.

Following the second round of voting, clear coalition partners emerge. Winners of the parliamentary elections TS-LKD with 50 seats in parliament, initiated coalition talks with two liberal parties - Liberal Movement (LRLS) and Freedom Party (LP) shortly after midnight. The centre-right coalition will have 74 votes. It cannot be ruled out that individual candidates, who directly won their constituency, could join the coalition. In the new Seimas, there are a total of eleven representatives without fraction status, some of which also have no direct party affiliation.

Parties, Themes, Positions

The new political force the Freedom Party (LP), placed the focus of its election campaign on human rights, education, environmental protection, and a generally positive policy. The

⁴ <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/paluckas-socialdemokratai-ir-valstieciai-remis-vieni-kitu-kandidatus-antrajame-ture.d?id=85471905>

⁵ https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/busimos-koalicijos-interesu-labirintas-kas-gali-sutrukdyti-gabrieliui-landsbergiui-ir-ingridai-simonytei.d?id=85470705#cxrecs_s

party chairperson Aušrinė Armonaitė explained that the party of course deems the possibility to implement their priorities through work in the governing coalition to be important but would not “sell her soul” for this. It is believed that if a centre-right coalition is formed, negotiations between the Fatherland Union (TS-LKD) and Freedom Party (LP), which is even more strictly liberal than the Liberal Movement (LRLS), would not be easy.

The chairperson of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) Ramūnas Karbauskis, who immediately after the first vote claimed that his party would also enter into a constructive opposition, explained, following a more precise analysis of results just one day later, that even the formation of a centre-left coalition is possible. According to Ramūnas Karbauskis, the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS), the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), the Labour Party (DP) and the directly elected representatives of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP) as well as the Election Action of the Poles of Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KŠS), could have formed a coalition. However, to ensure that this coalition puzzle is brought to bear, the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) would have had to gain at least 24 additional parliamentary seats, the LSDP - 7, the DP - 1, the LSDDP - 3 and the LLRA-KŠS - 1 additional parliamentary seat during the second election - from the start this was a forecast with too many unknown factors.

Following the first round of voting, one of the leading politicians in the Labour Party (DP) contended that the key issues of their election manifesto were in line with those of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS), whereas on economic issues the party sees itself more closely affiliated with the conservative TS-LKD. Therefore, it is likely that the third strongest party following the first round of elections will be willing to conduct coalition talks with the winning candidate, too.

Although the Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) was firmly in the lead even after the first round of elections, and the formation of a centre-right coalition together with the centre-right coalition seemed more favourable and probable, it was only after the run-off election that it became clear they could now also take the initiative to form a coalition.

Election Campaign and Discussion

In Lithuania, large-scale election campaigns are not generally carried out because there is simply a lack of money to do so, claimed the communications expert, Arijus Katauskas, during a programme broadcasted by national television (LRT) on the morning after the first round of voting. The most recent election campaign prior to the parliamentary election was deemed boring by many people; experts and political scientists bemoaned the form and content of debates, and discussions lacked a more active ideological struggle including knowledge about and consideration of a broader context. In this year's election, the repercussions of the pandemic also came to bear, since it was scarcely possible to hold larger events.

The election campaign held by the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) was driven by a rhetoric aimed against the conservatives (TS-LKD). The brochure most strongly opposing the conservatives, “The Untouchables”, which was published shortly before the election in a circulation comprising 400 000 copies, is just one example of how the election campaign conducted by the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union led to negative emotions and confrontation in public. The conservatives (TS-LKD), however, pursued a different tactic: They emphasised the importance of cohesion, attempted to avoid direct confrontation with opponents and inspired the electorate to vote “for” as opposed to “against” something.

The parties' election manifestos were assessed by the experts with scepticism: Some manifestos include excessively high goals, which cannot be achieved within four years, while

experts regretted the lack of continuity in other manifestos.⁶ Here it is necessary to mention that the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŹS) did not have its own manifesto during the parliamentary election and said its intention was to continue ongoing work. The party presented the government documents (e.g. The National Progress Plan for 2021-2030) as its election manifesto.

Prior to the election, the focus of discussions was the selection of socio-political issues as well as issues pertaining to the economy, health sector and education. All parties seem to agree that education represents the highest priority for the country, and in this regard talk about a necessary general agreement. The politicians attach great importance to solving socio-political problems and overcoming social injustice, whereas the parties consider different ways of tackling these problems. Hence, the intention announced by the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union and the governing coalition directly before the second round of voting, to vote in the payment of a so-called 13th Pension, should be viewed in the context of a second round of voting, and should not be considered as a permanent solution to solving the problem of small pensions. The decision of the current governing coalition to pay out 200 euros as “helicopter money” to each of the overall 900 000 pensioners in view of the COVID-19 pandemic in August shortly before the parliamentary election, so as to boost spending, was subject to scepticism, too. The most recent economic survey conducted by the Lithuanian bank claims that a deficit in the national budget is expected for the year 2021. National debt is rising sharply in the direction of 50 per cent of GDP. For this reason, following the “firefighting” during the pandemic long-term investments should not be made in individual payments, but rather in projects that are important for solving old problems such as low productivity, ageing societies and regional deficits.

Summary

The parliamentary vote in Lithuania takes place in the shadows of the Corona-19 pandemic. This confronted electoral campaign participants and institutions responsible for organising the vote with certain challenges. Following the second round of voting, the former opposition party Fatherland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) is the clear victor with 50 parliamentary seats (23 parliamentary seats via party lists). The governing party of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŹS) will be the second strongest party with 32 parliamentary seats. The Lithuanian electoral system is designed such that the final election winner is only clear after the run-off election. Four years ago, the victor of that year's election became painfully aware of this when she was unable to retain let alone develop the margin achieved during the first round of voting. On this occasion, run-off elections on 25 October resulted in victory and hence a change of government. It will be interesting to see how coalition talks proceed and what the future government will look like.

⁶ <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000121634/ekspertes-patarimai-naujajam-seimui-sustabdyti-balagana-teises-aktu-leidime-ir-issigryninti-ka-darys>

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