



Active participation in democratic life – focus on Lithuania

Berlin, 5/17/2024

Citizen participation

the active participation of citizens in political and social affairs.

It is a complementary format to representative democracy that aims to involve more people in decision-making processes and make their voices heard on issues that affect their lives.



Citizens' initiatives and petitions: citizens can submit their own proposals or concerns about political procedures or decisions and gather support through signatures from other people.

Citizens' forums and workshops: organized events to facilitate an open dialogue between citizens and decision-makers.

Citizens' referendums: can take place at the municipal level and allow residents to decide on local issues such as construction or infrastructure projects.

Online participation: Digital platforms enable citizens to submit and discuss their opinions and proposals online.

Citizens' councils: Representative groups of citizens are selected at random and develop recommendations on specific topics. The aim is to reach out to those who have previously not been involved in social and political activities.

Public consultations: Citizens have the opportunity to contribute with their opinions and suggestions on specific topics or projects, for example, in regard to the municipality or city.

Citizen participation can occur in various forms. The most common is *voting*.

It can take place at various political levels, whether municipal, regional, national, or even cross-border. Within the EU, we distinguish between different forms of citizen participation...

What about active participation in Lithuania?

- How does the voter turnout look like?
- Are young Lithuanians active in democratic life? And older people?
- What about other forms of democratic participation?

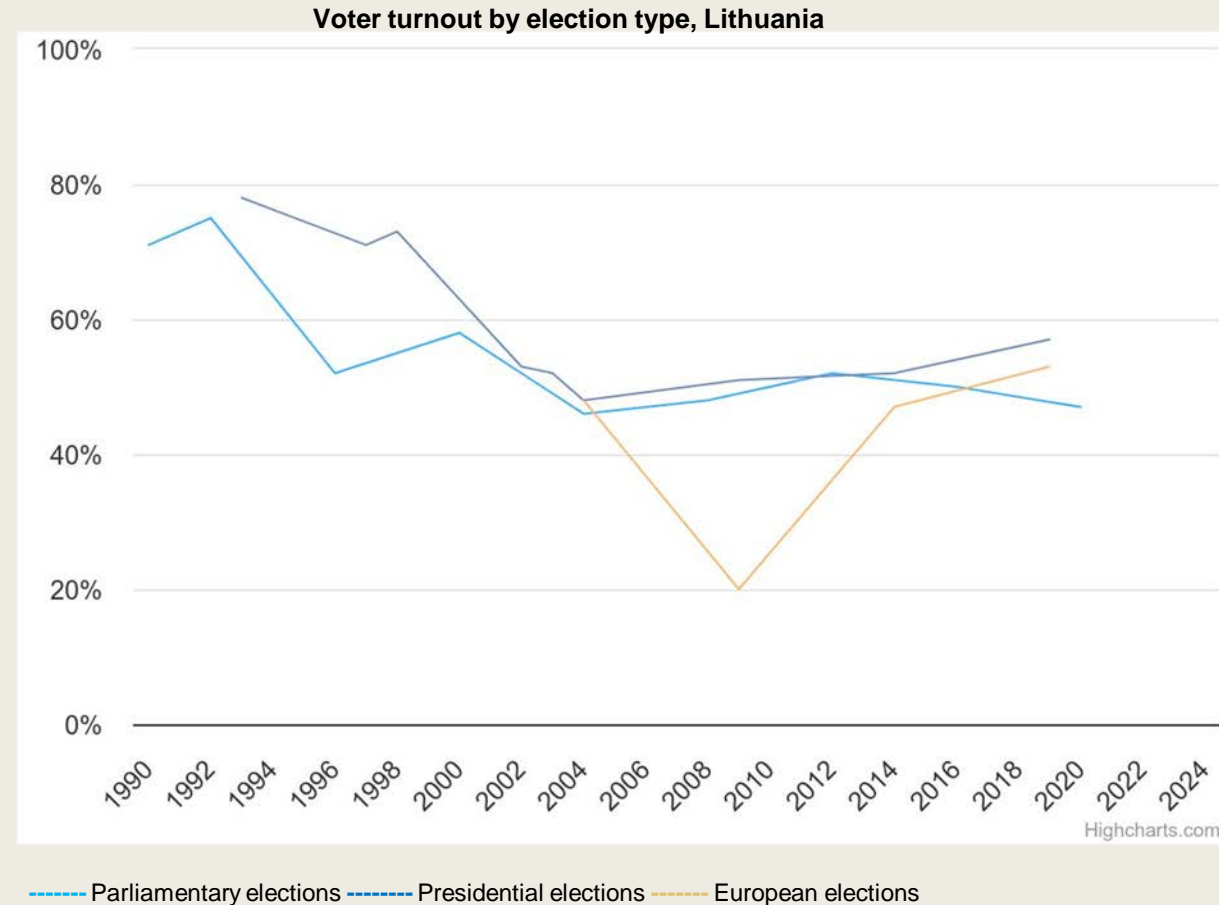


A **high voter turnout** is a sign that a country's political system enjoys a **strong degree of participation**.

According to official data, in most OECD countries there has been a decline in electoral participation over the last three decades.

Despite the general decrease since 1990, **voter turnout remains relatively high in Lithuania** (around 50%), with a slight increase in the 2019 presidential and European elections.

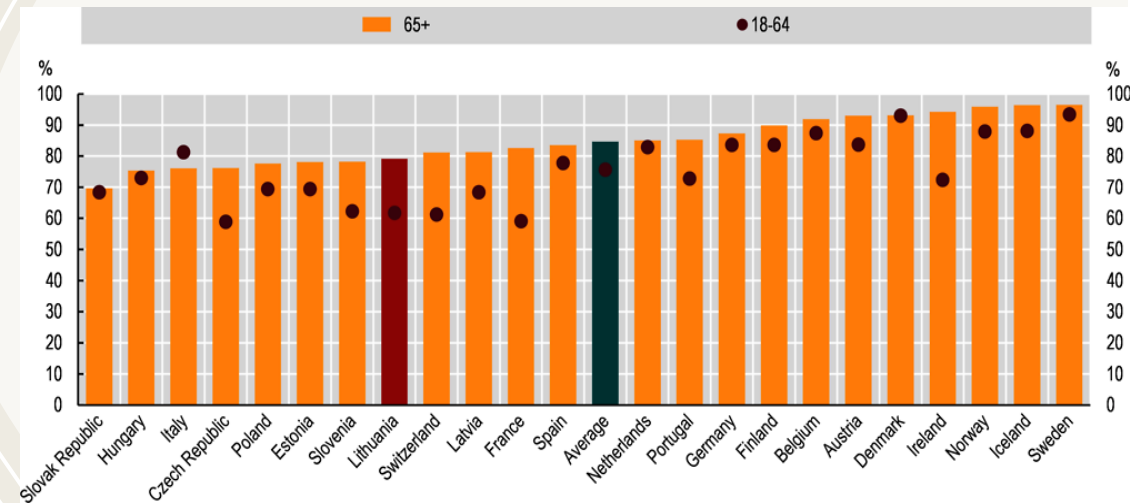
This may indicate a **positive trend towards greater civic engagement and democratic participation among Lithuanian citizens**. This uptick in turnout might suggest that efforts to encourage voter participation, such as voter education campaigns and mobilization initiatives, may be yielding some success.



What do the demographics of Lithuanian voters reveal about political participation in elections?

According to OECD research, **older individuals tend to participate more in elections** compared to younger demographics, often remaining loyal to the political parties they supported in their youth. This is in line with the trend of most OECD countries, in which older people are more likely to take part in elections and vote than younger people.

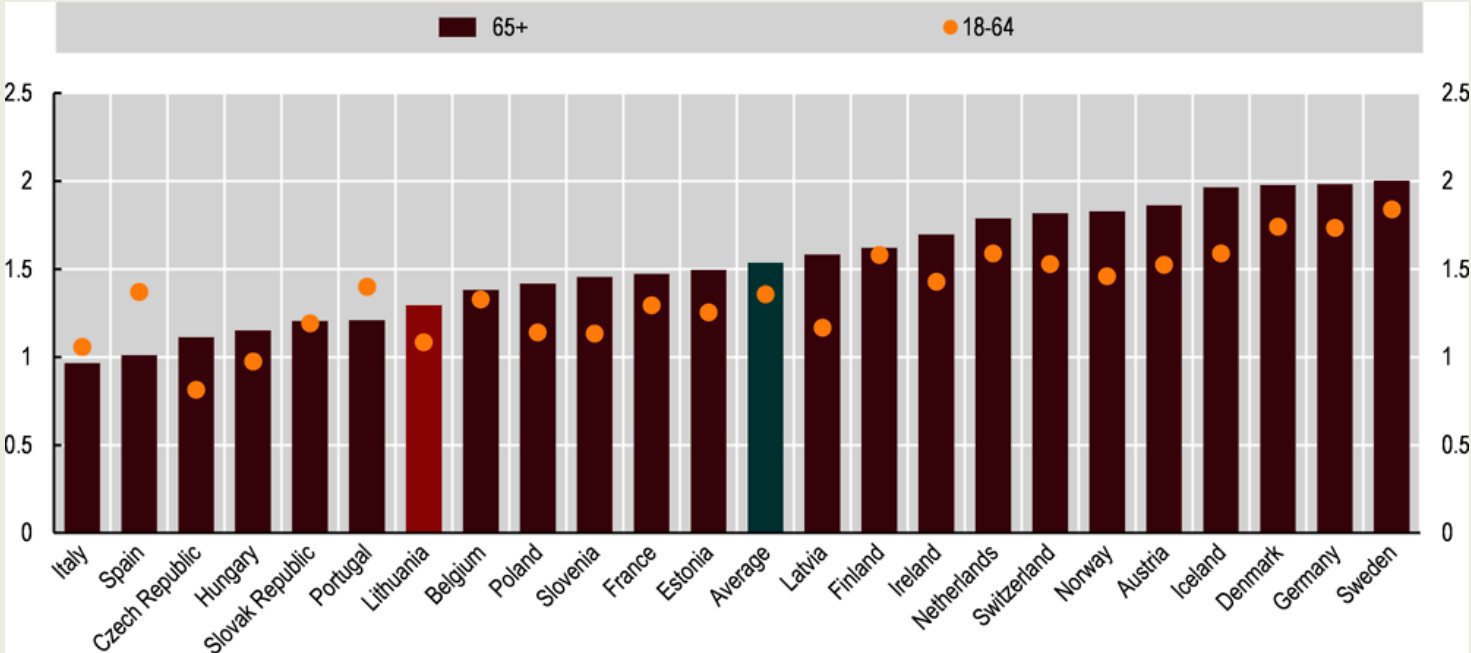
Older people in Lithuania are more likely to vote than persons aged 18-64, however, turnout is below the European average



Source: OECD calculations based on European Social Survey (wave 9)

Similarly, data shows that older people express more interest in politics compared to other age groups in Lithuania. Yet, older people are less likely than the younger population to join political parties, contact politicians or public officials, or take an active role in a group involved with political issues. However, Lithuania ranks below the OECD average in terms of older people’s interest in politics in 2018.

Older people in Lithuania express more interest in politics than those aged 18-64 but overall interest is low



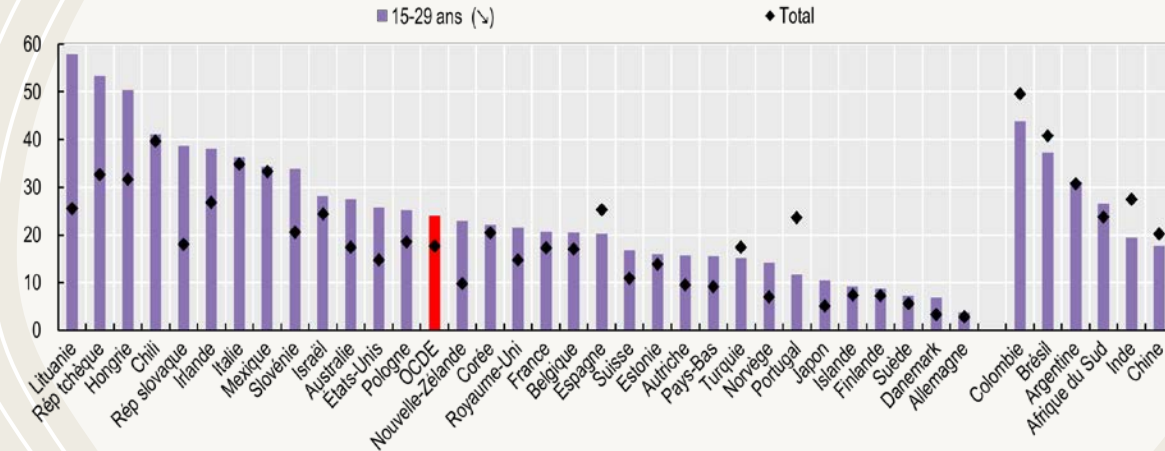
Source: OECD calculations based on European Social Survey (wave 9)

According to the data of the Central Electoral Commission, in 2019 May 12 President of the Republic elections 40% of voters were young persons of 18-29 of age. This is a record number of young people voting in presidential elections and confirms the **growing tendency of youth political activity**. As a matter of fact, in 2012 only 18% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 participated in the elections.

Interestingly, however, according to OECD statistics, Lithuania is one of the OECD countries recording the **highest levels of disinterest in politics among 15-to-29 years old citizens**.

As the graph shows, Lithuanian youth is characterized by exceptionally high levels of disinterest in politics, with **more than 50% of young people reporting no interest at all**. The gaps of turnout and interest in politics between the youngest cohorts of voters (up to 29 years old) and the older voters are among the largest in Europe.

Percentage of people reporting to be not at all interested in politics, by age group, 2016 or last year available

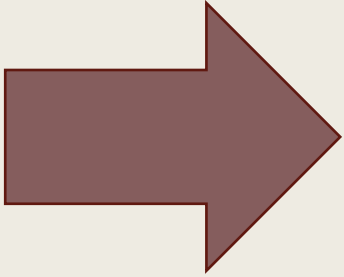


Source: European Social Survey ESS8-2016, ESS7-2014 and World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014

What are the reasons for such a disinterest in politics of young Lithuanians?

According to the Lithuanian Youth Council's president, there are numerous factors that influence the current youth's disinterest in politics, civic and social activities, and democratic processes.

- Young people's attitude is influenced by current global trends and crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, that greatly impacted their lives. The increase of emotional and mental health issues also contributes to undermining all attempts of civic engagement and activities.
- The climate crisis and its ramifications, anxiety, and doubts about the future is another element that discourages young people to engage in politics.
- Retrospectively, the Russian occupation left a mark in the Lithuanian society by undermining all efforts of political activity.
- But the most impactful aspect influencing young people's interest in politics is the **quality and nature of civic education**: generally speaking, civic activities and types of informal education and means are disconnected from formal education and general education programs, leaving a vacuum within the educational background of young Lithuanians who feel a profound sense of detachment about political issues.



A consequence of such dynamics is a low proportion of young people among members of political parties. The average age of elected members in 2020 Parliamentary elections was 45,8.

However, if compared with previous (2012) Parliamentary elections (the average age of elected members was 52,8) we can state that there is a trend towards younger age dynamics.



National Youth Policy Action Plan 2023 – 2027

Adopted in July 2023, it can be considered as a national strategy to increase youth civic and political participation. One of the main purposes of the Action Plan is to develop youths' sense of citizenship by encouraging them to participate in the activities of youth organizations, voluntary activities and other civic activities.


The plan also develops a vision of opportunities for young people to become active and motivated modern citizens of the state, capable of taking responsibility for themselves and creating a fulfilling life.




Youth policy in Lithuania




In what ways is young citizens participation implemented in Lithuania?




Consultations: young people can express their opinions through a network of youth organizations, businesses and civil society representatives.



Initiatives and petitions: with the involvement of youth representatives, young people can contribute to drafting legal documents or monitoring legislation adoptions through specific tools.



Forums and workshops: as, for instance, the EU Structured Dialogue, that aims to engage young people in policy-making by creating a space for connection between young people and policy makers.



E-participation: Lithuanian youth organizations and the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania call for the introduction of internet-based voting.



**Successful
examples of active
participation
initiatives**

GET INVOLVED _ CHANGE AND IMPROVE EU

Open Lithuanian Foundations Initiatives: as its mission is to promote an open and democratic civil society, it carries out various projects aimed at strengthening democracy and civic participation and advocating for a plurality of ideas, perspectives and opinions.

Conference on the Future of Europe: an opportunity for young Lithuanians to participate in national panels and discuss about central topics such as climate change, social justice, health, rule of law, European democracy, digital transformation, and many others.

Europe's People's Forum Initiatives:

- assisted the Lithuanian College for Democracy (L Duk) in building a model for empowerment and participation of vulnerable and rural youth in local communities through collaboration with the Trakai Municipality.
- contributed to the Conference in the parliament Saimas on Media Literacy and Information Technology.

Both activities were supported by Erasmus+ funds.



Sources

- <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/lithuania/59-e-participation>
- <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/3483a69a-en.pdf?expires=1714495333&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=A4274E191F64FC51C66ED9A8343103E7>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/democracy-here-now/meaningful-youth-participation>
- <https://vrk.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=95318a4e89ea428aaf89eeb7eb866d7c>
- <https://olf.lt/en/strengthening-democracy-and-civic-participation/>
- <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/3174c081-812f-4bb0-be94-80988c268778/Indicators%20for%20Democracy%20in%20EU%2C%20Candidate%20and%20.pdf>
- <https://europespeoplesforum.eu/citizens-listened-to/f/could-lithuania-become-an-example-for-participatory-democracy>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/elecdata-lithuania>
- <https://www.delfi.lt/en/my-impact/why-young-lithuanians-too-are-disappointed-with-politicians-explained-95595819>
- <https://www.journals.vu.lt/politologija/article/view/12216>
- <http://www.lnes.tspmi.vu.lt/vote-choice-in-the-2019-lithuanian-presidential-elections/>
- https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/country?country=129&database_theme=293