



Weekly Briefing

Latvia political briefing:

Preparations for the parliamentary elections in Latvia:

how the war in Ukraine affects party ratings

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Preparations for the parliamentary elections in Latvia: how the war in Ukraine affects party ratings

Summary

The 14th elections to the Parliament (Saeima) of the Republic of Latvia will take place on October 1, 2022, in which 100 members of parliament will be elected for the next four years. According to the latest polls, it is possible that the next parliamentary term will be composed of deputies from 8 political parties. Due to recent domestic and geopolitical developments, party support is fluctuating rapidly, and previously strong parties are on the verge of collapse. On the other hand, the attitude of the population towards the elections is deteriorating - the number of voters who do not plan to participate in the elections is increasing from election to election.

Introduction

In April of this year, there is less than half a year left until the 14th parliamentary (Saeima) elections, which will take place on October 1 this year. Latvian citizens from the age of 18 will have the right to participate in elections. On the other hand, the number of voters who do not plan to participate in the elections is increasing from election to election, according to a voter survey conducted by the Central Election Commission. This month's domestic policy briefing will set out current party ratings and a recent public opinion poll showing gloomy statistics of the possible turnout.

I Current Political Party Ratings

In March of this year - when Russia had already started a war in Ukraine - the “Latvian Russian Union” experienced the largest increase in support in Latvia, according to the party ratings created by the company "FACTUM".

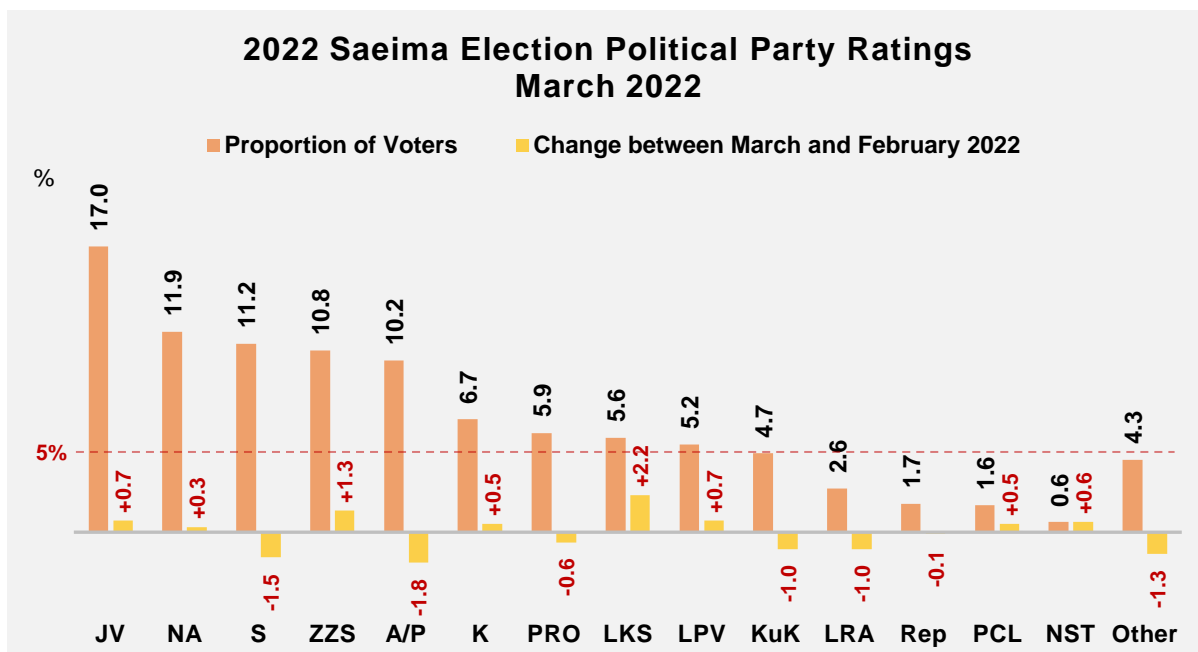


Figure 1. March 2022 Political Party Ratings for the 2022 Election of the Parliament (Saeima) of the Republic of Latvia and Ranking Position Changes¹
Source: created by the author using FACTUM data

The survey was conducted from March 29 to 31, 2022 and Latvian citizens over the age of 18 were interviewed. Of the 498 respondents, 51.9% do not plan to participate in the upcoming Saeima elections. According to the results, if the Saeima elections took place in March this year, 5.6% of voters would support the “Latvian Russian Union”. Over the past month, support for the party has increased by 2.2 percentage points, allowing the party to rank eighth among 14 parties with support above the 0.5% mark. The second largest increase in support - by 1.3 percentage points - was in March for the “Union of Greens and Farmers”, which would have been voted by 10.8% of respondents, thus ranking this political force in the fourth place in the party rankings.

If the Saeima elections had taken place in March, then in total 17% of respondents would support the "New Unity", 11.9% - the “National Alliance”, but in the third place in terms of voter support would have been "Harmony", which would be supported by 11.2% of respondents. Support for this party has decreased by 1.5 percentage points on a monthly basis.

¹ **Abbreviations:** **JV** – “New Unity” (“*Jauna Vienotība*”); **NA** – “National Alliance” (“*Nacionālā Apvienība*”); **S** – “Harmony” (“*Saskaņa*”); **ZZS** – “Union of Greens and Farmers” (“*Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība*”); **A/P** – “Development/For!” (“*Attīstībai/Par!*”); **K** – “Conservatives” (“*Konservatīvie*”); **PRO** – “Progressives” (“*Progresīvie*”); **LKS** – “Latvian Russian Union” (“*Latvijas Krievu Savienība*”); **LPV** – “Latvia First” (“*Latvija pirmajā vietā*”); **KuK** – “For Each and Every One” (“*Katram un Katrai*”); **LRA** – “Latvian Regional Alliance” (“*Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība*”); **Rep** – “Republicans” (“*Republikāņi*”); **PCL** – “For a Humane Latvia” (“*Par Cilvēcīgu Latviju*”); **NST** – “NS Justice” (“*NS Taisnīgums*”)

In terms of voter support, “Development/For!” also fell by 1.8 percentage points in March, thus entering the fifth place in the party rating table. This political force would have been supported by 10.2% of respondents in March.

The party "Conservatives" (previously the “New Conservative Party”) experienced a slight increase in support - 0.5 percentage points, in the sixth position, as it would have been voted for by 6.7% of respondents, in seventh place after the support of voters in March would be the "Progressives", for which 5.9% would vote, this party is followed by the already mentioned “Latvian Russian Union”, leaving the party "Latvia's First" in the ninth place - 5.2% of voters. Support for this party increased by 0.7 percentage points in March.

The party "For Each and Every One", if the Saeima elections had taken place in March, would have gained 4.7% of voters' support, and for this organization has decreased by one percentage point over the month. Support for the “Latvian Regional Alliance” has also decreased by one percentage point - it would have gained 2.6% of voters' support in March.

"Harmony" has a noticeable decline in ratings, but "Latvian Russian Union" - the biggest increase of all parties. Various experts agree that this is due to the war in Ukraine and the views of both “Harmony” leaders - Nils Usakovs and Janis Urbanovics - condemning the Russian aggression in the early days of the war. According to experts, apparently, part of the voters of "Harmony" are radical and pro-Russian enough to support Putin. Meanwhile, sociologist Arnis Kaktins explained: “What we know from other polls is that most of the Russian-speaking supporters of Latvia, including the supporters of “Harmony” had positive attitudes towards Russia until the events in Ukraine. We know that the Latvian-speaking public saw things very differently. But it seemed to the Russian-speakers that those Latvians were unreasonably afraid and exaggerating.”

The biggest drop is for the scandalous party association “Development/For!”. In response to the decision of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development Arturs Toms Pless (“Development/For!”) to suspend the Riga Development Plan, which is related to a possible gambling lobby, the Mayor of Riga Martins Stakis announced his resignation from the party association “Development/For!”. The “Progressives”, which is part of the ruling coalition of the Riga City Council, as well as the Union of Greens and Farmers, in response to the suspension of the Riga Development Plan, called on the Prime Minister to demand the resignation of Minister Pless, which was rejected by the Saeima on April 7, 2022. Currently,

the "For!" Movement" is collecting signatures of members to decide whether to withdraw from the elections together with the "Development / For!".

II Possibility of Low Turnout

In 2018, before the 13th Saeima elections, according to the data by the Central Election Commission (CEC), 20% of respondents, but this year, in a poll ordered by the CEC, 36% have indicated that they will not participate in the 14th Saeima elections planned for this year or are more likely not to participate. The study explained the reasons that encourage or hinder voters to participate in the Saeima elections. As reason why they do not plan to participate in the 14th Saeima elections, 25% of voters indicate that they have no faith in politicians, 20% do not know what to vote for, but 9% admitted that they are not interested in politics at all and are indifferent to these issues. About 3.4% of voters said their vote would have no effect, but 5% questioned the fairness of the election. By comparison, in 2018, 21% said they did not believe in anything, but 8% of those who did not plan to vote said they had nothing to vote for. According to the survey data, 66% of voters plan to participate in the upcoming Saeima elections this year, which is less than in 2018, when 77% of respondents stated that they plan to participate in the 13th Saeima elections.

Conclusions

If the voters vote as they indicated in the recent polls, then the Saeima would probably have 8 parties in it: "New Unity", "Union of Greens and Farmers", "National Alliance", "Harmony", "Development/For!", "Progressives", "Latvian Russian Union" and "Conservatives". The results of this month's rating leader "New Unity" have been stable on an annual basis. However, with the start of the Russian war in Ukraine, its rating has risen significantly. According to various experts, this is mostly due to Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics coordinated response to the war in Ukraine. The "Union of Greens and Farmers" has stable ratings. The rating of the "National Alliance" has not fluctuated sharply, and the increase in support for potential voters since the beginning of the war has been very small. The party association "Development/For!" is having the hardest time of all the parties. The future of the controversial association will be judged in the near future, following the changes in the mutual relations of the "Movement For!" and "Latvia's Development". The rating of the "Latvian

Russian Union” has been low throughout the last year. However, there has been a slight increase since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. A part of the "Harmony" voters could go to the "Latvian Russian Union" in the long run. The rating of the "Conservatives" has remained stable, also exceeding the 5% barrier by 0.3 percentage points in March. Judging by the population survey, there is a possibility that the turnout in these elections may be lower than in the 2018 elections, but the rapidly changing geopolitical situation and scandals in the political scene could potentially change the population's position regarding this question in the six following months.

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