Is i-voting a solution to diminishing voting turnout problem in Lithuania?

Ainė Ramonaitė, Vilnius University

aine.ramonaite@tspmi.vu.lt

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to analyze if and how i-voting might help to solve the problem of low and diminishing voting turnout in Lithuania. The paper analyses the reasons of non-voting in Lithuania using the data of pre-election and post-election surveys of 2008 and 2009. Moreover, it discusses which social groups are least likely to vote and if those groups are likely to use i-voting. Two specific social groups of non-voters are particularly interesting: young people and Lithuanian citizens currently living abroad (they comprise about 10 percent of Lithuanian electorate).

The conclusions about the use of i-voting for the problems of diminishing political participation are ambiguous. On the one hand, i-voting is an attractive technical solution to the problem of increasing mobility of population in democratic societies. On the other hand, it cannot countervail the losses of electorate caused by deeper problems of party democracy such as diminishing partisan identification, political alienation and increasing instrumental attitude of the young generation towards political institutions. Moreover, the paper discusses plausible unexpected negative effects i–voting might have on electoral turnout in the long run.

Introduction

During the last decades, voting turnout was decreasing in many European countries. In Western Europe, the turnout is steadily declining since World War II (Gray and Caul, 2000). In post-Communist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the turnout is lower than in Western countries and constantly decreasing as well. According to Tatiana Kostadinova (2003), the turnout in Central and Eastern Europe from first three elections to the forth elections decreased by 20 percentage points, i.e. from 86 to 66 percent. In Lithuania, electoral participation level is one of the lowest in Europe. In parliamentary elections of September 2008, the turnout was 48 percent in the first round and only 32 percent in the second round.

Introducing Internet voting is currently widely discussed in Lithuania as a solution to the problem of decreasing electoral turnout. Following the example of neighboring Estonia, Lithuanian Parliament passed the Conception of Internet Voting in Elections and Referendums in November 2006. The Plan of Actions for implementation of Internet Voting in Lithuania was approved by the Government in 2007. The preparations were made to introduce i-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections but the Parliament failed to pass necessary legislation.

In the Conception of Internet Voting in Lithuania, internet voting is projected as an additional method of casting a ballot alongside traditional voting in polling stations and postal voting. Internet voting would be provided as an alternative early voting method. Internet voting would be allowed 5-3 days before the Election Day. If a voter casts a traditional paper ballot on the Election Day, his internet vote would be deleted. A voter would be allowed to vote by internet unlimited number of times, but only the last vote is to be counted. Identification of voters is envisaged through e-banking system.

The main argument for introducing internet voting in Lithuania is related to low electoral turnout, in particular among the Lithuanian citizens living abroad. The main proponent of i-voting in the Parliament was the Liberal Movement. It is a political party that appeals mainly to young voters and is putting efforts to mobilize Lithuanian diaspora. Other parties, however, were more reluctant and the final political decision was postponed.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze if and how i-voting might help to solve the problem of low and diminishing voting turnout in Lithuania. The paper analyses the reasons of non-voting in

Lithuania using the data of pre-election and post-election surveys of 2008 and 2009. Moreover, it discusses which social groups are least likely to vote and if those groups are likely to use i-voting. Two specific social groups of non-voters are particularly interesting: young people and Lithuanian citizens currently living abroad (they comprise about 10 percent of Lithuanian electorate). Moreover, the paper discusses plausible unexpected negative effects i–voting might have on electoral turnout in the long run.

The preparation of Lithuania for i–voting

In European context, the internet penetration in Lithuania is not high (see Diagram 1). According to Eurostat data, 51 percent of 16-74 year-old inhabitants was regularly using internet (at least once a week) in EU countries in 2007. In Lithuania the number of regular internet users at the time was slightly smaller (45 percent). Lithuania, however, overtook in this respect Rumania, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Poland, Czech Republic and Spain. Moreover, the percentage of internet users in Lithuania is constantly and rapidly increasing every year (see Diagram 2).
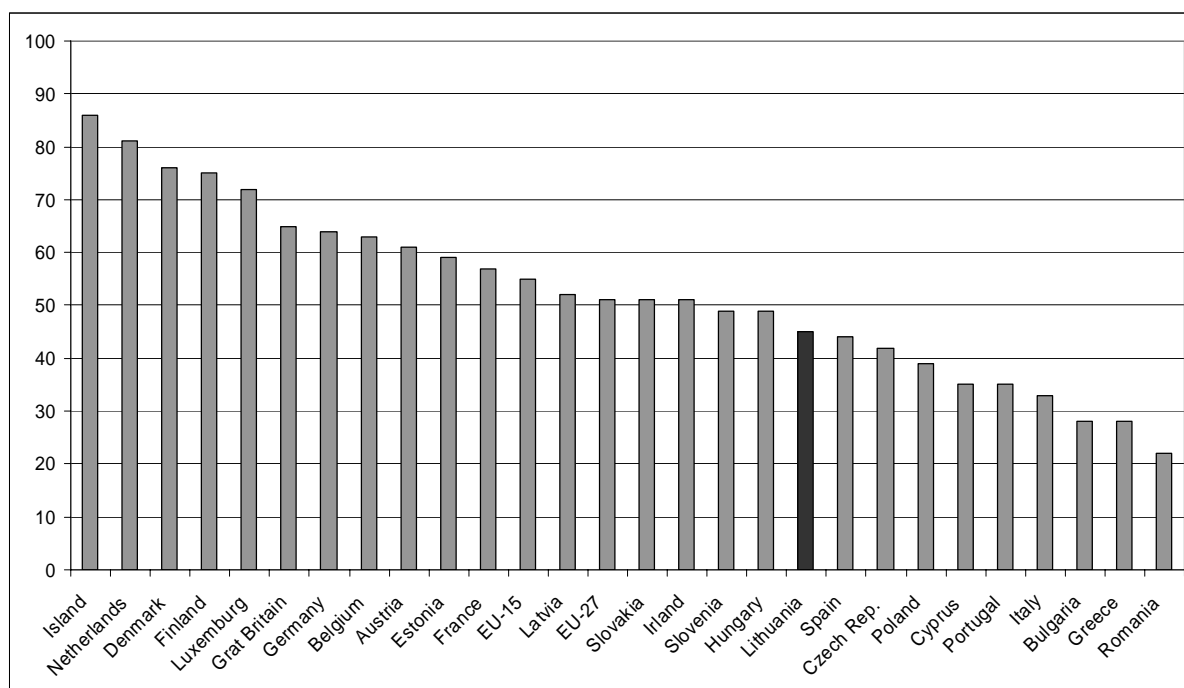

Diagram 1. Percentage of 16-74 year old inhabitants using internet at least once a week
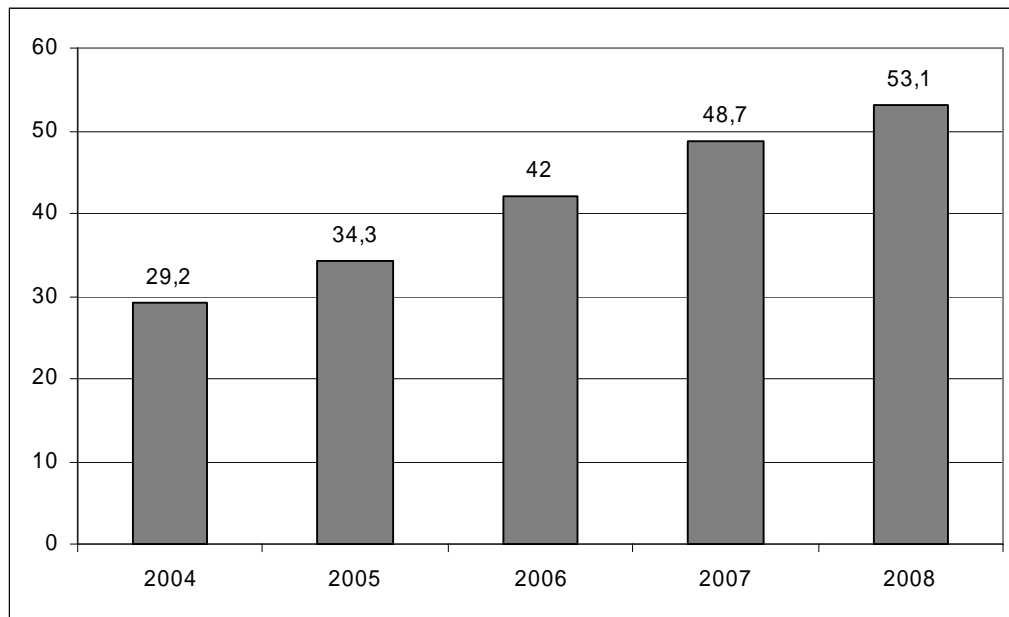*Source*: Eurostat, 2007

Diagram 2. The growth of internet users (percents) in Lithuania in 2004- 2008
Source: Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2009

According to the 2008 data of the Department of Statistics of Lithuania, 45 percent of Lithuanian population use internet for communication, 37 percent search for goods and services, 18 percent are obtaining information from public authorities' websites, 27 percent use e-banking. Internet is much more widely used by young population: among 16-24 year-old inhabitants of Lithuania there are 90 percent of internet users, while among 65-74 years-old population the internet is used only by 4 percent.

The preparation to introduce i-voting in Lithuania began in 2006. The Conception of Internet Voting in Elections and Referendums was presented for public in May 2006 and approved by the Parliament in November 2006. The proposed scheme of Internet voting in Lithuania was similar to that of Estonia. The main difference is that Estonian e-voting system is based on ID Card enabling remote identification of persons and digital signature while in Lithuania it was planned to use e-banking for the identification of voters.

The idea of introducing i-voting in Lithuania in general was positively accepted by Lithuanian politicians and population. E-petition supporting e-voting was initiated and signed by 13,000 citizens. The idea of e-voting was supported by President Valdas Adamkus. There were, however, some criticism and some doubts raised, mainly concerning security problems, anonymity of votes issue, the use of private banking system for the identifications of voters, etc.

A representative survey conducted in October 2007 by public opinion research center Vilmorus on behalf of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University revealed that Lithuanian population is rather conservative: if a possibility of i-voting was available almost half of citizens are strongly inclined to vote at voting station rather than via Internet (see Table 1). Only 24 percent of Lithuanians would choose voting via Internet. In contrast, in Estonia just before the introduction of e-voting (in 2005) the possibility of voting via Internet was considered by 43 percent of population.

Table 1. Preferred voting means of Lithuanian population in 2007 and Estonian population in 2005

Which mode of voting would you choose if a possibility of Internet voting would be available?	Estonia 2005	Lithuania 2007
Surely via Internet	12 %	15 %
Rather via Internet than at voting station	31 %	9 %
Rather at voting station than via Internet	19 %	10 %
Surely at voting station	28 %	47 %
Will not vote at all	5 %	12 %
Cannot say	5 %	7 %

Source: Lithuanian data from public survey data file, Estonian data from Ülle Madise, E-voting in Estonia. Paper presented at the conference, 15 October 2005, available at: <http://www.vvk.ee/english/ylle.ppt>

As can be seen from Table 2, preferred means of voting are directly related to age. Young people are much more susceptible to e-voting. In the age group of 18-29 year–old, as much as 56 percent were ready to vote via Internet and among the elderly only several percent claimed to prefer i-voting over traditional mode of casting a ballot. It is not surprising since the Internet is used much more widely by the youth.

Table 2. Preferred voting means of Lithuanian population in 2007 by age (percents)

Preferred means of voting	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 and more
Surely via Internet or rather via Internet than at voting station	56	47	26	15	5	2
Surely at voting station or rather via at voting station than via Internet	25	36	50	69	76	80
Will not vote at all	12	11	14	13	11	11
Cannot say	8	7	11	4	8	7

Source: representative public opinion survey carried out by Vilmorus, 2007

The level of electoral turnout in Lithuania

In the discussions about the benefits of i-voting in Lithuania, the main argument for the introduction of Internet voting is the possibility to increase electoral turnout. E.g. in the Plan of Actions for implementation of Internet Voting approved by the Government, two main aims of introduction of i-voting are declared: 1) increasing the electoral turnout, especially among the youth; 2) expanding voting facilities for emigrants, disabled, busy people and people temporary living abroad.

The electoral turnout in Lithuania is low both in parliamentary and in presidential elections. As can be seen from Diagram 3, voting turnout in Presidential elections in Lithuania is constantly decreasing since 1993. While in the first presidential elections after the restoration of independence the turnout was 77 percent, in the last elections of 2009 only 52 percent of electorate turned out to vote.[1] In absolute numbers, the number of citizens participating in elections decreased by 700,000 in a country with 269,000,000 eligible voters.

The pattern of turnout level in parliamentary elections is not so clear (see diagram 4). It is evident, however, that the average turnout in the last two elections is much lower than the average of the first two. It appears that the level of electoral participation in both parliamentary and presidential

---

[1] In 1993 and 2009 one round was enough as one of the candidates received more than 50 percent of votes. In 1997-2008, 2002-2003 and 2004 two rounds were taking place.

elections has currently stabilized around 50 percent. The figure appears to be rather low in comparative context. The turnout in local and European Parliament elections is much lower (it was only 21 percent in the last EP elections in June 2009).
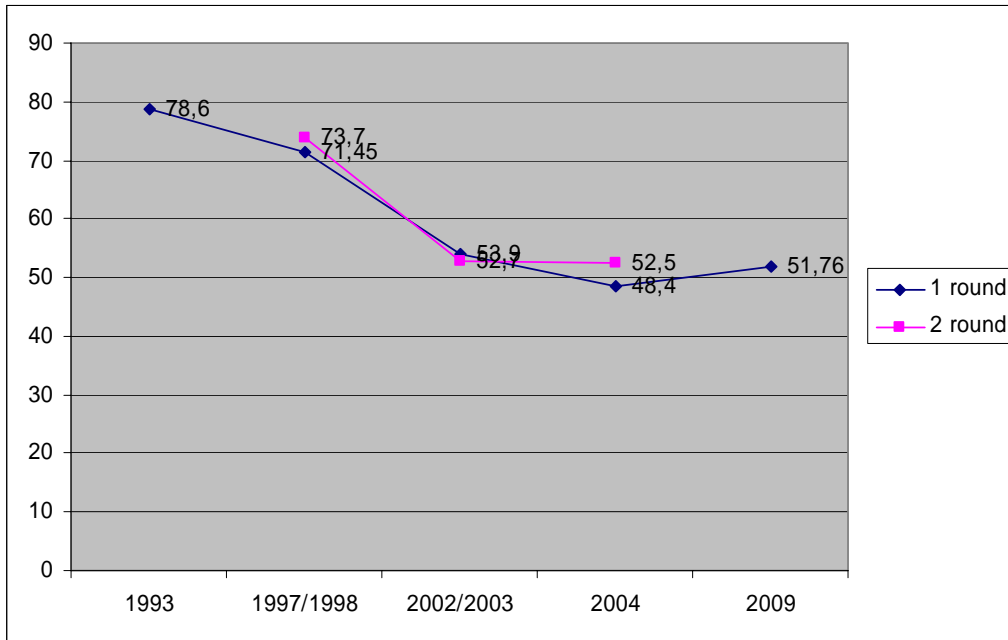

Diagram 3. Turnout in Presidential elections in Lithuania (percents)
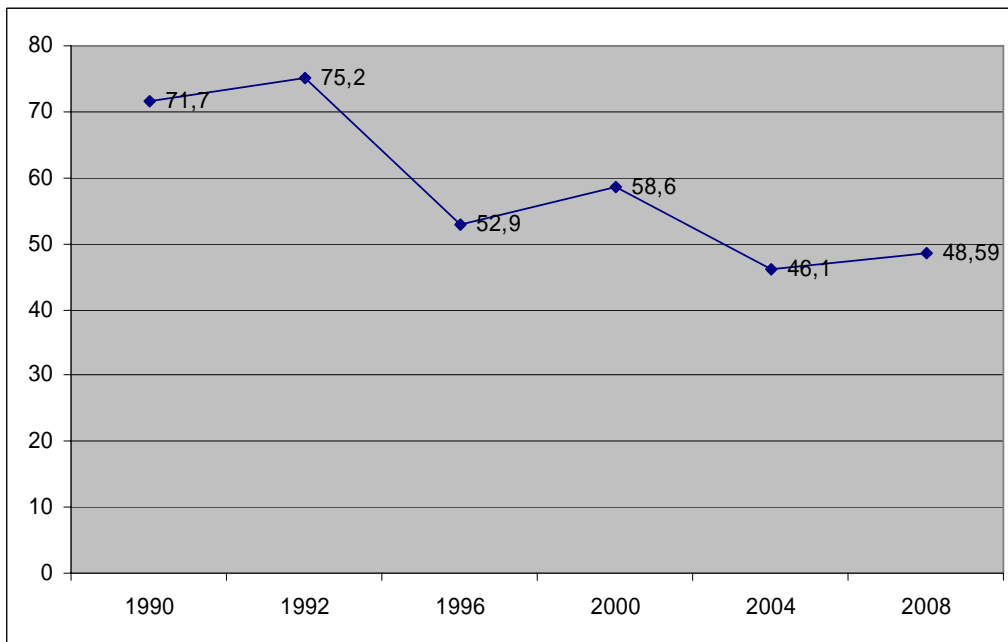*Source:* The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania <www.vrk.lt>

Diagram 4. Turnout in parliamentary elections (in a multimember district) in Lithuania (percents)
Source: The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania <www.vrk.lt>

The causes of low electoral turnout in Lithuania

Studies of electoral participation in Lithuania reveal that diminishing electoral turnout in Lithuania is caused mainly by decreasing partisan attachment and increasing public disillusionment with politics (see Žeruolis, 1998, Ramonaitė, 2006, Ramonaitė 2007). Recent electoral surveys confirm the results of previous research. The data from 2009 post-election survey demonstrate that people with partisan attachment[2] are much more inclined to vote than those who do not feel attached to any party or those who are not sure about their partisan attachment (see Diagram 5).

Partisan attachment in Lithuania surprisingly was one of the highest in post-communist countries in the beginning of 1990s (Evans and Whitefield, 1995). It has been, however constantly diminishing (Degutis, 2001) and now it is one of the lowest while electoral volatility is one of the highest in Central and Eastern Europe (Paškevičiūtė 2006, Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006).[3] Accordingly the electoral turnout was diminishing and it is currently one of the lowest in Europe.

The data from post-election survey of November 2008 reveals that electoral participation is also related to political trust. During the survey, the respondents were asked if they tend to agree with the statement that "One cannot trust any politician" or with the statement "There are some politicians and/or political forces that can be trusted" on a 10-point scale where 1 means total agreement with the 1st statement and 10 means total agreement with the 2nd statement. As can be seen from diagram 6, political trust seems to be directly related with electoral participation: those who believe that some politicians can be trusted voted in the last parliamentary elections much more often than those who do not trust in any politicians.

---

[2] The term „partisan attachment" rather than „party identification" is used here because the use of the concept of „party identification" in post-communist societies is highly disputable (Rudi, 2006, Colton 2000, Ramonaitė, 2007).
[3] For the reasons of diminishing partisanship in Lithuanian see Ramonaitė, 2008.
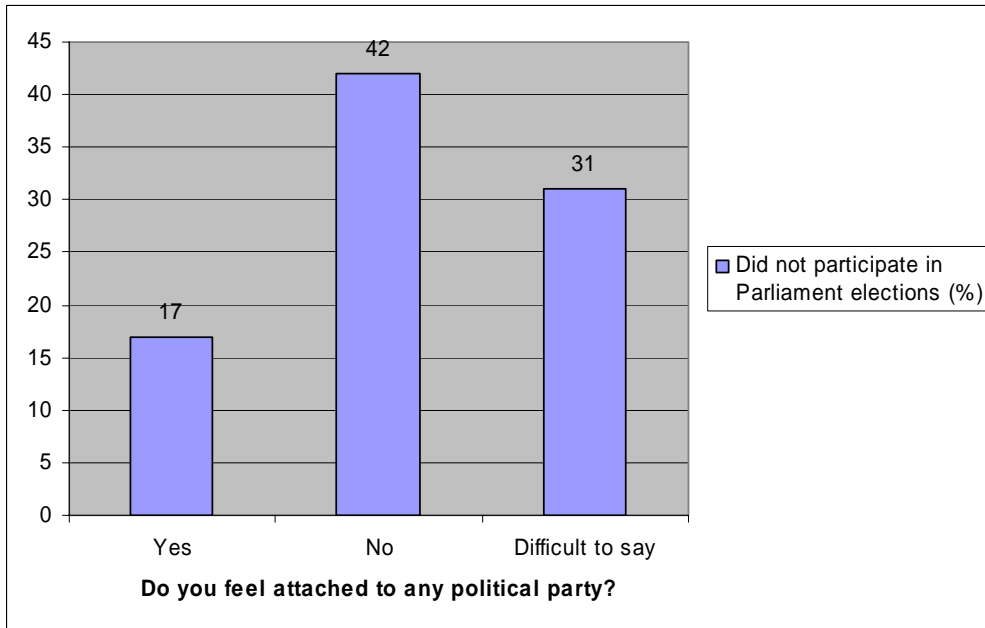
Diagram 5. Non-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections by partisan attachment (percents)
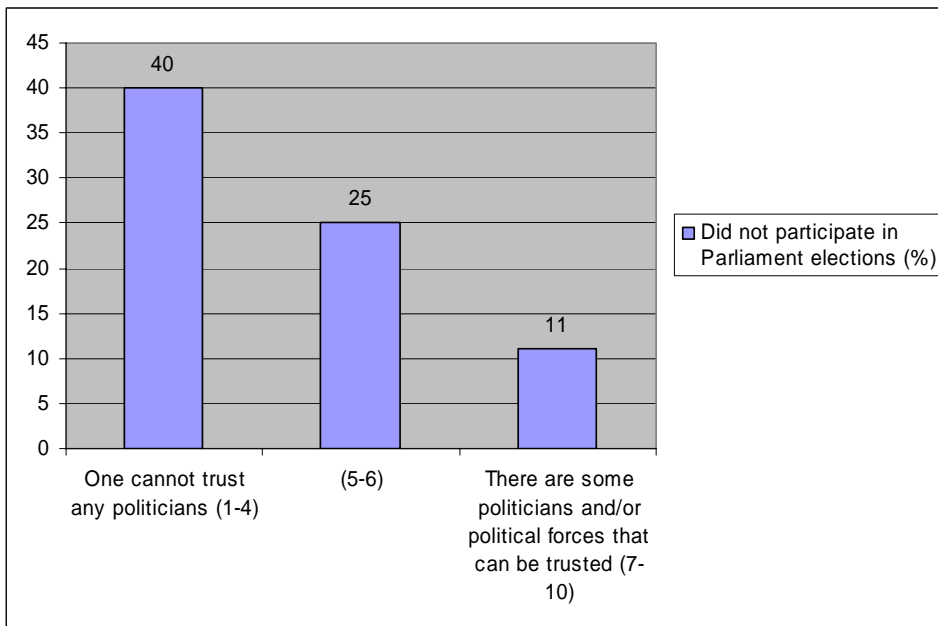
Source: Post-electoral survey 2009

Diagram 6. Non-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections by political trust (percents agreeing with one of the statements on a 10-point scale)

Source: Post-election survey, 2008

The level of electoral participation is strongly related to age. As can be seen from diagram 7, the relationship is rather straightforward: the younger the age, the higher the non-voting level with exception of those over 70 participating less often than middle-aged voters. This is in line with the

trend observed in other countries (Norris, 2002) but the relationship between age and electoral participation trend seems to be steeper in Lithuania. According to 2009 post-election survey those under twenty-nine comprise 35 percent of all resident non-voters in 2008 parliamentary elections in Lithuania while those over 70 comprise only 9 percent of absentees residing in Lithuania.
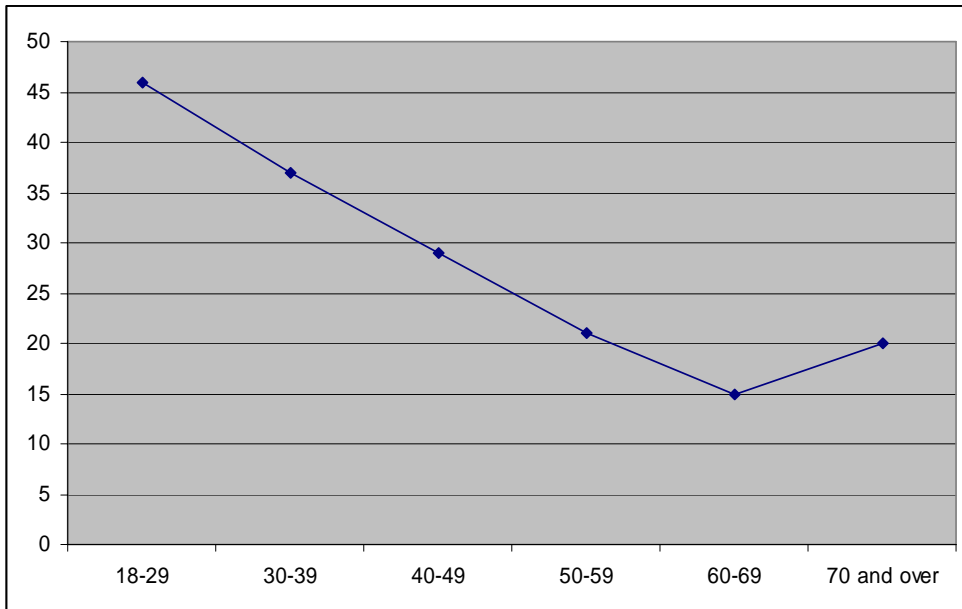

Diagram 7. Nonparticipation in the last parliamentary elections by age (percentages)
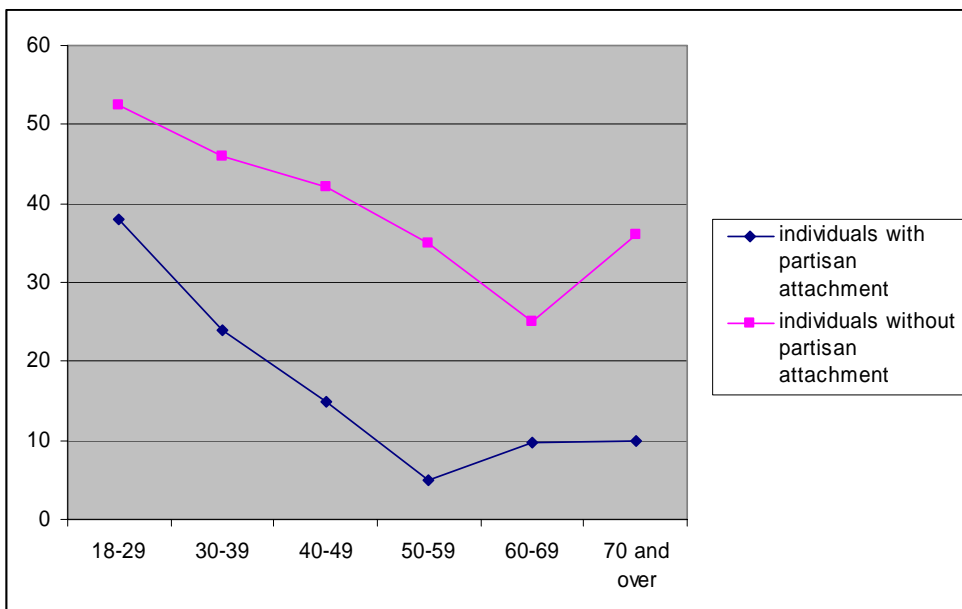*Source:* Post-electoral survey 2009

Diagram 8. Nonparticipation in the last parliamentary elections by age and partisan attachment (percentages)
Source: Post-electoral survey 2009

The factors of age and partisan attachment are partially overlapping. On the one hand, partisan attachment is strongly correlated with age. On the other hand, age remains an important factor of

electoral participation even after controlling partisan attachment (see diagram 8). The effect of age on electoral participation might also be related to diminishing sense of duty and increasing instrumental rationality of the youth (see Ramonaitė, 2007, Žiliukaitė, 2008).

Another important explanation of diminishing electoral turnout in Lithuania is emigration. According to the data of Statistical Department of Lithuania, about 470,000 people emigrated from Lithuania in 1990-2007; it is more than 10 percent of total population. By emigration rate Lithuania is one of leaders in Central and Eastern Europe (Barcevičius et al., 2009). The data of Statistical Department, however, is not precise as many emigrants do not declare the change of their living place.

Many of these new emigrants retain Lithuanian citizenship and are eligible to vote in the elections. The electoral participation among the emigrants, however, is extremely low. The Central Electoral Committee of Lithuania reports only about 17,000 voters registered in diplomatic representations of Lithuania. The number of registered voters increased from 11,500 in 2000 to 17,000 in 2008 while actual emigration in this period was almost 30 times bigger (about 200,000 persons). Therefore almost half of the decline of electoral turnout from 1992 to 2008 can be explained by massive emigration of Lithuanian citizens. The reasons of emigrants' absenteeism will be explored in the next section of the paper.

Reasons of abstention and potential effects of i-voting

Motivational theory of political participation suggests that decision of turning out to vote is influenced by 1) electoral costs; 2) electoral choice and 3) electoral decisiveness (Norris, 2002, 61). Aldrich (1993: 274) claims that the turnout decision is a marginal decision with low costs and low benefits for most people, therefore, small changes in costs or benefits might affect the decision. The question is if and how i-voting might influence the electoral costs or benefits.

Electoral costs include the costs of registration (if it is not automatic), the costs of information gathering, making a decision and, finally, casting a ballot. To reduce the electoral costs for mobile, elderly and disabled citizens many countries provide alternative voting facilities such as postal, absentee, overseas voting. In this respect, Internet voting is similar to other types of remote voting facilities designed to reduce electoral costs and barriers (Norris, 2003). But it can only reduce the

costs of casting a ballot and does not affect the costs of information gathering and making a decision, while these costs might be substantively high in a society with low partisan attachment.

How many Lithuanian voters do not vote because of high costs of casting a ballot? In the representative pre-electoral public opinion survey of Lithuanian inhabitants carried out by research center Vilmorus in March 2008, 13 percent of respondents claim that sometimes they are not able to vote because of the poor voting facilities. In 2009 post-election survey, 28,6 of non-voters claim that they did not vote for technical reasons. It is a second most important reason after the sense of meaninglessness of voting act (see Table 3). Is it an excuse or are there substantial barriers of turning out to vote in Lithuania?

Table 3. Reasons of non-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections in Lithuania (% from non-voters, only one answer was allowed)

Were not able to vote [for technical reasons] (e.g. was out)	28,6
At the moment in Lithuania I do not see any parties and candidates I could trust	24,5
Regardless of the results of the elections, my life and the life of the country will not change	35,5
I had no time to follow the elections	8,5
Other reasons	0,7

Source: post-election survey 2008

When sample is broken down by age group (see diagram 8), it appears that technical reasons of non-voting are most usually mentioned by elderly people and the youngest voters. Moreover, this reason was mentioned more often by businessman, specialists, pensioners and working in household (data not shown). The data suggest that elderly and more mobile persons indeed have hurdles to turn out to vote.
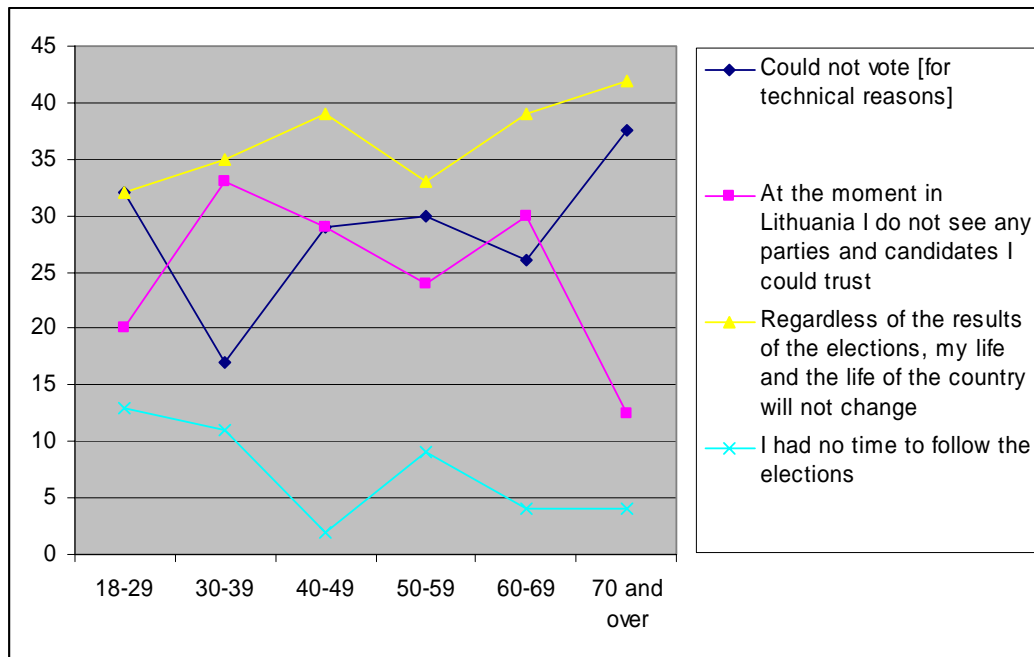
Diagram 8. Reasons of non-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections in Lithuania by age (% from non-voters, only one answer was allowed)

Source: post-election survey 2008

In Lithuania three types of early voting facilities for disabled, elderly or mobile population are available: 1) *early voting* in municipalities for those who are unable to come to a polling district to vote on an election day; 2) *postal voting* for voters who are in institutions of healthcare, social care or guardianship because of their health condition or age, or who perform military service or who serve arrest or imprisonment sentence, 3) *voting at home* for disabled voters, voters with temporary working incapacity, voters aged 70 and over.[4]

Early voting take place on the Wednesday and Thursday preceding an election day in the municipality building. The facility is mainly used by mobile people and students who are not able to come home on an election day from cities they are studying at. The procedure of early voting is quite simple but casting a ballot is sometimes rather cumbersome because of long queues in the main university cities such as Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai. Alternatively, a student might be included in the list of voters in the constituency of his studying place by the request of his school addressed to the Central Electoral Committee.

---

[4] See Law on Election to the Seimas <http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=342507>

Until 2008, early postal voting for those who are unable to come to a polling district to vote on an election day was allowed in all postal offices. The provision, however, was abandoned in March 2008 because of the frequent complaints about selling of votes during early postal voting.

Voting at home is organized only for the persons who are unable to come to a polling district to vote on an election day because of the health condition if they have produced a voter's request. There are no special voting facilities available for working in household, e.g. mothers with small children. During the 2004 parliamentary election the Central Electoral Committee received 80,612 (or 3 percent from total electorate) requests to vote at home, during 2007 municipal elections 117,764 (4 percent of electorate) requests were received. This comprise about 40 percent of total number of voting age population having difficulties to move or are not able at all to leave home (data from Statistical Department of Lithuania).

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data. First, difficulties of voting are most often experienced by elderly population even if facilities of voting at home are available. Elderly population, however, comprise only a small part of non-voters in Lithuania (about 9 percent, according to post-election survey 2009). Moreover, only a tiny percent of elderly people in Lithuania use Internet, therefore i-voting is not a solution to the problem at least in a foreseeable future.

Second, i-voting is much more appealing solution to the problem of young non-voters as about 90 percent of young people in Lithuania use Internet. The 18-29 year-old voters comprise about 23 percent of voting age population. More than a half of them do not vote in elections. About 1/3 of them claim having technical reasons for non-voting in 2008 parliamentary elections. Therefore one can roughly estimate that Internet voting facility could potentially increase voting turnout by about 4 percent by stimulating the turnout of the youngest generation. The estimate, however, seems to be too optimistic since about 60 percent of 18-29 year-old respondents claiming to have technical reasons for non-voting confess they rarely or never vote in elections (data not shown). Therefore, the increase of turnout by about 1,5 percent seems to be a more realistic estimate.

Third, voters of 30-39 age group are also keen to use i-voting but the percentage of them mentioning technical reason of non-voting is rather small. Other age groups are less relevant for the analysis because of relatively high electoral participation rate and relatively low rate of Internet usage.

The second most important group of non-voters is Lithuanian citizens living abroad. As was reported in previous section of the paper, only a small part of them (about 5 percent) is registered for elections and only about 60 percent of those registered regularly vote in elections.

According to the Electoral law, Lithuanian citizens abroad can vote at the diplomatic missions and consular offices or by post. There are some additions voting posts established in UK, where concentration of Lithuanian emigrants is especially high. Those wishing to vote by post are obliged to inform a diplomatic representation about his current living place and electoral ballots are sent to them by mail. It means that citizens living abroad have to apply in order to vote or to arrive to the diplomatic representation. The procedure of registration, however, is not complicated. A person can register for the elections by mail, e-mail or fax.[5]

It appears that there are no serious technical hurdles for emigrants to participate in elections. Why they do not participate? First, many of emigrants do not know about the procedures how to vote in diplomatic missions of Lithuania. Second, people wishing to vote in diplomatic missions and consular offices must apply themselves to be included in the list of voters. This implies additional electoral costs in comparison with automatic registration for Lithuanian residents. Moreover, some people, especially working illegally, do not wish to declare they work in a foreign country and do not want to disclose their living place. Finally, interviews with persons returned from temporary emigration reveal that usually people, especially those planning to work in a foreign country for a specific period, temporary withdraw from the civic life even if they were active citizens when living in Lithuania.

Introduction of i-voting would reduce the electoral costs of emigrants in one most important aspect. It eliminates the necessity to register for the elections in a diplomatic representation and to disclose a living place of an emigrant. Persons voting via Internet would be able to vote in their constituencies as if they were living in Lithuania if they do not wish to declare the change of their living place.

It is extremely complicated to estimate how i-voting would affect the turnout of emigrants because no representative surveys of emigrants are available. Unrepresentative pilot survey of emigrants

---

[5] Information provided by the Central Electoral Committee of Lithuania at http://www.vrk.lt/lt/pirmas-puslapis/ankstesni-rinkimai/2008-seimo-rinkimai/balsavimas-uzsienyje/balsavimas-uzsienyje.html

carried out by the Institute of International Relations and Political Science in 2007 suggests that i-voting might boost electoral turnout of emigrants; in particular it would stimulate the participation of those persons who were engaged when living in Lithuania.

According to the pilot survey data, 45 percent of those who used to vote in elections when living in Lithuania do not vote when staying in a foreign country (see Table 4). In general 72 percent of respondents claim that introduction of i–voting would stimulate them to go to polls excluding those who vote anyway (see Table 5). Internet voting would have the strongest effect on electoral participation of those who used to vote when living in Lithuania and those who did not have a right to vote (i.e. young people). When segregating those respondents who say they were always or usually voting in elections when living in Lithuania or had no right to vote at that time *and* claim that i-voting would encourage them to turn out to vote when staying in a foreign country, we get about 38 percents of total sample and about 50 percents of non-voters. If it was the data from representative survey we could estimate that i-voting can potentially boost the electoral turnout of emigrants by about 38 percentage points. The survey, however, is not representative with strong overrepresentation of Internet users and civically engaged.

Table 4. Self reported electoral participation of Lithuanian emigrants (percents)

How often did you turn out to vote in elections when living abroad?	How often did you turn out to vote in elections when living in Lithuania?					
	Always	Often	Seldom	Never	Did not have a voting right at the time	Total
Always	29	2	3	0	6	13
Often	12	18	3	7	6	12
Seldom	9	16	14	0	0	10
Never	45	63	76	86	88	62
Do not remember	4	2	3	7	0	3

Source: Pilot internet survey of Lithuanian citizens abroad, 2007 (N=193)

Table 5. Attitudes towards i-voting of emigrants who usually do not vote when staying in a foreign country according to their former civic engagement (percentages)

Would you be encouraged to vote in elections a possibility to vote via Internet would be available?	How often did you turn out to vote in election when living in Lithuania?					
	Always	Often	Seldom	Never	Did not have a voting right at the time	Total
Yes	90	62	54	69	86	72
No	0	7	15	23	7	8
Do not know	10	31	31	8	7	20

Source: Pilot internet survey of Lithuanian citizens abroad, 2007 (N=193)

Summing up, Internet voting seems to be efficacious solution to the problem of electoral absenteeism of Lithuanian emigrants even if precise estimate of the effects is not possible. If voting turnout of emigrants would increase by 30 percentage points, this would amount to the increase of general electoral turnout in Lithuania by about 3-4 percentage points.

Possible negative effects of i-voting on turnout in the long run

So far the analysis was focused on the electoral costs and the possibilities to diminish them by introducing i-voting. Can i-voting have an effect on the benefits of the voting act? Students of the rational calculus of voting suggest that voting in general elections seems to be irrational unless voting act is treated as a value in itself, i.e. unless we assume that a voter receives value from voting *per se*, regardless of the outcome (Riker and Ordershook, 1968). Rewards from the voting act might come from the satisfaction from compliance with the voting norm, affirming a partisan preference, satisfaction from going to the polls, etc. (Coleman 1990, Riker and Ordershook, 1968).

There are good reasons to argue that widespread use of i-voting in the long run might reduce potential benefits from the act of voting itself by removing it from the public to the private sphere. First, going to a polling station is regarded by some people as a pleasant experience in itself as it provides an emotional branding of democracy:

> „I have a dream. I imagine peace settling over the world via a particular Australian
> aroma. It is the smell of democracy. Try this. Picture yourself at you local polling

station, close your eyes and remember what you smell. To me, the front notes are the sausages and onions frying on the fund-rising barbecue and the back notes are of school or church-yard tarmac and hints of innocence." [6]

Second, going to the polling station might be regarded an important social occasion, an opportunity to meet neighbors and friends. The data from pre-electoral survey of 2008 reveals that possibility to meet people and to discuss with other voters at polling station is appreciated by 19 percent of all Lithuanian inhabitants and by 27 percent of people in rural regions (see Table 6). Shifting to i-voting would eliminate this kind of motivation to go to vote. Therefore, it might have a negative impact on electoral turnout in the long run.

Table 6. Appreciation of a possibility to meet people and to discuss with other voters at the polling station by living place (percents)

	Urban population	Rural population	Total
Appreciate possibility to meet people and to discuss with other voters at the polling station by living place	16	27	19

Source: pre-election survey, 2008

It might be argued that elections loose their social and symbolic importance for younger generations (Kersting et al. 2004.). Data in Diagram 9 illustrate that young voters indeed enjoy the social function of elections less often than elderly people. The differences, however, are not so high.

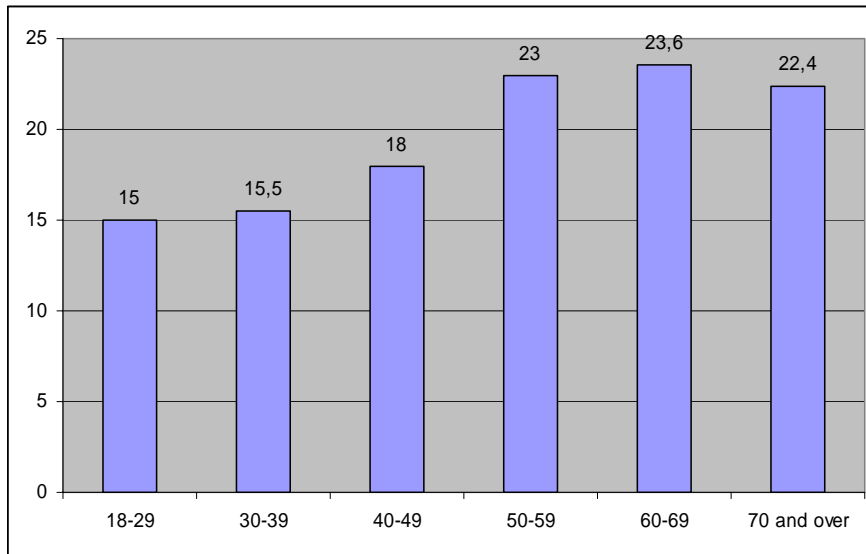[6] „Sense of Sell". In Melbourne Weekly Magazine. April 2-8, 2008, 19.

Diagram 9. Appreciation of a possibility to meet people and to discuss with other voters at the polling station by age groups (percents)

Source: pre-election survey, 2008

Finally, a public act of voting is important as it is an opportunity to demonstrate publicly a disposition towards the duty of voting. If voting norm is strong in the community, social sanctions can be applied for non-voters. If it is taken in private sphere, however, social sanctioning is less efficient or even impossible. Therefore, shifting from traditional voting in a polling place to i-voting might reduce the effectiveness of the voting norm which is proved to be the most important reason of turning out to vote (Campbell, 2006).

Conclusions

The question if Internet voting would affect voting turnout is important as it is one on the most often used arguments in favor of i-voting. So far, the evidence on the effects of i-voting on turnout is inconclusive (Kersting et al, 2004). The paper aimed to provide an estimate of the possible effect of i-voting on the electoral turnout in Lithuania using indirect evidence such as self reported reasons of non-voting and statistics of Internet usage among different social groups.

The analysis reveals that low and diminishing electoral turnout in Lithuania is attributed first of all to the diminishing partisan attachment and widespread political distrust. Moreover, it is attributable to the changing nature of political engagement of the youngest generation. Inconvenience of polling facilities is often an excuse rather than a cause of non-voting of dissatisfied and disengaged

population. There are, however, some differences in the electoral costs of different social groups that can explain the differences in the level of voting participation.

First, the electoral costs are substantively higher for Lithuanian citizens living in foreign countries. There are good reasons to believe that Internet voting might increase the turnout among emigrants, especially among those temporary working in foreign countries and unwilling to report to Lithuanian authorities. Since emigrants comprise about 10 percent of electorate in Lithuania, i-voting might increase the turnout by 3-4 percentage points by stimulating the electoral participation of Lithuanian citizens abroad.

Second, i-voting might increase the turnout among those with busy and mobile lifestyles, e.g. young specialists, businessman, students, and people working in household because early voting facilities are limited and inconvenient in Lithuania. Internet voting is not a solution, however, for non-voting of elderly people as the internet usage among elderly is very low. Therefore, we can roughly estimate that i-voting might increase a turnout of Lithuanian residents by about 1,5-2 percentage points.

Summing up, i-voting might have a noticeable effect on the voting turnout in Lithuania in the short run but it apparently cannot solve the problem of low and diminishing turnout in general. On the one hand, it seems to be an attractive technical solution to the problem of increasing mobility of population in democratic societies. On the other hand, it cannot countervail the losses of electorate caused by deeper problems of party democracy such as diminishing partisan identification, political alienation and increasing instrumental attitude of the young generation towards political institutions.

Moreover, i-voting might have a negative impact on voting participation in the long run by changing the nature of voting and removing it from the public to the private sphere. First, it eliminates the emotional effect of "experiencing democracy" on the polling day. Second, it deprives voters of social benefits of voting such as meeting neighbors and discussing political matters at the poling place. Finally, it reduces the effectiveness of the voting norm.

References

Gray, Mark and Miki Caul (2000) Declining Voter Turnout in Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1997. The Effects of Declining Group Mobilization. *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 33, Nr. 9, 1091-1122.

Campbell, D. (2006) *Why We Vote: How Schools and Communities Shape Our Civic Life*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Evans G. and Whitefield S. (1995) The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 25(4): 485-514.

Degutis M. (2001) How Lithuanian Voters decide: Reasons Behind the Party Choice. In A. Jankauskas (ed.) *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook 2000*. Vilnius: Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, pp.81-123.

Jungerstam – Mulders S. (2006) Parties and Party Systems in Post-Communist EU Member States: Comparative Aspects. In S. Jungerstam-Mulders (ed.) *Post-Communist EU Member States: Parties and Party Systems*. Ashgate, 2006, pp. 1-22.

Campbell, A., Converse R.E., Miller W.E., Stokes D.E. (1960) *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.

Kersting N., R.Leenes and J.Svensson (2004) Conlusions; Adopting Electronic Voting. Context matters. In N.Kersting and H.Baldersheim (eds.) Electronic Voting and Democracy. Palgrave Maccmillan.

Coleman, J. (1990) Foundations of Social Theory. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Colton T. (2000) *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia.* Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.

Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Paskeviciute A. (2006) Party Identification and System Legitimacy in Established and New Democracies. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions Workshops, Nicossia, Cyprus, 25-30 April 2006. < http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/nicosia/ws22/Paskeviciute.pdf>

Rudi T. (2006) What kind of party identification does exist in emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Paper presented at the Workshop "Beyond Party Identification and Beyond", ECPR Joint Sessions Workshops, Nicossia, Cyprus, 25-30 April 2006. < http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/nicosia/ws22/Rudi.pdf>

Žeruolis, D. (1998) Lithuania. In S.Berglund (eds.) *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*. London: Edward Elgar.

Ramonaitė, A. (2007) *Posovietinės Lietuvos politinė anatomija*. Vilnius: Versus aureus.

Ramonaitė, A. (2008) Changing nature of partisanship in a post-communist society: comparing "old" and "new" parties in Lithuania. In *Lithuanian Political Science Yearbook 2007*. Vilnius: Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, 91-110.

Ramonaitė, A. (2006) Kodėl rinkėjai ne(be)balsuoja? In Žiliukaitė R., Ramonaitė A., Nevinskaitė L., Beresnevičiūtė V., Vinogradnaitė I. *Neatrasta galia: Lietuvos pilietinės visuomenės žemėlapis*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 92-112.

Aldrich, J. (1993) "Rational Choice and Turnout". *American Journal of Political Science,* 37, 246-278.

Kostadinova, T. (2003) Voter turnout dynamics in post-Communist Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42: 741-759.

Pippa Norris (2003) Will Technology Boost Turnout? Evaluating Experiment in e-voting vs. all-postal voting facilities in UK elections. Paper for the British Study Group Seminar Friday 31st October 2003, Minda de Gunzberg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, p. 9.

Riker W. and P.Ordershook (1968) A Theory of the Calculus of Voting. *The American Political Science Review*, 62(1): 25-42.