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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2023 - Lithuania

FREE

89

/ 100

Political Rights 38 / 40

Civil Liberties 51 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

89 / 100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Lithuania is a democracy in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected. Chronic problems including corruption and socioeconomic inequality often arouse public dissatisfaction with the government, political parties, and other institutions. Women, LGBT+ people, members of the Romany minority, and some other groups experience varying degrees of discrimination and underrepresentation in politics.

Key Developments in 2022

- In February, hours after the Russian regime's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, Lithuanian authorities declared a state of emergency. Among other provisions, the designation placed restrictions on the transmission of Russian and Belarusian broadcasts, as well as demonstrations supporting the invasion. The war also prompted authorities to seek stronger military assurances from their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners. In September the nationwide state of emergency expired, but the

designation was extended to the end of the year for the areas along Lithuania's borders with Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast.

- Some 72,000 refugees from Ukraine arrived in the country and requested temporary protection. In addition to Lithuania's official military and humanitarian support of Ukraine, various civic initiatives were launched to help the country and its residents, and to accommodate refugees.
- The country experienced significant price increases, particularly in the energy and food sectors. The year-over-year inflation rate reached 24.1 percent in September, ending the year at 20 percent. As popular discontent rose, the government introduced emergency fiscal measures in an attempt to relieve an approaching economic crisis.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The president, whose main competencies as head of state pertain to foreign affairs, is directly elected for up to two five-year terms. The prime minister, who as head of government holds most executive authority, is appointed by the president with the approval of the Seimas (parliament). Recent executive elections have met democratic standards.

Centrist nonpartisan candidate Gitanas Nausėda was elected president in 2019. He took 66 percent of the vote in a runoff, defeating Ingrida Šimonytė, an independent lawmaker backed by the center-right Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD). Šimonytė was appointed prime minister following October 2020 parliamentary elections. Both the presidential election and the appointment of the prime minister were in accordance with democratic standards.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The unicameral, 141-seat Seimas includes 71 members elected in single-mandate constituencies and 70 chosen by proportional representation, all for four-year terms.

In the October 2020 elections, which observers deemed free and fair, the TS-LKD won 50 seats, while the then-incumbent centrist-populist Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) won 32. Two socially liberal and probusiness parties, the Liberal Movement and the Freedom Party, respectively won

13 and 11 seats; they formed a coalition government with the TS-LKD that November.

The center-left Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) won 13 seats, while the centrist-populist Labor Party won 10. Four other parties and independent candidates won the remaining seats.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 4 / 4

The legislative framework for conducting elections is consistent with democratic standards and generally well implemented. The Central Electoral Commission has typically operated and adjudicated election-related complaints in a fair manner.

In April 2022, the Seimas adopted three constitutional amendments on electoral issues. The amendments authorized direct mayoral elections, lowered the minimum age for running in legislative elections to 21 years from 25, and implemented a 2011 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights to allow an impeached person to run for president or parliament ten years after being removed from office.

In June 2022, the Seimas passed a new electoral code that consolidated election-related laws.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4 / 4

Political parties generally operate freely. Citizens of other European Union (EU) member states living in the country are eligible to join and found Lithuanian political parties.

The minimum number of members for political parties, which stands at 2,000, somewhat restricts the creation of new parties and the maintenance of small ones. Public funding rules generally favor the main parliamentary forces, as private financing of political organizations is tightly restricted.

In September 2022, the Seimas overrode a presidential veto to significantly raise requirements for the formation and functioning of public election committees—a way for groups of citizens to run for municipal councils or the European Parliament without joining or establishing a political party. Consequently, the number of committees

registered for forthcoming March 2023 local elections dropped almost threefold, to 32, from the 87 that had been registered for the previous local elections, in 2019.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Regular transfers of power between rival parties after elections have been the norm since the early 1990s, with left- and right-leaning coalitions alternating in government. Parties in opposition retain a significant presence in the Seimas.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 4 / 4

Sporadic cases of vote buying during national elections have been observed, and clientelism can influence politics at the local level. However, voters and candidates are generally free to exercise their political autonomy without undue influence or interference.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4 / 4

There are no formal restrictions on the political participation of women, LGBT+ people, or members of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. Women and women's interests remain underrepresented in politics, though improvements are evident. Women currently hold 28 percent of Seimas seats and the three leaders of the governing coalition are women, including Prime Minister Šimonytė and Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, the leader of the Liberal Movement, who serves as Seimas speaker. Šimonytė's cabinet approaches gender balance, with women holding 6 of the 14 ministerial posts.

Political parties that are supportive of LGBT+ rights increased their parliamentary representation in 2020. The Freedom Party, founded in 2019, campaigned for marriage equality and had an openly gay candidate among its leaders.

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance (LLRA-KŠS), which represents members of the ethnic Polish minority, won three seats in single-mandate districts.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

The country's elected officials are able to determine and implement government policies without improper interference from unelected or foreign entities.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Corruption remains an issue in Lithuania, and certain sectors, including health care and construction, are perceived as prone to malfeasance. While anticorruption bodies are active, there are usually considerable delays in the investigation and prosecution of political corruption cases.

The protection of whistleblowers and journalists who report on corruption cases is legally guaranteed, though such safeguards are upheld inconsistently at the local level.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

Lithuanian law grants the public the right to access official information, and the government generally complies with such requests. However, the operations of state-owned enterprises are somewhat opaque and prone to financial misconduct.

European institutions lauded recent changes to transparency rules for lobbying activities as well as improvements in the country's public procurement framework. Nevertheless, more than one-third of public contracts are still awarded following a single bid or no call for bids at all, and public procurement remains at high risk of corruption.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

The government generally respects freedom of the press, and the media market is vibrant. However, the increasing concentration of media ownership in the hands of a small number of companies raises the risk of editorial interference by powerful political and business interests. Journalists often engage in self-censorship when reporting on certain large companies. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic left the media more vulnerable to undue influence and affected the job security of journalists. Journalists also face online harassment and abuse.

Under the state of emergency declared after Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the transmission of any programs broadcast by

Russian and Belarusian television and radio channels was suspended. The state of emergency also allowed for the restriction of Lithuanian media if they were deemed to spread disinformation or propaganda, incite war, or breach Lithuanian sovereignty. On the other hand, state institutions, major media outlets, and civil society groups stepped up their efforts to fight disinformation on the Internet.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 4 / 4

Freedom of religion is legally guaranteed and largely upheld in practice. However, nine so-called traditional religious communities, and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, enjoy certain government benefits, including annual subsidies that are not granted to other groups.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 4 / 4

Academic freedom is respected, and the educational system is generally free from political influence.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

The freedoms of personal expression and private discussion are generally robust and unrestricted. However, the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to a narrowing of the freedom to criticize official stances on security-related issues without fear of institutional scrutiny or societal marginalization.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Freedom of assembly is generally respected.

In the wake of the nationwide state of emergency declared in February 2022, assemblies supporting the military actions of the Russian or Belarusian regimes in Ukraine were banned.

Due to a significant slowdown of the spread of COVID-19, the government in April 2022 announced that restrictions on public gatherings and other events that had been in place would be lifted the next month.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are able to register without facing serious obstacles, and they generally operate without undue restrictions in practice.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

Workers have the right to form and join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining, though there have been reports of employees being punished for attempting to organize. Less than 10 percent of workers are trade union members, and the share of workers covered by collective agreements is similarly low. Changes to the labor code in 2017 required employers with at least 20 workers to initiate the election of a work council to represent employees' interests, if a union was not already established, though only unions can engage in collective bargaining. Strikes are relatively uncommon due to strict regulations, lack of strike funds, and the absence of a culture of industrial action.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4

Although public confidence in the courts has been steadily improving in recent years, judicial corruption remains a concern. There are significant delays in appointments to high judicial positions. Notably, as of the end of 2022, the Supreme Court had been headed by an acting president since September 2019. There are also concerns regarding transparency in the selection of judges and low pay for some work in the court system.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 3 / 4

Defendants generally enjoy the presumption of innocence and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, but detained suspects are not always granted timely access to an attorney. The law states that pretrial detention should only be employed in exceptional circumstances, and its use has declined in recent years. However, due to low pay levels, many qualified lawyers do not wish to participate in the state-guaranteed legal aid system. Moreover, recent legislative changes have further restricted legal access for socially vulnerable groups by allowing the authorities to exact litigation costs from people who were provided with legal aid and subsequently convicted. The prosecutor general's office is largely independent of political control and influence. However, underfinancing remains an issue.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4

The population is largely free from major threats to physical security, and the homicide rate has declined in recent years, though it remains one of the highest in the EU.

Although the government has taken measures to improve the situation, conditions at some prisons are substandard, violence among prisoners remains a problem, and physical abuse of prisoners by correctional officers persists.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of 2 / various segments of the population? 4

The constitution guarantees equality before the law and forbids discrimination based on gender, race, language, and other categories. The laws provide similar protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, though gender identity is not addressed. In practice, women generally earn less than men per hour worked, and both LGBT+ people and members of the Romany minority experience societal discrimination. Ethnic Poles and members of other national minority groups have objected to limits on the use of their languages; public signs must be written only in Lithuanian, even in areas predominantly inhabited by people who speak different languages.

The Lithuanian government continued to apply pushbacks against migrants crossing the Belarus border; approximately 11,200 people were stopped from entering the country this way in 2022. Foreign registration centers for accepted migrants have been criticized by international human rights watchers for poor physical conditions and ill-treatment. Despite a June 2022 European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling that the pushback policy violated EU law, the Lithuanian government refused to abandon the policy, instead working to enshrine it into law. The Lithuanian capacity to absorb migration was affected in 2022 by the influx of some 72,000 refugees from Ukraine, who were welcomed much more favorably than the mostly African and Middle Eastern refugees affected by the pushbacks and substandard living conditions.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability 4 / to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4

Residents of Lithuania may leave the country and travel internally without significant obstacles.

The major COVID-19 national emergency plan ended in May 2022; its movement restrictions were generally considered to be proportionate measures aimed at protecting public health.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4 / 4

Successive governments have worked to maintain a well-regulated market economy, and the legal framework generally protects property rights and the freedom to operate private businesses.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 3 / 4

Individual freedom regarding personal status matters such as marriage and divorce is generally upheld, but marriage is constitutionally defined as a union between a man and a woman. Same-sex partnerships are not legally recognized. While a bill to allow same-sex civil unions did not receive sufficient support in a May 2021 Seimas vote, a year later, lawmakers agreed to consider a watered-down version of it.

Domestic violence remains a problem; it is one of the country's most reported crimes, but the rates of investigation and prosecution remain inadequate.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 3 / 4

Legal protections against exploitative working conditions exist and are enforced in practice. However, the incidence rate for fatal workplace accidents in Lithuania is nearly twice the EU average, according to Eurostat data from 2019. Foreign workers in sectors such as construction and transportation are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Lithuanian women and children have been exploited for sex trafficking.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and
Documentation
(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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