

Freedom in the World 2021 - Lithuania

Free

90

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 38 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 52 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

91 / 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 2020

- The main opposition party, the center-right Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), won a plurality of seats in October parliamentary elections and formed a coalition government with two other parties in November. Ingrida Šimonytė was sworn in as prime minister in December.
- The government imposed national social-distancing rules and movement restrictions for three months beginning in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After a period of reduced restrictions, the measures were reinstated in November due to a rise in cases and further tightened the following month. By the end of the year, Lithuania had reported more than 145,000 confirmed cases and some 1,800 deaths.

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 parliament.

Centrist nonpartisan candidate Gitanas Nausėda was elected as the new president in 2019 after his predecessor, Dalia Grybauskaitė, completed her second term of office. Nausėda took 66 percent of the vote in the runoff round, defeating Ingrida Šimonytė, an independent lawmaker backed by the TS-LKD, who took 33 percent. Šimonytė was appointed as prime minister following the October 2020 parliamentary elections and took office in December. 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 (parliament) consists of 71 members elected in single-mandate constituencies and 70 chosen by proportional representation, all for four-year terms.

In the October 2020 elections, the center-right opposition TS-LKD captured 50 seats, leaving the incumbent centrist-populist Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) in second place with 32 seats. Another centrist-populist party, the Labor Party, won 10 seats, while the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) received 13. The junior coalition partners in the LVŽS government—Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania—Christian Families Alliance (LLRA-KŠS) and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Labor Party (LSDLP)—won three seats each. Two liberal and business-oriented parties—the Liberal Movement and the Freedom Party—won 13 and 11 seats, respectively, and formed a new governing coalition with the TS-LKD in November.

The elections were considered free and fair, with few irregularities reported. However, the outgoing LVŽS government's decision to distribute cash benefits for pensioners and other social groups just before the balloting was widely criticized as politically motivated.

A3 0-4 pts

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

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive 4 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

Political parties generally operate freely. Citizens of other European Union (EU) member states are eligible to join Lithuanian political parties but cannot found them.

Small parties and some civic organizations argue that the minimum number of members for political parties (2,000) is a burdensome requirement that hampers 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. The state subsidies are calculated according to the results of the previous elections and represent the main source of revenue for parties. Public election committees—a way for groups of citizens to run for municipal councils without joining or establishing a political party—have been an option since 2010, though they are not permitted for parliamentary elections.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power 4 / through elections? 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 4 / political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 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+, 4 / and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 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 women candidates won 27 percent of the seats in the October 2020 parliamentary elections—an increase from 21 percent in the previous Seimas. Moreover, the three main leaders of the new governing coalition were women, including Prime Minister Šimonytė and Seimas speaker Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, who heads the Liberal Movement. Šimonytė's cabinet approached gender balance, with women holding six of the 14 ministerial posts.

Political parties that are supportive of equal rights for LGBT+ people 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, garnering 9 percent of the national vote.

The LLRA-KŠS, which represents members of the ethnic Polish minority, failed to clear the 5 percent vote threshold for proportional-representation seats in 2020, having succeeded in the 2012 and 2016 Seimas elections. Nevertheless, it captured 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 4 / determine the policies of the government? 4

The country's elected officials are able to determine and implement government policies without improper interference from unelected or foreign entities. However, corruption scandals have periodically raised concerns about the influence of major businesses on governance.

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 companies remain somewhat opaque and prone to financial misconduct. Reforms intended to improve the transparency and fairness of public procurement have been limited. In recent years, politicians' attempts to reduce the scope of accessible public information concerning themselves have increased.

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 in 2020 left the media more vulnerable to undue influence.

In July, the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania banned five television channels operated by the Russian state-owned network RT, following a recommendation from the Foreign Ministry. It cited links between RT and Dmitry Kiselyov, who heads another Russian state media group and had been sanctioned by the EU. Reporters Without Borders criticized the ban.

In October, the Court of Appeal found former Lithuanian president Rolandas Paksas and Lietuvos Rytas media group owner Gedvydas Vainauskas guilty in an influence-peddling case. Vainauskas, who received a fine, was accused of bribing Paksas, who received a suspended three-year prison sentence, to help secure regulators' support for a business project in 2015. An appeal to the Supreme Court was pending at year's end.

Because of a vaguely worded law restricting the dissemination of information that "abuses family values," public and private media outlets have faced pressure to limit coverage of the LGBT+ community and its interests.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because journalists' autonomy has been curtailed in recent years by ongoing consolidation of media ownership and related editorial pressure to support owners' business and political interests.

D2 0-4 pts

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

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by law 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. Despite the

presence of a small Muslim community, Vilnius remained without a mosque in 2020.

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, due to concerns about the Russian government's aggressive foreign policy, individuals who criticize government stances on security-related issues—including energy policy, military spending, conscription, and sanctions against authoritarian regimes—can face institutional scrutiny and societal marginalization.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Freedom of assembly is generally respected. Demonstrations on topics including LGBT+ people's rights and solidarity with antigovernment protesters in Belarus proceeded without incident in 2020, when public health conditions permitted.

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 significant concern. An extensive bribery scandal in 2019 led to criminal charges against eight senior judges, including a member of the Supreme Court.

In April 2020, the parliament rejected all three of the proposed candidates to replace three outgoing judges of the Constitutional Court, including its chairperson; the three were nominated by the president, the Seimas speaker, and the acting head of the Supreme Court, respectively. Lawmakers also rejected a permanent appointment for the acting Supreme Court chief, which had been proposed by President Nauseda. The votes left both of the country's highest judicial institutions without permanent leadership at the end of the year.

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 from previously high levels in recent years.

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, according to the statistics agency Eurostat.

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 various segments of the population? 3 / 4

The constitution guarantees equality before the law and forbids discrimination based on gender, race, language, and other categories. The laws provide similar protections, including 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.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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

Residents of Lithuania may leave the country and travel internally without significant obstacles. Movement restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 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 Lithuanian 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 the constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and same-sex partnerships are not legally recognized. In 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled that Lithuania must grant residence permits for foreigners in same-sex marriages or registered partnerships with Lithuanian citizens that were established abroad. Separately, legal provisions that would allow gender-confirmation surgery and related procedures are not in place.

Domestic violence remains a problem; it is one of the country's most reported crimes, second only to burglary, but the rates of investigation and prosecution remain inadequate. Eight out of 10 victims of domestic violence in Lithuania are women.

G4 0-4 pts

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

The law provides protections against exploitative working conditions, and these are enforced in practice. However, according to Eurostat data as of 2018, the incidence rate for fatal workplace accidents in Lithuania was nearly twice the EU average. Foreign workers in sectors such as construction and transportation are vulnerable to labor trafficking, and Lithuanian women and children have been exploited for sex trafficking. The government actively works to prosecute traffickers and provides aid to victims in conjunction with NGOs.

ecoi.net summary:



Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2020

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