



Freedom in the World 2017 - Lithuania

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 91 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 2,900,000

Capital: Vilnius

GDP/capita: \$14,147

Press Freedom Status: Free

OVERVIEW

Lithuania is an electoral democracy in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected. However, corruption and income inequality are serious issues that often arouse public dissatisfaction with the government.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Top officials from three major parties were implicated in separate bribery scandals.
- A perception of widespread corruption among the mainstream political parties contributed to a surge in support for the centrist Lithuanian Peasant and Green Union (LPGU), which won 56 seats in the 141-seat parliament in October's elections – the largest plurality achieved by a single party in two decades. It had held one seat in the legislature previously.

Executive Summary:

High-profile corruption claims that emerged in 2016 raised questions about the trustworthiness of Lithuania's mainstream parties. Serious accusations of bribery were levied against Liberal Movement (LRLS) leader Eligijus Masiulis, who had been a potential candidate for prime minister but resigned from the party and the parliament in May; Vytautas Gapšys, one of the leaders of the Labor Party (DP), who was accused of taking a bribe from MG Baltics, the same firm implicated

in the bribery claims against Masiulis; and Rolandas Paksas, the leader of the Order and Justice (TT) party, who was accused of taking a bribe from the owner of the prominent Lithuanian newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas*. The Lithuanian Special Investigation Service (STT) was investigating the cases at year's end.

The allegations proved beneficial to the opposition LPGU, which in 2016 elections saw its share of seats in the 141-member parliament rise to 56 from a single seat previously; its performance in the polls gave it the largest plurality seen in Lithuania in two decades. Voter turnout was low, at barely 50 percent in the first round and about 38 percent in the second, both of which were held in October. The LPGU in November formed a coalition government with the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP).

The elections were considered free and fair, though the election commission faced criticism for delays in announcing the official results, which were linked to issues with new electronic infrastructure for the polls. While relatively few irregularities were reported, there was one notable case of vote buying, to benefit TT. In late October, the election commission stripped lawmaker Kęstas Komskis of TT of his parliamentary mandate in connection with the events.

While residents of Lithuania enjoy a high level of economic freedom, inequality is a concern, and about 30 percent of the population remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Lithuania, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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