



Freedom in the World 2018 - 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: \$14,252

Press Freedom Status: Free

OVERVIEW

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

Key Developments in 2017:

- A new Labor Code that provided additional instruments for the organization of strikes took effect in July.
- In September, the Lithuanian Special Investigation Service brought formal corruption complaints against the Liberal Movement, and the Labor Party, in connection with allegations of wrongdoing that had shaken the country's politics when they emerged in 2016.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 12 / 12

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The president, who is chief of state and whose main competencies lie in foreign affairs, is directly elected to up to two five-year terms. The prime minister, who as head of government is the central executive authority, is appointed by the president with the approval of the parliament.

The present prime minister, Saulius Skvernelis, was appointed after the parliamentary elections in October 2016 and began serving that December. The current president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, was elected to a second term of office in 2014. Both the appointment of the prime minister and election of the president took place in a free and fair manner.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

A unicameral, 141-seat Parliament (Seimas) consists of 71 members elected in single-mandate constituencies and 70 chosen by proportional representation, all for four-year terms. The most recent parliamentary elections took place in October 2016. The elections were somewhat unexpectedly won by the centrist Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union (LVZS), which took 56 seats. The party formed a coalition government with the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), which received 17 seats. The main opposition Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) took 31 seats.

The elections were considered free and fair, though the election commission faced criticism for delays in announcing the official results – problems 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 the Order and Justice (TT) party. In late October 2016, the election commission stripped lawmaker Kęstas Komskis of TT of his parliamentary mandate in connection with the events.

A3. 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 clear and detailed. The boundaries of single-mandate districts of parliamentary elections were redrawn at the end of 2015 to comply with the ruling of the Constitutional Court. The electoral commission operates and adjudicates election-related complaints in a fair manner.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 16 / 16

B1. 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

Lithuania's political parties generally operate freely. Citizens of other European Union (EU) member states are eligible to become members of Lithuanian political parties, but cannot found them.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Lithuanian politics are dynamic, and opposition parties usually come to power after every parliamentary election.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 4 / 4

Sporadic cases of vote buying during national elections has been observed, and clientelism can influence politics at the local levels. However, people are generally free to exercise their political choices without undue influence or interference.

The State Security Department (VSD) has issued numerous warnings about efforts by Russian to influence politics, including through its energy policies and by influencing the country's ethnic Russian minority.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4 / 4

Political rights of minorities are generally upheld. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Lithuanian Poles Electoral Action (LLRA) for the second consecutive time overcame the 5 percent electoral threshold for parties, and took seats in the legislature.

Women are underrepresented in politics, though they do hold senior political positions, including the presidency. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working toward greater representation of women in politics and business, and combating violence against women, are active in the political sphere.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 10 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

Lithuania's freely elected lawmakers are seated according to schedule and are able to design and implement policy. However, bribery scandals that erupted in 2016 raised concerns about the influence of large businesses on politics.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Corruption remains an issue in Lithuania, and certain sectors, including health care and territorial planning, are widely perceived as prone to corruption. While anticorruption bodies are active, there are sometimes considerable delays in the investigation of cases of political corruption. In 2016, the leaders of three political parties were implicated in separate bribery scandals involving illicit deals with Lithuanian businesses. In September 2017, the Lithuanian Special Investigation Service (STT) brought formal complaints in response to two of the scandals, one against the Liberal Movement, and another against the Labor Party.

The protection of whistleblowers and journalists who report on corruption cases is guaranteed, though at the local level it is less effective than nationally.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

Lithuanian law grants the public the right to request information, and the government generally complies with information requests. However, the operations of state companies remains somewhat opaque, and prone to financial misconduct. Improvements to make public procurement more fair and open to public scrutiny have also been limited.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60**D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 16 / 16****D1. Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4**

The government generally respects freedoms of speech and the press. While the media market is vibrant, some owners of media outlets attempt to use their position to influence political processes. Local outlets are usually financially dependent on the local government.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 4 / 4

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by law and largely upheld in practice. However, nine so-called traditional religious communities enjoy certain government benefits, including annual subsidies that are not granted to other groups. Despite the presence of a Muslim community, Vilnius has been without a mosque since one was demolished by the Soviet government in the 1960s, and the planned construction of a new one remains stalled.

D3. 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. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

Private discussion is generally robust and unrestricted. However, in the wake of increasing concerns about Russia's aggressive foreign policy, individuals who criticize the government's foreign policy stances can face pressure.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 11 / 12**E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4**

Freedom of assembly is generally respected.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations may register without facing serious obstacles, and operate without restrictions.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

Workers may form and join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining, though there have been reports of employees being punished for attempting to organize. In July 2017, a new Labor Code came into force, which among other things provided additional instruments to organize strikes.

F. RULE OF LAW: 12 / 16 (-1)

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4 (-1)

Businesspeople and politicians closely linked with business exert pressure on the judiciary, and according to the most recent results of an EU survey, only about half of the general public and representatives of the business sector believe that judicial independence is guaranteed. Nontransparent decisions by the courts also remain an issue.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to influence by business groups and politicians on judicial decisions, and a lack of transparency surrounding some judgements.

F2. 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. Their rights to fair and impartial trial and other processes are also not always respected.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4

Police abuse of detainees and lengthy pretrial detentions are lingering issues. Separately, despite some progress in recent years, Lithuania still has one of the highest homicide rates in the EU.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4

Public signs must be written only in Lithuanian, even in areas predominantly inhabited by minorities who speak different languages. Members of the LGBT community face discrimination, and there have been several cases in the past in which public information about rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people has been restricted.

Men and women enjoy the same legal rights, though women generally earn less than men per hour worked.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 14 / 16 (+1)**G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4 / 4**

Lithuanian residents may travel freely within the country and internationally.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4 / 4 (+1)

Successive Lithuanian administrations have worked to maintain a well-regulated market economy, and economic freedoms are generally ensured.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because there are no significant impediments on people's ability to own property or engage in commercial activity.

G3. 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

Domestic violence remains a problem. Lithuania's constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and same-sex partnership is not legally established. Legal regulations that would allow sex reassignment procedures are not in place.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? **3 / 4**

Regional economic disparities remain acute. The minimum wage remains one of the lowest within the EU, and the share of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion is a little over 30 percent.

Trafficking of adults and children for the purposes of forced labor or sex work occurs in Lithuania. The government actively works to prosecute traffickers, and provides aid to victims in conjunction with NGOs.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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