

# Lithuania

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# Introduction

Lithuania gained independence from the Russian Empire on 16 February 1918 after the German Army withdrew from country. The newly founded Lithuanian state, under the leadership of the State Council, fought against the Soviet Union, German militias, and the Polish state to defend its independence. While it managed to defeat Soviet and German advances, Poland occupied and annexed the Vilnius Region. Despite these challenging beginnings, Lithuanians went to elect a Constituent Assembly under universal suffrage for all adults over 21 years of age in April 1920. Afterwards the country enters the ABEL database.

Passing its constitution in 1922 fully established the Republic of Lithuania. On 17 December 1926, Antanas Smetona collaborated with the military to stage a coup d'état that overthrew the first left-wing government of the Republic. Smetona and his supporters transformed the state into a Presidential system that, while holding elections, did not qualify as a democracy after 1926. The Lithuanian Republic was annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940.

## Elections

Between April 1920 and May 1926, Lithuanians voted in four democratic elections, one for the Constitutional Assembly, and three for the Seimas, the Lithuanian parliament. The country used proportional representation (PR) in six districts throughout its existence. Seats were allocated with the d'Hondt formula in 1920 and a mixture of "quotas and remainders" afterwards. Parliamentary size varied with 78 seats in 1922 and 1923, 85 in the 1926 parliament, and 112 seats in the Constitutional Assembly (1920) (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1194-5).

### 14 April 1920

According to the ABEL database, 18 parties contested the Constitutional Assembly election, and voter turnout reached 90%. The **Christian Democrats** gained 46.5% of the

vote and a clear majority of seats. Using its close connection to the Catholic Church in the overwhelmingly Catholic country, and out-maneuvering its political rivals by running three separate lists, one for farmers (**Lithuanian Farmer's Union**), one for workers (**Lithuanian Federation of Labour**), and one under the Christian Democratic label, it overwhelmingly won the elections. Nevertheless the Christian Democrats formed a coalition with the second-placed party (19 seats), the **Lithuanian Peasant's Party**, and even left that party the office of Prime Minister to Kazys Grinius from the **Peasant Union** or Populists. The Christian Democrats also invited the **Social Democrats** and smaller, nationalist parties, which opted to remain in the opposition. Grinius' cabinet stayed in office January 1922, when it was replaced by the non-partisan Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas, who was closely affiliated with the **Peasant Union**. Galvanauskas stayed in office until the October 1922 election.

## 10 October 1922

The first Seimas elections saw a repeat of the strong **Christian Democratic** performance, which took 41.6% of votes and 38 out of 78 seats. In a field of 31 contenders, six other parties gained parliamentary representation. The runner-ups were the **Peasant Union** and the **Social Democrats** with 14 and 11 seats respectively. The first and only cabinet included the **Christian Democrats** and the **Peasant Union** and was again headed by Galvanauskas. Galvanauskas had trouble bringing the coalition together, especially the **Peasant Union** was unwilling to carry a united government program, which led to early elections in 1923.

## 12 May 1923

The early Seimas elections saw the **Christian Democrats** gain a small majority with 40 out of 78 seats. Ernestas Galvanauskas again formed the government, and this time the second-place **Peasant Union** (16 seats) joined the Christian Democrats for a stable majority. Out of the 25 parties that ran in the election, only the **Social Democrats** (8 seats), the **United Minorities** consisting of German, Jewish, and Russian factions

(10 seats), and the **Polish Minority Committee** (4 seats) managed to enter parliament. The Galvanauskas government resigned in June 1924 and three more Christian Democratic single-party cabinets followed until the 1926 election.

## **8 May 1926**

The 1926 election was the first to see a government form without the **Christian Democrats**, although remaining the strongest party with 30 out of 85 seats, they were replaced by a left-of-center coalition of the **Peasants Union**, the **Social Democrats**, the **Party of Lithuanian Farmers**, and also counted on support from ethnic minority parties, which held no ministerial positions, however (Harrison, 1928: 223).

## Parties

The Lithuanian party system during the period was characterized by five main cleavages: left-right, urban-rural, religious-secular, center-periphery, and nationalist-separatist. Major political issues between 1920 and 1926 involved territorial conflicts with Germany and Poland over the Klaipėda and Vilnius regions respectively, the relationship with Soviet Russia, land reform, and worker's rights.

### Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party

The dominant party of the period, the **Christian Democrats** successfully appealed to farmers and workers of Catholic faith in separate lists, thus bridging urban and rural as well as economically left and right interests. Specific policy objectives included free religious education, limited land reform, social reforms based on Catholic social doctrine, the elevation of Catholicism to a state religion, and national independence and integrity.

Original Name	Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų partija
Other Names	
Abbreviation	LKDP
Factions	Lithuanian Farmer's Union, Lithuanian Federation of Labour

### Lithuanian Peasants Union

The **Peasants Union** was the main representative of rural interests, especially of smaller settlers. It took more left-wing positions on economic issues and social/secular stances compared to the Christian Democrats. (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 482). It merged with the Lithuanian Popular Socialist Democratic Party in 1922.

Original Name	Lietuvos valstiečių sąjunga
Other Names	Populists, Lithuanian Popular Peasants Union.
Abbreviation	LVS
Factions	

## Lithuanian Party of Social Democrats

The **Social Democrats** advocated national independence, urban, and working-class interests (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 483)

Original Name	Lietuvos socialdemokratu partija
Other Names	
Abbreviation	LSDP
Factions	

Add remaining parties

## References

Harrison, Ernest John. 1928. *Lithuania, 1928*. Hazell, Watson & Viney.

McHale, Vincent E and Sharon Skowronski. 1983. *Political Parties of Europe*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

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