

Lithuania

Rice

COW codes Lithuania as an independent country from February 16, 1918 to June 15, 1940. For the 1919-1926 periods, Lithuania was a democracy. POLITY gives score of 7 for the period from November 11, 1918 to December 17, 1926. A regional expert confirms that Lithuania should be coded as a parliamentary for this period. However, given the several facts that we found in our additional research, we decided to follow Archigos (Goemans et al. 2009) and code the president as the effective leader for foreign policy making. First, while it was constitutionally a parliamentary system, the parliament was not effective. Several sources indicate that the parliament was often dissolved because of the lack of agreement, and was not involved in making foreign policy because it was often in crisis (see Gerutis 1969, 214; Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania n.d.). Second, since no party could hold a majority in the Seimas (except for 1924-1925), coalition governments were formed with nearly equal representation: Christian Democrats (LKDP), Liberals, Social Democrats, and National Peasants (Pakštas 1947, 20). This suggests that basically no party could get anything done in the legislature, so they kept changing PMs and coalitions, with many of the coalitions including rightists and leftists.

On the other hand, throughout the period, the president of Lithuania came from the LKDP. In addition, the PMs were also affiliated with the LKDP for about 2/3 of the time (and from June 18, 1924 to September 25, 1925, the LKDP had a single party majority) during this period. This suggests that the president might be the one who had to conduct foreign policy under the domination of the LKDP (Indeed, the president eventually lost power when the LKDP lost control in the parliament). These facts lead us to code the president as an effective leader, while we do believe the country was a parliamentary system.

In 1919, the presidency was held by Antanas Smetona, who did not have a party affiliation. Smetona had been the head of state since Lithuania regained its independence following the First World War, in 1918. From 1918 to 1919, the Lithuanian government had to deal with an attempted invasion by the Soviet army, which was eventually repelled. Smetona was in power until the first Constituent Assembly was elected in 1920, because his supporters did not win any seats in the legislature. At that point, the structure of the government briefly changed, and the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly, Aleksandras Stulginskis, of the LKDP, became the head of state. This is a SOLS change. Following the ratification of the 1922 Constitution, Stulginskis was chosen to become president by the legislature.

Stulginskis held the presidency until June 1926, when it was turned over to Kazys Grinius, of the Lithuanian Peasant Populist Union (LVLS). This is a SOLS change. Grinius' government was not in power long—in December 1926, his government was overthrown by a group of military officers, and Smetona was installed as president, now with a party affiliation of the Lithuanian Nationalist Union (LTS, a party that Smetona had founded). This is another SOLS change. It marked the end of democracy in Lithuania, as Smetona established a personalist

regime. Smetona changed the structure of government to ensure that “power was concentrated in the hands of the People’s Representative, the elected President” (Kiaupa 2002, 353). Smaller parties were disbanded and outlawed, and the legislature was controlled entirely by Smetona. Further, martial law was declared and continued throughout this period. Basically, Smetona’s government fulfills the personalist qualifications perfectly.¹

Smetona remained in power until 1940, when, as its neighbors, Lithuania was invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union. Smetona fled the country and a puppet government directed by the USSR was put into place. Lithuania was annexed into the USSR in July 1940. There were attempts to declare independence from the USSR as early as 1989, but was obstructed by a variety of means.

The independence was achieved in 1991, and president Vytautas Landsbergis came in to power as the head of state. He was a member of the Sajudis Party, which was the driving political force for independence in the nation. In 1992, the Democratic Labor Party of Lithuania (LDDP) gained power with President Algirdas Brazauskas. This leftist takeover marked a SOLS change from the more conservative leadership under Landsbergis.

In 1998, Brazauskas’ term was up, and Valdas Adamkus was elected without a party affiliation. His coalition of support consisted of smaller centrist parties that did not want the government in the hands of either the LDDP or the Conservatives. For this reason, his term, as technically an independent, is coded as a SOLS change. Elections in 2003 brought Rolandas Paksas to power, but his term was cut short; the parliament found his susceptibility to international influence a Lithuanian security threat, and had him removed in 2004. Still, his term did constitute a SOLS change as he was backed by the Lithuanian Liberal Democratic Party (LLP). There was an interim leader after Paksas’s removal named Artūras Paulauskas. His regime, backed by the New Union (NS) party, is not coded as a SOLS change because of his interim status. Former president Adamkus won the elections called in 2004, and he had been in power as an independent until July 12, 2009.

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¹ Note: Because POLITY codes 1926 and 1927 as transition years, regtrans is not coded as 1 until 1928.

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