Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

LITHUANIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo: Lithuanian folk dancers, photo courtesy of Culture Grams, ProQuest).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Baltic States.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Lithuania society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: Lithuanian and US Army colleagues interact during Exercise Flaming Thunder at Pabrade, Lithuania).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity (Photo: US and Latvian military personnel take a break during reconstruction of an orphanage in Latvia).

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing

constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, social and political systems, among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture (Photo: Trakai Castle in Lithuania).

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

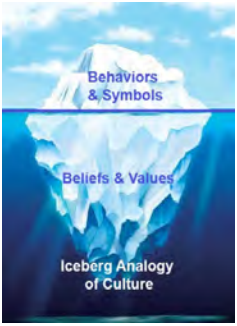
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true, regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed (Photo: Winter in Estonia).

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change (Photo: US and Estonian soldiers).

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success (Photo: US and Lithuanian paratroopers prepare to parachute from a Black Hawk helicopter during a multinational exercise near Rukla, Lithuania).

As you travel through the Baltic States, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language (Photo: A relief depicting Lithuanians battling Teutonic Knights).

The Baltic States comprise 3 countries bordering the Baltic Sea on the northern edge of Europe: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. While archaeological finds suggest people inhabited the region as early as 9000 BC, scientists believe that Finno-Ugric tribes from the east settled in the region beginning around 3000 BC. In present-day Lithuania, these tribes were later joined by Indo-Europeans around 2000 BC. As their populations increased, all groups erected permanent, loosely-allied settlements sustained by agricultural production. By the 1st century AD, inhabitants began participating in trade networks that extended as far as the Roman Empire.

Beginning in the 9th century, Vikings from Scandinavia began raiding the Baltic coast, and by the 11th century, Russian armies made several fruitless invasions of the region. In the 12th century, German knights tasked by the Pope with Christianizing the inhabitants of the Baltic region began to conquer parts of Estonia and Latvia, consolidating their rule over both by end of the 13th century. While they did not always retain political control in subsequent centuries, the Germans dominated commerce in the region and significantly impacted Estonian and Latvian government, religion, and education as well as the social and justice systems.

By contrast, Lithuania successfully repelled the German invaders, forming a powerful independent state and later uniting with neighboring Poland to control large parts of the region through the 18th century. Unable to stave off persistent attacks from Russia, all 3 Baltic States fell to Russian rule by the late 18th century. Over the next nearly 120 years, Russia quelled nationalist movements and imposed a series of measures intended to promote Russification, including suppressing the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages and increasing Russian immigration to the region.

All 3 Baltic States experienced substantial conflict during World War I (WWI). Estonia and Latvia then engaged in wars of independence leading to several decades of peace. By contrast, as a diminished independent state Lithuania remained embroiled in territorial disputes through the onset of World War II (WWII). For that war's duration, all 3 States became a battleground. During its wartime occupation of the region, Nazi Germany murdered, deported, or confined most of the region's sizeable Jewish population and other "undesirables." The blunt of the regime's atrocities occurred in Latvia and Lithuania (Photo: German troops in Riga in 1916).

At war's end, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) absorbed all 3 nations, imposing its communist system, nationalizing private companies, and appropriating private property. During their almost 50 years of occupation, the Soviets deported thousands of ethnic Baltic residents to prison camps in Russia. Furthermore, it murdered those deemed a threat to the new system, and repressed national languages, religions, and cultures while rapidly expanding industrial development.

Upon independence from the USSR in 1991, the 3 Baltic States transformed their governments into democracies. They adopted market capitalism and pivoted away from Russian influence to aggressively pursue political, military, and economic integration with the West.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

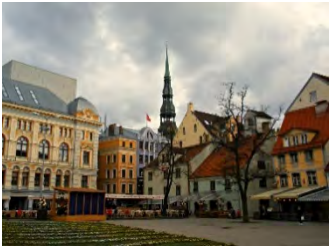
All 3 Baltic States are parliamentary republics led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and 1-chamber legislature. Executive power is vested in the Prime Minister, who leads the government together with the support of a Cabinet of Ministers. Presidential powers are largely ceremonial.

Within all 3 States, political parties typically form coalitions in order to attain and maintain power. The States have successfully created stable, well-run democracies, although they face several challenges to maintaining the democratic process. Weakened by overly broad and at times differing ideological profiles, some ruling political coalitions dissolve shortly after consolidation, in some cases resulting in frequent changes of government. In addition, corruption is particularly pervasive in Latvia and Lithuania, permeating all levels of government.

Following their independence from the USSR, the Baltic States formed strong regional and international alliances, such as joining the European Union (EU) and NATO. Today, the Baltic States are representative examples of democracy and post-Soviet economic growth, serving as advocates of a democratic and pro-Western agenda in the region (Photo: Former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates meets with the 3 Baltic State defense ministers in NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium).

The Baltic States rely heavily on NATO, the EU, the US, and other international allies to augment their military capabilities and to defend against external, state-level threats. Recently, rising tensions with neighboring Russia dominate the Baltic States' security environment.

In 2015, the US supported the Baltic States with $100 million in aid to build defense capacity and improve border security as part of a $3.4 billion "European Reassurance Initiative" fund intended to bolster NATO readiness in Europe. Meanwhile, NATO agreed to increase the number of troops permanently stationed in the region, despite fears that the increase in military presence might escalate tensions with Russia (Photo: City square in Riga, Latvia).



The 3 States exhibit differing levels of ethnic diversity. In Lithuania, 84% of the population are ethnic Lithuanians, while Poles are the largest minority group at just 7%. By contrast, the native populations of Estonia and Latvia are significantly lower, 69% and 62% respectively. In both countries, ethnic Russians comprise about 25% of the population.

Relations between ethnic groups are somewhat strained in Estonia and Latvia where citizenship laws, language policies, and social divisions create some friction. Amid recently rising tensions with Russia, there is some concern that the Russian government may attempt to capitalize on the existing tension and by provoking social unrest among those countries' sizeable Russian-speaking populations.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Residents of the Baltic region were among Europe's last to adopt Christianity. By the late 13th century, German knights had consolidated their rule over Estonia and Latvia and converted most residents to Christianity. By contrast, an independent Lithuanian state repelled the German crusaders, maintaining its pagan belief system as the state religion through the early 15th

century, when it finally adopted Christianity. Of note, many residents of all 3 Baltic States were slow to embrace the new religion, continuing their pagan practices or incorporating them into Christian worship for centuries (Photo: A church in Vilnius, Lithuania).

As the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe in the early 16th century, both Estonia and Latvia saw the Catholic Church reorganized under Lutheran authority. By contrast, a Catholic counter movement in Lithuania prevented Protestantism from taking root. Throughout the centuries, Russian Orthodoxy and Judaism also enjoyed some growth in the region. The Lithuanian Jewish community grew significantly, eventually becoming a regional center of learning that lasted until the annihilation of the community during WWII.

During their years of occupation, the Soviets repressed all religious institutions and activities in the States. Further, the Soviets deported clergy while destroying or converting churches and synagogues for other uses. Over the years, membership in religious organizations decreased significantly.

Today, some 60% of Estonians and 44% of Latvians remain religiously unaffiliated. Among Estonians who do claim an affiliation, about 14% are Orthodox Christian and about 8% are Lutheran. Observant Latvians are about evenly split among Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. By contrast, the majority of Lithuanians claim some religious affiliation, with about 77% identifying as Roman Catholics.

While Estonia and Latvia are home to small Muslim communities predominantly comprised of recent migrants, Lithuania's Muslim population traces back to the early 14th century. In all 3 Baltic States, small Jewish communities are experiencing some growth.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of the Baltic States’ societies. Baltic residents maintain strong connections with both immediate and extended family members, supporting them emotionally and financially while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Most households comprise 2 parents and their children, with many families choosing to have just 1 or 2 children.

The urbanization of the Baltic States’ society has changed family life in recent years, as urban inhabitants marry later or cohabit (live in long-term, unmarried partnership) and have fewer children. Consequently, while the traditional family structure remains common in rural areas, urban households are usually smaller and family structures more diverse (Photo: US Air National Guard member shows her camera to a Latvian boy).

While historically marriage was an arranged union, today both genders choose their own partners. Generally, couples spend several years dating, with some living together and having children before choosing to marry. Divorce carries little social stigma and is increasingly prevalent among younger generations. In fact, in all 3 Baltic States, divorce rates are among the highest in Europe and comparable to the US.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture’s categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Baltic States' historically patriarchal culture privileged men as leaders and providers. While some of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional values – men as breadwinners and heads of household and women as mothers and wives – gender roles and responsibilities began to transform during the Soviet era and are changing more rapidly in some families, particularly among younger generations in the post-Soviet period (Photo: US Army soldier talks with Estonian counterparts during a multinational military exercise).

Although women hold equal rights under the law, they continue to face barriers to their full participation in political, social, and economic spheres. For example, women often face discrimination in the hiring and promotion process, routinely receive lower wages than their male counterparts, and suffer from sexual harassment in the workplace.

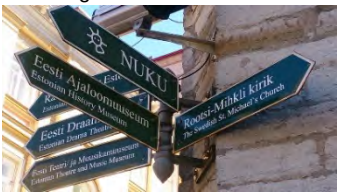
Despite these barriers, the number of women serving in elected, diplomatic, and judicial positions across the region has increased over the past few decades. Baltic women hold a significant proportion of national and sub-national government positions, maintaining similar participation rates in their national legislatures as women in the US. Additionally, in all 3 States women have held prominent leadership positions, including Prime Minister, President, and Speaker of Parliament (Photo: US Marines perform for trainees at the Baltic Guard Youth Camp).

Notably, Baltic women suffer from one of Europe's highest rates of gender based violence (GBV), both domestic abuse and rape. Considered private matters, many incidences of GBV go unreported. If cases are reported, the prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Although homosexuality is legal in all 3 Baltic States, many residents consider homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender activity inappropriate.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Following years of linguistic repression under Soviet rule, all 3 Baltic States named their native languages as official languages following their 1991 independence. Notably, while Estonian is derived from the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family, Latvian and Lithuanian belong to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family (Photo: Estonian street signs).



In Estonia and Latvia, about 1/3 of the population speak Russian as their first language. Russian is also prominent in Lithuania, where over 1/2 of residents speak it as a 2nd language. Russian was the predominant language in education, in media, and government proceedings during the Soviet era but no longer the region's main language. The Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian languages have supplanted Russian in each Baltic State, though many residents continue to use it in business and everyday life.

All 3 Baltic States are also home to native speakers of other languages including Polish, Ukrainian, Finnish, Belarusian, German, and other regional languages. English has become increasingly popular over the last several decades and is spoken widely in business and by young and urban Baltic communities.

Generally, Baltic residents demonstrate respect, privacy, and candor in their communication practices. They typically do not display strong emotions in public, tend to be reserved in all communications, feel comfortable in silence, and prefer direct speech. Residents usually share personal information only with family or close friends and rarely engage in small talk with strangers.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 16th century, most formal education in the Baltic States occurred in religious institutions, where clergymen taught religion and basic literacy. By the 17th century, all 3 States saw the founding of universities and other centers of academic learning. By the late 1800s, Estonia and Latvia had developed extensive public school networks and possessed some of the world's highest literacy rates.

The governments of all 3 States established free and compulsory public education systems in the early 20th century. The subsequent Soviet occupation brought significant changes to schools and curricula. During that period, the education system promoted Soviet ideology and communist tenets and emphasized Russian culture and language. It also prioritized vocational instruction, while simultaneously suppressing Baltic languages and culture (Photo: Lithuanian students).

Today, the Baltic States invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than in the US. School enrollment rates are high

and nearly 100% of Baltic residents are literate. Challenges to the education system include low teacher salaries, rural school closures, and disputes over the languages of instruction in Russian and other minority language schools.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Inhabitants of the Baltic States generally adhere to these habits, valuing punctuality, a sense of responsibility, and efficient and candid professional interactions. Within their personal lives, most Baltic residents invest significant time in establishing and maintaining relationships.

In Estonia and Latvia business tends to move at about the same pace as in the US, although more slowly in Lithuania. Like Americans, Estonians and Latvians prefer to build some trust before doing business but may engage in business activities without cultivating deep professional relationships. By contrast, Lithuanians typically invest time in building relations before conducting business. In all 3 Baltic States, residents rarely discuss their personal lives in business settings.

Concepts of personal space are similar to those in the US. For example, while conversing, Baltic residents stand at about the same distance as Americans, but may touch less often and display less affection when in public.

The Baltic States enjoy a number of public holidays. Besides the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, residents typically celebrate their nation's Independence Day. Further, all 3 States mark mid-summer with a public holiday and various festivities (Photo: US Marines enjoy a cookout with members of the Baltic Guard Youth Camp in Latvia).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Baltic States' forms of artistic expression, including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the region's rural peasant past, history of foreign occupations, and modern global trends.

Traditional music and dance in the Baltic States typically explore topics like nature, the seasons, rural life, and love. Folk songs usually include multiple melodic verses, while dances are slow and intricate. Under Russian and Soviet influence, classical ballet became a common form of dance across the region. The Baltic States' commitment to and enjoyment of song and dance are expressed every 4-5 years in national choir and dance festivals – a tradition that dates to the late 19th century. Rock, jazz, and classical music are popular contemporary genres (Photo: Latvian song and dance festival).

Rural landscapes and geometric designs are common themes in visual arts. Baltic residents also practice a variety of traditional handicrafts and folk art which reflect the region's rich peasant history, while incorporating Christian or ancient pagan motifs. Soccer and basketball are the most widely followed sports in the region. During the winter, residents also enjoy ice hockey, cross-country skiing, ice skating, bobsledding, and luge.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Baltic dishes tend to be simple, hearty, and mildly seasoned. Most meals are based on a staple – often potatoes, buckwheat, oats, or barley. Dark bread is particularly popular across the region and accompanies almost every meal. Although beer is

the most popular alcoholic beverage, Baltic residents also enjoy unique herbal liquors and vodka.

Health in the Baltic States has improved significantly in recent decades, as evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents have access to free, state-funded healthcare.

The region's healthcare systems face several challenges such as rapidly growing healthcare expenditures associated with a shrinking yet aging population. Further, although residents generally have access to modern healthcare, the quality of care varies between urban and rural areas. Rural clinics are often burdened with heavy workloads, equipped with outdated medical equipment, and understaffed (Photo: Latvian rye bread).

Non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases account for the majority of all deaths in the region. In all 3 Baltic States, cardiovascular diseases are overwhelmingly the leading causes of death, followed by cancers and respiratory diseases. In addition, Baltic residents suffer from high rates of suicide and alcohol poisoning. Notably, Baltic men experience significantly higher mortality rates than Baltic women primarily because they are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol, and follow unhealthy diets.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Prior to the 19th century, the States maintained largely agrarian economies, with many residents engaged in subsistence agriculture or laboring as serfs on German-owned holdings.

During the 1800s, Russian occupiers began to industrialize the region. These efforts intensified during the Soviet era, when the government implemented a centrally-controlled economic

system, established large collective farms, and developed various heavy industries.

Following their independence from the USSR in 1991, all 3 Baltic States immediately sought to de-centralize their economies and adopt liberal, free market systems. The transition initially caused their economies to contract, but by the mid-2000s, all 3 nations experienced significant growth. While the Baltic States' 2004 accession to the EU spurred further economic expansion, the 2008 global financial crisis slowed investment in the region and reduced demand for exports. As a result, the Baltic economies experienced severe contraction.

Reacting quickly, all 3 Baltic States enacted strict internal reforms, allowing their economies to recover within just a few years. Today, the Baltic States maintain stable, diversified economies, characterized by large, successful service industries and modernized industrial sectors. In fact, experts predict that each State will maintain current economic growth rates, which exceed the EU average, through 2020. Despite these positive trends, the Baltic States' economies face some challenges, including increasing income inequality, relatively low wages and productivity, corruption, outward migration of skilled workers, and ongoing unemployment (Photo: Skyline of Tallinn, Estonia).

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. While all 3 Baltic States have invested heavily into extensive road networks and efficient public transportation systems, Lithuania maintains the best roads. While only about 1/5 of roads are paved in Estonia and Latvia, over 4/5 of Lithuanian roads are paved. Railways connect major cities throughout the region, and a planned high-speed train will soon

connect the Baltic States with Europe. Because Latvia and Lithuania geographically separate Russia from Western Europe, both nations serve as important regional transit and trade hubs.

Modern information technology is widely available throughout the Baltic States. Cell phones are extremely popular while about 80% of residents regularly use the Internet. Estonia enjoys the region's highest rates of Internet connectivity and usage, especially among the younger generations.

Estonia is a net energy exporter, producing most of its energy from its large shale oil industry. By contrast, both Latvia and Lithuania heavily rely on oil and natural gas imports from Russia to meet domestic demand. Looking to decrease their dependence on Russia, both nations are actively diversifying their energy sources with the goal of reducing Russian imports in coming years.

Renewable energy is an important resource in Latvia and Lithuania, where it comprises about 43% and 32% of energy consumption respectively. Although Estonia is currently generating the least amount of renewable energy in the region, it plans to increase renewable consumption by 2020 (Photo: US Army and Lithuanian Land Forces personnel participate in airborne exercises near Rukla, Lithuania).

The EU is by far the region's largest trading partner. As EU members, the Baltic States enjoy a stable currency, a secure business environment, and free movement of goods and services. In addition, the Baltic States maintain important trade relationships with Russia. Regional trade among the Baltic States is also strong.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize the Baltic States' society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Lithuania.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

The largest and most populous of the 3 Baltic States, Lithuania has a history that is markedly different from that of Estonia and Latvia. Unlike them, Lithuania successfully repelled medieval German invaders, and together with Poland, established a powerful independent state for centuries. After losing its independence to Russia in the late 18th century, Lithuania briefly regained it between the 2 World Wars before being incorporated by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Since attaining its independence again in 1991, Lithuania has transformed its government into a democracy, adopted market capitalism, and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

Early History

Archaeological finds indicate people inhabited permanent settlements in Lithuania as early as 9000 BC. Scientists believe Finno-Ugric tribes moved into the area from the east between 3000 and 2000 BC and were joined by Indo-Europeans. Over the centuries, the 2 groups mixed, eventually creating the Baltic peoples, ancestors of modern-day Lithuanians and Latvians. As the population increased, these groups constructed fortified settlements on hills or mounds that were sustained by agricultural production (Photo: Archaeologists have reconstructed an ancient Lithuanian observatory in Šventoji).

By the 1st century AD, Lithuania's Baltic tribes were making iron knives, scissors, scythes, and other tools. Around this time, the tribes began participating in profitable trade networks

that extended from Scandinavia through Lithuania as far as the Roman Empire. An important export was amber, a fossilized tree resin commonly used to make jewelry today (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Between the 5th and 8th centuries, Lithuania's Baltic tribes interacted with Slavs who had settled in regions to the south and east. In the 9th century, Vikings from Scandinavia began raiding Lithuania's Baltic coast. While these other regional groups adopted Christianity over time, Lithuania's Baltic tribes retained their pagan traditions several centuries longer (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Early Medieval Period

Over the centuries, the Baltic tribes became accomplished farmers who settled in hamlets. Regional groupings, including the Aukštaitijans (or Highlanders) and the Samogitians (or Lowlanders), began to intermingle (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*). The name "Lithuania" appeared for the first time in a 1099 German account of an unsuccessful attempt to convert residents to Christianity.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, Scandinavians continued their raids of the Lithuanian coast, where German merchants also set up trading bases. In neighboring Latvia, a German Catholic bishop established the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, an organization of German knights with the mission of Christianizing all the Baltic tribes, by sword if necessary. A few years later, a duke in neighboring Poland invited another group of German warrior monks, the Knights of the Teutonic Order, to subdue Lithuania's Baltic tribes (Illustration: An 1870 depiction of German knights).

The Creation of the Lithuanian State

The pressure from these foreign forces was great. By 1236, the Brothers of the Sword had conquered most of modern-day Latvia and Estonia then turned their attention to Lithuania.

Unlike the Baltic tribes in those regions, Lithuania's tribes united in their opposition to the foreign invaders. Led by Prince Vykintas, the Lithuanians engaged the Germans in 1236 at the Battle of Saulé where they trapped the knights in marshland and delivered them a crushing defeat.

Their loss compelled the Brothers of the Sword to dissolve and merge with the Teutonic Order. Nevertheless, the knights viewed these events as a temporary setback and continued their aggressions. With the continuing German threat from the west as well as an emerging Mongol threat from the east, the Lithuanian tribes realized they must strengthen their unity.

King Mindaugas: By the 1240s, Lithuanian leader Mindaugas had emerged as the first, and only, king of a unified Lithuania. (Successive monarchs preferred the title of "Grand Duke.") In preparation for total war, Mindaugas introduced conscription then equipped his mounted warriors and infantry with chain mail, swords, spears, pikes, axes, and crossbows. Soon, he was expanding Lithuanian lands to the east (Photo: Lithuanians re-enact medieval battles).

Mindaugas realized that the security of the Lithuanian people depended on external acknowledgement of the nation. Consequently, he converted to Christianity in 1251 and petitioned the Pope, leader of the Catholic Church in Rome, for official recognition of his kingship. Two years later, the Pope officially recognized Mindaugas as King of Lithuania, granting him rank equal to all other European monarchs.

Nevertheless, Mindaugas' conversion was likely simply opportunistic. When official papal recognition of the Kingdom of Lithuania did not halt the German knights' aggressive activities, Mindaugas renounced Christianity a decade later.

Consolidation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Having conquered the Prussians to the west and the Latvians and Estonians to the east, the German knights renewed their campaign against the Lithuanians. Ostensibly seeking to convert the population to Christianity, the Germans were also interested in acquiring Lithuanian territory so they could link their Baltic holdings and monopolize the region's highly profitable trade routes.

Grand Duke Gediminas: For the Germans, Lithuania's Grand Duke Gediminas (r. 1316-41), became a powerful foe. Through alliances and conquest, Gediminas (pictured) extended his Grand Duchy over a vast area: at its height, the Grand Duchy included most of modern-day Belarus and Ukraine as well as parts of Russia and stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Gediminas aimed to improve the Duchy's economy and further bolster its standing among other nations by promoting Lithuania as an open and tolerant society. To do so, Gediminas invited merchants, craftsmen, and peasants, some Jewish, from across Europe to settle in Lithuania. According to myth, Gediminas also founded Vilnius, the capital of present-day Lithuania, at the site where he dreamed of an iron wolf howling at the moon (see "Myth" below).

Civil War

Gediminas' dynasty would last for the next 250 years. While his brother, Grand Duke Algirdas, continued the eastward expansion, another brother, Kestutis, responded to some 100 attacks by the Teutonic Knights. In 1377, Algirdas' son Jogaila became Grand Duke. Seeking peace, Jogaila signed a secret treaty with the Teutonic Knights in 1381. Upon discovering this act, Jogaila's uncle Kestutis deposed Jogaila and assumed the title of Grand Duke. Then, while Kestutis was away quelling a rebellion, Jogaila retook control, then arrested Kestutis upon his return. Kestutis soon died under unclear circumstances while his son Vytautus managed to survive. As the cousins Jogaila and Vytautus vied for control of the Duchy, German

attacks continued. Meanwhile, the Duchy's eastern territories suffered massive invasions by Mongols.

Union with Poland

Jogaila and Vytautus eventually reconciled. To better respond to continuing foreign threats, Lithuania and Poland sought alliance in the late 14th century. To facilitate the union with Roman Catholic Poland, both Jogaila and Vytautus (pictured) were baptized as Catholics in 1386 (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Then, Jogaila married Polish Princess Jadwiga and became King of Poland, uniting it with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. His Jagiellonian Dynasty would rule Poland for almost 200 years.

Polish quickly became the dominant language within the Polish-Lithuanian union (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Although the Polish nobility tried to abolish the Grand Duchy, the Lithuanian aristocracy successfully resisted these efforts. In 1392, Vytautus, eventually known as "the Great," became the Grand Duke of Lithuania, technically subservient to the Polish King but still the powerful ruler of one of Europe's largest states. Of note, some 50,000-100,000 Muslim Tatars as well as many additional Jews settled in Lithuania at Vytautus' invitation during this period (see p. 5 and 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Battle of Žalgiris: In 1398, the Teutonic Knights acquired control of a northwestern Lithuanian province, though it took several years to subdue its residents. When the residents rebelled against the Germans again in 1409, Vytautus and Jogaila decided to support them by raising an army of 150,000 against the Germans' force of 80,000. The armies met at Tannenberg (in present-day Poland, also known as Grünwald or Žalgiris) in 1410. The ensuing day-long conflict resulted in a crushing defeat for the knights, with 18,000 German fatalities. Although the Teutonic Order continued to exist for another 100 years, it never again posed a serious challenge to Lithuania.

Following this victory, the Polish-Lithuanian union enjoyed a long period of prosperity and growth. Under Vytautus the Great, the Grand Duchy reached its largest extent: by 1430 its territories came within 60 mi of Moscow. Several years following Vytautus' death, Lithuania's Grand Duke also became King of Poland. Thereafter, 1 monarch assumed both titles.

Threat from the East: During the 16th century, the Baltic region faced a renewed Russian threat. In 1512, the Russians captured the Lithuanian city of Smolensk (in present-day Russia). In 1558, Russian Tsar (leader) Ivan IV ("the Terrible") invaded neighboring Latvia and Estonia. The Polish-Lithuanian union soon joined the fray, acquiring the Duchy of Courland in present-day Latvia, which would remain an autonomous region of Poland-Lithuania for the next 200 years.

Generally, the 16th century represented a golden era for upper class Vilnius: artists and architects from Renaissance Italy introduced new forms and styles while Jesuit monks founded Vilnius University (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). By contrast, the region's peasants saw their plight worsen. Gradually, small landowners lost control of their lands and were forced to become serfs, enslaved laborers who were bought and sold with the land they worked for wealthy landowners.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Weakened by ongoing conflicts with Russia, Lithuania agreed to a change in the Polish-Lithuanian relationship in 1569. The resulting Republic of the Two Nations or Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a joint state with 1 each ruler and legislative assembly and a common currency. While Poland was clearly the dominant partner, Lithuania remained a Grand Duchy and retained administrative control of its territory, treasury, and army. To mark the new relationship, the Commonwealth chose Warsaw (capital of present-day Poland) as its new capital. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would last for over 200 years (Photo: Coins from 1616 depicting Lithuania's Grand Duke).

As a republic, the Commonwealth retained the combined office of King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, while making it an elected one. Electors comprised the Polish and Lithuanian nobility – about 10% of the population. While candidates for office had to be Roman Catholics, there were few other requirements. Consequently, Commonwealth heads were not necessarily Lithuanian or Polish. Instead, the nobility often elected leaders from other countries, including a Frenchman, a Transylvanian prince, and a series of Swedish nobles.

The Commonwealth initially was relatively successful. In the late 16th century, it recaptured territories from the Russians, forcing them to sign a peace treaty, then briefly occupied Moscow in the early 17th century. Over the years, Polish culture and language came to dominate. So many Poles settled in and around Vilnius that Lithuanians became a small minority.

Within a few decades, it became apparent that the Commonwealth's governing structure was unsound. Because its leaders often had conflicts of interest or were beholden to other foreign powers, the Commonwealth had periods of inconsistent governance. Further, legislative efforts were paralyzed by the assembly's rule that only 1 member's veto was required to stop legislation (Illustration: The 1764 election of the Commonwealth leader).

Concurrently, other challenges arose. In 1648, Ukrainians in the Commonwealth rebelled, seeking their own state. In 1654, Russians occupied the Commonwealth's east and devastated Vilnius, then the plague killing 1/2 the city's population. Soon, Sweden launched its own invasion. Although the Commonwealth repelled the 2 invaders, the effort depleted the state's coffers and caused the deaths of 1/4 of the population. When Poland played a pivotal role in repelling Turkish invaders in Ukraine in 1673 and in Austria a decade later, Lithuania declined to participate, a clear indication of the Commonwealth's growing fragility.

Decline and Partition

In the early 18th century, the Commonwealth attacked Sweden in an effort to regain parts of Latvia and Estonia. Following the Commonwealth's defeat, the Swedes deposed its ruler and, in collusion with Russian Tsar Peter I ("the Great"), handpicked a new leader. Over the next 50 years, Russia continued to interfere with Commonwealth elections, working to ensure its preferred leaders took office.

Significantly weakened, the Commonwealth was largely unable to resist when its foreign rivals moved to divide the Commonwealth among themselves beginning in 1772. That year, the Commonwealth lost about 30% of its territory to Prussia, Austria, and Russia. In an effort to avoid further partition, the Commonwealth initiated several reforms, including emancipating the Commonwealth's serfs and ending the parliament's paralyzing veto rule. In 1791, the Commonwealth adopted Europe's first constitution (only the 2nd in the world, after the US constitution) (Illustration: An 18th- century depiction of Polish and Lithuanian nobles).

In the end, these reform efforts were unable to stave off the inevitable. In 1792, Russia invaded. Despite vigorous resistance, the Commonwealth underwent a 2nd partition in 1793, then a 3rd and final partition in 1795. Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided up all the remaining Commonwealth lands among themselves. While Russia absorbed all of central and eastern Lithuania as well as the former Lithuanian lands in Belarus and Ukraine, Prussia gained control of territory in Lithuania's west.

Russian Rule

Hoping to regain their independence, many Lithuanians in the early 19th century looked to revolutionary France for inspiration. Hopes increased in 1812, when French leader Napoleon Bonaparte arrived in Lithuania during his invasion of

Russia. As the Russian troops retreated, Napoleon occupied Vilnius where he supported the formation of a provisional independent Lithuanian government before marching on to occupy Moscow. Unable to secure victory against the Russians and with his troops dying of starvation and hypothermia, Napoleon retreated, pausing in Vilnius on his way back to France only long enough to bury some 30,000 soldiers in mass graves.

Lithuanian Resistance: Poles and Lithuanians rose up in 1831 to rebel against Russian rule. In the crackdown that followed, Russian Tsar Nicholas I introduced a series of repressive measures intended to promote the country's Russification. Key measures included confiscating land and limiting landholding rights to Orthodox Christians, who were primarily ethnic Russians (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Illustration: A 1875 painting of Lithuanian peasants).

Following another revolt in 1863, the Russians stepped up their repression, including banning the construction of new Catholic churches and forbidding the use of Lithuanian in schools in all but the elementary level. Further, the state mandated the use of Russian over Lithuanian in most contexts, while allowing the printing of Lithuanian materials only in the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet.

In the 1880s, a Lithuanian nationalist movement began to organize, supported by the foundation of the first Lithuanian-language newspaper in 1883. This national revival experienced a setback when Russians further restricted the use of the Lithuanian language. To keep both the language and the nationalist movement alive, publishers in the Prussian-controlled part of Lithuania printed and smuggled Lithuanian-language books across the border. It was 1904 before the ban against the Lithuanian language was lifted.

World War I (WWI) and the Re-Emergence of Lithuania

As part of their strategy against Russia in WWI, German forces entered Lithuania in August 1915. In fall 1917, the German occupiers allowed the Lithuanians to assemble a congress, chaired by Antanas Smetona, Lithuania's future President, which formally demanded the resurrection of the Lithuanian state with Vilnius as its capital. Lithuania formally declared independence on February 16, 1918. A month later, Russia and Germany ended their WWI hostilities with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which transferred sovereignty over Lithuania to Germany. With the Germans still occupying the country and offering support, the Council of Lithuania established a national government (Illustration: A Lithuanian newspaper announces independence in 1918).

LIETUVOS AIDAS

LIETUVOS TARYBA
skelbia
Lietuvos nepriklausomybę

Meanwhile, Józef Pilsudski, a resident of Vilnius who had assumed leadership of a revived Polish state, strongly opposed Lithuanian independence. Instead, he preferred a renewed Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a bulwark against Russia, now known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Soon, the USSR, Poland, and Lithuania were disputing their national boundaries, and in December 1918, the USSR invaded Lithuania. Throughout 1919, Lithuanian and German forces battled the Soviets. Meanwhile, Polish troops also engaged Lithuanian troops as the Poles advanced through southern Lithuania in their own war against the Soviets.

The Loss of Vilnius: In July 1920, Lithuania and the USSR signed a treaty that recognized an independent Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital. Objecting to the treaty, Polish troops seized Vilnius and southern Lithuania in October. The Lithuanians retreated northwest to the city of Kaunas, where they established a temporary capital.

While widely recognized as Lithuania's historic capital, Vilnius' population was diverse: about 40% of the population was

Jewish (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and most of the rest Polish, with only a small Lithuanian minority. Convinced that Vilnius must be incorporated into Poland, Polish leader Pilsudski called an international conference, which agreed that the Poles had the right to occupy Vilnius and the surrounding territory. Consequently, Lithuania broke off all diplomatic ties with Poland.

Lithuania between the Wars

From 1920-1939, Poland occupied Vilnius and its surrounding territory. Meanwhile, the independent Lithuanian government persisted in calling its capital in Kaunas "temporary." Nationalist Party leader Antanas Smetona became independent Lithuania's first President in 1920. Following elections in 1922, the government instituted land reform and adopted a new constitution (Photo: Lithuanian troops in 1938).

The Annexation of Klaipéda: In 1923, Lithuania acquired the port city of Klaipéda, formerly a Prussian territory and source of Lithuanian publications during the 19th-century Russian ban. Its French occupiers transferred the city to Lithuania following an uprising by the local population.

A military coup overthrew Lithuania's democratically-elected government in 1926, re-installing Smetona as President. Smetona proceeded to dissolve the Parliament and introduce a new constitution which granted the Presidency greatly enhanced power. In this way, Smetona secured authoritarian control until the events of World War II intervened.

World War II (WWII)

In March 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Klaipéda and incorporated it into Germany. In August, Germany and the USSR signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, a secret nonaggression pact which essentially divided Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of influence, with Lithuania falling into the German sphere.

WWII officially began a month later, with Hitler's invasion of Poland. Following negotiations between the USSR and Germany, Lithuania was transferred to the Soviet sphere. In October, the Soviet government imposed on Lithuania a treaty of mutual assistance that returned Vilnius and surrounding areas to Lithuania but in exchange allowed the Soviets to establish military bases on Lithuanian territory (Photo: Soviet troops enter Vilnius in 1939).

The Soviet Occupation: In June 1940, President Smetona fled the country. In July elections, only Communist-backed candidates were permitted to run. The new Parliament announced Lithuania's desire to join the Soviet Union, and in August the USSR formally incorporated Lithuania as one of its constituent republics.

The Soviets moved quickly to impose their communist social and economic system, nationalizing private companies, appropriating private property, and replacing the Lithuanian currency with their own. Further, over the next year, the Soviets executed or deported to work camps around 35,000 Lithuanians, primarily intellectuals, farmers, and leaders.

The Nazi Occupation: In June 1941, Germany turned on its former ally and attacked the USSR. Within a week, the Germans entered Lithuania. For the next 3 years, Germany occupied the country, making it part of its *Ostland* province along with Estonia, Latvia, and Belarus. The Germans conscripted some Lithuanians, while others volunteered to serve. The Germans had hoped, but were unable, to find enough Lithuanian volunteers to form a local unit of the infamous Waffen-SS troops.

With its sizeable Jewish population (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), Lithuania became a target of and location for some of the Nazi regime's most horrific activities. Shortly following the German invasion, some Lithuanian non-Jews rose up against their Jewish neighbors, carrying out massacres and gaining a reputation for brutality. Scholars today contest the

reasons for these actions. Some believe that criminal Lithuanians acted independently. Others believe that Lithuanians were responding to the Nazis' propaganda against the Jews, which labeled them communists and Soviet collaborators. Still others suggest the Lithuanians acted on German orders.

Within weeks of the Germans' arrival, special Nazi units began to conduct mass executions of Jews at the Ninth Fort at Kaunas Fortress and in the forest of Paneriai, near Vilnius. They also confined Jews to ghettos enclosed by barbed wire in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, and Švenčionys. In sum, the Nazi occupation was devastating to Lithuania's Jewish population (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In total, the Nazis murdered some 190,000-220,000 Jews in Lithuania, including Jews from other countries. Besides targeting Jews, the Nazis also executed or deported other "undesirables," as well as Lithuanians who resisted cooperation. While some Lithuanians supported the Nazis, many others participated in resistance activities or risked their lives to save Jews (Photo: A monument commemorates 30,000 Jews massacred at Kaunas Fortress).

By 1944, the Soviets were advancing against the Germans. In July, they recaptured Vilnius and by January 1945 controlled the entire country again. In addition to the tremendous loss of life, Lithuania suffered substantial destruction during the war. Major cities were left largely in ruins and many smaller towns completely destroyed. As the war neared its end, about 200,000 Poles fled southern Lithuania back to Polish territory while 10s of 1000s of Lithuanians escaped to Germany.

The Soviet Era

Following Germany's surrender in May 1945, the USSR immediately reincorporated Lithuania, a move never recognized by Western nations. In order to eradicate Lithuanian national consciousness and restructure Lithuania in

the Soviet Socialist model, the Soviets introduced repressive measures aligned with Russification policies. Between 1946 and 1949, the Soviets deported around 300,000 Lithuanians in several waves to prison camps in northern Russia and Siberia. Further, the Soviets initiated a military draft, forcing thousands of young men into the services (Photo: Soviet soldiers in Vilnius in 1944).

Besides implementing agricultural collectivization programs, the Soviets introduced industrial development. The primary focus was energy production, such as constructing a nuclear power plant, an oil refinery, and a hydro-electric plant. To provide the workforce required by such projects, the Soviets encouraged ethnic Russians to move to Lithuania, although not on the same scale as in neighboring Estonia and Latvia.

Starting in the mid-1950s, there was a slight relaxation of the Soviet grip: governmental positions opened to Lithuanians, and the state demonstrated more tolerance for Lithuanian language and culture. Despite Soviet repression of organized religion (see p. 6-7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), many Lithuanians remained members of the Catholic Church, which became somewhat of a center of opposition to the USSR.

The Forest Brothers: Between 1944 and 1951, as many as 100,000 Lithuanians joined an anti-Soviet partisan movement known as the Forest Brothers. Until disbanded by USSR security forces in 1953, the Forest Brothers carried out various acts of armed opposition against the Soviets.

An Opening

Beginning in 1985, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced a series of reforms that would eventually result in the unintended dissolution of the USSR. These reforms – most notably ***perestroika*** (restructuring) and ***glasnost*** (openness) – introduced market forces into the struggling Soviet economy and increased individuals' freedom of expression. Although the

attempted reforms were largely unsuccessful, deteriorating economic conditions sparked a wave of democratic movements in the Soviet republics, including Lithuania.

In an act many observers called the first protest movement, Lithuanian journalists called for the return of pre-Soviet street names in 1986. A year later, demonstrators protested against the 1939 USSR-Nazi Germany non-aggression pact during a commemoration and against construction at the nuclear power plant. In 1988, a group of intellectuals including future President Vytautas Landsbergis formed ***Sajūdis***, Lithuania's first official pro-independence movement. In 1989, *Sajūdis* was instrumental in organizing some 2 million residents from the 3 Baltic States to join hands and form a human chain stretching from Tallinn (Estonia) to Vilnius to mark the 50th anniversary of the USSR-Germany pact (Photo: US Army Gen Marchi presents an award to Landsbergis in 2013).

In 1990 elections, *Sajūdis* won a large majority. On March 11, the Parliament proclaimed independence, demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops as Vytautas Landsbergis became President. The USSR voiced its disapproval, announcing an economic embargo and sending tanks to Vilnius. Confronted with international criticism, the USSR agreed to negotiations.

Deadly Demonstrations: Over the next months, the negotiations showed little progress. The economic blockade affected residents deeply, causing tensions to mount. In January 1991, Gorbachev sought to send a signal to all potential break-away Soviet republics by ordering troops to seize installations in Vilnius. In their own defense, Lithuanians erected and manned barriers outside governmental buildings. Then, Soviet tanks and soldiers opened fire on demonstrators outside the Vilnius TV tower, resulting in the deaths of 14 Lithuanians. Following international outrage, the Soviet troops retreated.

Lithuania's status remained unresolved until August 1991 when a coup attempt against Gorbachev in Moscow failed. Within days, the international community and then the USSR recognized Lithuania's independence. In September, Lithuania was admitted to the United Nations.

Independence Restored

Newly-independent Lithuania moved quickly to restructure its economy, including adopting its own currency. In 1992 voters rejected Landsbergis' plan for a strongly presidential system of government, supporting instead a division of power between a President and Parliament. Dogged by charges of authoritarianism, Landsbergis did not stand in the 1992 presidential election. Instead, the former Secretary of the Communist Party and early supporter of Lithuanian independence, Algirdas Brazauskas (pictured while visiting the Pentagon), won an easy victory, remaining in office until 1998.

Transition from a Soviet state to independence was not always smooth. The uncertainties of the market economy, including inflation, high unemployment, and business bankruptcies caused substantial economic suffering. Further, Lithuanians were forced to endure significant food and fuel shortages. Consequently, some Lithuanians chose to express their dissatisfaction with the loss of the Soviet social safety net by electing former Communist Party leaders. The majority welcomed the transition, though, and the population was supportive when Lithuania took the first steps toward membership in the EU in 1995.

Modern Lithuania

In subsequent years, Lithuania was rocked by political and financial scandals. After consistently supporting independent and left-wing parties, voters performed an about-face and gave right-wing parties the majority in Parliament during the 1996 elections, resulting in conservative control of the Prime Minister (PM) office until 2000.

Following a tight race, an independent candidate, Valdas Adamkus (pictured in 2007 with then US President Bush), won the 1998 presidential election. Born in Lithuania in 1926, Adamkus immigrated to the US in 1944 during WWII before returning to Lithuania in 1997. Except for a small gap in 2003-04 when a newly-elected President was impeached and removed from office, Adamkus served as Lithuania's President from 1998 until 2009.

Because Lithuania lacked the industrial foundation that the other Baltic republics relied on, its economy struggled to emerge from Soviet central control. Gradually, foreign investment began to flow into the country to take advantage of Lithuania's well-educated and inexpensive workforce. Lithuania experienced an economic boom following its 2004 accession to the EU and membership in NATO. Only 4 years later, the 2008-09 European financial crisis profoundly affected the country, resulting in significant economic contraction. In response, Lithuania instituted strict austerity measures that were met with some opposition but proved to be very effective, resulting in relatively swift economic recovery.

Meanwhile, many political parties continue to struggle for control of Parliament. Since 2012, the center-left Social Democratic Party has controlled the PM office (see p. 4-5 of *Social and Political Relations*). Of note, Lithuania's first female President, Dalia Grybauskaité, took office in 2009 and was re-elected in 2014. Lithuania became the last of the Baltic States to adopt the EU's euro as its currency in 2015.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

For Lithuanians, myth and folklore played an important role in maintaining pagan beliefs in the face of pressures to convert to Christianity during the medieval period (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). A well-known story with distinctive pre-Christian themes tells of Egle, a young woman who is tricked by a grass snake into marrying him. When she appears for the wedding, the snake has turned into a young man, Zilvinas. The couple marry and live in a palace at the bottom of the sea.

Egle has 3 sons, Oak, Ash, and Birch, as well as a daughter, Aspen. Because she misses her family on land, Egle asks her husband's permission to visit them. He refuses until she successfully completes 3 impossible-sounding tasks. Once she has proven herself, he allows her to leave with the children, giving her a password that will allow her to return to the bottom of the sea. Egle's parents and brothers rejoice upon seeing her and her children. To keep her from leaving again, Egle's brother tricks Aspen into revealing the password. The brothers then use the password to descend into the sea where they murder Zilvinas. In her grief and despair, Egle turns her children into the trees indicated by their names and herself into a fir tree.

Other myths helped to bolster Lithuanian identity through its early history of Polonization and the 18th-century Russification. For example, Vilnius' origin story is closely connected to the unification of Lithuania's Baltic tribes. Another well-known tale was recently made into a rock opera. The story recounts how a mermaid named Jūraté fell in love with Kastytis, a fisherman, and transported him to her castle under the sea. In punishment for their forbidden love, Perkūnas (pre-Christian god of thunder –see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) sent a storm to demolish her castle. Today, pieces of the structure – Lithuanian amber – continue to wash up on the Lithuanian shore (pictured).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Republic of Lithuania
Lietuvos Respublika

Political Borders

Latvia: 338 mi
Belarus: 398 mi
Poland: 65 mi
Russia: 162 mi
Coastline: 56 mi

Capital

Vilnius

Demographics

With a population of about 2.7 million, Lithuania is the most populous Baltic State yet remains one of Europe's smallest nations. Significantly, Lithuania's population is declining at an annual rate of -1.13%, in part due to Lithuania's low birth rate (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*) and the emigration of Lithuanians in search of employment abroad. Nearly 68% of the population lives in metropolitan areas, primarily in the capital city of Vilnius and surrounding suburbs.

Flag

The Lithuanian flag consists of 3 equal horizontal yellow, green, and red stripes. The top yellow band symbolizes the sun, light, and goodness while also representing Lithuania's golden fields. The green band denotes nature, hope, and freedom, as well as Lithuanian forests. Lastly, the red band represents courage and the blood spilled in defending Lithuania. First adopted in 1918, the flag was banned during the Soviet and Nazi Germany occupations (see p. 11-13 of *History and Myth*). Lithuanian officially re-adopted the flag in 1989.

Geography

Situated along the southeastern shore of the Baltic Sea, Lithuania shares a border with Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the southwest, and Russia (the enclave of Kaliningrad) to the southwest. Lithuania's short western coastline faces the Baltic Sea, about half of which forms the Curonian Spit – a narrow strip of land separating the Baltic Sea from the Curonian Lagoon. Lithuania's total land area is about 39,000 sq mi, making it slightly larger than West Virginia and about the same size as Ireland.

Lithuania has a low, mostly flat terrain characterized by coastal lowlands along the Baltic shoreline in the West, gently rolling plains in the center, and hilly uplands in the East. Lithuania's highest point, Aukštojas Hill, rises about 964 ft and is located near the capital city of Vilnius in the Southeast. Forests cover about 35% of the country. Lithuania is also home to thousands of small lakes and rivers, the longest of which are the Nemunas (pictured) and the Neris, which passes directly through Vilnius.

Climate

Lithuania experiences a temperate, mixed continental and maritime climate with 4 distinct seasons. Summers tend to be short and cool, while winters are long and wet. Temperatures in the summer month of July average 63°F. By contrast, in the winter month of January, temperatures average 23°F. Generally, coastal regions and western lowlands experience warmer temperatures than Lithuania's east due to the warm Gulf Stream. Snowfall typically occurs November-March, while rainfall is heaviest May-August. Of note, the number of daylight hours varies dramatically throughout the year. For example, there are over 18 hours of daylight in June, and no more than 6 hours in December.

Natural Hazards

Lithuania is vulnerable to relatively few types of natural hazards, the most significant being heavy winter snowfall and cold temperatures. The country also occasionally experiences droughts, the severest resulting in a number of forest and bog fires in 2002.

Environmental Issues

Lithuania's environmental issues stem from damaging activities performed by the Soviets during their occupation (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*). Significant water and air pollution resulted from the improper disposal of industrial waste, hazardous chemicals at military bases, and untreated sewage released into groundwater reservoirs (Photo: The historic island town of Trakai).

Following independence, the Lithuanian government took measures to counteract the environmental degradation. These included the cleanup of coastal and inland waters, the management of agricultural runoff, and the regulation of industrial waste. While most inland lakes and rivers are generally free of pollution today, parts of the Baltic Sea and the Curonian Lagoon remain heavily polluted. In addition, air pollution from automobile emissions is a concern in Vilnius.

Government

Lithuania is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 10 counties (***apskritis***), administered by governors who are appointed by the Parliament (see "Legislative Branch" below). The counties further subdivide into 60 regions (***rajonas***) governed by mayors and elected local councils. Adopted in 1992 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), Lithuania's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and outlines the fundamental rights of Lithuanian citizens.

Executive Branch

Elected by popular vote, the President is head-of-state and commander-in-chief of Lithuania's Armed Forces and may serve up to 2 consecutive 5-year terms. Presidential powers are largely ceremonial. The current President, Gitanas Nausėda (pictured, 2018), took office in 2019. A 2019 poll considered Nausėda to be the most trusted politician in Lithuania.

By contrast, executive power is vested in the Prime Minister (PM), who is head-of-government. With the support of a 14-member Council of Ministers, the PM oversees the country's day-to-day affairs. Named by the President and approved by the Parliament, the PM is traditionally the leader of the political party that holds the most seats in the Parliament. Lithuania's current PM, Saulius Skvernelis, took office in late 2016.

Legislative Branch

Lithuania's legislature is a 1-chamber Parliament (***Seimas***), composed of 141 members elected to serve 4-year terms. Of those, 70 are elected through a nationwide vote based on proportional representation. The remaining 71 seats are elected in single constituencies by an absolute majority vote. The Parliament controls all federal legislative powers, including amending the constitution, appointing positions in government, approving declarations of war, and passing the national budget.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, Court of Appeals, and system of lower courts. As the highest court, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases. The President nominates and Parliament approves the 37 Supreme Court justices to serve 5-year, renewable terms. The Constitutional Court consists of 9 judges nominated by the President, Speaker of the Parliament, and Supreme Court chairperson, and approved by the Parliament.

Political Climate

Lithuania's political landscape includes a multi-party system in which political parties or coalitions of parties compete for power. Generally, those parties and coalitions which hold the majority of seats in the Parliament also hold the bulk of government leadership positions. While the government allows most political parties to operate without restriction, it does prohibit those advocating communism (Photo: The Parliament building in Vilnius).

As of the 2016 elections, the agrarian Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union (LVZS) became Parliament's largest party (54 seats). Two candidates elected as independents were included as LVZS members on the list of multi-mandate constituencies, bringing the actual LVZS total to 56 mandates. The center-right party Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) is the 2nd largest party (31), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) is the 3rd (17). Other active parties currently holding seats include the Liberal Movement (14), the Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles (8), the party Order and Justice (8), independent candidates (4), and the Labour Party (2). Additionally, the Lithuanian Green Party, the political party List of Lithuania, and the Anti-Corruption Coalition of Kristupas Krivickas and Naglis Puteikis each hold 1 seat.

The government faces challenges to maintaining the democratic process. Due to many years of occupation (see *History and Myth*), many Lithuanians are skeptical of the political process. In addition, corruption permeates all levels of government, further engendering public distrust of officials.

Defense

The Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) are a unified military force consisting of primarily ground forces with smaller maritime and air branches. They are charged with defending against foreign and domestic threats, performing search and rescue

operations, and protecting critical infrastructure. As of 2015, at least 1 year of military service is mandatory for both men and women aged 19-26. Lithuanians may voluntarily enlist at age 18.

With a joint strength of 23,550 active duty troops, 6,700 reserve personnel, and 15,500 paramilitary troops, Lithuania has the largest military of the 3 Baltic States. Nevertheless, Lithuania heavily relies on the support of its allies to respond to large, state-level threats. Currently, it receives the majority of support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – a political and military alliance among 29 nations (including the US) that promotes its members' security through collective defense.

Joint: Comprised of 8,600 active-duty personnel, the joint forces divide into Joint Logistics Support and Joint Training and Doctrine Commands as well as 1 combat support battalion.

Army: The Lithuanian Army is a well-equipped, well-trained force of 12,900 active-duty troops, consisting of 4 maneuver brigades (including mechanized and light), 6 maneuver territorial defense units, 1 combat support brigade, and 1 combat service support regiment.

Navy: Consisting of 700 active-duty personnel, the Lithuanian Navy is the smallest of the branches, with 4 patrol and coastal combatants, 4 mine warfare and countermeasures vessels, and 4 logistics and support vessels. Of note, the 3 Baltic States share the joint naval unit "***Baltron***" with bases in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania (Klaipéda) (Photo: Lithuanian forces during joint exercises with US marines).

Air Force: The Lithuanian Air Force consists of 1,350 active-duty personnel and has 1 air defense battalion with 14 fighter aircraft.

Paramilitary: The Lithuanian Paramilitary forces consist of 11,000 Riflemen Union members and 3,400 State Border Guard servicemen.

Lithuania Air Force Rank Insignia

JR AIRMAN

AIRMAN

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS

CORPORAL

SERGEANT SPECIALIST

SERGEANT

SR SERGEANT SPECIALIST

SR SERGEANT

STAFF SERGEANT SPECIALIST

STAFF SERGEANT

MASTER SERGEANT

SERGEANT MAJOR

LIEUTENANT

1ST LIEUTENANT

CAPTAIN

MAJOR

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

COLONEL

BRIG GENERAL

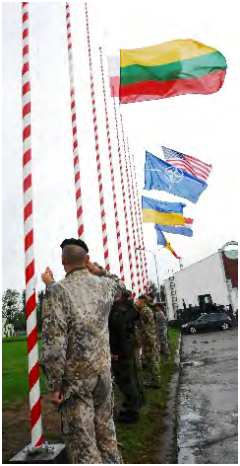
MAJ GENERAL

LT GENERAL

Foreign Relations

After gaining independence from the USSR, Lithuania rigorously pursued political, economic, and military integration with its Baltic, Nordic, and Western European neighbors. With its accession to NATO and the EU in 2004, Lithuania continued its divergence from Russian influence.

In 2013-2014, Lithuania assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, becoming the 1st Baltic nation to hold this rotating leadership position. Lithuania served as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2014-15. In addition, Lithuania has contributed to multiple UN peacekeeping missions and regularly participates in and hosts NATO military exercises (Photo: Multinational troops salute national flags during exercises hosted by Lithuania).



Regional Cooperation: Lithuania joined with Estonia and Latvia in 1991 to form the Baltic Assembly, established to address common political, economic, and social issues. Lithuania is also active in the Nordic-Baltic Cooperation (NB8) along with Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, and Latvia. Formed in 1992, the NB8 promotes members' coordination on economic policy, foreign and national security, energy and transportation infrastructure, civil protection, and cultural matters.

Relations with the EU: The EU is a political and economic partnership among 27 European nations. Lithuania relies on the EU as a political, military, and economic buffer against neighboring Russia. Of note, Lithuania adopted the EU's euro as its own currency in 2015 (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), further solidifying its economic integration with European nations.

Relations with the US: The US and Lithuania have strong political, economic, and military ties dating to 1922 (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Fully supporting the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1991, the US never formally recognized the USSR's occupation during World War II (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Accordingly, the US views the current Lithuanian government as a legal continuation of the independent republic that existed between the 2 World Wars.

Following Lithuania's independence, the US advocated for Lithuania's accession into various international organizations, such as NATO and the EU. Further, it worked closely with the Lithuanian government to help rebuild its free- market economy and democratic institutions. Today, Lithuania is an important advocate for promoting the US's democratic and pro-Western agenda in the region (Photo: Former Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Jukneviciene visits the Pentagon in 2012).

The US provides substantial defense assistance to Lithuania, both financially and through military training and equipment designed to bolster Lithuanian military capability. Further, the US and Lithuania have signed several bilateral trade and investment agreements, which protect intellectual property and allow goods, services, and capital to move freely between the 2 nations. Finally, Lithuania is one of 38 nations participating in the "Visa Waiver" program, which allows Lithuanians to travel to the US visa-free for up to 90 days.

Security Issues

Lithuania's security environment is dominated by its historically volatile relationship with neighboring Russia (see p. 11-16 of *History and Myth)*. As noted earlier, Lithuania heavily relies on military and economic support from NATO, the UN, and the EU to help insulate it from large, external threats.

Relations with Russia: Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, tensions between Lithuania and Russia intensified. Lithuania was also concerned by the resulting unrest in Eastern Ukraine, Russia's continued support of Ukrainian separatist forces, and the bolstering of Russian military capacity in neighboring Kaliningrad. With the goal of deterring further aggression, NATO responded in early 2016 to Lithuania's request for increased troop strength along its Russian borders. The move concerns some NATO members who believe that this increase will exacerbate tensions between Lithuania and Russia (Photo: US Airmen board a C-130 traveling to Šiauliai Air Base in Lithuania).

Amid these tensions, the West shares some apprehension that the Russian government may attempt to provoke social unrest among Lithuania's Russian-speaking population. However, because ethnic Russians constitute a small minority of the Lithuanian population (see "Social Relations" below), the Lithuanian government has not taken measures to counteract any such moves.

Finally, Lithuania's significant reliance on trade with Russia (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*) leaves Lithuania particularly vulnerable to potential economic disruptions from Russia, including trade and energy sanctions. Consequently, the 2 nations maintain a dialogue despite the heightened political tensions (Photo: Lithuanian Airmen prepare for a simulated fire during a NATO military exercise).

Ethnic Groups

Lithuania's historic diversity was bolstered by certain policies during the Soviet occupation that encouraged workers from Russia and other Soviet states to resettle in Lithuania while simultaneously deporting Lithuanians. Nevertheless, these policies did not cause the Lithuanian proportion of the population to decline as significantly as in the other Baltic States. According to the 2011 census, 84% of the population is ethnically Lithuanian.

Related to Lithuania's long-term alliance with Poland (see p. 5-8 of *History and Myth*), Poles comprise Lithuania's largest minority group at about 7% of the population. Most Poles live in southeast Lithuania and in Vilnius. Russians comprise the 2nd largest group (6%) and live predominantly in Vilnius, Klaipėda, and Visaginas. Other minority groups include Belarusians (1%) and Ukrainians (1%). While many minority members have fully integrated into Lithuanian society, some Polish and Russian communities remain somewhat socially segregated.

Historically, Lithuanians subdivided into different tribes or ethnic groups (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Today, these differences remain in some linguistic and cultural variations across Lithuania's 5 ethnographic regions (see "Social Relations" below). While most Lithuanians speak a dialect from Aukštaitija, some residents of Žemaitija speak the Samogitian dialect (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*) (Photo: Lithuanians pose with US Army paratroopers).

Lithuania is home to about 3,200 Tatars of Turkic origins who are primarily Muslim (see p. 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*) Russian-speakers. Finally, about 2,100 residents identify as Roma or "Gypsy" who live primarily in small, secluded communities on urban peripheries.

Social Relations

Lithuanians generally identify with 1 of 5 ethnographic regions (Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija, Mažoji Lietuva – also known as Lithuania Minor – and Žemaitija), delineated by cultural and some dialectal variation. While the cultural differences were more pronounced in the past, Lithuanians continue to associate particular characteristics with the residents of each region. For example, Lithuanians may stereotype residents of Aukštaitija as cheerful, those of Suvalkija as thrifty and hardworking, and Žemaitijans as stubborn but faithful.

Lithuanian society divides along rural-urban, male-female, and rich-poor lines. Generally, urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy enjoy greater access to educational and economic opportunities and hold the most social prestige. Women tend to experience high levels of domestic violence and face discrimination in the workplace (see p. 1-3 of *Sex and Gender*). Further, some ethnic minorities face discrimination and socio-economic exclusion. For example, the Roma suffer from negative social stereotypes, employment discrimination, and increased school drop-out rates (Photo: Vilnius).

Some social divisions exist among Lithuanians and minorities. For example, a territorial dispute between Poland and Lithuania at the end of World War I (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*) resulted in strained relations between Poles and Lithuanians. Similarly, some friction exists between Russians and Lithuanians, evident primarily among older Lithuanians who experienced the Soviet occupation and as a result hold anti-Russian sentiment. In recent years, discord among the 3 groups has centered on legislation concerning language use in education (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). While the 3 groups coexist harmoniously today, they may not always mix. Proud of their cultural differences, Poles and Russians tend to socialize among themselves, follow different faiths (see p. 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*), and attend Russian or Polish language schools.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

With the vast majority of its inhabitants claiming a Roman Catholic affiliation, Lithuania is the only Baltic country where religion is central to national identity. According to the 2011 census, 77% of Lithuania's population is Roman Catholic. A 2015 study found that about 5% of the population are Russian Orthodox and 1.4% Protestants, while about 10% claim no religious affiliation. There are other Christian, as well as Islamic and Jewish groups collectively comprising less than 1% of the population. Other Christian groups include Old Believers, Greek Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, and Pentecostals (Photo: The Hill of Crosses in Šiauliai includes over 100,000 crosses).

Lithuania's constitution protects the freedom of religion and recognizes no state religion. By law, 9 "traditional" religious groups – including Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed, Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites (a Turkic Jewish sect) – retain some rights and privileges not granted other religious groups. These include the right to teach religion in public schools, officiate at marriages, and receive government subsidies.

Lithuania's Early Spiritual Landscape

While there was likely some regional variation, early Lithuanians practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in natural objects, including trees, rocks, hills, fields, and animals. Trees, in particular, held great significance, as did places, such as forests, fields, and springs, and certain animals (including the grass snake – see p. 18 of *History and Myth*).

While there was no organized priesthood, a spiritual leader (***krivis***) performed ceremonies at an outdoors place of worship (***alkas***), such as a shrine or altar usually located on a hill near a stream or river. One aim of the ceremonies was to communicate with gods and spirits who, early Lithuanians believed, could guide or obstruct human behavior. Ceremonies could include offerings before an eternal sacred flame and animal sacrifice. While the Lithuanians worshiped many different deities, some of the most important included *Dievas* (the God of the Sky), *Perkūnas* (the God of thunder, lightning, and the atmosphere), and *Laima* (the Goddess of Fate).

Early Lithuanians' belief in an afterlife is indicated by their funeral traditions. For example, deceased rulers were often cremated, then buried with household goods, food, and even companion animals. Following his death in the late 14th century, Grand Duke Algirdas (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), was cremated with horses, falcons, and dogs.

The Arrival of Christianity

Lithuanians maintained their pagan beliefs and practices well into the medieval period. Further, this belief system was closely linked to the unification and growth of the early Lithuanian state, which consolidated to repel German crusaders seeking to Christianize the Lithuanian people (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*). Despite some early success against the crusaders, King Mindaugas sought external recognition of his right to rule (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*) and thereby converted to Christianity in 1251. After receiving acknowledgement of the Kingdom of Lithuania from the Catholic Pope in Rome, Mindaugas renounced Christianity and returned to his pagan ways. This act was timely considering few Lithuanians followed Mindaugas' lead in converting nor did German aggressions lessen. (Photo: Lithuanian soldiers in medieval armament).

As Lithuania acquired new territory and attracted settlers from across Europe beginning in the 14th century (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), its population became more diverse. Both Jews and Muslims arrived at the invitation of Lithuanian monarchs, while most of the inhabitants of the newly-conquered eastern lands were members of the Russian Orthodox Church. During this period, the early Lithuanian state demonstrated significant religious tolerance. Although officially pagan, the state allowed Catholic and Orthodox monasteries to exist side-by-side with pagan shrines.

In 1386, Lithuania sought union with Poland to better respond to continuing foreign threats (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Because Poland was a Roman Catholic state, a condition of the union was the conversion of Lithuania's leaders (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). A year later, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania officially adopted Roman Catholicism as its official religion. The last remaining pagan territory in the region, the lowland district of Žemaitija, adopted Christianity in 1413. Despite the state's official adoption, Lithuanians were slow to embrace Christianity. Most continued their pagan practices for decades or even centuries longer. For example, as late as the 18th century, Catholic Church officials were destroying "sacred" groves in the attempt to stamp out these beliefs.

The Crosses of Lithuania

Crosses are a common site across Lithuania. They are seen along roads and rivers, on homes and hilltops, and in yards, forests, and town squares. Crosses serve to remember the dead, encourage a good harvest, keep away bad fortune, bless a new home, or mark a birth or marriage. Some crosses incorporate pre-Christian elements, such as the sun, moon, or serpents. Catholic pilgrims have been erecting crosses at the Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai since the 19th century. Although the Soviets bulldozed the site twice, Lithuanians always returned to erect more crosses to demonstrate their allegiance to their Lithuanian and Catholic heritage.

The Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation

The Protestant Reformation began in the early 16th century to answer a call for change in the Roman Catholic Church. A key event in the movement occurred when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Germany in 1517. Critical of several Catholic Church teachings and the authority of the pope, Luther's ideas spread quickly, especially through the use of the newly-invented printing press.

Within Lithuania, Protestantism, especially the branch known as Calvinism, found significant support among many noble families. In response, the Catholic Church soon mounted its own "Counter-Reformation," initiating reforms to priestly training and religious life in an effort to re-convert areas influenced by the Protestants. In Lithuania, Counter-Reformation efforts included the publication of the first Bible in Lithuanian in 1547, the adoption of Lithuanian for some Catholic Church services, and the 1579 founding of Vilnius University by Jesuit monks (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Due to such successful Counter-Reformation efforts, Protestantism did not take root. Through the 17th and 18th centuries, many new Catholic churches and monasteries were built as Catholicism flourished (Photo: 16th century Polish-Lithuanian Catholic clergy).

Religion under Russian Rule

By the end of the 18th century, Russia had acquired control of all of modern-day Lithuania (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), soon proclaiming Russian Orthodoxy the state religion. Over the next 115 years, the Russian Orthodox Church enjoyed growth due to state support, suppression of other churches and religions, and a small influx of Russians.

Following rebellions against Russian rule in 1831 and 1863, the Russian state implemented several repressive measures intended to promote the country's Russification (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Among these measures were a ban on the

new construction of Catholic churches, the conversion of Lutheran and Catholic churches for Orthodox worship, and the closing of Catholic monasteries. Despite this repression, most Lithuanians remained faithful Catholics. During the late 19th-century national revival (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), Catholicism became an important marker of Lithuanian identity.

Jerusalem of the North: Since its origins in the medieval period (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), Lithuania's Jewish community had continued to grow. By the 18th century, Jews made up 7.6% of Lithuania's population and 30% of Vilnius'. With its vibrant Jewish culture and tradition of rabbinical scholarship, Vilnius became known as the "Jerusalem of the North" during this period. Although the Jewish community also suffered under 19th century Russian repression, Jews made up nearly 56% of the population of Vilnius by 1860. The population declined somewhat in the late 19th century when famine, disease, and pogroms in southern Russia compelled many Jews to emigrate. Despite this population contraction, Lithuania remained a center of Yiddish culture.

Religion during Inter-War Independence

After regaining independence following World War I (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*), Lithuania named Roman Catholicism as the official state religion. Due to ongoing territorial disputes with Poland, reorganization of the Lithuanian Catholic Church was contentious but completed by 1926. Generally, Catholicism flourished during the inter-war period. It was taught in the public schools; many monastic communities were revived; nearly 1/3 of the population was actively involved in some type of Catholic organization; and 28 Catholic periodicals enjoyed wide readership. Following the return of Vilnius and surrounding territory to Lithuania in 1939, the Lithuanian Catholic Church counted 4 seminaries, over 1200 priests, 73 monasteries with 580 monks, as well as 85 convents with 950 nuns (Photo: The Roman Catholic Cathedral of Vilnius).

World War II (WWII)

Lithuania's Christian churches experienced significant losses during WWII, when many clergy fled as refugees or were deported to Soviet labor camps (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). While significant, these losses paled in comparison to the trauma experienced by Lithuania's Jewish community under the Nazi regime (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*).

Just before WWII, Jews comprised about 7% of Lithuania's population, or about 160,000 people. When WWII began with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, many Jews in Poland fled to Vilnius. By 1941, Lithuania's Jewish population had swollen to about 250,000. Over the course of their 3 year occupation, the Nazis confined Jews to ghettos, shipped then to labor camps, exterminated them in concentration camps, or murdered them outright in mass shootings. Although exact numbers are unknown, historians estimate that at least 85% and perhaps more than 90% of Lithuania's Jews were dead by war's end in 1945. Few displaced survivors chose to return to Lithuania. As a result, the country's Jewish community was all but eliminated and Vilnius' rich Jewish culture was erased (Photo: Šiauliai's Choral Synagogue was destroyed in WWII).

Religion during the Soviet Period

The Soviet Union's 1940 invasion and annexation of Lithuania also brought significant changes to the country's religious landscape. Besides attempting to eradicate Lithuanian national consciousness and restructure Lithuania to fit their socialist order (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), the Soviets imposed their communist worldview. A key component of this view was atheism or the disbelief in deities and the rejection of religion.

The Soviets' brutal repression of the Lithuanian population in general (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*) also included the execution, deportation, or banning of about 1/3 of the Catholic clergy. The Soviets also dissolved all monasteries and

convents and drastically restricted the activities of all religious organizations. The state also banned religious literature and excluded religion from educational policy and curriculum. While Orthodox priestly candidates could attend a seminary in Russia, the Catholic Church was allowed to maintain just 1 seminary that was restricted to 10 new candidates per year. Further, the state destroyed many churches, mosques, and synagogues and confiscated others, converting them for alternative uses (Photo: St. Casimir Church in Vilnius became a Museum of Atheism during the Soviet period).

Despite this repression, many Lithuanians continued their religious practices in secret while maintaining a strong connection to the Catholic Church. In the 1970s, an underground network of Catholic activists published a journal documenting the state's religious repression and human rights violations. With Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's social and economic reforms in the 1980s (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*) came the lifting of religious repression. As the Soviet hold on Lithuania weakened, the Catholic Church enjoyed a surge of interest and became allied with the independence movement (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*). Then, as Lithuania moved to full independence, Catholic organizations resumed their range of educational and charitable activities. With the 1990 Act of Restitution of the Catholic Church, freedom of religion was restored to Lithuania.

Religion Today

While almost 90% of Lithuanians claimed a Christian affiliation in a 2015 survey, far fewer reported that religion was significant in their everyday lives. In fact, just 19% of those surveyed agreed that religion was very important in their lives, while just 12% reported they attended weekly religious services. Research also revealed a significant age gap: while 48% of Lithuanians aged 65+ claimed religion was very important, just 8% of those aged 18-29 did.

Roman Catholicism: Most of Lithuania's Roman Catholics are ethnic Lithuanians or ethnic Poles (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Currently, 3 seminaries offer priestly training.

Russian Orthodoxy: Most members of Russian Orthodox churches are ethnic Russians. The community also includes the Old Believers, members of an offshoot of the Russian Orthodox Church formed following a 17th century schism.

Judaism: Following WWII, some Jews from other Soviet republics moved to Lithuania. According to a 1959 census, the country was home to about 25,000 Jews. Beginning in the 1970s, the population began to decline significantly as many Jews emigrated to Israel. By 1989, they numbered about 12,000. Today, about 5000 Jews live in Lithuania, primarily in Vilnius, Klaipéda, and Šiauliai. Beginning in the 2000s, several Jewish cultural and educational institutions became active in Vilnius. For example, Vilnius University's Yiddish Institute opened in 2001 to support the study of Yiddish and East European Jewish culture.

Islam: Between 50,000-100,000 Muslim Tatars settled in Lithuania during the 14th century reign of Vytautas the Great (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Although they also suffered under Soviet religious repression, many have retained their ethnic and religious identity. Today about 3,200 Tatars live in Lithuania, primarily in Vilnius and Kaunas, where the government built a mosque in 1930 to commemorate 500 years of their presence. Besides the Tatars, Lithuania's Muslim community also includes some migrants and temporary workers from the Middle East and Africa (Illustration: A 19th century depiction of a Lithuanian mosque).

***Romuva*:** About 5000 Lithuanians follow *Romuva*, a religion first founded in the 1920s that sought to reestablish Lithuania's pagan spirituality. Today, practitioners hold worship services at various shrines, including a pilgrimages site in the neighboring Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

While some Lithuanians have moved to urban areas in search of employment and education opportunities, they often return to their rural birthplace to spend time with family. Lithuanians maintain strong relationships with both immediate and extended family, sharing good fortune with their relations and involving them in all important life decisions.

Residence

Over 2/3 of Lithuanians live in urban areas, where housing structures vary by income level. Rural residences tend to be larger than their urban counterparts. Generally, Lithuanians take pride in furnishing their homes, spending large portions of their income to decorate living spaces and make their homes comfortable (Photo: A wooden home in rural Lithuania).

Rural: Following independence in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), the Lithuanian government converted many Soviet-era state-run collective farms into small, single-family farmsteads. Most rural residences today comprise multiple structures, including a main house, a separate storehouse, and a sauna – a single, well insulated room heated by a wood-burning stove. Larger farms may have additional barns to house livestock and store grain. Many farmhouses feature sloping, tiled roofs and 2nd-story attics for storage.

Traditionally constructed of wood, many rural homes today are built of bricks and cement. Homes typically have extensive gardens containing fruit trees, vegetables, flowers, and herbs.

Urban: Housing in Lithuania's urban areas is varied. Lower-income Lithuanians typically live in basic, high-rise apartment

complexes built during the Soviet occupation (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*). Situated on the outskirts of cities, these tenement blocks served to accommodate the influx of workers seeking jobs in Soviet industries. Today, many of these buildings remain in poor condition, with unreliable water and electricity.

Although the government has renovated some Soviet-era buildings, many families continue to live in small, outdated apartments comprised of 1-3 bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and bathroom. If needed, the living room doubles as an extra bedroom. By contrast, wealthier urban dwellers live in single-family homes on the outskirts of cities or in newly-built, modern apartments near city centers.

Of note, Lithuanians mostly prefer to own rather than rent their homes. Some newly-married young couples live with family members (see "Children" below) or rent modest, temporary apartments to save money toward buying a home.

The Lithuanian Summer Cottage

Besides their primary homes in the city, many Lithuanians also own holiday cottages in the countryside--a tradition started in the Soviet era. During that period, many urban residents maintained modest rural homes and gardens where they grew fruits and vegetables to supplement the food supplies provided by the state. Today, these country homes serve as summer and weekend retreats for Lithuanians looking to escape busy city life.

Family Structure

Even if both parents work outside the home (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*), the father is traditionally the head of the household and primary breadwinner. The mother holds responsibility for most household chores, including cleaning and cooking. Most Lithuanians live as nuclear families (2 parents and their children), though extended families play a

significant role in daily life. For example, relatives typically support one another financially and emotionally, gathering frequently for meals, birthdays, and other special occasions. Lithuanians revere their elderly family members for their wisdom and experience, often choosing to provide physical and financial care for their aging parents. Nursing homes generally house only elderly who are without close kin or have serious medical conditions.

Children

Most Lithuanian families choose to have 1-2 children. While other extended family members may help raise children, grandparents are highly influential since they often care for children while both parents work. Parents generally do not encourage their children to work outside the home before they reach age 18, though they expect children to assist in household chores. Lithuanian parents tend to give their children a high degree of autonomy, allowing them to venture outside the home unattended from a young age.

Children usually live with their parents until they marry, although some rural young adults move to urban areas before marriage in search of education or employment opportunities. Once married, young couples often continue to live with their parents until able to purchase their own homes (Photo: A US paratrooper poses with a young Lithuanian girl in Rukla).

Birth: Lithuanians tend to be highly protective of pregnant women. After the birth, relatives and friends typically visit, bringing gifts for both the mother and child. Later, the child's parents appoint godparents, who promise to help raise the child. Since Lithuanians believe the child emulates the godparents' temperaments and habits, new parents take particular care to make the proper selections for these roles. Christian Lithuanians may baptize their child, usually within about 1 month of birth.

Dating and Marriage

Boys and girls typically interact from a young age, socializing at school and sports events, and begin dating around age 15. Popular activities among young couples include going to clubs, attending parties, and traveling together. Couples typically spend several years dating and may live together before deciding to marry.

While Lithuanians usually marry in their early or mid-20s, more couples are postponing or foregoing marriage altogether. Nearly 26% of all Lithuanian children are born to unwed, cohabitating couples or single mothers – a rate lower than the EU average of 40% and substantially lower than the rates of neighboring Estonia (54%) and Latvia (40%) (Photo: A bride poses in a US military vehicle during a community event in Vilnius).

Weddings: Lithuanians may marry in either a civil ceremony held at a local government marriage bureau or in a church wedding. During civil ceremonies, which are particularly popular in urban areas, the bride and groom recite vows, exchange rings, and sign a marriage contract. By contrast, rural weddings tend to be large, lavish church ceremonies that incorporate traditional practices.

While arranged marriages are no longer customary among Lithuanians, the traditional matchmaker continues to hold an important, honorary position in modern Lithuanian weddings. Today, the matchmaker is usually a close friend or family member who helps the couple plan the wedding and assumes several responsibilities during wedding festivities.

Celebrations generally last 2-3 days and include a series of parties held at the family home, restaurant, or a rented hall. During the celebrations, friends and family gather for elaborate meals, dances, and practical jokes. In one tradition, access to the newlywed couple's home is symbolically blocked with ropes

of flowers or branches that are placed by the bride's family. Led by the matchmaker, friends of the groom must then "buy" the couple's passage through the barriers with candy, alcohol, and other presents. When the couple has reached their home, their parents greet them with fresh bread (representing life), salt (representing tears), honey liquor (representing wealth), and an evergreen wreath (representing longevity) (Photo: A couple marries in a church in Vilnius).

Divorce: Divorce is increasingly common and carries little social stigma, especially among younger Lithuanians. At 3.1 per 1,000 people, Lithuania's divorce rate is among Europe's higher rates and similar to the US and Latvian rate of 3.1.

Death

Following a loved one's passing, mourners gather for a casket viewing at the deceased's family home, a church, or in a funeral parlor. Viewings may last 2-3 days, allowing friends and family time to offer prayers and give condolences. While the deceased may be left alone at night, at least 1 family member remains with the body at all times during the day. After the viewing, mourners gather at a church for a funeral service then burial in a cemetery. Some Lithuanians, particularly in urban areas, increasingly choose cremation over a casketed burial. Following the burial, family and close friends gather for a quiet meal to honor the deceased. On All Souls Day, celebrated in November of each year, family members visit the grave to light candles and offer prayers (Photo: Kaunas Street cemetery in Kėdainiai).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

While Lithuanians' outlook on gender roles is changing, Lithuanian society is traditionally patriarchal, meaning that men hold most power and authority. Although women and men have equal rights before the law, women continue to face barriers to their full participation in economic and political spheres.

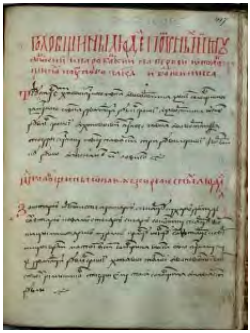
Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Lithuanian women traditionally hold responsibility for all household chores and childcare. Women who work outside the home still perform the majority of domestic tasks. Some women find it difficult to balance both work and family life and elect to forfeit employment, reentering the labor force only several years after having a child.

Labor Force: In 2019, about 57% of Lithuanian women worked outside the home, on par with the US rate. Even though some women hold high level positions in government and business, they are more likely to experience workplace discrimination and receive lower wages than men with comparable education levels and work experience. Women generally attain higher education levels than men and demonstrate greater academic achievement. Nevertheless, Lithuanian women earn an average of 14% less than their male counterparts. Of note, this pay gap is significantly smaller than in Estonia where women earn 23% less than men but is about the same as the EU average and that of neighboring Latvia. About 31% of Lithuanian firms employ a female top manager, higher than the EU average of 20% (Photo: Former Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė during a multinational military exercise).

Gender and the Law

When Lithuania established its legal code in the early 16th century, it became one of the first European nations to grant women social and economic equality, regardless of marital status or religious affiliation. Today, the 1992 Lithuanian constitution continues to guarantee equal rights to women in social welfare, education, healthcare, and employment. Women and men enjoy equal rights within marriage, divorce, and authority over their children. In addition, the constitution recognizes a female head of household and guarantees special protections to single mothers and pregnant women. The law also protects women from differential treatment based on gender in the workplace (Photo: The First Lithuanian Statute, drafted in 1522).



Despite this supporting legal framework, some laws are not always enforced. For example, Lithuanian women generally experience discrimination in hiring and promotion by both public and private employers. Further, while the law criminalizes sexual harassment in the workplace, the burden of proof falls entirely on the victim. In addition, many women are unaware of the law and of incident reporting mechanisms. As a result, very few of the 20% of women suffering sexual harassment in 2010 reported it (Photo: Then-Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė addresses a crowd).

Further, some women are unaware of their equal rights to property and do not acquire a fair share of their marital assets following divorce. Finally, there is currently no law requiring absent fathers to pay

child support following a divorce, placing the financial burden of child-rearing entirely on the mother in cases of sole custody.

Gender and Politics

Lithuanian women hold several national and sub-national government positions even though the government does not rely on quotas to promote female participation in the political process. In 2016, 3 of the 15-member Council of Ministers and 30 of the 141-member Parliament (21%) were women (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). These rates are higher than that of Latvia and Estonia (30%) , but similar to the US, where women comprise 23% of all Congress members, respectively. Further, two Deputy Speakers of the Parliament (pictured, Loreta Grauziniene) and the former President, Dalia Grybauskaitė, have been women. Locally, women accounted for 5% of mayors and 25% of regional council appointments in 2015.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Lithuanian women face a significant level of violence, mostly related to domestic disturbances. Amidst mounting pressure from international human rights organizations, Lithuania criminalized domestic violence in 2011. Unlawful activities include any physical, mental, sexual, or economic damage to married, divorced, or cohabitating men and women or same-sex partners. Rape is also a criminal offense, punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment.

While Lithuania's GBV-related legislation today aligns with the highest international standards, support services overall are inadequate. Likewise, some women are reluctant to seek help from authorities because they consider domestic violence a private matter. Further, police and prosecutors often lack the training to properly handle victims of sexual violence. Even if GBV cases are reported, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare.

Sex and Procreation

During the Soviet era (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*), public displays of affection and sexuality were largely uncommon. Although attitudes have liberalized in recent years, older Lithuanian couples typically do not discuss sex openly nor express affection in public. By contrast, younger, urban couples are more likely to show affection (Photo: Lithuanian children play musical instruments).

At 1.6 births per woman, Lithuania's birthrate is well below the rate required to maintain the population. Concerned about this low rate, the government has instituted programs intended to encourage women to have children. For example, pregnant women receive paid leave for 70 days prior to and following birth. Either parent may also take an additional 2-year leave from work, during which the government pays a portion of that parent's salary.

Abortion is legal in Lithuania and carries relatively little social stigma. With some opponents objecting to the practice on philosophical grounds, the government has occasionally considered proposals restricting the procedure to cases of rape, incest, health risk to the mother, or malformation of the fetus. As of early 2020, abortion remains legally available through the 12th week of pregnancy.

Homosexuality

While Lithuania decriminalized homosexual activity in 1993, lawmakers have not yet legalized same-sex marriage and do not recognize civil unions of same-sex couples. Studies reveal that Lithuania is among the most homophobic (fearful of homosexuals) countries in the EU – a fact recently highlighted by lawmakers' attempts to pass legislation prohibiting homosexual activity in public spaces. Generally, homosexuals experience significant social stigmatization and public displays of affection between homosexuals may incur harassment.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Lithuanian is the official language of Lithuania. While about 96% of the population have some knowledge of the language, about 85% speak it as a first language (Photo: A stamp honors American-Lithuanian Feliksas Vaitkus who piloted a plane across the Atlantic in 1935).

Over centuries of political union with Poland, the Lithuanian elite adopted Polish as their primary language – only rural residents and peasants spoke Lithuanian (see p. 5-7 of *History and Myth*). When Lithuania lost its sovereignty to Russia in 1795 (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), the occupiers encouraged Lithuanians to speak Russian. First formalized in the 18th century, the Lithuanian language and literature enjoyed a resurgence during the 19th-century national revival, despite the Russian rulers' ban on the printing of Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*).

While Lithuanian was used for official purposes during the inter-war republic (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*), it lost its official status following incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940. For the next 50 years, the Soviet state compelled Lithuanians to use Russian in many contexts, while many institutions functioned primarily or even exclusively in Russian. The status of Lithuanian as the official language was restored in 1989. Notably, the decades of Russian and Soviet rule left a lasting mark on Lithuanian society, as about 63% of the population today speak Russian.

Lithuanian

Lithuanian belongs to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family. While Lithuanian exhibits many archaic features also present in ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, it is

most similar to Latvian. Some Slavic, Polish, German, and English loanwords make up modern Lithuanian vocabulary.

Spoken Lithuanian is soft and melodic, with typically long vowel sounds. Stress may occur on any syllable of a word, and each letter is spoken exactly as written. A number of sounds and grammatical constructions in Lithuanian do not exist in English.

Modern Lithuanian utilizes a 32-letter Latin alphabet that relies on diacritics to indicate pronunciation. For example, diacritics placed over vowels indicate length, while those placed over or under consonants indicate a pronunciation change. Thus, the Lithuanian "s" is identical to the English "s," but "š" sounds like "sh" and "č" is pronounced like "ch."

While each region has its own vernacular, Standard Lithuanian is based on the Aukštaitian (highland) dialect, native to northeast Lithuania and spoken by more than 2 million people. Nearly 500,000 people speak the Samogitian (lowland) dialect of the western Žemaitija region. Some scholars even consider it a separate language due to its significant differences from Aukstaitian and other regional dialects. Although some local signs and a quarterly magazine utilize Samogitian, it is not a language of instruction in public schools, and its daily use is declining (Photo: Žemaitija court book from 1592).

Russian

Just over 8% of the Lithuanian population speaks Russian as a first language today, although as noted earlier, many Lithuanians speak it as a 2nd language. Native Russian speakers, including many ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians, primarily live in urban areas.

Other Languages

Some Lithuanians speak languages other than Lithuanian or Russian. Almost 9% of residents speaks Polish, while just over

8% speaks German. Other commonly-spoken languages include Belarusian, Ukrainian, Tatar, and Latvian. English, German, and Russian are popular as 2nd or 3rd languages.

English: Since independence, English has become increasingly popular, and most students now take English beginning in 2nd grade (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). While Russian remains the dominant 2nd language of the older generations and rural residents, young and urban Lithuanians are more likely to speak English. For example, although just 30% of all Lithuanians speak English, around 72% of 15-29 year-olds have some knowledge of the language.

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Lithuania requires not only knowledge of Lithuanian but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Kerry with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linkevicius at a NATO meeting).

Communication Style

Lithuanian communication patterns reflect the value Lithuanians place on privacy, candor, and modesty. Compared to Americans, Lithuanians may seem reserved or somber, often preferring to keep their feelings private. Most Lithuanians favor direct speech and an even tone of voice. They consider small talk excessive and tend to avoid using it, which foreign nationals may find unusual. Comfortable with silence and typically unemotional around strangers, Lithuanians generally

are more open with family and friends, who tend to be loyal and lifelong.

Hierarchy is important in Lithuanian communications. Formality, respect, and deference to authority figures are crucial parts of successful communication, especially during initial meetings. Lithuanians typically try to avoid public conflicts, instead preferring to deal with issues in private (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*). While displaying social status is important in certain situations, Lithuanians generally tend to appreciate modesty.

Lithuanian humor tends to be dry, dark, and even absurd. Jokes that exaggerate, underestimate others, or allude to foreign occupations are popular. Common comedic themes include poking fun at Estonians, as well as the misfortunes and travails of ***ežiukas*** (a little hedgehog). In these well-known sayings and jokes, the little hedgehog typically meets his demise in unfortunate ways, such as by falling in a hole and encountering Germans.

Greetings

Lithuanian greetings are typically simple and direct, consisting of a firm handshake with constant eye contact, a smile, and a verbal ***Sveiki*** (hello). ***Labas*** (hi) and ***Labas, kur eini?*** (roughly "How are you doing?") are less formal and do not always require a response. Handshakes are more common among men than women, and close friends often hug and kiss cheeks. Of note, most Lithuanians never greet in entranceways, as they believe it causes bad luck (Photo: Former US President George W. Bush and former Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus).

Forms of Address

Lithuanians use different forms of address to demonstrate respect and the nature of the relationship. For example, Lithuanians typically address new acquaintances with ***Ponas***

(Mr.), ***Ponia*** (Mrs.), ***Panelė*** (Miss), or other appropriate title followed by their last names. Family, friends, and close colleagues typically call each other by first name.

Lithuanian has distinct "you" pronouns that reflect different levels of formality and respect. Lithuanians typically use the formal "you," or ***jūs***, when meeting for the first time, with elders, or with authority figures. They tend to reserve the informal ***tu*** for friends, relatives, or close colleagues. Foreign nationals should use formal forms of address unless directed otherwise.

Names

Lithuanian names reflect gender and marital status. Most male names end in *–as*, *–is* or *–us*, while female names end in *–a* or *–ė*. Unmarried females take their father's surname with *–aitė*, *–utė*, *–ūtė*, or *–ytė* as an ending, while married women take their husband's surname with the suffix *–ienė*.

Lithuanians also use diminutive endings on names to convey affection, adding *–ukas* or *–utis* for males and *–ėlė* or *–ytė* for females. For example, Jonas may be called *Jonukas*. Of note, Lithuanians often modify foreign names to fit Lithuanian pronunciation: for example, Brad Pitt may become *Bradas Pitas* and George Bush is *Džordžas Bušas* (Photo: Former US President George W. Bush with former Lithuanian President Adamkus).

Conversational Topics

Common conversation topics include family, work, hobbies, history, culture, and sports. Many Lithuanians particularly enjoy discussing the country's basketball team (see p. 3-4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Lithuanians typically appreciate any attempt to speak even just a few words in Lithuanian.

Potentially offensive topics include the country's history of occupation, comparisons with Poland or Estonia, and

Lithuania's place in the global political-economic order. While Lithuanians often discuss politics among themselves, foreign nationals should avoid this sensitive topic. Although profanity and vulgarity are common in some circles, foreign nationals should avoid all language that could be considered vulgar or ill-mannered (Photo: Lithuanian briefs US and Lithuanian Navy officers).

Gestures

Lithuanians tend to avoid excessive use of gestures and facial expressions, though they may use them to augment informal conversation. Lithuanians frequently nod to show agreement and may use the "thumbs up" gesture to indicate a positive occurrence. To explain individual steps in a procedure, they outstretch a hand with the palm up, then use the other hand's index finger to bring the pinky into the palm to indicate the 1st step, the ring finger to the palm for the 2nd step, and so on.

Lithuanians consider pointing with the index finger to be impolite. Instead, they indicate direction with the entire hand. They may also flick the index finger with the thumb against the throat to indicate that someone is intoxicated (Photo: A Lithuanian soldier directs his team to advance during Exercise Saber Strike in 2015).

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Lithuanian
Hi / Hello	Labas / Sveikas (m), Sveika (f), sveiki (plural)
Good morning	Labas rytas
Good afternoon	Labas diena
Good evening	Labas vakaras
My name is ____	Mano vardas ____
What is your name?	Koks tavo vardas?
How are you?	Kaip sekasi?
I'm well, thank you. And you?	Ačiū, gerai. O Jums?
Please	Prašau
Thank you	Labai ačiū
You're welcome	Prašom
Yes / No	Taip / Ne
Goodbye	Viso gero
Good night	Labos nakties
See you later	Susimatysime vėliau
I am American	Aš esu amerikietis (m) amerikietė (f)
Do you speak English?	Ar kalbate agliškai?
I don't understand	Aš nesuprantu
Sorry	Atsiprašau
I don't know	Aš nežinau
I'm lost	Aš pasiklydau
Help!	Padėkite!
Cheers!	Į sveikatą!
What?	Kas?
Where?	Kur?
Who?	Kas?
How?	Kaip?
When?	Kada?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 99.8%
- Male: 99.8%
- Female: 99.8% (2015 estimate)

Early History of Education

Before the introduction of formal education, regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, and historical knowledge to younger generations. Following the late 14th-century arrival of Christianity (see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), Lithuanian elites established the first formal schools to educate their children in Catholicism and basic literacy.

During the 16th-century Reformation and Counter-Reformation (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*), Catholics and Protestants competed to expand their influence in Lithuania by founding primary and secondary schools. The Catholics, and in particular the Jesuit order, were the most successful, establishing around 300 primary schools and the precursor to the University of Vilnius in 1579. Despite this increase in educational opportunities, relatively few Lithuanians attended these schools since most were serfs bound to the land (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

By the 17th century, every parish church had a primary school that taught religion and basic Latin literacy skills to the Lithuanian and Polish elite. While Lithuanian-language primary schools became more common in the 18th century, Polish was the principal language of instruction in most educational institutions (Illustration: Vilnius University at the end of the 18th century).

During much of the 18th century, war and disease caused stagnation in the number and quality of educational offerings. The situation initially improved following Russia's acquisition of Lithuania in 1795, although the mid-19th century Lithuanian rebellions against Russian rule resulted in repressive measures that negatively impacted education (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). In 1832, the authorities closed Vilnius University, allowing only Russians to attend school beyond the elementary level. From 1864-1904, the state restricted the use of Lithuanian, allowing the publication of Lithuanian materials only if they were written in the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. Lithuanians responded by opening some secret schools and smuggling Lithuanian books printed in the Latin alphabet into the country (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: A physics classroom in 1892 Vilnius).

Early 20th Century Education

While these restrictions were lifted in the early 20th century, their effects were long-lasting. Specifically, Lithuania's literacy rate remained significantly lower than those of its Baltic neighbors for many years: in 1923 just 67% of Lithuanians were literate, compared to 86% in Latvia and 94% in Estonia.

During Lithuania's inter-war independence (1918-40), the state used public education to foster Lithuanian national identity, emphasizing lessons in Catholicism and the Lithuanian language. While minority-language schools (primarily Polish and Russian but also Yiddish – see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) operated legally, the 1936 Education Act required them to teach Lithuanian history and patriotism.

Massive investments in education during this period resulted in a rapid increase in the literacy rate, which reached over 90% by 1940. At that time, 6 years of primary school was compulsory while secondary schooling became more widely available.

Education under the Soviet Occupation

The Soviet occupation (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*) brought significant changes to Lithuanian education. Notable improvements included increasing compulsory education to 8 years by the late 1950s and opening many new technical schools and academies.

Nevertheless, the Soviets primarily used the education system to implement their socialist agenda (see p. 12 of *History and Myth* and p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Emphasis was placed on Soviet patriotism and communist tenets of collectivism, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and proletarian internationalism. Overall, the Soviets sought to suppress Lithuanian ethnic, linguistic, and religious consciousness. Many Lithuanians who objected to this imposition of Soviet doctrine were either executed or deported to Soviet labor camps. Still others fled, further facilitating the dominance of Soviet educational ideals (Photo: A Soviet government building in Vilnius).

Highly centralized, the Soviet educational system was designed to produce graduates with the requisite skills to meet the needs of the USSR's military-industrial economy (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Consequently, the Soviets prioritized vocational education in Lithuania. While the curriculum emphasized Soviet ideology as well as Russian culture, language, and history, textbooks and most instruction remained primarily in Lithuanian.

In the late-1960s, the USSR established Russian-language schools to serve the ethnic Russian population and to develop Lithuanians' Russian-language skills. The Soviets required nearly all Lithuanians to learn Russian, while few ethnic Russians learned Lithuanian.

By 1975, the Soviets had implemented universal secondary education, and literacy rates reached almost 99%. While vocational education remained the priority, many Lithuanians pursued a university education. Along with calls for independence in the late 1980s (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*), Lithuanians began to protest education's focus on Russian culture and language, publicly debating ways to alter educational policies to incorporate Lithuanian national identity, democracy, and humanism. Following independence in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), the new government's General Concept of Education laid the foundation for the current curriculum. The primary emphasis became youth development, Lithuanian national identity, civic engagement, and lifelong learning traditions.

Modern Education System

Following significant reform, the scholastic achievement of Lithuanian students on international math, reading, and science exams is comparable to that of US students. Notably, school enrollment rates are higher than in the US. In 2016, the government spent 5.2% of it's GDP on education, lower than government spending in the US (6.1%), and a steady decline from 7.2% in 2009.

Today, Lithuania's education system reflects features of both the inter-war independence and Soviet eras, as well as recent trends. Lithuanian is the primary language of instruction in most schools. By law, minority language schools that offer instruction in English, Russian, Polish, Yiddish, or other languages must provide at least 50% of coursework in Lithuanian. While disputes over the language of education are less intense than in other post-Soviet countries, some Polish and Russian language schools have protested the Lithuanian language requirements (Photo: The Francysk Skaryna Belarusian School in Vilnius).

Although the public school system is officially secular, the government curriculum requires “moral education,” either ethics or religious instruction in any of the 9 religions recognized as “traditional” (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The curriculum also emphasizes math, science, and technology; vocational studies; and positive lifelong learning experiences.

Lithuania is on track to achieve the majority of the Europe 2020 education goals of developing standardized competence criteria for students and improving professional support and training for teachers. Nevertheless, the education system still faces challenges, notably gaps in education quality and access between rural and urban communities. Other concerns include an aging teacher population, low teacher salaries, minimal adult participation in education, and a misalignment between acquired skills and labor market needs. Lithuania has attempted to address these and other issues in its National Education Strategy 2013-22.

Pre-Primary: Lithuania subsidizes fee-based, non-compulsory pre-primary education for children aged 1-5. In 2017, 88% of 4-year-olds were enrolled in such programs. Since 2006, 6-year-olds have received free, compulsory pre-primary education. This program expanded to include 5-year-olds in 2017.

Basic: Consisting of 10 grades starting at age 7, basic school is compulsory and consists of primary school (grades 1-4) and lower secondary school (grades 5-10). The curriculum includes moral studies, math, Lithuanian, 2 foreign languages (usually English beginning in the 2nd grade and German, French, or Russian beginning in the 6th grade), natural and social sciences, information technology, art, and physical education. In 2017, 98% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in basic schools (Photo: Vilnius’ Žygimantas Augustas Primary School).

The objectives of basic schooling are to provide students with moral, socio-cultural, and civic maturity; literacy; numeracy; and basic technological skills. In grades 9-10, students may choose to attend a 2-year basic vocational program.

Secondary: While secondary school (grades 11-12) is not compulsory, over 90% of Lithuanians complete academic or vocational secondary education. Academic "gymnasiums" offer courses in Lithuanian, foreign languages, social and natural sciences, history, math, and information technology. Students typically create their own education plans, which may include electives such as technology, art, and music. To graduate and qualify for university, all students must pass final exams in Lithuanian and a subject of their choice.

Vocational schools remain an important part of the Lithuanian education system. About 27% of secondary school students attend vocational schools to learn specific trades such as art and design, textiles, business and management, construction, mechanics, and tourism, among others. While some vocational programs include academic coursework, many provide only industry-specific training. Programs usually last from 1-3 years.

Post-Secondary: The government heavily subsidizes public post-secondary institutions, making higher education free or very low cost for Lithuanians. Some 55% of Lithuanians hold post-secondary qualifications, significantly higher than both the US rate of 45% and the EU's 39% average. The Baltic States' oldest institution of higher learning, Vilnius University (pictured, The Grand Courtyard of Vilnius University and the Church of St. John) remains Lithuania's most prestigious post-secondary institution. Other notable universities include the Lithuanian Academy of Science, Vilnius Technical University, and Vytautas Magnus University. While some courses are in English or other foreign languages, most programs of study are in Lithuanian.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Lithuanians value straightforward and professional interactions in the workplace, are usually punctual, and consider significant tardiness to be rude. Further, they tend to maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives.

Time and Work

Lithuania's work week runs from Monday-Friday with most business hours from 8:00am-5:00pm. While hours vary by store size and location, most shops are open weekdays from 10:00am-7:00pm and Saturdays from 10:00am-4:00pm. Many stores close on Sundays, although major shopping centers are typically open every day, often for longer hours (Photo: Kiosk in Vilnius).

Most banks open Monday-Friday from 8:00am-5:00pm with shorter hours on Saturdays. Post offices typically open Monday-Friday from 7:00am-7:00pm and from 9:00am-4:00pm on Saturdays. Some banks, post offices, and shops stay open later in urban centers than in rural areas and usually close for an hour during lunch. While most businesses close on public holidays, large food stores and supermarkets in urban areas typically remain open.

Working Conditions: The standard work week is 40 hours with up to 8 hours of paid overtime, although many Lithuanians who work in the private sector often work longer hours. Lithuanian labor laws provide comprehensive regulations to protect workers, particularly children and mothers. While the government generally enforces the labor laws, some violations do occur. In addition to paid public holidays, Lithuanian workers receive at least 28 days of annual paid leave.

Time Zone: Lithuania adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)

and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Lithuania observes daylight savings from the end of March-October, when Lithuania is 3 hours ahead of GMT.

Date Notation: Like the US, Lithuania uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Lithuanians write either the year first, followed by the month and day, or the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February 16: Independence Day
- March 11: Independence Restoration Day
- March / April: Easter Sunday and Monday (dates vary each year)
- May 1: Labor Day
- June 24: St. John's Day / Midsummer's Day
- July 6: Statehood Day / King Mindaugas Coronation Day
- August 15: Assumption Day
- November 1: All Saint's Day / All Soul's Day
- December 24: Christmas Eve
- December 25: Christmas Day
- December 26: Boxing Day

Of note, for any holiday that falls on a weekend, the holiday is observed on the following Monday.

Time and Business

Business tends to move somewhat slower in Lithuania than in the US. Most Lithuanians prefer to build personal relations before doing business, which often requires several meetings, phone calls, and frequent communication. While Lithuanians appreciate punctuality, arriving up to 10 minutes late is typically acceptable given prior notification. Most business discussions occur during scheduled office meetings, though informal meetings in other locations or during meals are also common.

When meeting for the first time, Lithuanian businessmen greet and shake hands (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*). Potential business partners typically exchange gifts such as wine, chocolates, or flowers to help establish rapport. Most business meetings may begin and end with talk on other topics, though Lithuanians rarely discuss their personal lives in business settings. Since Lithuanians value hierarchy (see p. 3-4 of *Language and Communication*), foreign nationals should introduce themselves to new acquaintances using their rank and title.

Lithuanians value both competence and flexibility in their business relations, while maintaining formality, respect and deference to authority (see p. 3-4 of *Language and Communication*). Typically candid and direct, Lithuanians consider interruptions to be rude and inappropriate.

Even though the Lithuanian workplace is typically hierarchical, some businesses have begun to follow a more consultative and democratic decision-making process. Nevertheless, senior officials or upper management tend to run meetings and make most decisions; subordinate staff rarely make business decisions or reach an agreement without management's approval. Managers generally prefer to deliver feedback and criticism to employees in private (Photo: Former US Secretary of Defense Gates attends a NATO meeting in Vilnius).

Personal Space

As in most societies, the use of personal space depends on the nature of the relationship. Generally, Lithuanians tend to value their personal space, maintaining an arm's length of distance when conversing with strangers. With family and friends, the distance is often smaller. Of note, while waiting in lines or on public transportation, Lithuanians tend to stand close together.

Touch

Aside from an initial handshake, Lithuanians typically engage in less conversational touching than Americans. Strangers and members of the opposite sex rarely touch during conversations. By contrast, close friends and family members may touch to convey affection.

Eye Contact

Direct eye contact is important during any greeting (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*) or business meeting to convey interest, respect, and transparency. Lithuanians typically consider reluctance to make periodic eye contact during conversation a sign of dishonesty or an attempt to conceal information.

Photographs

Banks, churches, museums, secured areas, and similar places may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Lithuanian's permission before taking his photo.

Driving

Some drivers have aggressive habits, often violating traffic rules and passing other vehicles at high speeds. Nevertheless, Lithuania recorded 13 traffic-related deaths per 100,000 people in 2015, higher than the US rate of 11. Traffic law enforcement and monitoring have recently improved, particularly regarding drunk driving, which results in severe penalties.

Most city roads and major highways are paved and well-maintained, while many rural roads lack lighting, pavement, and proper maintenance (see p. 1 of *Technology and Material*). Driving in rural areas at night can be hazardous when agricultural vehicles are operating on roadways. Extreme winter weather conditions also pose a threat. Like Americans, Lithuanians drive on the right side of the road (Photo: The Constitution Avenue in Vilnius).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Lithuanian traditional dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the country's rural peasant history, past foreign occupations, 20th-century nationalist movement, and modern global trends.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Traditional dress has become a visible expression of Lithuanian national culture. Lithuanians often wear traditional wool or linen costumes during festivals, national holidays, or special events. While styles are similar across the country, the colors and patterns of women's attire reflect distinctive regional variations. For example, the aprons of Aukštaitija are typically checkered in white or light colors with a horizontal red stripe at the bottom. By contrast, aprons from Žemaitija tend to have highly-contrasted bright colors, vertical stripes, and horizontal patterned bands (Photo: A Lithuanian girl in traditional attire).

Women's wear typically includes a long skirt paired with an apron and a ***juosta*** (sash), each reflecting specific regional colors and patterns, topped by a blouse and a bodice. Married women often cover their hair with scarves or other headwear, while single girls wear beads or ribbons in their hair. Sheepskin coats, shawls, and scarves provide extra warmth during winter. Necklaces made from beads, silver, or ***gintaras*** (amber) are common accessories.

Men's traditional attire usually includes dark gray or white trousers worn with a sash. Over a long-sleeved linen shirt, men often wear a vest and lightweight coat. In winter, heavier sheepskin coats, wool clothing – including mittens, socks, and jackets – and sturdy hats are common. Straw hats are typical during the summer. Both men and women wear ***klumpės*** (solid wooden shoes.

Modern: For everyday dress, most Lithuanians wear clothing that reflects the latest European fashion trends. Lithuanians typically are attentive to their clothing's appearance and quality, often preferring more formal attire than most Americans. While Lithuanian fashion tends to be colorful and unique in its design, individual styles may depend on age and geographic location. Generally, older Lithuanians dress more conservatively than younger generations, and most urban Lithuanians dress more formally than rural dwellers. Men typically wear collared long-sleeved shirts and pants, while women tend to wear blouses with pants or dresses.

Recreation and Leisure

Lithuanians typically spend their leisure time with close friends and family (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*). Perhaps the most popular leisurely activity is taking walks, either through city streets or rural forests. Other activities demonstrate Lithuanians' close connection to nature and traditional life, including relaxing in a ***pirtis*** (sauna), folk dancing and singing, craft-making, and fishing. During the cold, dark winter months, Lithuanians enjoy visits to the theater, cinema, and opera, as well as storytelling, playing instruments, singing, and engaging in winter sports. Many Lithuanians also vacation in warmer destinations during the winter.

During the long, temperate summer days, many Lithuanians spend their extended vacation time in the countryside, along rivers and lakes, or by the sea. Popular activities in these destinations include swimming, gardening, barbecuing, bird-watching, berry- and mushroom-picking, and cycling (Photo: A lake by Šiauliai).

Festivals: The ***Dainų Šventė*** (Song and Dance Festival) is one of Lithuania's most significant cultural and historical events. Held every 4-5 years, it began in 1924 during the period of inter-war independence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). In addition to the main choral performances, thousands

of participants exhibit traditional arts and crafts, folk dances, and theater acts. In 2014, more than 50,000 spectators attended the festival. Typically held in July, the next *Dainų Šventė* in 2018 will be dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the first declaration of Lithuanian independence (Photo: The *Dainų Šventė* stage in the Vilnius Vingis Park).

Other popular festivals mark the changing seasons or celebrate traditional pagan or Christian holidays. Perhaps the most important annual festival, ***Rasos*** (Midsummer's Day), celebrates the summer equinox. As part of the festivities, Lithuanians decorate their homes and make traditional food and beer. They celebrate by singing, dancing, playing games, and jumping over bonfires. Other popular festivals include ***Kaziukas*** (St. Casimir's Day), ***Užgavėnės*** (Shrovetide or Carnival), the Kaunas International Jazz Festival, the Pažaislis Music Festival, and the Klaipėda Festival of the Sea.

Sports and Games

Sports: Lithuanians enjoy many winter sports, including ice hockey, bobsledding, luge, and cross-country skiing, as well as outdoor summer activities like fishing, swimming, and biking. Spectator sports such as football (soccer), volleyball, tennis, and Formula 1 racing are also popular. Lithuanians have been successful at the Olympics, winning medals in modern pentathlon, wrestling, swimming, canoeing, and boxing in 2012.

Basketball: Basketball is the country's favorite sport and the national pastime. Lithuanian-American Steponas Darius introduced the sport around 1920 then became a champion player and national hero. The Lithuanian team went on to win gold at the European Championships in 1937 and 1939. Since regaining independence in 1991, the men's national team won the gold again in 2003 and silver in 1995, 2013, and 2015. The men's national team also won Olympic bronze medals in 1992, 1996, and 2000.

Besides the national team, Lithuania has a professional league: the 2 most popular teams are Žalgiris and Lietuvos Rytas. Meanwhile, several Lithuanians have had success in the American NBA. For example, former players Arvydas Sabonis and Šarūnas Marčiulionis were inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame in 2011 and 2014 respectively (Photo: Sabonis and the Soviet team face the US in the 1988 Olympics).

Traditional Games: Lithuanians play many traditional games, especially on holidays. Well-known children's games include ***šarka*** and ***žvirblis*** which involve imitating a bird's movement while quietly singing. Other games include ***ripkos*** (similar to baseball, but played with a wooden disc) and ***Jurgelis*** (similar to Simon Says). Various traditional games played with props like balls, ropes, and sticks are also common (Photo: US soldiers play a traditional Lithuanian bag game in Anyksciai).

Music

Traditional: Lithuania has a long history of folk music. The earliest songs likely accompanied work or religious rituals. Usually performed by women, the most common traditional form is the ***daina***, a short melodic song typically consisting of 2 rhyming couplets. While *dainas* may evoke any emotion or theme, common subjects include youth, love, fate, and sorrows. Lithuanians traditionally sing *dainas* at weddings, while ***raudos*** are a type of *daina* sung at funerals.

Sutartinės are elaborate folksongs that consist of 2 symmetrical melodies performed by 2 or more people. Native to Aukštaitija, *sutartinės* exhibit similar themes as *dainas* and often accompany traditional dances. Traditionally, only women sang *sutartinės*, although men sometimes acompanied them with instrumental music.

Lithuanian music utilizes many traditional instruments, the most notable of which is the ***kanklės***, an ancient harp-like zither. Often used to accompany *dainas* and *sutartinės*, the *kanklės* is traditionally made from limewood, has a trapezoid shape with 4-7 strings, and is played on a table or while held on the knees. Other traditional instruments include the ***birbynė*** (a wooden flute-like instrument with a cowbell), ***daudytė*** and ***ragas*** (wooden trumpets), ***kelmas*** (a type of drum), ***skrabalai*** (wooden bells), and ***skudučiai*** (panpipes) (Photo: Lithuanians playing the *kanklės*).

Beginning in the 16th century, the Lithuanian state's connections with other countries and traditions (see p. 6-8 of *History and Myth*) brought new instruments, including organs, violins, accordions, mandolins, and guitars. German and Swedish choral music became popular in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Modern: Lithuania has produced several notable musicians, including the composer Mikalojus Čiurlionis and violinist Jascha Heifetz. Rock and jazz are widely-popular genres that are now staples of Lithuanian musical culture and festivals. Popular artists include Jurgas and Vytautas Labutis. Foje and Jonis are notable bands. International pop music is also widespread.

Dance

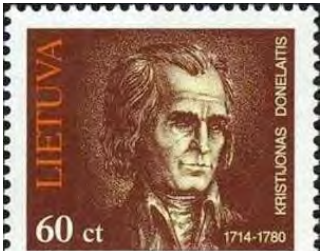
Traditional: Like other Baltic dances, Lithuanian folk dances are typically slow and intricate, often depicting the seasons, nature, routine work, and rural life. Traditionally performed by women, the ***šokiai*** (dances) featured simple movements of dancers in rows or circles. ***Rateliai*** (game dances) began with simple movements but gradually became more complex, sometimes including theatrical plots. After the 18th-century introduction of the German waltz, polka, and square dance, some folk dances adopted male leads and more formalized

choreography. Today, Lithuanians perform many dances with partners or in other non-traditional formations.

Modern: Classical ballet flourished under the Russian and Soviet 19th- and 20th-century occupations (see p. 8-14 of *History and Myth*). Today, Lithuanian ballet has a reputation for high quality, producing world-class dancers who compete and perform around the world. Ballroom dancing also became common in the 20th century and continues to be popular.

Theater

Due to the Russian state's restrictions on Lithuanian language use from 1864-1904 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), Lithuania did not establish a national theater until the early 20th century. Theater played an important role during Lithuania's 20th century national revival and period of inter-war independence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). While resources and talent were plentiful during the Soviet era, censorship limited the content of theater productions. Today, the country's active theater scene offers a wide array of Lithuanian-language productions.



Literature

The earliest written accounts of life in Lithuania include descriptions of attempts to Christianize the region and chronicles of the Grand Duchy rulers (see p. 2-5 of *History and Myth*). The first Lithuanian language literature includes 16th-century catechisms and other religious documents (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In the late 18th century, Kristijonas Donelaitis penned *The Seasons*, an epic poem depicting Lithuanians' everyday life, connection to nature, and struggle under serfdom. First published in its entirety in the late 19th century, the poem became a Lithuanian literature classic (Photo: Donelaitis depicted on a 1994 stamp).

During the Russian state's 19th-century restrictions on the use of Lithuanian, readers relied on smuggled Lithuanian-language

books (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Founded in 1883, ***Aušra***, a Lithuanian-language literary magazine, helped foster the country's national revival (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Due to these and other efforts, Lithuanian literature flourished in the early 20th century. Common themes included rural life, foreign occupation, and the struggle for independence.

During the Soviet era (see p. 13-14 of *History and Myth*), literature stagnated more than the other arts. Many authors went into exile (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*), while those remaining were subject to censorship. Writing from Chicago, Czesław Miłosz, a Lithuanian-born Pole, won the 1980 Nobel Prize for Literature for his work critiquing artists who accommodated communism.

Folk Art and Handicrafts

Lithuania has a rich folk art tradition, including textiles, ceramics, metalwork, leatherwork, decorated Easter eggs, straw mobiles, amber and other jewelry, and woodcarving. These works often demonstrate a unique combination of Christian symbols and ancient pagan motifs, particularly serpents, the sun, the moon, and other celestial bodies (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Particularly predominant in artistic works, the Christian cross is a favorite motif of both metalworkers and woodcarvers (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Lithuania's crosses include 2 broad types: the traditional cross-shaped type and the pillar type, with a concealed cross beam. Besides a highly stylized sun, many crosses incorporate depictions of flowers, plants, and various geometric shapes in addition to Christian motifs (Photo: Carved wooden cross in memory of the victims of Soviet deportations, located in Vilnius' St. Casimir Church – see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Lithuanians enjoy socializing with family and friends over lengthy meals. While friends often gather at bars and restaurants, families typically get together at home. During the summer months, Lithuanians enjoy picnicking and grilling outside. Lithuanian dishes are hearty, characterized by fresh, local ingredients prepared with relatively few seasonings.

Dining Customs

Most Lithuanians supplement 3 daily meals with snacks throughout the day. Although lunch is typically the largest and main meal, dinner also tends to be substantial. While some rural residents eat meals earlier, breakfast is generally served between 7:00-9:00am, lunch 12:00-2:00pm, and dinner 6:00-8:00pm (Photo: A café-lined street in Vilnius).

When invited to a Lithuanian home for a meal, guests usually arrive a few minutes late, bringing gifts of cakes, chocolate, alcohol, or flowers. Upon entering a home, guests may remove their shoes and replace them with slippers. In formal settings, guests wait to take their seats until the host indicates it is time do so. Meals typically consist of a series of courses served at a leisurely pace, often over several hours.

After guests finish their food, they may request additional servings. Of note, Lithuanians consider it impolite to leave unfinished food on a plate. Most social visits include alcoholic beverages, typically accompanied by several toasts made throughout the meal. At the end of a meal, hosts rarely ask their guests to leave and instead allow them to determine the end of an evening.

Diet

Potatoes are a main staple and prepared in a variety of ways, including boiled, fried, incorporated into salads, or transformed into dumplings and pancakes. Bread is another staple accompanying almost every meal. The most popular type is a traditional dark rye bread. Besides potatoes and bread, grains such as barley, oats, and buckwheat are common. Most Lithuanian dishes also incorporate assorted dairy products, such as cheese, yogurt, milk, sour cream, and cottage cheese. Dill, sorrel and other fresh herbs accent many dishes.

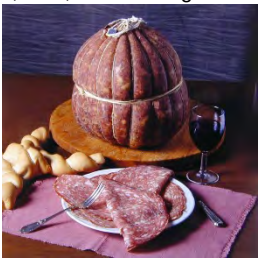
The most popular forms of protein are pork, lamb, beef, wild boar, chicken, and sausage. Lithuanians also enjoy several varieties of fish, including carp, salmon, pike, herring, and eel, all of which may be served smoked, salted, or incorporated into soups or salads. Common vegetables include cabbage, beets, carrots, and peas. Particularly popular, mushrooms are fried, boiled, pickled, or made into a sauce. Locally grown fruits – apples, pears, plums, strawberries, and currants (pictured) – are especially popular in the spring and summer.

Popular Dishes and Meals

Breakfast typically includes a variety of bread, cheese, curd cheese, eggs, cured meats, smoked fish, sausages, porridge, and pancakes. As the day's largest meal, lunch often comprises 3 courses. Typical fare includes a soup, followed by a meat or fish dish served with potatoes and seasonal vegetables, and a dessert. Similar to lunch, dinner may also comprise several courses.

Popular Lithuanian dishes include ***cepelinai*** (a ball of potato dough stuffed with meat and served with a hearty sauce); ***vėdarai*** (potatoes and sausage cooked in pig intestines); ***kugelis*** (potato pudding served with a sour cream sauce); ***rūgštynių sriuba*** (a soup of beef broth, sorrel, and vegetables); and ***skilandis*** (spiced ground pork inserted in a

pork stomach or bladder and smoked – pictured). Lithuanians also enjoy salads ranging from lightly-dressed greens to hearty mixtures of eggs, potatoes, meats, fish, and/or vegetables dressed in mayonnaise or sour cream. A popular variety is the ***pikantiškos salotos***, a blend of cheese, eggs, garlic, and mayonnaise.



Lithuanians commonly eat a variety of dishes adopted from Russia, Poland, and other regions. These include ***blynai*** (pancakes, served with sour cream, jam, and butter or rolled with cheese, meat, cabbage, mushrooms, or potatoes); ***barščiai*** (a tart beet soup served either hot and cold); and ***balandėliai*** (baked or stewed cabbage leaves stuffed with meat, rice, and spices). For dessert, Lithuanians enjoy ***pyragas*** (cakes), ***pyragėliai*** (buns), and ***spurgos*** (donuts). ***Spanguolių kisielius***, a sweet and tangy cranberry pudding, is popular at Christmas.

Beverages

Tea, coffee, and milk are the most popular beverages, consumed throughout the day. Popular in the summer, ***gira*** is a refreshing non-alcoholic drink made from fermented rye bread or caraway seeds. Common alcoholic beverages include vodka, cognac, ***Medžiotojų*** (an herb-based liquor), ***Dainava*** and ***Palanga*** (mixed berry liquors), and beer, including local brews such as Horn, Kalnapilis, Utenos, Tauras, Švyturys.

Eating Out

Many Lithuanians dine out regularly. Restaurants range from upscale establishments serving regional and international foods to small casual eateries (***valgyklas***) and cafes. Specialty ***pieno baras*** (milk bars) serve coffee, tea, and sweet pastries. Besides serving full menus, bars often offer salty snacks such as ***kepta duona*** (fried pieces of rye bread topped with garlic or cheese), smoked pig ears, peanuts, and cured meats. Although some restaurants automatically add a service fee of 5% to the bill, wait staff may expect an additional tip of about 10% for good service.

Health Overview

Lithuanians' overall health has improved in recent decades, primarily due to specific government efforts. Between 1991 and 2020, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased dramatically from 15 to 3.8 deaths per 1,000 live births. Meanwhile, maternal mortality was reduced from 29 to 5 deaths per 100,000 live births. While life expectancy at birth also increased from about 70 to 76 years, it remains lower than the US and EU averages of 81 and 81, respectively.

While Lithuanians generally have access to modern healthcare, the quality of care diminishes significantly in rural areas. Further, like other nations with a shrinking and aging population, Lithuania's demographic trends seem poised to burden the healthcare system with increasing demand amid rising costs (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry visits Vilnius).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Lithuanian medicine uses herbal, mineral, and animal-based remedies, not surgical methods, to identify and treat the basic causes of illness.

Knowledge of natural remedies is widespread. Many Lithuanians grow or gather their own medicinal herbs and plants. In addition, merchants in both urban and rural areas commonly sell a variety of herbal remedies. Besides herbal treatments, homeopathy (a form of alternative medicine developed in 18th-century Germany prescribing a patient to ingest diluted plant, mineral, and animal substances to trigger the body's natural system of healing) is popular. Generally, traditional medicine is particularly widespread among patients who face high out-of-pocket expenses (see "Lithuania's Healthcare System" below). These patients may supplement or entirely replace modern therapies with traditional treatments.

Modern Healthcare System

Lithuania's healthcare system operates at both the national and regional levels. Providing regulation and oversight at the national level, the Ministry of Health is responsible for setting industrywide requirements and standards, provisioning licenses, approving capital investments, and managing central hospitals. Meanwhile, regional authorities oversee the provision of primary care in municipal clinics and smaller hospitals. The healthcare system is predominantly funded by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF), a compulsory national health insurance scheme that is supplemented by local and state budgets (Photo: US Sailors demonstrate proper push-ups to Lithuanian children).

In 2019, Lithuania had 63 general hospitals, 43 nursing facilities, 15 specialized hospitals, and 4 rehabilitation centers in the public healthcare system. General practitioners (GPs) provide primary care and act as their patients' gatekeepers to secondary hospital services. Of note, the privatization of the Lithuanian health sector has generally been limited to specialist services. Consequently, while public facilities provide most of the primary and inpatient care, private facilities provide the majority of dental care, cosmetic surgery, psychotherapy, and some specialist outpatient care.

Healthcare System Challenges: Although the NHIF provides free, basic medical coverage to all Lithuanian residents, high out-of-pocket expenses for medication, diagnostic tests, and special medical procedures, including dental work, force many Lithuanians to forgo treatment. Of note, Lithuania's traditionally poor dental health is indicative of the ill-effects of high out-of-pocket medical expenses: a 2012 study revealed that roughly 27% of all Vilnius residents and 80% of those over age 65 were lacking teeth.

Further, Lithuania's hospitals and clinics are concentrated in cities and underserve rural dwellers. As a result, high demand in rural areas forces clinicians to work long hours and creates long waiting periods for patients to receive care. Finally, some of Lithuania's finest physicians and nurses choose to practice outside the country, attracted by better pay and advancement opportunities in neighboring countries.

Health Challenges

As in most countries with aging populations, the rate of chronic and non-communicable diseases has increased: they now account for almost 90% of all deaths. In 2016, the top causes of death were cardiovascular diseases (57%) and cancer (20%), followed by digestive and respiratory diseases, and diabetes. Preventable "external causes," such as car accidents, suicides, drownings, falls, and drug use resulted in about 7% of deaths. Notably, Lithuanians suffer from one of the world's highest rates of alcohol-related deaths. Further, Lithuania has the EU's highest suicide rate accounting for 32 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

Communicable diseases, like tuberculosis and hepatitis, infectious and parasitic diseases, and HIV/AIDS account for about 4% of deaths (Photo: Children at a rehabilitation hospital in Palanga).

Non-fatal yet common health issues afflicting Lithuanians include arterial hypertension, arthritis, migraines, stomach ulcers, anxiety, and depression. In addition, about 26% of Lithuanian adults are obese, a slightly higher rate than that of its Baltic neighbors Latvia (24%) and Estonia (20%), but lower than the US rate of 40%. Of note, Lithuanian men experience a significantly shorter life expectancy (70 years) than Lithuanian women, who live on average 11 years longer than men. In fact, Lithuanian male life expectancy is the lowest in the EU. Experts link this gap to the prevalence of unhealthy behaviors among men, including alcohol abuse, excessive smoking, and an unhealthy diet.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most Lithuanians subsisted as peasants in an agrarian and trade-based economy (see *History and Myth*). While Russian occupiers began to industrialize the other Baltic States in the late 19th century, Lithuania's economy remained mostly agrarian until the USSR initiated rapid industrialization in the 1950s. In addition to large collective farms, the USSR developed timber, machinery, nuclear, electronics, processing, and other industries until the Soviet collapse and Lithuanian independence in 1991 (Photo: Town Hall Square in Vilnius).

Lithuania's transition from a centrally-planned Soviet system to a liberal free-market economy was arduous. Using the West as an economic model, Lithuania sought to reform its economy by privatizing state-owned companies, adopting its own currency, curbing price controls, and developing a stock exchange to entice foreign direct investment (FDI). Despite the intent, the economy actually took a turn for the worse, shrinking by almost 1/2 as inflation peaked at over 700% and unemployment surged.

Following political and financial crises in the mid-1990s, Lithuania's economy began to recover by the early 2000s. Employment increased, there was almost no inflation, and most enterprises were privatized. Despite persistent corruption and other structural issues, the Lithuanian economy recorded average annual growth of about 7.6% from 2000-07, a rate greater than most other European countries.

With its modernized industrial sector, rapidly expanding services sector, and newly-privatized farms, Lithuania gained accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, further facilitating economic expansion. EU membership, substantial growth, relatively low public debt, and high-quality, low-cost

production made Lithuania an attractive candidate for FDI. To further entice investors, Lithuania created tax-free trade zones in 7 cities – notably Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda.

The 2008-09 global financial crisis hit Lithuania hard, largely due to its trade-dependent economy. In 2009, the economy shrank by almost 15% and unemployment rose to nearly 18% by 2010. Through fiscal austerity measures, tax reforms, an internal currency devaluation, and EU-funded infrastructure investment, Lithuania was able to recover quickly, seeing 1.6% growth in 2010. Average annual growth from 2011-16 was roughly 3%. Partially due to its prudent reaction to the financial crisis, the EU approved Lithuania's application to join the Eurozone and to adopt the EU's euro as its currency in 2015 (Photo: Euro coin depicting a Lithuanian knight).

Lithuania's current economic outlook is largely positive. Experts predict an average economic growth rate of 3.5% from 2016-20, which should outpace most other EU countries. Lithuania currently has low inflation, a declining unemployment rate near 6%, and rising wages. Due to recent reforms that increased the efficiency and flexibility of the labor market, tax code, and business procedures, Lithuania is considered one of the easiest places to conduct business in the EU.

Although Lithuania has successfully transitioned to a modern free-market economy, it has a lower per-capita income than most EU members. Other economic issues include persistent corruption; low productivity, wages, and tax compliance rates; inadequate vocational education; net emigration; and dependence on trade with Russia's stagnant economy. Despite Russia's recent negative effect on the Lithuanian economy, which limited growth to 2.3% in 2016, experts expect growth to improve as Lithuania pursues further economic diversification and reform.

Services

Accounting for about 60% of GDP and 68% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing segment of Lithuania's economy. Key services industries include wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, banking and financial services, telecommunications, and tourism.

Tourism: Despite steady growth, Lithuania's tourism market remains the 2nd smallest of the Baltic States. In 2019, about 4 million foreign tourists visited attractions including the historic centers in Vilnius and Kaunas, the beaches in Palanga, and the Trakai Historical National Park, among others. Most tourists were from Russia and other neighboring countries (Photo: The Kaunas Castle dates to the mid-14th century).

Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for about 26% of GDP and 25% of the labor force. The most significant sub-sectors include manufacturing, oil refining, construction, and biotechnology.

Manufacturing: Accounting for nearly 16% of GDP, Lithuania's manufacturing sector includes metalworking, electronics, and textiles, as well as chemical and food processing. Just over 1/2 of the manufactured goods produced in Lithuania are exported.

Oil Refining: While Lithuania has limited proven oil reserves (see p. 2-3 of *Technology and Material*), oil refining is one of its largest industries. In 1980, the USSR built a massive refinery in Mažeikiai to process Soviet oil. Today, the modernized Polish-owned Mažeikių Nafta refinery processes crude oil from Russia and other countries to produce refined oil and petroleum products. Primarily shipped from a sea terminal in Būtingė, the refinery's output accounts for about 30% of all exports, making it a vital component of Lithuania's industrial sector.

Construction: Construction accounts for nearly 6% of GDP and provides about 93,000 jobs. The $3 billion industry has been a key driver in Lithuania's transition to an open-market economy. Several Lithuanian construction companies compete for projects mainly in the Baltic States and in Scandinavia.

Agriculture

Consisting of farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry, agriculture is the smallest component of the Lithuanian economy, accounting for nearly 3% of GDP and 8% of the labor force.

Farming and Livestock: About 46% of Lithuania's land area is dedicated to cultivation. In recent years, traditional family farming has declined as the typical farm size has significantly increased. Cows, pigs, and poultry are the most common livestock, comprising about 40% of the agricultural sector. Dairy production is a significant enterprise. Major crops include grains, potatoes, sugar beets, flax, and vegetables. Even though it exports many of these products, Lithuania fulfills most of its own agricultural needs.

Fishing: In 2018, the relatively large Lithuanian fishing industry consisted of about 147 vessels that harvested about 95,000 tons of sprat, herring, cod, and others. An important part of the food production sector, the fish processing industry employs about 6,000 people. Much of the catch is consumed locally, although some fish are exported primarily to Germany, France, Latvia, and Estonia.

Forestry: With over 35% of its territory covered by woodlands, Lithuania has a highly-developed forestry industry. Timber, paper, and other wood products account for around 5% of Lithuania's exports. While about 50% of Lithuanian forests remain under state protection, commercial harvests primarily include pine, spruce, birch, and alder trees (Photo: Forests and lakes in Lithuania's countryside).

Currency

The ***euro*** (€), the EU's common currency, is issued in 7 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500) and 2 coin values (1, 2). A euro subdivides into ***centų*** (cents), issued in 6 coin values (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50). With the variance in exchange rates, $1 has been valued from 80-94 *centų* in recent years. Most businesses accept credit cards, although some smaller vendors may only accept cash in small denominations.

Foreign Trade

Totaling $33.34 billion in 2018, Lithuania's exports included refined fuel, machinery and equipment, chemicals, textiles, foodstuffs, and plastics. Major export partners were Russia (14%), Latvia (10%), Poland (8%), Germany (7%), Estonia (5%), the US (5%), and Sweden (5%). In the same year, Lithuania imported $36.50 billion in oil, natural gas, machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, textiles, and metals from Russia (14%), Germany (12%), Poland (12%), Latvia (7%), Italy (5%), and the Netherlands (5%).

European Union

Membership in the EU (see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations)* provides a large common market for exports, a stable currency, a secure business environment, and easier access to FDI. In 2018, about 64% of Lithuanian trade was with EU countries. Disadvantages to EU membership include restrictions in the flow of some goods and services and easier emigration of Lithuanians to other EU countries, thereby reducing Lithuania's labor force (Photo: US vehicles cross Lithuania's border).

Foreign Aid

For 2014-20, the EU has granted Lithuania €7.9 billion for structural assistance and regional development. In early 2016, the US pledged $3.4 billion in military support for Europe as a whole in response to recent Russian military aggression (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*). As a result, US aid to Lithuania was forecasted at $1 million in early 2020.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Lithuania has a modern physical infrastructure with well-maintained roads and efficient public transportation systems. Lithuanians enjoy free speech and press, unrestricted Internet access, and an advanced telecommunications network.

Transportation

While most Lithuanian families use privately-owned vehicles (POV), many people also travel by bus, train, taxi, bicycle, or foot. Vilnius and Kaunas have efficient and reliable mass transit systems to include buses, trolleys, vans, and trains that run from around 5:30am-11:30pm. The most efficient way to travel within and between cities is by POV or bus. Vilnius and Kaunas feature well-marked bike lanes in some areas.

Some of Europe's most important trade routes traverse Lithuania. Consequently, recent investments have focused on improving Lithuania's transportation system in order to secure the country's position as a regional hub for trade and transport. While its railway system is antiquated, Lithuania's advanced air, road, and sea transport networks now connect major global markets (Photo: Vilnius).

Roadways: In 2016, Lithuania had over 52,300 mi of roads, with 82% paved. Due to heavy national and EU road infrastructure investment, Lithuania has the best roads of any former Soviet republic. While most roadways are well-maintained, some rural roads may be unpaved or in poor condition. Although most roads are 1 lane in each direction, 4-lane highways connect Lithuania's large urban areas. Routes A5, A8, A10, and A17 comprise the *Via Baltica* (EU route E67), which runs from Estonia to Poland.

Railways: Lithuania has just over 1,160 mi of railways that connect major cities and towns with Belarus, Latvia, Poland, and Russia. State-owned ***Lietuvos Geležinkeliai*** (Lithuanian Railways) has decreased its passenger routes in recent years largely due to a lack of investment. The government plans to increase spending on railways, including an electric high-speed ***Rail Baltica*** train that is set to connect Lithuania to the EU Railroad Network by 2025.

Ports and Waterways: Lithuania has over 568 mi of sea and inland waterways that are navigable year-round. As Lithuania's and the Baltic States' largest port, Klaipėda (pictured) has been a special economic zone since 1996 (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Regular ferry services connect Klaipėda to ports in Germany and Sweden. The government recently approved funds for a new sea port in Šventoji and a new pier for the Kaunas river port.

Airways: Lithuania has 61 airports, 22 with paved runways. The largest, Vilnius International Airport, served over 5 million passengers in 2019. Although Lithuania presently has no national carrier, several global carriers connect Lithuania to many European destinations.

Energy

During the Soviet era, Lithuania generated almost all of its energy through nuclear power. As part of its EU accession agreement, Lithuania decommissioned the Ignalina nuclear power plant in 2009, even though it still provided about 70% of the country's energy at the time. In 2017, 64% of electricity consumed in Lithuania was imported; the majority was imported from Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Renewable resources like biomass, wind, and hydropower accounted for about 61% of the country's total electricity generation with thermal power accounting for 39%.

Lithuania continues to follow several strategies reducing its dependence on Russian imports. First, it has begun to integrate its power infrastructure with the EU by consolidating

electricity connections with Poland and Sweden; it has constructed its own liquefied natural gas terminal; and has increased its share of renewables surpassing 25%. Finally, together with Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania is working with a Japanese firm to explore construction of a new nuclear facility.

Media

The Lithuanian constitution protects freedom of speech and press, while specific laws regulate public information access and protect the rights of journalists. Although there have been some reports of state interference, censorship is rare.

Print Media: The Lithuanian press includes hundreds of local and national periodicals, comprising the Baltics States' most vibrant media market. Publications in Lithuanian, English, Polish, Russian, and other languages are common. *Lietuvos rytas* and *Respublika* are the most popular national newspapers. Lithuania's main English-language newspaper, *The Baltic Times*, is published in Latvia.

Radio and TV: The public Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) network broadcasts many of Lithuania's most popular radio and TV programs. Other stations offer programs in Lithuanian, English, and other languages. Most households subscribe to cable, satellite, or Internet services that provide international content (Photo: Fireworks at the Vilnius TV tower on Christmas).

Telecommunications

Lithuania has an extensive and advanced telecommunications network. In 2018, Lithuania had about 15 landline and 164 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.

Internet: Lithuania has the EU's most affordable Internet services. Its high-speed broadband is available to over 98% of households, organizations, and businesses and has some of the world's fastest download speeds. Despite this high rate of connectivity, just 80% of Lithuanians regularly used the Internet in 2018, a significantly lower rate than Baltic neighbors Latvia (84%) and Estonia (89%).

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