

Lithuania



Population: 2.8m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 31.5

Media capture risk average across countries (mean - %): 38.3



Country Overview

Lithuania shows medium levels of media capture risk across all three dimensions, slighter under the average score, facing persistent challenges related to political participation and high levels of media ownership concentration.

Generally, the media ecosystem is characterized by a market dominated by television and internet-based media, though media consumption has increasingly shifted toward digital platforms and social media, especially among younger, better-educated, and more socioeconomically advantaged audiences. In this regard, *Google* plays a central role as a search engine but is less relevant for direct news consumption, since most Lithuanian media outlets maintain a strong presence on social platforms, and new digitally native actors, such as journalist- or activist-led start-ups, as *Laisvės TV*, funded through crowdfunding, subscriptions, and advertising, have emerged alongside established media. The audiovisual sector is dominated by the public broadcaster *LRT* and major commercial groups, notably *TV3 Group* and *LNK Group*. Online media, including both major news portals such as *Delfi.lt*, *15min.lt*, and *Lrytas.lt*, as well as outlets specializing in investigative journalism and fact-checking (often operating in line with IFCN standards), attract a growing share of younger and higher socioeconomic-status groups. By contrast, local and regional media face significant economic and structural challenges. There are only few local television stations, local radio operates in fewer than one-third of municipalities, and media concentration in local markets is high due to the limited number of outlets. Strengthening local news is considered the most pressing challenge in policymaking, requiring stable funding via the Media Support Foundation, stronger safeguards for editorial independence from local political actors, and structural measures to reduce the risk of news deserts.

The most critical composite indicator in the Lithuanian media ecosystem is pluralism, specifically in media ownership concentration, which shows the highest score of risk across all the countries considered. Such value is the result of the lack of specific legal thresholds regulating media ownership concentration beyond general competition law, which considers a dominant position at a 40% market share. Ultimately, owners are often active across multiple economic sectors, including printing, real estate, telecommunications, and finance. However, the media's independence is largely guaranteed, as demonstrated by the low-risk score of the political and business influence composite indicator. Even so, while political parties and banks are prohibited from owning media, Lithuanian politicians, civil servants, and their spouses hold ownership stakes in over 100 local media outlets, particularly in municipalities where media depend on municipal advertising revenues.

Journalists generally operate in a relatively favorable environment, though financial pressures, legal ambiguities, and (episodic) tensions with government authorities persist. The most recent scandal surrounding the politicization of *LRT* has exposed attempts by the governing coalition to strengthen its control over the public service broadcaster's editorial agenda. Although these aggressive attempts did not succeed (because civil society mobilized and several dozen thousand people joined protests under the slogan "Hands off the free word"), efforts to intervene legally by changing the *LRT* governance arrangements are continuing in 2026. While political attacks on journalists are rare, access to state-held information is sometimes denied without explanation, and self-censorship occurs in reporting sensitive historical or gender-related issues. The legal framework offers partial protection against SLAPPs but does not consistently safeguard journalists' rights. Ethical issues are handled through self-regulation under judicial oversight.

Lithuania's media ecosystem levels are linked to the country's political and societal dimensions. While Lithuania is a democracy in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected, political participation remains limited. Political participation is among the country's weaker areas, and trust in political parties is low. Instances of political corruption, including a 2023 municipal expenses scandal, have contributed to voter apathy. On the other hand, the scandal uncovered by media activists highlighted emerging new forms of accountability-seeking and new modes of civil society organization.

The political debate is strongly shaped by national security concerns linked to Lithuania's borders with Russia and Belarus, particularly regarding migration governance and border security measures adopted in response to alleged migrant instrumentalization from the neighboring Belarusian regime. This political issue is particularly relevant, considering that Lithuania is a relatively ethnically homogeneous society, with Poles and Russians constituting the largest minorities. The country retains a strong religious influence, with approximately four-fifths of the population identifying as Roman Catholic, though regular religious practice is much lower. Yet the representatives of the Bishops' Conference take part in various Committees, including the *LRT* Council. Lithuania consistently performs well in gender equality, and women's political representation has improved in recent years. The adoption of a new Law on National Minorities in 2025 strengthened linguistic, cultural, and political rights for minority communities and established formal mechanisms for minority representation, like the Russian one.

Overall, Lithuania combines strong democratic institutions and judicial safeguards with persistent challenges related to political participation and public trust. The media system remains pluralistic and digitally dynamic but is affected by ownership concentration, transparency gaps, and the economic fragility of local journalism, creating uneven conditions for editorial independence. Lithuanian society shows progress in rights protection and equality, while continuing to face challenges related to minority inclusion, demographic change, socioeconomic disparities, and institutional credibility.