

“Go Farther and Fare Worse”: Municipal Elections in Lithuania in 1995, 1997, and 2000 (Explanation to the Tables and Appendixes)

Table 1 compares fundamental characteristics of the newly emerged local institutions, comparing their “distances” from the former Soviet local institutions. This table shows that the local reforms in Lithuania during the 1990s revealed a striking conservativeness. The Czech Republic and Poland inherited a council system from the communist era, but they changed drastically the relations between the state and municipalities, from a continental system to a system closer to the Anglo-Saxon type. Accordingly, small municipalities have been preferred. In Russia (in which meso-elites prevailed) a council system of Soviets was replaced by a strong mayoral system, though the continental framework of state-municipal relations has been preserved. Accordingly, the large territorial units (rayons and cities of regional subordination) continue to play crucial roles. Nevertheless, this arrangement has been criticized by the “progressive” jurists and politicians, who regard the Polish and Czech choice (the wager on the first tier) as more democratic. Lithuania has preserved all three elements, i.e. a council system, continental framework, and large territorial units. Moreover, in contrast to Russia, this arrangement has not been contested. Paradoxically at a first glance, Lithuania’s conservative and evolutionary strategy of municipality building proved to be more successful than the other countries’ reforms.¹

The centralized local electoral system in Lithuania generated a centralized party system; all the relevant central parties established their branches in cities and rayons of the country, while few regional and ethno-regional parties have been able to gain local councilors’ seats.² However, this does not mean that local party leaders in Lithuania are only obedient functionaries of the parties’ central organs. On the contrary, city and rayon party leaders play a significant role in their parties’ decision-making, often being members of the parties’ central committee. Under the present council system Lithuanian local elections are composed of two stages: the first is the popular elections of deputies, and the second is the nomination of mayors by the local councils. Since one-party dominance has not been realized in most local councils of Lithuania (Appendix 1), local coalition making plays a decisive role in the second stage. The first stage, local deputy elections in 1995, 1997, and 2000, was tangibly influenced by national political trends (the decline of the LDDP and the resurgence of the Conservatives in 1995, the apogee of the Conservatives in 1997, and the rise of

¹ See more detail in my essay: Kimitaka Matsuzato, “The Last Bastion of Unitarism? Local Institutions, Party Politics, and Ramifications of EU Accession in Lithuania,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 43 (2002), No. 5, pp. 383-410.

² The rare exceptions are the Polish Electoral Action, influential in several ethnically Polish rayons, and the Union of Russians, successful in Klaipeda and Vilnius.

Centrist parties, in particular the Social Liberals in 2000). However, these general national tendencies were followed by very personal maneuverings and intrigues in coalition making in order to nominate mayors at local councils – a process often independent from national political configurations.

As was the case with other Western post-communist countries, most of the existing Lithuanian political parties were established within a relatively short period, 1988-92, which can be divided to two stages. The first stage was from 1988 to 1990, when so-called “informal organizations” developed into embryonic parties. Most of them pretended to have roots in the parties that had existed in the pre-Socialist period. The Christian Democratic Party, the Union of Political Prisoners and Exiles,³ the Lithuanian National Union (*Lietuviu tautininku sajunga*),⁴ the LSDP,⁵ and the Lithuanian Peasant Party (*Lietuvos valstieciu partija*) belong to this category. The second stage was the process of dissolution of the anti-communist united fronts (Sajudis in Lithuania, the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia, *Solidarnosc* in Poland, etc.) during 1990-92. In Lithuania, the Liberal Union, the Conservative Party, and the Centrist Union were established during these years. Among these, only the Conservatives, as Landsbergis’s party, have a definite ideology, while the Centrist Union, established in 1992,⁶ has often been regarded as a party of soft-liners from the former nomenklatura now seeking power. The Liberal Union, formerly as amorphous as the Centrist Union, became more neo-conservative and businessmen-oriented owing to the former Prime Minister R. Paksas’s participation in 1999. The most significant party, established after this cradle period (1988-92) had passed, was the Social Liberals. Less significant is the New Democracy/Woman’s Party established by the former Prime Minister K. Prunskiene in 1995.⁷ In further analyses I will rely upon the conventional view, classifying political parties as follows:

The Right bloc: the Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the National Union, the Union of Political Prisoners and Exiles.

The Centrist bloc: the Liberal Union, the Centrist Union, the Peasant Party, the Women’s Party, the Democratic Party, the Social Liberals.

The Left bloc: the LDDP, the LSDP.

Let me define the patterns of coalitions for the following argument. If the cleavage between the Right and Left coalitions is located between the Right-Centrist and Centrist-Left borders,

³ This organization was established as the Deportees’ Club in July 1988, rallying former political prisoners of Soviet concentration camps and Siberian deportees (www.lpkts.lt/en/org_en.html).

⁴ This party pretends to be the successor of the inter-war party of the same name established by the dictator Antanas Smetona.

⁵ “Lietuvos socialdemokratu partijos istorija” (www.lsdp.lt/partija/istorija.html).

⁶ “Lietuvos centro sajungos istorija” (www.lcs.lt/cs.istorija.phtml)

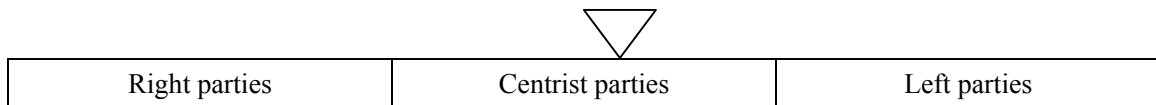
⁷ www.5ci.net/ndmp/ISTORIJA.HTM

this competition is defined as “R vs. L.” In Appendix 3 this category is divided further into three subcategories. If the cleavage overlaps the Right-Centrist border, this competition is defined as “R vs. C-L.” If the cleavage overlaps the Centrist-Left border, this competition is defined as “R-C vs. L.” Only the other cases are the genuine “R vs L.” However, in Appendix 5 the competitions “R vs. C-L” and “R-C vs. L” are not distinguished from “R vs. L” for simplification. In other words, the category “R vs. L” in Appendix 5 is broader than that in Appendix 3.

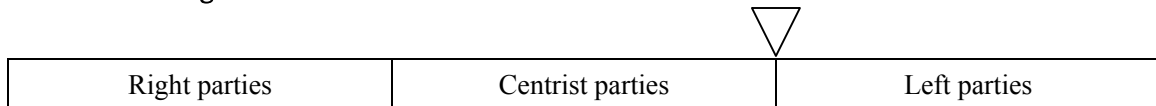
If a party or parties in the Right bloc, together with Centrist and Left deputies, voted against the Conservative mayoral candidate, this competition is defined as a “grand coalition against the Conservatives.” Likewise, if the LSDP, together with Centrist and Right deputies, voted against the LDDP candidate, this competition is defined as a “grand coalition against the LDDP.”⁸ If the making of coalitions is twisted from an ideological point of view (for example, Cons.-LDDP vs. CDP-LSDP), this competition is defined as a “stepping-stone coalition.”

Typology of Coalitions (Cleavage)

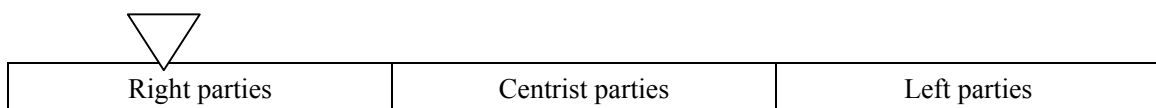
R vs. L



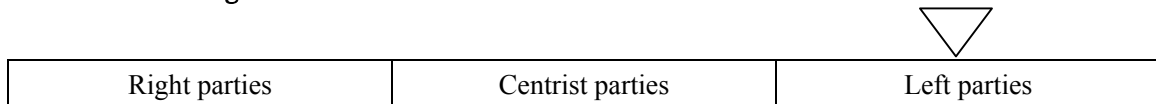
C-R coalition against L



Great coalition against the Conservatives



Great coalition against the LDDP



⁸ Generally, relations between the largest and second largest parties in both the Right and Left blocs (the Conservatives and Christian Democrats, the LDDP and LSDP, respectively) have been ambivalent. They are natural allies in terms of ideological affinities, but the second largest parties are always urged to distinguish themselves from the larger partners before the electorate.

R-L coalition against the centrists

Right parties	Centrist parties	Left parties
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Stepping-stone coalition

Right parties	Centrist parties	Left parties
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We have researched the making of intra-council coalitions in 1995, 1997, and 2000 mainly through local newspapers. The result of the 1997 and 2000 local deputy elections are published by the Lithuanian Central Electoral Committee on the Internet (www.lrs.lt/rinkimai/). To study the coalition makings in 1997 we also relied upon material obtained with the assistance of the Lithuanian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In other words, the information concerning the 1997 local elections has been triply checked (Internet, local press, and ministerial data), while the 2000 elections were researched through two sources (Internet and local press). As for the 1995 elections we relied upon local newspapers exclusively.

Tables 2-4 and Appendix 1-5 reveal the existence of a second national democratic revolution in Lithuania, led by the Conservatives during the electoral cycle of 1995-96.⁹ If the first national democratic revolution in Lithuania was characterized by the aforementioned internal peace and a continuity of cadres, the second revolution was accompanied by revenges. The Conservatives, having been out of office after 1992, purged a number of local leaders for political reasons. What had happened in Western Ukraine in 1990-91, happened in Lithuania in 1995-96. A biographic analysis of the mayors nominated in 1995 will reveal that many former foresters, mechanics, and teachers came to power. These people suddenly appeared in 1995 and disappeared in 1997. On the other hand, this “Conservatives’ revolution” gave new leaders without nomenklatura background a chance for promotion. A number of the mayors elected in 1995 were recruited as national parliamentarians, county governors, and ministers in 1996.¹⁰

As the “Conservatives’ revolution” cooled down, leaders of nomenklatura origin revived. This process began as early as 1997 and became even more tangible in 2000 (Appendix 2).

⁹ Novagrockiene found embryonic symptoms of the decline of the bipolar party system and the development of Centrist parties in the results of the 1995 local elections (Jurate Novagrockiene, “Lietuvos politiniu partiju dalyvavimas 1995 m. savivaldybiu rinkimuose ir ju perspektyvos (The Participation of Lithuanian Political Parties in the 1995 Municipal Elections and Their Perspectives),” *Politologija*, 1995, No.6, pp. 150-163). This view does not contradict the fact that the bipolar system was solid then.

¹⁰ The number of cases in which mayors used the posts as a springboard to be promoted to national politics decreased in the 2000 electoral cycle. See Appendix 2; and Darius Varanavicius, “Geru meru geri norai (Good Mayors’ Good Desire),” *Atgimimas (Rebirth)*, 7 September 2001, pp. 1 and 4-5. This can be regarded as a symptom of the consolidation of local autonomy.

The bipolar party system in Lithuania (composed of the Sajudis/Conservatives and the LDDP) had emerged as a result of the unexpected victory of the LDDP in 1992, and was consolidated by the second national democratic/“Conservative” revolution in 1995-96. This system continued to function until the electoral cycle of 2000, as Tables 2 and 3 show. What attracts our attention is that Table 4 reveals a different trend. First, the LDDP was able to obtain only one mayor’s post in 1995, despite the fact that it was the second largest party both in terms of the local deputies’ national total and the number of councils in which it composed the largest deputy groups (Tables 2 and 3). Second, the number of the Conservative mayors diminished significantly in 1997, although the Conservatives, being the ruling party at the national level, increased their local influence (Tables 2 and 3). Third, the number of LDDP mayors increased after the 2000 elections, despite the significant decrease of the LDDP local deputies. As one would easily assume, these apparent contradictions are explained by the second stage of local elections, i.e. the making of intra-council coalitions.

Appendixes 4 and 5 reveal peculiar characteristics of Lithuanian local politics and interpolitical relations. In 1995, the LDDP was in power at the national level. But at the local level it was blocked from mayoral posts even when it had the largest deputy groups in the local councils (ten cases; Appendix 4). According to Appendix 5, there were four cases of the formation of anti-LDDP grand coalitions, in which even the Social Democrats participated. In Pakruojis the LDDP gained 12 of the 25 deputy seats but nevertheless was defeated because all the other 13 deputies supported a Christian Democratic candidate. Even when anti-LDDP grand coalitions did not take place, in a number of councils LDDP was in complete isolation; in Anyksciai, Kelme, Pasvalys, Radviliskis, Siauliai, and Zarasai the LDDP mayoral candidates were able to gain only the LDDP deputies’ votes or add only one vote to them.

This unhappy fate fell on the Conservatives in 1997. At that time, the Conservatives were the national ruling party and at the zenith of their power at the local level as well, obtaining the largest deputy groups in as much as 44 local councils, that is, 79 percent of the total local councils in Lithuania. However, in 11 councils anti-Conservative grand coalitions were organized. In 14 councils¹¹ the Christian Democrats did not support Conservatives’ candidates, or even openly challenged them in the alliance with Leftist parties. As Appendix 5 shows, in 1995, an overwhelming majority of competitions between Right and Left blocs resulted in Right blocs’ victories (27 of the 31 cases). In 1997, the Left-Centrist blocs won in as much as six councils vis-à-vis 14 cases of the Rights’ victory. The first reason for this improvement of the Lefts’ odds is that the four Rightist parties as a whole decreased their deputy seats from 762 to 716 (Table 2). In 1995, in many councils an arithmetic aggregation of the Conservative and Christian Democratic deputies guaranteed the

¹¹ Alytus, Birštonas, Ignalina, Jonava, Klaipėda City and Rayon, Marijampole Rayon, Radviliskis, Raseiniai, Skuodas, Silute, Taurage, Utena, and Varena.

majority, but this condition was lost in many councils in 1997. Second, even more importantly, in 1997 the LDDP came out of isolation and the cleavage between Right and Left blocs shifted to the right.

This situation forced the Conservatives to compromise more in order to create winning coalitions. In seven councils, the Conservatives had to yield the mayoral post to their allies despite having the largest number of deputies. In 1995 also, in seven councils the Conservatives were required to sacrifice the mayoral post even if they had the most seats. However, at that time they only passed it to other Rightist parties: the "Prisoners," Christian Democrats, and National Union. In 1997, in contrast, the Conservatives needed to do this not only with the CDP and NU but also with the Centrist Union and even Social Democrats (Appendix 4). Even with these compromises, in 14 councils the Conservatives became the opposition despite having the most seats. Overall, only 23 Conservative mayors appeared in 1997.

The rule of "going farther and faring worse" reappeared in 2000. Until then the bipolar party system had been liquidated both at the national and local levels, whereas the Centrist parties had become too strong. In particular, the boom of the Social Liberals and their anticipated victory in the national parliamentary elections in the coming autumn of 2000 made the traditional Right and Left parties sensitive. Overcoming old quarrels, Right-Left coalitions against the Centrist parties took shape in five local councils. Remarkably, in Silale and Zarasai, the winning LDDP gave the incumbent Conservative mayors the positions of vice-mayor and municipal controllers respectively (Appendix 2). In four councils the Peasant Party became the opposition despite having the most seats in the councils. Likewise, in three councils the Social Liberals composed the largest deputy groups but their mayoral candidates were defeated. On the other hand, in 2000, the Centrist parties were not objects of coalition politics any more. On the contrary, they tried to attract the Right and Left parties to win. This situation resulted in the increase of stepping-stone, de-ideologized coalitions.

In Japan, local party organizations, as a rule, strive to coalesce with the national ruling party, namely the Liberal Democratic, for the purpose of making their positions advantageous in the nationwide distribution of subventions, public investments, and other resources. As a result, whilst a more or less competitive party politics is functioning at the national level, Japanese local politics display a tangible tendency towards grand coalitions.¹² In contrast, the most significant driving force in Lithuanian local politics is local politicians' desire to maintain a balance of power among the local party organizations. They jealously watch each other to prevent one or another of them from becoming excessively influential. Contrary to Japan, if a party is in power at the national level, at the

¹² About this peculiarity of Japanese inter-party relations, see: Steven R. Reed, "Gubernatorial Elections in Japan," in John C. Campbell (ed.), *Parties, Candidates and Voters in Japan*, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1981, pp. 139-167; Idem, "The Changing Fortunes of Japan's Progressive Governors," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26 (1986), No. 4, pp. 452-465.

local level it faces the danger of isolation.¹³ This sense of balance in local party politics eventually liquidated the bipolar party system in national politics, which had emerged in Lithuania during the first half of the 1990s, and made Lithuanian politics more Centrist at the beginning of the 21st century. Presently, however, the same motive is functioning to the disadvantage of Centrist parties, often pushing Right-Left coalitions to bloc the Centrist parties from mayoral posts.

It is difficult to explain this peculiar behavior of Lithuanian local elites anthropologically. Its origin may be traced to the primitive democracy from the heathen period, “*liberum veto*” under the *Rzeczpospolita*, or partisan democracy in the resistance movement.

A problem not analyzed here is the role of individual leaders. Both formations of major party groups and stable coalitions in local councils have been strongly influenced by the existence of influential leaders, such as A.S. Zenkevicius of Birstonas (LSDP), V. Zurba of Birzai (Peasant), B. Rope of Ignalina (Peasant), V. Bandziukas of Joniskis (CU), A. Zairys of Jurbarkas (Peasant), V. Muntianas of Kedainiai (From Peasant to SL), E. Gentvilas of Klaipeda City (LU), V. Stundys of Moletai (CDP), S. Mikelis of Neringa (from National Progress to Cons.), V. Simelis of Radviliskis (from Prisoners to LSDP) (Appendix 2).

¹³ Based on an analysis of the 2000 local elections, A. Lukosaitis concludes that parties' behavior changed in 2000 (Alvidas Lukosaitis, “*Svivaldybiu tarybu rinkimai 2000: Rinkimu rezultatu analize* (The Municipal Council Elections in 2000: An Analysis of Election Results),” *Politologija*, 2000, No.2, p.57). In fact, their behavior aimed at preserving the balance of power, often by blockading the strongest, was consistent from 1995 to 2000.