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3 May Constitution Day (also *3rd May National Holiday*; Polish: *Święto Konstytucji 3 Maja*) is a [Polish national](#) and [public holiday](#) that takes place on 3 May. The holiday celebrates the declaration of the [Constitution of 3 May 1791](#) - the first modern constitution in Europe. Festivities date back to the [Duchy of Warsaw](#) early in the 19th century, but it became an official holiday only in 1919 in the [Second Polish Republic](#). Delisted during the times of the [Polish People's Republic](#), it was reestablished after the [fall of communism](#) in modern [Poland](#).

Background^[edit]

The Constitution of 3 May 1791 is considered one of the most important achievements in the [history of Poland](#), despite being in effect for only a year, until the [Russo-Polish War of 1792](#). Historian [Norman Davies](#) calls it "the first [constitution](#) of its type in Europe"; other scholars also refer to it as the world's second oldest constitution.^{[a][1][2][3][4]}

The 3 May Constitution was designed to redress long-standing political defects of the [Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth](#). The Constitution sought to supplant the existing anarchy fostered by some of the country's [magnates](#) with a more [democratic constitutional monarchy](#). The adoption of the 3 May Constitution provoked the active hostility of the Commonwealth's neighbours, leading to the [Second Partition of Poland](#) in 1792, the [Kościuszko Uprising](#) of 1794 and the final, [Third Partition of Poland](#), in 1795. In the words of two of its co-authors, [Ignacy Potocki](#) and [Hugo Kołłątaj](#), it was "the last will and testament of the expiring Fatherland."^[5]

The memory of the 3 May Constitution—recognised by [political scientists](#) as a very progressive document for its time—for generations helped keep alive Polish aspirations for an independent and just society, and continued to inform the efforts of its authors' descendants.^[6] In Poland it is viewed as a [national symbol](#), and the culmination of all that was good and enlightened in [Polish history](#) and [culture](#).^[6]

The 3 May anniversary of its adoption has been observed as Poland's most important [civil holiday](#) since [Poland regained independence](#) in 1918, along with the [National Independence Day](#) and the [Armed Forces Day](#).^[7] Its importance for the [Polish people](#) has been compared to that of [4 July](#) to the Americans.^[8]

3 May was first declared a [holiday](#) on 5 May 1791, and celebrated a year later, on 3 May 1792.^{[9][10]} Banned during the [partitions of Poland](#), it was celebrated in the [Duchy of Warsaw](#) in 1807, and unofficially in [Congress Poland](#) by various pro-independence activists, more openly during the times of insurrections, such as the [November Uprising](#).^{[9][10][11]} It was again made an official Polish holiday in April 1919 under the [Second Polish Republic](#)—the first holiday officially introduced in the [Second Polish Republic](#).^[7] The 3 May holiday was banned once more during [World War II](#) by the [Nazi](#) and [Soviet](#) occupiers. It was celebrated in the Polish cities in May 1945, although in a mostly spontaneous manner.^[7] The celebrations were officially canceled shortly before 3 May 1946, and [the anti-communist demonstrations](#) took place later that

day.^[7] This, along with competition with the communist-endorsed 1 May [Labor Day](#) celebrations, meant that the authorities of the [Polish People's Republic](#) disapproved of the Constitution Day and forbade celebrations thereof.^{[7][9][10]} In 1947 it was officially rebranded [Democratic Party Day](#) and removed from the list of national holidays in 1951 .^[9] Until 1989, 3 May was a common day for anti-government and anti-communist protests.^[7] 3 May was restored as an official Polish holiday in April 1990, after the [fall of communism](#).^[9] In 2007, 3 May was also declared a [Lithuanian national holiday](#); the first joint celebration by the Polish [Sejm](#) and the Lithuanian [Seimas](#) took place on 3 May 2007.^[12]

In modern Poland, this day, free from work, sees many parades, exhibitions, concerts and public figure speeches.^[13] Most important Polish politicians participate in those festivities; for example in 2011 [President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski](#), [Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk](#), and [Marshal of the Sejm, Grzegorz Schetyna](#), [Marshal of the Senate, Bogdan Borusewicz](#), and [Minister of National Defence, Bogdan Klich](#), took part in the festivities in [Warsaw](#).^[13] The official festivities in Warsaw or in other Polish cities in the presence of the President and important dignitaries would include [flag flying](#), cannon salvos, reading of the constitution preamble, and singing a patriotic song from the November Uprising, Witaj, majowa jutrzeńko (Welcome, May Dawn)^[14] plus drill shows and the annual [military parade](#).^[13] Other events of the 2011 celebrations in Warsaw included a celebratory [mass](#) (see: [The Most Holy Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland](#)) in [St. John's Archcathedral, Warsaw](#), and presidential awards for achievements in the field of advancing [Polish culture](#).^[13] It is also held in various other Polish cities as well.^[citation needed]

The holiday has been a focal point of ethnic celebrations of [Polish-American](#) pride in the [Chicago area](#), where it is known as Polish Constitution Day, since 1892.^[15] [Poles in Chicago](#) have continued this tradition to the present day, marking it with festivities and the annual [Polish Constitution Day Parade](#); guests of national stature, most notably [Bobby Kennedy](#), have attended over the years as a way to ingratiate themselves with [Chicago Polonia](#).^{[15][16]} In [Minnesota](#), first celebrations date to the 1870s.^[17] In [San Francisco](#), the anniversary of the May 3rd Constitution has been observed annually for decades in the [Music Concourse](#) at [Golden Gate Park](#).^[18] In Buffalo, NY there is a Polish Happy Hour Buffalo event held every 3 May at the Adam Mickiewicz Library. There is free admission, free Polish food, Polish music played, and a reading of the preamble of the Polish Constitution in English and in Polish.^[19]