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GEOPOLITICS AND SECURITY STUDIES CENTER

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract pattern of swirling, wavy lines in shades of red and white, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are dense and layered, giving the impression of a textured, organic form.

Democracy sustainability barometer **2024**

Turinys

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Mažvydas Jastramskis – politikos mokslų daktaras, VU TSPMI docentas. Savo moksliniuose tyrimuose nagrinėja rinkėjų elgesį, politines institucijas ir demokratijos problemas.

Introduction

For the third consecutive year, we present the Democracy Sustainability Barometer, aiming to systematically measure, evaluate, and compare the attitudes of Lithuanian residents toward democracy and their resilience to propaganda from authoritarian states in the East. As in previous surveys, we calculate two main indices of Democracy Sustainability Barometer based on data from a representative survey. The **Democracy Sustainability Index** measures the public's support for liberal democratic institutions, willingness to defend democracy through protests, satisfaction with democratic functioning (both procedures and governmental responsiveness), and trust in state institutions. The **Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index** examines perceptions of the threat posed by Russia and the extent to which people agree with the economic and political narratives of authoritarian regimes in Russia and China.

The year 2024 was marked as an election year both globally and in Lithuania. Significant elections took

place in the United States, India, and the European Union, where citizens elected members of the European Parliament. Some election results, particularly the U.S. presidential election, added uncertainty to an already tense geopolitical situation. Other elections, such as those in India, where the ruling party transitioned to a coalition government, provided hope for improving global democracy, which during the last decade regressed to 1985 levels by 2023. Only about 29% of the world's population lived in countries meeting high democratic standards in 2023 (V-Dem 2024). With Ukraine facing increasing challenges in halting the Russian invasion and candidates in Lithuania's 2024 presidential elections openly representing pro-Russian positions, it is essential to continue investigating public support for democracy and resilience to authoritarian propaganda. On a positive note, a consensus has emerged among major Lithuanian political parties, both left and right, to increase defence spending.

Since the first survey, it has been evident that while Lithuanians have a sound understanding of democracy and are willing to support its defence through protests, trust in democracy and satisfaction with its functioning remain weak. These trends persist. However, this year, there are positive signs: the Democracy Sustainability Index value has risen from 55.8 in the last survey to 57.4 on a 100-point scale (0 representing a completely sociologically weak democracy, 100 representing an ideally sustainable democracy). This is likely associated with the election year. Despite the increased (at first glance) polarization in the public political sphere at that time, many people still engage more with political options, go out to vote, and participate in the democratic process. This likely results in positive short-term changes.

Conversely, similar positive trends were not observed in the survey on resilience to propaganda from Eastern authoritarian states. Here, the index value on a 100-point scale (0 representing complete agreement with propaganda, 100 representing ideal resilience) stands at 58.6. This is nearly identical to the initial measurement in 2022 (58.8). As before, Lithuanians demonstrate relatively high awareness of threats posed by Russia and the necessary responses, but agreement with economic propaganda narratives remains the weakest point, significantly lowering the Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index. For a more precise interpretation of these aggregated indices, it is essential to examine their components, which are detailed in subsequent sections of this report.

As in previous years, the report is divided into three parts. The first analyses the democratic attitudes of

the Lithuanian population and the components of the Democracy Sustainability Index. The second focuses on foreign policy attitudes and resistance to Eastern propaganda; the Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index is presented here. We also compare the intermediate indexes on the basis of several key independent variables: age, education, place of residence and assessment of the Soviet era. Responses related to the latter variable are notably asymmetric: 54% disagree that life was better during the Soviet era, 24% say “neither agree nor disagree,” 13% agree, and about 8% are unsure. This political divide continues to shape public attitudes (Ramonaitė et al., 2014; Ramonaitė, 2020), and previous surveys show a strong correlation with resilience to propaganda (RESC 2017). Moreover, last year’s survey confirmed (as does the current one) that assessments of the Soviet era best differentiate public attitudes toward democracy and resilience to propaganda. Therefore, this question serves well as a criterion for comparing the impact of social factors.

The survey uses data from a representative survey of the Lithuanian population conducted by Spinter Research on behalf of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre by Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) between 4 and 17 October 2024. 1,020 respondents aged between 18 and 75 were interviewed. The statistical overlap between the components of the indexes presented in the survey was tested by means of factor analysis: all the intermediate index indicators fall into one dimension. The t-test and ANOVA statistical significance criteria were used to assess the differences between index averages according to sociodemographic characteristics.

Part I.

Democratic Sustainability Index

1.1 Perception of democracy

The survey begins with an assessment of how residents perceive different elements of democracy and the extent to which they support them as essential features of democracy. These attitudes are measured through the Democracy Perception Index. As in previous surveys, participants were asked the question, “We may desire many things, but not all of them are essential features of democracy. Please indicate for each of the listed items how essential you believe it is as a feature of democracy”. Respondents evaluated various elements of liberal democratic institutions (political and civil rights, electoral and other procedures), representation and government accountability to the people, social justice, and elements of direct democracy on a scale from 1 (completely non-essential feature of democracy) to 10 (essential feature of democracy). Table 1.1 lists average responses and percentages of respondents who indicated a given element as an essential characteristic of democracy (giving it a 10). Additionally, the table shows changes in the averages compared to the 2023 survey.

As in previous surveys, Lithuanian residents rate critical political and civil rights as the most essential fea-

tures of democracy: freedom of belief and speech, free elections, women’s and men’s rights, and impartial courts. The average scores for these items range from 8.6 to 8.7, with 50–57% of respondents identifying these elements as essential features of democracy. Slightly less essential elements include the rule of law (41.9%) and the rights of national minorities (40.3%), although their overall averages remain high (8.3 and 8.2, respectively). A trend observed in last year’s survey persists: there is an increased recognition of the importance of competition between two or more political parties. In the initial 2022 survey, only about 35% of respondents considered this element essential (average score of 7.9), while this year, 51.1% of respondents did so (average score of 8.4). This can be attributed to the election period, which began with the municipal elections in March 2023 and continued through the parliamentary elections in October 2024. Finally, accountability of government, justification of decisions, and citizen involvement remain critical to residents’ perceptions of democracy. The average scores for these questions range from 8.4 to 8.5, with 45–48% of respondents identifying them as essential elements. Similar importance is attached to direct democracy, the idea that major issues are to be decided by referendums.

Table 1.1 Lithuanian residents’ perception of democracy

Item	Average	% of respondents selecting “Essential characteristic of democracy”	Difference in the average compared to 2023
<i>Liberal democracy</i>			
Citizens have a right to freely and openly express opinions and beliefs, including criticism of the government	8.7	54.1	0
People elect their representatives in free elections	8.7	56.8	0

Item	Average	% of respondents selecting "Essential characteristic of democracy"	Difference in the average compared to 2023
Women have the same rights as men	8.6	51.7	0
Courts act in an impartial manner and are free from political influence	8.6	49.6	0.1
Rule of law prevails in the country	8.3	41.9	-0.1
The rights of ethnic minorities are guaranteed	8.2	40.3	0.2
Two or more political parties compete in an election	8.4	51.1	0.1
<i>Accountability of democratic government</i>			
When making decisions, the government takes the views of the population into account	8.4	46.3	0
Citizens can get involved in and influence government decision-making	8.4	44.9	0.1
The government justifies its policies to the public	8.5	47.6	0
<i>Social justice</i>			
People receive state support in case of unemployment or sickness	8.4	44.9	0
The state taxes the rich and supports those in need	7.2	26.6	0.2
The state ensures equal pay	7.1	29.8	0.3
<i>Direct democracy</i>			
The most important political issues are decided by referendum	8.5	48	0.2

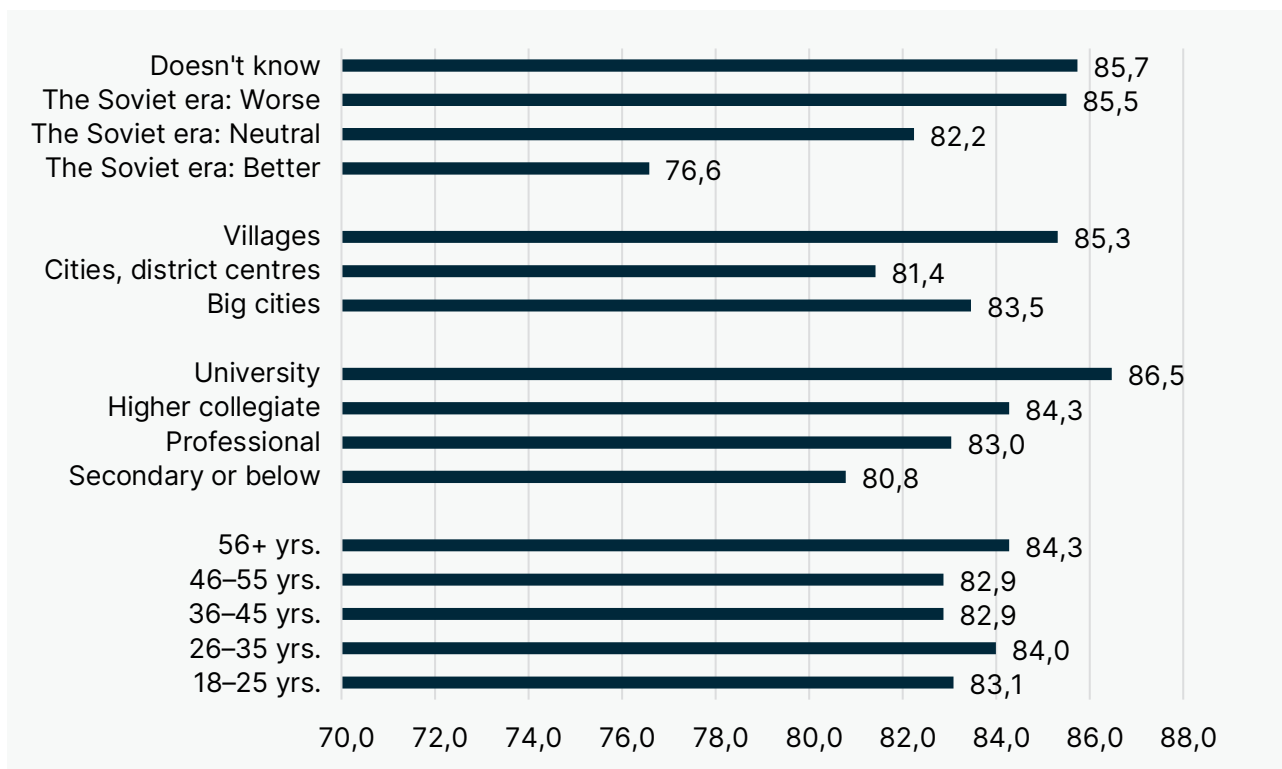
As in two previous surveys, the indicators of support for one of the elements of social justice – state support in the event of unemployment or sickness – are similar to the assessments of liberal democratic institutions. The average response here is 8.4, and 45% of respondents cite this as a necessary feature of democracy. It is interesting that while the other two elements of social justice – redistribution of wealth (average score of 7.2) and guaranteed equal income (average score of 7.1) – are still considered less essential for democracy, this year they showed the largest increase in average scores. This is likely linked to the more frequent emphasis on socioeconomic inequality in recent times. Of course, this may also reflect a temporary electoral effect, and next year's survey will reveal whether these changes are sustainable.

As in previous years, responses to questions about the necessity of liberal democratic institutions (the first group of seven elements in Table 1.1) and government accountability (the second group of three elements in Table 1.1) were used to calculate the Liberal Democracy Perception Index for each respondent.

The index ranges from 0 (all elements of liberal democracy and government accountability are considered completely unnecessary for democracy) to 100 (all elements of liberal democracy and government accountability are considered essential). The average index value derived from individual responses this year is 83.6, reflecting a relatively high level of democratic perception and a slight increase from 2023, when the index was 82.5.

In addition, we tested for differences in the Liberal Democracy Perception Index across four social and demographic indexes (Fig. 1.1). No statistically significant differences were found by place of residence or age – all age groups perceive democracy similarly. Differences were observed based on education level – those with higher university education scored the highest in democratic perception (86.5), consistent with last year's findings. The Soviet era remains a factor – those who view it more favourably have a significantly (and statistically significant) lower perception of democracy (76.6) compared to other groups.

Fig. 1.1. Averages of the Liberal Democracy Perception Index based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era



1.2 Support for the active defence of democracy

For the third consecutive year, support for active defence of democracy in the survey is measured using the question: “Would you participate in protests or otherwise actively express dissent if you believed that politicians...” followed by several hypothetical scenarios. The first scenario is general (“seek to restrict democracy in Lithuania”), while others address specific democratic freedoms and rights. To differentiate between those who would not attend the protests from those who would support the cause without attending, we listed these two options separately – it’s quite a large group.

Fig. 1.2 shows the distributions of Lithuanian residents’ responses in percentages. As in previous years, responses to these questions reveal a fairly high level of indecision, with “don’t know” selected by 6.4% (restricting media rights and freedom of speech) to 13.7% (restricting democracy) of respondents. The overall distribution of responses is also similar to results from previous surveys: only a minority of Lithuanian residents would actively participate in protests. The highest percentage of respondents stated they would protest in response to the primary issue – if politicians sought to restrict democracy in Lithuania (26.6%), while the smallest

percentages were willing to protest restrictions on minority rights (7.3%) and the rights of homosexual individuals (about 7.6%). On the other hand, as before, if those who would support such protests are included, the active defence of at least five democratic elements would be backed by an absolute majority of respondents. These include restrictions on media rights and freedom of speech (63.4%), restrictions on democracy (65%), limitations on judicial independence (57.6%), significant changes to election rules in favour of the ruling party (60.2%), and the abolition of abortion rights (54.7%). Interestingly, compared to 2023, there is a slight increase in support for protests against restrictions on homosexual rights increased by 4.1 percentage points, and against abortion restrictions by 5 percentage points.

It is challenging to assess whether these changes are significant and sustainable, but they do contribute to the rise in the Support for the Defence of Democracy Index. This index ranges from 0 (neither participating in nor supporting any of the seven protests) to 100 (participating in or supporting all protests). The average index value derived from individual responses this year is 54.5, indicating a notably higher-than-average tendency to defend democratic institutions in protests and support such protests. The index value has consistently increased since its introduction: in 2022, it was 52.1, and in 2023, it was 52.7.

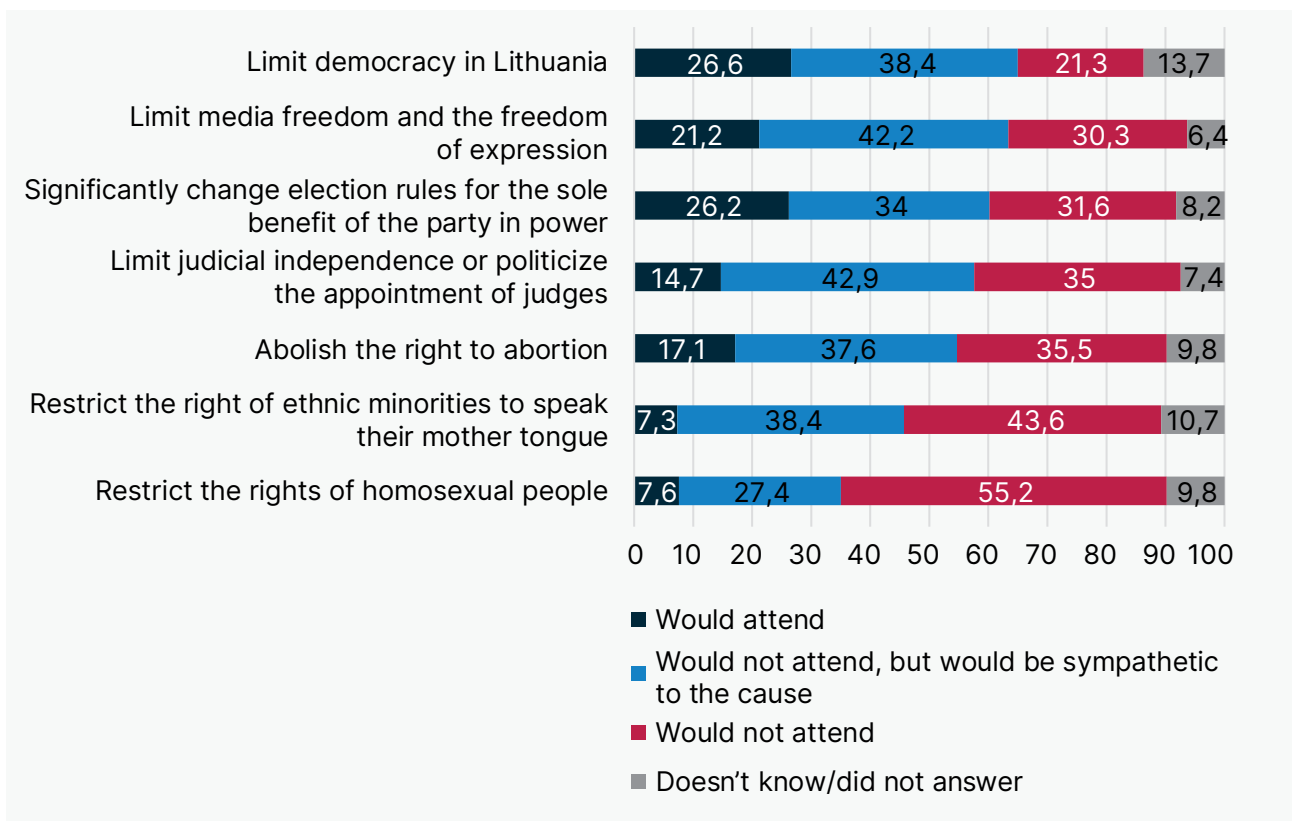


Fig. 1.2. Lithuanian residents' support for the active defence of democracy, in %

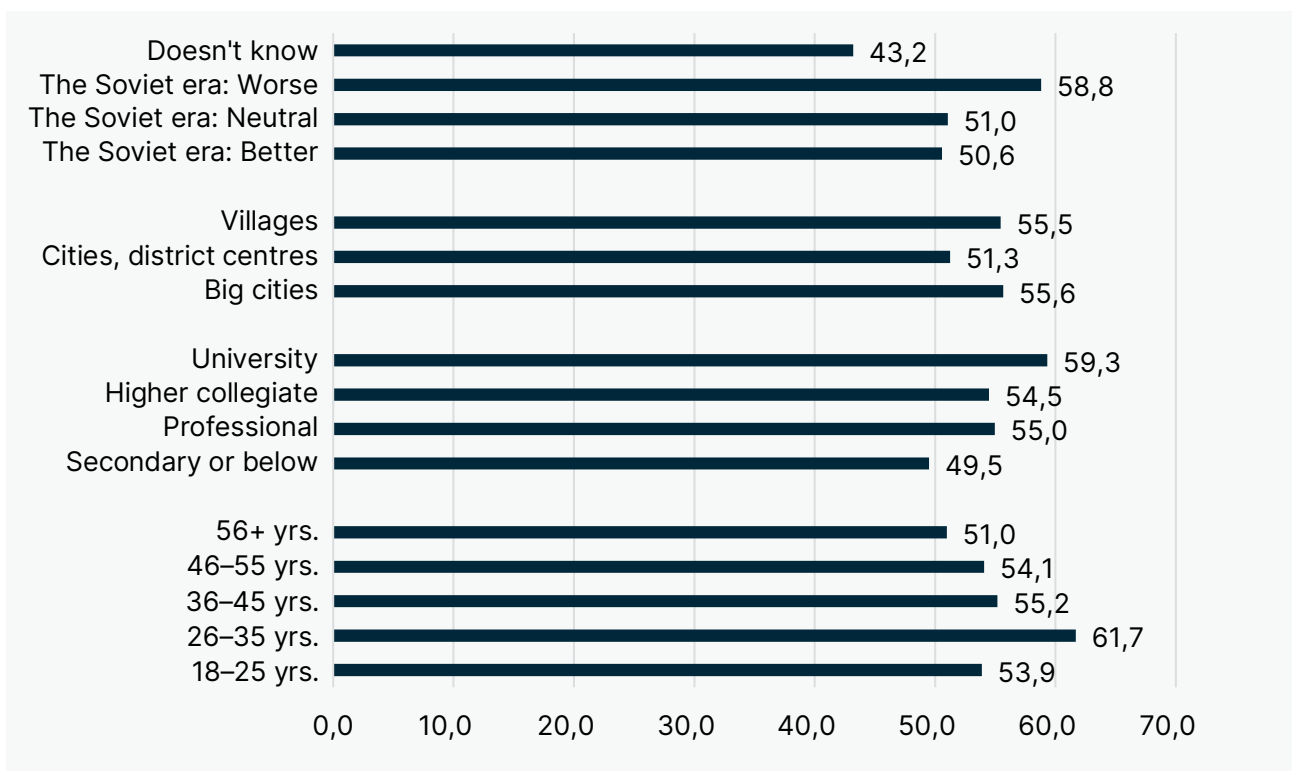


Fig. 1.3. Averages of the Index of Support for the Defence of Democracy based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

Fig. 1.3 shows the averages of this index by the respondents' social characteristics. The university-educated group stands out again (average 59.3). Similarly to previous surveys, individuals with higher education are statistically significantly more inclined to support protests for democracy (index value: 58.8) than those with secondary education (49.5). Regarding the evaluation of the Soviet era, this time the group with an unequivocally negative assessment of it stands out, with the highest index value of 58.8. Place of residence does not have a significant influence on the index. However, based on age, the 26–35 age group stands out – respondents in this category are more likely to support protests for democracy than all other groups, with an index value of 61.7.

1.3 Satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania

Next, we analyse how Lithuanian residents assess the functioning of democracy and the performance of state institutions. In democratic surveys, respondents are typically asked how satisfied they are with the functioning of democracy in the country. This year, responses were distributed as follows: 6.3% of respondents are very satisfied, 44.1% are satisfied, 34.1% are dissatisfied, 12.2% are completely dissatisfied, and 3.3% didn't know how to respond. Overall, it can be said that more respondents are satisfied with democracy (50.4% of responses) than dissat-

isfied (46.3%). These numbers remain quite stable and are statistically not significantly different from the 2022 and 2023 surveys.

Despite the general positive evaluation of the functioning of democracy, we know that when asking about specific indicators of democratic procedures and the responsiveness of democratic institutions to society, satisfaction tends to vary. These indicators have been grouped into two categories. The first (Fig. 1.4a) examines how residents evaluate the procedures of liberal democracy and the practical functioning of political rights.

In three out of four questions (except for equality before the law), those who are satisfied ("strongly agree" and "agree") form a clear majority. The highest satisfaction is with free elections (54%) and freedom of speech and beliefs (53.8%). Around 45% agree that democratic party competition exists in Lithuania (26.5% disagree). However, as in the 2023 survey, less positive numbers appear when respondents were asked whether all citizens are equal before the law: 41.3% agree, while about 38% disagree. On the other hand, compared to the 2023 survey, there is a slight increase in satisfaction across all indicators. The largest and statistically significant increase is regarding democratic party competition (+6.2 percentage points of total agreement). Again, this change is almost certainly related to the differences between parties that became evident during the election period.

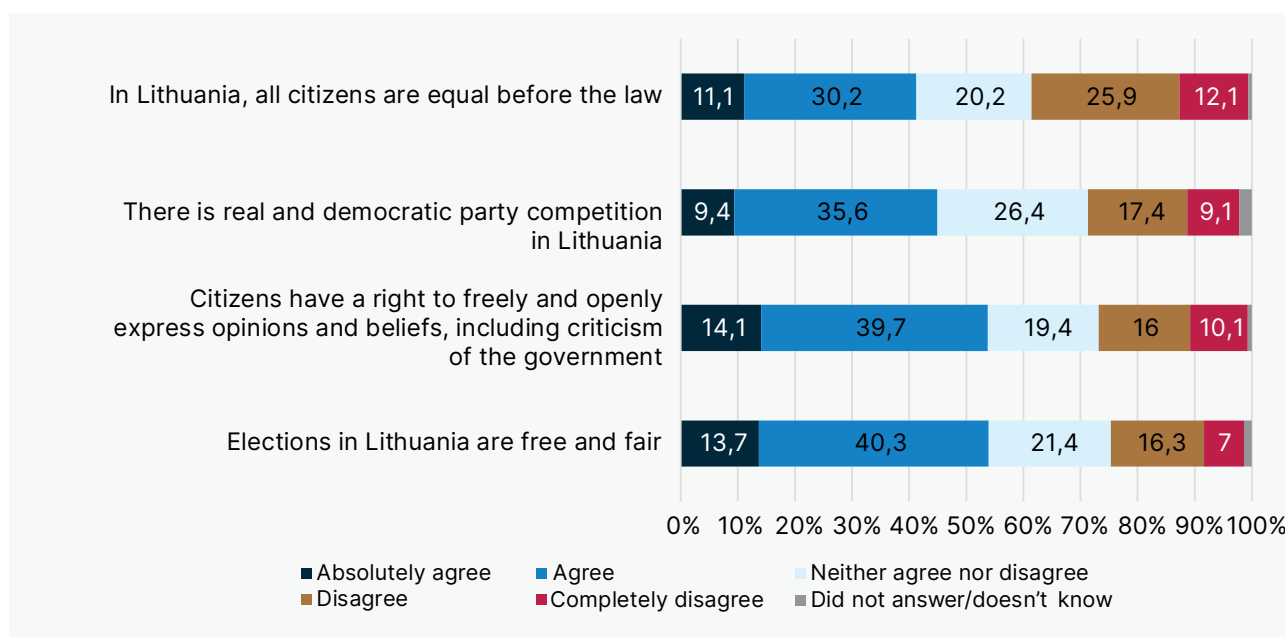


Fig. 1.4a. Lithuanian residents' satisfaction with liberal democracy procedures (political and civil rights), %.

The second group of satisfaction indicators covers the substantive dimension of democracy: accountability of power and responsiveness to the people (Fig. 1.4b). Although, as in previous surveys, there is still a dominant negative assessment by residents, there are positive shifts, especially compared to the first survey in 2022. For the first three statements in Fig. 1.4b, satisfaction with democracy is represented by agreement, while for the last two statements, it is represented by disagreement. Compared to 2022, there has been an increase in positive responses (combining “strongly agree” and “agree”) regarding the following: Lithuanian authorities appropriately representing the public interest (+10.7 percentage points), providing opportunities for Lithuanian citizens to engage in decision-making processes and influence government decisions (+9.9 percentage points), and Lithuania’s law enforcement effectively fighting corruption (+7 percentage points). These positive responses still make up a minority, with 26–28% of respondents choosing them. However, the positive trend alone indicates that we are emerging from a low point – in the 2023 survey, we cautiously suggested that these could be random fluctuations, but this year’s data provides more grounds for optimism. On the other hand, responses related to the last two statements remain stable and less positive. Only 14.3% disagree that the Lithuanian government works for itself and the interests of large businesses, while 59.7% agree. These indicators have remained almost unchanged since 2022.

We combined the responses to the questions from Fig. 1.4a and 1.4b, along with the summary question about satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, into an overall Satisfaction with Democracy Index. It ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied with all aspects of democracy) to 100 (completely satisfied with all aspects). The average of this index is 47.3, indicating a significant increase from 2023 (44.5). It is still unclear whether this increase is a short-term effect of the election period, as it often involves a refresh of the political system with the election or re-election of new politicians (mayors, president, or parliament). Additionally, despite positive changes, satisfaction with democracy is still below the theoretical average threshold (50).

We compared the differences in the Satisfaction with Democracy Index across social categories (Fig. 1.5). This comparison can provide insights into why the index value is gradually increasing. Although education does not have a statistically significant effect this time, age shows a clear trend: the two youngest groups are generally more satisfied (averages around 53) than the two oldest categories. Statistically significant differences are also seen based on the perception of the Soviet era. As in the previous survey, satisfaction with democracy is closely related to whether a person living in Lithuania views themselves as a winner of the post-Soviet transformation. The gap between those who view it positively in one aspect (52.4) and those who view it neutrally (41.2) or

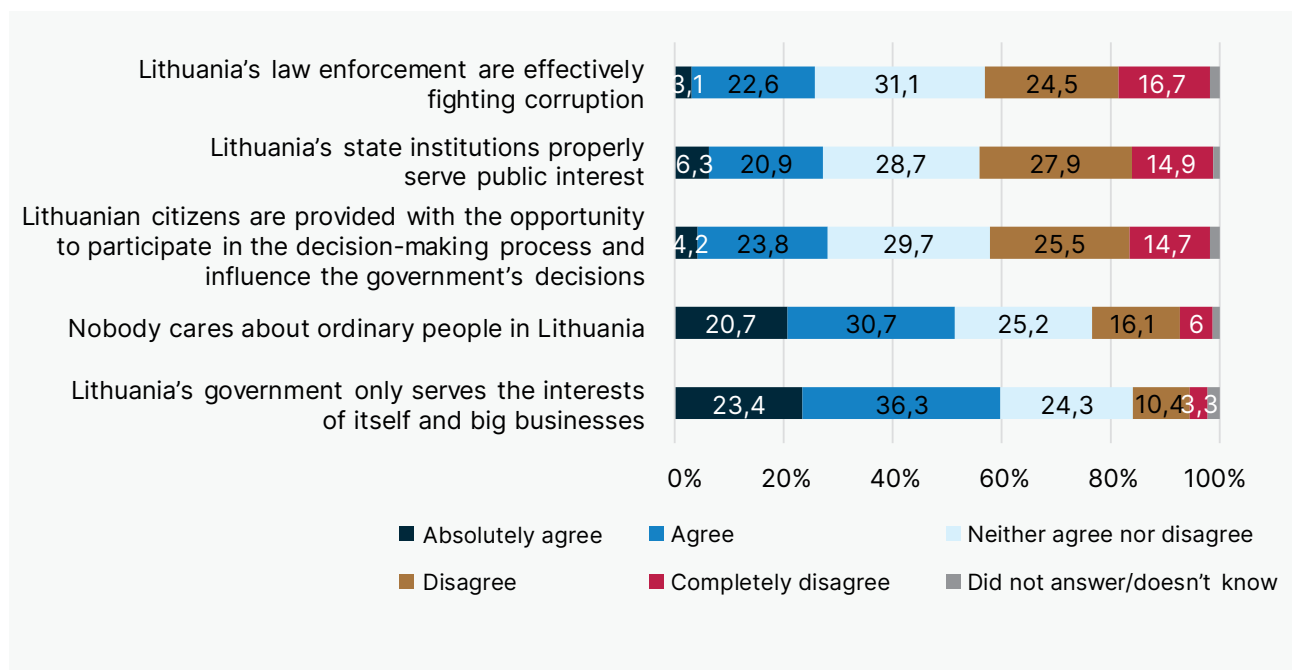


Fig. 1.4b. Lithuanian citizens' satisfaction with the responsiveness of democratic institutions to society, in %.

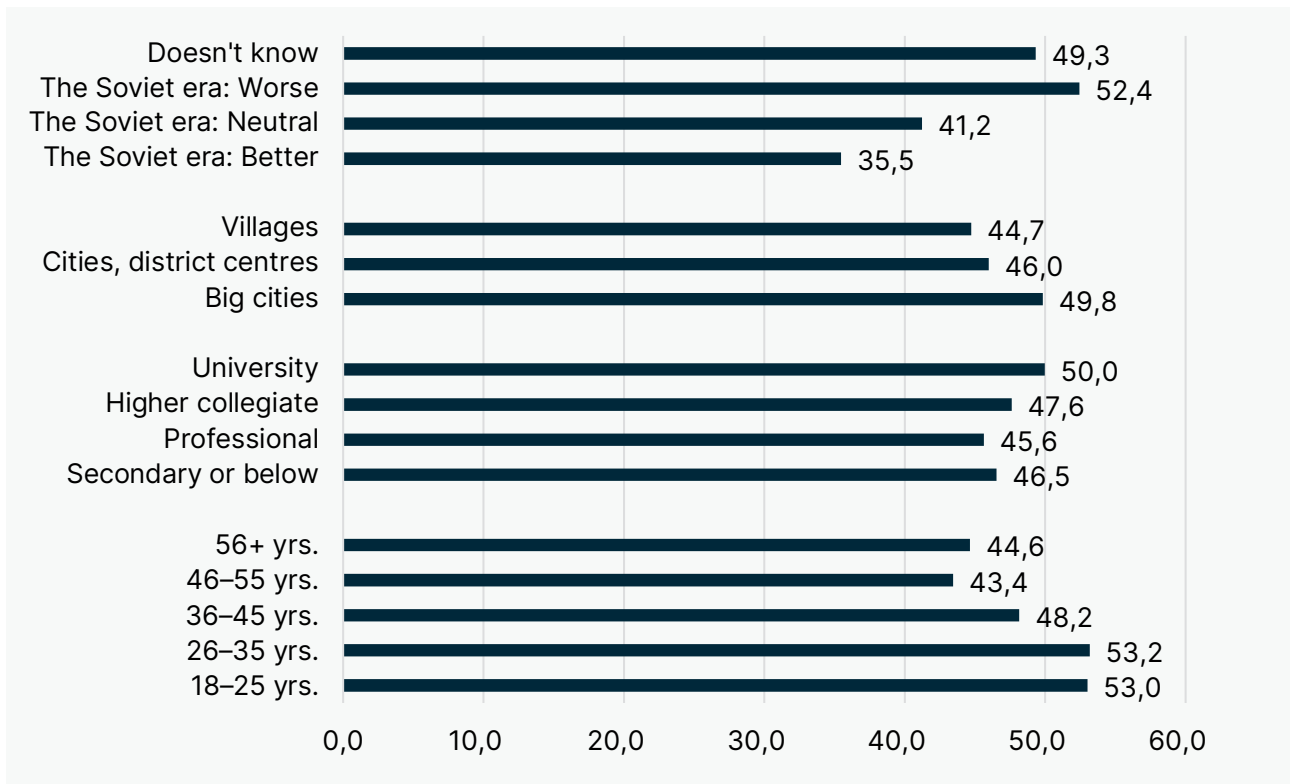


Fig. 1.5. Averages of the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy (new version) by place of residence, education, age and perception of the Soviet era

negatively (35.5) significantly exceeds the influence of the place of residence – larger cities (49.8) stand out more, but the differences from other locations are smaller. As in 2023, those who are unsure how to assess the Soviet era also tend to be relatively more satisfied (49.3) – this category mainly includes young people who did not live under the Soviet regime.

1.4 Trust in Lithuanian state institutions

Finally, we need to assess the specific support for particular government institutions. In the survey, we repeated the standard list of political and law enforcement institutions. State institutions aside, we also asked to what extent Lithuanian residents trust the media, international institutions (the EU and NATO), the church, medical professionals and scientists. The responses, in percentages, are shown in Fig. 1.6. The institutions are arranged according to the level of trust in them.

As in previous surveys, people trust the police the most among state institutions, with this indicator remaining relatively unchanged: approximately 81.7%

express high or moderate trust. There is also a relatively high level of trust in international political institutions – NATO and the EU, with 70.8% and 69.9% of residents respectively expressing trust. However, the fact that these indicators are almost identical is a new phenomenon, primarily due to a significant drop in trust in NATO compared to 2022 (down by 7.5 percentage points) and 2023 (down by 5.2 percentage points). On the one hand, this could be related to concerns about the potential impact of the U.S. presidential election results on the alliance. On the other hand, since such fluctuations could be random, we will only be able to confirm their sustainability next year.

When it comes to domestic political institutions, the overall situation remains similar to previous surveys. Lithuanians continue to trust the president's office the most (47.6%), while trust in other institutions is significantly lower: 16.8% trust political parties, and 34.2% trust the government. The 2023 survey showed an increase in trust in the courts, and this trend continues, with those trusting the courts (about 48.9%) slightly exceeding those who do not trust them (45.1%). Trust in the media has also increased, and for the first time in our survey, we observe almost identical indicators for trust (48%) and distrust (48.8%).

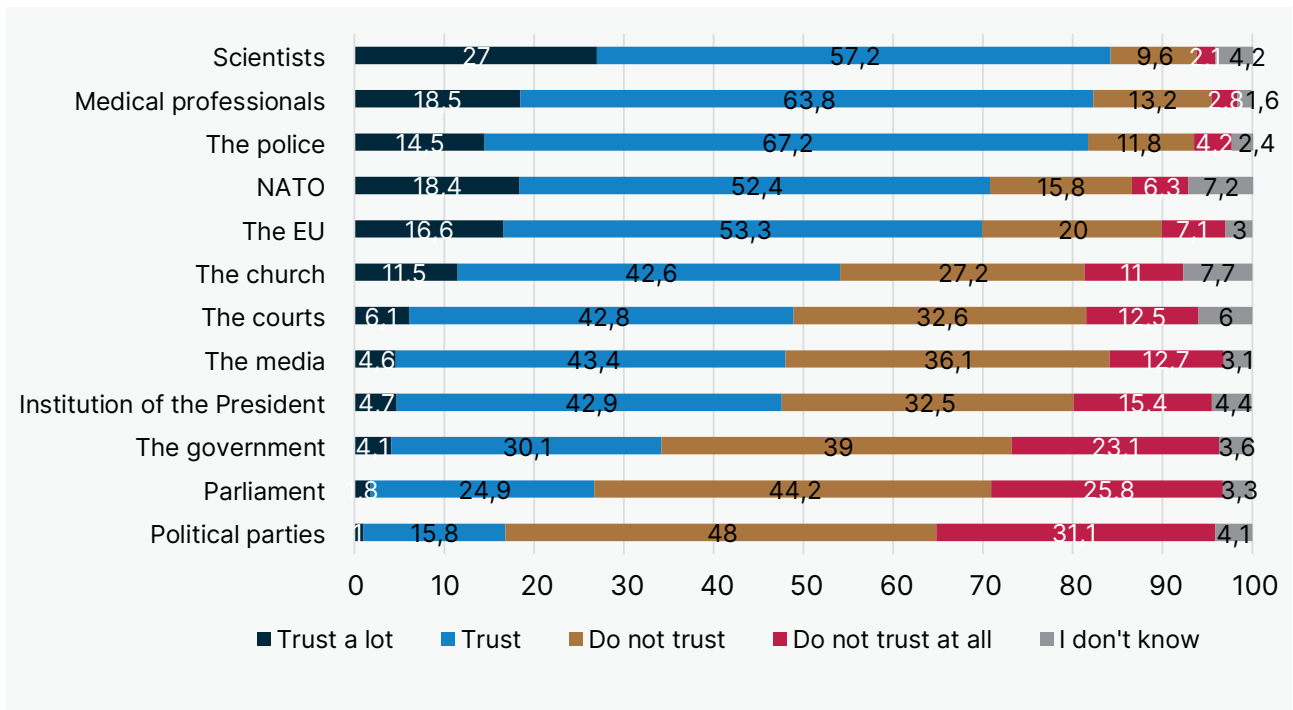


Fig. 1.6. Lithuanian residents' trust in institutions, in %

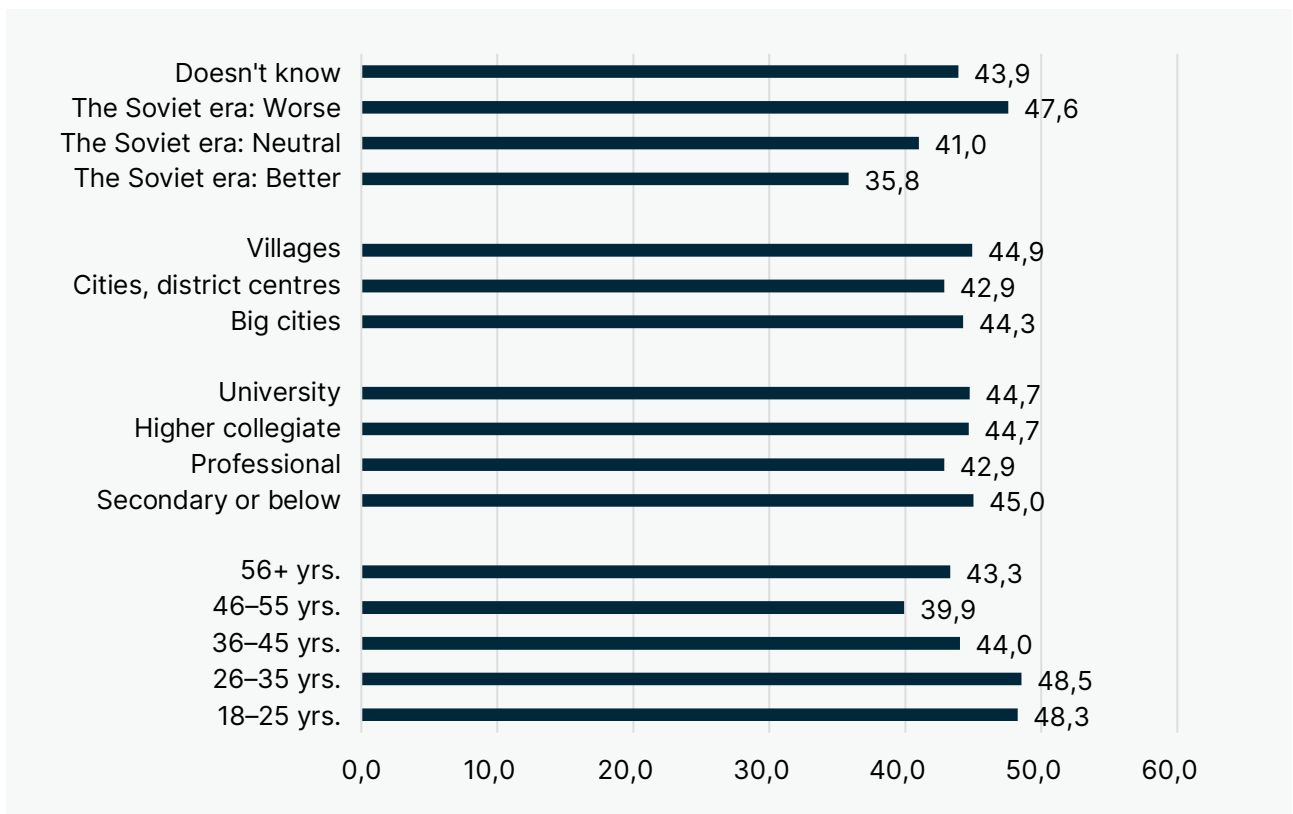


Fig. 1.7. Averages of the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy based on place of residence, education, age and perception of the Soviet era

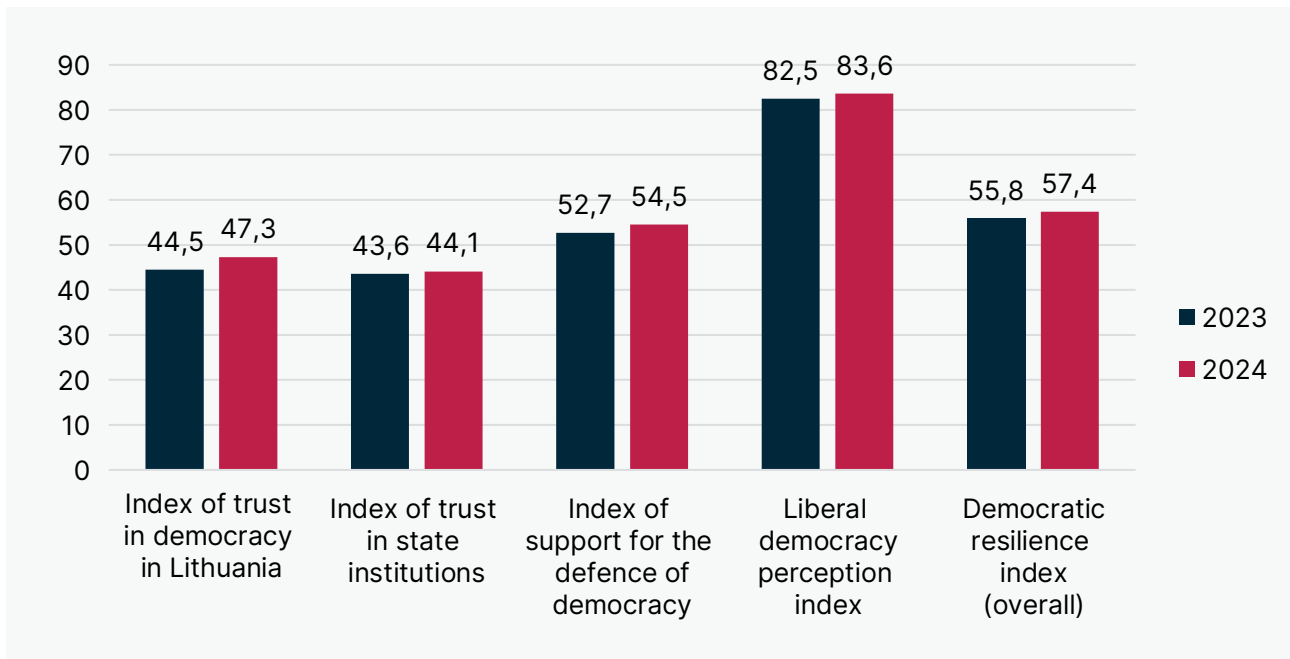


Fig. 1.8. The Democratic Sustainability Index and its components: Comparison between 2023 and 2024

As in previous surveys, we created a State Institutions Trust Index based on seven indicators, including domestic political institutions (Seimas, Government, political parties, and the President’s Office), law enforcement institutions (police and courts), and the media. The index values range from 0 (very low trust in all institutions) to 100 (very high trust in all institutions).

The average value of this index is 44.1, which indicates below-average (theoretically) trust and a slight increase compared to 2022 (when the index was 43.6). Fig. 1.7 shows the differences in the averages of this index based on the social characteristics of the respondents. As in previous surveys, factors such as place of residence, education, and age do not significantly differentiate trust levels. This time, however, age is related to trust: the two youngest age groups have higher averages (around 48–49). These are the social groups that trust political institutions the most, based on all criteria. Nevertheless, the impact of Soviet-era perceptions stands out: those who view the Soviet era more negatively tend to trust state institutions more (index average 47.6) than those with a more positive or neutral view (35.8 and 41, respectively).

The four indexes we discussed measure different dimensions of democracy sustainability at the so-

ciological level: the perception of liberal democratic elements, support for active democracy defence, satisfaction with democracy’s functioning, and trust in state institutions. The average values of these indexes, calculated through the survey, are presented in Fig. 1.8, comparing them with the respective 2023 figures.¹ On one hand, the main trends remain similar: the democracy perception index significantly outpaces the other indexes in both surveys, and only the support for defending democracy is slightly above the theoretical average. Trust in institutions and satisfaction with democracy maintain values below the average.

On the other hand, all four indexes show consistent positive changes. The final Democracy Sustainability Index for this year, derived from these four components, is higher (57.4) than in 2023 (55.8), indicating a shift toward greater support for democracy in Lithuanian society. It is interesting whether this effect will persist in the coming year, especially with the distance from the elections and the political engagement they triggered. Additionally, despite the overall improvement in sustainability, certain individual indicators, not included in the indexes, slightly raise concerns, such as the decline in trust in NATO.

¹ Since the 2023 index was updated with new indicators and its methodology slightly differs from that of 2022, we provide a comparison for only two years. For more details, refer to the Democracy Sustainability Barometer 2023 available at <https://www.eesc.lt/publikacija/demokratijos-tvarumo-barometras-2023/>.

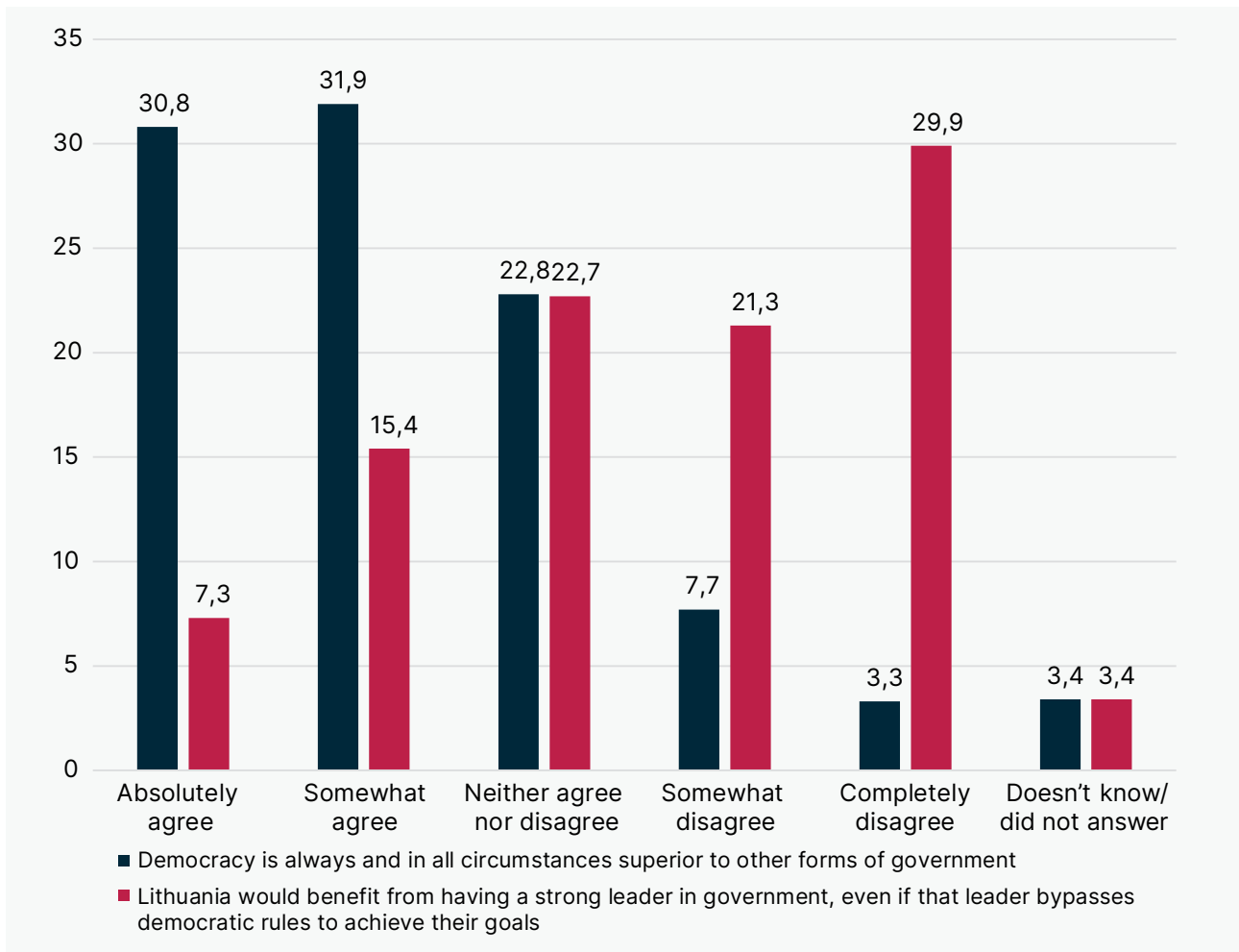


Fig. 1.9. Lithuanian residents' support for a strong leader and democracy as a form of government, in %

As in previous surveys, respondents were asked to assess two statements about democracy on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree): first, that democracy is always and under all circumstances superior to other forms of governance, and second, that Lithuania would benefit from having a strong leader in power, even if he or she bypass-

es democratic rules to achieve goals. 62.7% agree with the statement that democracy is superior (11% disagree), while 51.2% disagree with the statement about a strong leader (22.7% agree). The average of these two indicators, showing support for democracy, is 57%, perfectly matching the Democracy Sustainability Index, validating the presented index.

Part II.

The Index of Appeal of Authoritarian Regimes

2.1 Perception of threat from Russia

Regarding how people perceive the threat from Russia and the response to it, we continued measuring this with the indicators that were successful in previous surveys. As in 2022 and 2023, respondents were asked to what extent they agree with these statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree): Russia poses a threat to the Baltic states; more NATO troops should be deployed in the Baltic states; Lithuania should help Ukraine in every possible way in its fight against Russia; and Lithuania's rhetoric with respect to Russia is too aggressive. Agreeing with the first three statements and disagreeing with the fourth indicates an adequate understanding of threat from Russia and the fight against it.

The distribution of respondents' answers to these statements is shown in Fig. 2.1. The frequencies are similar to last year's figures. Compared to 2023, agreement with the Russian threat has risen to 76.1% (+3.8 percentage points), but disagreement with the statement that Lithuania's rhetoric is too harsh has dropped to 30.4%. However, these are not statistically significant differences. The absolute majority still agrees that more NATO troops should be deployed in the Baltic states (65.6%) and that Lithuania should support Ukraine by all means (56%). As before, the only question where opinions are more divided (as in the 2022 and 2023 surveys) concerns Lithuania's rhetoric toward Russia. 30.4% disagree with the corresponding statement, while 40.1% agree. This represents a slight shift compared to 2023 when there was a clearer balance between these two positions (34.3% disagreed, and 35.3% agreed).

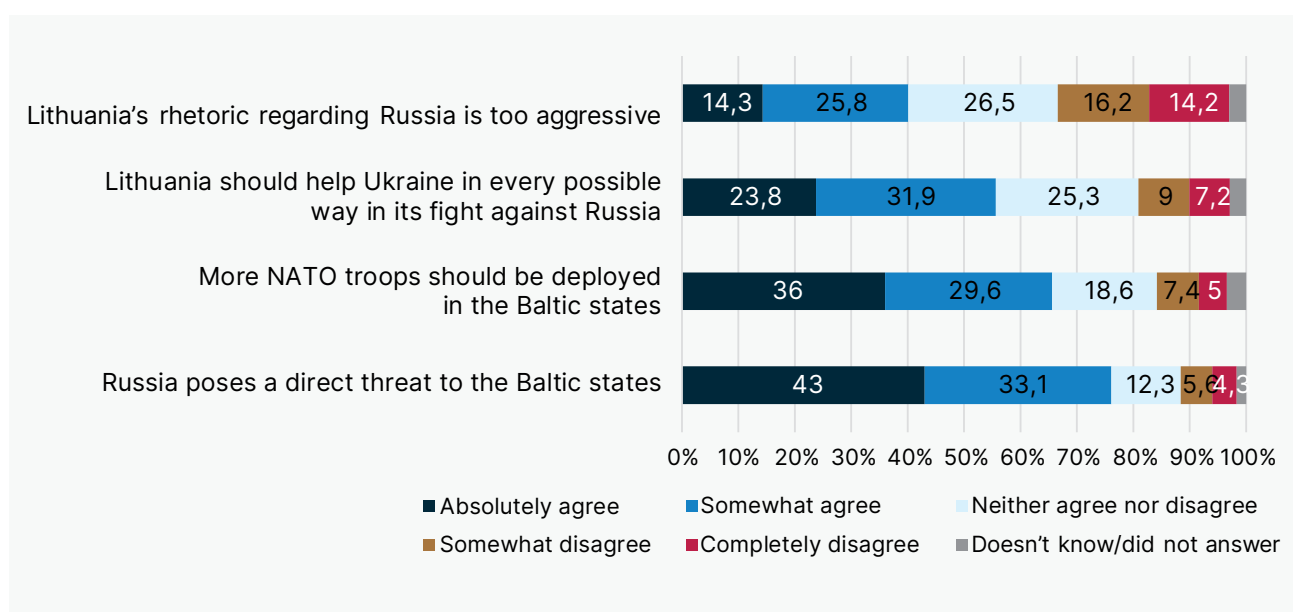


Fig. 2.1. Perception of threat from Russia among Lithuanian residents, in %

Based on these four indicators, we have calculated the Index of the Perception of Threat from Russia, where 0 means not seeing any threat from Russia and not supporting the fight against it, and 100 means fully understanding the threat from Russia. The index value is 65.5. On one hand, this reflects a relatively good perception of the threat posed by Russia. On the other hand, compared to 2022 (67.2) and 2023 (66.5), we observe a decrease in the index. Given that the index is formed from four indicators, it is sensitive to small changes in its constituent parts, with the decrease primarily attributed to the previously discussed question about Lithuania's rhetoric. Nonetheless, we can conclude that the perception of Russia's threat has not improved since 2022.

In addition, we calculated the averages of this index by main social categories (Fig. 2.2). Social characteristics such as education, place of residence, and age have little impact – the only statistically significant difference is observed when comparing respondents aged 26–35 (average 70) with those aged 46–55 (average 61.3). The influence of the Soviet era remains much stronger, as in 2023, showing a strong connection between the assessment of Russia's threats and the post-Soviet transformation. Among those with a negative view of the Soviet era, the average index is

over 26 points higher (73.8) compared to those with a positive view (48.2). The neutral (58.1) and uninformed (57.7) groups are significantly further behind this group.

2.2 Resilience to Eastern economic narratives

Alongside the evaluation of Russia's threats, in the Democracy Sustainability Barometer survey, we also analyse how resistant Lithuanian people are to the propaganda narratives of Russia and China. These narratives are divided into two groups – economic and political. They include propagandistic statements aimed at promoting cooperation with these regimes, downplaying the perceived threats they pose, and deflecting responsibility for their aggressive foreign policies by blaming the West. We start with the economic narratives.

As in previous Democracy Sustainability Barometer surveys, respondents were presented with six typical economic propaganda narratives promoted by Russia and China. These can be grouped into three categories: first, statements assessing the willing-

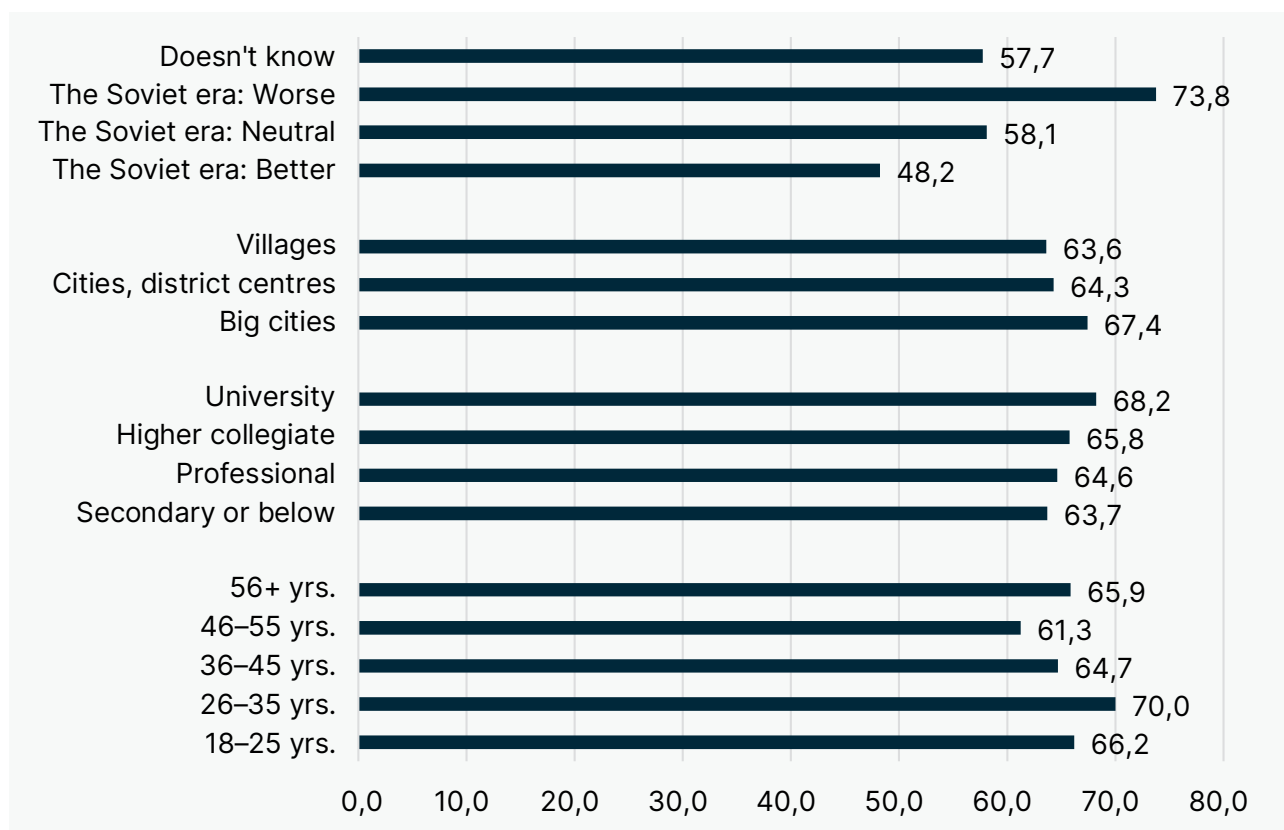


Fig. 2.2. Averages of the Index of the Perception of Threat from Russia based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

ness to trade democratic rights and freedoms for cooperation and economic benefit; second, statements measuring the extent to which respondents believe that conflicts with Russia and China harm Lithuania’s economy; and third, statements regarding the view that sanctions on Russia and trade restrictions harm the West. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with these propaganda narratives (which were called “statements about international politics” in the survey) on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “strongly agree” and 5 means “strongly disagree”. Thus, disagreement with these statements was treated as resilience to them.

The overall distribution of responses repeats the findings from previous surveys: resistance to economic narratives is not particularly strong. It can be assumed that many of these statements are considered through the lens of potential benefits to Lithuania, without fully appreciating the realities of international politics and the fact that deeper cooperation with authoritarian regimes comes with a price (as demonstrated by Hungary’s example). The absolute majority of the population still tends to agree that conflicts with China (56.4% strongly agree or rather agree) and Russia (52.2%) are hurting the Lithuanian economy.

Responses to other questions, as in previous surveys, do not show a dominance of opinion either in favour of resistance or susceptibility. The number of respondents agreeing that Russian resources are necessary for the economies of EU countries (35.9%) is similar to those who disagree (37.5%). There is also no statistically significant difference between the number of people who tend to disagree with cooperation with China on the grounds of human rights violations (35%) and those who tend to agree (35.7%). A slightly higher percentage agrees that sanctions against Russia harm the West (39%) than disagree (32.2%). However, when asked whether social and economic human rights are more important than freedom of speech and fair elections, more respondents disagree (34.8%) than agree (23%).

From the six questions on the economic narratives of Russia and China in Fig. 2.3, we have constructed the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism, with values theoretically ranging from 0 (total appeal of and agreement with the narratives) to 100 (total resilience to and disagreement with the narratives). This year’s index value is 47.2 – lower than in 2023 (48.5) but identical to the 2022 value (47). Statistically, there has been no change in this index over the past three years. Lithuanian citizens remain somewhat in the middle between appeal and resistance to the economic narratives of China and Russia.

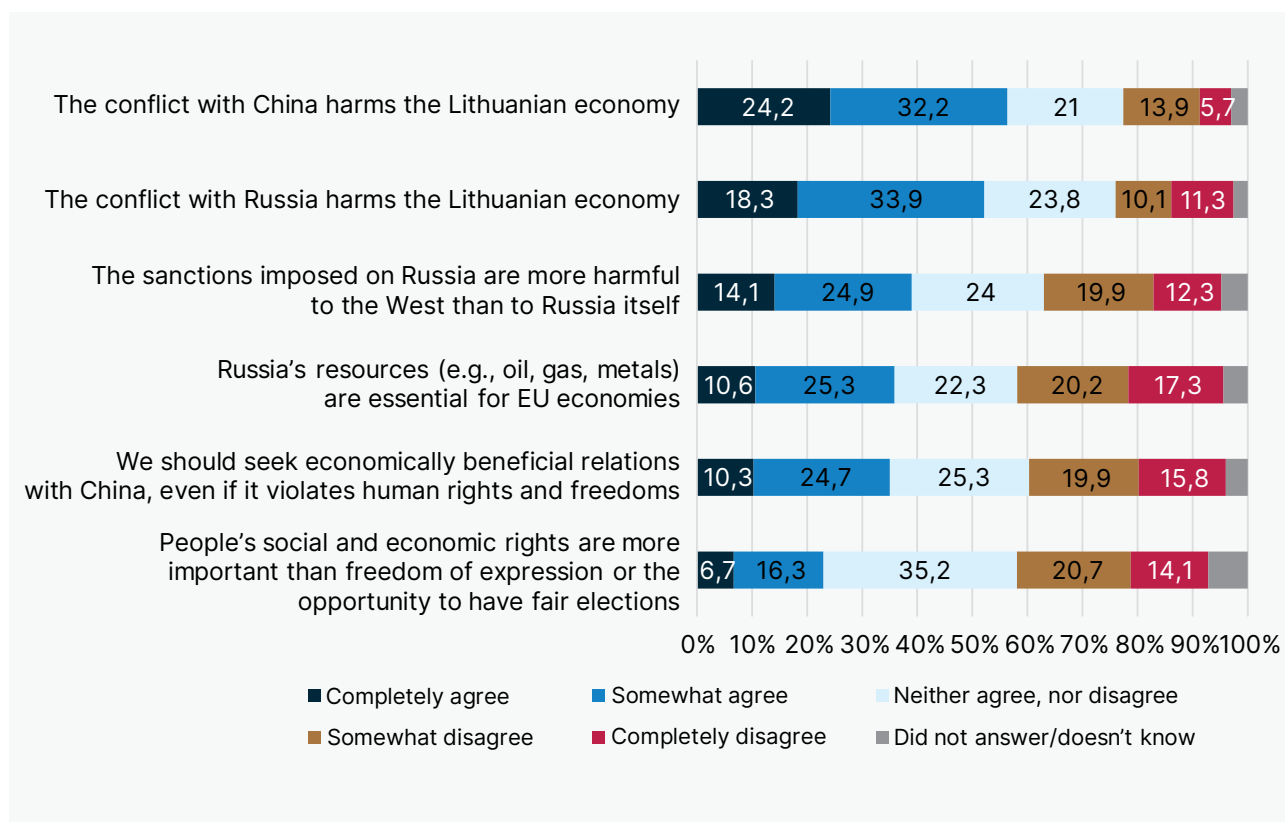


Fig. 2.3. Lithuanian residents’ agreement to Russian and Chinese economic narratives, in %

Fig. 2.4 shows the averages of the index by social category. Age has little effect on differentiation, but there is a significant difference based on place of residence: city dwellers are more resistant (average index 52.1) than residents of towns and rural areas (43–44). Those with higher education also have higher average values compared to other groups. The biggest differences again appear in the Soviet-era dimension. Those who view the Soviet era negatively are more inclined toward resistance (average index 56.7), while those who view it neutrally (40.3) or positively (27.3) clearly fall into the zone of appeal to authoritarianism – these differences are very similar to what was observed in the 2023 survey.

2.3 Resilience to Eastern political narratives

As in previous surveys, we assessed resistance to political Eastern narratives using seven statements, which we can further categorize. First, we established how many respondents agree with the lies spread by Russia about the war in Ukraine, namely, that it was in-

cited by NATO and the US, that reports of Russia’s war crimes (the Bucha massacre) may be fake, and that Lithuania advances the interests of the US by stoking the war in Ukraine. Second, we asked about broader narratives regarding Russia’s role in international politics – whether respondents agree that Russia defends traditional values in the world and that NATO’s expansion forces Russia to defend its interests by any means. Finally, we tested narratives concerning Lithuania’s role: whether respondents believe that Lithuania is to blame for the conflict with China and whether Lithuania should maintain a neutral status in conflicts between major powers. The respondents were asked to use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means complete agreement and 5 means complete disagreement with a given statement. Disagreement with the statements is treated as resilience to the narratives. The distribution of respondents’ answers is shown in Fig. 2.5.

As in the previous surveys, resistance to political propaganda narratives is higher than to economic ones. The only statement that receives significantly more agreement is the deterioration of relations with China, with about 44.3% of the population agreeing that Lithuania is to blame. However, this figure has decreased compared to the 2022 survey, when 56.3% agreed.

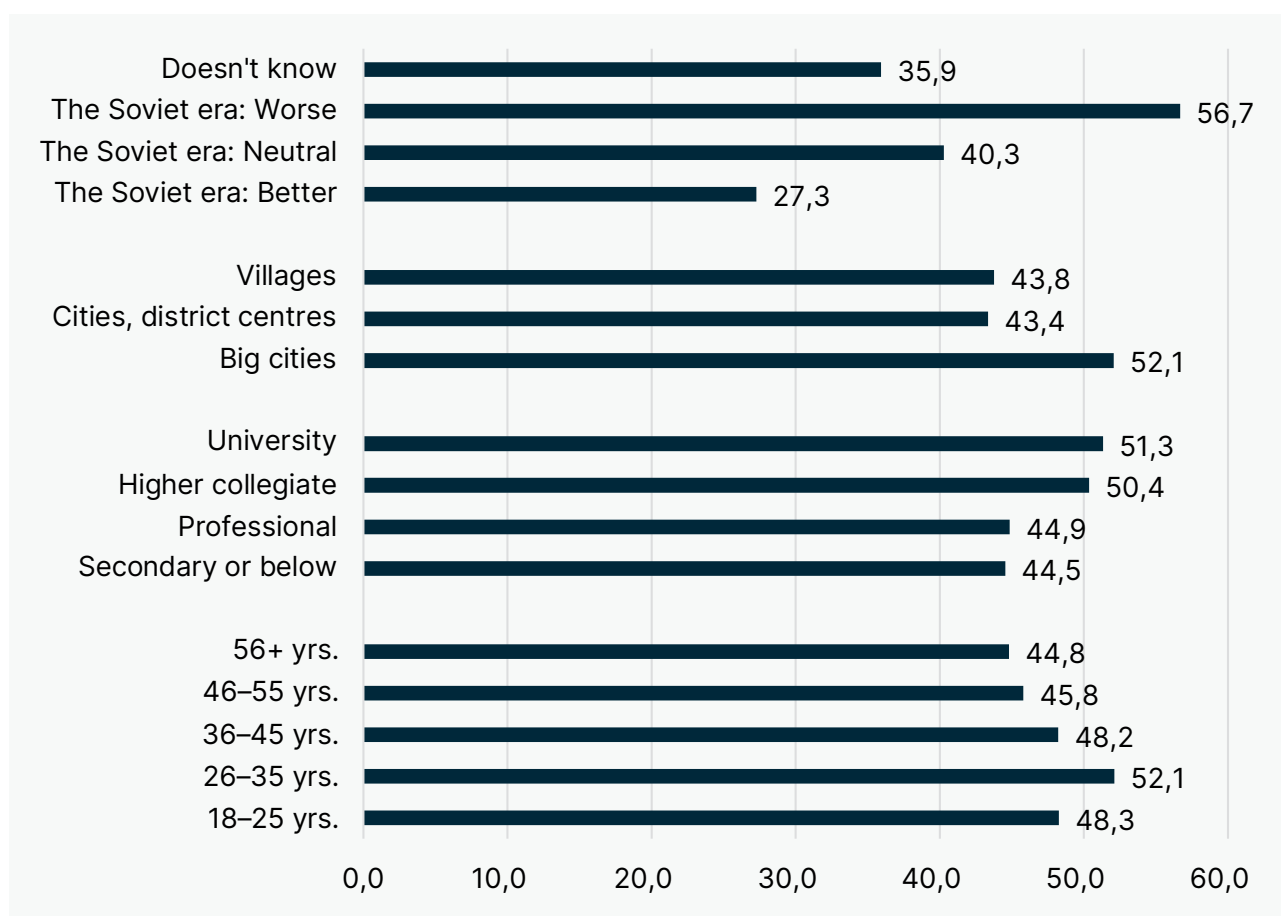


Fig. 2.4. Averages of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

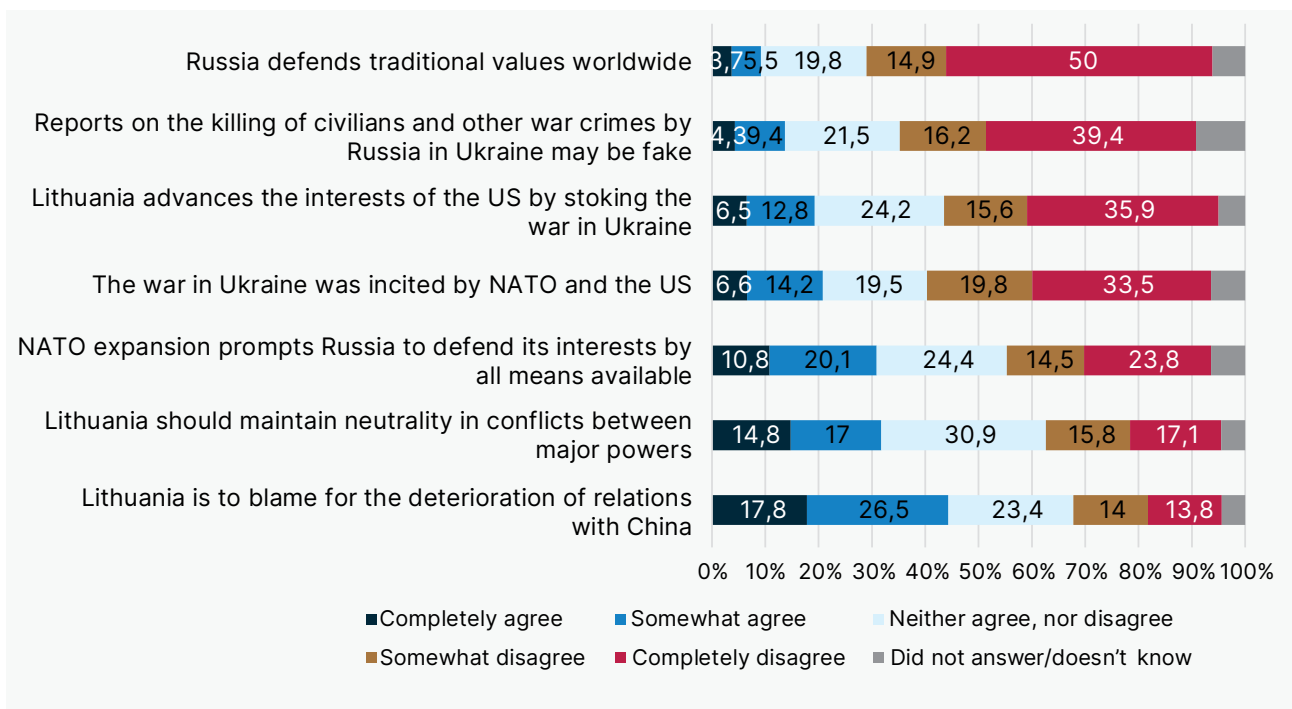


Fig. 2.5. Lithuanian residents' agreement to Russian and Chinese political narratives, in %

The most disagreement is with the statement that Russia defends traditional values in the world (64.9%) and that reports of Russian crimes might be fabricated (55.6%). More than half of the respondents also do not think that Lithuania is pursuing US interests and instigating the war in Ukraine (51.5%) and that

the war was instigated by NATO and the US (53.3%). Regarding the statement about NATO's expansion forcing Russia to defend its interests, there is no majority disagreement (38.8%), and the gap between supporters (30.9%) has decreased, with agreement rising by 7.4 percentage points compared to 2023.

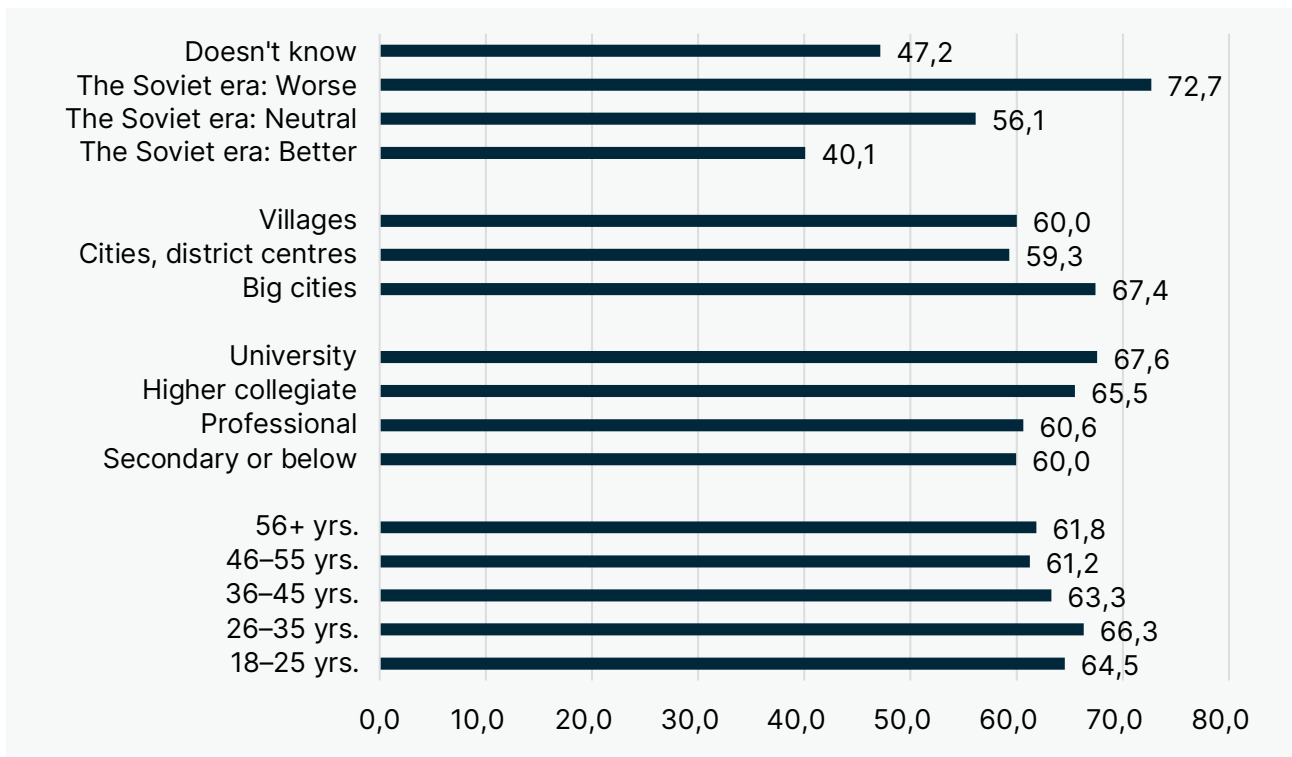


Fig. 2.6. Averages of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

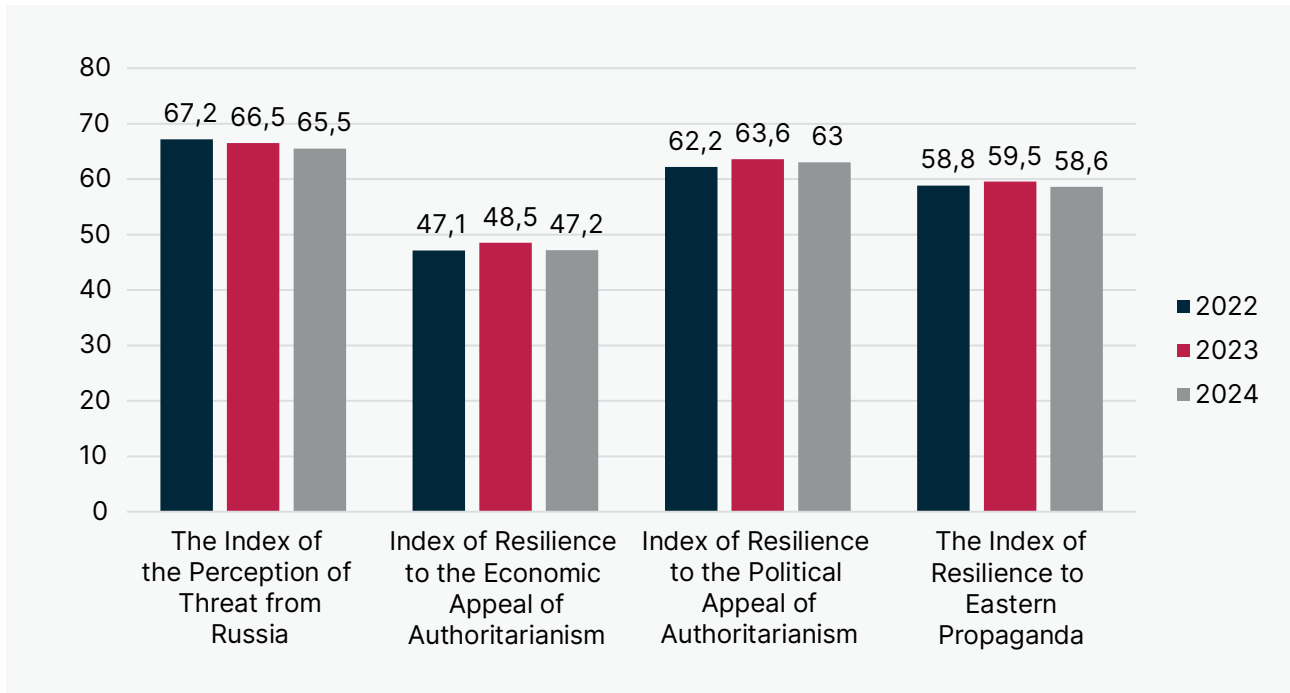


Fig. 2.7. The Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index and its components in 2022 and 2024

There are no significant differences in responses to other political narrative questions from the previous year, so we cannot definitively say whether this increase is part of a broader shift, although similar trends (such as decreased trust in NATO) are emerging in other parts of the survey. Finally, responses to whether Lithuania should maintain a neutral status in conflicts remain evenly split, with 31.8% agreeing and 32.9% disagreeing.

From the seven statements, we derived the Political Authoritarianism Appeal Index, which ranges from 0 (complete appeal and agreement with the narratives) to 100 (complete resistance and disagreement with the narratives). The average index value in this year's survey is 63, indicating a higher-than-average level of resistance, statistically unchanged from previous years: 62.2 in 2022 and 63.6 in 2023.

Fig. 2.6 presents the average values of the Political Authoritarianism Appeal Index by social characteristics. Age (as in 2023) has no significant effect, but we observe statistically significant differences based on place of residence and education level: city dwellers (average index 67.4) and those with a university education (66–68) are more resistant to political authoritarianism than other groups. However, the influence of the Soviet era is significantly greater. Those who view the Soviet era negatively are the most resistant to political Eastern narratives, with an

average index of 72.7. The more positive the view of the Soviet era, the more the index drops: those with a neutral view of the Soviet era have average resistance (56.1), while those with a positive view are in the political authoritarian appeal zone (40.1).

The three indices discussed in this section measure different dimensions of resistance to Eastern propaganda in relation to democracy: perceptions of Russian threats, resistance to economic and political narratives of Russian and Chinese authoritarianism. The average values of these indices, established through the survey, are presented in Fig. 2.7 and compared with the results from 2022 and 2023. It can be concluded that resistance to Eastern propaganda has largely remained the same over the past three years. The overall Resistance to Eastern Propaganda Index (58.6), derived as the average of the three discussed indices, remains identical to the value recorded in the first survey in 2022 (58.8). Thus, society remains more resistant to propaganda narratives than the average, but there are a few exceptions. Firstly, economic propaganda still faces relatively low resistance. Secondly, some indicators are concerning: reduced trust in NATO and decreasing support for Lithuania's rhetoric towards Russia. Considering that the international security situation remains tense, the fact that resistance to propaganda among Lithuania's population is not improving should serve as a clear signal to Lithuanian state institutions.

III. Other questions

3.1. Support for restrictions on democracy

In the survey we additionally asked the respondents in which situations they would support restrictions on human rights and freedoms in a democracy, such as freedom of speech, freedom of thought, free elections, and freedom of assembly. These indicators are not included in the Democracy Sustainability Index, as they refer to exceptional situations where certain rights (e.g., the right to assemble) may need to be temporarily restricted due to unavoidable circumstances, such as pandemics, war, or emergencies. Therefore, positive answers do not necessarily indicate anti-democratic views – it is difficult to interpret these answers unambiguously.

Fig. 3.1 shows the response rates by situation. As in previous surveys, democratic rights restrictions would mostly be justified (answers “completely justified” and “somewhat justified”) in the case of war (58.3%) and national security (49.4%). Support for restrictions due to war has slightly increased compared to 2023 (by 4.5 percentage points), though it is difficult to say if this is accidental or reflects grow-

ing concerns about the geopolitical situation. A large proportion of respondents (46.1%) would justify restrictions on public health grounds. Finally, as in previous surveys, only a minority supports restrictions for the sake of economic welfare (23.5%) or social equality (20.3%). A decrease in support for these situations was recorded in 2022, and this year’s survey confirms this trend.

3.2. Matters of value

The survey also explored the values of Lithuanian citizens regarding social and economic issues, relevant to discussions about democracy. Fig. 3.2 presents the last four questions on economic and immigration topics, while the previous ones cover other social and value aspects.

Regarding the economy, for the first time in this survey, we recorded an absolute majority of respondents who fully agree or somewhat agree (53.2%) that the state should increase taxes for higher-income individuals to expand social services. This may be

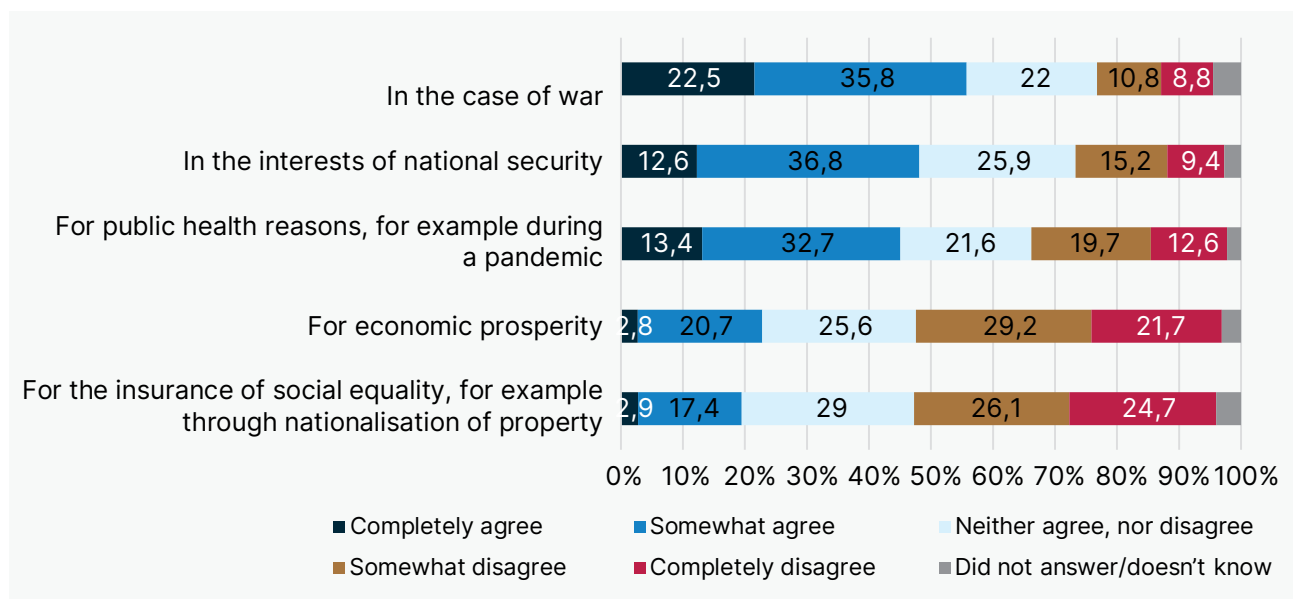


Fig. 3.1. The extent to which Lithuanians would justify restrictions on democracy, in %

related to recent discussions by both the presidency and political parties from the centre-left and right about the necessity of increasing state finances and strengthening welfare state institutions. On the other hand, when asked whether taxes for businesses should be reduced, even if that would decrease state budget revenue, there is no clear consensus: more people oppose it (37%) than support it (29.5%).

There is no clear societal position on the issue of immigration, though the distribution tends to lean negatively. First, more respondents agree that immigrants harm Lithuanian culture and society (37.2%) than disagree (29.9%). Second, fewer respondents agree that immigration is a positive factor for Lithuania's economy (26.7%) than disagree (36.3%). It is worth noting the large number of undecided respondents: 29% to 33% of participants selected "neither agree nor disagree".

Regarding questions about the liberalism (conservatism) of Lithuanian citizens, there have been no significant changes since 2022. As before, a large majority of respondents (68.9%) support women's right to abortion, and more than half (54.3%) disagree with restricting protest actions for the sake of order. Support for the death penalty is not large, but the difference between liberal and conservative views is smaller here: 32.1% agree, while 43.4% disagree. Finally, when it comes to same-sex marriage and the legalisation of marijuana, the majority of respondents tend to be more conservative: 49.5% disagree that same-sex couples should have the same rights to marry as heterosexual couples, while 24.5% strongly agree and somewhat agree. Support for the legalisation of marijuana is even lower (12.7%). These figures have remained virtually unchanged over the past two years.

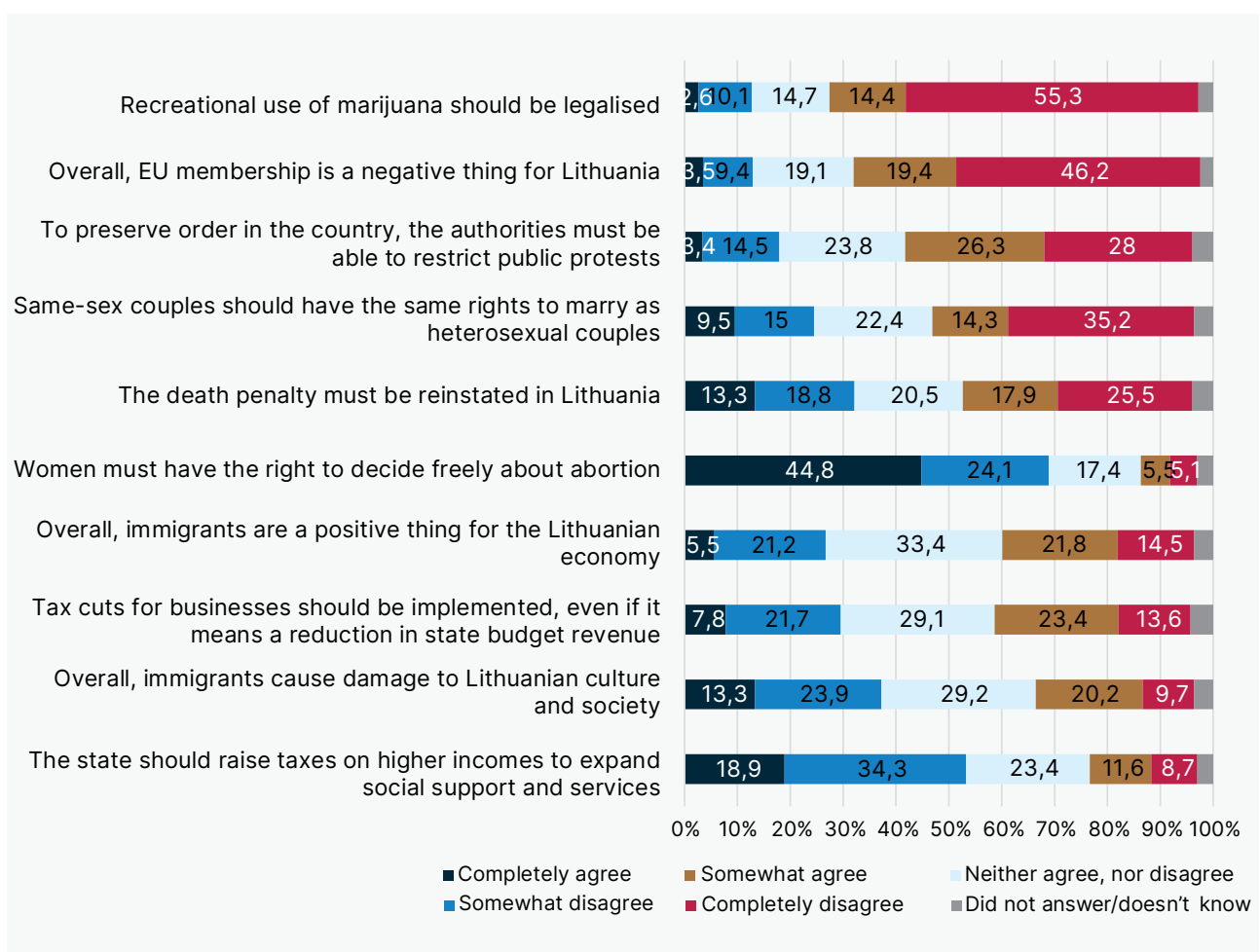


Fig. 3.2. Socio-economic values of the Lithuanian population, in %

Summary

This year's Democracy Sustainability Barometer reveals some positive trends. While trust in state institutions and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy remain less than satisfactory, the survey records a modest but significant increase in satisfaction with democracy. The previously observed strengths of democracy's sustainability have also solidified: a good understanding of the elements of liberal democracy (support for democracy) and support for defending democratic institutions through protests. These factors contribute to an increase in the Democracy Sustainability Index from 55.8 to 57.4 over the year. However, it is necessary to add a clarification: since the satisfaction with democracy index is influenced by aspects related to democratic procedures (elections, freedom of speech, party competition), this positive change may be associated with a natural increase in citizens' engagement in political processes during the election period. Only next year's survey will provide a clearer assessment of whether this change is sustainable.

The second part of the Democracy Sustainability Index, the Resistance to Eastern Propaganda Index, is less encouraging. On the one hand, we can reiterate the conclusion from the first 2022 survey that Lithuanian citizens adequately perceive the Russian threat, understand the necessary responses, and are more resistant than susceptible to Eastern political narratives. A clear majority continues to disagree with claims that NATO is provoking the war in Ukraine, that Russia defends traditional values globally, and similar narratives. On the other hand, the weakness remains in resistance to economic narratives emphasizing losses due to deteriorated relations with Russia and China. This is particularly evident in responses to statements suggesting these strained relations harm Lithuania's economy, with roughly half or more respondents agreeing.

Additional concerns in this survey arise from the decline in certain specific indicators, particularly trust in NATO. This may reflect Lithuanian citizens' anxiety about the alliance's future amid the U.S. presidential elections and the course of the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that in the two years since Russia's war against Ukraine began, Lithuanian citizens' resistance to propaganda from authoritarian states has not increased. This should serve as a signal to state institutions – while there is no immediate danger, the situation warrants attention.

Further analysis of indices based on citizens' socio-demographic characteristics confirmed last year's finding that sociological sustainability of democracy, particularly resistance to Eastern propaganda, correlates most strongly with attitudes toward the Soviet era. The influence of this factor on index differences remains greater than that of education, age, or place of residence. Most notably, the group of Lithuanian citizens who unequivocally state that life was not better during the Soviet era (about 54%) stands out with high democracy sustainability and resistance to propaganda. Interestingly, despite the often-emphasized political divide between urban and rural areas in public discourse, this factor has the least impact on people's democratic attitudes and resistance to Eastern propaganda. On the other hand, the overriding influence of the Soviet-era divide somewhat explains the stagnation of the Resistance to Eastern Propaganda Index – it is unlikely that these attitudes will change quickly.

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