



Democracy Sustainability Barometer **2026**

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Introduction

For the fourth 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 the Democracy Sustainability Barometer based on data from a representative survey. The first one, 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 second one, 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 2025 proved to be a challenging period for democracy and international security. The actions of Donald Trump's administration have raised questions about the United States' commitment to democracy and to the Western-led international security order. Democracy continues to erode worldwide. According to the latest V-Dem report (2025),¹ for the first time in two decades, the number of autocracies (91) exceeds that of democracies (88) globally. Autocratic governance has taken root within the European Union, and not only in Hungary; following the 2024 elections, Slovakia has also begun to move in a sim-

¹ V-Dem. 2025. Democracy Report 2025. *25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?* University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute. <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>.

ilar direction. Although political freedoms and civil rights remain strong in Lithuania, the country has experienced significant political instability in recent years. In 2025, Lithuania saw a change of prime ministers and governments, and for the first time since 2008, the government failed to complete its full parliamentary term. There were concerns regarding the foreign policy rhetoric of some of the ruling parties. In combination, these factors underscore the continued importance of studying Lithuanian society's resilience to Eastern propaganda and its support for democratic values. Moreover, as the survey shows, there are troubling signs, including persistent – and in some cases, growing – distrust of political institutions, as well as a slight decline in the perceived threat posed by Russia.

As in previous years, the report is divided into three parts. The first part analyses the democratic attitudes of the Lithuanian population and the components of the Democracy Sustainability Index. The second part focuses on foreign policy attitudes and resilience to Eastern propaganda; this part presents the Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda. This year, we have added new questions to the core index, including, for example, how residents perceive the Belarus threat. The report also addresses other key security issues: attitudes toward the deployment of German brigades in Lithuania, support for increased defence spending, and perceptions of the reliability of the United States and NATO as security partners, among other issues.

We compare the intermediate indices across several independent variables, including age, education, place of residence, and attitudes toward the Soviet era. Responses to the question relating to the latter variable are distributed as follows: 51.8% disagree that life was better during the Soviet era, 25.2% responded with “neither agree nor disagree,” 11.7% agree, and approximately 11.2% are unsure. While the divide in attitudes toward the Soviet era may appear less relevant in today's Lithuania, previous Democracy Sustainability Barometer surveys indicate that it remains closely linked to significant differences in attitudes toward democracy and resilience to propaganda. Accordingly, this variable serves as an effective criterion for comparing the influence of other factors, such as education.

The study uses data from a representative survey of the Lithuanian population conducted by Spinter Research on behalf of the Geopolitics and Security Studies Center by computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) between 20 November and 9 December 2025. 1015 respondents aged between 18 and 75 were interviewed. The statistical overlap between the components of the indices presented in the study was tested by means of factor analysis: all the intermediate index indicators fall into one dimension. The t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to assess the differences between mean index scores across sociodemographic groups.

Part I.

The Democracy Sustainability Index

1.1 Perception of Democracy

As in previous years, the study begins by examining how residents perceive various elements of democracy and the extent to which they consider them essential. The Liberal Democracy Perception Index captures the full spectrum of these attitudes. Survey respondents were asked the following question: “We may desire many things, but not all of them are essential elements of democracy. Please indicate for each of the listed items how essential you believe it is as an element of democracy.” Responses were recorded on a scale from 1 (not at all essential for democracy) to 10 (essential for democracy), evaluating various aspects of liberal democracy, including political and civil rights, electoral and procedural mechanisms, government representation and accountability, social justice, and direct democracy. Table 1.1 lists mean responses and percentages of respondents who indicated a given element as an essential characteristic of democracy (giving it a 10). The table also indicates the change in mean responses compared with the 2024 survey.

Lithuanians regard political and civil rights as the most essential elements of democracy, highlighting freedom of belief and speech, free elections, and gender equality as particularly important. The mean scores for these questions are notably high, ranging from 8.6 to 8.7, with approximately 51–55% of respondents identifying these elements as essential elements of democracy. Impartial courts and competition between two or more political parties are also highly valued as fundamental elements of democracy, each receiving a mean score of 8.5. As in last year’s survey, the rule of law and the rights of ethnic minorities are regarded as slightly less important. Although their overall mean scores remain rel-

atively high (8.1 and 8.0, respectively), the trend regarding the principle of the rule of law is somewhat concerning. Since the first survey, the proportion of respondents who consider this an essential element of democracy has steadily declined: in 2022, 48.6% of respondents rated it as essential, with a mean score of 8.4; in 2025, that figure has fallen to 39.6%, with a mean of 8.1. On the other hand, as noted in last year’s study, competition between two or more political parties is increasingly viewed as an essential element of democracy. These two trends largely offset each other, resulting in minimal change to the overall index, as we will see.

Regarding perceptions of government accountability, survey respondents identify the justification of government decisions and citizen participation as the most important factors, with a mean score of 8.4 and 43–46% of respondents rating them as essential elements. A similar level of importance is attributed to direct democracy, specifically to the statement that major issues should be decided by referendums (mean score of 8.4; 47% rating it as an “essential element”).

As in previous studies, indicators of support for one aspect of social justice – state assistance in cases of unemployment or illness – align closely with assessments of liberal democratic institutions. The mean response is 8.2, with 43% of respondents identifying it as an essential element of democracy. The other two elements of social justice – wealth redistribution (mean of 7.2) and guaranteed equal pay (mean of 6.9) – remain the least regarded as essential for democracy. The mean for the latter indicator rose above 7 last year but has since declined, suggesting a random fluctuation.

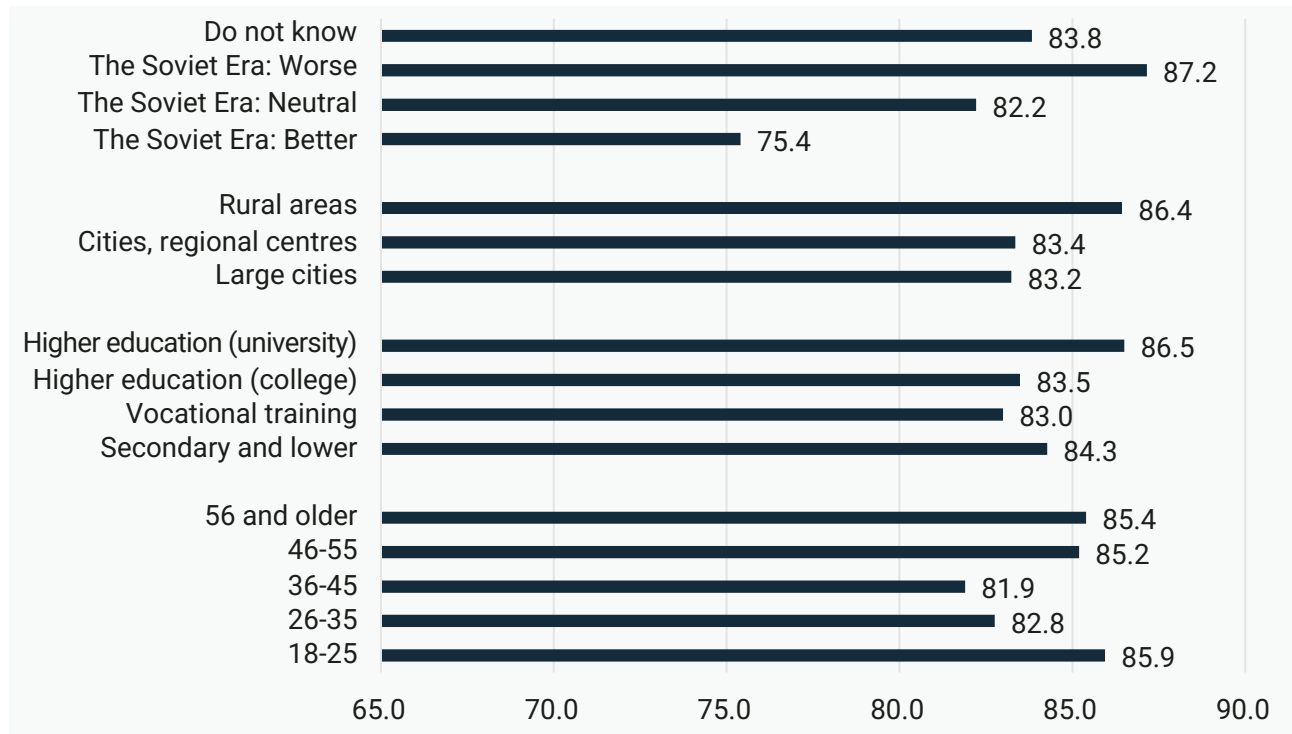
Element	Mean score	% of the respondents selecting an "essential element of democracy"	Average change compared with 2024
<i>Liberal democracy</i>			
People elect their representatives in free elections	8.7	54.6	0.0
Citizens have the right to freely and openly express opinions and beliefs, including criticism of the government	8.6	54.5	-0.1
Women have the same rights as men	8.6	51.1	-0.1
Courts act in an impartial manner and are free from political influence	8.5	46.7	0.0
Two or more political parties compete in an election	8.5	47.8	0.0
The rule of law prevails in the country	8.1	39.6	-0.2
The rights of ethnic minorities are guaranteed	8.0	37.9	-0.3
<i>Accountability of the democratic government</i>			
The government justifies its policies to the public	8.4	46.2	-0.1
Citizens can get involved in and influence government decision-making	8.4	42.9	0.0
When making decisions, the government takes the views of the population into account	8.2	43.3	-0.2
<i>Social justice</i>			
People receive state support in case of unemployment or illness	8.2	43.1	-0.2
The state taxes the rich and supports the disadvantaged	7.2	27.5	0.0
The state ensures equal pay	6.9	26.5	-0.2
<i>Direct democracy</i>			
The most important political issues are decided by referendum	8.4	46.8	-0.1

Table 1.1 Lithuanian residents' perception of democracy

Using responses to questions on the essentiality 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), we calculated a Liberal Democracy Perception Index for each respondent. The index ranges from 0, indicating that all elements of liberal democracy and government accountability are seen as completely unneces-

sary, to 100, indicating that all are considered essential. Based on individual responses (excluding cases where respondents were unable to assess a particular element of democracy), the mean index score this year is 84.3, compared with 83.6 last year. Thus, the relatively high level of democratic awareness observed in previous studies remains consistent.

Fig. 1.1. Mean Liberal Democracy Perception Index Scores by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era



We analysed differences in the Liberal Democracy Perception Index across four social and demographic indicators (Fig. 1.1). We found no statistically significant differences based on place of residence, education, or age; all social groups perceive democracy in a broadly similar manner. Only attitudes toward the Soviet era exert a stronger influence. As in previous years, the minority who view it more positively have a significantly lower perception of democracy (mean index score of 75.4), while those who see the Soviet era as unequivocally negative report the highest perception of democracy (mean index score of 87.2).

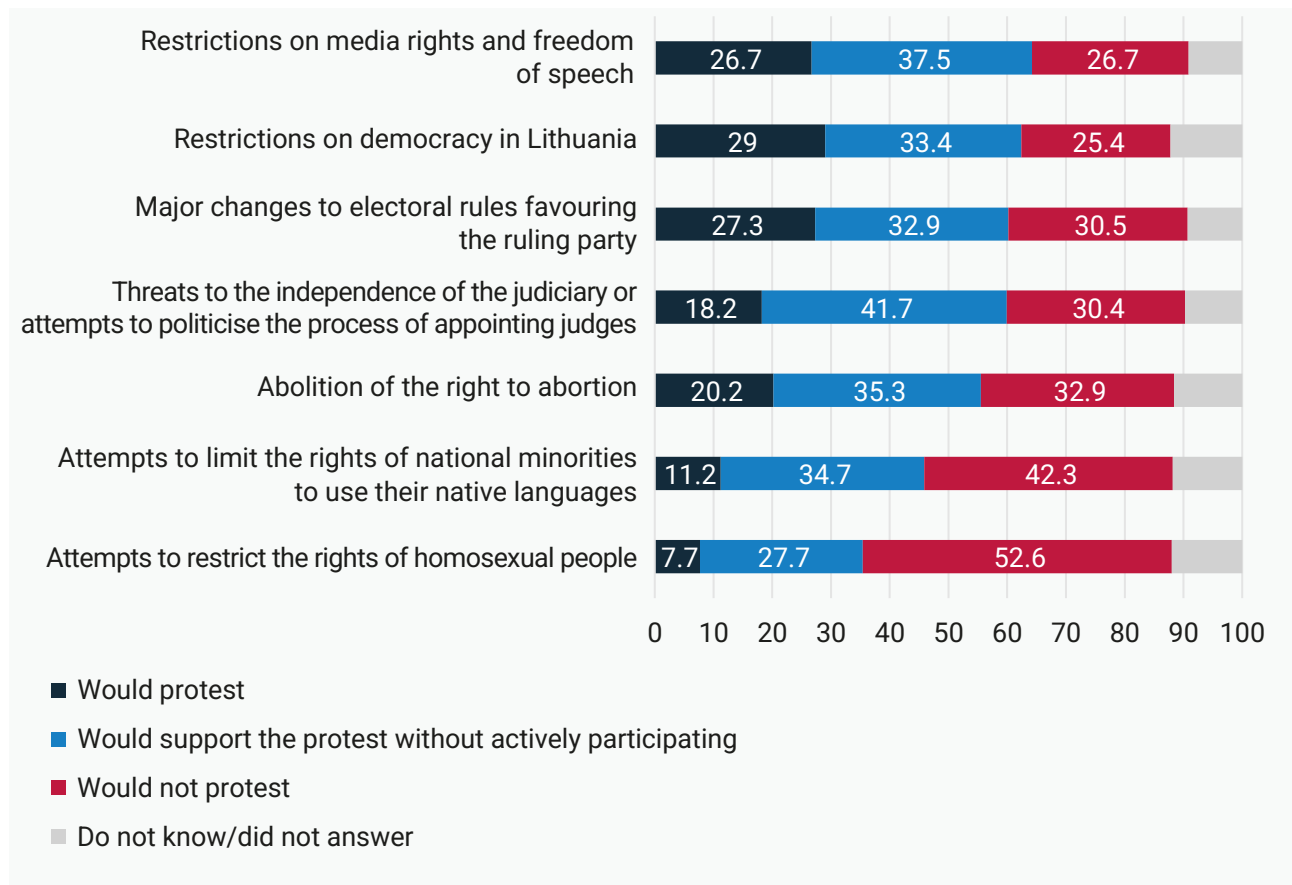
1.2 Support for the Active Defence of Democracy

For the fourth consecutive year, the survey has measured support for active defence of democracy by asking respondents the following 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 distinguish between those who would not participate in protests and those who would not

participate but still support them, the responses are presented separately; supporters of the protests constitute a fairly significant group.

Figure 1.2 shows the distributions of Lithuanian residents’ responses in percentages. As in previous years, responses to these questions reveal a relatively high level of indecision, with 9–12% of respondents selecting “I don’t know,” depending on the specific scenario. The distribution of the remaining responses mirrors the results of previous surveys: only a minority of Lithuanian residents indicate they would actively participate in protests. The largest share of respondents (29%) indicated that they would protest if politicians sought to restrict democracy in Lithuania. However, when including those who would support the protests without directly participating, the strongest backing for active defence of democracy is seen in response to attempts to restrict media rights and freedom of speech, totalling 64.2%. The widespread protests at the end of 2025 against the Seimas-initiated amendments to the Lithuanian National Radio and Television law demonstrate that the potential indicated in the surveys can translate into real-world action. Compared with the 2024 survey, the proportion of respondents expressing willingness to protest against restrictions on media rights increased by 5.5%, rising from 21.2% to 26.7%.

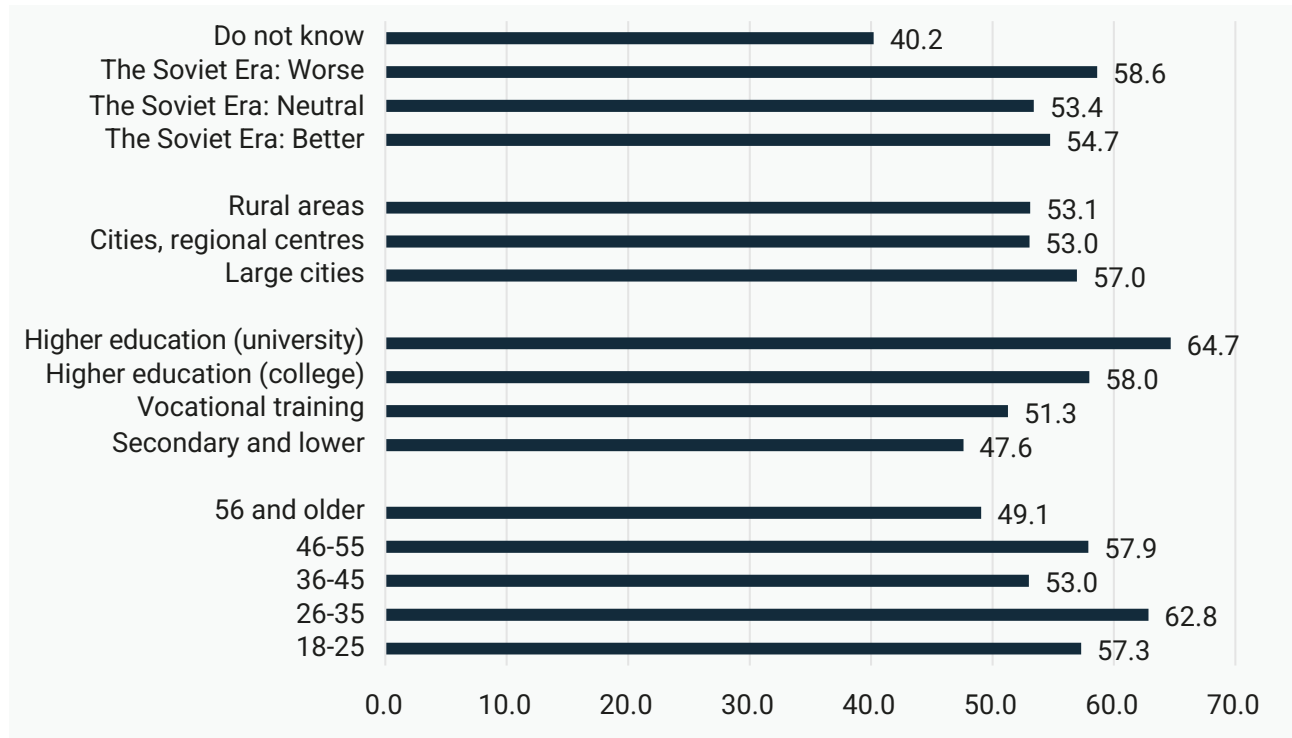
Fig. 1.2. Lithuanian Residents' Support for the Active Defence of Democracy (%)



As in previous surveys, the fewest respondents are willing to protest against restrictions on the rights of national minorities (11.2%) and LGBTQ+ individuals (approximately 7.7%). On the other hand, when including those who support such protests without actively participating, an absolute majority of Lithuanian residents would actively defend at least five elements of democracy: attempts to restrict media rights and freedom of speech (64.2%), restrictions on democracy in general (62.4%), threats to the independence of the judiciary (59.9%), major changes to electoral rules favouring the ruling party (60.2%), and the abolition of the right to abortion (55.5%). In the previous survey, compared with 2023, we observed a slight increase in support for most of these issues, contributing to an overall rise in the Support for the Active Defence of Democracy Index. This year, the trend persisted: the mean index value based on individual respondent ratings was 54.8, nearly identical to last year's improved figure of 54.5. Thus, since 2022, when we first began measuring Lithuanian support for defending democracy through protests, this support has steadily increased.

Fig. 1.3 shows the mean index scores by the respondents' social characteristics. Three factors are statistically significantly associated with differences in support for defending democracy through protests: education, attitudes toward the Soviet era, and age. As in previous years, the group with university education stands out most prominently, with a mean score of 64.7. Overall, the higher a respondent's level of formal education, the higher their score on the Support for the Active Defence of Democracy Index. Regarding attitudes toward the Soviet era, those who are uncertain stand out: within this group, support for protests is relatively low, at 40.2. Those with the most negative attitudes toward the Soviet era tend to show the strongest support for defending democracy. Among age groups, as in previous years, those aged 26–35 stand out, showing the strongest tendency to support protests in defence of democracy, with an index value of 62.8.

Fig.1.3. Mean scores of the Support for the Active Defence of Democracy Index by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era



1.3 Satisfaction with Democracy in Lithuania

How do Lithuanian residents assess the functioning of democracy and the performance of state institutions? When asked a straightforward question – how satisfied they are with the functioning of democracy in the country – responses are generally positive. 6.1% of respondents report being very satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania, while 45.8% are somewhat satisfied. Negative assessments are less common: 32.7% of respondents report being somewhat dissatisfied, while 9.7% are completely dissatisfied. These figures have remained stable and show no significant change compared with previous surveys.

Next, we assess public satisfaction with the functioning of specific democratic processes and the responsiveness of state institutions. Fig. 1.4a addresses the first theoretical aspect, showing how residents assess democratic procedures and the practical implementation of political rights. The data show that, for the first time since we began tracking these indicators in 2023, more respondents agree that specific democratic procedures function properly than disagree. However, this shift is less the result of a clear increase in satisfaction and more

due to a decrease in negative perceptions regarding equality before the law: 42.6% agree that all citizens in Lithuania are equal before the law (up slightly from 41.3% in 2024), while 30.8% disagree (down from 38% in 2024).

As in previous surveys, assessments are less positive for the second group of indicators in this subsection, which examines the substantive dimension of democracy: government accountability and responsiveness to citizens (Fig. 1.4b). It is worth noting, however, that the improvements observed in the previous study on certain issues have largely been maintained and, at a minimum, have not reverted to earlier levels. For example, since 2022, support has grown (by 12.3%) for allowing Lithuanian citizens to participate in decision-making and influence government actions. Unlike other indicators in this group, the proportion of satisfied respondents (30.4%) is roughly equal to that of those who are dissatisfied. Furthermore, although there has been a slight decline this year compared with last year in the number of respondents who believe Lithuanian authorities adequately represent society’s interests, the percentage (21.4%) remains higher than in the 2022 survey (16.5%). Thus, while we are not yet completely out of the woods in terms of the substantive dimension of democracy, gradual progress is continuing.

Fig. 1.4a. Lithuanian Residents' Satisfaction with Liberal Democracy Procedures (Political and Civil Rights) (%)



As in previous studies, we combined responses from Figures 1.4a and 1.4b, along with the overall question on satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, into a single Satisfaction with Democracy Index. It ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied with all aspects of democracy) to 100 (completely satisfied with all aspects). The mean score for this index is 49, reflecting a continued, though gradual, increase in satisfaction with democracy compared with 2023 (44.5) and 2024 (47.3).

We compared differences in the Satisfaction with Democracy Index across social categories (Fig. 1.5). As in previous years, age remains a factor: the youngest respondents are significantly more satisfied with

democracy, with an index value of 57.2, than all other age groups. Satisfaction with democracy is also associated with attitudes toward the Soviet era: respondents who view it negatively have a higher mean score (52.6) than those with more positive or neutral attitudes. Place of residence and education do not appear to significantly influence this index, as differences between groups are minimal and not statistically significant.

We also examined whether the recent increase in satisfaction with democracy, the aforementioned process of “getting out of the woods,” has been driven by changes within specific social groups. Compared with 2023, when the Satisfaction with Democ-

Fig. 1.4b. Lithuanian Citizens' Satisfaction with the Responsiveness of Democratic Institutions to Society (%)

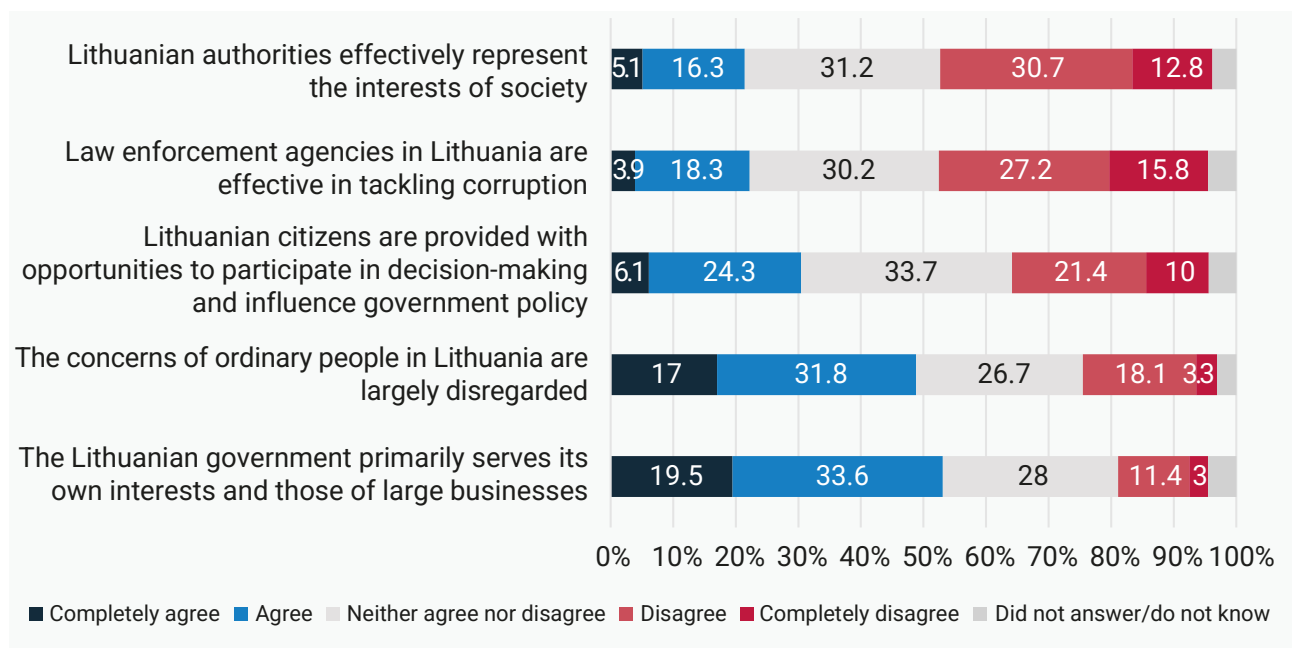
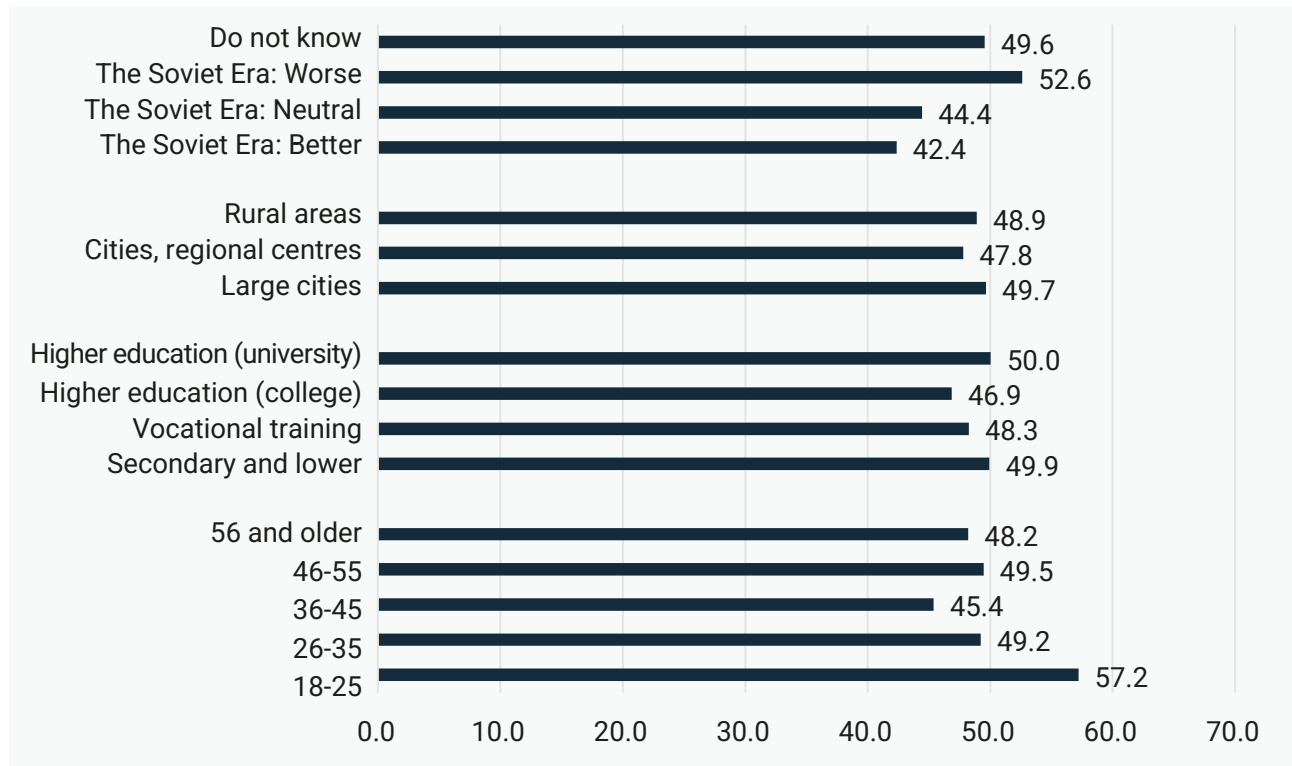


Fig. 1.5. Mean scores on the Satisfaction with Democracy Index (New Version) by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era



Democracy Index was updated with new questions, several interesting trends emerge. First, satisfaction with democracy increased most among the youngest respondents (aged 18–25) (+11.9), though smaller increases were also observed in older age groups. Second, it is noteworthy that while satisfaction levels among those with higher education remained largely unchanged, the index increased most significantly among respondents with vocational (+5.6) and secondary education (+9.1). Examining the place of residence, satisfaction with democracy rose slightly across all areas, with the most notable increase observed in rural regions (+6.9). Finally, when considering attitudes toward the Soviet era, the index increased across all groups, with the most significant rise observed among those holding a more favourable view of that period (+8.8). These trends are encouraging, as the largest increases occur in groups – apart from young people – whose overall averages, particularly regarding the Soviet era, were lower in 2023, indicating a narrowing gap between social groups.

1.4 Trust in International and Lithuanian Institutions

While earlier indicators show positive trends, trust in public authorities remains lower, having experienced significant declines. We repeated the standard list of political and law enforcement institutions. We also asked respondents about their level of trust in the media, international institutions (the EU and NATO), the Church, medical professionals, and scientists. The responses are presented as percentages in Fig. 1.6, with institutions ranked according to their level of trust.

The data show that respondents place high trust in scientists (82.8%) and medical professionals (77.9%), while among state institutions, the police maintain the highest level of trust at 82.4%. Although trust in international political institutions remains relatively high – around 72% of respondents trust NATO and the EU – the downward trend in trust toward NATO observed in recent years has continued. When our study began in 2022, NATO enjoyed higher trust, with 78.3% of respondents expressing confidence in the organisation. This decline is likely linked to the ambiguous signals from the US administration regarding NATO’s future.

The influence of the US on trust in NATO is further supported by two additional questions, though their percentages are not shown in Fig. 1.6 due to differences in wording. We asked respondents whether NATO and the US are reliable partners for Lithuania's security in the event of a crisis or war. When asked about NATO, a majority of respondents (54.5%) either completely or somewhat agree that it is a reliable partner. For the US, however, only 36.1% of respondents completely or somewhat agree that it is a reliable security partner. This does not imply outright disagreement, as only 23.8% of respondents do disagree; a substantial proportion (34.3%) chose the neutral option, "neither agree nor disagree." This trend is likely connected to the US's ambiguous stance on European security.

Turning to Lithuania and its domestic political institutions, the situation appears markedly less positive compared with previous studies. As in previous surveys, Lithuanians continue to place low trust in the Seimas (24%) and political parties (19.6%). However, notably, trust in the government has declined to match that of the Seimas, with only 22.3% expressing trust, down from the lowest previous figure of 31.9% in 2022. As a result, there is no longer any political institution in Lithuania that enjoys more trust than distrust. Until now, the Institution of the President of the Republic of Lithuania has held this position. However, this year's survey reveals a sharp drop in confidence –

down 15.5% from last year – meaning that, at best (considering statistical margins of error), the proportion of respondents who trust the president (32.1%) is roughly equal to those who do not (36.4%).

It is, therefore, unsurprising that this year's overall Trust in Institutions Index – which includes domestic political institutions (the Seimas, the government, political parties, and the Institution of the President), law enforcement agencies (the police and courts), and the media – has also declined. The index theoretically ranges from 0, indicating very low trust in all institutions, to 100, indicating very high trust in all institutions. This year, the actual index value (mean among respondents) is 42.6. After a few years of gradual growth, it has essentially returned to its initial level from the first survey in 2022, when the mean was 42.1.

Fig. 1.7 shows the differences in the mean index scores by respondents' social characteristics. Three factors are significantly associated with levels of trust. As in previous years, the youngest voters stand out, with a higher mean index score of 47.4. Trust in political institutions is lowest among residents of large cities, at 40.6. Finally, although the differences are smaller this year, respondents with a more positive attitude toward the Soviet era (44.1) exhibit slightly higher trust in state institutions than those with a less favourable attitude (39.6).

Fig. 1.6. Lithuanian Residents' Trust in Institutions (%)

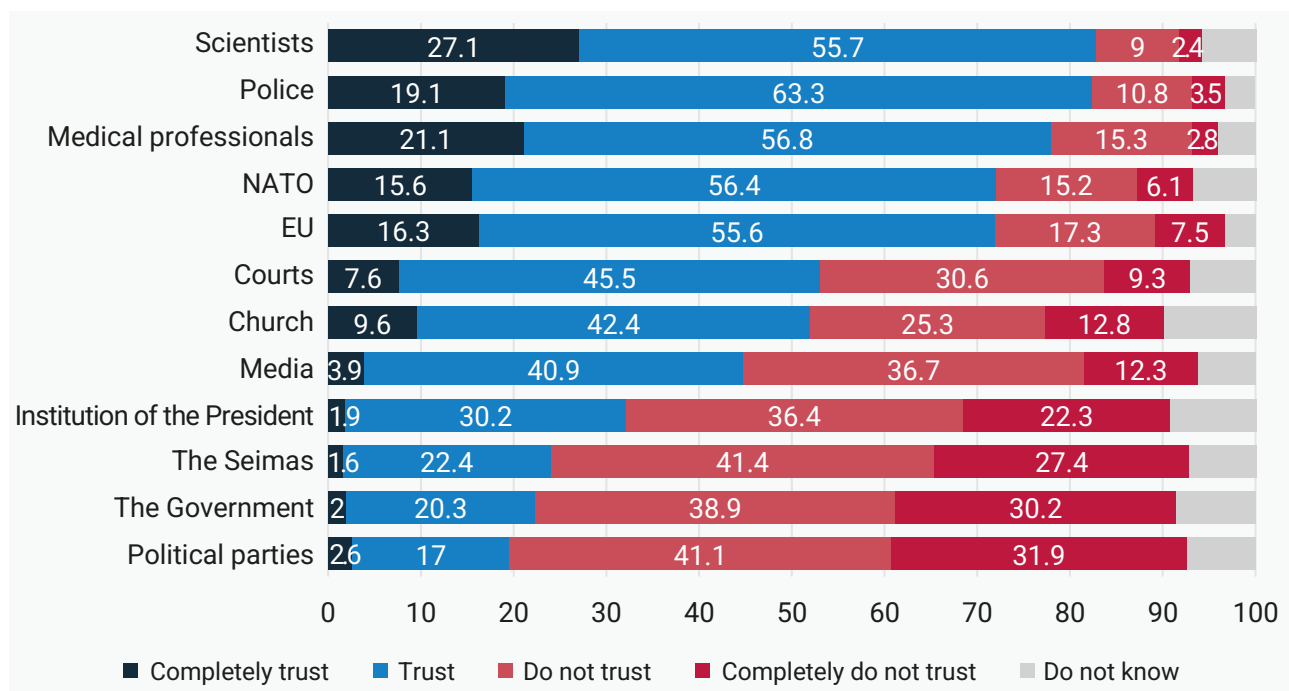


Fig. 1.7. Mean Scores on the Trust in Lithuanian State Institutions Index by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era

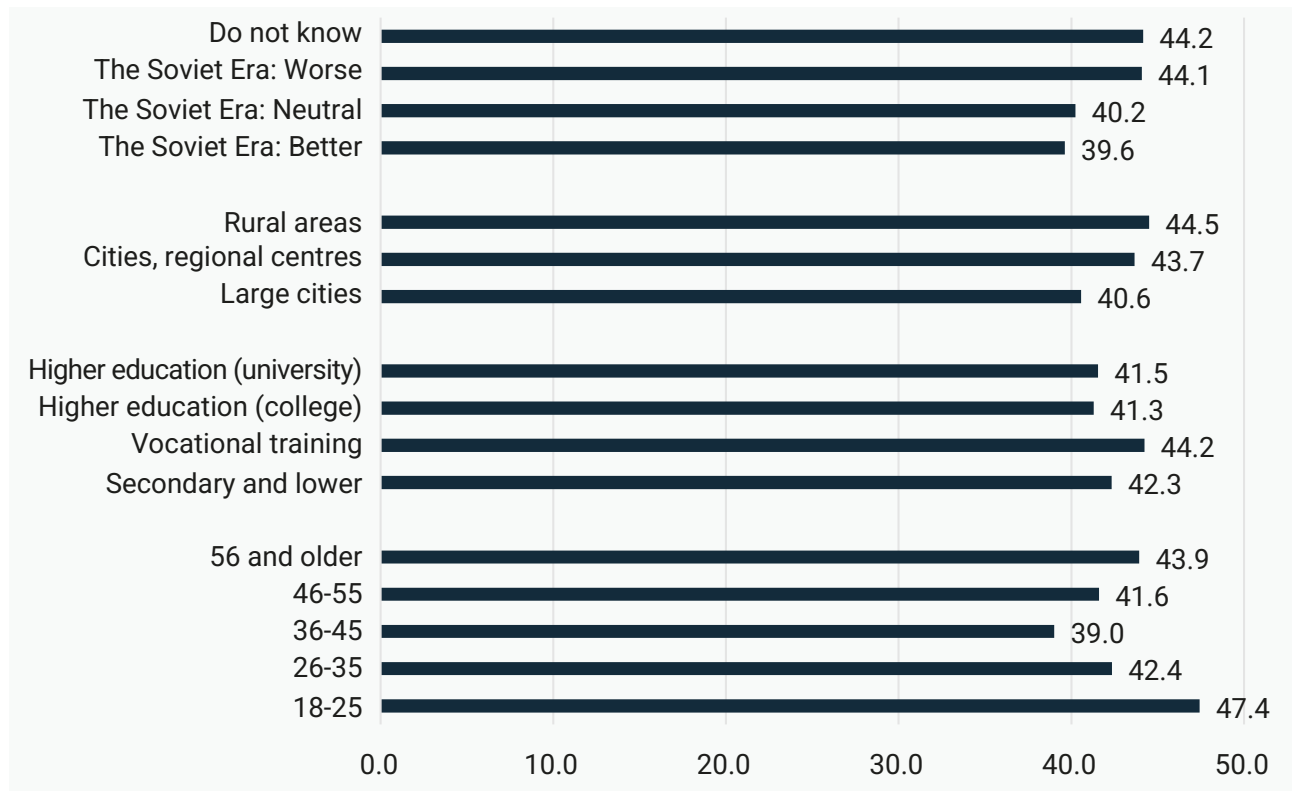
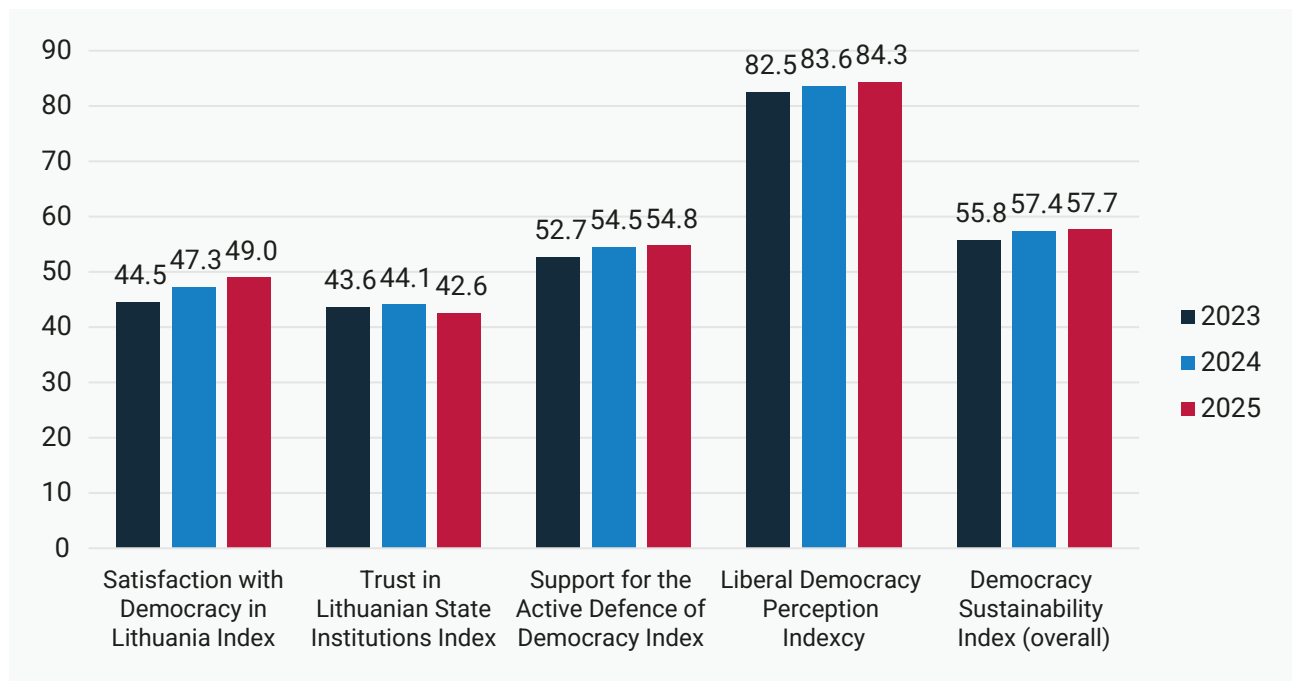


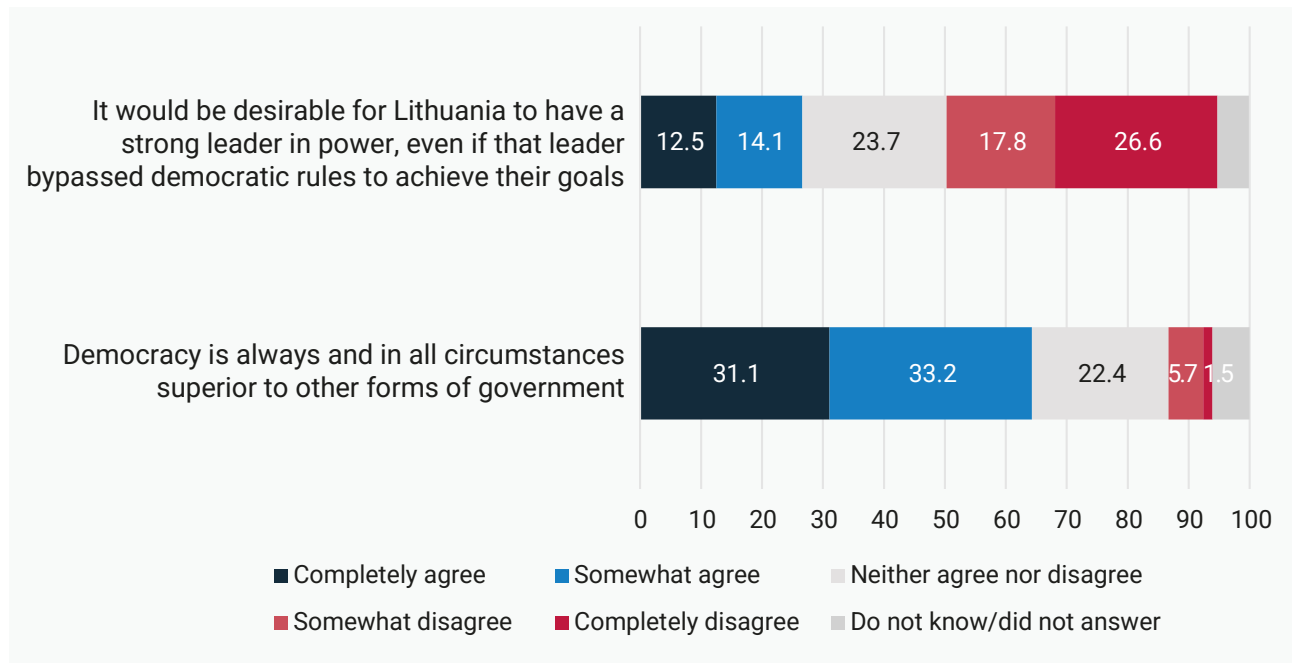
Fig. 1.8. The Democracy Sustainability Index and Its Components: Comparison Between 2023, 2024, and 2025



The four indices discussed so far measure distinct sociological dimensions of democracy sustainability: perception of liberal democracy elements, support for the active defence of democracy, satisfac-

tion with the functioning of democracy, and trust in Lithuanian state institutions. The survey's mean values for these indices are presented in Fig. 1.8, alongside comparisons with the corresponding figures for

Fig. 1.9. Lithuanian Residents' Support for a Strong Leader and Democracy as a Form of Government (%)



2023 and 2024.² On the one hand, the relative ranking of the indices remains largely unchanged. The Liberal Democracy Perception Index consistently outperforms the other indices in both studies, which makes sense and is expected, as it measures the fundamental understanding of democracy. Among the other indices, only support for the defence of democracy (54.8) exceeds the theoretical midpoint of the scale, which is 50.

On the other hand, three of the four indices have shown slow but steady growth over the past three years. The sole exception is the Trust in Lithuanian State Institutions Index, which has fallen to its lowest point in three years following declines in confidence in the government and the president. However, it is encouraging that Lithuanians' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy has reached the theoretical midpoint of the scale. The final Democracy Sustainability Index for this year, calculated from these four components, is 57.7 – nearly identical to last year's value of 57.4. We interpreted last year's assessment as a step toward stronger support for democracy in Lithuanian society and wondered whether this trend would continue in the coming year, given the longer interval since the elections and the resulting increase in public engagement with political processes. We are now convinced that it is the

case, even though the decline in trust in the president, the government, and NATO remains a cause for concern.

As in previous surveys, respondents were asked to rate two additional statements about democracy on a scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree): first, that democracy is always and in all circumstances superior to other forms of government; and second, that it would be desirable for Lithuania to have a strong leader in power, even if that leader bypassed democratic rules to achieve their goals. 64.3% agree that democracy is superior (7.2% disagree), while 54.4% disagree with the statement about a strong leader (26.6% agree). The mean of these two indicators, reflecting support for democracy, is 59.4% and aligns closely with the Democracy Sustainability Index score of 57.7. As before, this confirms that our measurements effectively capture the concepts they are intended to measure.

² Since new indicators were added to the 2023 index, and its methodology differs slightly from that of 2022, we provide a comparison covering only the three most recent years. For more details, see the Democracy Sustainability Barometer 2023, <https://www.eesc.lt/publikacija/demokratijos-tvarumo-barometras-2023/>.

Part II.

The Appeal of Authoritarian Regimes Index

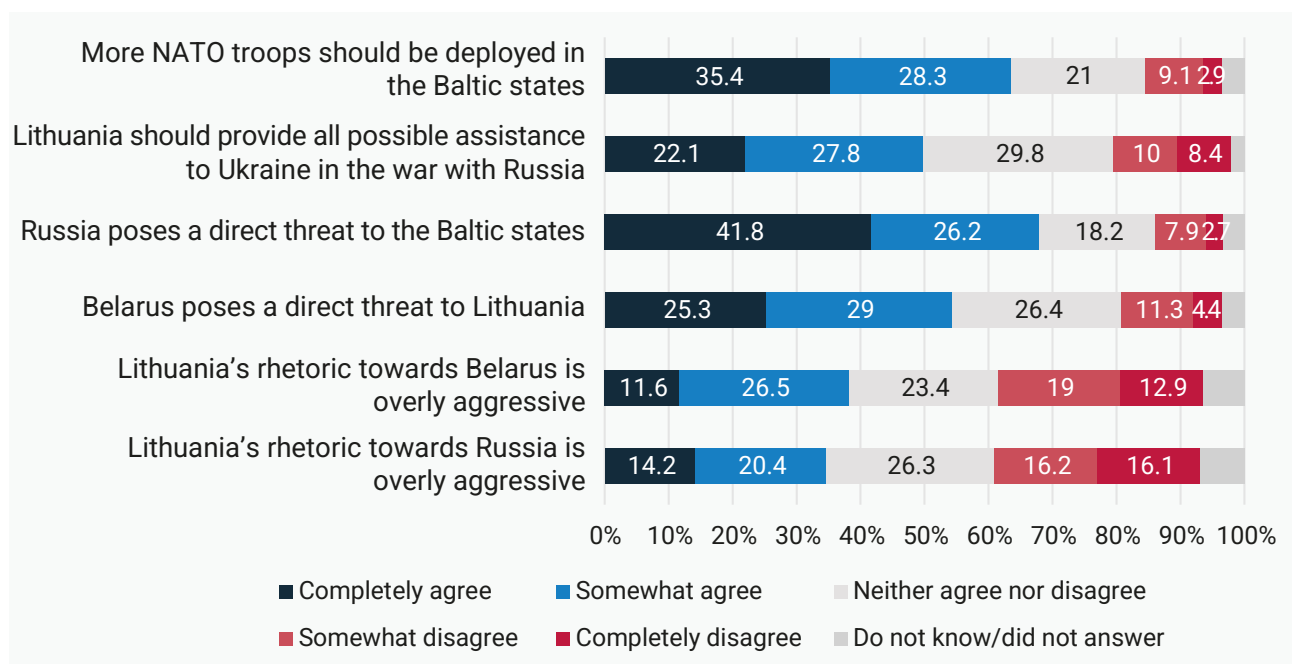
2.1 Perception of Russia Threat

We continued measuring residents' perceptions of the threat posed by Russia and their responses to it using indicators that had proven effective in previous studies. Additionally, we added similar questions regarding Belarus. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely 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. Agreement with the first three statements, coupled with disagreement with the fourth, indicates a strong understanding of the Rus-

sia threat. Together, these responses form the Perception of Threat from Russia Index, which we discuss below. We also asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree that Belarus poses a direct threat to Lithuania or that Lithuania's rhetoric toward Belarus is excessively aggressive. Given the similarity of the questions, these responses can be directly compared with those concerning Russia.

The distribution of residents' responses to these statements is shown in Fig. 2.1. A similarly high percentage of respondents (63.7%) agree that more NATO troops should be deployed in the Baltic states. Opinions remain fairly evenly divided regarding Lithuania's rhetoric toward Russia. There are no major changes here either, but one potentially positive development is that the share of respondents who

Fig. 2.1. Perception of Russia Threat Among Lithuanian Residents (%)



believe Lithuania’s rhetoric is overly aggressive has declined slightly compared with 2024, from 40.1% to 34.6%. However, trends in the other two areas are more concerning. For the first time since our survey began, fewer than 70% of respondents believe that Russia poses a direct threat to the Baltic states, down 8.1% compared with 2024. Additionally, the share of respondents who agree that Lithuania should provide all possible assistance to Ukraine (49.9%) falls short of an absolute majority for the first time in four years, down 6.1% from last year.

The distribution of responses concerning Belarus is similar to that for Russia, with only minor differences. The percentage of respondents who believe Lithuania’s rhetoric toward Belarus is overly aggressive (38.1%) is slightly higher than the corresponding figure for Russia (34.6%). A majority of residents (54.3%) believe that Belarus poses a direct threat to Lithuania, although this is lower than the corresponding figure for Russia (68%).

Using four indicators (all shown in Fig. 2.1 except those for Belarus), we constructed the Perception of Russia Threat Index, with values ranging from 0,

indicating no perception of the Russia threat and no support for measures to address it, to 100, representing full recognition of the threat. The value of this index is 64.8, marking the lowest level recorded since we began consistently studying these issues in 2022. This indicates that perception of the Russia threat remains relatively high. However, the conclusion from last year’s survey – that perception had not improved since 2022 – is now gradually shifting toward the view that it is declining.

In addition, we calculated the mean index scores by main social categories (Fig. 2.2). Unlike last year, education appears to play a role: respondents with higher education show greater perception of the Russia threat. There are no clear trends across age groups, although respondents aged 26–35 have a higher mean index scores than older groups. As in previous surveys, the impact of respondents’ attitudes toward the Soviet era remains evident. Respondents with a negative attitude toward the Soviet era have a mean score more than 20 points higher (72.7) than those with a positive attitude (49.4). The neutral (57.1) and undecided (59.7) groups fall considerably behind those with a negative attitude toward the Soviet era.

Fig. 2.2. Mean scores of the Perception of Russia Threat Index by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era

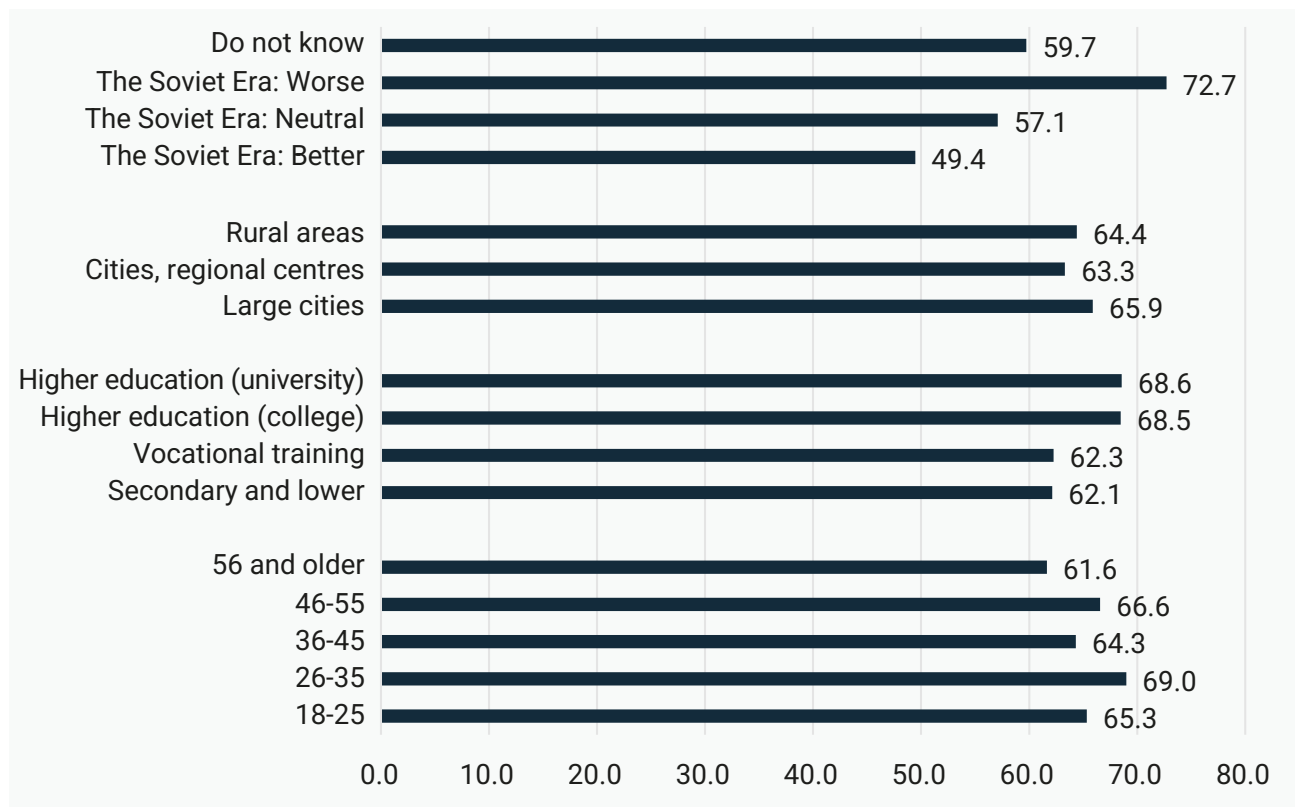


Fig. 2.3. Lithuanian Residents' Agreement with Eastern Economic Narratives (%)



2.2 Resilience to Eastern Economic Narratives

In addition to assessing threats, the Democracy Sustainability Barometer survey, now in its fourth year, examines the extent to which Lithuanians are resilient to Russian and Chinese propaganda narratives – narratives that downplay the threats posed by these countries, obscure responsibility for aggressive foreign policies, and promote the purported benefits of cooperation with them. We categorise these narratives into two groups: economic and political.

As in previous surveys, we included six typical economic narratives promoted by Russia and China (for more details on their justification and classification, see previous reports).³ This year, we included an additional question asking respondents to assess the economic impact of the conflict with Belarus. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with these narratives – referred

to in the survey as “statements about international politics” – on a scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). Thus, disagreement with these statements was treated as resilience to them.

The majority of respondents (59.2%) believe that the conflict with Belarus is harming Lithuania's economy. Although agreement with propaganda narratives is lower for other statements, overall resilience remains limited, as in previous surveys. On the one hand, there are some positive changes: compared with last year, the share of respondents who believe the conflict with Russia is harming Lithuania's economy has decreased from 52.2% to 44.5%. Accordingly, fewer respondents (down by 7.8% from the previous survey) believe that Lithuania is harmed by its absence of relations with China. The change in wording (from “conflict” to “absence of relations”) may have influenced responses, better reflecting the actual situation. On the other hand, a significantly larger proportion of respondents still agree with these narratives than those who clearly disagree.

³ For example, Democracy Sustainability Barometer 2022: <https://www.gssc.lt/publikacija/demokratijos-tvarumo-barometras-2022/>.

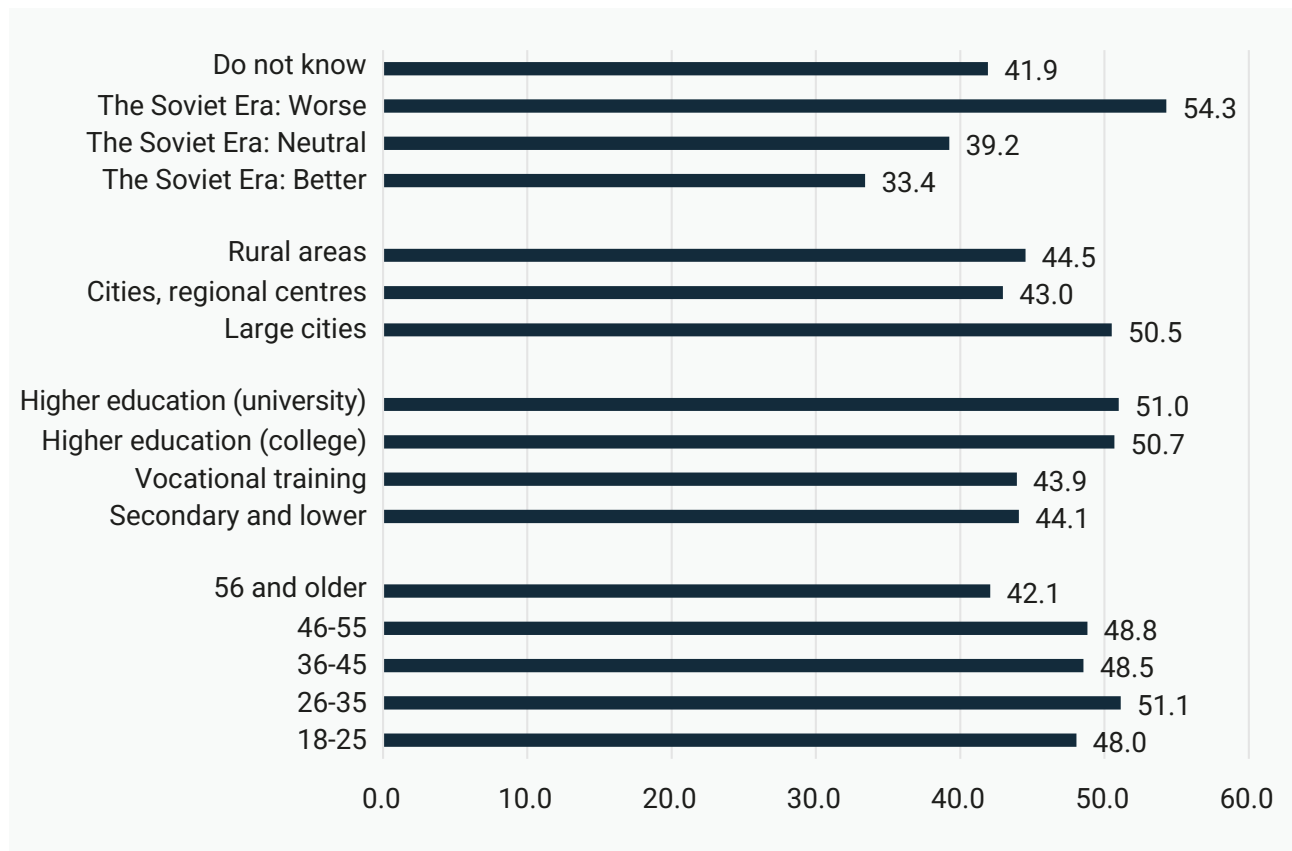
Less encouraging is the fact that, at the expense of those who disagree, the share of respondents selecting “neither agree nor disagree” in response to Russian narratives about the negative impact of sanctions on the West and the supposed necessity of its resources has risen by 5.2–5.3%. This hesitant position is relatively common, selected by 27–35% of respondents for the four lower statements in Fig. 2.3. One indicator where a resilient position clearly prevails concerns whether economic rights are more important than freedom of speech and fair elections: more respondents (35%) disagree than agree (24.5%). Even here, however, roughly 40% of respondents either do not know or choose the “neither agree nor disagree” option.

Given this, it is not surprising that Lithuanians’ overall resilience to Eastern economic narratives remains relatively low. The six questions about Russia and China (all except the one concerning Belarus) shown in Fig. 2.3 can theoretically be used to calculate the Resilience to Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism Index, with values ranging from 0, indicating complete susceptibility and acceptance of the narra-

tives, to 100, indicating full resilience and rejection of the narratives. This year, the index value is 46.8, essentially unchanged from when we first measured these indicators in 2022, when it was 47.1. Statistically, the mean value has remained unchanged over the past four years.

Fig. 2.4 presents the mean index scores broken down by social category. This index is notable because its variations are explained by all the independent variables. First, the oldest respondents are the least resilient, with a mean index score of 42.1. Second, higher education is associated with greater resilience to economic narratives, as well as higher perception of the Russia threat. Third, residents of large cities exhibit greater resilience, with a mean index score of 50.5. However, as in previous surveys, attitudes toward the Soviet era account for the largest differences. As in previous studies, respondents with a negative attitude toward the Soviet era are slightly more resilient, with an mean index score of 54.3, whereas those with neutral (39.2) or positive (33.4) attitudes fall into the zone of susceptibility to authoritarian influence.

Fig. 2.4. Mean scores of the Resilience to Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism Index by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era



2.3 Resilience to Eastern Political Narratives

As in previous studies, we assessed resilience to Eastern political narratives using seven statements to measure respondents' resilience to Russian propaganda about the war in Ukraine, Russia's (and China's) attempts to shift responsibility or enhance their image, and efforts to steer countries such as Lithuania toward a "neutral" stance. Additionally, this year, we asked respondents the extent to which they agree that the war in Ukraine should end as soon as possible, even if this requires Ukraine to cede some of its territory. Respondents rated the statements on a scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). Disagreement with the statements is treated as resilience to the narratives.

The distribution of respondents' answers is shown in Fig. 2.5. As in previous surveys, resilience to political propaganda narratives is stronger than resilience to economic ones. The only statement that continues to receive more agreement than disagreement concerns the deterioration of relations with China – about 40% of respondents agree that Lithuania is to blame. However, this is considerably lower than in 2022, when roughly 56.3% of respondents agreed with this narrative. We observed a downward trend

last year, which appears to be continuing. It is likely that the passage of time since the event is influencing this trend.

As in previous surveys, residents clearly disagree that Russia defends traditional values worldwide (62.3%) and that reports of Russian crimes might be fake (56.2%). Accordingly, more than half of respondents do not believe that Lithuania advances the interests of the US by stoking the war in Ukraine (53.6%), nor that the war in Ukraine was incited by NATO and the US (51.4%). Overall, support for certain narratives has decreased slightly, but these changes are minor and may reflect random fluctuations. One notable change is that the share of respondents who believe the US incited the war in Ukraine has dropped from 20.8% to 15%. However, this shift may also be influenced by Donald Trump's ambiguous stance on Russia.

As in previous surveys, opinions on whether Lithuania should maintain neutrality are evenly split, with 33.6% agreeing and 33.9% disagreeing. Responses to the new question regarding the conditions for ending the war in Ukraine are similar. About 29.7% of respondents believe that Ukraine should agree to peace, even if it requires ceding some of its territory. Approximately 32.3% of respondents disagree, while another third remain undecided.

Fig. 2.5. Lithuanian Residents' Agreement with Russian and Chinese Political Narratives (%)

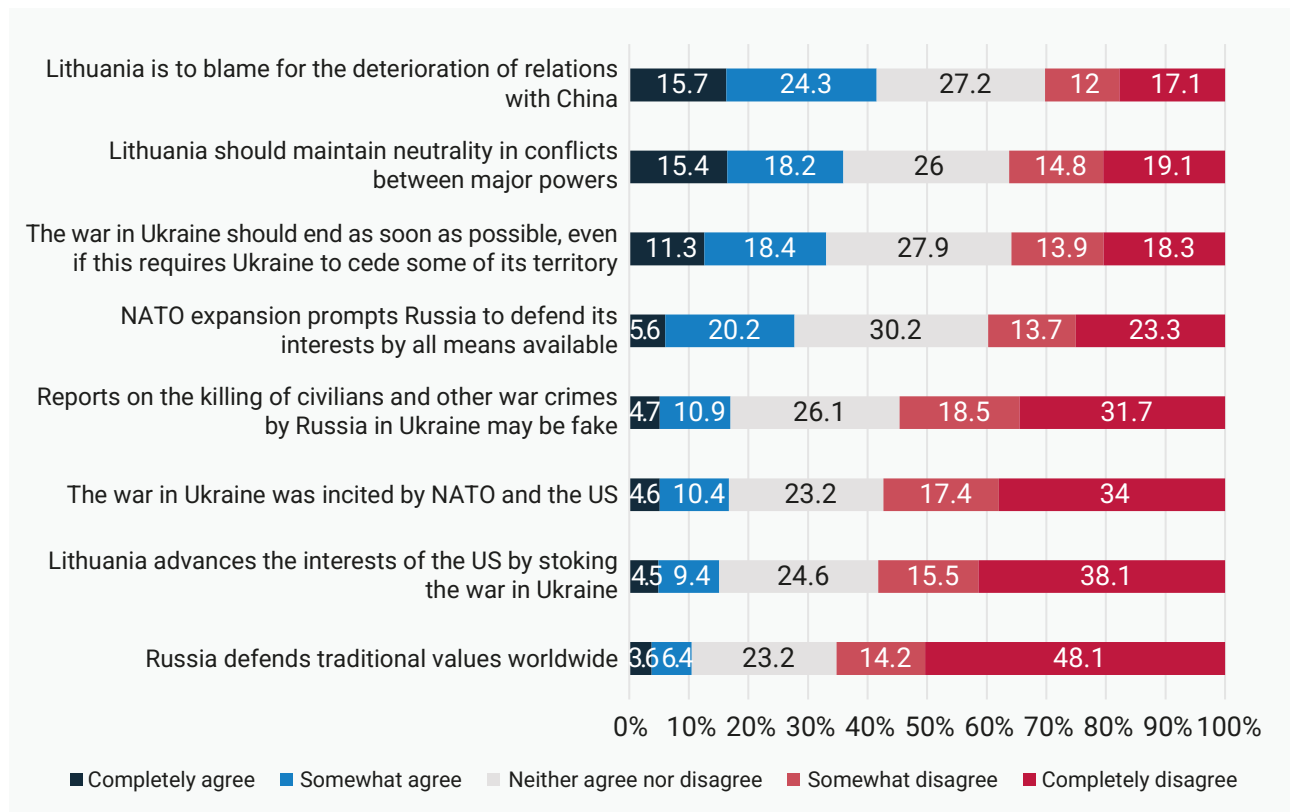
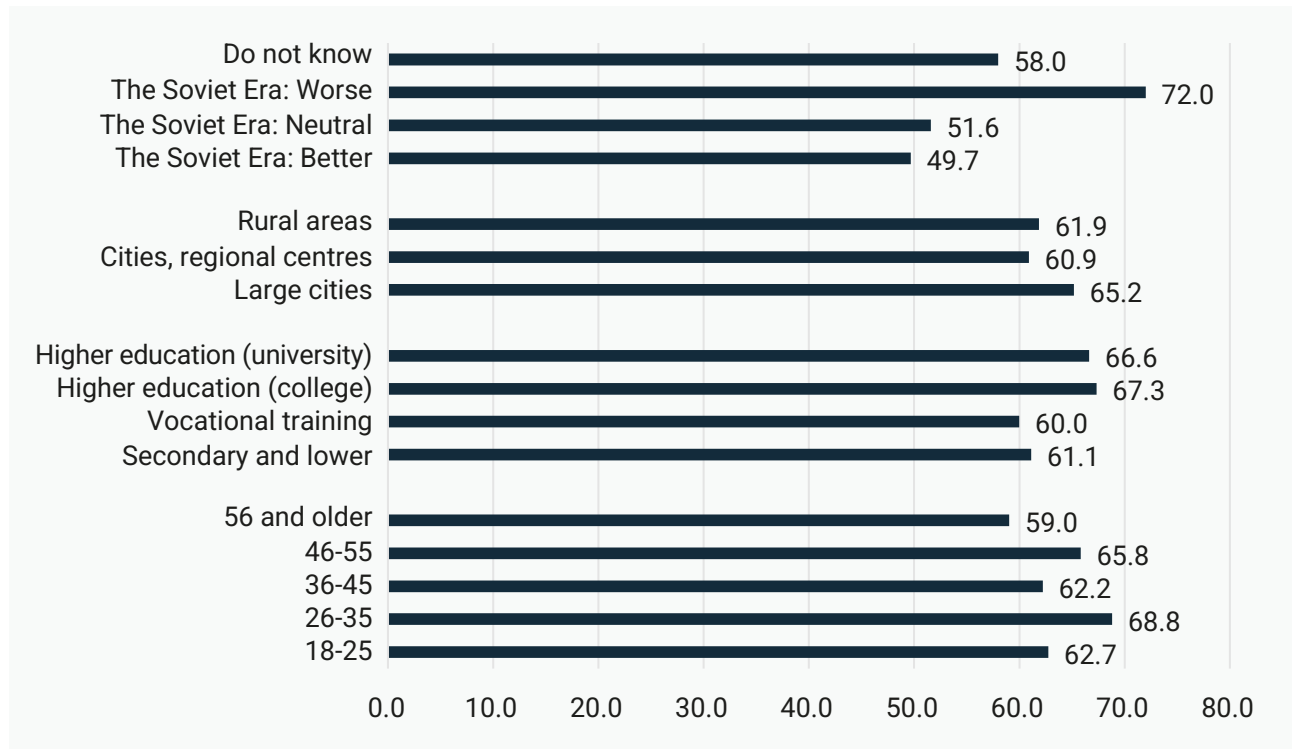


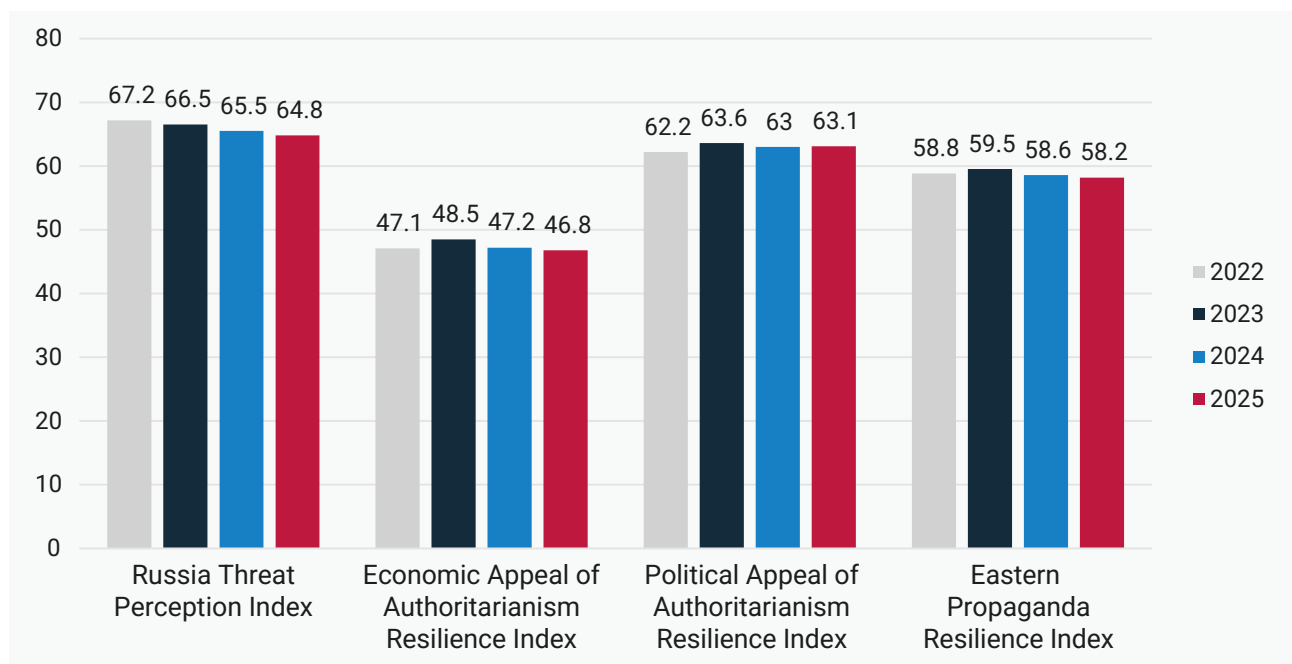
Fig. 2.6. Mean scores on the Resilience to the Political Appeal of Authoritarianism Index by Place of Residence, Education, Age, and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Era



From the seven statements discussed (excluding the new question on ending the war in Ukraine), we again constructed the Political Appeal of Authoritarianism Index, with theoretical values ranging from 0, indicating complete appeal and agreement with the narratives, to 100, indicating full resilience. The

mean value of the index in this year's survey is statistically unchanged from last year, at 63.1. This indicates resilience above the theoretical average, with no statistically significant differences from previous years: 62.2 in 2022 and 63.6 in 2023.

Fig. 2.7. The Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index and Its Components 2022–2024



The mean scores of the Political Appeal of Authoritarianism Index by social characteristics are shown in Fig. 2.6. Of these characteristics, only place of residence is not significantly related to the index. Looking at age, older respondents show lower resilience, with a mean index score of 59, particularly compared to those aged 26–35, who score 68.8. As with the other two indices measuring resilience to Eastern propaganda, higher education is associated with greater resilience to the narratives, reflected in a higher mean index scores. Once again, attitudes toward the Soviet era have a strong influence: respondents with a negative view of the Soviet era are the most resilient to Eastern political narratives, with a mean index score of 72, while those with neutral or positive attitudes are significantly less resilient, scoring 51.6 and 49.7, respectively.

The three indices discussed in this section capture different dimensions of the population's resilience to Eastern propaganda: perception of the Russia threat,

resilience to the economic narratives, and resilience to the political narratives of Eastern authoritarian states. The survey's mean values for these indices are shown in Fig. 2.7, together with results from previous studies. Several conclusions can be drawn. First, perception of the Russia threat has gradually but steadily declined over the past four years, reaching its lowest index value this year. Second, resilience to economic narratives has remained unchanged over the past four years and remains below the theoretical average. Similarly, resilience to political narratives about Russia and China is stable – relatively satisfactory but not increasing. Third, when these trends are considered alongside the decline in trust in NATO and Lithuanian political institutions (the government and the president) discussed in Part I, the conclusion of the previous report is reinforced: the deterioration of the situation should serve as a clear warning to Lithuanian political institutions and the political elite.

Part III.

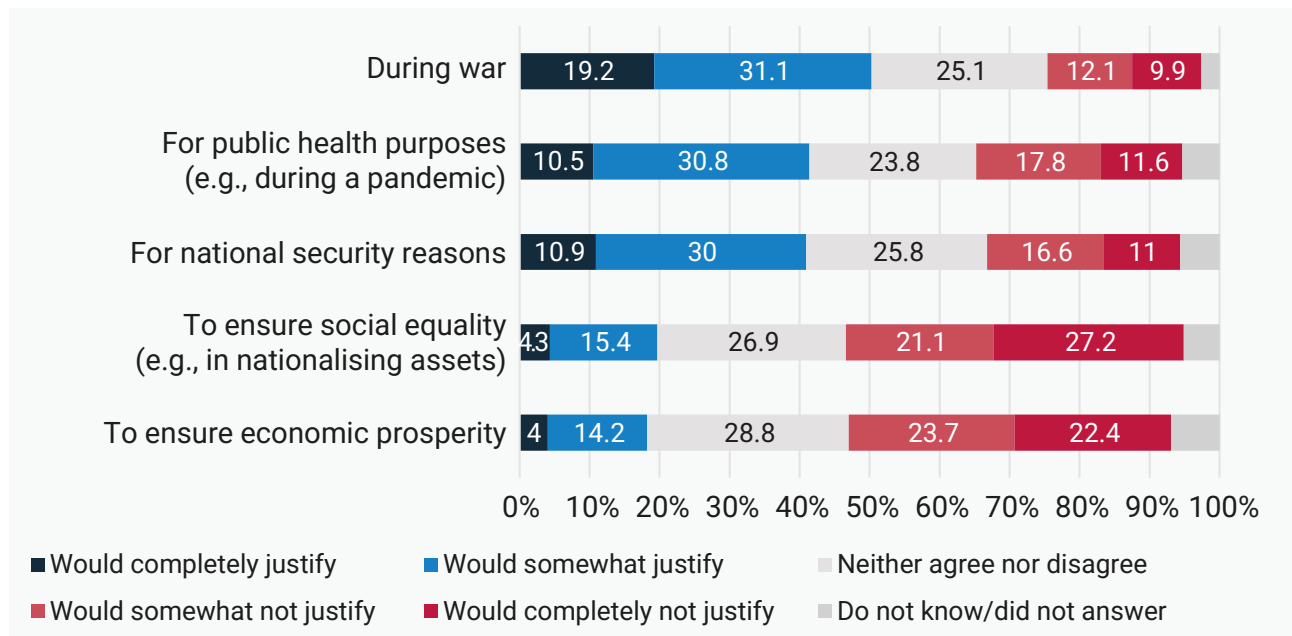
Other Questions

3.1. Support for Restrictions on Democracy

Our survey also asks respondents in which situations they would support restrictions on human rights and freedoms in a democracy, including freedom of speech, freedom of thought, free elections, and freedom of assembly. These indicators are not included in the Democracy Sustainability Index because they pertain to exceptional circumstances where certain rights (such as freedom of assembly) might be temporarily restricted out of necessity – during a pandemic, war, state of emergency, etc. Therefore, positive responses do not necessarily reflect anti-democratic attitudes, making them difficult to interpret unambiguously.

Fig. 3.1 shows the response rates by situation. Support for restricting democratic rights has declined in several areas compared with last year: during war (down by 8%), for national security reasons (down by 8.5%), and for public health purposes (down by 4.8%). Some of these changes may be random, particularly since last year we observed an increase in support for restrictions in the event of war. However, it is worth noting that in previous surveys, support for restricting democratic rights for national security reasons was consistently at least 49%, while in this survey, it has dropped to 40.9%. Of course, these figures are difficult to interpret definitively, but one possible explanation is that a smaller proportion of the population now perceives a serious threat to their security, especially considering that perceptions of Russia as a threat have also declined. Finally, as in previous surveys, only a small minority supports restricting rights to ensure economic prosperity (18.2%) or social equality (19.7%).

Fig. 3.1. The Extent to Which Lithuanians Would Justify Restrictions on Democracy (%)



3.2. Population Values

The survey also examines the values of Lithuanian residents regarding social and economic issues relevant to democratic debates, as well as security-related topics not covered by the indices discussed earlier. Fig. 3.2 presents the questions from top to bottom: the first three address social issues, the next four focus on economic and immigration topics, and the final three relate to current EU and Lithuanian security concerns.

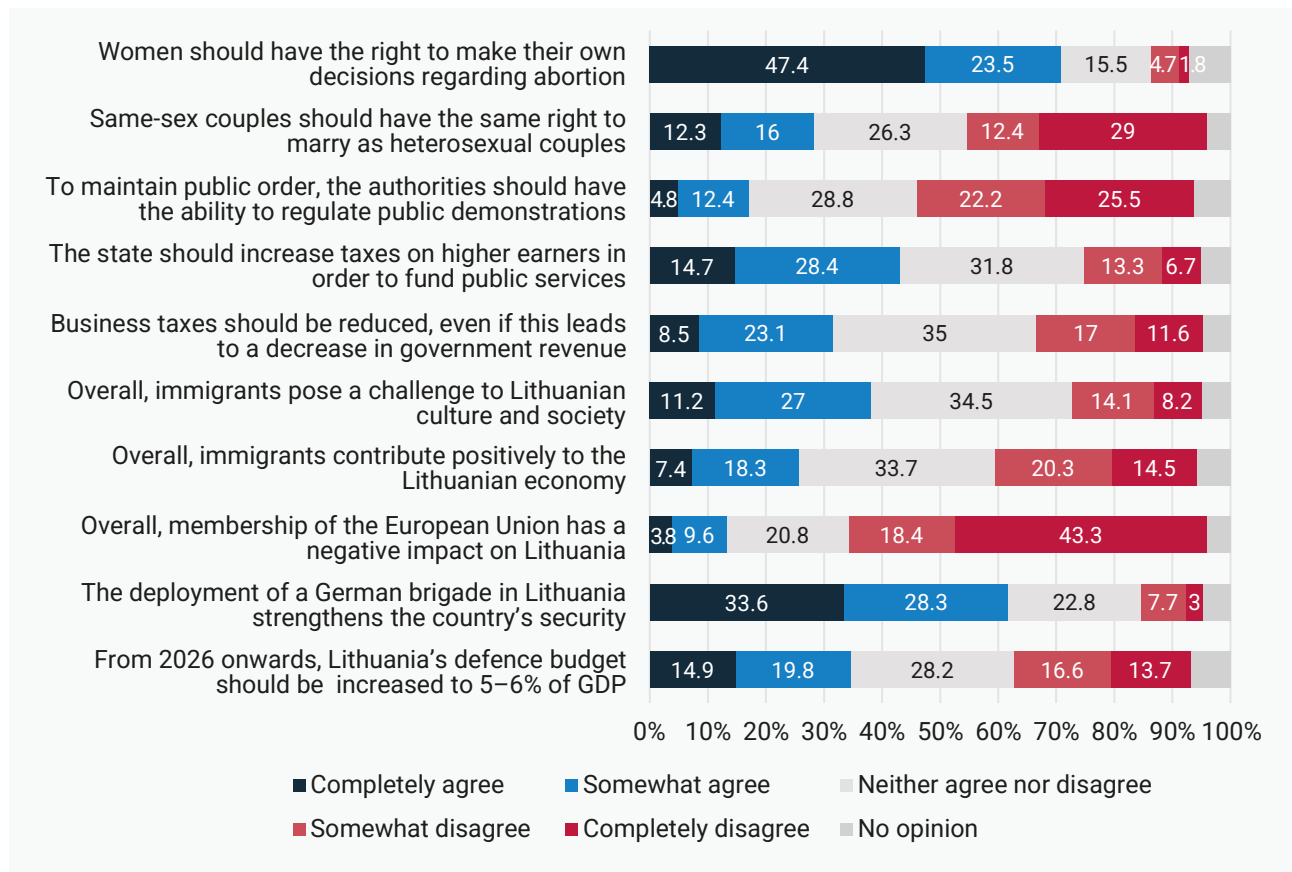
Last year, an absolute majority of respondents either completely agreed or somewhat agreed that the state should increase taxes on higher earners in order to fund public services. This was linked to ongoing discussions by both the left and right about the need to increase state revenue and strengthen welfare institutions. However, the tax reform implemented by the centre-left government last year appears to have influenced opinions: this year, support for tax increases has dropped by 10.1%, falling to 43.1%. However, it should be noted that those who disagree with increasing taxes remain a much smaller group, at 20%. A large portion of respondents, however, do

not have a clear position: 31.8% selected “neither agree nor disagree,” and another 5.1% were unsure how to answer.

Responses to most of the other repeated questions remain similar to previous surveys. The gradually emerging topic of immigration does not appear to have significantly shifted public attitudes. Opinions continue to lean negative, but no clear consensus has formed. First, more respondents agree that immigrants pose a challenge to Lithuanian culture and society (38.2%) than those who disagree (22.3%). Second, fewer respondents agree that immigrants contribute positively to the Lithuanian economy (25.7%) than those who disagree (34.8%). Third, roughly one-third of respondents remain undecided, with 34–35% selecting “neither agree nor disagree” across the immigration questions.

One notable change in this year’s survey concerns attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Support has increased slightly, with 28.3% agreeing and 41.4% disagreeing. While opponents still outnumber supporters, the gap between the groups has narrowed compared to previous surveys, where the difference

Fig. 3.2. Socio-Economic Values of the Lithuanian Population (%)



was often 20% or more. However, since the increase in support (up 3.8%) is close to the threshold of statistical significance, it is difficult to determine whether this reflects a genuine liberalisation of society or merely a random fluctuation.

Perhaps the most notable findings relate to two new questions concerning the German brigade deployment and the defence budget. On the first issue,

there is strong public consensus: 61.9% completely or somewhat agree that the deployment of a German brigade strengthens Lithuania's security, while only 10.7% disagree. Opinions are more divided regarding an increase in the defence budget to 5–6% from 2026: 34.7% of respondents agree with the proposal, 30.3% disagree, and 28.2% take an intermediate stance, selecting "neither agree nor disagree."

Conclusion

This year's Democracy Sustainability Barometer continues to reflect some positive trends seen in previous studies, but it also reveals growing areas of concern. The increase in the Democracy Sustainability Index observed last year has been sustained, with this year's value at 57.7 (compared with 57.4 in the 2024 study). The main positive driver is the notable rise in Lithuanians' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy over the past few years, which has reached at least the theoretical midpoint of the scale. Democratic procedures, along with civil and political rights, are functioning in Lithuania, and citizens recognise this – suggesting that the positive assessment is not merely a temporary effect of the election period, as discussed in last year's report.

However, an examination of the components of the Democracy Sustainability Index reveals some negative trends. By now, it is not unusual that trust in political institutions is weakening; however, what is unusual is the sharp decline in trust in the government and the president this year. Since these institutions are responsible for foreign and security policy, this trend is particularly concerning. Their actions and rhetoric are crucial in convincing citizens of the necessity of policy decisions, and growing distrust will make these tasks more challenging. It is also notable that public opinion on increasing defence spending to 5–6% of GDP is evenly split: roughly one-third agree, one-third are undecided, and one-third disagree. Other studies indicate that political trust is closely linked to support for defence spending.⁴ If current trends of declining trust continue, it will become increasingly difficult to persuade the public to approve higher defence expenditures.

When it comes to security issues and resilience to Eastern propaganda, the outlook is less positive. There is some encouraging news: over 60% of Lithuanians believe that the deployment of the German brigade enhances the country's security, while only about one in ten disagrees. However, the Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index has declined slightly over the past three years, falling from 59.5 in 2023 to 58.2 this year. This change is statistically small – and possibly insignificant – but, as noted last year, in tense geopolitical times, even a lack of improvement in resilience should serve as a warning to the political elite. Of particular concern is the decline in the proportion of people who perceive Russia as a direct threat to the Baltic states. Furthermore, although a large majority (68%) of respondents still view Russia as a direct threat, this year marks the first time that only half of respondents believe Lithuania should use all possible means to assist Ukraine in its fight against Russia. In previous surveys, an absolute majority consistently held this view. Thus, while the perception of the Russia threat remains at a satisfactory level, it is gradually declining. Combined with stagnation in the other two components of the Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index, namely resilience to economic and political narratives, the overall result is still acceptable but increasingly concerning.

⁴ M. J. Hetherington and J. A. Husser, 2012. "How Trust Matters: The Changing Political Relevance of Political Trust." *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2): 312–325; M. Jastramskis, 2025. "Political Trust, Polarization and Support for Defense Spending in Lithuania." Presentation at the Conference *ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops 2025*, May 20–23, Charles University, Prague.

