



**Eastern Europe
Studies Centre**
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Democratic Sustainability Barometer

2022

Two thick, red, slanted parallel bars pointing to the right, positioned below the year '2022' and above a horizontal line.



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The survey presents the Democratic Sustainability Barometer, an index comprising four intermediary indexes. They measure different dimensions of public perception of democracy, namely the perception of elements of liberal democracy, the support for the active defense of democracy by means of protests, satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania and trust in Lithuania's state institutions.

Summary

- The survey presents the Democratic Sustainability Barometer, an index comprising four intermediary indexes. They measure different dimensions of public perception of democracy, namely the perception of elements of liberal democracy, the support for the active defense of democracy by means of protests, satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania and trust in Lithuania's state institutions.
- The value of the first Democratic Sustainability Barometer Index is 53.5. This indicates a theoretically above-average democratic sustainability on the sociological level. The index is negatively affected by distrust in political institutions and the rather prevalent dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in Lithuania. This is likely related to social expectations for democracy.
- The survey also calculates the Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda, comprising three intermediary indexes that measure the perception of threat from Russia and the resilience to economic and political narratives pushed by the propaganda of the authoritarian regimes in Russia and China. The average value of this index is 58.8, indicating an above-average resilience to Eastern propaganda among Lithuanian residents.
- The perception of threat from Russia is fairly high. Lithuanian residents' resilience is the lowest with respect to economic narratives, in which the authoritarian regimes in the East extol the benefits of cooperating with them. With that said, a separately conducted survey suggests that in the end, Lithuanians are more inclined to cooperate with democracies than authoritarian regimes.

Part 1.

The Democratic Sustainability Barometer Index

1.1 Perception of democracy

The democracy perception index shows the extent to which residents view different elements of liberal democracy as essential. Survey respondents were asked the following question: “While many things may seem desirable to us, not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following is an essential feature of democracy.” The respondents were asked

to individually rate different elements of liberal democracy, social justice and direct democracy on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means an absolutely inessential characteristic of democracy and 10 means an 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) and saw it as going against the principles of democracy.

Based on the responses regarding the extent to which different elements of liberal democracy are deemed essential (the first seven elements in Table 1.1), we calculated each respondent’s individual Liberal Democracy Perception Index, where 0 means that all the elements of liberal democracy are perceived as absolutely inessential for democracy and 100 means that all the elements of liberal democracy are perceived as essential. **The average Liberal Democracy Perception Index calculated from all responses is 82.5**, which indicates a fairly good understanding of democracy.

Element	Average	% of respondents selecting “Essential characteristic of democracy”	% of respondents selecting “Goes against the principles of democracy”
<i>Liberal democracy</i>			
Citizens have a right to freely and openly express opinions and beliefs, including criticism of the government	8.8	60	2.4
People elect their representatives in a free election	8.8	58.5	—
Women have the same rights as men	8.8	57.4	—
Courts act in an impartial manner and are free from political influence	8.6	54.5	3
Rule of law prevails in the country	8.4	48.6	—
Ethnic minorities have proportional representation in the parliament	7.9	33.5	3.1
Two or more political parties compete in election	7.9	35.1	5.6
<i>Social justice</i>			
People receive state support in case of unemployment or sickness	8.5	49.1	2.2
State taxes the rich and supports the deprived	7.1	23.6	5.8
State ensures equal pay	6.7	20.7	7.2
<i>Direct democracy</i>			
Most important political issues are decided by referendum	8.5	50.1	3.7

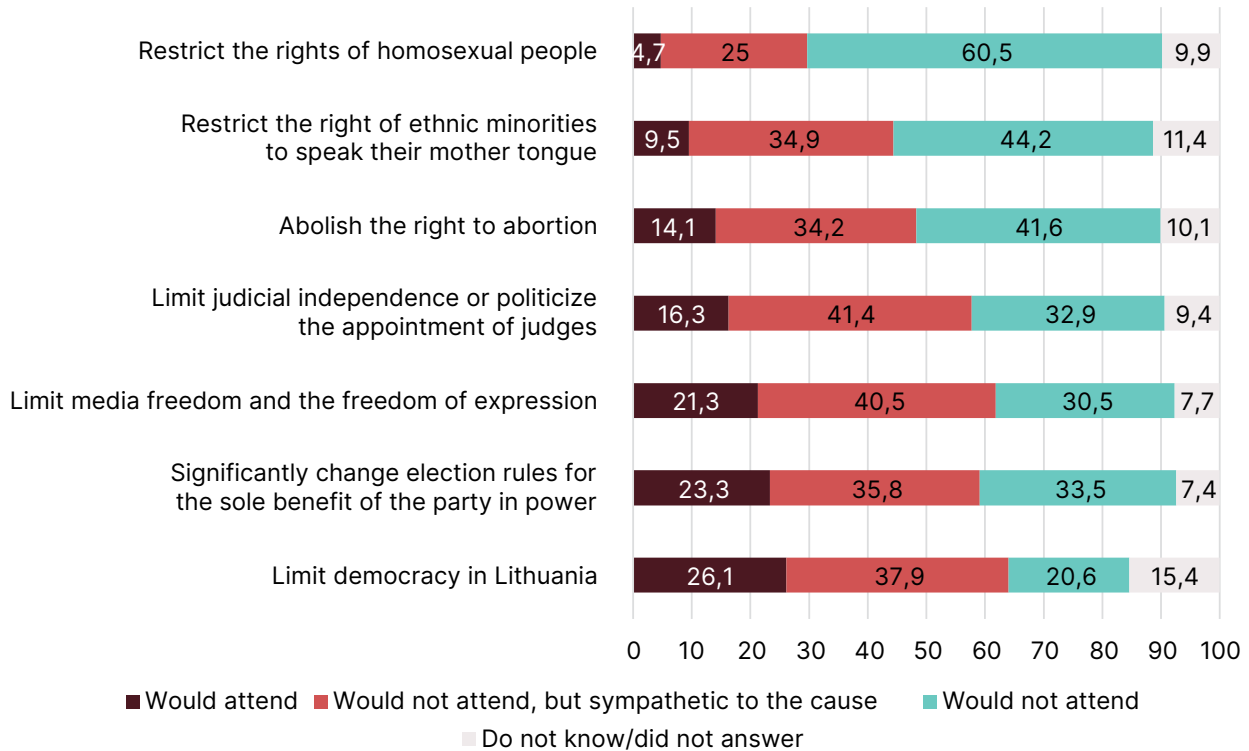
Table 1.1. How Lithuanian residents perceive democracy

1.2 Support for the active defense of democracy

The support for the active defense of democracy was measured by posing the question “Would you attend the protests or otherwise actively show your opposition if you thought that politicians...” and listing several different situations, the first of which is

general (“Seek to limit democracy in Lithuania”) and the others encompass specific democratic rights and freedoms. To differentiate between those who would not attend the protests from those who would also not attend them but would support the cause, we listed these two options separately. Fig. 1.1 shows the distributions of Lithuanian residents’ responses in percentages.

Fig. 1.1. Lithuanian residents’ support for the active defense of democracy, in %



Based on the responses, we calculated the Index of Support for the Defense of Democracy, where 0 means neither attending, nor supporting the cause of any of the seven protests and 100 means attending or supporting the cause of all the listed protests. The average Index of Support for the Defense of Democracy calculated from all responses is 52.1, which shows an average level of willingness to defend democratic institutions and support the cause of such protests.

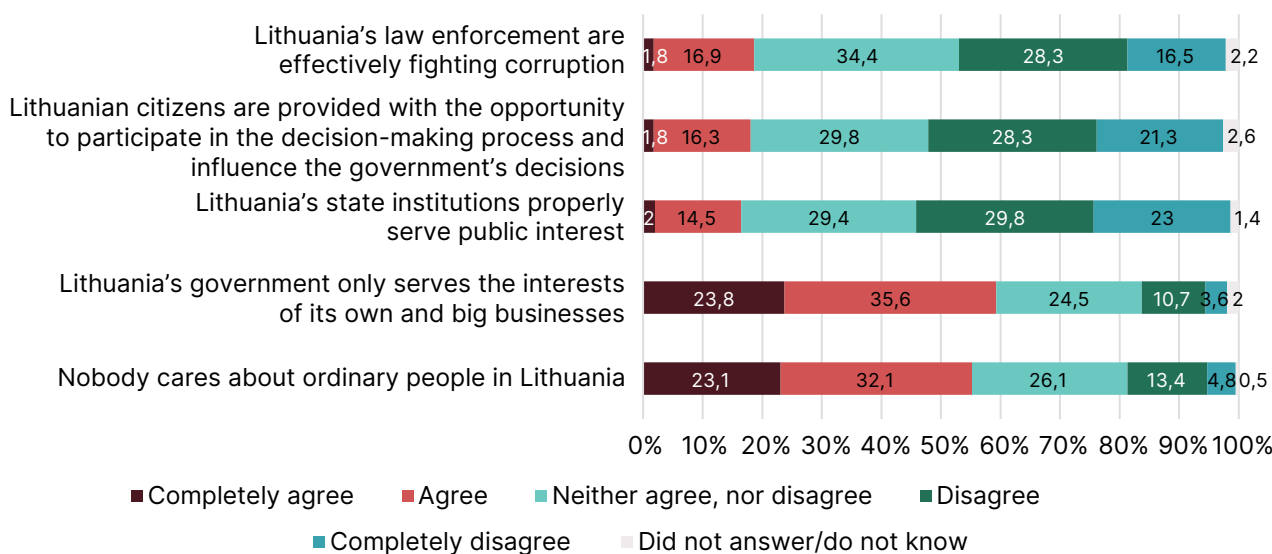
1.3 Satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania

Another important factor aside from democracy perception and willingness to defend it is how residents assess democracy in Lithuania. Usually, these surveys measure the satisfaction with democracy by asking respondents to what extent they are generally satisfied with how democracy works in their country. The distribution of responses was as follows: 5% were very satisfied, 44% satisfied, 28% dissatisfied, 16% very dissatisfied, and 7% of respondents did not answer or said they do not know. Therefore, slightly more respondents were generally satisfied (49% of responses) than generally dissatisfied (44% of responses).

In this survey, we used a set of five indicators developed by Ainė Ramonaitė, which measure the level of satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania among its residents and how they view the responsiveness of democratic institutions. The respondents were asked to what extent they agree to the following statements: *Lithuania's government only serves the interests of its own and big businesses; nobody cares about ordinary people in Lithuania; Lithuania's law enforcement are effectively fighting corruption; Lithuanian citizens are provided with the opportuni-*

ty to participate in the decision-making process and influence the government's decisions; and Lithuania's state institutions properly serve public interest. In their answers, the respondents were asked to use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "Completely agree" and 5 means "Completely disagree". It should be borne in mind that satisfaction with democracy is indicated by disagreeing with the first two statements and agreeing with the remaining three. The responses in percentages are shown in Fig. 1.2.

Fig. 1.2 Lithuanian residents' satisfaction with democracy, in %



Based on these five indicators and a general question about the way democracy works in Lithuania, we calculated the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy for each respondent. In this index, 0 indicates utter dissatisfaction with democracy in all respects and 100 indicates complete satisfaction with democracy in all respects. **The average Index of Satisfaction with Democracy calculated from all responses is 37**, which indicates a theoretically below-average satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania.

1.4 Trust in Lithuanian state institutions

Finally, studies of support for democracy usually also survey the support for specific state institutions. In this survey, we presented the respondents with a standard list of political and law enforcement

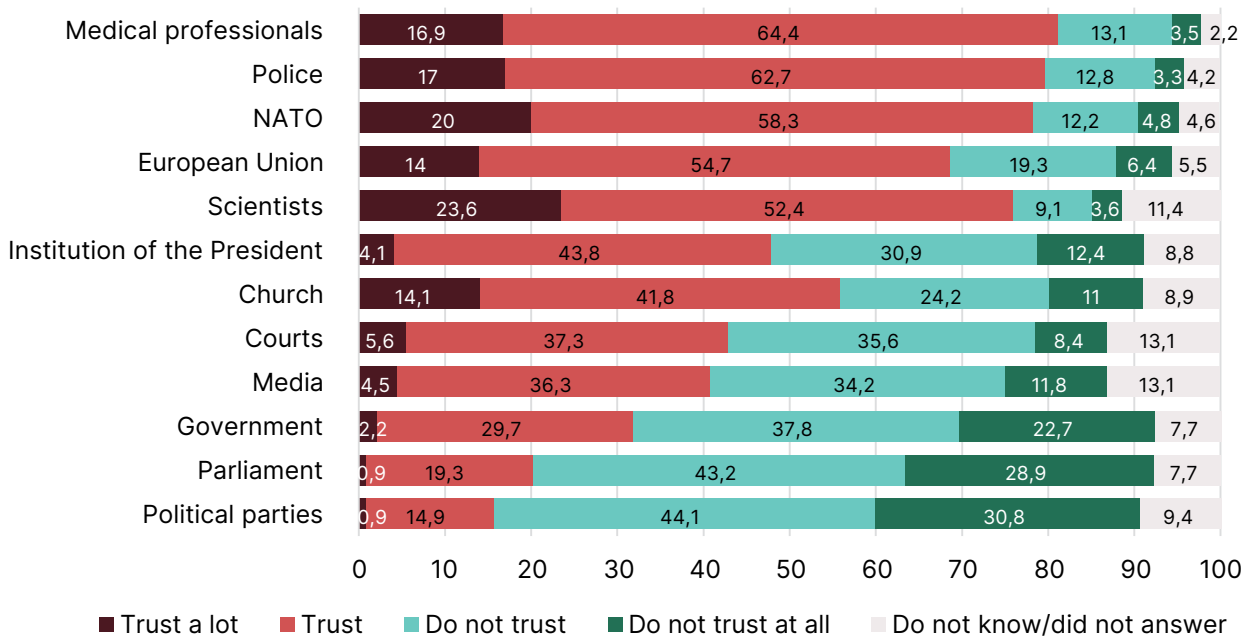
institutions, asking them to indicate the extent to which they trust them on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means trusting a lot and 10 means not trusting at all. State institutions aside, we also asked to what extent Lithuanian residents trust the media, international institutions (the EU and NATO), the Church, medical professionals and scientists. The responses in percentages are shown in Fig. 1.3, where the institutions are sorted by the level of trust in them.

Based on seven indicators, comprising trust in political institutions (the Seimas, the Government, political parties, and the institution of the President), law enforcement institutions (the police and the courts) and the media, we calculated the Index of Trust in State Institutions, where 0 means strong distrust in all institutions and 100 means strong trust in all institutions. **The average Index of Trust in State Institution is 42.1**, which indicates a (theoretically) below-average trust in state institutions.

The four indexes discussed in this chapter measure different dimensions of democratic sustainability, namely the perception of elements of liberal democracy, the support for the active defense of democracy, the satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania and trust in Lithuania's state institutions. The average values of these indexes in the survey are shown in Fig. 1.4. The Democracy Perception Index (82.5) is far ahead of the other average indexes. The support for defense of democracy (52.1) is slightly above the

theoretical average. The more problematic dimensions are the satisfaction with democracy (averaging at 37) and trust in institutions (42.4) in Lithuania, where average indexes are below the theoretical average. It appears that Lithuanian residents have an adequate understanding of democracy and more than half of them would support its defense, but far fewer of them are satisfied with the way Lithuanian democratic institutions work in practice.

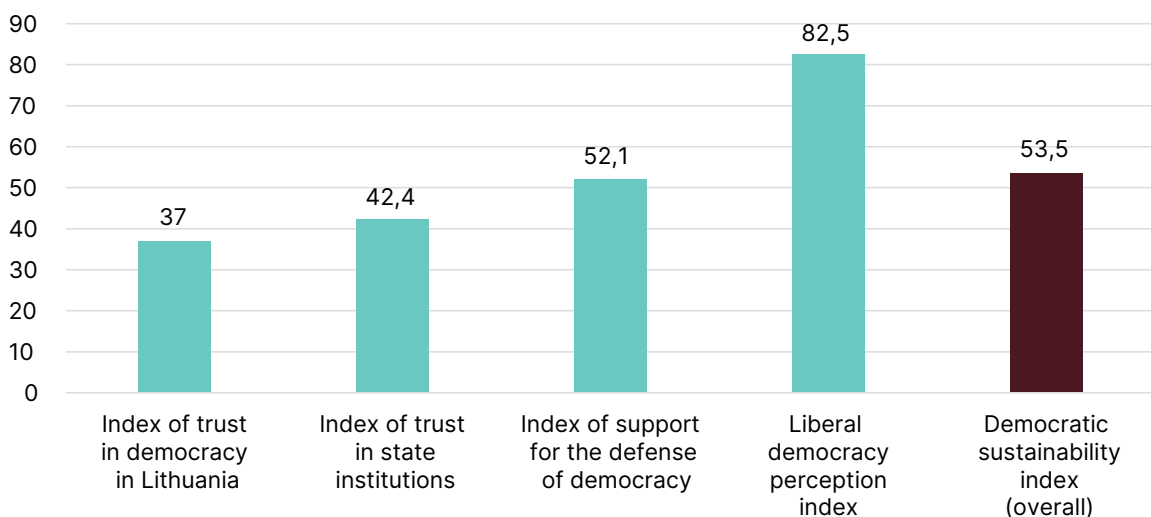
Fig. 1.3 Lithuanian residents' trust in institutions, in %



Based on all these indexes, we derived the ultimate Democratic Sustainability Index, **the value of which is 53.5 in this first survey**. This is a starting point that will provide a basis for comparison for planned

annual surveys of this kind, allowing to track the extent of democratic sustainability in Lithuania on a societal level.

Fig. 1.4. The Democratic Sustainability Index and its components



Part 2. The Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda

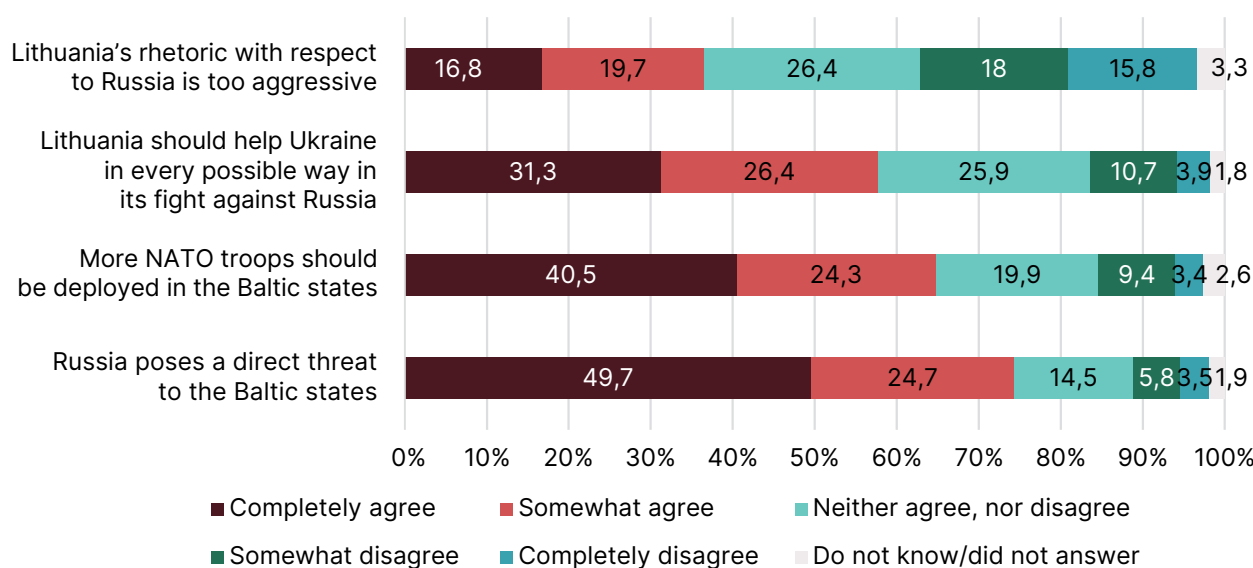
2.1 Perception of threat from Russia

We measured Lithuanian residents' perception of threat from Russia and how they view our country's response to it in earlier surveys, using the indicators that had already been tested. Respondents were

asked to what extent they agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "Completely agree" and 5 means "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.** Agreeing with the first three statements and disagreeing with the fourth indicates an adequate understanding of threat from Russia and the fight against it.

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 average Index of the Perception of Threat from Russia is 67.2**, which indicates a fairly adequate (albeit not perfect) public understanding of the threat from Russia and the country's response to it.

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



2.2 Resilience to Eastern economic narratives

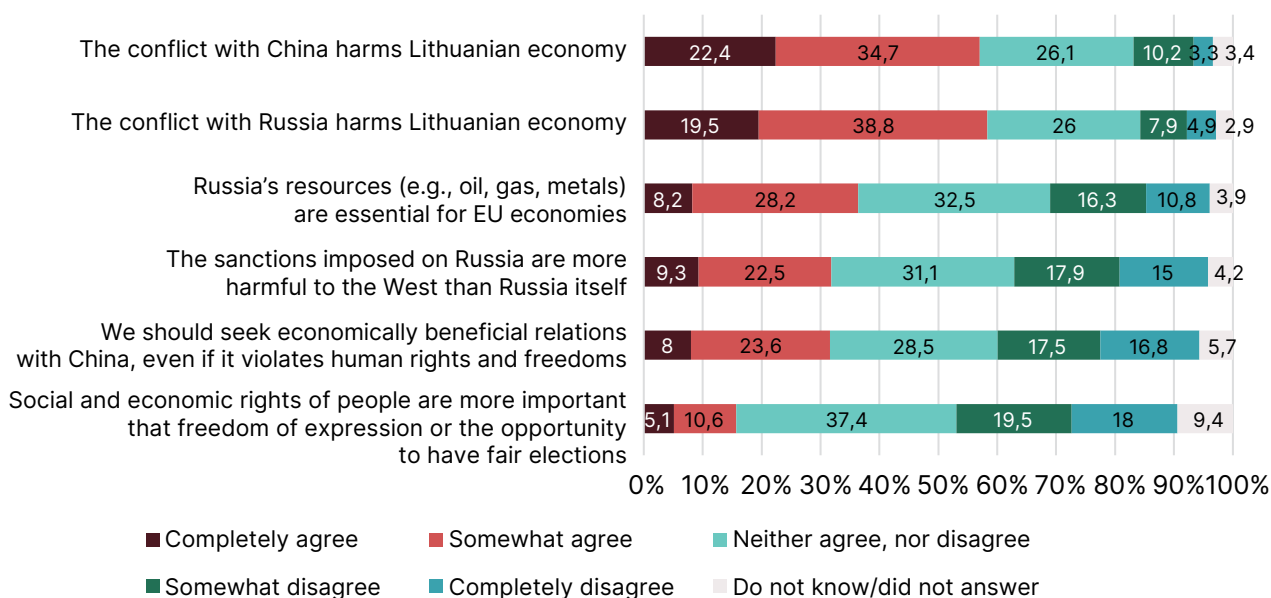
Next, we analyzed Lithuanians' resilience to Russian and Chinese propaganda narratives. It is theoretically and statistically justified to divide these narratives into two groups, namely the political and the economic narratives. These narratives encompass propaganda statements used by authoritarian re-

gimes to convince the public that cooperation with them is beneficial, the perceived threats are exaggerated, the alleged human rights violations are unfounded, and the West is ultimately to blame. The respondents were presented with six typical propaganda narratives pushed by Russia and China, encompassing various economic topics, which can be divided into three main groups with two statements each: first, the statements assessing the extent to which Lithuanians agree that the support for dem-

ocratic rights and freedoms should be relinquished in favor of economic cooperation and benefits; second, the statements assessing the extent to which the respondents see the conflicts with Russia and China as harmful to Lithuania's economy; third, the statements assessing the extent to which the respondents agree that sanctions against Russia and trade restrictions on natural resources are harmful to

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 "Completely agree" and 5 means "Completely disagree". Thus, disagreement with these statements was treated as resilience to them.

Fig. 2.2. Lithuanian residents' agreement to Russian and Chinese economic narratives, in %



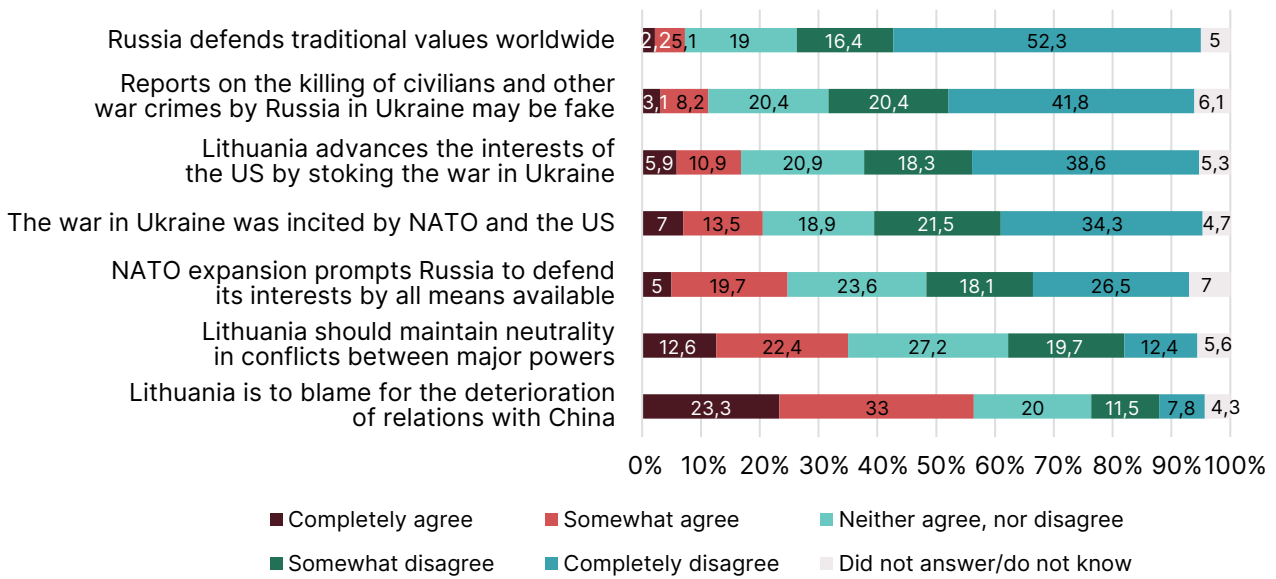
Based on the questions listed in Fig. 2.2 on Russian and Chinese economic narratives, we calculated the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism, where 0 meant a thorough appeal of authoritarianism and agreement with the narratives and 100 meant complete resilience to and disagreement with the narratives. **The value of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism is 47**, which means that Lithuanian residents do not find authoritarianism appealing, but nor are they resilient to it.

2.3 Resilience to Eastern political narratives

We assessed the resilience to Eastern political narratives by presenting the respondents with seven statements, which can be divided into several additional groups. First, we assessed how many respondents agree with the lies spread by Russia about the

war in Ukraine, namely, that it was incited 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 them about more general narratives regarding Russia's role in international politics, namely, that Russia defends traditional values worldwide and that NATO expansion prompts Russia to defend its interests by all means available. Finally, we also tested the narratives related to Lithuania's role in international politics, namely, to what extent the respondents agree that Lithuania is to blame for the conflict with China and that Lithuania should maintain neutrality 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 the respondents' answers in percentages is shown in Fig. 2.3.

Fig. 2.3 Lithuanian residents' agreement to Russian and Chinese political narratives, in %

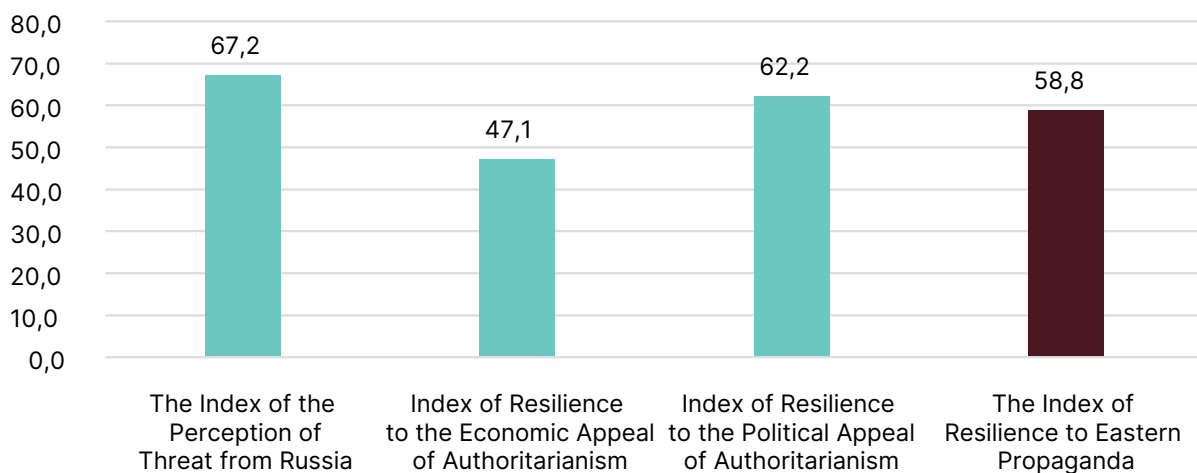


Based on the responses to these seven statements, we derived the Index of Resilience to the Political Appeal of Authoritarianism, where 0 meant a thorough appeal of authoritarianism and agreement with the narratives and 100 meant complete resilience to and disagreement with the narratives). **The average value of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism is 62.2**, which indicates a theoretically above-average resilience.

The three indexes discussed in this part measure different dimensions of democratic resilience, namely, the perception of threat from Russia and the appeal

of both economic and political narratives from two Eastern authoritarian states (Russia and China). The average values of these indexes in the survey are shown in Fig. 2.4. It may be observed that the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism (47.1) lags behind the rest and thus lowers the overall Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda (58.8), which we derived as an arithmetic average from all the three indexes. In the future, this index may serve as a basis of comparison for planned annual surveys to track changes in the public perception of threat from the East, and the extent of public resilience to propaganda from authoritarian states.

Fig. 2.4. The Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index and its components



Conclusion

The results of the first Democratic Sustainability Barometer Index indicate a fairly good understanding of liberal democracy and its elements in Lithuania, as well as support for democracy. Moreover, more than half of Lithuanians are inclined to defend democracy from various threats in protests (or support the cause of such protests). With that said, the values of the indicators of satisfaction with how democracy works in Lithuania and trust in its institutions are not as high. The trust in institutions, as well as the perception of the extent to which democratic principles are implemented in practice and of the responsiveness of democratic institutions, remain the most vulnerable aspects of Lithuanian democracy. A partial answer to why that is the case lies in the fact that Lithuanian residents tend to attribute social elements to democracy: around a half of respondents see state support in case of unemployment or sickness as an essential characteristic of democracy, and the same is more or less true of the idea that the state should tax the rich and support the deprived.

The survey shows that Lithuanian residents rather adequately perceive the threat from Russia and the responses it necessitates. Moreover, they are relatively resilient to Eastern political narratives, with the absolute majority of residents disagreeing with the statements that, for example, NATO is stoking the war in Ukraine, Russia defends traditional values worldwide, etc. Nonetheless, the weak point of this resilience are the economic narratives that underscore the economic losses incurred by the deterioration of relations with Russia and China: this is particularly evident in responses to the statements that this situation harms Lithuania's economy, with around a half or more respondents agreeing to them. Similarly, we may observe a lower-than-desirable support for a more active diplomatic role of Lithuania: for instance, Lithuanians' responses to the proposal that Lithuania should maintain neutrality are distributed fairly equally between the three options, with a third agreeing, a third disagreeing and a third undecided.