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Democracy Sustainability Barometer 2023





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Summary

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

The value of the 2023 Democratic Sustainability Index is 55.8 (theoretical maximum – 100). It has increased slightly compared to the 2022 value (53.5), but this is not a statistically significant change, and part of the increase is due to new aspects of the measurement of satisfaction with democracy: we have observed that citizens are relatively more satisfied with democratic rights than with representation. We confirm the findings of the first study: In Lithuania, the sustainability of democracy at the sociological level is above the theoretical average. The value of the index is again undermined by a lack of trust in political institutions and dissatisfaction with the practical functioning of democracy in Lithuania, particularly with institutions' responsiveness to the public.

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 this year is 59.5 (58.8 in 2022). This indicates an above-average resilience to Eastern propaganda among Lithuanian residents.

The perception of threat from Russia remains fairly high. Lithuanian residents' resilience is the lowest with respect to the economic narratives, in which the regimes of Russia and China extol the benefits of cooperating with them. On the other hand, the results of the survey experiment show that Lithuanians generally prioritise cooperation with democratic countries. Among the social indicators, the biggest influence on resilience is the perception of the Soviet era: if all Lithuanians had a negative perception of the Soviet era (compared to today), society's resilience to Eastern propaganda would be even higher.

Introduction

Last year, we presented the first Democracy Sustainability Barometer. This study was the first step towards a consistent measurement of democratic attitudes and resilience to the propaganda of authoritarian Eastern states in Lithuania. After conducting and analysing a representative survey of the population, we have developed the two pillars of the Democracy Sustainability Barometer – two statistical indexes. The first, the **Democracy Sustainability Index**, measures sociological support for democracy: how Lithuanians perceive liberal democracy, how ready they are to defend it, how satisfied they are with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania, and how much trust they have in state institutions. The second, the **Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda**, looks at people's perceptions of the Russian threat and the extent to which they are willing to accept the economic and political narratives that the authoritarian regimes in Russia and China use in their propaganda.

The main findings of the first survey point out that although Lithuanians have a good understanding of democracy and are quite actively committed to defending it, trust in democracy and satisfaction with its functioning are lagging behind. These two aspects have lowered the Democracy Sustainability Index, which was 53.5 on a 100-point scale (0 for a completely sociologically weak democracy, 100 for an ideally sustainable democracy) in 2022. In terms of resilience to Eastern propaganda, Lithuanians had a fairly adequate perception of the threats posed by Russia and were fairly resilient to political propaganda, but acceptance of economic narratives was a weak point. It was this aspect that lowered the Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda, with a final value of 58.8 on a 100-point scale (0 for complete acceptance of propaganda, 100 for ideal resistance). Of course, a more accurate interpretation of these aggregated indexes requires looking at their components – both last year's report and this new study are suitable for this.

Democracy continues to face challenging times: there are now more closed authoritarian regimes in the world than liberal democracies, and the level of democracy in 2022 has returned to 1986 levels (V-Dem 2023). Accordingly, it is particularly important to constantly monitor the democratic attitudes of the population and their resilience to the propaganda emanating from the countries that export authoritarianism – in particular, Russia and China.

This year, we are continuing the Democracy Sustainability Barometer study by updating the data and slightly adjusting some indicators. The political year 2023 was relatively calm in Lithuania, with no major waves of protests. Accordingly, the indexes should have remained more or less stable. And that is exactly what happened: we do not see any significant changes, although there are a few changes in the indicators for specific issues. The main innovation of this year's study is the addition of questions to measure satisfaction with democracy. New questions measure support for the functioning of procedural elements of liberal democracy and of political and civil rights in Lithuania (whether elections are free, whether parties compete, etc.). This adjustment slightly increases the index for this component and the final Democracy Sustainability Index.

The results of the study are presented in three parts. The first part 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 Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda is presented here. We also compare the indexes based on several key independent variables: age, education, place of residence and assessment of the Soviet era. We include the latter criterion because this political divide still structures people's political attitudes (Ramonaitė et al. 2014; Ramonaitė 2020), and previous research has shown a strong relationship with the level of resilience to propaganda (RESC 2017). This division is also confirmed in our study: the evaluation of the Soviet era best differentiates the population in terms of its democratic attitudes and resistance to propaganda. The people most in favour of democracy and most resilient to propaganda are those for whom the present times are better than the Soviet times.

The study 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 20 September and 9 October 2023. 1017 respondents aged between 18 and 75 were interviewed. The statistical overlap between the components of the indexes presented in the study was tested using factor analysis: all the intermediate index indicators fall into one dimension, respectively. The t-test and ANOVA, statistical significance criteria, were used to assess the differences between index averages according to the sociodemographic characteristics.

Part I.

Democratic Sustainability 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 are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell us to which extent each of these things is a necessary feature of democracy.” On a scale from 1 (not at all necessary) to 10 (necessary), respondents rated various elements of the institutions of liberal democracy (political and civil rights), representation and accountability, social justice, and direct 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).

As in the 2022 survey, political and civil rights – such as freedom of opinion and expression, free elections, and women’s and men’s rights – are seen by Lithuanians as the most essential features of democracy.

Their average score is between 8.6 and 8.8, and between 55% and 59% of respondents chose these elements as essential features. The assessment of the impartiality of the judiciary is not far behind (average 8.5). Among the institutes of liberal democracy, the rights of national minorities are perceived as the least necessary (38.8%), but the average for this aspect is still quite high (8). Interestingly, the perception of competition between two or more parties has increased significantly compared to last year’s survey, with the average increasing from 7.9 to 8.3, and the share of respondents indicating that this feature is a must-have, rising from 35% to as high as 50%. This change can be attributed to the fact that the new survey was carried out in the run-up to the election year and the increasing competition between parties in the public sphere. Party competition is becoming more relevant when people think about their choices in presidential, European, and national parliamentary elections. The next survey will show how sustainable this change is.

This year, we have added three new questions regarding democracy perception, on the importance of government accountability and citizen engagement. These were also considered quite important by respondents, with averages between 8.2 and 8.4 and percentages ranging from 44% to 48%. 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 selected “Essential characteristic of democracy”	% of respondents selected “Goes against the principles of democracy”
<i>Liberal democracy</i>			
People elect their representatives in free elections	8.8	59.8	0.2
Citizens have a right to freely and openly express opinions and beliefs, including criticism of the government	8.7	58.6	0.3
Women have the same rights as men	8.6	55.6	0
Courts act in an impartial manner and are free from political influence	8.5	52.7	0.3
Rule of law prevails in the country	8.3	47.5	0.9
Two or more political parties compete in elections	8.3	50.0	0.6
The rights of ethnic minorities are guaranteed	8.0	38.8	0.5

Item	Average	% of respondents selected "Essential characteristic of democracy"	% of respondents selected "Goes against the principles of democracy"
<i>Accountability of democratic government</i>			
When making decisions, the government takes the views of the population into account	8.4	46.9	0.7
Citizens can get involved in and influence government decision-making	8.2	43.9	0.2
The government justifies its policies to the public	8.4	47.9	0.4
<i>Social justice</i>			
People receive state support in case of unemployment or sickness	8.4	50.0	0.5
The state taxes the rich and supports those in need	7.0	24.4	1.8
The state ensures equal pay	6.8	22.7	0.3
<i>Direct democracy</i>			
The most important political issues are decided by referendum	8.3	44.7	0.1

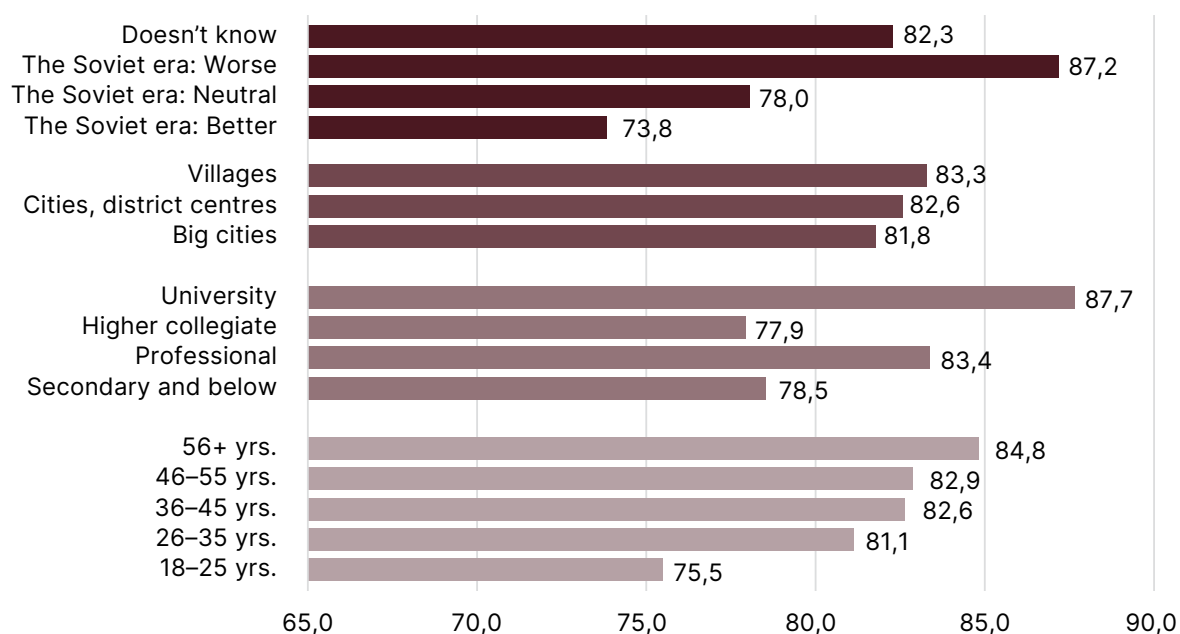


Fig. 1.1. Averages of the Liberal Democracy Perception Index based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

As in previous years, 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 50% of respondents cite this as a necessary feature of democracy. The other two elements of social justice – redistribution of wealth (average 7) and guarantee of equal income (average 6.8) – are considered the least necessary of all the elements and lag behind significantly.

Based on the responses about the essentiality of different elements of liberal democracy (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 index derived from the respondents' individual estimates is 82.9, which indicates a rather high level of perception of democracy, almost identical to the 2022 index (82.5). In order to better assess the perception of democracy and taking into account the comments on the first study (we are grateful to VU TSPMI professor Aina Ramonaitė for her advice on this and other matters), we added three criteria

of accountability and representation of the government to the first seven elements of the first study, which are used to measure political and civil rights. The index is virtually unchanged at 82.5, identical to last year's lesser index. We will use this version of index in the Democracy Sustainability Barometer.

In addition, we tested for differences in the Liberal Democracy Perception Index across four social and demographic indicators (Figure 1.1). There are no statistically significant differences based on place of residence. Within the age groups, respondents aged 18–25 have a relatively lower perception of democracy (75.5). In terms of education, people who have a university education have the highest perception of democracy (87.7). Finally, perceptions of the Soviet era has the strongest impact: there is roughly 13 points of difference between those who rate this period positively (73.8) versus negatively (87.2).

1.2 Support for the active defence of democracy

The support for the active defence of democracy was measured by posing the question, “Would you attend the protests or otherwise actively show your opposition if you thought that politicians...”, listing several different situations, the first of which is general (“Seek to limit democracy in Lithuania”) while the others encompass specific democratic rights and freedoms. To differentiate between those who would not attend the protests and those who would support the cause without attending, we listed these two options separately.

Fig. 1.2 shows the distributions of Lithuanian residents’ responses in percentages. What can be noted is that the responses to this question show a relatively high level of missing answers, with a range from 6.8% (to restrict media rights and freedom of expression) to 14.3% (to restrict democracy) of respondents choosing this answer. Overall, the distribution of responses is very similar to last year’s survey. As in 2022, only a minority of Lithuania’s population would be actively involved in protests. The highest percentage of respondents said they would protest when asked about the general issue: if politicians sought to restrict democracy in Lithuania (27.8%). The issue least likely to be protested against would be limiting the rights of homosexual people (around 4.6%). On the other hand, when we add those who support such protests to those who are inclined to participate, there are five elements of democracy that about half or more of the population would support actively defending: if attempts were made to limit media rights and freedom of speech (64%), to limit democracy (63%), to limit the independence of the judiciary (58.9%), to change the electoral rules significantly in favour of the governing party (57.2%), and to abolish access to abortion (49.7%).

Based on the responses, we calculated the Index of Support for the Defence of Democracy, where 0 means neither attending, nor supporting the cause of any of the seven protests and 100 means either attending or supporting the cause of all the listed protests. The **average Index** of Support for the Defence of Democracy calculated from all responses is **52.7**, which shows an average level of willingness to defend democratic institutions and support the cause of such protests. The value of this index is almost identical to that recorded in last year’s survey (52.1).

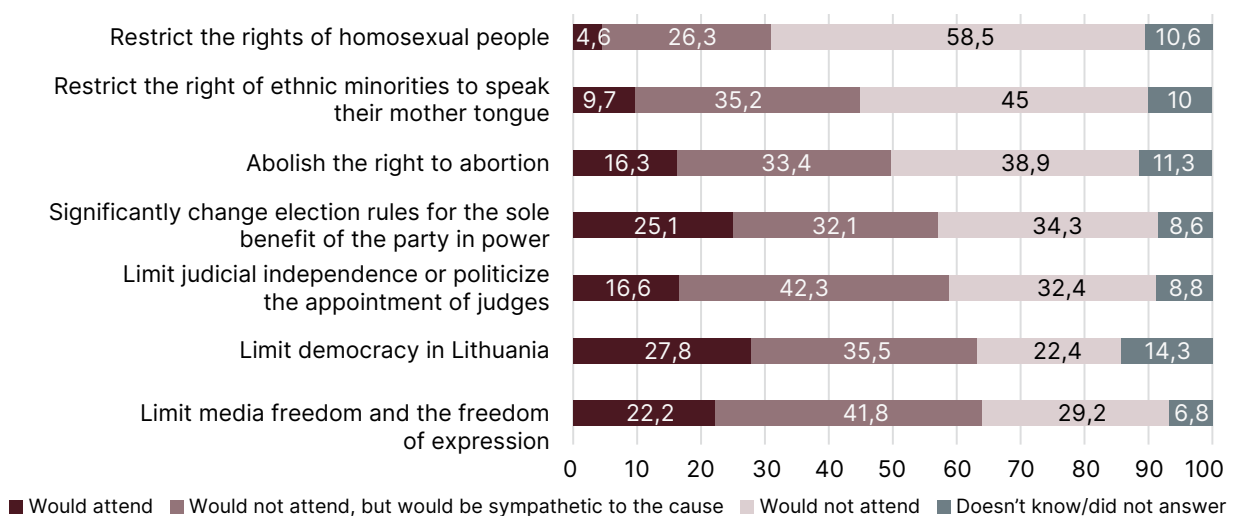


Fig. 1.2. Lithuanian residents’ support for the active defence of democracy, in %

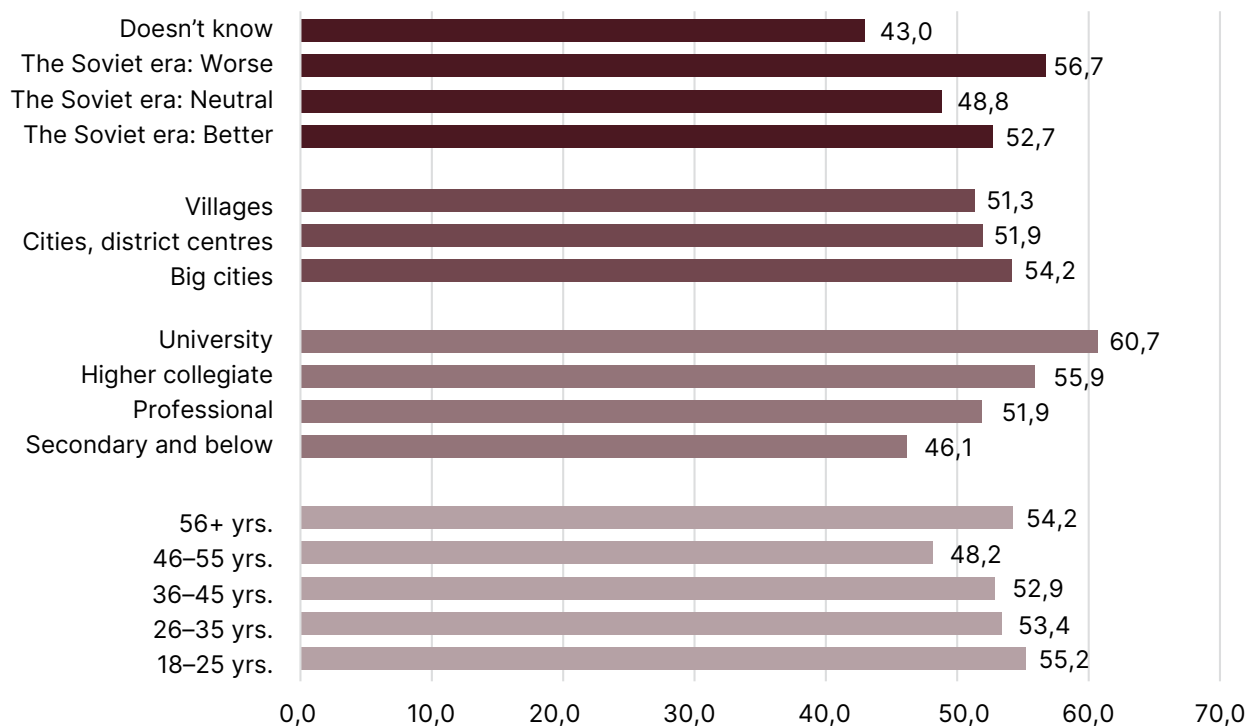


Figure 1.3. Averages of the Index of Support for the Defence of Democracy based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

Figure 1.3 shows the averages of this index by the respondents' social characteristics. The university-educated group stands out again (average 60.7). Similarly to last year's survey, this group is about 14 percentage points more likely to support protests for democracy than people with only a secondary education (46.1). The Soviet era evaluation differentiates this index less than the perception of liberal democracy, but those who evaluate it less favourably still have the highest index value (56.7). Place of residence and age do not significantly change the index values.

1.3 Satisfaction with Democracy in Lithuania

Usually, surveys ask how satisfied the respondent is with the way democracy works in their country in overall. The distribution of responses was as follows: 5.2% were very satisfied, 46.1% satisfied, 29.9% dissatisfied, 13.3% very dissatisfied, and 5.5% of respondents did not answer or said they do not know. Therefore, somewhat more respondents were generally satisfied (51.3% of responses) than generally dissatisfied (43.2% of responses). These figures are not statistically significantly different from last year's survey.

When asking the public more specifically about the functioning and responsiveness of democratic institutions, the answers show much less satisfaction. In this study, we have split the questions on the functioning of democracy into two parts. The first, which we repeat from the last study, is about the substantive dimension of democracy: the accountability and responsiveness of the government to the people (Figure 1.4a). The second and new part of the questions measures attitudes towards people's perceptions of the procedures of liberal democracy and the functioning of political rights (Figure 1.4b).

As in the 2022 survey, we see that only a minority of respondents are satisfied with the responsiveness of democratic institutions. In Figure 1.4a, satisfaction with democracy is indicated by agreement with the first three statements and disagreement with the last two. Compared to 2022, there was an increase in the number of responses (combining "strongly agree" and "agree") that Lithuanian public authorities adequately represent the interests of the public (+ 5.9 percentage points) and that Lithuanian citizens are given the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process and to influence the decisions of the public authorities (+ 7.6 percentage points). However, the latter criterion, which shows the relatively highest level of satisfaction, is still only at 25.7%. In addition, only 11.5% disagree that the Lithuanian government is working for itself and

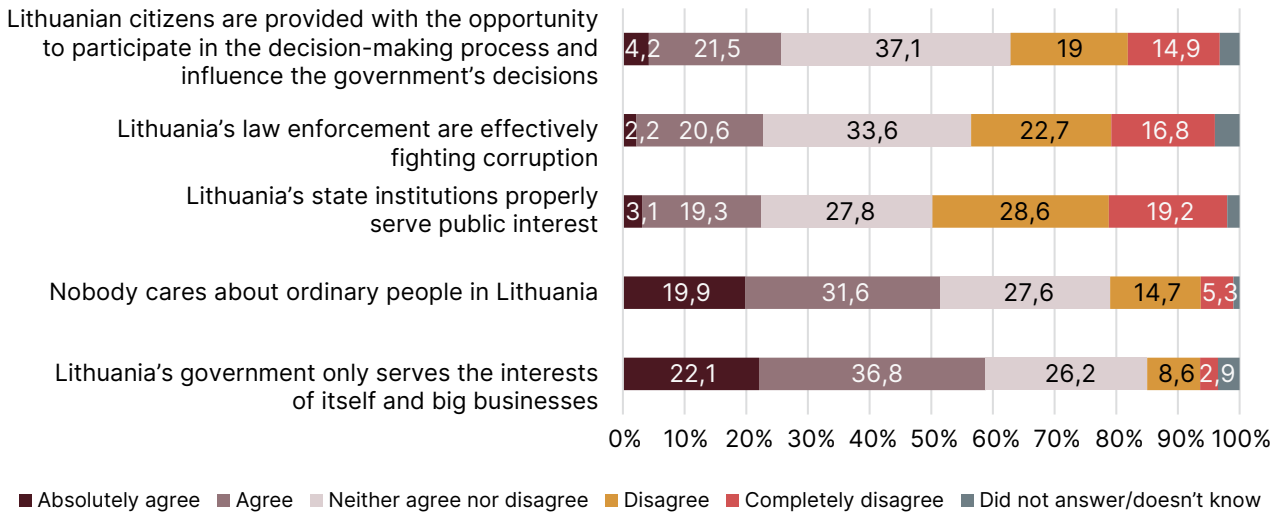


Fig. 1.4a. Lithuanian citizens' satisfaction with the responsiveness of democratic institutions to society, in %.

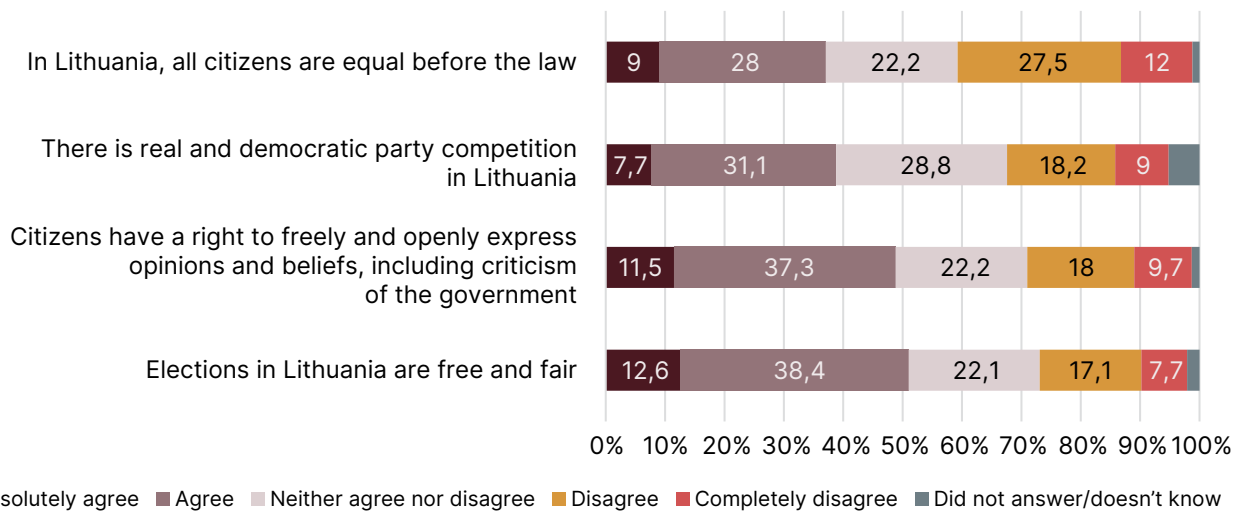


Fig. 1.4b. Lithuanian residents' satisfaction with liberal democracy procedures (political and civil rights), %.

for the interests of big business (and around 58.9% agree). Thus, positive developments do not represent an overall significant shift and may be random: clearly only a minority of the population is satisfied with the institutions' responsiveness to the public on all issues. The answer "neither yes nor no" is quite common (between 26.2% and 37.1%).

In the last survey, we put the answers to these five questions and a summary question about satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Lithuania into the **Index of Satisfaction with Democracy**. It ranges from 0 (completely dissatisfied with all aspects of democracy) to 100 (completely satisfied with all aspects). **The average for this index is 38.7**, which represents a slight increase from the previous average (37), but not enough to register a statistically significant increase in satisfaction.

In addition, we have included questions measuring the extent to which the population is satisfied with the political and civil rights of liberal democracy. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements: In Lithuania, all citizens are equal before the law; elections in Lithuania are free and fair; citizens have the right to publicly and openly express their beliefs and thoughts, including criticism of the government; and there is real and democratic competition between parties. Theoretically, these aspects better reflect the institutions of liberal democracy presented in the first part of Table 1.1.

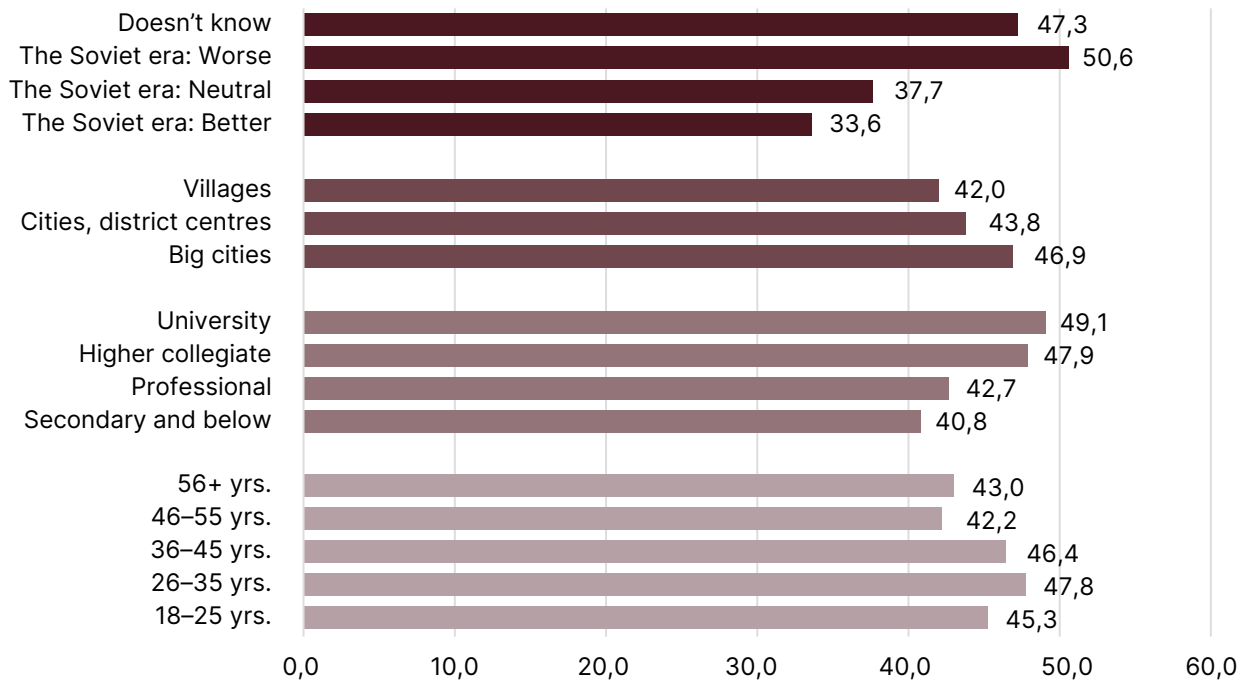


Fig. 1.5. Averages of the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy (new version) by place of residence, education, age and perception of the Soviet era

The distribution of responses to these questions is shown in Table 1.4b. Satisfaction with political rights is higher than with the responsiveness of institutions to society: for three out of four questions (except equality before the law), there are more respondents who are satisfied (“strongly agree” and “agree”) than dissatisfied. The highest levels of satisfaction are with freedom of speech and beliefs (48.8%) and free elections (51%). However, only about 37% of respondents believe that all citizens in Lithuania are equal before the law, while about 39.5% of respondents disagree. If we add these four questions to the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy (which we shall call the new version), the value rises to 44.5, which is still below the theoretical average satisfaction (which would be 50) with democracy in Lithuania.

We compared the differences in the updated index (covering questions 1.4a and 1.4b) across social categories (Figure 1.5). Age has no influence. People living in cities and those with higher education are more satisfied with democracy. The biggest differences are in the assessment of the Soviet era. The gap between those who rate it positively on the one hand (50.6) and those who rate it neutrally (37.7) or positively (33.6) on the other far exceeds the influence of place of residence and education. It seems that satisfaction with democracy is strongly related to whether a person living in Lithuania sees herself or himself as a winner of the post-Soviet transformation. Those who do not know how to evaluate the Soviet era are also relatively more satisfied (47.3),

which can be attributed to the fact that this category is mainly made up of young people who have not lived under the Soviet system.

1.4 Trust in Lithuanian state institutions

It is also important to look at specific support for particular public authorities. We used a 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 % are shown in Fig. 1.6.

As in 2022, people still trust the police the most among all public authorities. Confidence in NATO and the EU is again quite high. When it comes to domestic political institutions, the overall situation is also stable compared to 2022. First, there are more respondents who are trusting (49.7%) than distrusting (44.2%) of the Institution of the President. Second, trust in other political institutions is much lower (from 16.1% of those who trust political parties to 33.6% of those who trust the government) than distrust (from 60.2% of those who distrust the government to 77.9% of those who distrust political parties).

Compared to 2022, confidence in the judiciary has increased by about 7.1 percentage points, with the number of confident respondents (about 50%) being higher than the number of non-confident respondents (42.3%) in this poll. It's hard to say whether this is a significant or a random change. On the other hand, as in the previous survey, evaluations of the media are balanced with a tendency towards the negative side: about 42.7% trust and 48.7% distrust.

Based on seven indicators, comprising trust in political institutions (the parliament, 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 43.6**, which indicates a (theoretically)

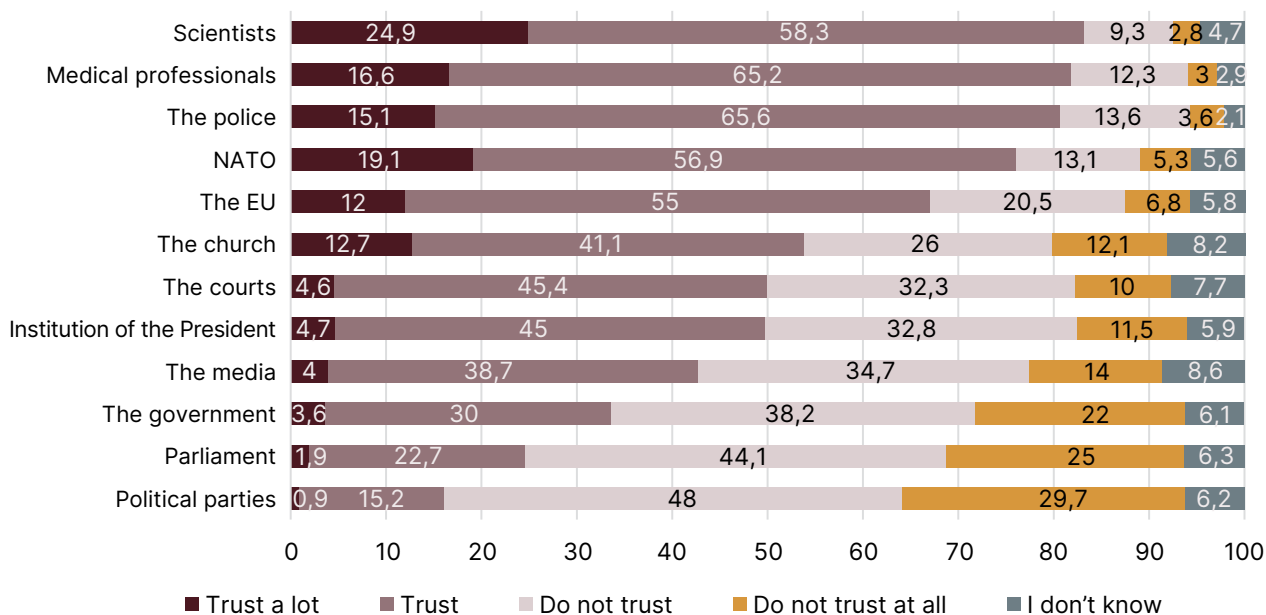


Fig. 1.6. Lithuanian residents' trust in institutions, in %

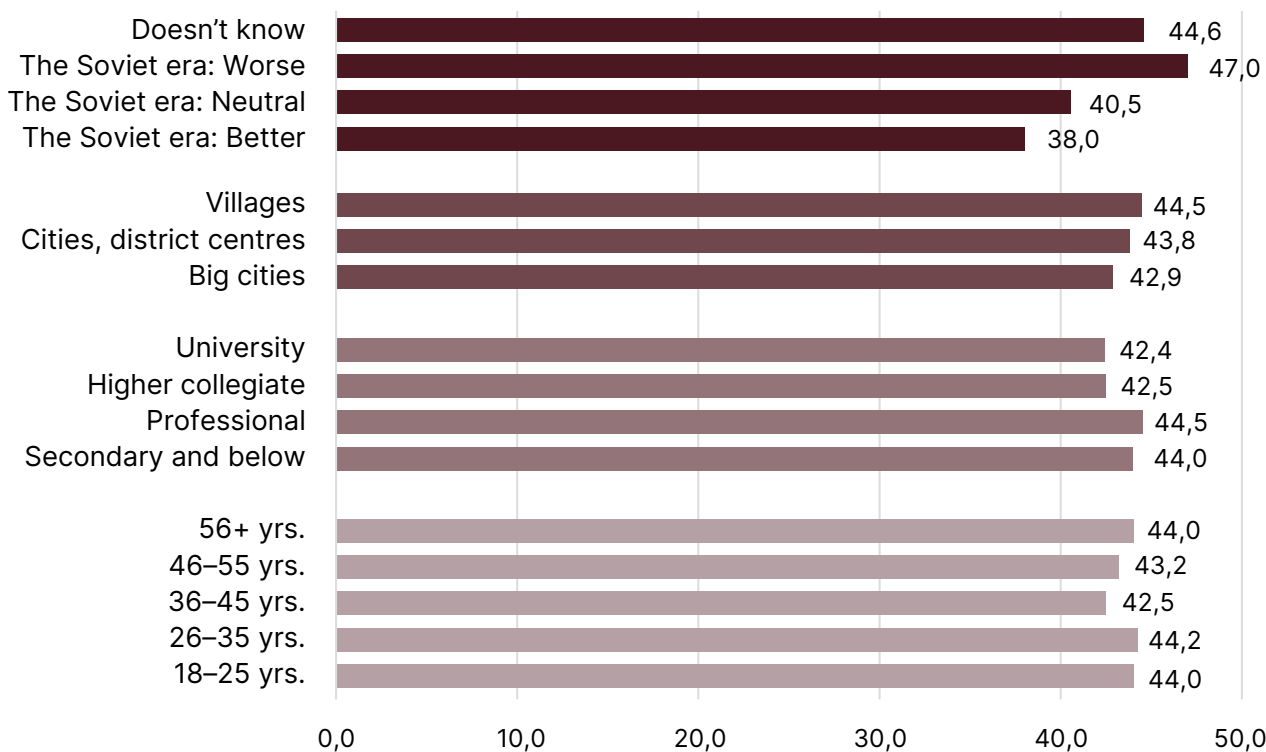


Fig. 1.7. Averages of the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy based on place of residence, education, age and perception of the Soviet era

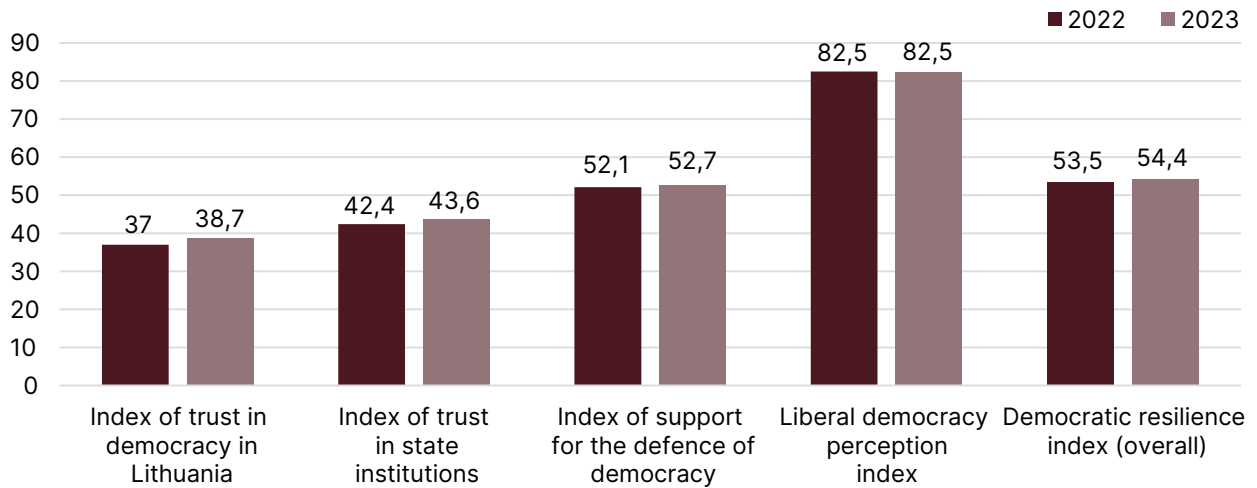


Fig. 1.8a. The Democratic Sustainability Index and its components: Comparison between 2022 and 2023

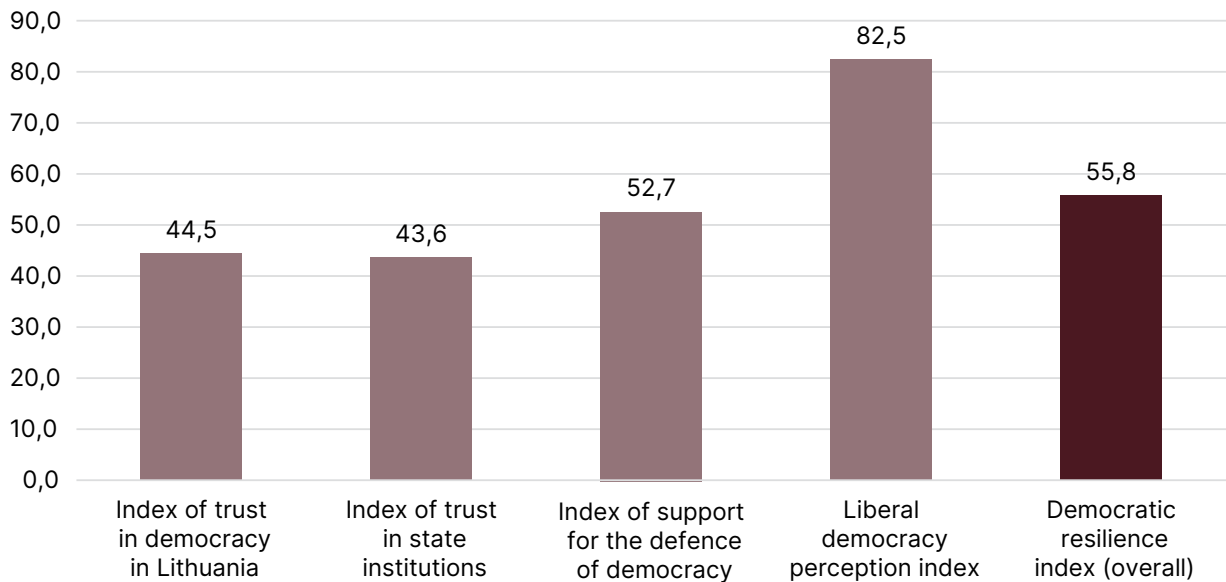


Fig. 1.8b. The Democracy Sustainability Index and its components, including a new version of the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy

below-average trust in state institutions, the same as in 2022 (when the index was 42.1; no significant change). Figure 1.7 shows the differences in the averages of this index based on the social characteristics of the respondents. As in the 2022 survey, place of residence, education and age do not significantly differentiate trust. However, the influence of perceptions of the Soviet era is again evident: respondents who rate the Soviet era less favourably are more trusting of state institutions (average 47) than those who rate it more favourably (38) or neutrally (40.5).

The four indexes discussed in this part measure different dimensions of public evaluation of democ-

racy, namely the perception of elements of liberal democracy, the support for the active defence of democracy, satisfaction with democracy in Lithuania and trust in Lithuania's state institutions. The average values of these indexes, as determined by the survey, are shown in Figure 1.8 compared to the 2022 data. For comparability, the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy, which does not cover our new questions, is included here (see section 1.2). It can be seen that in 2022 and 2023, the Index of Perception of Democracy is well ahead of the other indexes (82.5 in both surveys), and support for the defence of democracy is slightly above the theoretical aver-

age. Trust in public institutions and satisfaction with democracy are the most problematic areas, with index values below the theoretical average (50). **The final Democracy Sustainability Index** derived from these four components is **54.4**, slightly higher than in 2022 (53.5), but this is not a significant difference.

The addition of new questions to the Index of Satisfaction with Democracy (Figure 1.8b) does not substantially change the situation: the score of the new version of this index (44.5) is similar to that of the Index of Trust in State Institutions (43.6), but remains below the theoretical average value (50). The final **updated Democracy Sustainability Index** increases slightly (55.8), but this does not significantly change the sociological assessment of the sustainability of democracy: as was the case last year, in the new version it is slightly above satisfactory.

The survey asked respondents to rate two more statements about democracy on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree): first, that democracy is always and in all circumstances superior to other forms of government, and second, that it would be a good thing for Lithuania to have a strong leader in power, even if that leader bypassed the democratic rules in order to pursue their goals. 60.9% agree that democracy is superior (13.3% disagree), while 24.5% agree with the statement about a strong leader (49.2% disagree). The average of these two indicators of support for democracy is 55.1% and is in line with this year's Democracy Sustainability Index, which provides additional confidence in the validity of the index presented in this study, which is also demonstrated by the stability of its components when comparing the two studies.

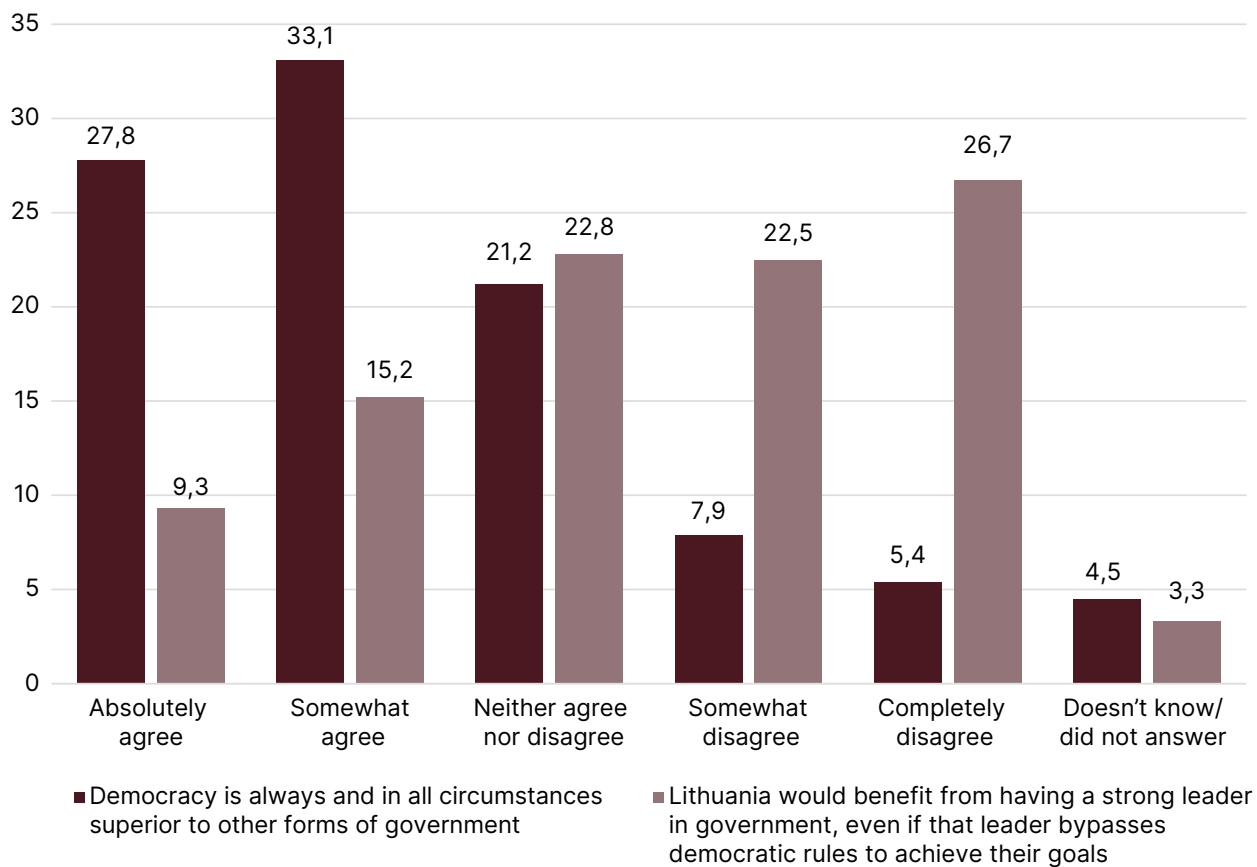


Fig. 1.9. Lithuanian residents' support for a strong leader and democracy as a form of government, in %

Part II: The Index of Appeal of Authoritarian Regimes

2.1 Perception of Threat from Russia

We measured Lithuanian residents' perception of the threat from Russia and how they view our country's response to it in earlier surveys and the 2022 Democracy Sustainability Barometer, using indicators already tested in previous research. 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 concerning Russia is too aggressive. Agreeing with the first three statements and disagreeing with the fourth indicates an adequate understanding of the threat from Russia and the fight against it.

The distribution of the population's responses to these statements is shown in Figure 2.1. It should be stressed that the distribution of responses is almost identical to last year's survey: the differences are very small and within the margin of error. The overwhelming majority of the population adequately assesses the Russian threat, agrees with the deployment of more NATO troops and supports assistance to Ukraine. The only issue on which opinions are again more divided (as in the 2022 survey) is Lithuania's rhetoric towards Russia. Around 34.3% of respondents disagree with said statement. On the other hand, there is no dominant opinion: a similar number agree (35.3%), another 26.4% answered "neither yes nor no", and 4% had no opinion.

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 of the Perception of Threat from Russia is 66.5**, which indicates a fairly adequate (albeit not perfect) public understanding of the threat from Russia and Lithuania's response to it. The change from 2022 (67.2) is statistically insignificant. In addition, we calculated the averages of this index by main social categories (Figure 2.2). As before, place of residence and age do not play a role, and those with a university degree have a higher perception of the Russian threat (average 71.6) than those with any other level of education. The influence of perception of the Soviet era is again much greater. The average index score for those with a negative view of the Soviet era is over 29 percentage points higher (76.6) than for those with a positive view (47.5); the neutral category is also far behind (56.8).

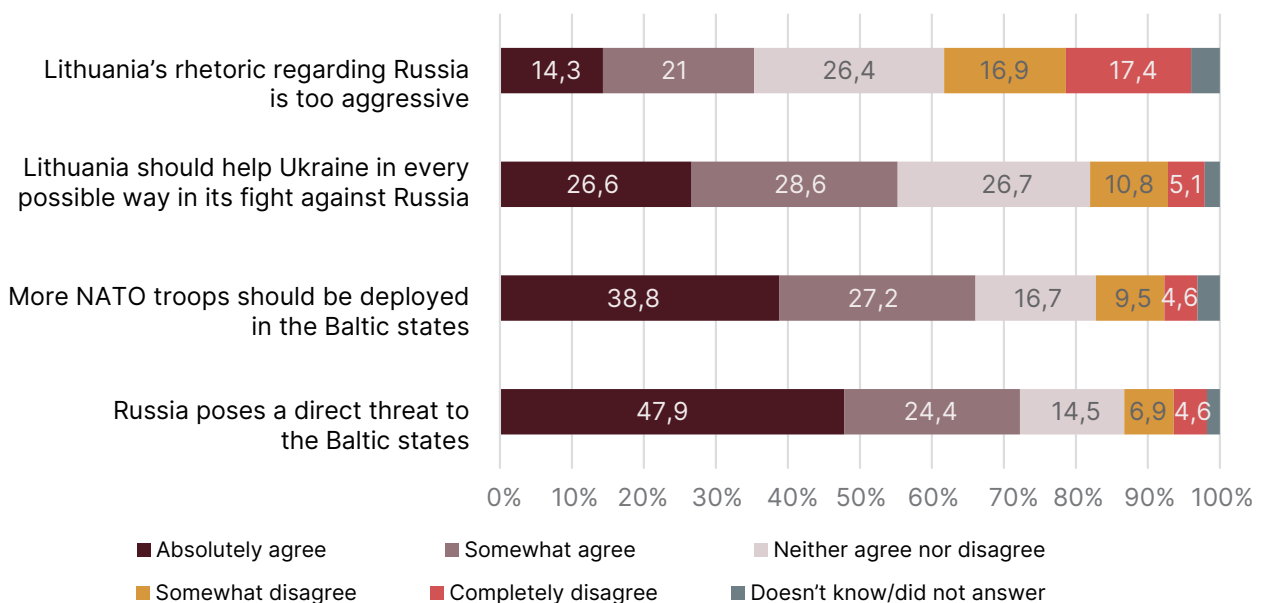


Fig. 2.1. Perception of threat from Russia among Lithuanian residents, in %

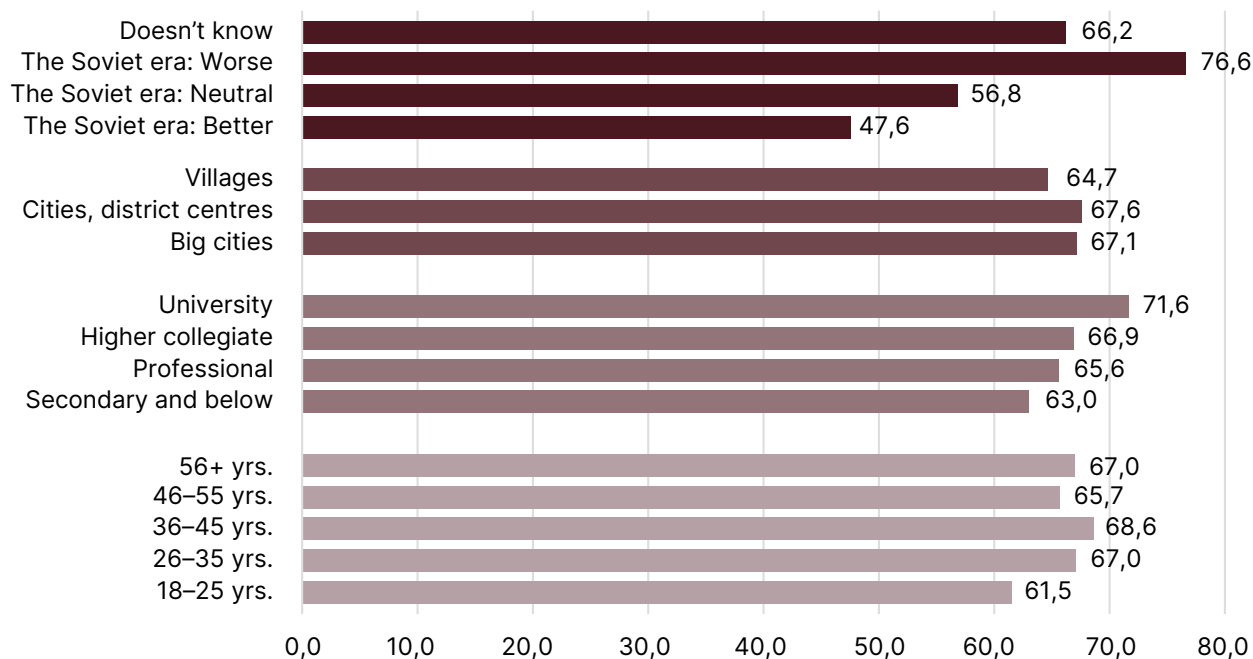


Fig. 2.2. Averages of the Index of the Perception of Threat from Russia based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

2.2 Resilience to Eastern Economic Narratives

Next, we analyse Lithuanians' resilience to Russian and Chinese propaganda narratives. The first Democracy Sustainability Barometer study succeeded in separating these narratives into two groups – economic and political. These narratives encompass propaganda statements used by authoritarian regimes 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. First, we analyse the economic narratives. Respondents were presented with six typical propaganda narratives disseminated by Russia and China, covering a range of economic topics (see last year's [report](#) for their theoretical background). 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.

As in last year's study, the resilience to economic narratives is not high, probably because many of the statements are treated through the prism of expected benefits for Lithuania without considering

the realities of international politics and what deeper cooperation with authoritarianism-exporting states would mean for democracy. The absolute majority of the population tends to agree that conflicts with China (56.3% strongly agree or rather agree) and Russia (51.3%) are hurting the Lithuanian economy. However, in the case of Russia, the number of those who agreed dropped by 7 percentage points, which could be due to the lower relevance of energy prices. In any case, support for this claim remains quite strong.

As in the 2022 survey, the answers to the other questions do not show a prevailing opinion. The number of respondents who agree that Russia's resources are indispensable for EU economies (35.2%) is similar to the number of respondents who disagree (34.6%). Correspondingly, a similar number of people agree (34.5%) and disagree (35%) with the idea that Russia's sanctions are harming the West. 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 (35.2%) and those who tend to agree (30.7%). However, when asked a generalised question about whether social and economic human rights are more important than freedom of expression and access to fair elections, without mentioning a specific country, more people disagree (34.7%) than agree (21.9%). In fact, support for this statement increased by around 6.2% over the year.

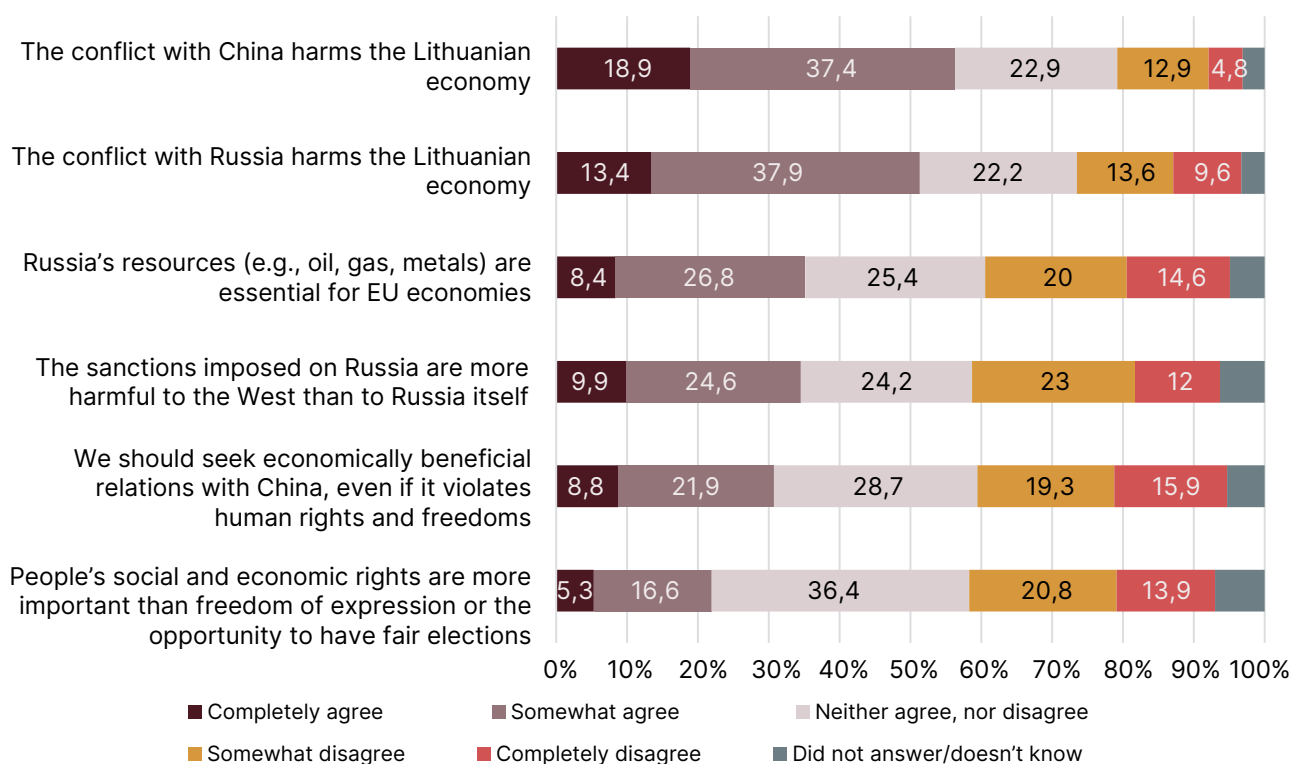


Fig. 2.3. Lithuanian residents' agreement to Russian and Chinese economic narratives, in %

To better understand whether these people's responses really signify a favourable attitude towards cooperation with authoritarian regimes at the expense of democracy, we conducted an additional survey experiment. Respondents were randomly divided into two groups of 508 and 509. We asked both groups the same question, the only difference being that one group was asked about cooperation with a democratic state and the other with an authoritarian one. Compared to 2022, the wording of the question has been revised by increasing the number of hypothetical jobs from 100 to 1,000: *Let's say that Lithuania is about to strengthen economic cooperation with an authoritarian/democratic state. Suppose it would create an extra 1,000 jobs in Lithuania and an extra 1,000 jobs in that authoritarian/democratic country as well. To what extent would you support such cooperation?* The distribution of response rates in % is shown in Table 2.1.

The results of the experiment, as in the 2022 survey, show large differences in favour of democracy. By changing the only condition (the regime), people are much more likely to support cooperation that

benefits both parties equally, namely with a democratic state, than with an authoritarian one. An absolute majority of the population would support cooperation with a democratic state (82%), while only a minority would support cooperation with an authoritarian one (28.3%). The difference between the regimes on the answer "strongly agree" is 36.6% in favour of democracy, and on "somewhat agree" 17.1% in favour of democracy. Accordingly, 22.8% more respondents would be more likely to disapprove of cooperation with an authoritarian state, and 26.3% more respondents would strongly disapprove (compared to cooperation with a democratic state). Therefore, while the answers to the questions about the Russian and Chinese narratives may be disturbing, it is clear from this experiment that the Lithuanian population prefers cooperation with democratic countries. As formulated in the previous study, the practical implication regarding the institutions' communication on relations with Russia and China needs to be reiterated: we need to keep emphasising that these are authoritarian regimes, and Lithuania prefers the company of democracies and economic relations with them.

Table 2.1. Support for cooperation with an authoritarian or democratic state (%): results of the survey experiment

	Democratic	Authoritarian	Difference
Strongly agree	40.7	4.1	36.6
Somewhat agree	41.3	24.2	17.1
Somewhat disagree	6.9	29.7	-22.8
Completely disagree	3	29.3	-26.3
Did not respond	7.7	12	-4.3
Does not know	0.4	0.8	-0.4

From the six questions on the economic narratives of Russia and China in Figure 2.3, we have constructed the **Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism**, with values ranging from 0 (total appeal and disagreement with the narratives) to 100 (total resilience to and disagreement with the narratives). **The value of this index is 48.5**, slightly higher than in 2022 (47), but this is not a significant difference. When it comes to the economy, the Lithuanian population remains in a grey area, with no clear decision on whether to accept or reject the Chinese and Russian economic narratives. Figure 2.4 shows the

averages of the index by social category. Differences by place of residence and age are statistically insignificant. University graduates are more resistant to the economic appeal of authoritarianism. The biggest differences are again in the Soviet dimension. Respondents who have a poor view of the Soviet era are more likely to be resilient (average index 56.9), while those who have a neutral view of the Soviet era (41.5) and those who have a positive view of the Soviet era (41.5) are clearly within the zone of appeal of authoritarianism. These differences are greater than for any other sociodemographic characteristic.

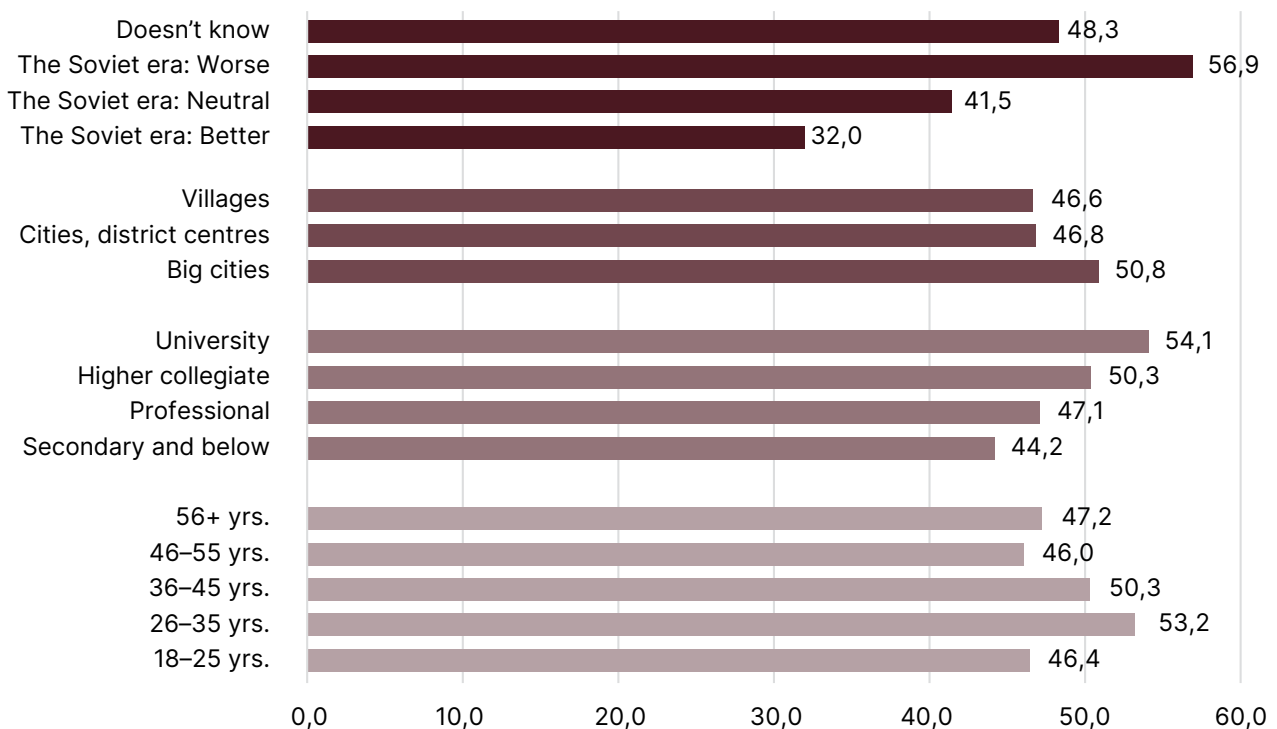


Fig. 2.4. Averages of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

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 further divided into three groups. First, we assessed how many respondents agreed 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 on 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 respondents' answers is shown in Figure 2.5.

As in the 2022 survey, resistance to political propaganda narratives is higher than to economic ones. The only statement with a significantly higher level of support relates to China, with around 45.3% of the population agreeing that Lithuania is to blame for the deterioration of relations with China. However, it should be noted that this figure is also significantly lower than in 2022 when it was 56.3%.

Around three-fifths or more of respondents disagree (strongly disagree or somewhat disagree) that Russia defends traditional values in the world (69%) and that reports of Russian crimes can be fabricated (58%). More than half also do not think that Lithuania is pursuing US interests and instigating the war in Ukraine (56%) and that the war was instigated by NATO and the US (54%). There is no majority of disagreeing respondents on the claim that NATO enlargement encourages Russia to defend its interests, but there are still far more disagreeing respondents (43%) than supporters (23.5%). The responses to the question of whether Lithuania should maintain a neutral status were evenly split between approval (32%) and disapproval (36%). All these indicators are almost identical to the ones we recorded in the 2022 study.



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

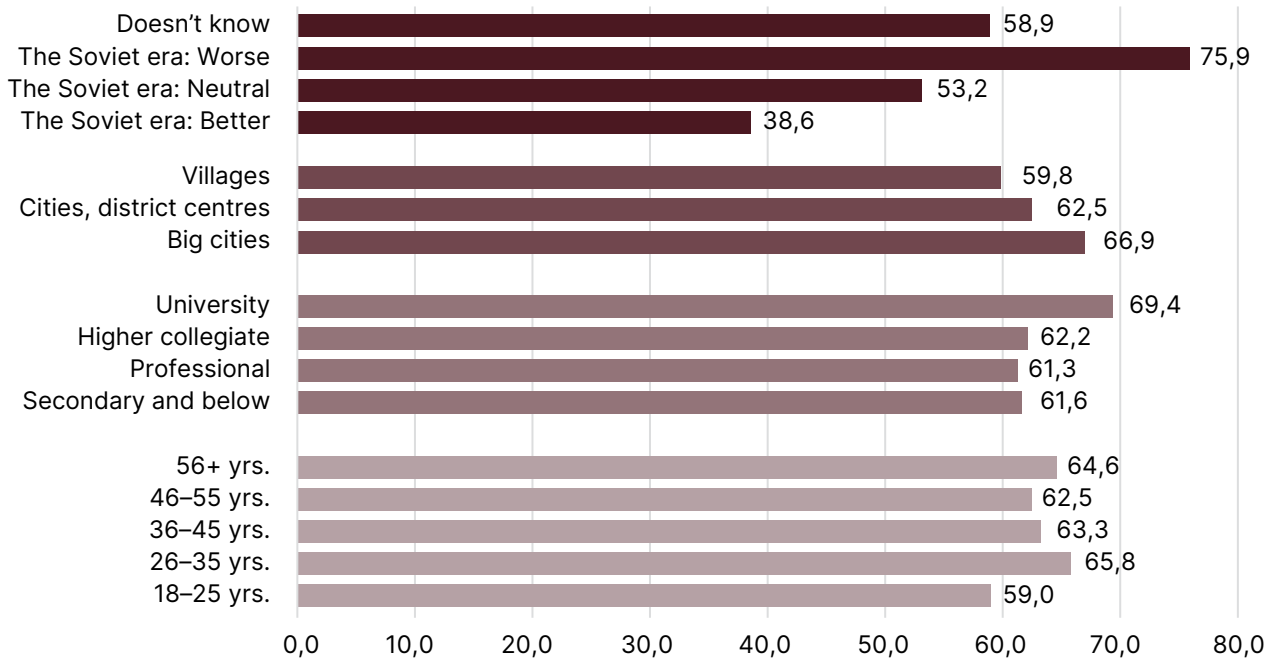


Fig. 2.6. Averages of the Index of Resilience to the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism based on place of residence, education, age and assessment of the Soviet era

Based on the responses to these seven statements, we derived the **Index of 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 index in this year's survey is 63.6**, which confirms a resistance higher than the theoretical average, similar to that recorded last year (62.2). The averages by social characteristics are shown in Figure 2.6. Age is not a significant factor, but there are statistically significant differences based on place of residence and education: big city inhabitants (average 66.9) and those

with a university education (69.4) are more resilient to the political pull of authoritarianism. The influence of perception of the Soviet era is again much greater. People who rate the Soviet era poorly are exceptionally resistant to political narratives, with an average index of 75.9. The more the assessment of the Soviet era improves along this continuum, the more the average index score drops: respondents with a neutral assessment of the Soviet era have a moderate level of resilience (53.2), while those with a positive assessment of the Soviet era are already in the zone of appeal of political authoritarianism (38.6).

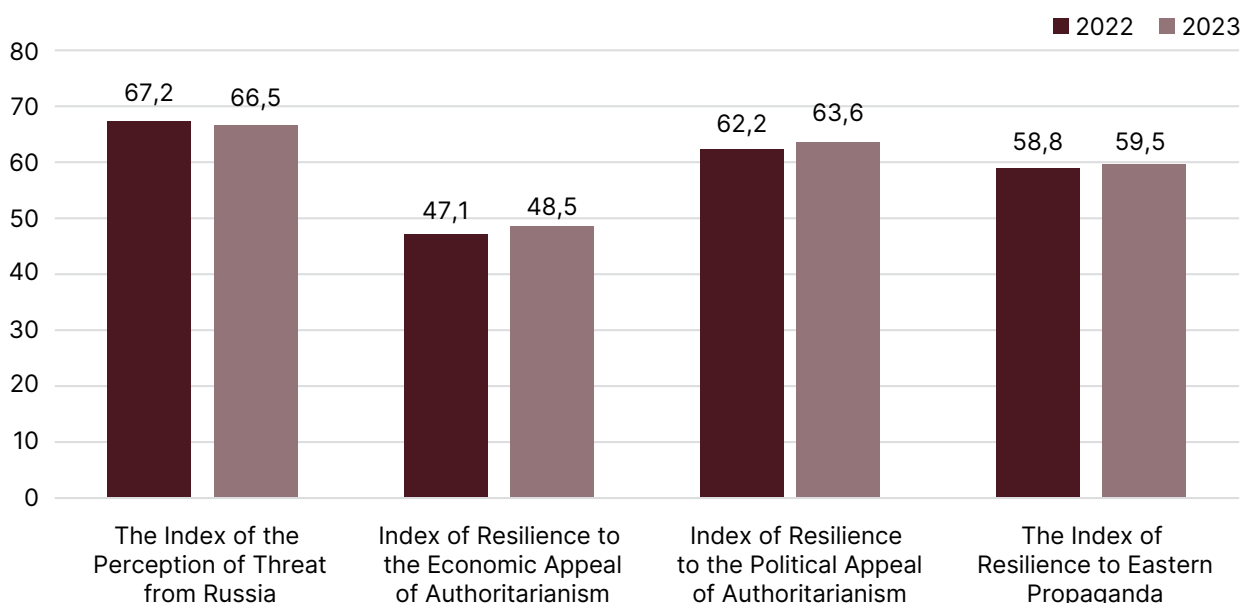


Fig. 2.7. The Resilience to Eastern Propaganda Index and its components in 2022 and 2023

The three indexes discussed in this section measure different dimensions of democratic sustainability: 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, as determined by the survey, are shown in Figure 2.7 compared to the 2022 data. Resistance to Eastern propaganda has not changed significantly. Just like in the previous study, it may be observed that the Index of the Economic Appeal of Authoritarianism (48,5) lags behind the rest and thus lowers the overall Index of Resilience to Eastern Propaganda (59,5), which we derived as an arithmetic average from all three indexes. Thus, the public remains more than moderately resistant to propaganda narratives, but economic propaganda is the weak side of resistance.

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. We do not include these indicators in the Democracy Sustainability Index because they refer to specific situations in which

certain rights (such as assembly) may be temporarily restricted in an unavoidable way: during a pandemic, a war, a state of emergency etc. Thus, a positive response does not necessarily imply anti-democratic attitudes on the part of the population, but it may be important in assessing the population's approval or disapproval of government decisions and the potential for protest in emergency situations.

Figure 3.1 shows the response rates by situation. As in 2022, restrictions on democratic rights would mainly be justified (answers "Would definitely justify" and "Would rather justify") in the case of war (53.8%) and national security (49.6%). A large proportion of respondents (45.4%) would justify restrictions on public health grounds. However, as in 2022, only a minority of respondents would support restrictions for the sake of economic prosperity and social equality. In addition, support for constraints in these situations fell by 5.9 (economic well-being) and 6.2 (ensuring social equality) percentage points respectively. As these changes are close to the threshold of statistical significance, they do not yet indicate a significant trend.

3.2 Matters of Value

The survey also explored Lithuanian residents' values related to social and economic issues that are relevant in democratic debates. This year, we have added new questions that have recently become relevant: we asked about immigration and the monument to Justinas Marcinkevičius.

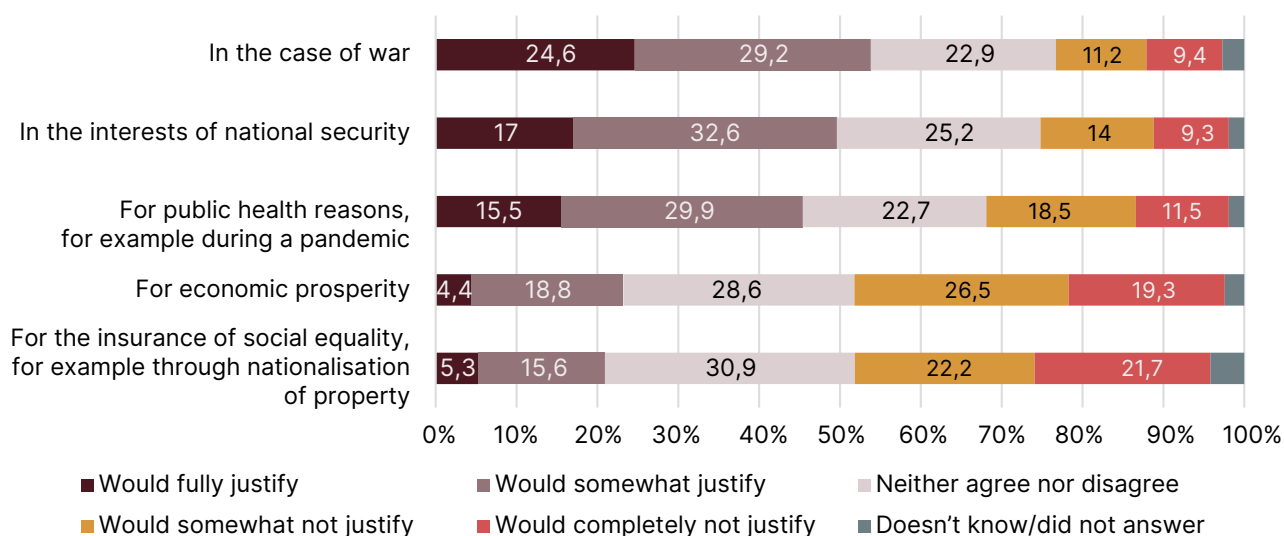


Fig. 3.1. The extent to which Lithuanians would justify restrictions on democracy, in %

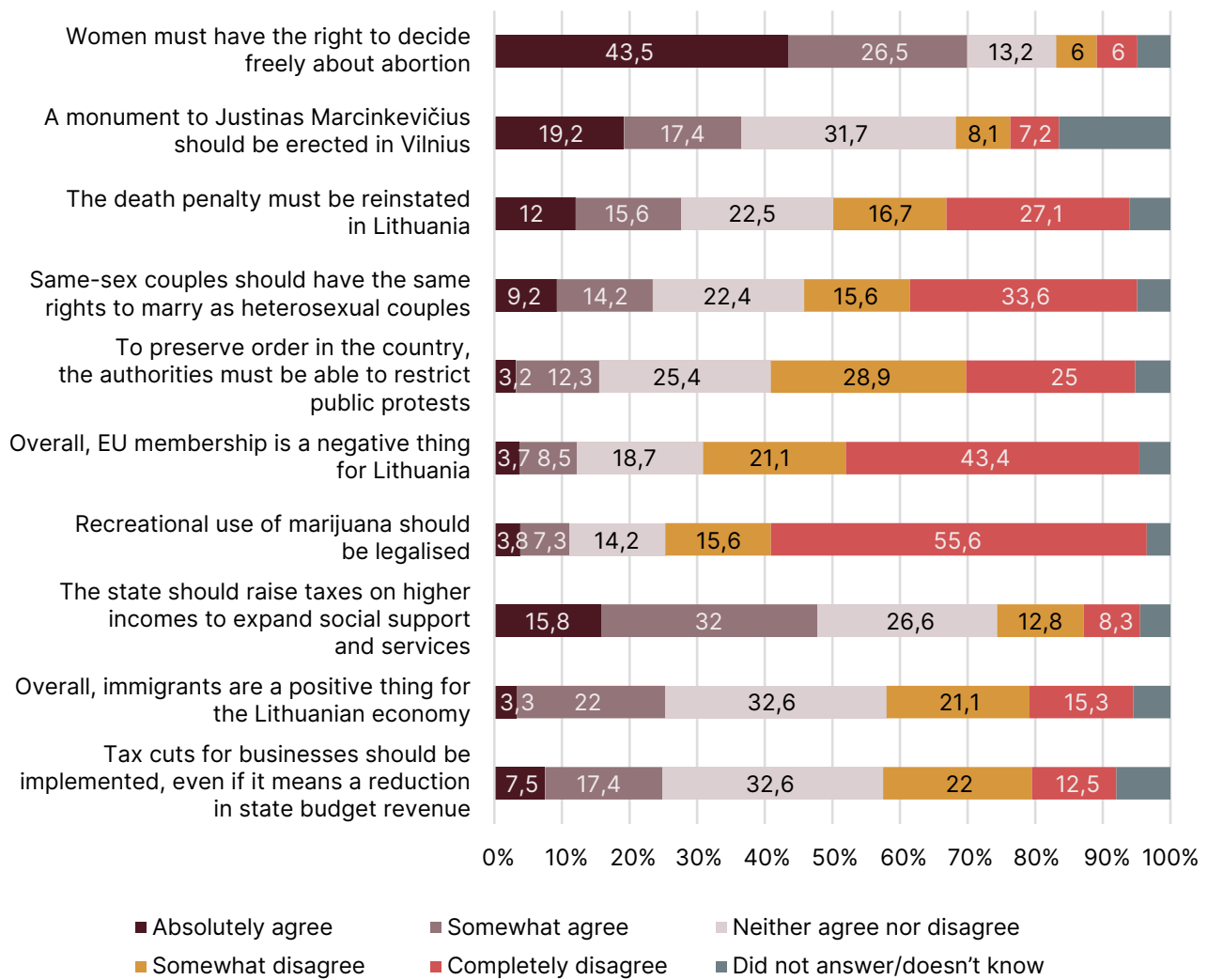


Fig. 3.2. Socio-economic values of the Lithuanian population, in %

When it comes to the economy, significantly more people strongly agree and somewhat agree (47.8%) than disagree (21.1%) that the state should raise taxes for higher-income earners to expand social services. There are more people who oppose (34.5%) than support (24.9%) a tax cut for business if it would reduce the state budget revenue. The number of those who support these tax cuts has fallen by more than 6% over the year. This change may be coincidental, but it may also reflect the growing relevance of the public debate on welfare state institutions and public finances.

There are no significant changes in the questions about the liberality/conservatism of the Lithuanian population. As in 2022, a large majority of respondents (70%) agree with women's right to abortion and over half (53.9%) disagree with restricting protests on grounds of order. Support for the death penalty is not high, but the difference between liberal and

conservative attitudes is smaller: 27.6% agree and 43.8% disagree. Finally, when it comes to same-sex marriage and the legalisation of marijuana, the majority of respondents tend to be more conservative: 49.2% disagree that same-sex couples should have the same rights to marry as heterosexual couples, while 23.4% strongly agree and 23.4% somewhat agree. Support for the legalisation of marijuana is even lower (11.1%).

The public does not have a clear opinion on the monument to Justinas Marcinkevičius: 36.6% agree, 16.3% disagree, but as many as 31.7% say "neither yes nor no", and a further 16.5% do not know how to answer (the highest percentage among any of these questions). The situation is similar for immigration: 25.3% agree with its positive impact on the Lithuanian economy, 36.5% disagree, and another 32.6% say "neither yes nor no".

Conclusion

The re-examination of the Democracy Sustainability Barometer shows that the results of the first survey were not random. In our country, the perception of the elements of liberal democracy and support for democracy remains high. The population is also more likely than average to defend democracy in protests (or to support such protests). However, as in the past, trust in state institutions and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy are weak points in the sustainability of democracy. Adding new indicators of satisfaction with democracy, we found that citizens are more satisfied with the procedural aspects of democracy (elections, freedom of speech, party competition) than with the responsiveness of democratic institutions (citizen involvement, fight against corruption, attention to grassroots, etc.). However, even the inclusion of these indicators ultimately shows that satisfaction with democracy is below the theoretical average. This dissatisfaction and, at the same time, distrust of institutions (especially political ones – the government, political parties, and the parliament) remains a vulnerability in our democracy.

The survey also confirms the 2022 conclusion that the Lithuanian population has an adequate perception of the Russian threat and the necessary responses to it and is relatively resistant to Eastern political narratives – e.g. an absolute majority of the population disagrees that NATO is instigating the war in Ukraine, that Russia is defending the world's traditional values, etc. The weak point is still the resilience to economic narratives that emphasise economic losses due to the deterioration of relations with Russia and China, again strongly reflected in the scores for the statement that this is damaging to the Lithuanian economy (around half or more of the respondents agree with this). On the other hand, repeating the survey experiment, we again found that when no specific countries are named, people are much more likely to support economic cooperation with a democratic country than with an authoritarian one. This is a positive trend: we have been, and clearly continue to be, part of the democratic world and are oriented towards that direction, despite some pragmatic attitudes towards relations with China and Russia.

Additional index analyses based on the sociodemographic characteristics of the population showed that the sociological sustainability of democracy, and in particular the resilience to Eastern propaganda, correlates most strongly with the evaluation of the Soviet era. This factor's impact on the indexes' differences is much greater than that of education or place of residence and age. In the long term, this is positive: as we move further away from the Soviet era and the population becomes more politically and socially formed in an independent, democratic and stable state, the resilience of society and its support for democratic values should increase. On the other hand, it shows the need to continue to focus on the objective success story of the Lithuanian state.

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