

Belarus in Latvian Public Opinion: Sovereignty, Threat Perceptions and Policy Preferences

Dr. Andrei Kazakevich

Director of the Institute of Political Studies “Political Sphere”

Dmitrijs Borjajevs

Research Assistant

Belarus presents a complex case for international relations analysis. On the one hand, it operates as a sovereign state with a centralized power structure centered around a single authoritarian leader. On the other hand, it remains profoundly dependent on Russia across vital domains, including the economy, security, and the media space.

This dependence is formally anchored in the 1999 treaty establishing the so-called ‘Union State.’ Yet, key provisions of the agreement remain largely unimplemented, leaving the actual dynamic concealed behind opaque and unpredictable interactions between two autocrats – relations that have frequently dissolved into heated public disputes. While statistics on trade, logistics, bilateral meetings, agreements, and synchronized media narratives offer a proxy for tracking this dependency, other sectors remain deeply non-transparent, complicating accurate assessment.

The complexity of Belarus’s status is reflected in both academic research and public narratives. Official media portray Belarus exclusively as a strong, sovereign nation – one of the few truly independent states in Europe. Russian media convey a more ambivalent image: while recognizing Belarus as independent because it falls outside the Western sphere of influence, they simultaneously frame it as an integral part of the ‘Russian World’, virtually merging it with Russia. In contrast, Belarusian independent and European

media increasingly view Belarus as a state heavily dependent on Moscow, lacking strategic autonomy in foreign policy and security. Moreover, since 2022, a narrative has gained traction depicting Belarus as an occupied territory under total Russian control.

This article examines how Latvian society perceives Belarus and its foreign policy, the perceived threat level posed by the neighboring country, and the policy approach Latvia should adopt toward Minsk. It also aims to identify which groups hold divergent views and analyze the key drivers behind these attitudes. Furthermore, this analysis assesses the scope and impact of Belarusian state and Russian narratives within Latvian society.

The main conclusion of the article is that Latvian society does not perceive Belarus as a single, undifferentiated source of threat. Public opinion draws a fairly clear distinction between the Belarusian state, Belarusian citizens and democratic political forces. That said, concerns are directed to a far greater extent towards the state, whilst Belarusian citizens living in Latvia are generally perceived as posing only a minor threat. At the same time, the Latvian population shows considerable support for cooperation with democratic forces, further indicating that attitudes towards Belarus vary substantially depending on the actor in question.

Belarus and Latvia: the context of relationships. Belarus and Latvia are neighbors whose historical relations have been largely smooth and uncontentious. Any past friction remained minor and failed to leave a lasting mark on either nation's collective memory. For decades, the two countries maintained an active political dialogue. At the prime ministerial level, for instance, at least seven bilateral visits took place – four by Belarusian heads of government to Latvia and three by Latvian prime ministers to Belarus, the most recent in 2018. Foreign ministers also met on a regular basis¹.

Following the EU's lifting of sanctions against Lukashenko in 2016, bilateral cooperation peaked between 2018 and 2020. This period was capped by preparations for an official visit by Alexander Lukashenko to Latvia – which would have marked his first trip to both Latvia and the wider EU since the diplomatic thaw began. Another key sign of rapprochement was the 2017 decision to jointly host the 2021 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship². Overall, despite the absence of major joint infrastructure projects, Riga actively demonstrated interest in deepening ties with Minsk. While Latvia

aligned with broader European initiatives on Belarus, it rarely assumed a leading role in pushing hardline policies. Unlike Lithuania and Poland – both of which had experienced recurring conflicts with the Belarusian regime since the 1990s – Latvia maintained a significantly more peaceful relationship.^{3, 4}

A profound rupture in this traditional good-neighborly dynamic occurred following the crackdown on the 2020 post-election protests in Belarus, as well as the outbreak of the ongoing migration crisis along the Belarusian-Latvian border. This sharp escalation led to a near-total collapse of diplomatic ties, culminating in the expulsion of diplomatic staff and the reduction of embassy operations to a bare minimum by mid-2021⁵.

This volatile period in bilateral relations escalated dramatically with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, during which the Belarusian regime acted as a key co-aggressor alongside Moscow. Consequently, Belarus ceased to be a predictable partner for Latvia, emerging instead as a source of direct and hybrid security threats. It is against this turbulent geopolitical backdrop that the empirical research underpinning this article was conducted.

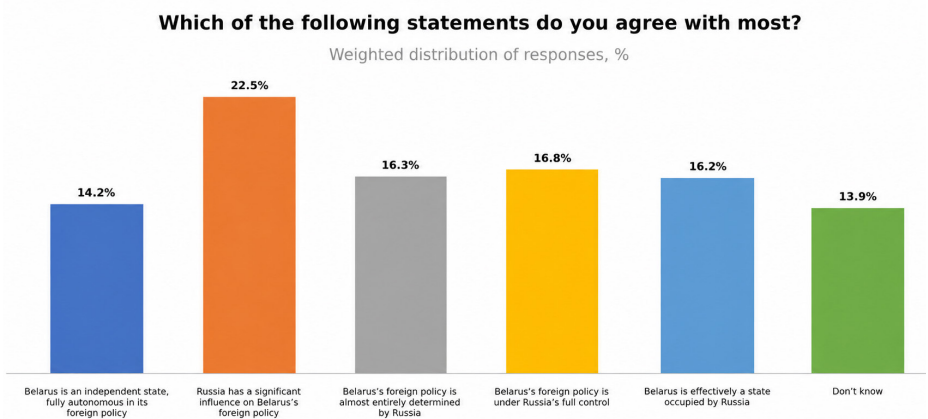
Research methods. The public opinion survey, the results of which form the basis of this article, was developed and conducted by the “Political Sphere”⁶ Institute of Political Research as part of the project “Strengthening of Independent Belarusian Social, Political, and Economic Research”, funded by the European Union. Data collection in Latvia was carried out by the Latvian research centre SKDS⁷. The fieldwork took place from 27 February to 2 March 2026 using the CAWI method. The final sample comprised 1,005 respondents and was weighted in accordance with the socio-demographic structure of the Latvian population by gender, language, age, region of residence, and level of education. The indicative maximum margin of error for a sample of this size is approximately ± 3 percentage points.

Data from the Population Register of LR IeM PMLP⁸ and CSP⁹ were used for weighting, which allows the sample to be regarded as representative of the Latvian population. All results presented in this article have also been calculated using the weights. Descriptive statistics are presented regardless of the presence of statistically significant differences. The analytical part of the study focuses on adjusted intergroup differences, statistical associations, and interaction effects.

Adjusted estimates were obtained using multivariable regression models with survey weights and robust standard errors. The core models controlled for gender, age, language spoken at home, and region of residence; supplementary specifications also examined education, income, and recent contact with Belarusian citizens where relevant. Ordered logistic regression was used for ordinal outcomes and linear regression for the 1–10 threat scale, while interaction models were used to examine age-by-language and language-by-region differences. Unless otherwise specified, analytical results are presented only for intergroup differences, statistical associations, and interaction effects that reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

Is Belarus an independent nation?

As noted above, opinions on the extent of Belarus’s foreign policy autonomy vary widely. According to Belarusian state media, Belarus stands as virtually the only sovereign nation in Europe, alleging that nearly all others are beholden to funding and directives from Brussels and Washington. However, beyond the narratives of the official Belarusian media, it becomes evident that Belarus is dependent on Russia to a greater or lesser extent. How, then, are these differing views on Belarus’s foreign policy independence reflected in Latvian public opinion?



According to our research, only 14.2% of respondents consider Belarus to be a fully independent state that determines its own foreign policy. A further 22.5% mention significant Russian influence, 16.3% believe that Belarus's foreign policy is almost entirely determined by Russia, 16.8% select the option of complete Russian control, and 16.2% effectively regard Belarus as a state occupied by Russia. Thus, 71.8% of the total sample acknowledge at least significant Russian influence, while 33.0% select the two most extreme descriptions: complete control or de facto occupation. Among respondents who expressed a substantive view, 83.5% noted some form of dependence.

When analysing the assessment of Belarusian sovereignty by various groups within Latvian society, the most striking divide is between Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking residents. Among Latvian speakers, only 4.7% consider Belarus to be completely independent, while 82.3% note some degree of Russian influence. Almost half – 45.9% – select 'complete control' or 'occupation'. Among Russian-speakers, almost a third (30.6%) recognise complete independence, 54.0% identify various forms of influence, while only 11.1% give the two most extreme assessments. At the same time, the proportion of undecided responses in the two language groups is relatively similar, at 13.0% and 15.4%. Consequently, the difference is primarily linked not to a willingness to respond, but specifically to the content of the assessment. It is particularly telling that nearly a third of Russian speakers chose 'complete independence'.

Age is less closely linked to assessments of sovereignty, as its role once again depends on the language spoken at home. Among Latvian speakers, the likelihood of questioning Belarus's independence stands at around 94.5% for both younger and older respondents. Among Russian speakers, this figure reaches 86.4% in the 18–34 age group and only 58.8% among respondents over 35. Looking at the extreme responses, the likelihood of recognising Belarus as fully independent stands at 41.2% among older Russian speakers and 13.6% among young Russian speakers. Conversely, the likelihood of describing it as effectively occupied by Russia rises from 2.9% to 11.7%. Among the Latvian-speaking group, age-related differences in these responses are minimal. Thus, it is only within the Russian-speaking community that a significant generational divide can be observed in the understanding of Belarus's place in regional politics.

The undecided respondents deserve special attention. Overall, 13.9% of those surveyed find it difficult to assess Belarus's foreign policy independence; however, in Latgale,^{10, 11} this proportion reaches 24.7%. After considering age, language, and other key characteristics, the likelihood of selecting an 'undecided' response in Latgale remains approximately 2.6 times higher than in Riga. However, this regional pattern does not show an independent correlation with the direction of the substantive assessment. In other words, the distinctiveness of Latgale lies primarily in a lower degree of opinion consolidation or a higher proportion of undecided views, rather than a systematically higher or lower assessment of Belarus's external dependence.

Income, by contrast, is specifically linked to the substantive response. The likelihood of viewing Belarus as a de facto occupied state stands at 13.3% among low-income respondents and 25.7% among high-income respondents. No independent correlation is evident.

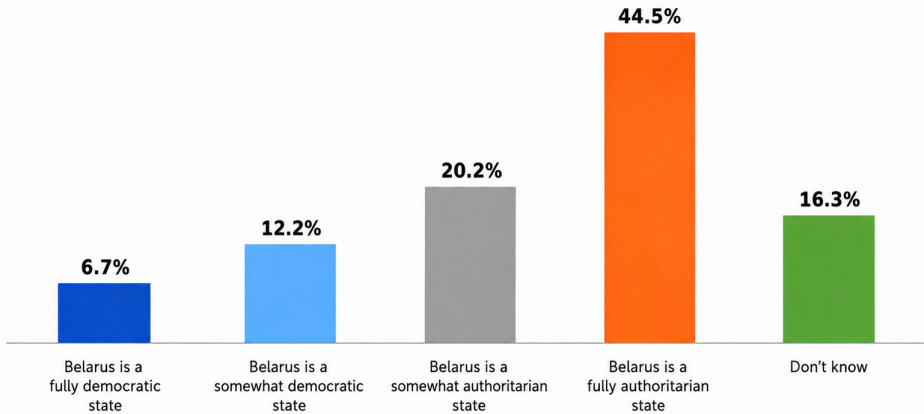
Democracy or autocracy?

An important aspect of Belarus's image is the perception of its political system. The existence of significant authoritarian traits in Belarus is beyond doubt among the vast majority of political scientists - not only in the West, but also in Russia. There is even less doubt on this matter among Belarusian researchers.

Even the narratives put forward by the Belarusian authorities are ambivalent in this regard. On the one hand, Belarus officially frames itself as a democratic state; on the other hand, its authoritarian nature is openly acknowledged and even presented as a political virtue^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16}. In practice, the degree of authoritarian control is extremely high: the activities of opposition political groups are banned in the country, the majority of non-state socio-political media outlets have been outlawed, thousands of people have been subjected to criminal prosecution, and hundreds of thousands of Belarusians have been forced to leave the country. In fact, as things stand today, all authoritative international rankings describe Belarus as an authoritarian regime^{17, 18}.

Which of the following descriptions best characterizes the current situation in Belarus?

Weighted distribution of responses, %



In Latvia, 44.5% of respondents consider Belarus to be a fully authoritarian state, whilst a further 20.2% regard it as ‘somewhat authoritarian’. Overall, 64.7% of the full sample and 77.4% of respondents with a substantive opinion give an authoritarian assessment. 19.0% consider Belarus to be democratic or ‘somewhat’ democratic, whilst a further 16.4% find it difficult to answer. These results show that, for the majority, the Belarusian state is politically distant from the democratic model with which Latvia associates its own system of government.

Age and language divides are also evident here. Among respondents aged 18–24, 75.0% describe Belarus as ‘completely authoritarian’, whilst among those aged 65–75, the figure is 33.0%. Among Latvian speakers, 78.3% give a ‘completely’ or ‘somewhat’ authoritarian assessment, compared with 41.4% among Russian speakers. However, the interaction between age and language significantly alters the overall picture. The estimated probability of selecting the most categorical assessment, ‘a completely authoritarian state’, stands at 66.1% among Latvian speakers over the age of 35 and 17.1% among Russian speakers of the same age. Among young people, the corresponding figures reach 70.7% and 60.3%, and the language-based difference is no longer consistent. A similar pattern is observed when the two authoritarian response options are combined. Among young and

older Latvian-speaking respondents, the figures are almost identical, while among Russian-speaking respondents, the probability of an authoritarian assessment rises from 45.8% in the older age group to 86.2% among young people.

Income is again linked to a more critical assessment. The likelihood of considering Belarus to be completely or rather authoritarian stands at 68.7% among low-income respondents and 85.0% among high-income respondents. Region and education do not show an independent association. Consequently, perceptions of the regime, dependence, and threat (see below) follow a similar social pattern. The most noticeable differences are along the lines of language and generation, while more affluent groups are more likely to choose a critical view. However, the similarity in the pattern does not in itself allow us to conclude that one assessment directly causes another.

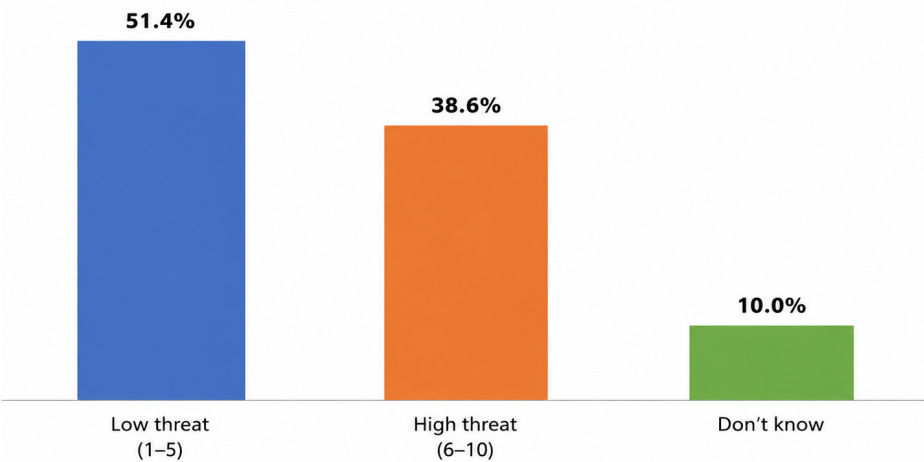
Belarus and Belarusians as a threat

Belarus's dependence on Russia and the authoritarian nature of its political system are of interest not only in their own right, but also in terms of how this might affect Latvia and its security. With this in mind, we asked to what extent the modern Belarusian state poses a threat to Latvia on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents no threat and 10 represents the highest level of threat.

This question was posed against a regional backdrop that has already changed significantly. According to SKDS data presented in a study by the Centre for Security and Strategic Research at the Latvian National Defence Academy, in 2019 only 45% of the Latvian population considered Russian policy to be one of the most serious threats to Latvian society. By 2022, this figure had risen significantly to 74%¹⁹. It is telling that this increase is also evident among Russian-speaking families: from 15% in 2019²⁰ to a significant 54% in 2022²¹. These figures cannot be directly compared with the results of the present survey, as different wording and response scales were used; however, they provide further context for the current state of Latvian society. Clearly, perceptions of Belarus are shaped against

How much of a threat to Latvia is the Belarusian state?

Grouped responses on a 10-point scale, %, mean score = 4.55



a backdrop of sharply intensified threats from Russia, with which the Belarusian state is closely linked not only in practice but also in terms of public opinion in Latvia, as clearly demonstrated above.

According to the results of our study, the average assessment of the threat to Latvia posed by the Belarusian state is 4.55 points on a ten-point scale. In the full sample, 51.4% of respondents placed their answers at the lower end of the scale, from one to five inclusive; 38.6% chose values from six to ten; and a further 10.0% found it difficult to answer. The most common individual response was ‘no threat at all’, chosen by 26.9% of those surveyed. Consequently, the Belarusian state is not perceived by the public as either unequivocally safe or unconditionally threatening. It is worth noting, however, that behind this comparatively moderate average lies a wide distribution of ratings and a marked polarisation of public opinion.

Age emerges as one of the key factors. Among respondents aged 18–24, 68.1% chose figures between six and ten, whereas in the 65–75 age group, this proportion stands at around 32%. After taking other key characteristics into account, the average threat rating stands at 5.94 points among 18–24-year-olds and 5.06 points among respondents aged 25–34. In all ages groups over 35, it falls within a significantly narrower range of 4.14 to 4.35 points. Thus,

the main age-based distinction is not a gradual one across all cohorts, but is primarily between young people and older generations. Young people in Latvia are noticeably more likely to view the Belarusian state as a serious threat.

The differences are even more pronounced when it comes to the language spoken at home. The threat was assessed on a ten-point scale, where 1 meant no threat at all and 10 meant the maximum threat; scores from 6 to 10 were considered to indicate a high threat. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the average threat rating is 5.64 points, whilst among Russian-speaking respondents it is only 2.76. Scores of 6 to 10 are selected by 51% and 17.5% of respondents in these language groups, respectively. However, the overall language gap masks fundamentally different age-related patterns within the two groups.

Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the adjusted average score is 6.12 points for those aged 18–34 and 5.53 points for those over 35. Among Russian-speakers, the gap is significantly wider: 4.63 points among young people and only 2.21 points among older generations. As a result, the difference between the language groups narrows from 3.32 points among respondents aged 35 and over to 1.49 points among young people. It does not disappear, but it becomes less than half as large. This convergence of Russian-speaking young people's views with those of Latvian-speaking respondents is consistent with the findings of other studies of Latvian society²².

Among additional characteristics, income retains an independent association with the assessment of the state threat. The average score is 4.02 points among low-income respondents and around 5.05 points in the middle-to-high and high-income groups. The relationship is not entirely linear; however, wealthier groups generally perceive the Belarusian state as a more serious threat. Region of residence and education do not show an independent association once other factors are considered. Overall, it is language, age, and income that form the main lines of distinction, while regional contrasts on this issue are largely linked to the demographic composition of specific regions.

Against this backdrop, perceptions of the threat posed by Belarusian citizens living in Latvia are particularly telling. Only 1.8% of respondents

believe that Belarusians in Latvia pose a very high threat, while a further 6.6% rate it as somewhat high. In total, 8.4% of those surveyed perceive the threat as high. Conversely, 28.5% describe it as rather low, whilst 49.6% consider it very low or non-existent. Thus, 78.1% of the total sample assess the threat posed by Belarusian citizens as low or non-existent. Even considering the differences between the scales used, the contrast with the assessment of the Belarusian state remains evident. Concerns are directed significantly more often at the state and its actions than at Belarusian citizens as a social group. This may also reflect the relatively small number of Belarusian citizens living in Latvia – around four thousand.

Age differences are present here too, but they are noticeably less pronounced. Among respondents aged 18–24, 12.7% perceive a high threat from Belarusian citizens, while among those aged 65–75, the figure is 6.5%. However, across all age groups, the overwhelming majority give low ratings. Once again, the language difference turns out to be more pronounced. Among Latvian speakers, 12.1% perceive a high threat, while among Russian speakers the figure is only 2.2%. At the same time, even among Latvian speakers, 69.5% consider the threat to be low or non-existent. Consequently, while the language divide influences the level of caution, it does not diminish the overall calm and measured attitude toward the presence of Belarusian citizens.

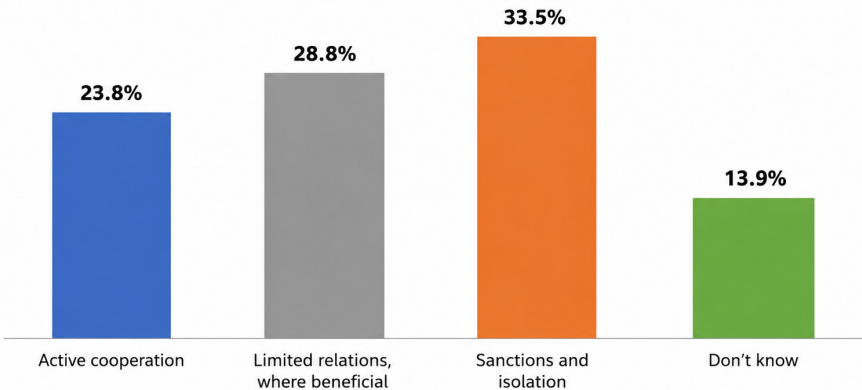
A targeted comparison of Latvian-speaking residents of Riga and Latgale reveals further differences, which must be interpreted with caution. The average assessment of the Belarusian state threat is 6.14 points in Riga and 4.51 points in Latgale. Belarus is described as fully authoritarian by 77.6% and 41.3% of respondents with a substantive opinion, respectively, and as fully independent in foreign policy by 4.6% and 23.4%. However, after adjusting for multiple cross-checks, the correlation between language and region is not significant for the threat, the regime, and sovereignty. Therefore, these differences should be viewed as a supplementary observation, without assuming that the region actually influences all the issues under consideration.

Sanctions or cooperation? What should Latvia's policy be

There is no broad consensus on Latvia's policy towards Belarus. Economic sanctions and foreign policy isolation are supported by 33.5% of the total sample. A further 28.8% prefer not to pursue active cooperation, but to maintain relations where this is in Latvia's interests. 23.8% are in favour of actively developing cooperation, while 13.9% find it difficult to answer. Among respondents who expressed a clear position, 38.9% opt for sanctions, 33.5% for limited relations, and 27.6% for active cooperation. Consequently, sanctions and isolation are the most common single position, but do not command the support of an absolute majority.

What policy should Latvia pursue toward Belarus?

Weighted distribution of responses, %



Age differences are particularly pronounced here. Among 18–24-year-olds, 66.7% support sanctions and isolation, while only 8.4% favour active cooperation. Among respondents aged 65–75, the corresponding figures are 23.2% and 29.2%. The divide along linguistic lines also takes on an almost mirror-image form. Among Latvian speakers, 45.5% support sanctions, while 9.7% support active cooperation. Among Russian speakers, 12.8% favour sanctions, whilst 47.7% favour cooperation. The middle ground receives almost identical support in both groups, at around 29%. This shows that the linguistic divide is concentrated primarily in the choice between the two extreme policy positions.

The region of residence retains an independent correlation with preferences regarding the current Belarusian government. Even after controlling for demographic composition, the model estimates the probability of supporting sanctions at 45.5% in Riga compared to 28.1% in Vidzeme²³, while the likelihood of active cooperation is 22.9% and 38.1%, respectively. The contrast is particularly striking within the Latvian-speaking section of the population. Among Latvian-speaking residents of Riga, 72.0% support sanctions, compared with 29.7% in Latgale; active cooperation stands at 5.1% and 23.6%, respectively.

Unlike with other issues, the interaction between language and region on this matter persists even after accounting for all socio-demographic factors. No significant regional differences were found among Russian-speaking respondents. Nevertheless, the exact figures for the Latvian-speaking population in Latgale should be interpreted with caution due to the small size of the subgroup. Income also remains linked to preferences. The likelihood of supporting sanctions rises from 28.5% among low-income respondents to approximately 46.5% among high-income respondents, while support for active cooperation falls from 36.8% to 20.8%.

Attitudes towards the Belarusian democratic opposition follow a different pattern. 20.7% of respondents opt for comprehensive cooperation and state support, 26.4% favour official meetings without broader support, and 9.1% prefer informal and non-public interaction. 13.8% propose a complete refusal to cooperate. A further 30.1% find it difficult to answer, which is the highest proportion of uncertainty among the indicators considered here. If the three forms of cooperation are combined, they are supported by 56.2% of the total sample. Among respondents who have a clear position, 80.3% are in favour of engagement, while 19.7% are against.

Young people once again take a more active stance. Among 18–24-year-olds, 47.8% opt for full support for the opposition, while only 3.3% are against it. Among 65–75-year-olds, the corresponding figures are 12.8% and 19.7%. The language divide persists, but it is significantly less pronounced than in relation to the current government. Some form of cooperation is supported by 59.2% of Latvian-speaking and 51.4% of Russian-speaking respondents in the full sample. Among those who have made up their minds, the likelihood of supporting at least one form of cooperation stands at 84.0%

and 74.1%, respectively. Consequently, even among Russian-speaking respondents, the majority of substantive responses suggest cooperation with the democratic opposition.

The results of an additional analysis among respondents who characterise the Belarusian state as authoritarian are particularly telling. In this group, 69.2% support at least one form of cooperation with the democratic opposition; only 8.8% reject any form of interaction, whilst a further 22.0% find it difficult to answer. Respondents who both recognise the authoritarian nature of the regime and support cooperation with the opposition account for approximately 44.8% of the total sample. Within this group, 64.3% assess the threat posed by the Belarusian state as high, with an average score of 6.12 points; 52.8% regard Belarus as being fully controlled by or effectively occupied by Russia; and 56.3% support sanctions. This profile indicates that, for a significant segment of society, a critical view of the Belarusian state does not translate into a rejection of Belarusian society; rather, it aligns with support for engaging alternative political actors and pro-democratic civil society.

Key findings

Belarus is widely perceived as dependent on Russia. A clear majority of Latvian respondents see Belarus as lacking full foreign-policy autonomy: 71.8% identify at least significant Russian influence, while one third describe Belarus as being under complete Russian control or effectively occupied. At the same time, these assessments are far from uniform across Latvian society, with particularly strong differences between Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents.

Language and generation form the main lines of social division. Russian-speaking respondents are generally less critical in their assessments of Belarusian sovereignty, authoritarianism and state-related threat. However, this linguistic divide is strongly conditioned by age. Younger Russian-speaking respondents consistently display more critical assessments than older Russian-speakers and, on several key indicators, move substantially closer to the views of Latvian-speaking respondents. The most pronounced

divergence from broader societal patterns is therefore concentrated among older Russian-speaking residents.

The Belarusian state is perceived as a source of concern, but not as an unequivocally high threat. The average assessment of the threat posed by the Belarusian state is 4.55 on a ten-point scale. Just over half of respondents place the threat in the lower half of the scale, while 38.6% choose values between six and ten. The result therefore points to a divided and polarised perception rather than to a broad societal consensus that Belarus represents an immediate or uniformly severe threat.

The Belarusian state and Belarusian citizens are clearly distinguished in public perception. Concern about the state does not translate into a comparable perception of Belarusian citizens living in Latvia. Only 8.4% assess the threat posed by Belarusian citizens as high, whereas 78.1% regard it as low or non-existent. This distinction is one of the central findings of the study and indicates that critical perceptions of the Belarusian state are not automatically extended to Belarusians as a social group.

Democratic forces constitute a separate object of public perception. Various forms of cooperation with the Belarusian democratic opposition are supported by 56.2% of the full sample and by 80.3% of respondents who express a substantive position. Support for engagement is also present among Russian-speaking respondents. Taken together, these findings show that Latvian public opinion differentiates between the Belarusian state, Belarusian citizens and democratic political forces rather than treating Belarus as a single and undifferentiated political or security actor.

Some recommendations

Official communication should consistently distinguish between Belarus as a state, Belarusian citizens, and democratic forces. The survey suggests that these categories are not perceived interchangeably. A more differentiated vocabulary would therefore allow security-related communication to remain focused on state actors and policies without unnecessarily extending this framing to Belarusian citizens or to political actors opposed to the regime.

This would also preserve greater space for engagement with democratic forces and civil society.

Communication strategies should take into account the pronounced internal differences within Latvia's Russian-speaking population. Older Russian-speaking respondents diverge most strongly from broader societal patterns in their assessments of Belarusian sovereignty, authoritarianism, and the threat posed by the Belarusian state, while younger Russian-speakers tend to hold substantially more critical views. The practical implication is that communication strategies should take age and language into account jointly rather than treating the Russian-speaking population as a homogeneous audience. These findings do not allow conclusions about the causes of this divergence, including possible exposure to particular media or disinformation. They do, however, suggest that older Russian-speaking residents may require more targeted and accessible communication on Belarus-related issues.

Latgale would benefit from a communication strategy aimed primarily at reducing uncertainty. The region stands out above all for its relatively high level of uncertainty regarding Belarus's foreign-policy autonomy, while some additional differences are also visible among Latvian-speaking residents of Latgale. This pattern suggests that communication efforts in the region could place greater emphasis on providing clear and accessible information, rather than proceeding from the assumption that public attitudes require directional correction. Communication in Latgale should therefore remain issue-specific and avoid treating the region as politically homogeneous.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Belarusian–Latvian Relations," Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Latvia, accessed September 23, 2026. Available: https://latvia.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/
- ² Merk, M., "Welcome to Minsk & Riga in 2021," *International Ice Hockey Federation*, June 22, 2020. Available: <https://www.iihf.com/en/events/2021/wm/news/19621/welcome-to-minsk-riga-in-2021>
- ³ Slunkin, P., Šrajbman, A., Hubarava, H., "Belarus and the Baltic states: repercussions of the lingering political crisis," *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, June 2021. Available: <https://collections.fes.de/publikationen/ident/fes/18025>

- ⁴ Potjomkina, D., Šukytė, D., “Belarus and the Baltics: Did Crisis Really Become an Opportunity?” in Kudors, A. (eds.) *Belarusian Foreign Policy: 360*, Riga: University of Latvia Press, 139–158. Available: https://appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/book_Belarusian_360-www-2.pdf
- ⁵ “Embassy of Belarus in Latvia is temporarily closed,” Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Latvia, June 7, 2021. Available: <https://latvia.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/news/dbc13cd4d572788f.html>
- ⁶ An independent Belarusian think tank in exile, registered in Lithuania and operating throughout the EU. See: <https://palityka.org/>
- ⁷ The research centre SKDS, established in 1996, is a private and independent research company specialising in marketing and public opinion research in Latvia. See: <https://www.skds.lv/>
- ⁸ LR IeM PMLP: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) is a Latvian state institution responsible for citizenship, migration, residence permits, identity documents and the Register of Natural Persons. See: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en>
- ⁹ CSP: The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSP) is the country’s main institution responsible for producing and coordinating official statistics. See: <https://stat.gov.lv/en>
- ¹⁰ Andžāns, M., “Societal Perceptions in Transition from a Borderland to a Frontline: Latvia’s Latgale During the War in Ukraine,” *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 2024. Available: https://www.academia.edu/123990218/Societal_Perceptions_in_Transition_from_a_Borderland_to_a_Frontline_Latvias_Latgale_During_the_War_in_Ukraine
- ¹¹ Latgale - the eastern region of Latvia, bordering directly on Russia and Belarus. It has a population of around 250,000. The region is characterised by marked ethnolinguistic diversity and a significant proportion of Russian-speaking residents. Economically, Latgale continues to be Latvia’s most vulnerable region. Owing to geographical and historical factors, the region is also subject to a stronger Russian influence, including significant penetration by the Russian media. See: Andžāns, 2024.
- ¹² “Лекция “Исторический выбор Республики Беларусь” в БГУ” [Lecture “The Historical Choice of the Republic of Belarus” at BSU], President of the Republic of Belarus, March 14, 2003. Available: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/lektsija-istoricheskij-vybor-respubliki-belarus-v-bgu-5819>
- ¹³ The statement went as follows: “We are being criticised today for having, as I have already said, a forceful government – an authoritarian regime, a dictatorship, and so on. You know, I have never denied this, no. There is no shortage of evidence of authoritarianism in our government. I have no objections to this. (translation from Russian)
- ¹⁴ “Беларусь готова сотрудничать со словацкими бизнесменами во всех сферах” [Belarus is ready to cooperate with Slovak businesspeople in all spheres], President of the Republic of Belarus, September 7, 2009. Available: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/belarus-gotova-sotrudnichat-so-slovatskimi-biznesmenami-vo-vsex-sferax-4889>

- ¹⁵ The statement went as follows: “If we have reached an agreement, then we adhere strictly to it. In this respect, we have an ideal order – what some countries call a dictatorship. Businesspeople welcome the fact that there is order here: what is said will be done. They do not like all sorts of pseudo-democracies.” (translation from Russian)
- ¹⁶ “Lukashenka’s press secretary says ‘dictatorship’ is Belarusian brand,” EuroRadio, March 10, 2019. Available: <https://euroradio.fm/en/lukashenkas-press-secretary-says-dictatorship-belarusian-brand>
- ¹⁷ Countries and Territories,” Freedom House, accessed September 23, 2026. Available: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/scores>
- ¹⁸ “Country Graph,” Varieties of Democracy, accessed September 23, 2026. Available: https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/
- ¹⁹ Bērziņa, I., “*Latvijas sabiedrības un valsts attiecības Krievijas-Ukrainas kara kontekstā. DSPC stratēģiskais apskats 02/23*” [Relations between Latvian society and the state in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. DSPC Strategic Review 02/23], *Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmijas Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs*, January 2023. Available: https://www.naa.mil.lv/sites/naa/files/document/I.Berzina_Latvijas_sabiedriba_%20un_valsts_attiecibas_Krievijas_Ukrainas_kara_konteksta.pdf
- ²⁰ Berzina, I., Zupa, U. “*Latvijas sabiedrības griba aizstāvēt valsti: veicinošie un kavējošie faktori*” [The Will of Latvian Society to Defend the State: Facilitating and Hindering Factors], *Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmijas Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs*, 2020. Available: https://www.academia.edu/41710559/Latvijas_sabiedrības_griba_aizstāvēt_valsti_veicinošie_un_kavējošie_faktori
- ²¹ Bērziņa, I., “*Latvijas sabiedrības un valsts attiecības Krievijas-Ukrainas kara kontekstā. DSPC stratēģiskais apskats 02/23*” [Relations between Latvian society and the state in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. DSPC Strategic Review 02/23], *Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmijas Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs*, January 2023. Available: https://www.naa.mil.lv/sites/naa/files/document/I.Berzina_Latvijas_sabiedriba_%20un_valsts_attiecibas_Krievijas_Ukrainas_kara_konteksta.pdf
- ²² Kažoka, I., Bērziņa, L., “*Sabiedrības saliedētības radara ziņojums 2023*” [Social Cohesion Radar Report 2023], Providus, 2023. Available: <https://providus.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/sabiedrības-saliedetības-radara-petijums-2023.pdf>
- ²³ Vidzeme – a historical and cultural region in central and northern Latvia. In the context of this study, the region does not possess any distinct ethnolinguistic or socio-political characteristics.