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Strangers Next Door

Belarus and Belarusians in Latvian Public Opinion

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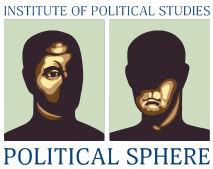
Dmitrijs Borjajevs, Yury Stakavetski,
Dr. Andrei Kazakevich (PhD in Political Science)



Institute of Political Studies
“Political Sphere”

Summary

Despite its marked dependence on Russia, Belarus remains an important factor in regional security and is of considerable significance to Latvia. This study traces the main trends in Latvian public opinion regarding Belarus and its citizens, as well as related issues: labour migration, perceptions of domestic and external threats, assessments of the political regime and foreign policy, and preferences regarding Latvia's policy towards Belarus.

Monitoring and in-depth study of public opinion trends are especially important amid the continuing regional crisis, Russia's war against Ukraine, growing military threats, and increasing hybrid pressure from Belarus.

The report includes the following sections: 1. *Attitudes towards Belarusians*; 2. *Labour migration;* 3. *Security and the perception of threat;* 4. *Perceptions of the current Belarusian state and its foreign policy;* 5. *Expectations regarding Latvia's policy towards Belarusian authorities and opposition.*

This research was conducted by the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere" (Belarusian think tank in exile, registered in Lithuania and working in EU). The fieldwork in Latvia was conducted by the Latvian research center SKDS[1]. The research is a part of an extensive regional study of "Political Sphere" in neighboring countries (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia) regarding Belarus, its citizens, and migration. The survey, financed by the EU, was conducted between 27 February 2026 and 2 March 2026 using the CAWI method.

1. 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/

The final sample was weighted according to the socio-demographic parameters of Latvian society based on criteria of gender, language, age, region of residence, and education (based on data from the Population Register of LR IeM PMLP[2] and the CSP[3]). The final sample comprised 1,005 respondents, which allows us to conclude that the data obtained is representative.

All results presented in the report were also calculated using survey weights. Descriptive indicators are reported regardless of their statistical significance. In the analytical sections, unless explicitly stated otherwise, we discuss only those between-group differences, associations, and interaction effects that reached statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ in the relevant test or model. Where multiple tests were conducted, the significance-level adjustments specified by the analysis were applied.

The main adjusted results were obtained using models that included gender, age, language spoken at home, and region of residence. An extended specification was used to assess additional associations; it also included education, income, and contact with citizens of Belarus during the previous 12 months. Interaction models included the relevant interaction effect together with the remaining main control variables not included in the interaction term.

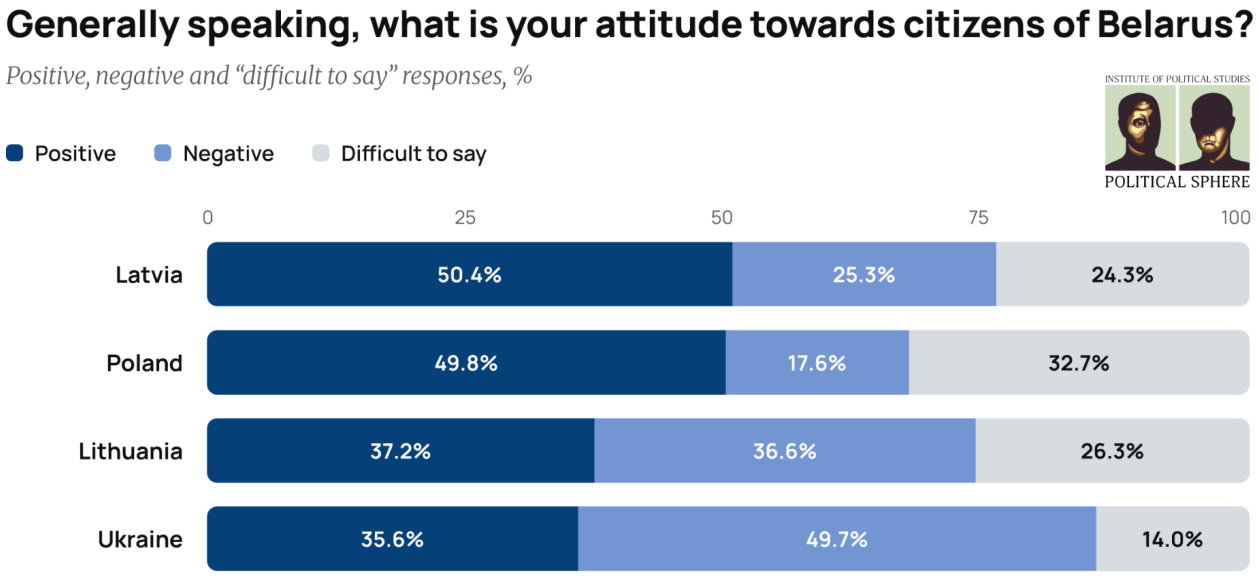
2. LR IeM PMLP: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) is a Latvian state institution responsible for citizenship, migration, residence permits, identity documents and the Register of Natural Persons. See: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en

3. 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

1. Attitudes towards Belarusians

General attitudes. Overall, attitudes among Latvian residents towards citizens of Belarus are rather favourable: 21.8% of respondents describe their attitude as very positive and another 28.6% as rather positive. Positive assessments therefore account for 50.4% in total (see Fig. 1). Negative assessments are chosen considerably less often: 17.8% report a rather negative attitude and 7.5% a very negative one. At the same time, almost a quarter of respondents (24.3%) find it difficult to give a definite assessment.

For comparison, according to studies by the Political Sphere Institute, 37.1% of respondents in Lithuania express a positive attitude towards citizens of Belarus and 36.6% a negative one; in Ukraine in 2025, 35.6% of respondents had a positive attitude towards Belarusians, while 49.7% had a negative one; in Poland, 49.8% express a positive attitude and 17.6% a negative one, while another 32.6% find it difficult to define their attitude. The Latvian results are therefore closest to those in Poland: the shares of positive assessments are almost identical, at 50.4% and 49.8% respectively. Latvia, however, has a somewhat higher share of negative responses - 25.3% compared with 17.6% - while respondents in Poland more often choose an uncertain answer, 32.6% compared with 24.3%.

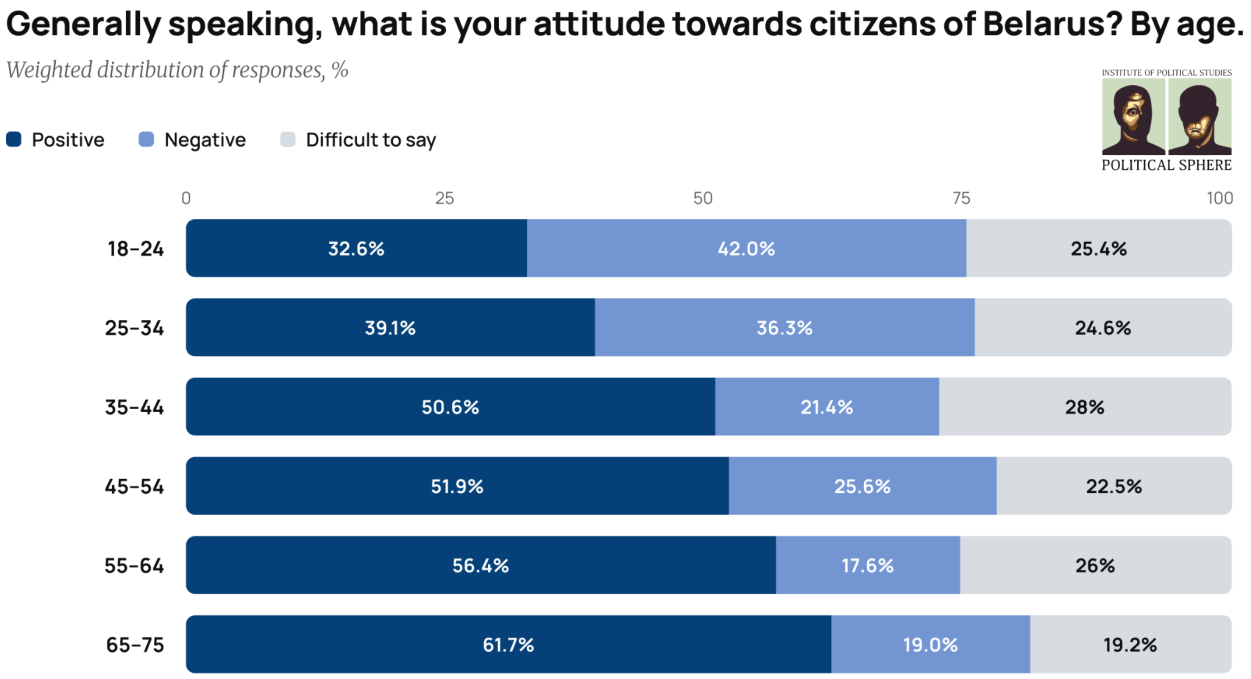


Sources: Latvia — SKDS 2026; Poland — SW Research 2026; Lithuania — Spinter Research 2026; Ukraine — InfoSapaiens 2025.

Figure 1. Generally speaking, what is your attitude towards citizens of Belarus?

One of the most noticeable differences in attitudes towards Belarusians is associated with age. In the youngest cohort (18–24), around 33% of respondents express a positive attitude (see Fig. 2), while the combined share of negative responses exceeds 40%. Among respondents aged 65–75, the relationship is reversed: positive assessments account for around 62% and negative ones for around 19%, a pattern that broadly

persists across the older age groups. This points to an overall generational divide in which younger respondents take a more critical position. A similar phenomenon was also recorded in Lithuania and Ukraine.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 2. Generally speaking, what is your attitude towards citizens of Belarus? By age.

The difference by language spoken at home is considerably more pronounced. Among Russian-speaking respondents[4], 82.2% express a positive attitude towards Belarusians, while only around 5% express a negative one. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, positive answers account for 32.1% and negative ones for around 37%. Overall, the probability of answering "very positive" is 52.6% among Russian-speaking respondents and 9.6% among Latvian-speaking respondents. The level of uncertainty also differs substantially: "difficult to say" is chosen by 30.9% of Latvian-speaking respondents and only 12.8% of Russian-speaking respondents. The language divide therefore appears in two respects at once: Russian-speaking respondents not only assess Belarusians much more positively, but are also considerably more likely to have a definite position on the issue.

4. In this report, the term "Russian speakers" refers to ethnic Russians and members of other ethnic minorities who use Russian as their dominant or preferred language of interaction (Pavlenko 2008). They constitute 34.6% of Latvia's population and are most strongly represented in Latgale (55.3%) and Riga (53.0%) (CSP 2022). We operationalise this category as respondents who speak Russian at home.

Regional differences are also noteworthy in this context when considered together with the language dimension. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, Latgale stands out in particular: 78.5% of respondents who expressed a substantive opinion report a positive attitude towards Belarusians, compared with an average of 43.5% among Latvian-speaking residents of all other regions, a statistically significant difference of 35 percentage points. The contrast with Riga is especially clear: 36.9% of Latvian-speaking respondents there express a positive attitude, approximately 41.7 percentage points less than in Latgale. At the same time, Latvian-speaking residents of Riga generally do not display consistent differences from residents of the other regions, with the exception of Latgale. Thus, the particularly favourable attitude in Latgale is explained not only by the region's high share of Russian speakers, but also by the considerably more positive position of its Latvian-speaking residents.

Direct contact with Belarusians. The survey also asked about direct contact with citizens of Belarus. Around a quarter of respondents (23.9%) reported such contact during the previous 12 months. Among those who had been in contact with Belarusians, 82.8% express a positive attitude towards them, while only 7.4% chose "difficult to say". Among those without such contact, positive assessments amount to around 39%, while 29% find it difficult to answer. We cannot, however, establish the direction of this association: contact may contribute to more positive perceptions, or people who were already more favourably disposed may be more likely to enter into such contact. It is also worth noting that, when attitudes towards Belarusians are considered, education and income do not retain independent associations.

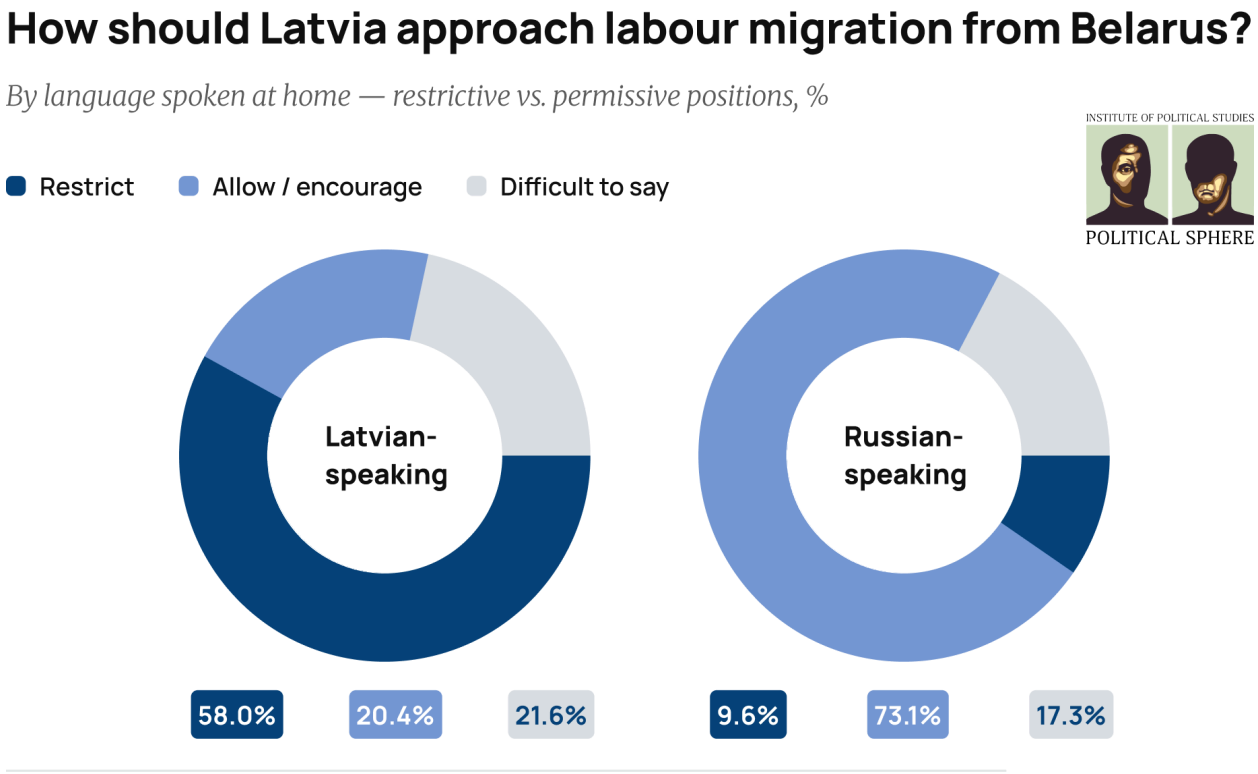
2. Labour migration

Attitudes towards labour migration look somewhat different. In total, 24.5% of respondents believe Latvia should seek to reduce the existing number of labour migrants from Belarus. Another 15.4% favour stopping further migration without actively reducing the number already living in the country. A more open position is taken by 32.2%, who believe migration should be permitted on the same terms as migration from other non-EU countries. A further 7.7% favour encouraging it. Finally, 20.1% find it difficult to answer.

Combining the two restrictive and the two permissive positions reveals a symmetrical structure of public opinion. Around 40% of respondents take a restrictive position, while a similar share - also around 40% - support a more open approach. Thus, unlike general attitudes towards citizens of Belarus, where positive assessments predominate, public opinion on labour migration is effectively split into two equal camps. This difference shows that a positive attitude towards Belarusians as people does not automatically translate into support for a more open migration policy.

The language divide is reproduced here as well, and in particularly pronounced form. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 36.5% favour reducing the existing number of

migrants and another 21.4% favour stopping further migration. Restrictive positions therefore account for around 58% in this group (see Fig. 3), while only around 20% support permitting or encouraging migration. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the picture is almost the reverse: restrictive positions together account for less than 10%, while around 73% support permitting or encouraging migration. The share of respondents who are undecided is 21.6% among Latvian speakers and 17.3% among Russian speakers. Consequently, the probability of holding the view that labour migration should be permitted on the same terms as migration from other non-EU countries is 63.7% among Russian-speaking respondents and only 25.7% among Latvian-speaking respondents.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 3. How should Latvia approach labour migration from Belarus? By language spoken at home.

Contact with Belarusians shows the expected, but still fairly strong, association with migration attitudes. Among respondents who had such contact, 52.2% favour allowing migration under the general rules and another 14.6% favour encouraging it; the combined share of the two restrictive positions is around 21%. Among those without contact, by contrast, restrictive positions reach roughly 48%, while more open positions account for around 32%. As above, however, we treat this only as an additional finding and do not interpret it causally. Age, education, and income do not show a consistent association, while region affects only uncertainty of position, which is higher in Latgale.

3. Security and the perception of threat

Threat posed by citizens of Belarus. The third part of the study examines perceptions of security in Latvian society. With regard to Belarusian migrants, the overall picture is fairly unambiguous[5]. Only 1.8% of respondents believe that citizens of Belarus living in Latvia pose a very high threat, while another 6.6% perceive the threat as rather high (8.4% in total; see Fig. 4). By contrast, 28.5% assess the threat as rather low, and almost half of the sample, 49.6%, consider it very low or entirely absent (78.1% in total). Another 13.5% find it difficult to answer, a comparatively low share of uncertain responses among the indicators examined.

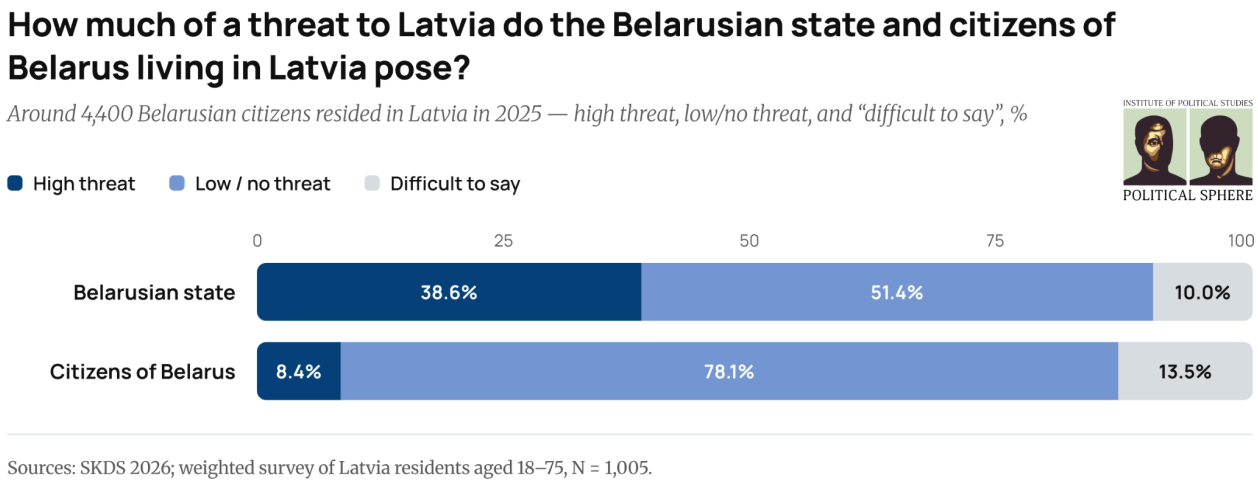
Age differences persist here as well, although they are less pronounced than in assessments of the threat posed by the state. Among respondents aged 18–24, 12.7% consider the threat posed by citizens to be high, while 77.2% assess it as low or absent. Among respondents aged 65–75, 6.5% give a high assessment and 83.1% a low one. The adjusted probability of answering that the threat is entirely absent or very low rises from 44.7% among 18–24-year-olds to 62.2% among respondents aged 65–75. The main divide is between the youngest group and respondents over 35, who are generally more relaxed about the presence of Belarusian citizens.

A much more pronounced difference is again associated with language spoken at home. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 12.1% consider the threat high, 69.5% low or absent, and 18.5% find it difficult to answer. Among Russian-speaking respondents, only 2.2% perceive a high threat, while 92.9% assess it as low or absent. The share of undecided respondents in this group is just 5.0%. When only substantive responses are considered, the adjusted probability of assessing the threat as rather low or entirely absent is 98.1% among Russian-speaking respondents and 85.4% among Latvian-speaking respondents. It is important to note that language differences concern not only the direction of assessment but also the degree of certainty: Russian-speaking respondents are also significantly less likely to choose “difficult to say”. Neither region, education, nor income shows an independent association.

5. The assessment used a four-point scale with the options “very high threat”, “rather high threat”, “rather low threat”, and “very low or no threat”, plus a separate “difficult to say” response.

A much more pronounced difference is again associated with language spoken at home. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 12.1% consider the threat high, 69.5% low or absent, and 18.5% find it difficult to answer. Among Russian-speaking respondents, only 2.2% perceive a high threat, while 92.9% assess it as low or absent. The share of undecided respondents in this group is just 5.0%. When only substantive responses are considered, the adjusted probability of assessing the threat as rather low or entirely absent is 98.1% among Russian-speaking respondents and 85.4% among Latvian-speaking respondents. It is important to note that language differences concern not only the direction of assessment but also the degree of certainty: Russian-speaking respondents are also significantly less likely to choose "difficult to say". Neither region, education, nor income shows an independent association.

Threat posed by the Belarusian state. By contrast, assessments of the threat posed by the Belarusian state produce a much less clear-cut picture. The mean threat rating is 4.55 out of 10, where 10 represents the maximum threat and 1 the absence of any threat. In the full sample, 51.4% of respondents choose ratings indicating a rather low or absent threat (1–5 inclusive), 38.6% choose a rather high threat (6–10 inclusive), and another 10.0% find it difficult to answer. The single most frequently selected response is "no threat at all" (1 out of 10), chosen by 26.9% of respondents. Perceptions of the Belarusian state therefore cannot be described as either predominantly safe or unequivocally threatening: assessments are widely distributed and reflect considerable heterogeneity in public opinion.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 4. How much of a threat to Latvia do the Belarusian state and citizens of Belarus living in Latvia (around 4,400 people in 2025) pose?

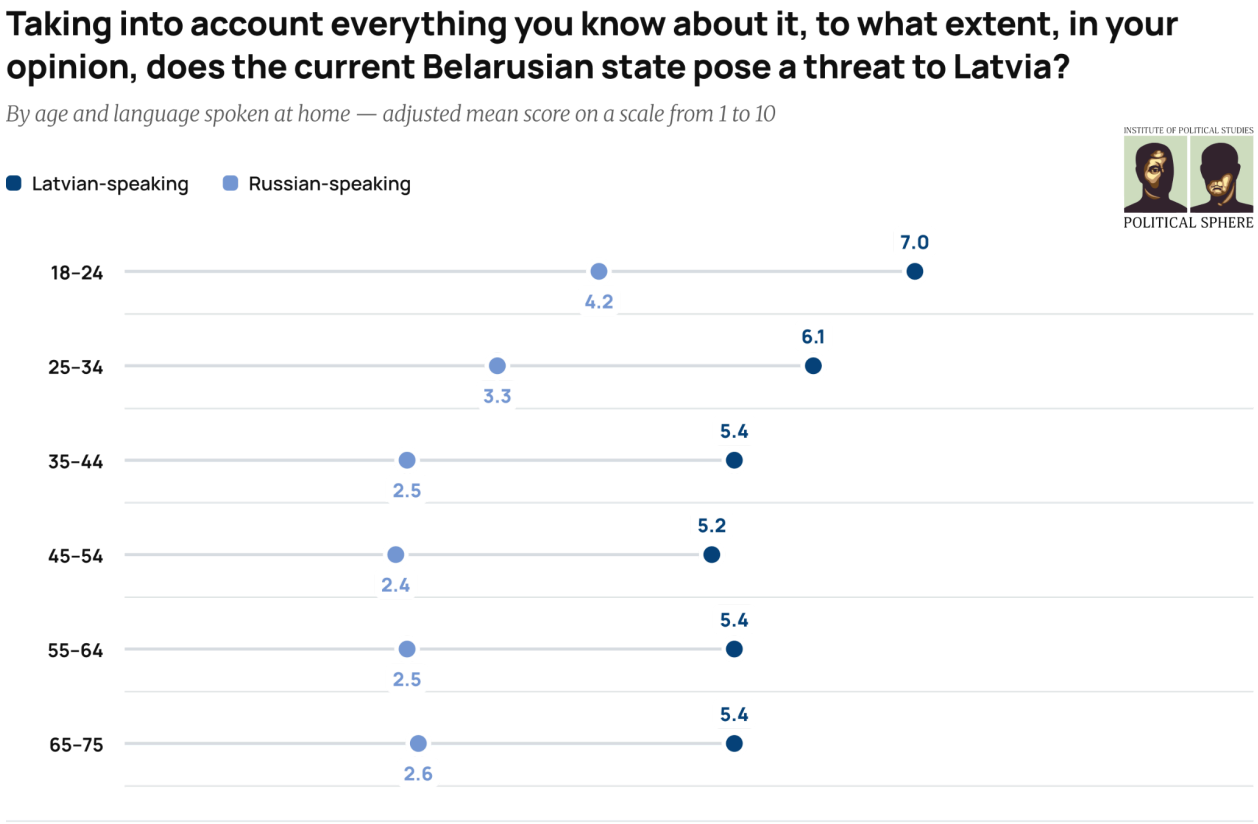
Perceptions of the threat posed by the state differ particularly strongly across age cohorts. Among respondents aged 18–24, 68.1% place their assessments in the upper half of the scale, while only 26.7% choose values from one to five. In all groups over 35, by contrast, lower assessments predominate. Among respondents aged 65–75, around 32% choose the upper half of the scale and 59.1% the lower half. The adjusted mean score is 5.94 (see Fig. 5) among 18–24-year-olds, falls to 5.06 among 25–34-year-olds, and ranges

from 4.14 to 4.35 in all groups over 35. Once again, young people - especially the youngest age cohort - stand out most clearly.

These results contrast with the findings of our Lithuanian study, where age differences in responses to the analogous question were almost entirely absent and statistically insignificant. The position of Lithuanians is relatively homogeneous: the majority agree that the Belarusian state poses an above-average threat, while differences between age groups range only from 6.01 to 6.54 points. Thus, despite Latvia and Lithuania being neighbours, perceptions of the threat posed by Belarus differ noticeably between the two countries.

The language divide continues to play an important role. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 51.0% give ratings from six to ten and 37.4% from one to five. Among Russian-speaking respondents, only 17.5% choose the upper half of the scale, while 75.0% give lower ratings. Overall, the mean threat rating is 5.64 among Latvian-speaking respondents and 2.76 among Russian-speaking respondents. The difference is almost three points, indicating an especially strong independent association between language spoken at home and perceptions of the threat posed by the Belarusian state.

At the same time, age differences develop differently within the two language groups. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the adjusted mean score is 6.12 among those aged 18–34 and 5.53 among respondents aged 35–75. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the age gap is much wider: younger respondents rate the threat at an average of 4.63, while the older group gives an average of only 2.21. This finding substantially refines the overall picture of the ethnolinguistic divide. Russian-speaking respondents on average perceive the Belarusian state as a less serious threat, but among younger Russian speakers assessments move noticeably closer to those of Latvian speakers. Although the language gap does not disappear entirely, the difference in perceived threat between the groups narrows from 3.3 points among older generations to around 1.5 points among younger cohorts.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 5. Taking into account everything you know about it, to what extent, in your opinion, does the current Belarusian state pose a threat to Latvia? By age and language spoken at home.

Among additional socio-demographic characteristics, income shows a consistent association with assessments of the threat posed by the state. The mean score is 4.02 in the low-income group and around 5.05 in the high- and upper-middle-income groups, with a statistically significant difference. The relationship is not fully linear, but overall, better-off groups perceive the Belarusian state as a more serious threat. Region and education, meanwhile, have no significant effect.

4. Perceptions of the current Belarusian state and its foreign policy

Political regime. The fourth part examines perceptions of Belarus's political regime and the country's independence in foreign policy. In total, 44.5% of respondents describe Belarus as a fully authoritarian state, while another 20.2% consider it rather authoritarian (64.7% combined). The opposite assessment is much less common: only 12.3% consider Belarus rather democratic and just 6.7% fully democratic. Another 16.4% find it difficult to answer. Among respondents who expressed a substantive position,

77.4% classify Belarus as fully or rather authoritarian, while 22.6% consider it fully or rather democratic.

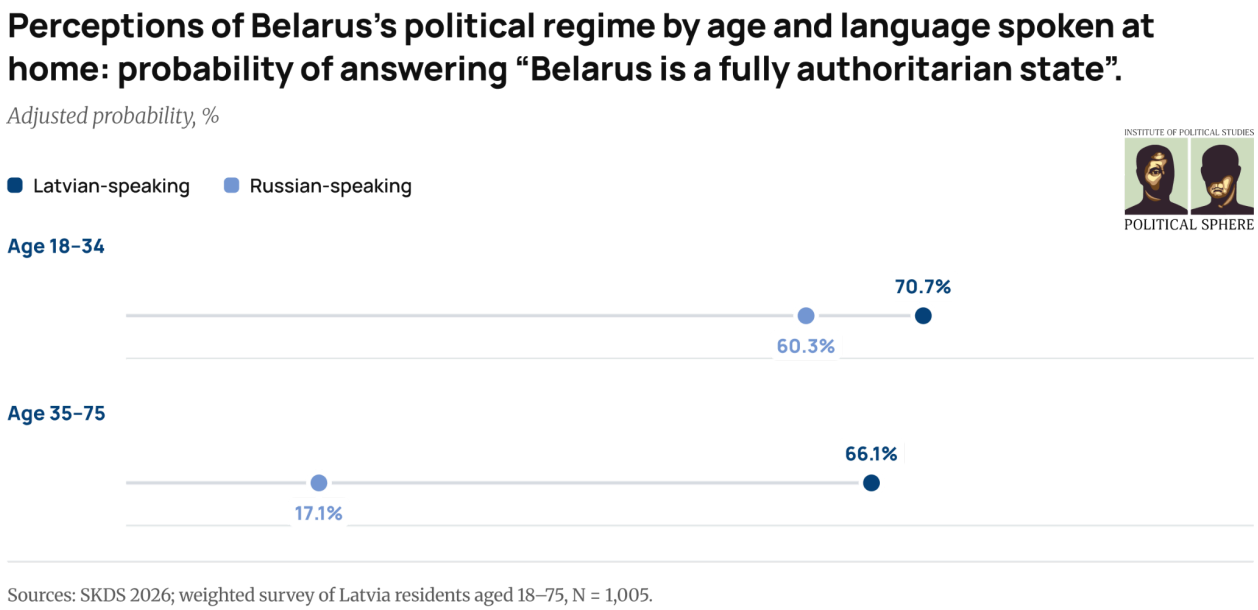
The most pronounced age differences in assessments of Belarus's political regime are observed between younger and older generations. Among respondents aged 18–24, 75.0% consider Belarus fully authoritarian and another 14.5% rather authoritarian. Only 3.4% describe it as partly or fully democratic. Among respondents aged 65–75, the combined share of authoritarian assessments is 53.9%, while 27.5% consider the country fully or rather democratic.

Accordingly, the probability of describing Belarus as a fully authoritarian state is 73.9% in the 18–24 age group and 58.6% among those aged 25–34. In all groups over 35, it is noticeably lower, ranging from 44.5% to 50.6%. The main divide therefore runs between younger respondents and the older generations.

The differences along the ethnolinguistic divide are again striking. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 78.3% consider Belarus fully or rather authoritarian, while only 6.9% describe it as fully or rather democratic. Among Russian-speaking respondents, 41.4% give an authoritarian assessment and 39.7% a democratic one. The share of respondents without a definite position is 14.8% among Latvian speakers and 19.0% among Russian speakers.

Among respondents who expressed a substantive position, the probability of describing Belarus as fully or rather authoritarian is 88.5% for Latvian-speaking respondents and 56.3% for Russian-speaking respondents.

The overall language gap, however, once again conceals substantial generational differences. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the estimated probability of recognising Belarus as a fully or rather authoritarian state is almost identical among young people aged 18–34 and respondents over 35: 90.9% (see Fig. 6) and 88.9%, respectively. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the picture is fundamentally different. In the group over 35, the estimated probability of an authoritarian assessment is 45.8%, while among Russian-speaking respondents aged 18–34 it reaches 86.2%. The generational difference is 40.4 percentage points. As a result, among older generations the language gap in the probability of a fully or rather authoritarian assessment reaches 43.1 percentage points, while among young people it narrows to 4.7 points. Thus, the positions of young Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents converge substantially.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 6. Perceptions of Belarus's political regime by age and language spoken at home: probability of answering "Belarus is a fully authoritarian state".

Among additional factors, income again shows a consistent association with perceptions of the political regime. The probability of considering Belarus fully or rather authoritarian is 68.7% in the low-income group and 85.0% among high-income respondents. Education and region do not retain independent associations.

Foreign policy and dependency. Perceptions of Belarus's foreign-policy independence have a more fragmented structure than assessments of the nature of the country's political regime. Only 14.2% of respondents (see Fig. 7) consider Belarus an independent state that is fully autonomous in its foreign policy. According to 22.5%, Russia exerts significant influence on Belarusian foreign policy, while another 16.3% believe it is almost completely determined by Russia. A further 16.8% speak of full Russian control, and 16.2% effectively regard Belarus as a state occupied by Russia; 13.9% find it difficult to answer. Thus, 71.8% of the full sample believe that Russia exerts at least significant influence on Belarus's foreign policy. Among respondents with a definite position, this share reaches 83.5%, while an absolute minority - 16.5% - consider Belarus fully independent.

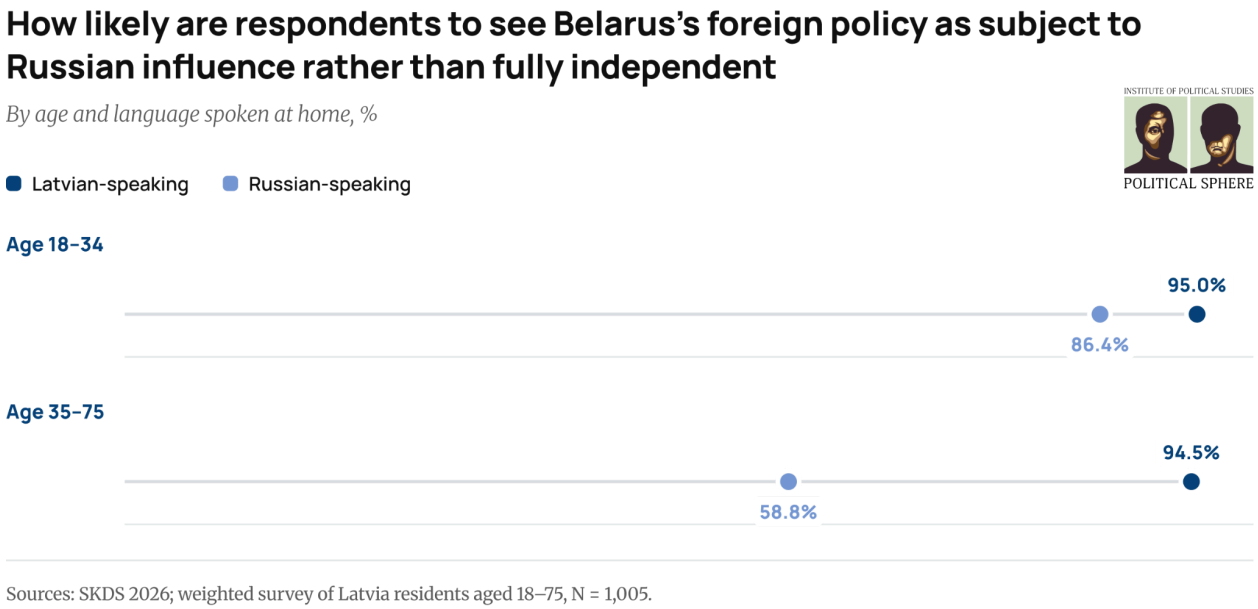
Figure 7. How independent is Belarus in its foreign policy?

Perceptions of Belarus's foreign-policy dependency are also strongly associated with language spoken at home. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, only 4.7% consider Belarus fully independent in foreign policy. Some form of Russian influence, control, or even occupation is reported by 82.3%, including 45.9% who choose the two strongest assessments - full control or de facto occupation. Another 13.0% find it difficult to answer. Among Russian-speaking respondents, 30.6% consider Belarus fully independent. Various forms of Russian influence are noted by 54.0%, including 11.1% who choose full control or occupation. The share answering "difficult to say" is a comparable 15.4%. Russian-speaking respondents are therefore not only much more likely to recognise Belarus's foreign-policy independence, but also far less likely to choose the strongest formulations of dependency. The probability of rejecting Belarus's complete foreign-policy independence and recognising at least significant Russian influence is 94.0% among Latvian-speaking respondents and 65.3% among Russian-speaking respondents.

Age differences are also fairly noticeable at the descriptive level. Among respondents aged 18–24, only 1.3% consider Belarus fully independent, while 92.3% note some degree of Russian influence, control, or occupation. Among respondents aged 65–75, the share recognising full independence rises to 19.2%, while 69.2% note various forms of dependency. Age differences in themselves are not consistent and depend primarily on language spoken at home.

Among Latvian-speaking respondents, age is almost unrelated to recognition of Belarus's foreign-policy independence. The estimated probability of rejecting the country's full independence is about 94.5% (see Fig. 8) both among respondents aged 18–34 and those over 35. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the age difference is much stronger: the corresponding probability reaches 86.4% among young people and only 58.8% among respondents over 35. A similar pattern appears when the most

categorical assessment is considered. The probability of viewing Belarus as de facto occupied by Russia is 11.7% among young Russian-speaking respondents and only 2.9% among Russian speakers over 35. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the corresponding figures are virtually identical: 28.1% among younger respondents and 26.3% among the older group.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 8. How likely are respondents to see Belarus's foreign policy as subject to Russian influence rather than fully independent? By age and language spoken at home.

It is worth noting that region affects respondents' readiness to formulate a definite position. The probability of answering "difficult to say" when assessing Belarus's foreign-policy position differs substantially across regions. The chance of choosing an uncertain answer in Latgale is approximately 2.6 times higher than in Riga. Latgale therefore stands out for a considerably higher level of uncertainty in its assessments: the share of "difficult to say" responses is the highest of all regions. At the same time, region does not show a significant independent association with assessments of Belarus's foreign-policy dependency.

Income also retains an independent association with assessments of foreign-policy dependency. After controlling for the main factors, the estimated probability of considering Belarus de facto occupied by Russia is 13.3% among low-income respondents and 25.7% among high-income respondents. As with assessments of the political regime, better-off groups are generally more likely to choose the most critical descriptions of the Belarusian state. Education, however, has no independent effect.

5. Expectations regarding Latvia's foreign policy towards Belarusian authorities and opposition

Isolation or cooperation. The fifth part of the study examines Latvian residents' preferences regarding foreign policy towards the Belarusian state and the democratic opposition. In total, 33.5% of respondents support economic sanctions and foreign-policy isolation. Another 28.8% prefer not to develop active cooperation while maintaining limited relations where these are advantageous. Active development of cooperation and partnerships is supported by 23.8%, while 13.9% find it difficult to answer. Among respondents who expressed a substantive position, 38.9% choose a sanctions policy, 33.5% limited engagement, and 27.6% active cooperation. The sanctions-and-isolation approach is therefore the most common single position, but it does not command an absolute majority.

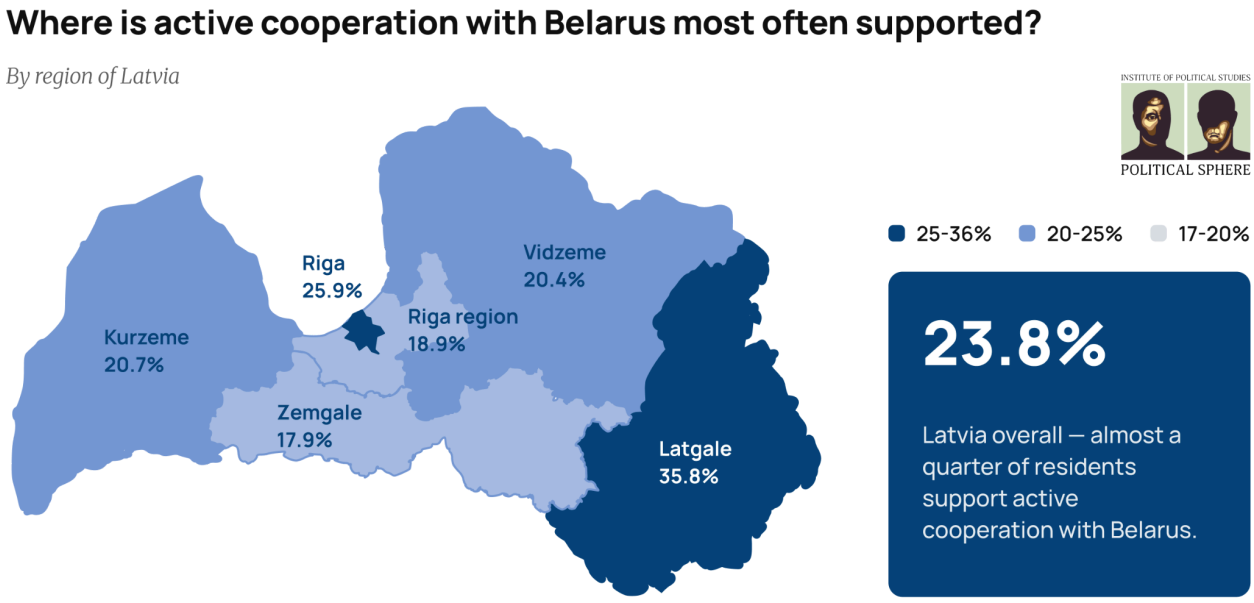
Age differences on this issue are particularly pronounced. Among respondents aged 18–24, 66.7% support sanctions and foreign-policy isolation, while only 8.4% support active cooperation. Among respondents aged 65–75, 23.2% choose the sanctions approach and 29.2% active cooperation. In all groups over 35, the distribution is considerably less categorical than among young people. Among respondents with a substantive position, the estimated probability of supporting a sanctions-and-isolation policy is 59.7% in the 18–24 group and 32.9% among respondents aged 65–75. The probability of supporting active cooperation, by contrast, rises from 12.2% to 31.0%. Once again, the clearest divide is between respondents under 35 and older generations. Younger people are much more likely to support a hard line towards the current Belarusian authorities, while older groups more often favour limited or active engagement.

An even more revealing picture emerges when language differences are considered. Support for the intermediate position is almost identical in the two groups. A comparable 28.8% of Latvian-speaking and 29.4% of Russian-speaking respondents favour avoiding active cooperation while maintaining relations where this is advantageous to Latvia. The two extreme response options, however, reveal strong polarisation. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, 45.5% support sanctions and foreign-policy isolation, while only 9.7% support active cooperation. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the picture is the reverse: 12.8% choose the sanctions approach, while 47.7% support actively developing cooperation. The language difference therefore reflects not a general tendency to take more or less categorical positions, but opposite choices between the two extreme foreign-policy directions. At the same time, Russian-speaking respondents are significantly less likely to choose "difficult to say", so language differences also concern the degree of certainty.

Overall, the probability of supporting the sanctions-and-isolation approach is 55.4% among Latvian-speaking respondents and 13.6% among Russian-speaking respondents.

The probability of supporting active cooperation, by contrast, reaches 52.7% among Russian-speaking respondents and only 11.8% among Latvian-speaking respondents. Relations with the current Belarusian authorities are therefore one of the clearest manifestations of ethnolinguistic polarisation in the entire study, although even here there are some points of intergroup convergence, namely pragmatic preferences in foreign policy.

Unlike most issues considered in the study, region of residence retains an independent association with the direction of preferences. In Latgale, only 15.0% of respondents support a sanctions policy. Opinions are almost evenly divided between the intermediate position - maintaining relations where advantageous - and actively developing cooperation: 34.7% and 35.8% (see Fig. 9), respectively. In Riga, 38.4% support the sanctions approach, 24.8% the intermediate position, and 25.9% active cooperation.



Sources: SKDS 2026; weighted survey of Latvia residents aged 18–75, N = 1,005.

Figure 9. Where are active cooperation with Belarus most often supported?

The observed regional differences are partly related to differences in the composition of regional populations. We therefore use estimated probabilities to compare the regions: these show what the share supporting each position would be if the regions had the same population distribution by gender, age, and language spoken at home. Under this comparison, the most consistent difference is between Riga and Vidzeme: the probability of supporting the sanctions-and-isolation policy is 45.5% in Riga and only 28.1% in Vidzeme, while the probability of active cooperation is 22.9% and 38.1%, respectively. Regional specificity on this issue therefore cannot be reduced to Latgale alone. After accounting for population composition, Vidzeme shows the most notable difference: its residents take a less sanctions-oriented position than residents of the capital.

The analysis also identified a significant interaction between language spoken at home and region of residence, allowing regional patterns to be considered separately among Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents. Among Latvian-speaking residents of Riga, 72.0% support the sanctions-and-isolation approach, compared with only 29.7% in Latgale - a difference of 42.2 percentage points. Active cooperation, by contrast, is supported by 23.6% of Latvian-speaking residents of Latgale and only 5.1% of those in Riga. Latgale also stands out when compared with the average among Latvian-speaking residents of all other regions, among whom 56.2% choose the sanctions approach and only 10.6% active cooperation. Riga, in turn, takes a more sanctions-oriented position than Latvian-speaking residents of the rest of the country on average.

No significant regional differences are found among Russian-speaking respondents. This allows for more nuanced conclusions about regional specificity: it becomes clear that regional variation appears primarily within the Latvian-speaking part of the population. Latgale's more open position is therefore linked not only to the region's language composition, but also to the less sanctions-oriented preferences of its Latvian-speaking residents, while attitudes towards the Belarusian authorities among Russian-speaking respondents remain comparatively homogeneous regardless of region of residence.

Income also retains a consistent association with preferences regarding the current Belarusian authorities. The probability of supporting a sanctions-and-isolation policy is 28.5% among low-income respondents and around 46.5% among high-income respondents. The probability of supporting active cooperation, by contrast, falls from 36.8% to 20.8%. Better-off groups are therefore, on average, more likely to support a hard line towards the current Belarusian authorities, while lower-income respondents more often favour cooperation. Education again does not retain an independent association.

Cooperation with the opposition. Attitudes towards cooperation with the democratic opposition have a different structure. In the full sample, 20.7% of respondents favour comprehensive cooperation and support at the state level. Another 26.4% support cooperation limited to official meetings, while 9.1% prefer only unofficial and non-public interaction. A complete refusal to cooperate is chosen by 13.8%. Almost a third of respondents, 30.1%, find it difficult to formulate a position - the highest share of uncertain responses among the indicators considered. This result points to the relatively weak formation of public preferences in Latvian society regarding a specific policy towards the Belarusian opposition.

If the three different forms of cooperation are combined, they are supported by 56.2% of the full sample, while only 13.8% favour refusing any interaction. Among respondents who expressed a substantive position, 80.3% support cooperation in one form or another, while 19.7% oppose it. Cooperation with the democratic opposition as a general direction therefore enjoys broad support, although the most common option is the comparatively restrained form of official engagement.

Age is again one of the most important factors. Among respondents aged 18–24, 47.8% choose the most active option - comprehensive cooperation and state support - while only 3.3% propose ending interaction altogether. Among respondents aged 65–75, the corresponding figures are 12.8% and 19.7%. Younger people therefore not only more often support a hard line towards the current Belarusian authorities, but at the same time are much more likely to favour active support for their democratic opponents.

The language difference in attitudes towards the opposition also persists, although it is noticeably weaker than on the question of relations with the current authorities. Among Latvian-speaking respondents, the three forms of cooperation are supported by 59.2%, while 9.5% favour a complete refusal. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the corresponding figures are 51.4% and 21.0%. The share of uncertain responses is comparable: 31.3% versus 27.7%. Ultimately, the probability of supporting at least one form of cooperation is 84.0% among Latvian-speaking respondents and 74.1% among Russian-speaking respondents. The probability of comprehensive cooperation reaches 34.2% and 22.4%, respectively, while the probability of complete refusal is 16.0% and 25.9%. Differences on the intermediate options are almost invisible, again showing that the language divide is concentrated mainly at the two extremes. Overall, Russian-speaking respondents take a more restrained view of cooperation with the democratic opposition, but the majority of substantive responses in both language groups still envisage some form of engagement.

Income retains an independent association with attitudes towards the democratic opposition as well. The probability of supporting comprehensive cooperation is 19.3% among low-income respondents and 38.4% among high-income respondents. The probability of completely refusing cooperation, by contrast, falls from 27.7% to 12.6%. Taken together with the findings on relations with the current authorities, this shows that better-off respondents more often adopt a consistently critical stance towards the current Belarusian leadership while also supporting more active cooperation with its democratic opponents. Education and region have no independent effect.

The general level of public awareness of the Belarusian opposition also deserves brief consideration. Recognition of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is relatively high: 77.0% of respondents report that they know of or have heard of her, 18.2% answer in the negative, and only 4.8% find it difficult to answer. The latter is one of the lowest levels of uncertainty in the entire survey. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is therefore known to a broad majority of Latvia's residents, although awareness in itself does not imply support for any particular policy. It is also noteworthy that, unlike most of the previous indicators, awareness is hardly divided by language spoken at home. At the descriptive level, 75.5% of Latvian-speaking and 80.0% of Russian-speaking respondents give a positive answer. This is an important exception to the overall pattern of the study: despite substantial differences in assessments of the Belarusian state and foreign-policy preferences, the two language groups are approximately equally familiar with one of the main figures of the Belarusian opposition. Income, unlike education and region, again shows an

independent association: positive responses amount to 78.4% in the low-income group and 89.9% in the high-income group.

Conclusions

The analysis shows that Latvian society draws a consciously clear distinction between citizens of Belarus and the current state regime. The almost regionally unique positive attitude towards Belarusians coexists with more restrained assessments of migration, threats, and foreign policy, indicating a differentiated, sober, and responsible perception of the situation in Latvian society. At the same time, high uncertainty on a number of political questions suggests that Belarus is insufficiently represented in public discourse; broadening public awareness therefore becomes a separate task for future policy and public engagement.

Attitudes towards Belarusians. Latvia has the highest share of positive assessments among the four countries studied, ahead of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. This is largely associated with the country's sizeable Russian-speaking population, among whom favourable attitudes are especially widespread.

Labour migration. A favourable attitude towards Belarusians does not automatically translate into support for an open migration policy. Society is divided almost evenly between restrictive and permissive approaches, demonstrating the difference between attitudes towards people and assessments of specific policy choices.

Security. Citizens of Belarus living in Latvia are generally not perceived as a threat, whereas assessments of the Belarusian state are considerably more cautious and heterogeneous. This confirms that respondents distinguish between migrants and the state, and associate the threat primarily with the political regime in Belarus and its actions.

Regime and external dependency. The majority describe Belarus as an authoritarian state and recognise substantial Russian influence on its foreign policy. Latvian society thus demonstrates a nuanced and critical understanding of the Belarusian regime, as well as of its political and value distance from Latvia.

Latvia's foreign policy. A restrained approach predominates towards the current Belarusian authorities, with the sanctions-and-isolation position remaining the most widespread. At the same time, a majority of Latvia's population support cooperation with the democratic opposition, indicating a willingness to oppose the Lukashenka regime comprehensively by combining pressure on the regime with engagement with its opponents.

Age. Young people in Latvia consistently take a more critical position. They are more wary of Belarusians, perceive a higher level of threat, more often recognise the

authoritarian nature of Belarus and its dependence on Russia, and are more supportive of sanctions and active assistance to the opposition. Age therefore shapes not isolated differences but a broader generational profile of perceptions of Belarus.

Language and region. Language spoken at home remains the main dividing factor. Among younger Russian-speaking respondents, however, assessments of threat, authoritarianism, and Russian dependency move noticeably closer to those of Latvian-speaking respondents, which may also point to a broader trend towards the gradual homogenisation of risk perceptions in Latvian society. The regional effect appears primarily within the Latvian-speaking group: residents of Latgale have a considerably more positive attitude towards Belarusians and favour a less sanctions-oriented policy, suggesting a possible influence of the experience of proximity and interaction.

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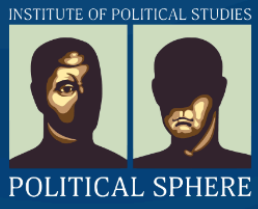
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