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Political Sphere

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ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER

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Belarus and Belarusians as Perceived by Lithuanian Society

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Summary

Belarusian-Lithuanian relations have undergone a substantial transformation over the past decade — from pragmatic interaction between neighbours to a deep political crisis. The political crisis in Belarus following the 2020 presidential election, the Lithuanian authorities' active support for Belarusian democratic forces, increasing Belarusian migration to Lithuania, growing regional security challenges, and Minsk's support for Russia's war against Ukraine have created a new context for perceptions of Belarus and Belarusians in Lithuanian society.

Under these circumstances, the analysis of public opinion provides an opportunity to explore how Lithuanian residents perceive Belarus and Belarusians, and the extent to which they distinguish between Belarusian society, the Belarusian authorities, and democratic forces. The study pays particular attention to perceptions of Belarus and Belarusian citizens in the context of national security, assessments of Belarusian citizens' economic contribution and labour migration, and expectations of Lithuania's policy towards official Minsk and the Belarusian democratic opposition. A separate section of the study addresses historical memory and perceptions of the shared heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, historical symbols, discussions surrounding "Litvinism", and the extent of Lithuanian society's familiarity with Belarusian cultural and historical figures.

The study therefore seeks to identify the principal trends, underlying contradictions, and key issues characterising Lithuanian residents' attitudes towards Belarus and Belarusians. The findings provide a better understanding of the current state of public perceptions of Belarusian-Lithuanian relations and the factors that may influence their further development.

The study was designed and conducted by the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere", in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania), while the fieldwork was carried out by the Lithuanian market and public opinion research company "Spinter tyrimai".[1]

Methodology. The study used a combined survey method: Computer Assisted WEB Interview (CAWI) and Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI).[2] The survey was conducted in two stages: 19–29 January and 19–27 February 2026, throughout the Republic of Lithuania. Residents of Lithuania aged 18 to 75 took part in the study. The total sample comprised 1017 respondents, allowing the data obtained to be considered

[1] The market and public opinion research company "Spinter tyrimai" was founded in 1996. Source: https://spinter.lt/
[2] In the overall sample, 70% of respondents were interviewed using CAWI and 30% using CATI.

representative.[3] Participants were selected using quota sampling. The maximum statistical margin of sampling error is approximately ±3.1%.

The analysis used respondents' main socio-demographic characteristics to identify differences between population groups. The results were compared by gender, age, education, income, marital status, region, and type of settlement of residence. Respondents' political preferences and the presence of personal ties with Belarus and Belarusians were also taken into account. This approach makes it possible to identify which social, economic, and political characteristics are associated with differences in perceptions of Belarus, Belarusian citizens, and particular aspects of Belarusian-Lithuanian relations.

Attitudes towards Belarusians

General opinion. Overall, 9.4% of respondents express a positive attitude towards citizens of Belarus, and 27.7% a rather positive one. A negative opinion of citizens of Belarus is expressed by 12.9% of survey participants, while 23.7% report a rather negative attitude. At the same time, a quarter of respondents (26.3%) were unable to answer. Thus, Lithuanian citizens' public opinion regarding Belarusians is evenly divided: 37.1% positive and 36.6% negative. The substantial proportion of respondents who were unable to answer may indicate ambiguity surrounding the topic or a degree of caution in expressing their views.

Differences in attitudes towards Belarusians are particularly apparent between age and social groups, as well as among supporters of different political forces. Respondents aged 26–35 are the most critical: 45.1% express a negative attitude towards Belarusians, while 25.1% express a positive one. Favourable attitudes are characteristic of the 46–55 age group (44.6% positive assessments) and those aged 56 and over (41.2%). Negative assessments are also more common among respondents with higher education (40.4%) and especially among the most affluent group, with an income above €1500 (48%).[4] Substantial differences are also evident in political preferences. Among voters of the Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union), 54.7% view Belarusians positively or rather positively, as do 49.3% of Nemuno aušra (Political Party "Dawn of Nemunas") voters, whereas the share of negative assessments reaches 46% among supporters of the Demokratų sąjungą "Vardan Lietuvos" (Union of Democrats "For Lithuania") and 43.8% among supporters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius (Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats).

[3] Both samples included 1017 respondents.
[4] Similar differences are present in public opinion among citizens of Latvia and Ukraine.

For comparison, in other studies conducted by the Institute "Political Sphere" in neighbouring countries, 50.4% of respondents in Latvia express a positive attitude towards citizens of Belarus and 25.3% a negative one; in Poland, the positive assessment stands at 49.8% and the negative at 17.6%, while in Ukraine, attitudes towards citizens of Belarus improved in 2026 for the first time since the start of the war, reaching 44.5 percentage points, with 36.1% expressing a negative assessment.[5]

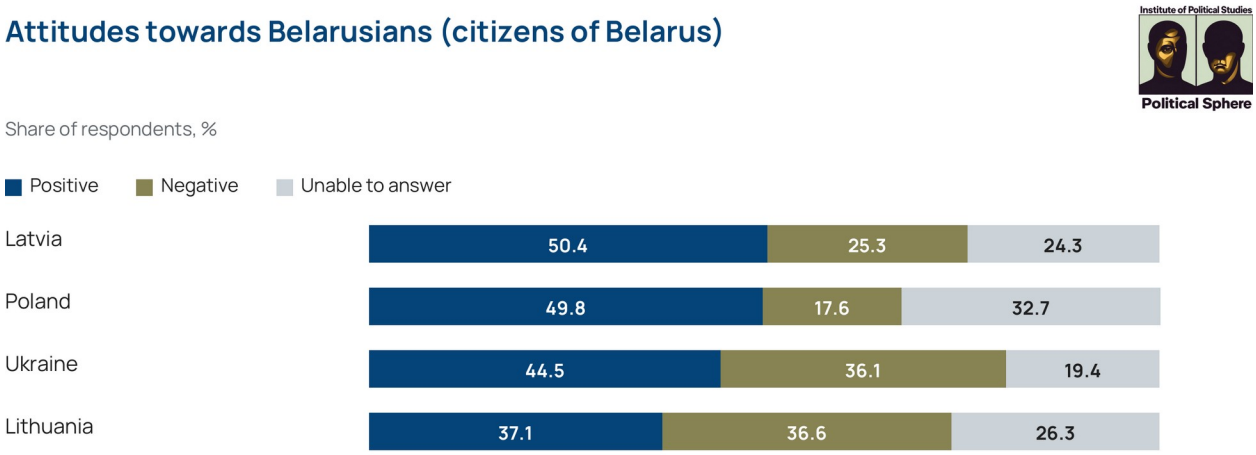


Figure 1. Attitudes towards Belarusians (citizens of Belarus).

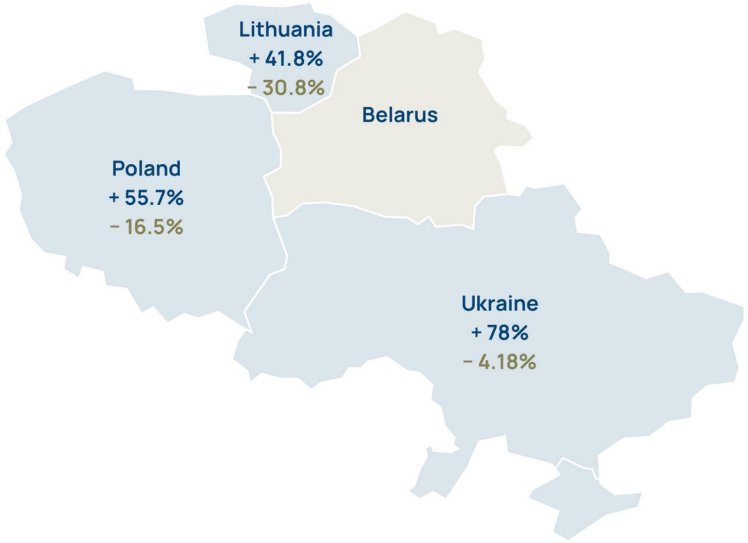
Thus, among the neighbouring countries examined, Lithuania exhibits the most reserved attitudes towards Belarusian citizens. The proportion of positive assessments is the lowest, while that of negative assessments is among the highest.

Attitudes towards citizens of Belarus living in Lithuania. The study found that respondents more often appreciate Belarusian citizens living in Lithuania. The presence of Belarusians in Lithuania was viewed positively by 9.2% of respondents and rather positively by 32.6%. The presence of Belarusian citizens in Lithuania was assessed negatively by 9.1%, while 21.7% viewed it rather negatively. Another 27.2% of respondents were unable to answer. Overall, attitudes towards Belarusian citizens residing in Lithuania tend to be more favourable than unfavourable, with 41.8% of respondents expressing positive views compared to 30.8% expressing negative ones.

[5] Dmitrijs Borjajevs, Yury Lytko, and Andrei Kazakevich, *Strangers Next Door: Belarus and Belarusians in Latvian Public Opinion*, Palitsfera Working Papers No. 4/2026 (Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere"), 2026.

Attitudes towards Belarusian citizens living in the country

Attitudes towards resident Belarusians: + positive; – negative



Unable to answer: Lithuania 27.2%; Poland 27.8%; Ukraine 17.82%.

Figure 2. Attitudes towards Belarusian citizens living in the country.

Attitudes towards Belarusian citizens residing in neighbouring countries, however, appear to be different. For example, in Poland, 55.7% of respondents view resident Belarusian citizens positively and 16.5% negatively; in Ukraine, 78% express a positive attitude towards Belarusians living there, while 4.18% express a negative one.

Attitudes towards Belarusians living in Lithuania differ between population groups. Respondents aged 26–35 are the most critical, with 33.5% expressing positive attitudes towards Belarusian residents and 36.1% expressing negative ones. Among respondents with higher education, the share of positive assessments is also lower, at 36.2%, compared with 45.1% among those with secondary education. At the same time, residents of large cities are somewhat more reserved towards Belarusians: 37.8% give a positive assessment, compared with 45.6% of residents of district centres and 44.9% in rural areas. More substantial differences emerge depending on political preferences: 56.2% of Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą voters and 48.9% of Socialdemokratų party (Social Democratic Party of Lithuania) voters view Belarusians living in Lithuania positively, whereas this figure is 34.7% among supporters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius and 39.2% among Demokratų sąjungą "Vardan Lietuvos" voters.

Overall, attitudes towards the Belarusian diaspora abroad are favourable, but in Lithuania they are noticeably more reserved than in Poland and especially in Ukraine. This suggests that, in the eyes of Lithuanian society, Belarusian migration is perceived somewhat differently from Belarusian citizens in general.

Belarusian migration in 2020. In 2020, following the outbreak of protests against alleged electoral fraud in Belarus, the Lithuanian government allowed numerous individuals who had been forced to leave Belarus to enter the country. In response to the question "How do you assess this decision?", 12.9% consider the Lithuanian government's decision to have been correct, while 37% assess it as rather correct. At the same time, 8.7% consider official Vilnius's decision to have been entirely wrong, 18.5% regard it as rather wrong, and 23% were unable to answer. Thus, half of survey participants (49.9%) support the government's 2020 decision to open the borders to Belarusian citizens, while 27.2% assess the decision less positively.

For comparison, in neighbouring Poland, 59.3% of respondents consider the Polish government's decision to allow entry to have been correct, while 19.8% express a more negative assessment.

In assessments of the Lithuanian authorities' 2020 decision, the most pronounced differences are associated with respondents' income levels. Among high-income respondents (over €1500), 61.6% support the decision, compared with 43.6% among those earning up to €500. Support is also somewhat higher among respondents with higher education (52.3%). Some variation is also apparent in political preferences. The decision is viewed positively by 56.1% of Liberalų sąjūdį (Liberals' Movement) voters and 55.4% of supporters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius, whereas this figure is 45.7% among Nemuno aušra voters and 43% among those who did not participate in the last election.

Thus, the study's findings indicate that the Lithuanian government's 2020 decision received a rather positive public assessment, with the share of supporters noticeably exceeding the share of critical respondents. Greater support among respondents with higher levels of education may indicate differences between social groups in their perceptions of the humanitarian and political grounds for this decision. At the same time, the substantial proportion of respondents who were unable to answer shows that the issue of admitting Belarusian citizens after 2020 remains a source of uncertainty within Lithuanian society.

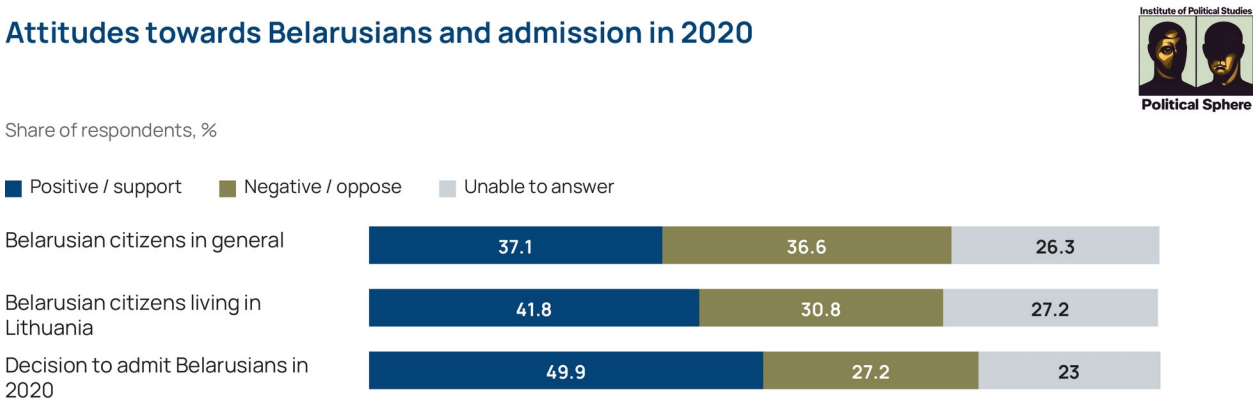


Figure 3. Attitudes towards Belarusians and admission in 2020.

A comparison of the three abovementioned indicators shows that Lithuanian society's attitudes towards Belarusians depend on the context in which the question is formulated. The general assessment of citizens of Belarus is the most reserved (37.2% positive responses), while attitudes towards Belarusians living in Lithuania are more positive in Lithuanian society (41.9%). The greatest support is given to the decision to admit people forced to leave Belarus following the events of 2020 (49.9%). These conclusions suggest that Lithuanian society distinguishes, to some extent, between its general attitude towards citizens of Belarus and its assessment of a particular group of migrants, especially when their presence is linked to the political and humanitarian circumstances of 2020.

Direct contact with Belarusians. The study's findings show that the intensity of direct contact between Lithuanians and Belarusians is rather low. Only 12.4% of respondents had maintained contact over the past 12 months with relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or other people from Belarus (regardless of whether they live in Belarus or in other countries).

Vilnius's historical connection with the Belarusian public sphere is partly reflected in contemporary social contacts. Among residents of the capital, 21.7% have relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or other people from Belarus with whom they maintained contact over the past 12 months. By contrast, the figure is only 7.5% in other large cities, 9.8% in district centres, and 12.1% in rural areas.

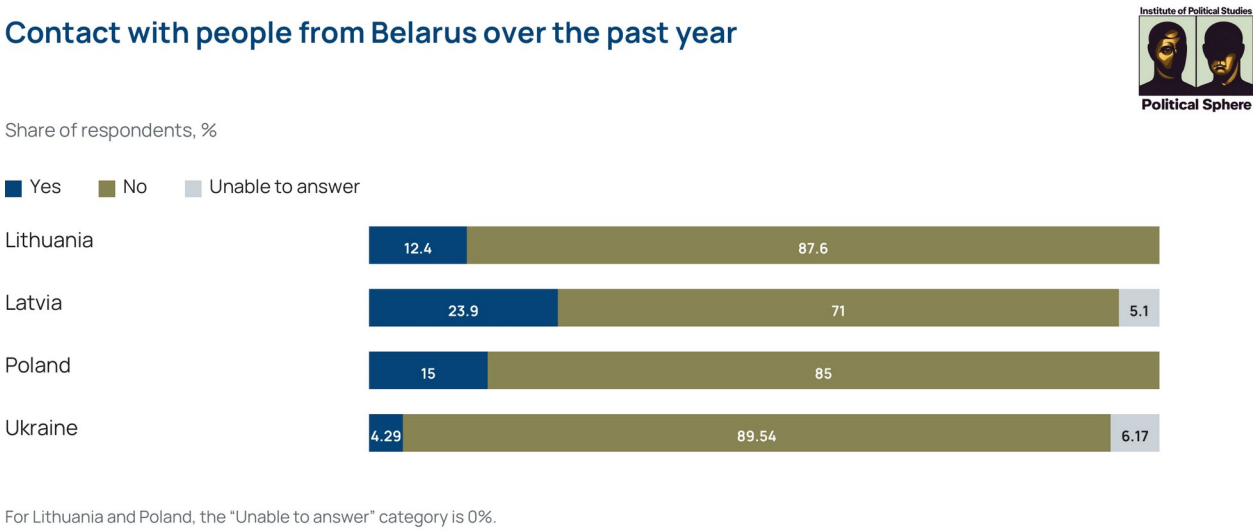


Figure 4. Contact with people from Belarus over the past year.

In Latvia, around a quarter of respondents (23.9%) reported such contact over the past year; in Poland, the figure was 15%, and in Ukraine, 4.29%.

It can therefore be concluded that, for most of Lithuania's population, perceptions of Belarus and Belarusians are shaped primarily by the media and official Vilnius's political agenda, rather than by direct ties with Belarusian citizens. Only one in eight survey participants had personal contact over the past year, which in turn indicates limited interaction between social groups in Belarus and Lithuania.

Labour Migration and Economic Contribution

In response to the question "How should Lithuania approach labour migration from Belarus?", 26.8% support a more restrictive position and believe that the number of labour migrants from Belarus currently in Lithuania should be reduced. Another 18.1% favour stopping further labour migration from Belarus without taking steps to reduce the number already present. More than a third (37.3%) support allowing labour migration on the same terms as from other non-EU countries. Encouraging labour migration from Belarus is supported by 3.9%. A tenth of respondents (13.9%) were unable to answer, indicating uncertainty on the issue of Belarusian labour migration.

Combining the responses into more negative and positive groups reveals an even division of public opinion. A more restrictive approach to labour migration from Belarus is supported by 44.9% of respondents, while 41.2% favour maintaining the current conditions or encouraging such migration.

The social divide is again a key factor. The view that Lithuania should seek to reduce the number of labour migrants already in the country or stop further migration is supported by 53.9% of Vilnius residents, compared with 41.4% of rural residents. Among respondents earning up to €500, 39.2% express this view, compared with 54.2% of those earning more than €1,500. A more restrictive approach is also more common among respondents with higher education (48.6%) than among those with secondary education (43%).

For comparison, in neighbouring Latvia, around 40% of respondents take a restrictive position, while approximately 40% support a more open approach; in Poland, 42.9% favour reducing migration, while 39.7% favour an open labour market.

At the same time, Belarusians' contribution to Lithuania's economy is assessed predominantly positively. In the view of 39.6% of survey participants, Belarusians living in Lithuania make a small but positive contribution to the country's economy, while another 8% consider this contribution significant. More than a third of respondents (34.7%) believe that Belarusians have no impact on the Lithuanian economy. A small negative contribution is noted by 11.9% of respondents, and a significant negative contribution by 5.8%. Thus, around half (47.6%) assess Belarusians' economic contribution positively, while more than a third (34.7%) take a neutral position. Only 17.7% give a negative assessment. This indicates that, in economic terms, the presence of Belarusians in Lithuania is viewed rather positively or neutrally, while explicitly negative assessments remain in the minority.

Age differences are most apparent between the younger and older groups of respondents. Among those aged 26–35, 38.7% assess Belarusians' economic contribution positively, compared with 55.3% among respondents older than 56. At the same time, the share of negative assessments reaches 21.5% in the 26–35 age group, compared with 15.9% in the older age group. In terms of income, the most affluent group, with income over €1500, stands out: 54.8% note a positive contribution and only 8.2% a negative one.

In Poland, 42.1% of respondents give a positive assessment of Belarusians' economic contribution, 13.2% a negative one, while 24.3% do not see a noticeable impact on the country's economy.

Labour migration from Belarus thus remains one of the most divisive issues in Lithuanian public opinion. On the one hand, Lithuanian society does not support fully opening the labour market to Belarusian migrants, and there is also support for introducing additional restrictions or reducing the flow. On the other hand, almost one in two respondents favours maintaining labour migration on the same terms as for citizens of other non-EU countries, or encouraging it. Overall, around 40% of

respondents demonstrate a relatively open position towards citizens of Belarus in general, Belarusians living in Lithuania, and labour migration. Positive assessments of the economic contribution of Belarusians in Lithuania are even higher, reaching 47.6%. Lithuanian residents thus appear more receptive to the economic contributions of Belarusians already living in the country than to further labour migration from Belarus.

Security and Perceptions of Threats

According to the Lithuanian Migration Department, approximately 50,000 Belarusian citizens were residing in Lithuania as of 1 February 2026.[6] Belarusian citizens are thus the second-largest group of foreigners holding residence permits in Lithuania, after citizens of Ukraine. When asked whether citizens of Belarus living in Lithuania pose a threat to the country's national security, 4.2% of respondents answered affirmatively, while another 21.2% believe that such a threat probably exists. At the same time, 34.3% think there is probably no threat, while 14.5% rule it out entirely. Another 25.8% were unable to answer.

Perceptions of Belarusian citizens as a threat to national security vary most noticeably according to respondents' political preferences. Supporters of the Demokratų sąjungą "Vardan Lietuvos" stand out in particular, as this is the only electoral group represented in which the share of those who consider Belarusians living in the country a threat (41.9%) exceeds the share of those who do not (32.5%). The opposite views prevail in other political camps. For example, among voters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius, 29.7% see Belarusian residents as a threat and 43.8% do not; among supporters of Nemuno aušra, the respective figures are 27.1% and 54.3%; for the Socialdemokratų party, 22.4% and 49.5%; the Liberalų sąjūdį, 20.9% and 53.9%; and the Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą, 18.8% and 54.7%. In terms of age, the youngest group stands out: only 16.8% of those aged 18–25 perceive Belarusians living in Lithuania as a threat, compared with 29.9% of those aged 26–35 and 28.2% of people older than 56. It is important to note that young respondents are also more likely to find it difficult to make an assessment — 32.7%. Thus, almost half of respondents (48.8%) tend not to regard citizens of Belarus living in Lithuania as a threat to national security, while 25.4% see such a threat to some degree. At the same time, one in four respondents was unable to form a definite position, indicating substantial uncertainty in public opinion on this issue.

[6] Migracija Lietuvoje, "IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / 2026 m. vasario 1 d. duomenys" (Lithuanian Migration Department), 2026, p. 1, https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1770372012/1522/imig-2026-02.pdf

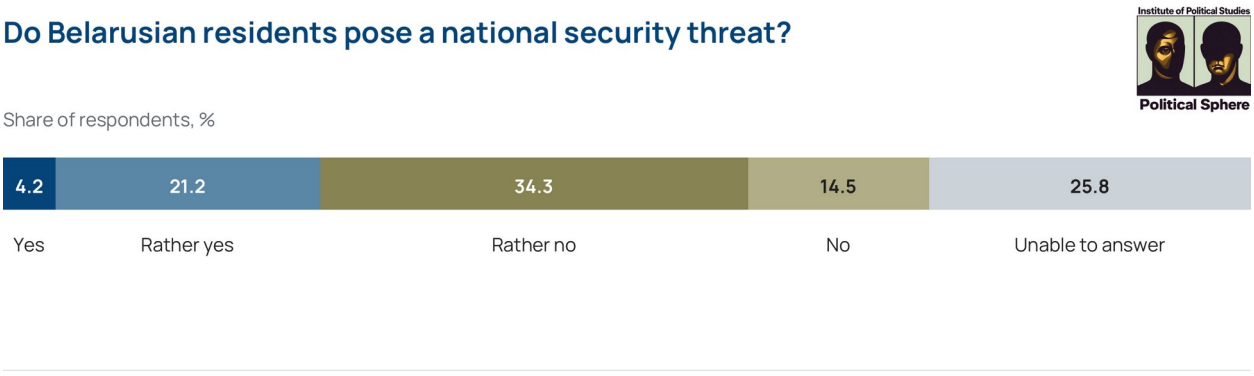


Figure 5. Do Belarusian residents pose a national security threat?

Looking at neighbouring countries, the share of respondents in Poland who perceive citizens of Belarus as a threat is 17.7%, while 64.8% see no such threat. In Latvia, this gap is even more pronounced, with 8.4% and 78.1% respectively.

Among respondents who, to some degree, consider citizens of Belarus living in Lithuania a threat to national security, the most frequently mentioned threat is espionage by Belarusian intelligence services — 22.8%. Another 14.7% associate the threat with political disloyalty, 12% with possible internal destabilisation, 11.2% with socio-cultural risks, and 10.4% with hybrid threats. Less frequently mentioned are military scenarios (6.2%), uncertainty about "who has arrived" (4.2%), crime (3.5%), economic and labour-related threats (3.1%), various unforeseen threats (3.1%), smuggling and other illegal activities (2.7%), demographic concerns associated with the large number of Belarusians (1.5%), and autonomist ideas (0.8%). Another 15.1% were unable to name a specific threat, while 1.5% selected "other".

Thus, among respondents who perceive citizens of Belarus as a potential threat, the dominant concerns relate to the activities of Belarusian intelligence services, political loyalty, and possible internal destabilisation. Military, criminal, economic, and demographic scenarios are mentioned noticeably less often.

Threats from the Belarusian state. When assessing whether the current Belarusian state poses a threat to Lithuania on a scale from 1 to 10, respondents gave an average score of 6.28 points.[7] The most frequently selected scores were 7 and 8 points, chosen by 19% and 17.1%, respectively. In total, 52.4% rated the threat at 7–10 points, while 20.6% gave low scores of 1 to 4. Another 27% selected intermediate scores of 5–6 points.

[7] The assessment used a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates a complete absence of threat and 10 the highest possible level of threat.

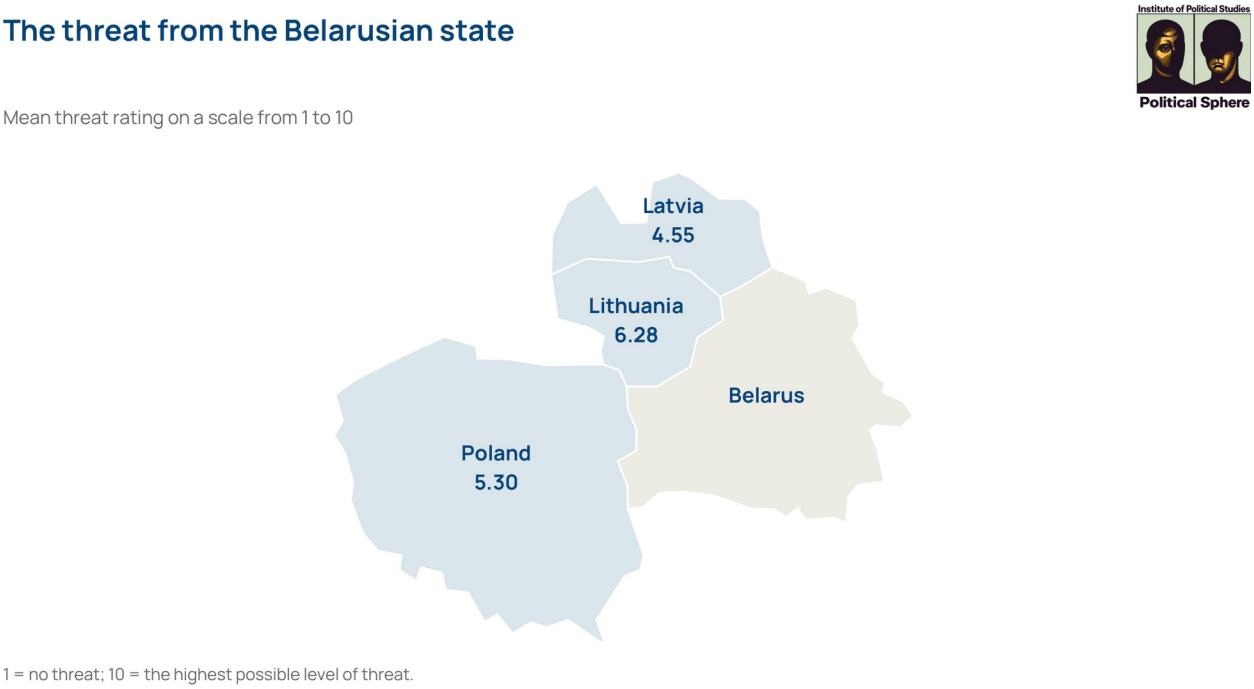


Figure 6. The threat from the Belarusian state.

Respondents with higher education tend to rate the threats more highly: 56.2% rate the threat at 7–10 points, compared with 50% of respondents with secondary education. Differences are also evident by place of residence: in large cities and district centres, 55.2% and 55.1%, respectively, give scores of 7–10, compared with 45.3% in rural areas. A clearer example can be seen in the electorates of political parties. Among voters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius, 65.3% give scores of 7–10, as do 63.8% of Liberalų sąjūdį supporters. At the same time, 36% of Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą voters and 40.8% of Nemuno aušra voters identify a threat of this magnitude. The findings thus suggest that perceptions of Belarus as a potential threat are closely associated with respondents' political affiliations.

In neighbouring Latvia, the average assessment of the threat from the Belarusian state was 4.55 points, compared with 5.3 out of 10 in Poland.

Lithuanian residents are thus more likely than those in Latvia and Poland to perceive the Belarusian state as a significant threat to their country. At the same time, a noticeable share of Lithuanians take a more moderate position, and assessments remain relatively consistent across age groups (6.01–6.54 points), whereas Latvia displays much more pronounced age differences.

Belarusian Politics and the State

When assessing the political system of contemporary Belarus, an absolute majority of Lithuanians (54%) characterise Belarus as an authoritarian state, and 21.9% as more authoritarian than democratic. Only 6.8% of Lithuanians perceive Belarus as a democratic state to some degree. Another 17.3% were unable to answer, indicating that opinions about Belarus's political regime are insufficiently formed. Lithuanian public opinion is dominated by the view of Belarus as a country in which an authoritarian regime prevails (75.9%). However, the view of Belarus as a democratic state is supported by only 6.8% of respondents.

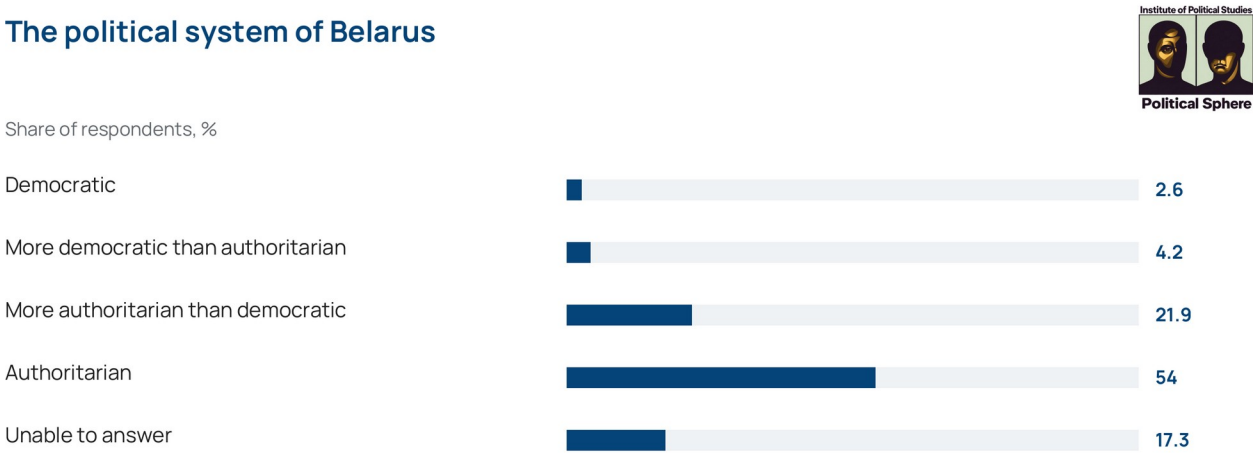


Figure 7. The political system of Belarus.

Thus, in the eyes of Lithuania's residents, Belarus is consistently perceived as an authoritarian state. Its authoritarian character is noted by respondents with higher education (65%), while the most economically secure respondents, with an income above €1500 (74.5%), explicitly describe Belarus as authoritarian, compared with 41.6% among economically vulnerable respondents (with an income up to €500). An absolute majority of residents of the capital (65%) describe Belarus as authoritarian, compared with 46.8% of residents in rural areas. Personal ties with Belarus appear to moderate perceptions to some extent: 45.2% of respondents with such contacts regard the country as unequivocally authoritarian, compared with 55.2% of those without them.

The status of the Belarusian state. Since 2020, the narrative of Belarus's limited sovereignty and growing dependence on Russia has gained considerable prominence in Lithuanian media and official discourse. An illustrative example is the resolution "On the Illegal Union with Russia Imposed on Belarus", adopted by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 10 September 2020, which regarded the further deepening of

Belarusian-Russian integration as a threat to Belarus's sovereignty and, in effect, as a possible "de facto annexation of the country".[8]

Lithuanians' views on Belarus's foreign policy orientation can be considered equally consolidated. An absolute majority — 62% — view the country as highly dependent on Russia. Around a quarter (22.9%) consider Belarus a dependent state under Russia's complete control, while 11% see it as a country effectively occupied by the Kremlin. Another 28.1% believe that, although some autonomy remains, Belarus's foreign policy is still determined "almost entirely" by Moscow.

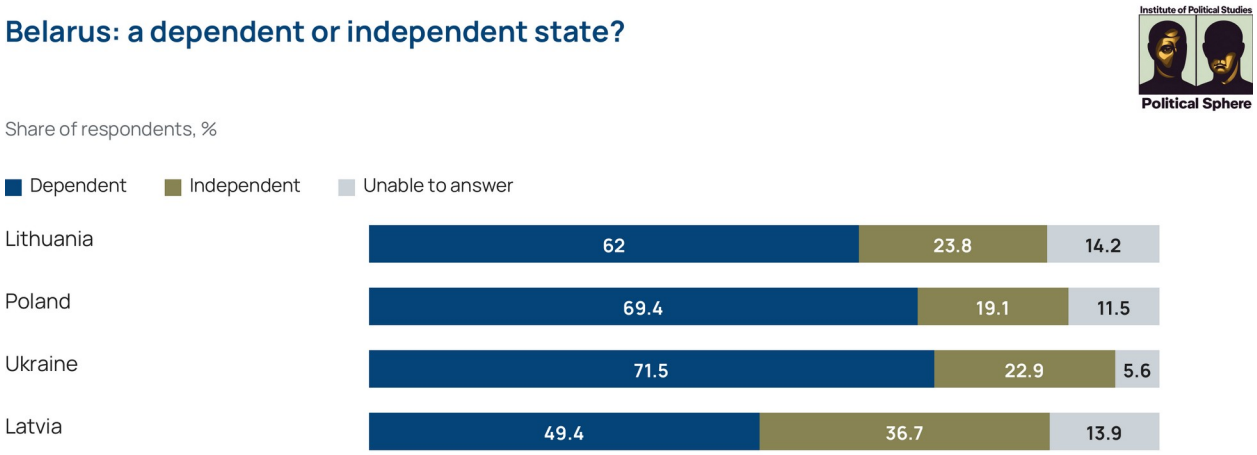


Figure 8. Belarus: a dependent or independent state?

In Poland and Ukraine, Belarus is more often perceived as a dependent state — 69.4% and 71.5%, respectively — while 19.1% of Polish and 22.9% of Ukrainian respondents consider it independent. The balance in Latvia is noticeably different: 49.4% describe Belarus as dependent and 36.7% as independent.

Perceptions of Belarus's dependence on Russia vary noticeably between socio-economic groups. Assessments of dependence are characteristic of respondents with higher education and the highest incomes. Combining the responses that Russia determines Belarus's foreign policy almost entirely, exercises complete control, or effectively occupies the country, these options are selected by 71.3% of respondents with higher education and 79.5% of those with the highest income. By contrast, this figure is 56.7% among those with secondary education and 53.1% among respondents with the lowest income.

As noted earlier, political preferences differentiate perceptions of Belarusian foreign policy more clearly. The perception of Belarus as a state dependent on, completely

[8] Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, "Rezoliucija dėl neteisėtos ir Baltarusijai Rusijos primetamos sąjungos," September 10, 2020, https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a7825340f3f311eab72ddb4a109da1b5

controlled by, or effectively occupied by Russia is most widespread among voters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius (77.7%) and the Liberalų sąjūdį (73.6%). At the same time, among Nemuno aušra supporters, the share considering Belarus an independent state reaches 34.6%, one of the highest figures among the main political groups.

Nevertheless, almost a quarter of respondents (23.8%) consider Belarus an independent state to some degree. Thus, in the eyes of Lithuanian society, the Belarusian state is perceived as a politically non-independent actor.

The legitimacy of Alexander Lukashenko. In response to the question "Is Alexander Lukashenko the legitimate leader of Belarus (expressing the will of the people)?", most respondents stated that they do not consider the current head of state a legitimate representative of the people's will. More than a third (39.5%) unequivocally reject his legitimacy, while another 23.2% tend to share this assessment. At the same time, 4.3% consider Alexander Lukashenko a legitimate leader, and 15% a rather legitimate one. Another 17.9% were unable to answer.

Socio-demographic differences in assessments of Alexander Lukashenko's legitimacy are generally moderate. However, among those with higher education, 69% do not consider Lukashenko the legitimate leader of Belarus, compared with 59.1% of respondents with secondary education. Differences by income are particularly noticeable: among the most affluent respondents, the share who do not recognise his legitimacy reaches 80.8%, while the other income groups fall within approximately the same range of non-recognition, 60–66%. Political preferences are noticeably associated with assessments of Alexander Lukashenko's legitimacy. The highest share generally recognising his legitimacy is found among voters of Nemuno aušra (30.8%) and the Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą (26.6%), whereas non-recognition is characteristic of supporters of the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius (77.7%) and the Liberalų sąjūdį (74.7%).

In total, 62.7% of respondents do not recognise Alexander Lukashenko's legitimacy, while 19.3% express the opposite views. Thus, in Lithuanian public opinion, the share who do not recognise the legitimacy of the current Belarusian head of state is more than three times as large. At the same time, the fact that approximately one-fifth of respondents remain undecided suggests that the question of legitimacy remains unresolved for a segment of society.

Recognition of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. With regard to alternative Belarusian political forces, the opposite trend is observed. When asked "Do you know Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya — the leader of the Belarusian democratic opposition who ran against Alexander Lukashenko in the 2020 election?", almost three-quarters of respondents

(74.4%) answered affirmatively. At the same time, 14.9% do not know and/or have not heard of her. Another 10.6% were unable to answer.

Socio-demographic variation remains limited, but older and more affluent respondents are somewhat more likely to know the leader of the Belarusian opposition. Among those older than 56, recognition reaches 79.6%, and among those with the highest income, 84.9%, compared with 67.8% among respondents with the lowest income (up to €500). Somewhat unexpectedly, recognition of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is higher among rural residents (79.2%) than among residents of large cities (70.9%) or district centres (75.5%). However, these differences are primarily related to the age structure of these groups, as Tsikhanouskaya is more often known among older respondents aged 56 and over (79.6%), compared with 69.1–69.4% among those aged 26–45.

Thus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya enjoys a very high level of public recognition in Lithuania, owing in part to her presence and political activities in Vilnius, as well as her extensive visibility in the Lithuanian media.

Expectations of Lithuania's Policy towards Belarus

A separate set of questions concerned the policy that official Vilnius should pursue towards the Belarusian authorities and alternative political forces.

Approximately one-third of respondents (30%) strongly support the diplomatic isolation of Belarus and the imposition of sanctions against the country. An additional 39.9% of respondents favour maintaining relations with Belarus, albeit limited to areas of practical benefit, particularly economic cooperation. Active cooperation and partnership with Minsk are supported by 13.2% of respondents, while 16.9% were unable to answer.

The analysis also identified socio-economic trends in preferences regarding Lithuania's policy towards Belarus. The higher the income, the more often a policy of isolation and sanctions is supported: among respondents with the lowest income (up to €500), 18.4% favour a hard-power position, compared with 51.1% in the most affluent group. At the same time, support for limited pragmatic engagement with the Belarusian authorities declines from 48% among the respondents with the highest level of income to 31.9% among those with the lowest income, and support for full cooperation from 18.4% to 8.5% respectively. A similar pattern emerges across education levels: among respondents with higher education, 38.3% support isolation and sanctions, compared with 24.5% among those with secondary education. Support for isolation and sanctions is highest among Vilnius residents, at 41.9%; in other large cities and district centres, it is supported by around 28–30%, and in rural areas by

22.5%. Personal contact with Belarusians is associated with a more open attitude towards cooperation: 23% favour developing full cooperation with the Belarusian authorities, compared with only 11.8% among those without such ties.

Among neighbouring countries, limited pragmatic engagement with the Belarusian authorities also remains the most widespread position: it is supported by 44.9% of respondents in Poland, 45.8% in Ukraine, and 28.8% in Latvia. At the same time, the sanctions-and-isolation approach is noticeably stronger in Latvia (33.5%) than in Poland (20.7%) and Ukraine (17.6%), while active cooperation remains a less common position in all countries.

Lithuanian public opinion thus indicates considerable reservations about the prospect of normalising bilateral relations with Belarus. Almost a third support a principled position based on political pressure and distancing from the Belarusian regime. This may be attributed to a combination of factors, notably the Lithuanian government's consistently firm stance towards Minsk and the geopolitical tensions associated with Belarus, which have contributed to heightened security concerns in Lithuania and the wider region. At the same time, an approach based on cautious pragmatism and limited engagement remains widespread, particularly where such cooperation offers practical benefits to Lithuania.

Engagement with the Belarusian democratic opposition. The study's findings show that 22% of respondents favour comprehensive cooperation with the democratic opposition and support for it at the official level. Around a third (31.5%) believe that Lithuania should limit itself to official meetings, statements, and other forms of interaction. Another 13.1% opt for unofficial and non-public cooperation, while 10.1% oppose developing any contacts with the democratic opposition. A further 23.3% were unable to provide an answer, which may indicate a limited understanding of the Belarusian opposition and its significance among the Lithuanian public.

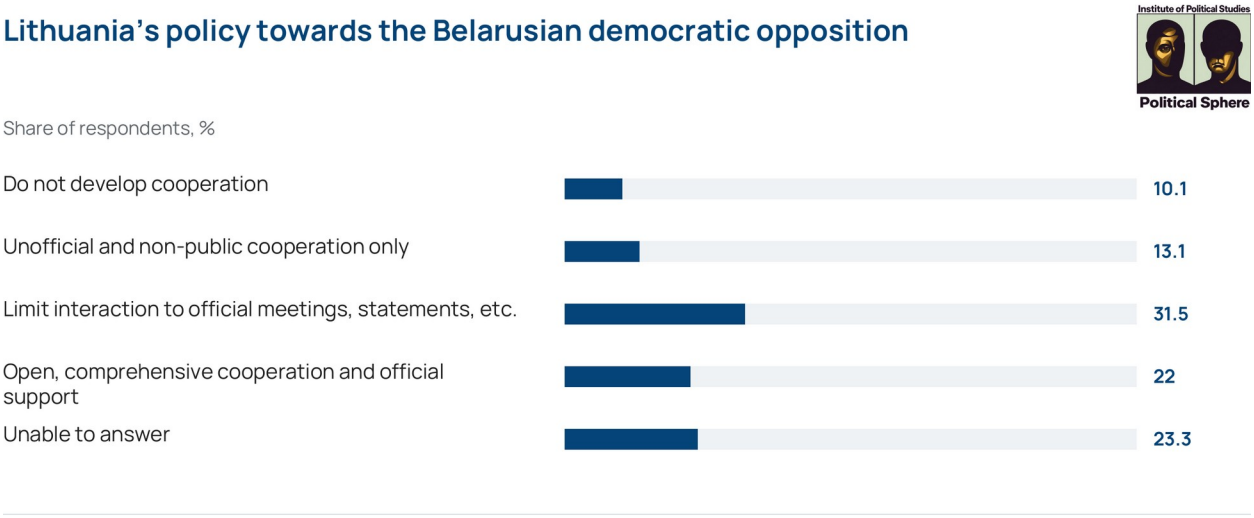


Figure 9. Lithuania's policy towards the Belarusian democratic opposition.

The most noticeable difference is associated with personal contacts with Belarus. Among respondents with contacts with Belarus and Belarusians, 32.5% favour open, comprehensive cooperation with the democratic opposition and support for it at the official level, compared with 20.5% among those without such ties. Overall, some form of cooperation is supported by 74.6% of those with personal ties and 65.4% of those without them. Support for open, comprehensive cooperation increases somewhat with age: while 15.6% of those aged 18–25 express this position, the share reaches 25.4% among respondents aged 56 and over.

Among those who oppose cooperation with the Belarusian democratic opposition, the main motive is doubt about its independence: 46.6% point to uncertainty about the extent of Russia's influence on Belarusian democratic forces. Another 34% link their position to the opposition's weakness and lack of real influence over political processes. For 15.5%, the reason for rejecting cooperation is concern that such contacts could provoke a negative reaction from the Belarusian authorities and complicate bilateral relations; 3.9% were unable to answer.

It is important to note that respondents with personal ties to Belarus favour more open relations with both official Minsk and the democratic opposition. Direct ties with Belarus probably contribute to a more differentiated perception of the country and a greater interest in maintaining various channels of interaction.

Thus, two-thirds of respondents (66.6%) support some form of engagement with the Belarusian democratic opposition, while only one in ten supports a complete refusal to cooperate. However, public opinion leans more towards moderate forms of engagement than towards full official support and comprehensive partnership. Negative attitudes towards cooperation are primarily associated with doubts about the

opposition's political independence and its ability to have a real impact on the situation in Belarus. Concerns about a possible deterioration in relations with official Minsk play a noticeably smaller role and are not the dominant motive in Lithuanian public opinion.

History, Culture, and Identity

The historical heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remains an important part of the shared past of Belarus and Lithuania, and at the same time one of the most sensitive elements of contemporary historical memory in the two societies. The mounted knight symbol, known in the Lithuanian tradition as "Vytis" and in the Belarusian tradition as "Pahonia", originates in the heraldry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Following the restoration of its independence, Lithuania reinstated "Vytis" as its state coat of arms in 1990, a status it retains to this day. In Belarus, "Pahonia" was likewise restored as a state symbol following independence and served as the official coat of arms from 1991 to 1995, when it was replaced by a new state emblem. Thus, the shared historical symbol came to occupy different positions in the two states' contemporary systems of national symbols.

As part of the study, participants were asked about the possible return of "Pahonia" as a state symbol of Belarus: "How would you feel if a coat of arms based on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's symbol 'Pahonia' (Vytis) became a state symbol of Belarus again, as it was in 1991–1995?" Only 3.4% give an unequivocally positive assessment of the possible return of "Pahonia" as a state symbol of Belarus, while another 15.9% view it rather positively. At the same time, 32.1% assess this prospect negatively, and 15% rather negatively. For 16.4% of respondents, the issue does not matter, while another 17.1% were unable to answer.

Combining the shares of positive and negative assessments shows that the negative assessment predominates. Around half (47.1%) do not support the symbol's return, while 19.3% view it positively. Another third of respondents take a neutral or undecided position.

Attitudes towards the possible return of "Pahonia" as a state symbol of Belarus are more favourable among men, at 24.1%, compared with 15.3% among women. Respondents with higher education (52.2%) and residents of Vilnius (53%) are critical. At the same time, the return of the coat of arms is supported by 28.5% of those with personal contacts with Belarus, compared with 18.1% of those without them.

In Poland, attitudes towards the possible return of "Pahonia" are less negative: 36.3% view it negatively, while 45% are neutral on the issue. Positive assessments remain similar in the two countries: 18.7% in Poland and 19.3% in Lithuania.

Thus, in its symbolic dimension, the shared historical heritage of the GDL remains a sensitive topic for Lithuanian society.

Continuing the historical section, respondents were asked to whom the political and cultural heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania belongs. More than a third (34.4%) consider it the shared heritage of all the peoples who lived within the GDL. At the same time, 25.8% associate this heritage exclusively with the Lithuanian people. Respondents are much less likely to describe it as the shared heritage of Lithuanians and Poles (9.2%) or Lithuanians and Belarusians (3.6%). Another 6.2% disagreed with all the proposed statements, while 20.7% were unable to answer.

Ownership of the political and cultural heritage

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Share of respondents, %

	Lithuania	Poland
Exclusively Lithuanian / Polish	25.8	45.9
Lithuanian / Polish and Belarusian	3.6	4.4
Lithuanian and Polish	9.2	6.9
All peoples who lived within its territory	34.4	28.3
None of these options	6.2	4.6
Unable to answer	20.7	9.9

Lithuania: Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Poland: Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Figure 10. Ownership of the political and cultural heritage.

The view of the GDL's political and cultural heritage as the shared heritage of all the peoples who inhabited it becomes more widely shared with age. This view is held by 22.2% of respondents aged 18–25, and the share gradually increases, reaching 44.1% among respondents older than 56. This position is also more common among people with higher education, at 40.1%, compared with 31.3% and 26.2% among those with secondary or incomplete education. A similar trend is observed by economic well-being: support for the recognition of the GDL's historical heritage as a shared legacy stands at 30.4% among respondents with incomes of up to €500, compared with 44.7% among those earning more than €1,500.

Thus, a multinational understanding of the GDL's heritage is the most widespread in Lithuanian society, although a substantial group continues to regard it primarily as part of Lithuania's national heritage.

At the same time, the Polish results reveal a different structure of historical perceptions: 45.9% of respondents consider the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth exclusively Polish, while 28.3% support a multinational interpretation. Thus, in the Lithuanian case, a universal, multinational interpretation is somewhat more widespread, while an exclusively national interpretation is noticeably less common.

Discussions of "Litvinism" in Lithuanian society. In Lithuanian public and institutional discourse, the term "Litvinism" is generally used to refer to radical historical interpretations of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's past that challenge the Baltic origins of Lithuanian statehood and, in their most radical versions, modern Lithuania's rights to Vilnius.[9] Nevertheless, expert discussions emphasise the need to distinguish such radical views from Belarusians' broader interest in the GDL's heritage and its role in Belarusian national identity.[10]

In recent years, this topic has become more prominent in Lithuania's public sphere. Provocative posters and inscriptions bearing the slogans "Vilnius is ours" and "The Litvins are coming" appeared in Vilnius. However, such incidents cannot be regarded as an expression of the Belarusian diaspora's views, as Lithuania's State Security Department subsequently reported that some of these provocations were used by Russian and Belarusian intelligence services to inflame tensions between Lithuanian society and Belarusians living in the country.[11]

Despite the topic's prominence in politics and the media, most respondents (54.8%) reported that they had not heard of the discussions surrounding "Litvinism". Among those surveyed, 29% reported being familiar with them, while 16.2% were unable to provide an answer.

The issue thus maintains a noticeable presence in public discourse without having achieved widespread public awareness or recognition. Despite Vilnius being the focal point of this discourse, nearly half of respondents residing in the Lithuanian capital (45.2%) reported being unfamiliar with the concept of "Litvinism".

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[9] Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, National Threat Assessment 2024 (Vilnius, 2024), 17, https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GR-2024-02-15-EN.pdf

[10] Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, "Apskritojo stalo diskusijoje aptarta Lietuvos ir Baltarusijos istorija ir atminties politika," October 25, 2023, https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=1&p_t=286506

[11] State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, "Priešiškos žvalgybos tarnybos bando organizuoti smurtinius išpuolius prieš Lietuvoje gyvenančius baltarusius," April 23, 2025, https://www.vsd.lt/2025/04/23/priesiskos-zvalgybos-tarnybos-bando-organizuoti-smurtinius-ispuolius-pries-lietuvoje-gyvenancius-baltarusius/

The extent of the threat and problem posed by "Litvinism" to Lithuania. Among respondents who had previously reported hearing about discussions surrounding "Litvinism", the perceived degree of threat to Lithuania was additionally measured on a scale from 1 to 10.[12] The average level of perceived threat was 5.93 points. The most common score was 7–8 points, selected by 30.5% of respondents. Another 18% rated the threat at 9–10 points. At the same time, 21.7% see virtually no threat, selecting 1–2 points. An intermediate score of 5–6 points was given by 10.5%, while 17.6% were unable to answer.



Figure 11. The degree of threat posed by “Litvinism” to Lithuania.

Socio-demographic variations are more often associated with education and place of residence. Among respondents with higher education, 58.1% rate the threat at 7–10 points, compared with 39.9% among those with secondary education. Such assessments are considerably more common among residents of Vilnius (61.4%) and other large cities (59.7%) than among residents of district centres (33.9%) and rural areas (36%).

Thus, among those familiar with the discussion of "Litvinism", the perception of it as a fairly serious problem (7–8 points) predominates, but there is no public consensus on the issue. Nevertheless, almost one in five survey participants sees virtually no threat to Lithuania in "Litvinism".

Recognition of Belarusian cultural figures. The final question concerned Lithuanians’ awareness of aspects of Belarusian culture. Respondents were presented with a list of figures associated with different historical periods: the shared heritage of earlier history, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, and contemporary culture.[13]

[12] The assessment used a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates a complete absence of threat and 10 the highest possible level of threat.

[13] Note: respondents could select several answers, so the percentages total more than 100%.

Overall, the study's findings show a low level of recognition of Belarusian cultural and historical figures in Lithuanian society. More than half of respondents (52.6%) do not know any of the listed figures, while another 4.5% were unable to answer.

The most recognisable figures were Kastus Kalinouski, known to 25.8% of respondents, Yanka Kupala (25.2%), and Francysk Skaryna (20.9%). Recognition of all the other political and cultural figures included in the list ranges from 1.3% to 13.3%.

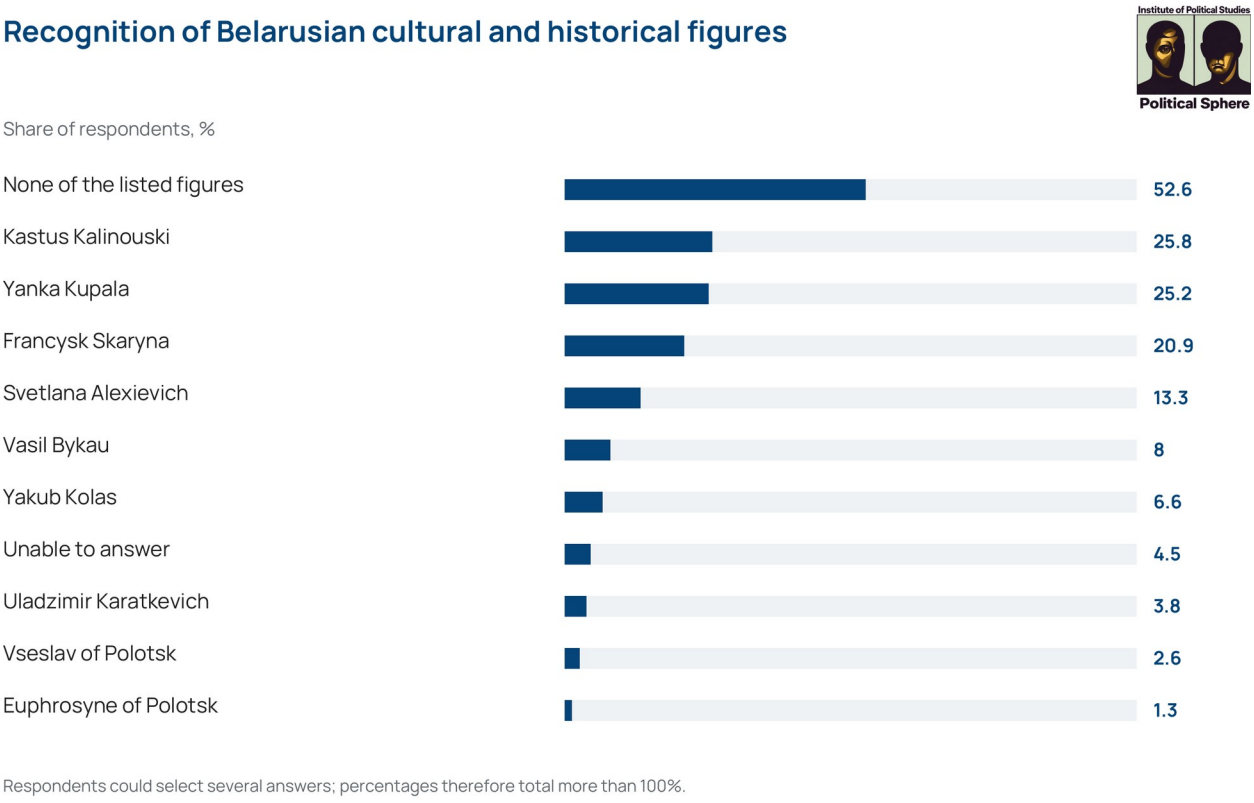


Figure 12. Recognition of Belarusian cultural and historical figures.

Respondents' age is the main indicator: in the 18–25 and 26–35 age groups, 66.7% and 67.2%, respectively, do not know any of the listed names, whereas among respondents older than 56 this share falls to 31.7%. Yanka Kupala (48.6%), Kastus Kalinouski (41%), and Francysk Skaryna (36.5%) are particularly well known in the older age group. At the same time, 45.3% of respondents with higher education do not know any of the listed figures, compared with 56.9% of those with secondary education. The gap is particularly noticeable in recognition of Francysk Skaryna (31.7% versus 14.8%) and Kastus Kalinouski (35% versus 20.2%). Greater awareness is also characteristic of Vilnius residents: 41.5% do not know any of the listed figures, while in other types of settlement the figure exceeds half. Recognition of Skaryna (35%), Kalinouski (37.3%), Kupala (31.8%), and Svetlana Alexievich (18.4%) is also higher in the capital. It is

important to note the association with economic well-being. The share who do not know any of the listed names falls from 58.4% among respondents earning up to €500 to 47.9% in the group earning more than €1500. Finally, respondents with personal ties to Belarus show higher recognition: among them, 42.1% do not know any of the listed figures, compared with 54.1% of those without such contacts.

Thus, knowledge of Belarusian cultural and historical figures in Lithuanian society remains limited. A substantial share of respondents do not know any of the listed names, and recognition is concentrated around only a few of the best-known figures. The high figures for Kastus Kalinouski, Yanka Kupala, and Francysk Skaryna probably reflect the close connection between historical memory and Lithuania's history. Skaryna is directly associated with Vilnius, where he established his printing activities, while Kalinouski is one of the key figures of the 1863–1864 uprising and of the shared historical memory of the peoples of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the same time, the low recognition of most other listed names indicates Lithuanian society's comparatively limited familiarity with Belarusian culture beyond the best-known historical figures.

In the regional context, Lithuanian respondents demonstrate a higher level of familiarity with Belarusian cultural and historical figures. In Poland, 63.1% do not know any of the listed names, as do approximately 65% in Ukraine (in 2025). By comparison, 52.6% of Lithuanian respondents do not know any of the names on the list.

Thus, despite the greater visibility of the Belarusian cultural and historical discourse within Lithuanian society, even here, not knowing any of the listed figures remains the most common response.

Conclusions

The study's findings indicate that Lithuanian society's attitudes towards Belarus are complex and multifaceted. Nevertheless, Lithuanian society clearly distinguishes between Belarusian citizens, the diaspora, and the Belarusian state. Attitudes towards Belarusians remain evenly divided between positive and negative assessments, while citizens of Belarus living in Lithuania are perceived more favourably. Support is even higher for the Lithuanian authorities' decision to admit Belarusians forced to leave their country following the events of 2020. Thus, Lithuanian society is able to distinguish Belarusians as a separate social group in the context of interstate challenges and the political and humanitarian circumstances of their presence in the country.

The status of Belarusians in Lithuanian society. Lithuanian society is divided between positive and negative attitudes towards Belarusians, with assessments in Lithuania

appearing the most reserved compared with other countries. However, Belarusians already living in Lithuania are perceived less negatively. At the same time, personal contact with citizens of Belarus increases favourable attitudes towards both Belarus and Belarusians, but only a small share of the population living in the capital has such contacts.

Economic migration. Labour migration remains a dilemma not only for the government but also for the population, with society divided between supporters of restrictions and those favouring the preservation of existing conditions. However, the economic contribution of Belarusians already living in Lithuania is assessed more favourably than the further expansion of migration. Thus, Belarusians' economic contribution is assessed considerably more positively than the prospects for the further expansion of labour migration.

The security context. Public perceptions draw a distinction between citizens and the state. Lithuanian citizens do not regard Belarusians living in Lithuania as a direct threat to national security, whereas the current Belarusian state is viewed with apprehension (an average of 6.28 points). The threat is thus associated primarily with the political regime and its foreign policy orientation, rather than with Belarusians as a social group.

The political image of Belarus. Assessments of Belarus's political system and foreign policy orientation form a fairly coherent picture. Belarus is classified as an authoritarian state, and its ability to pursue an independent foreign policy is considered substantially constrained by Russia's influence. Alexander Lukashenko is not perceived as a legitimate representative of the people's will, while Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is known to a substantial part of Lithuanian society.

Lithuania's strategy. Society demonstrates no pronounced demand either for the full normalisation of relations with official Minsk or exclusively for its isolation. The most widespread position favours limited and pragmatic engagement in areas where this serves Lithuania's interests. Support for cooperation also predominates with regard to the democratic opposition, although more often in limited or formally institutionalised forms.

Historical memory. Perceptions of the shared historical heritage remain a sensitive issue within Lithuanian society. The most widespread understanding is that the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania belongs to all the peoples who lived within its territory. At the same time, the idea of restoring "Pahonia" as a state symbol of Belarus is viewed rather negatively, while only a minority of Lithuanian society is familiar with the discussion of "Litvinism". Knowledge of Belarusian culture and history remains limited and is mainly concentrated around a few figures closely associated with the region's shared history.

ANNEX

Results of the 2024 parliamentary election. Elections to the Lithuanian Seimas were held in the second half of 2024. The Lithuanian Socialdemokratų party won, securing a majority of seats, while second place was retained by the governing Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius and the Nemuno aušra party.[14]

According to the data obtained, a substantial share of respondents' political preferences goes to the Socialdemokratų party, at 17.1%, and the Tėvynės sąjungą – Lietuvos Konservatorius, at 11.9%. Another 8.9% chose the Liberalų sąjūdį, and 8% favour Nemuno aušra. The Demokratų sąjungą "Vardan Lietuvos" received support from 7.3% of respondents, and the Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungą from 6.3%. The Nacionalinis susivienijimas (National Alliance) received 2.2% of votes, and the Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akciją – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungą, (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance) 1.8%. Finally, 9.1% chose another party, while 27.4% did not vote for a political party in the last parliamentary election.

Thus, the survey results reflect the current political force forming the Lithuanian government, represented by the Socialdemokratų party. Nevertheless, around a third of respondents did not participate in voting, indicating socio-political apathy in Lithuanian society.

[14] Vyriausioji rinkimų komisija, *Rezultatai – 2024 m. Seimo rinkimai*, VRK, https://www.vrk.lt/en/2024-seimo/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/1544/2/2148/rezultatai/en/rezultataiIsrinktiNariai.html

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