

Palitsfera Working Papers No. 8/2026

Us or Them?

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How Belarusians Are Perceived in Poland

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Introduction

The study was designed by the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere" as part of the European Union-funded project "Strengthening of Independent Belarusian Social, Political and Economic Research". Data collection in Poland was conducted by the research company SW Research in May 2026. The survey included 1,006 residents of Poland aged 18 and over. The methodology slide reports 800 online interviews through SW Panel and 200 telephone interviews conducted by interviewers. The sample design took account of gender, age and settlement size (GUS). Statistical weighting was not applied.

The questionnaire covered attitudes towards Belarusians living in Belarus and Poland, historical and cultural perceptions, personal contacts, migration, the economy, security, assessments of the Belarusian political regime, and preferences regarding Poland's policy towards the Belarusian authorities and democratic opposition. Cross-tabulations were used to analyse differences. Associations between categorical variables were tested using Pearson's χ^2 test; differences were considered statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Cramér's V was used to assess the strength of the associations identified: values closer to 1 indicate a stronger association, while values close to 0 indicate a weak association. Results based on small categories or tables with many cells with low expected frequencies were interpreted cautiously. "Don't know" responses were retained as a substantive category in their own right unless a specific analysis required their exclusion.

Potential systematic bias associated with educational attainment was also examined. Weights were calculated using Statistics Poland (GUS) data on the educational distribution of Poland's adult population, and the main results were compared between the weighted and unweighted samples. Weighting did not produce substantively meaningful changes, so the subsequent analysis uses unweighted data.

Main divisions within Polish society

Unlike the Ukrainian study, the Polish data do not reveal a consistent sociodemographic profile of respondents with positive or negative attitudes towards Belarusians. Some statistically significant differences exist, but they are mostly small, nonlinear and do not form a single coherent pattern.

Factors associated with positive and negative attitudes. The most noticeable association is with gender, although it primarily reflects how definite respondents' views are. Men more often give a substantive positive or negative assessment, while

women more often choose “don’t know”. The gender gap in positive responses is 9.1 percentage points for Belarusians living in Belarus and 11.7 points for those living in Poland; at the same time, the share of undecided respondents is 10.8 and 12.7 points higher among women, respectively.

Income, employment and education. These characteristics distinguish responses in individual categories, but the relationships are not straightforward: higher income or education does not automatically imply more positive attitudes towards Belarusians. Some differences involve small groups and therefore cannot be interpreted as a stable social profile.

Financial circumstances and language spoken at home. These characteristics are primarily apparent in attitudes towards Belarusians living in Belarus but are not reproduced as consistently in assessments of Belarusians living in Poland. They therefore indicate particular differences between groups rather than a division within society.

Factors that do not produce a consistent division. Age, settlement size, voivodeship and marital status have no consistent effect on general attitudes towards Belarusians. In particular, the data do not support the existence of a generational divide or a stable regional profile of sympathy and antipathy.

Personal contacts and cultural awareness

Having contacts with Belarusians, as well as knowledge of Belarusian historical and cultural figures, is considerably more often associated with positive attitudes.

Thus, sociodemographic characteristics in Poland mainly explain how definite respondents’ answers are and particular differences between groups, rather than a single profile of those favourably or unfavourably disposed towards Belarusians.

How substantive assessments relate to sympathy or antipathy towards Belarusians

For this analysis, respondents with a definite attitude towards Belarusians living in Belarus were combined into two groups: 177 with negative attitudes and 501 with positive attitudes. “Don’t know” responses to the question about Belarusians in Belarus were excluded from this comparison.

The strongest association is between attitudes towards Belarusians in Belarus and those towards Belarusians living in Poland. Among respondents with positive attitudes towards Belarusians in Belarus, 83.7% also view Belarusians in Poland positively,

compared with only 22.0% among those with negative attitudes. In the latter group, 51.4% also view Belarusians in Poland negatively, compared with just 9.8% among those with positive attitudes. Attitudes towards the two groups are therefore closely related, although they do not coincide entirely: some respondents who view Belarusians in Belarus negatively are noticeably more favourable towards those living in Poland. The association between these two indicators is the strongest among the substantive questions examined.

Unlike in the Ukrainian study, historical and cultural perceptions in Poland form one of the clearest dividing lines between the groups. Among those with positive attitudes, 50.7% regard Belarusians as a distinct nation, compared with 22.0% among those with negative attitudes. Conversely, the view that Belarusians are a branch of the Russian nation is supported by 27.7% and 58.8%, respectively. The heritage of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth is considered exclusively Polish by 62.1% of respondents with negative attitudes and 36.5% of those with positive attitudes, while the view that it is the shared heritage of all the peoples who lived in it is chosen by 18.1% and 36.3%, respectively. Attitudes towards a possible Belarusian coat of arms inspired by Commonwealth symbolism also differ markedly.

Simple cultural awareness, however, is much less closely associated with attitudes. Among those with negative attitudes, 66.1% do not know any of the listed Belarusian historical and cultural figures, compared with 54.3% among those with positive attitudes. Yet knowledge of most individual names is either unrelated to attitudes or only weakly associated with them. This distinguishes two phenomena: positive attitudes are primarily associated with particular ideas about Belarusian identity and shared historical heritage, rather than simply the number of Belarusian figures known to respondents.

Attitudes towards Belarusians are even more clearly associated with questions concerning their presence in Poland. Personal contacts with Belarusians are reported by 23.6% of respondents with positive attitudes and 8.5% of those with negative attitudes. Poland's decision to admit people forced to emigrate after the events of 2020 is viewed positively by 70.0% and 45.2%, respectively. Belarusians living in Poland are not regarded as a threat by 73.6% of those with positive attitudes and 56.5% of those with negative attitudes. The stronger association between personal contacts and overall assessments is another difference between the Polish and Ukrainian data.

Belarusians' contribution to the Polish economy is viewed positively by 56.3% of respondents with positive attitudes and 25.5% of those with negative attitudes. Reducing the current number of labour migrants or stopping further migration altogether is favoured by 72.4% of those with negative attitudes and 33.8% of those with positive attitudes. Conversely, allowing migration under the general rules for

non-EU countries or actively encouraging it is proposed by 55.5% and 20.3%, respectively.

Political assessments of Belarus also differ, but the picture is more complex. Critical assessments of the regime are common to both groups and do not follow directly from attitudes towards Belarusians.

Respondents with negative attitudes are somewhat more likely to take a hard line on the Belarusian state, its dependence on Russia and Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimacy, but these associations are weaker than the differences on historical, cultural and migration issues. Awareness of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya also differs relatively moderately: 65.9% of those with positive attitudes and 54.8% of those with negative attitudes have heard of her.

Responses concerning Poland's preferred policy differ much more sharply. Among respondents with negative attitudes towards Belarusians, 37.9% favour international isolation and sanctions against the Belarusian authorities, compared with 15.4% among those with positive attitudes. Broad cooperation with the Belarusian authorities is supported by 4.0% and 19.8%, respectively. Complete rejection of cooperation with the democratic opposition is favoured by 28.2% of those with negative attitudes and 5.6% of those with positive attitudes, while public and comprehensive cooperation is supported by 18.1% and 41.1%.

Positive and negative attitudes towards Belarusians are thus associated with fairly coherent sets of perceptions. The strongest differences concern attitudes towards Belarusians living in Poland, labour migration, economic contributions, the democratic opposition, and historical and cultural perceptions. Assessments of the Belarusian state and regime are less polarised: critical attitudes towards them are widespread regardless of attitudes towards Belarusians themselves. Negative attitudes towards Belarusians therefore cannot be reduced solely to rejection of the regime, nor positive attitudes to a more lenient assessment of it. Rather, they reflect a broader set of perceptions of Belarusians as a nation, migrants, members of Polish society and a subject of Polish foreign policy.

Key indicators and deviations from the full sample



Figure 1. Key indicators and deviations from the full sample

The key indicators with the most noticeable deviations are shown; deviations are calculated relative to the full sample (N=1006).

General attitudes towards Belarusians

Positive attitudes towards Belarusians living in Belarus are expressed by 49.8% of respondents: 37.3% are somewhat positive and 12.5% definitely positive. Negative assessments account for 17.6%, with only 3.9% choosing the definitely negative response. A further 32.6% find it difficult to define their attitude. This distribution suggests moderate sympathy combined with considerable uncertainty, rather than polarisation.

Attitudes towards Belarusians living in Poland follow a similar pattern. Positive responses account for 55.7%, negative responses for 16.5%, and the share of undecided respondents falls only slightly, to 27.8%.

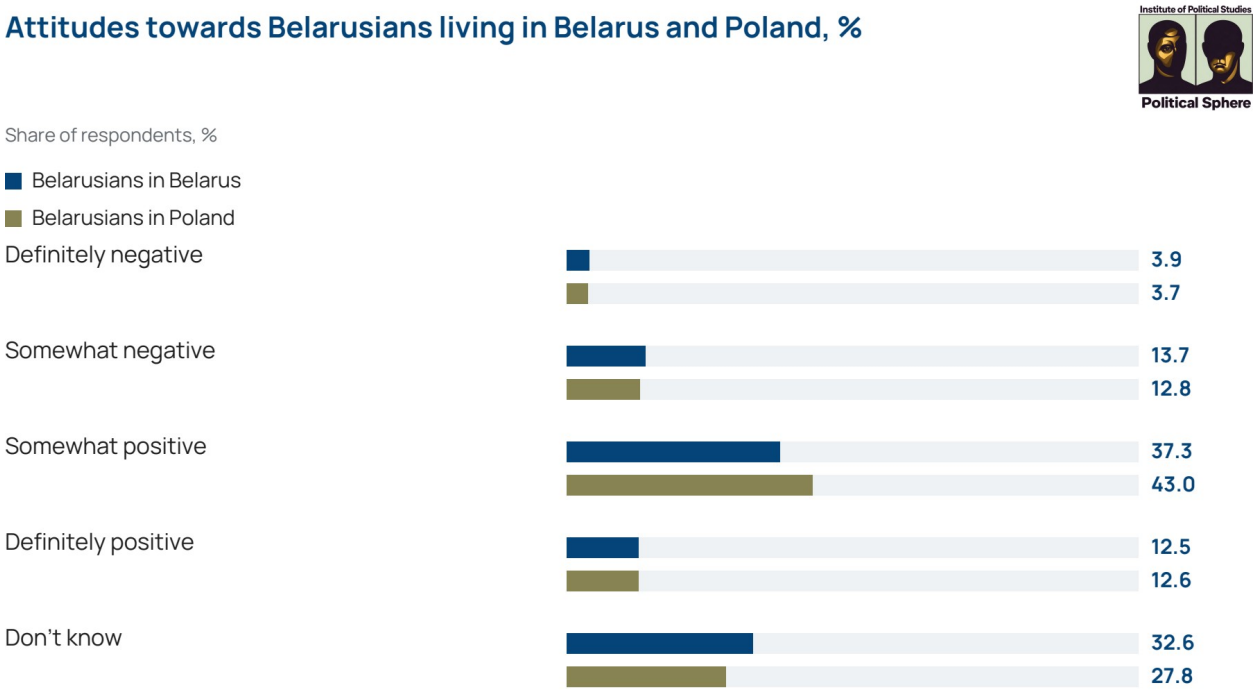


Figure 2. Attitudes towards Belarusians living in Belarus and Poland, %

Note: Full sample, N=1006.

Assessments of Belarusians in Belarus and Poland are closely related but not identical. Among respondents with positive attitudes towards Belarusians in Belarus, 83.6% assess Belarusians in Poland in the same way. Among those with negative attitudes towards the first group, 51.4% retain a negative assessment in the second case, while almost a quarter view Belarusians in Poland positively. This suggests that some

respondents distinguish between their general attitude towards Belarusian citizens and those citizens' presence in Polish society.

In both cases, more than a quarter of respondents choose "don't know". This response is particularly common among women and some groups with lower incomes and educational attainment.

This category cannot simply be excluded from the analysis: it may reflect limited engagement, insufficient information or reluctance to transfer attitudes towards the Belarusian state to people. "Don't know" responses are therefore retained in the main analysis, while comparisons excluding them are used only as an additional check.

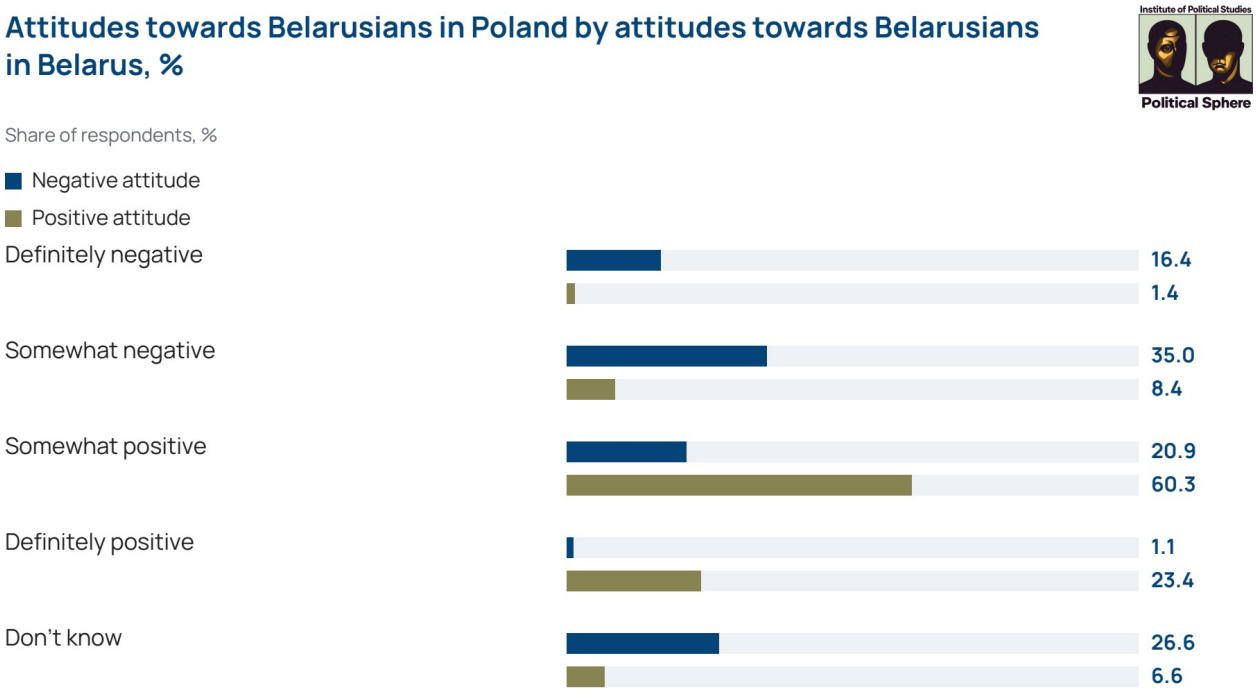


Figure 3. Attitudes towards Belarusians in Poland by attitudes towards Belarusians in Belarus, %

Note: "Don't know" responses to the question about attitudes towards Belarusians in Belarus were excluded from this comparison.

Belarus as a state

Most respondents — 69.7% — regard Belarus as an authoritarian state: 27.0% predominantly so and 42.6% fully so. It is described as democratic by 15.8%, while a further 14.5% are unsure. This assessment predominates among respondents with both positive and negative attitudes towards Belarusians. The latter are more categorical,

however: 54.8% regard Belarus as fully authoritarian, compared with 39.7% of those with positive attitudes.

Assessments of the regime have a more pronounced social structure than direct attitudes towards Belarusians. Differences are found by gender, age, employment, income, education and financial circumstances. Belarus's authoritarian character is most consistently recognised by respondents in better financial circumstances, older respondents and more educated groups.

With age, it is primarily the share of "don't know" responses that declines. Belarus is regarded as authoritarian by 61.9% of respondents aged 18–29 and 79.9% of those over 60. In every age group, a minority describes it as democratic. Financial circumstances have a similar effect: "don't know" responses are less frequent among those with stable means and more frequent in the most vulnerable group.

Opinions also differ by gender, employment, income and education. Some differences, however, concern respondents' willingness to give a definite answer rather than their assessment of the political system. Excluding those who choose "don't know" makes differences between social groups more pronounced.

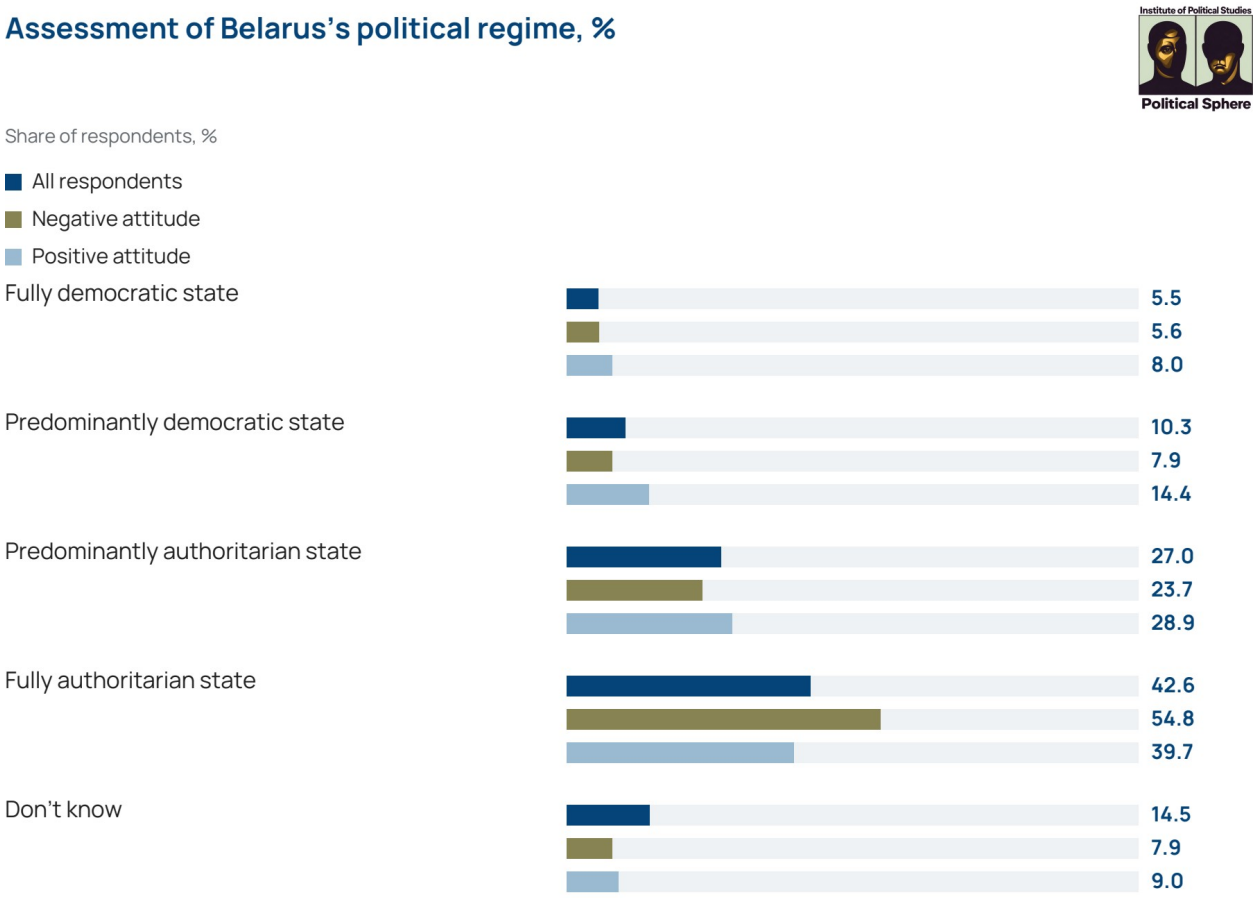


Figure 4. Assessment of Belarus's political regime, %

Note: "Don't know" responses are included in the distribution.

Belarus is considered dependent on Russia by 69.5% of respondents. Russia is seen as largely determining the country's foreign policy by 28.8%; 31.1% refer to full control, and 9.5% to de facto occupation. Belarus is described as fully independent by 4.5% and as independent but under substantial Russian influence by 14.6%. Assessments of dependence are most closely associated with views of the regime: only 13.3% of those who regard Belarus as fully independent classify it as authoritarian, compared with 92.7% of those who describe it as fully controlled by Russia.

Perceptions of Belarus's dependence on Russia differ by gender, age, income and financial circumstances. Older and financially more secure respondents more often choose full control or de facto occupation, while younger and less affluent respondents are more often unsure.

Gender differences concern the perceived degree of dependence: men more often refer to full control or de facto occupation, while women more often choose moderate dependence or uncertainty. The share of the strongest assessments increases with age, although a majority in every group recognises substantial Russian influence.

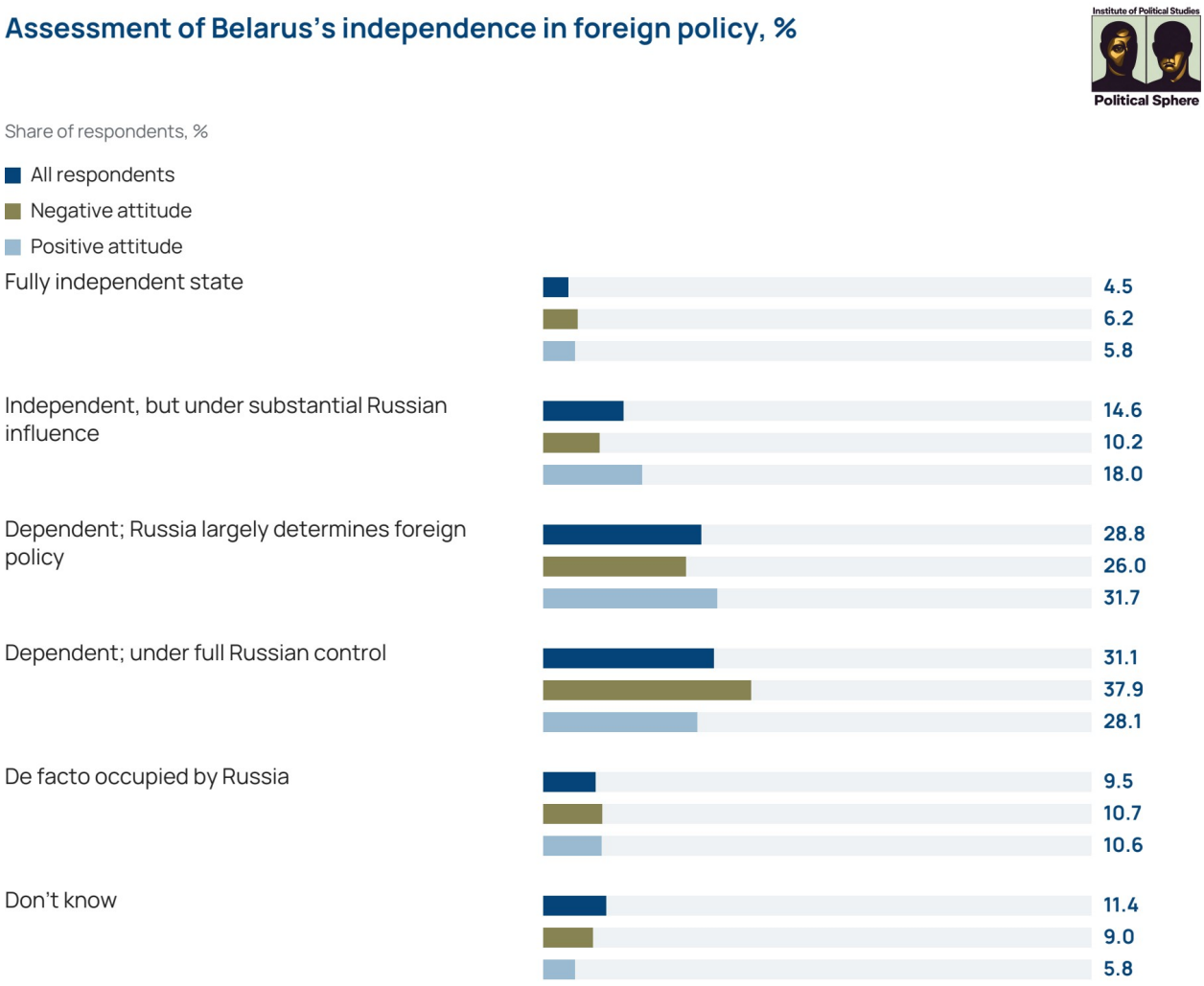


Figure 5. Assessment of Belarus's independence in foreign policy, %

Note: N=1006.

Belarusian politics

Alyaksandr Lukashenka is not recognised as Belarus's legitimate leader by 69.0% of respondents: 47.3% chose "definitely not" and 21.7% "probably not". The opposite view is held by 16.1%, while a further 14.9% are unsure. Negative assessments predominate among respondents with both negative attitudes towards Belarusians —

75.7% — and positive attitudes — 65.5%. They are closely associated with perceptions of the country's political system: 92.4% of those who chose "definitely not" describe Belarus as authoritarian.

Of the explicitly political questions, this one is most noticeably associated with sociodemographic factors.

Older, more educated and financially better-off respondents are less likely to recognise Lukashenka's legitimacy. Women and younger respondents more often choose "don't know".

Among respondents aged 18–29, 56.8% do not recognise Lukashenka as a legitimate leader, compared with 81.9% of those over 60. The difference arises mainly because uncertainty decreases and categorical responses increase with age. This does not mean that younger people support Lukashenka more often: more of them simply lack a definite opinion.

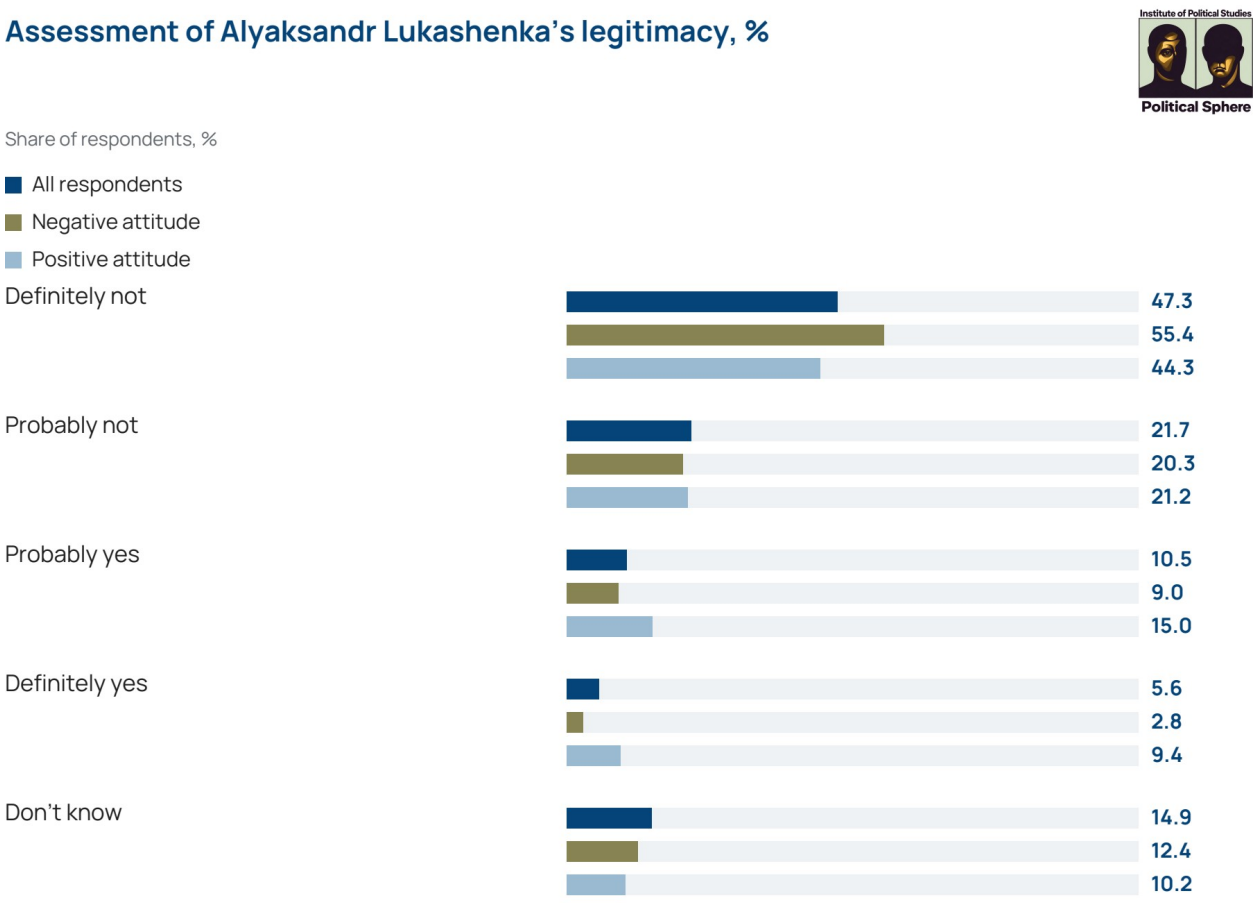


Figure 6. Assessment of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimacy, %

Note: N=1006.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is known to 60.4% of survey participants; 27.5% say they have not heard of her, and 12.0% are unsure. Older respondents are considerably more likely to have heard of her. Differences also exist between supporters of different parties: electoral groups here mean groups of voters supporting different political forces. Awareness of Tsikhanouskaya is also associated with assessments of Belarus's political system. Belarus is described as authoritarian by 82.6% of those who have heard of her and 54.9% of those who have not.

Differences are also apparent by gender, marital status, employment, income, education and financial circumstances. Age stands out most clearly: 40.0% of respondents aged 18–29 have heard of Tsikhanouskaya, compared with 48.7% of those aged 30–39, 55.4% of those aged 40–49, 69.9% of those aged 50–59 and 77.4% of those over 60.

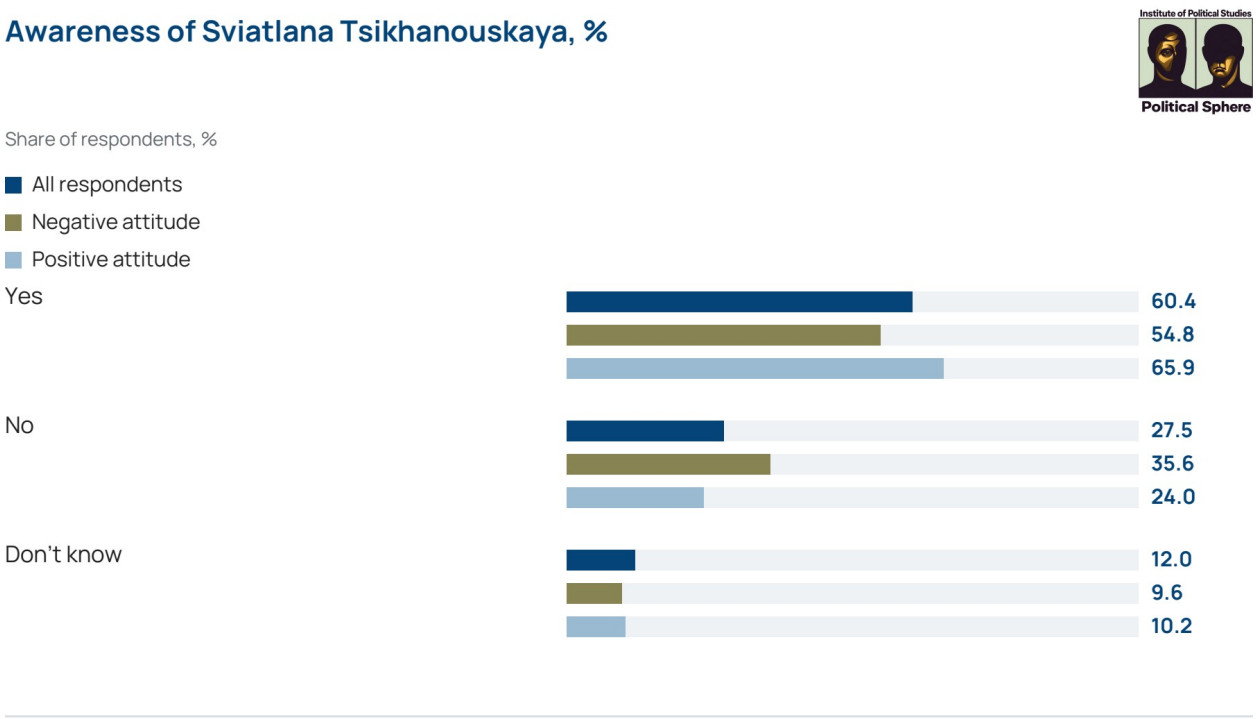


Figure 7. Awareness of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, %

Note: N=1006.

The most common position towards the Belarusian authorities is pragmatic: avoid developing active cooperation but maintain economically beneficial relations. This is supported by 44.9%. Isolation and international sanctions are favoured by 20.7%, broad cooperation and partnership by 11.6%, while 22.8% are undecided. Isolation is supported by 37.9% of respondents with negative attitudes towards Belarusians and 15.4% of those with positive attitudes. Broad cooperation is chosen by 4.0% and 19.8%, respectively.

Preferred policy towards the Belarusian authorities is associated with gender, age, employment, income and financial circumstances. Older respondents and financially more secure groups more often choose sanctions and limited contacts; younger and less affluent respondents more often support pragmatic relations or are unsure.

The age relationship is not a simple contrast between younger and older people. Sanctions and isolation are favoured by 13.5% of respondents aged 18–29, around 22–23% of those aged 30–59, and 20.8% of those over 60. Younger people more often choose active or pragmatic cooperation and are more often unsure. Support for sanctions is therefore highest among those aged 30–59 and lowest among those aged 18–29.

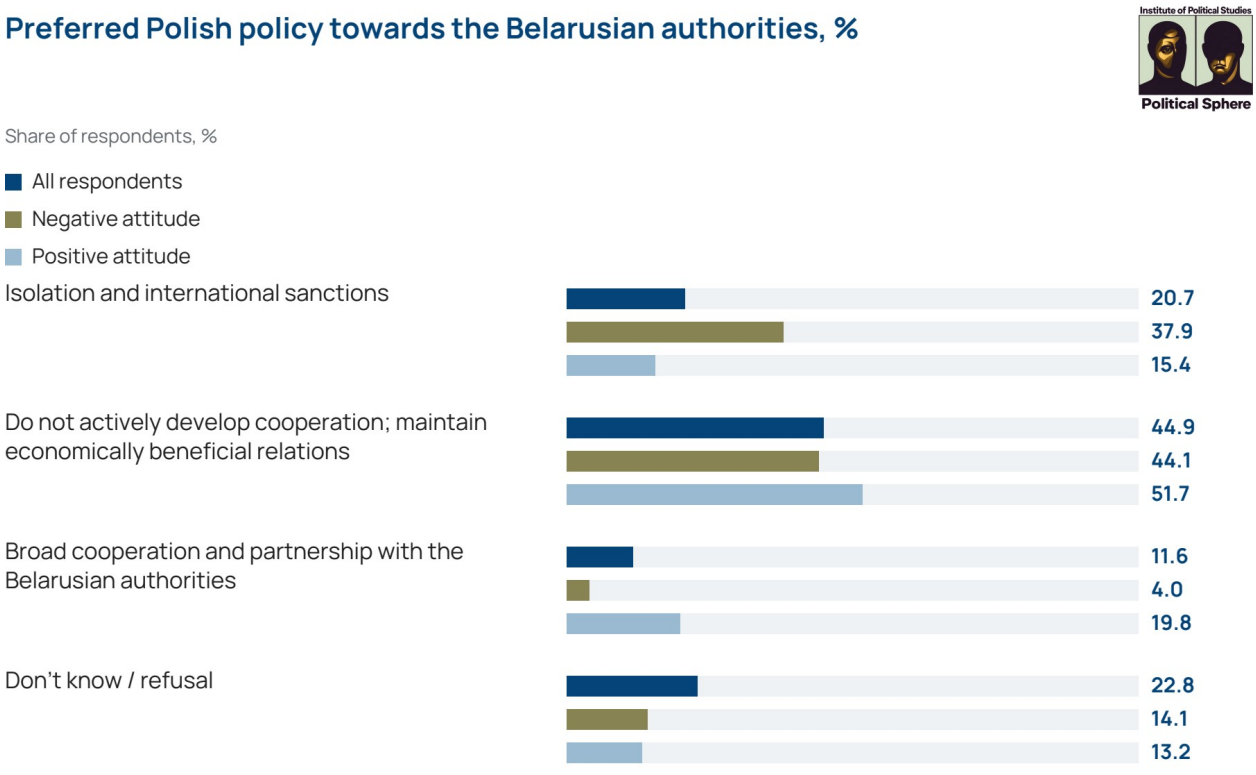


Figure 8. Preferred Polish policy towards the Belarusian authorities, %

Note: N=1006.

Regarding the democratic opposition, 31.7% choose public, comprehensive cooperation and official support, 24.7% official meetings and statements, and 12.9% non-public cooperation. No cooperation is favoured by 10.0%, while a further 20.7% cannot give a definite answer. Differences by general attitudes towards Belarusians are especially large: public support is chosen by 41.1% of those with positive attitudes and 18.1% of those with negative attitudes; rejection of cooperation by 5.6% and 28.2%, respectively, a broadly understandable pattern.

Opinions on cooperation with the democratic opposition differ noticeably between social groups. Public cooperation is more often supported by men, older respondents, those with higher education and those in more secure financial circumstances. Women and respondents with limited means more often choose a cautious option or are unsure. Differences are also apparent by settlement size, employment, income and language spoken at home, but not by voivodeship or marital status.

The most noticeable gap is associated with gender. Public, comprehensive cooperation is chosen by 23.7% of women and 40.2% of men. Women more often prefer cautious forms of support or give no definite answer. Age also affects the boldness of the

position: older respondents more often support public cooperation, while younger people more often favour non-public cooperation or remain uncertain. Public cooperation is more often supported by respondents with higher education and more secure financial circumstances.

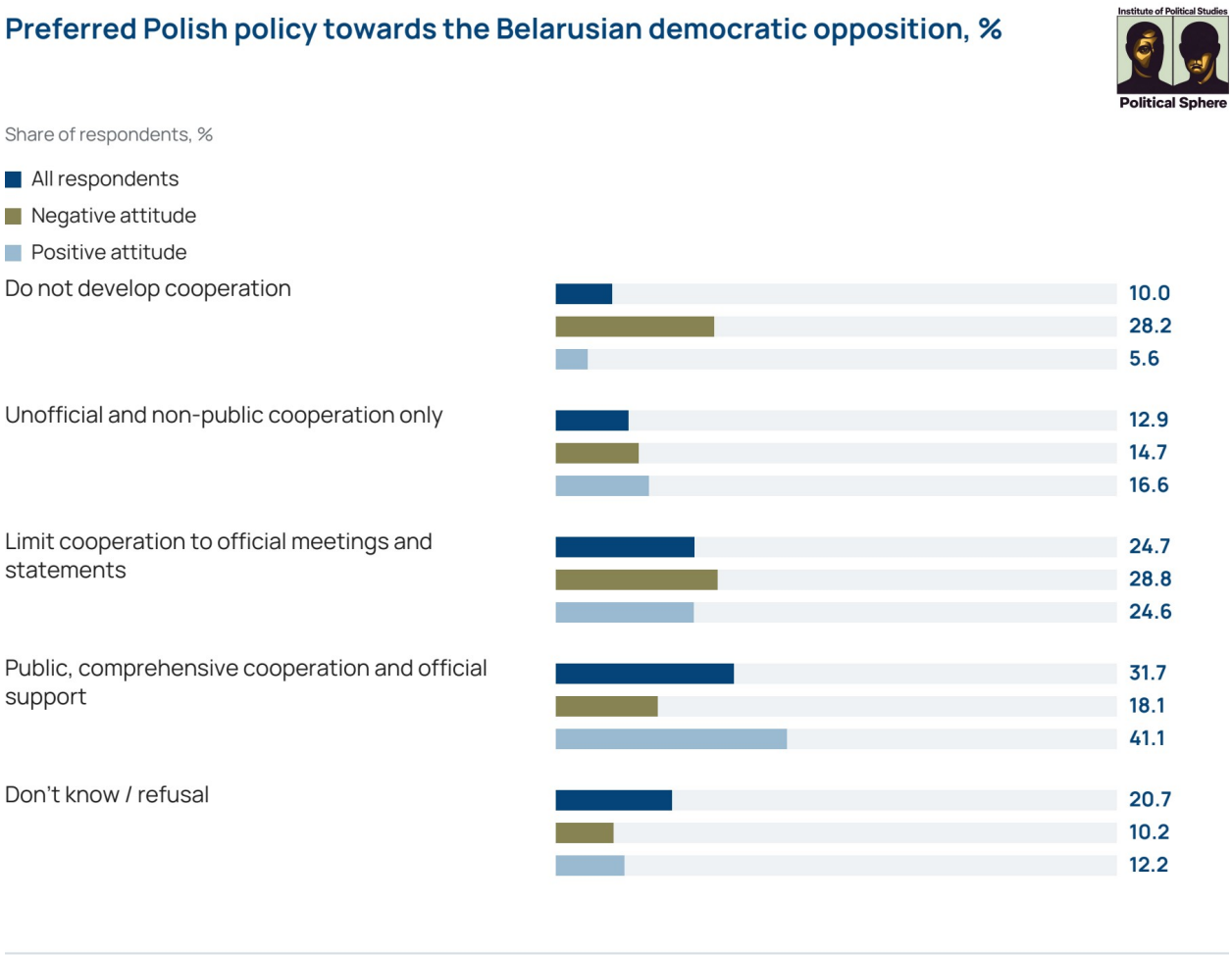


Figure 9. Preferred Polish policy towards the Belarusian democratic opposition, %

Note: N=1006.

Almost half of those opposing cooperation with the democratic opposition — 46.5% — are concerned about its dependence on Russian influence. A possible deterioration in relations with the Belarusian authorities is something 23.8% wish to avoid, while 16.8% consider the opposition too weak to influence the situation.

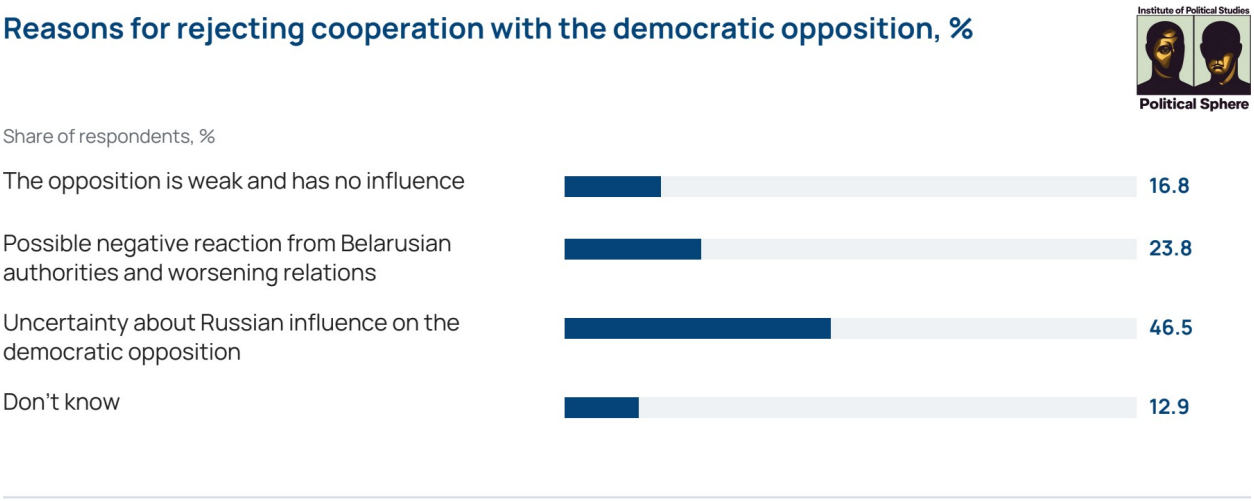


Figure 10. Reasons for rejecting cooperation with the democratic opposition, %

Note: Conditional question, N=101.

Party differences exist but do not produce entirely homogeneous camps. Belarusians in Poland are viewed most positively by KO voters — 64.0% — and New Left voters — 63.5%. Among Confederation voters, positive responses account for 43.2% and negative ones for 28.4%. Among non-voters, the largest group is undecided — 49.0%.

Differences between party supporters cannot be explained solely by political views: these groups also differ in age, education, financial circumstances and awareness of Belarusian politics. Nevertheless, supporters of KO, the New Left and the Third Way generally view Belarusians more favourably and more often support cooperation with the democratic opposition. Among Confederation voters and those who did not vote, support for restrictions and "don't know" responses are more prominent. None of these groups, however, holds a uniform position.

Crucially, party differences do not negate the general trends. In all major electoral groups, positive attitudes towards Belarusians in Poland exceed negative ones, and a majority regards Belarus as authoritarian. Parties differ mainly in the share of undecided respondents and the degree of willingness to support the opposition or sanctions. In other words, political competition changes emphasis and firmness, but does not produce two polarised views of Belarusians and Belarus.

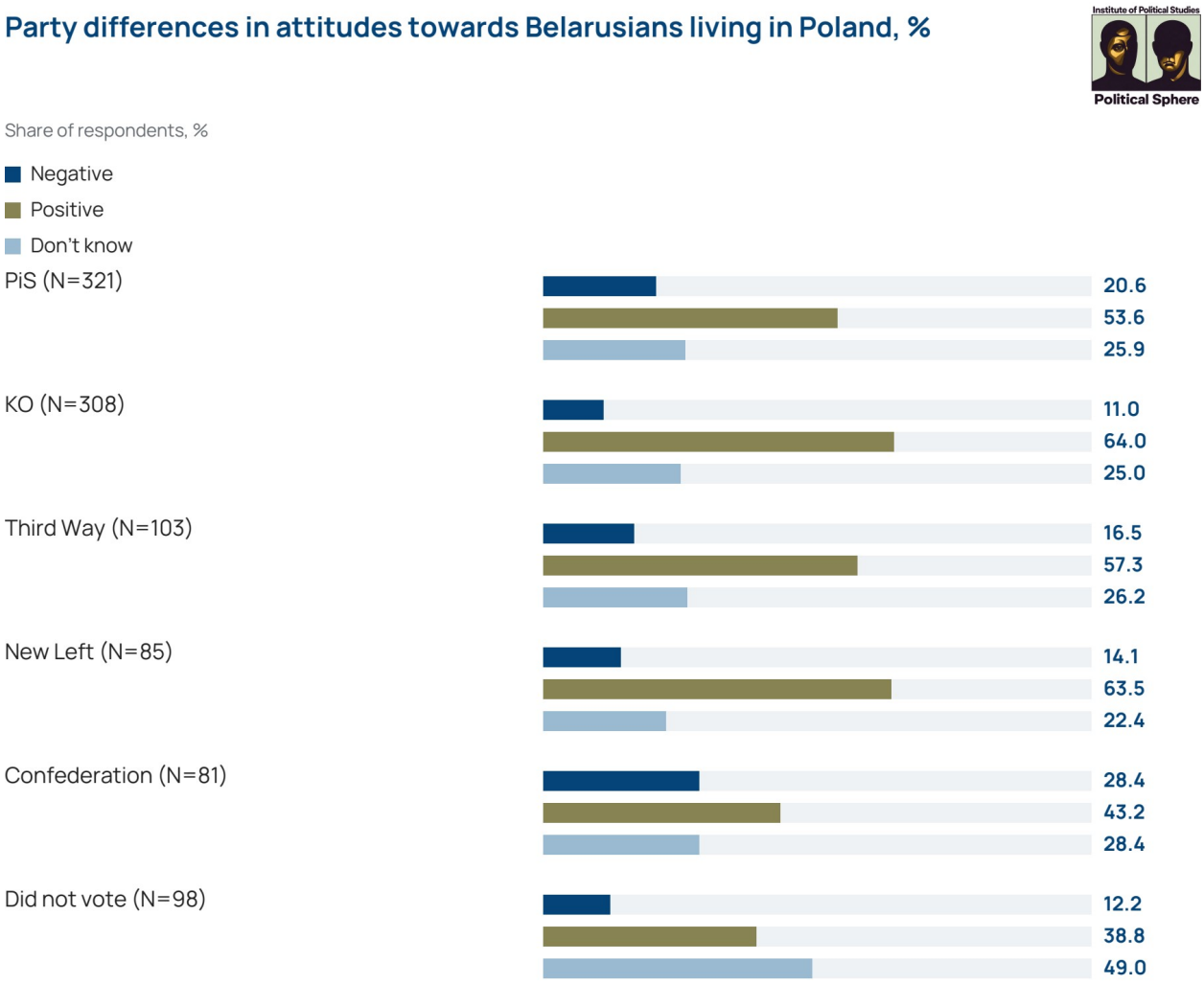


Figure 11. Party differences in attitudes towards Belarusians living in Poland, %

Note: 47.6, df=10, $p<0.001$, $V=0.155$; the "other party / committee" category was excluded because it had few responses.

Belarus's authoritarian character is more often recognised by Third Way supporters — 78.6% — and KO supporters — 77.9%. The figure is 63.2% among PiS voters, 69.1% among Confederation voters and 54.1% among non-voters. The party association is somewhat stronger here, but still does not determine responses entirely; the figures clearly exceed half in every group.

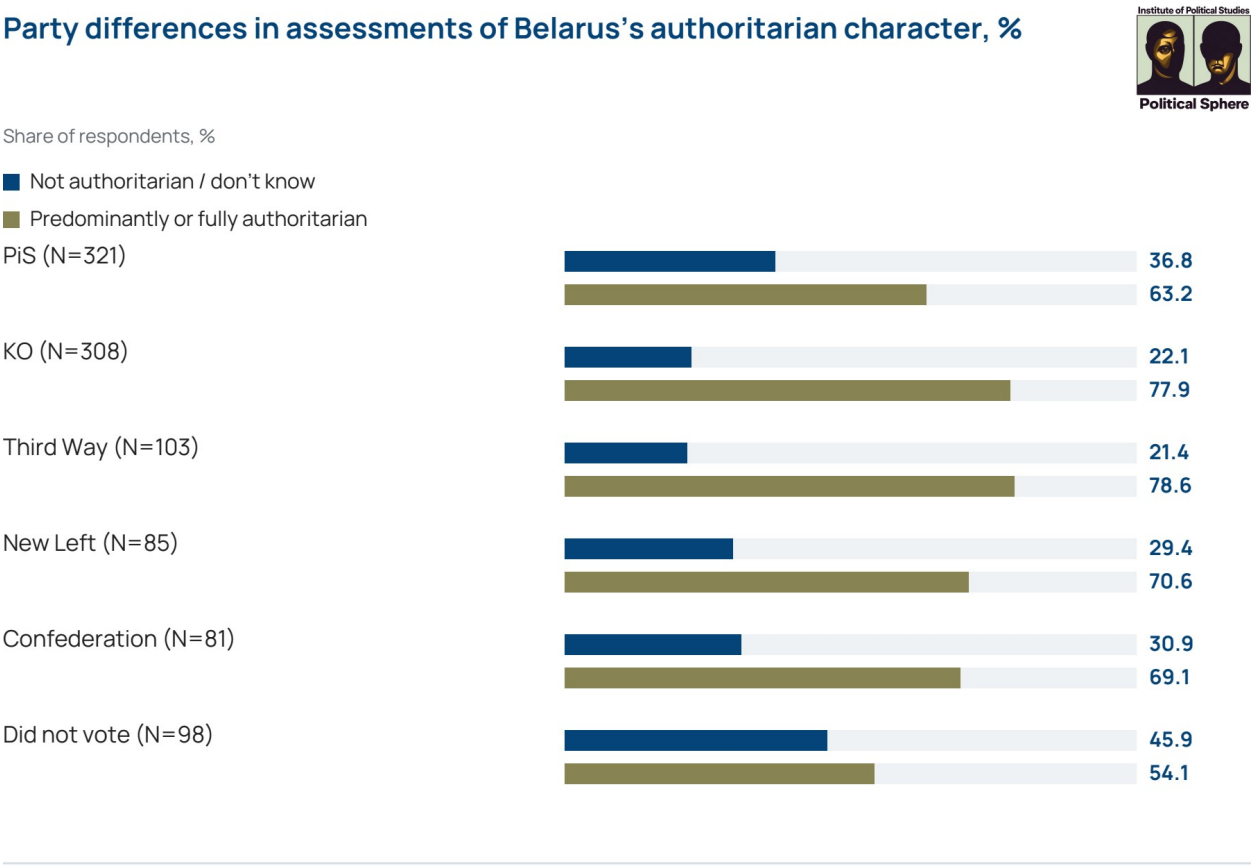


Figure 12. Party differences in assessments of Belarus's authoritarian character, %

Note: 31.4, df=5, p<0.001, V=0.178.

Public support for the democratic opposition is more often chosen by KO voters — 44.2% — New Left voters — 36.5% — and Third Way voters — 35.0%. Among PiS and Confederation supporters, the figure is close to 24%. Non-voters more often lack a definite position.

Party differences in policy towards the democratic opposition, % (1/2)

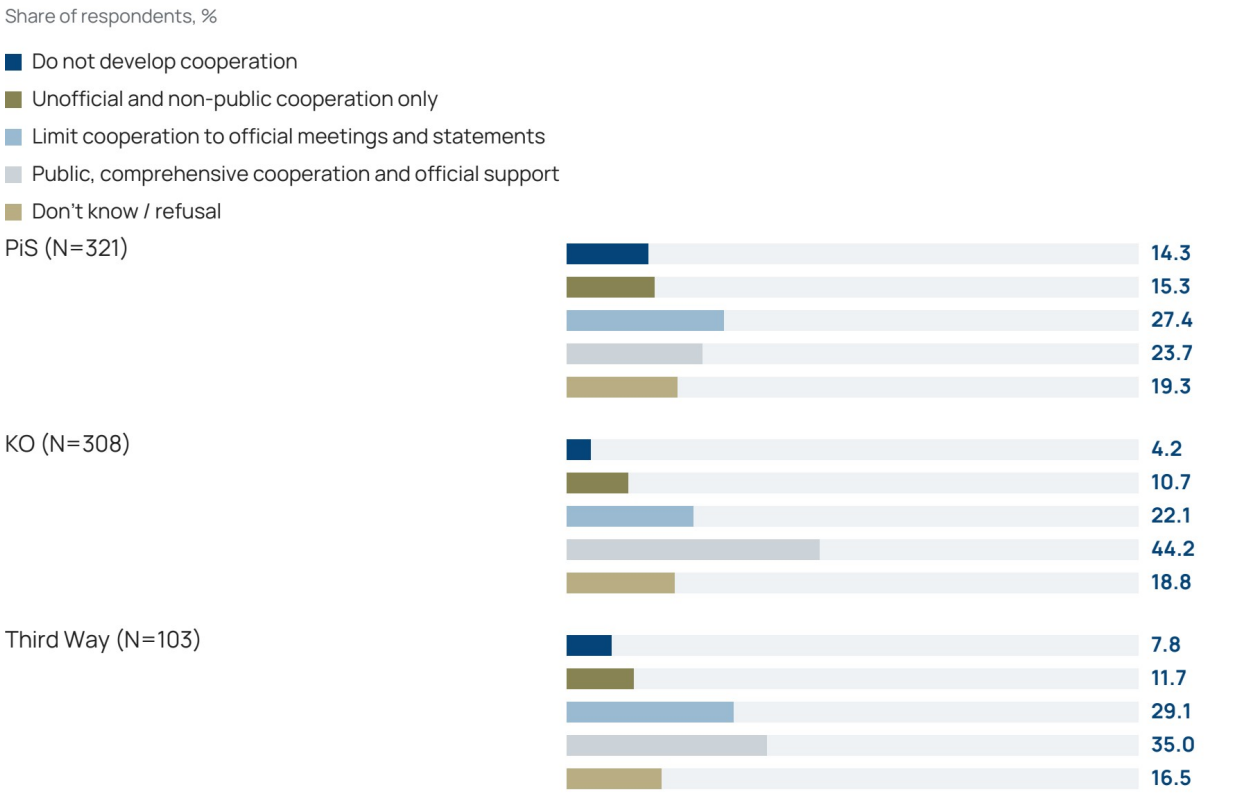


Figure 13. Party differences in policy towards the democratic opposition, % (1/2)

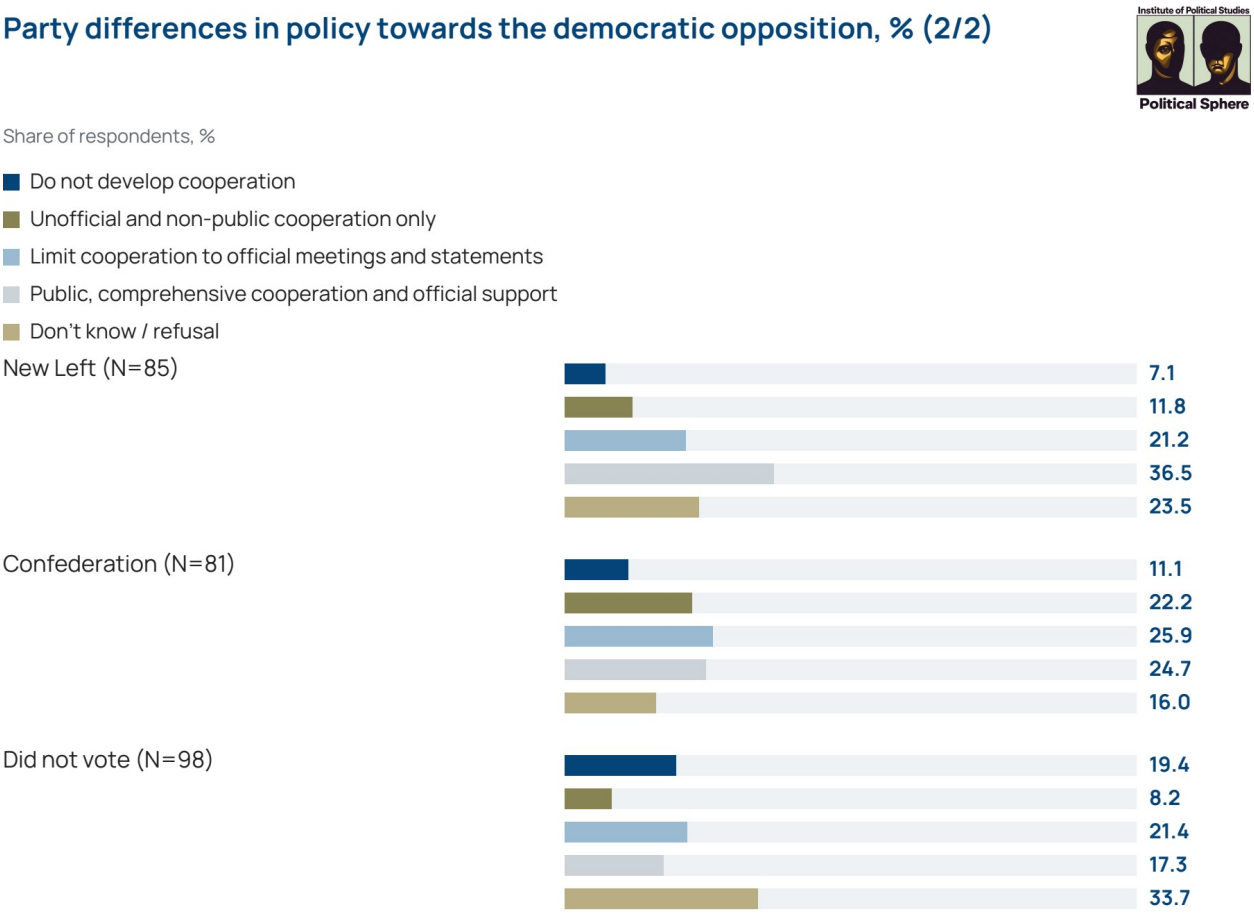


Figure 13. Party differences in policy towards the democratic opposition, % (2/2)

Note: 80.3, df=20, p<0.001, V=0.142; N=996.

This is why direct assessments of people and political assessments of the state diverge. A respondent may view Belarusians positively, regard Belarus as authoritarian and simultaneously support restrictions on labour migration. Another may criticise Lukashenka but know no Belarusian cultural figures. Cross-tabulation analysis shows that such combinations are not exceptional: Polish public opinion consists of several relatively independent dimensions.

Contacts, migration, the economy and security

Relatives, colleagues, acquaintances or friends among Belarusians are reported by 15.0% of respondents. The share is 23.6% among those with positive attitudes and 8.5% among those with negative attitudes. Belarusians in Belarus are viewed positively by 78.1% of those with personal contacts and 44.8% of those without them. The

association is statistically significant, but direct interaction remains a minority experience, so most assessments are formed without it.

Younger and middle-aged respondents more often have personal contacts with Belarusians. Differences by education and financial circumstances do not form a consistent relationship and partly involve small groups.

Older respondents are noticeably less likely to know Belarusians personally. Contact frequency also varies between voivodeships, but this does not produce consistent regional differences in overall attitudes.

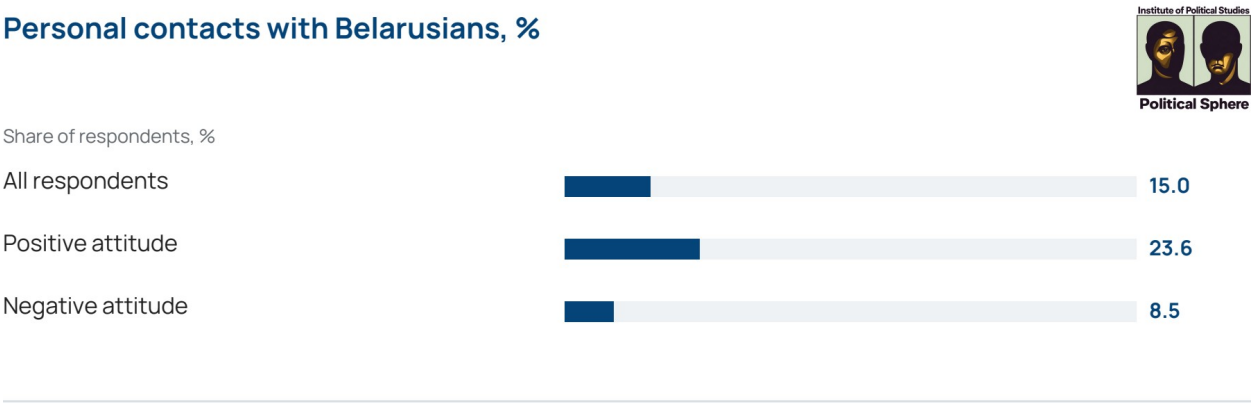


Figure 14. Personal contacts with Belarusians, %

Note: The question covers relatives, colleagues, acquaintances and friends.

The Polish government's decision to admit people forced to leave Belarus after the 2020 protests is viewed positively by 59.3% of respondents, negatively by 19.8%, while 20.9% are undecided. The decision is approved by 70.1% of those with positive attitudes towards Belarusians and 45.2% of those with negative attitudes. The association with financial circumstances is especially pronounced: approval rises from 32.8% in the most vulnerable group to 66.7% among financially secure respondents.

Assessments of the decision to admit emigrants after 2020 differ between men and women and by age, employment, income and education. The financial divide is particularly noticeable: those who must economise even on everyday spending approve less often than people with moderate or stable means. This may reflect a more acute sense of scarce resources and competition for them. These differences are more pronounced than those in general attitudes towards Belarusians.

Gender and age also distinguish responses on admitting emigrants. The decision is assessed positively by 52.7% of women and 66.4% of men. Support rises with age, from 51.6% among respondents aged 18–29 to 67.0% among those over 60. The gap is associated with overall assessments of the Belarusian regime. Financial circumstances

nevertheless remain more strongly associated: approval in the most vulnerable group is almost half that among financially secure respondents.

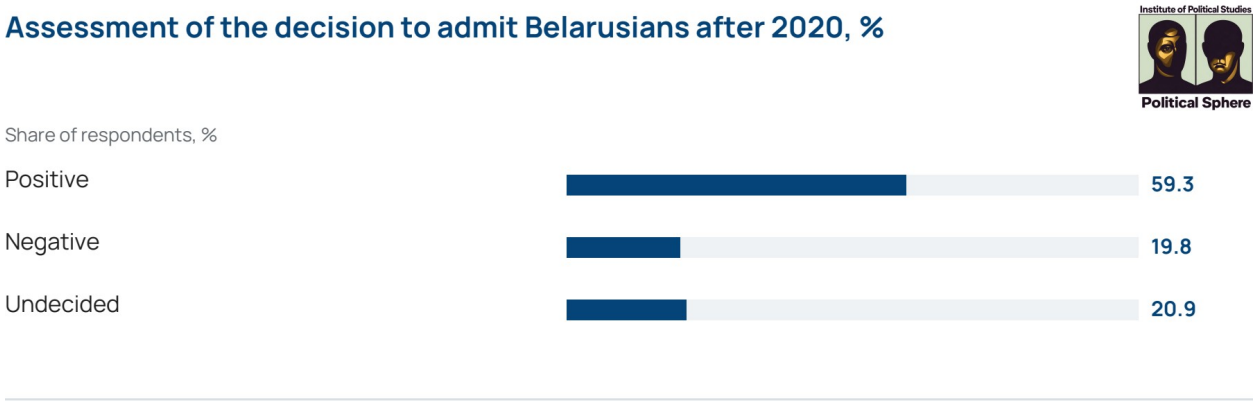


Figure 15. Assessment of the decision to admit Belarusians after 2020, %

Note: N=1006.

Most respondents — 64.8% — do not consider Belarusian citizens living in Poland a threat to national security: 16.7% answer "definitely not" and 48.1% "probably not". The opposite view is held by 17.7%, and the same share are unsure.

Attitudes towards Belarusians and assessments of potential risks are related but do not coincide. A threat is perceived by 27.7% of respondents with negative attitudes and 18.6% of those with positive attitudes. Even among those who chose "definitely yes", a noticeable share view Belarusians positively. Some respondents thus distinguish attitudes towards people from perceptions of security.

Responses on threats differ by gender, age, place of residence, marital status, employment, income and financial circumstances. Financially secure people are more likely not to perceive Belarusians as a threat. Among those who must economise even on essentials, both concerns and "don't know" responses are more common. Education and language spoken at home are not associated with these assessments. Overall, security concerns are more common among financially less secure respondents.

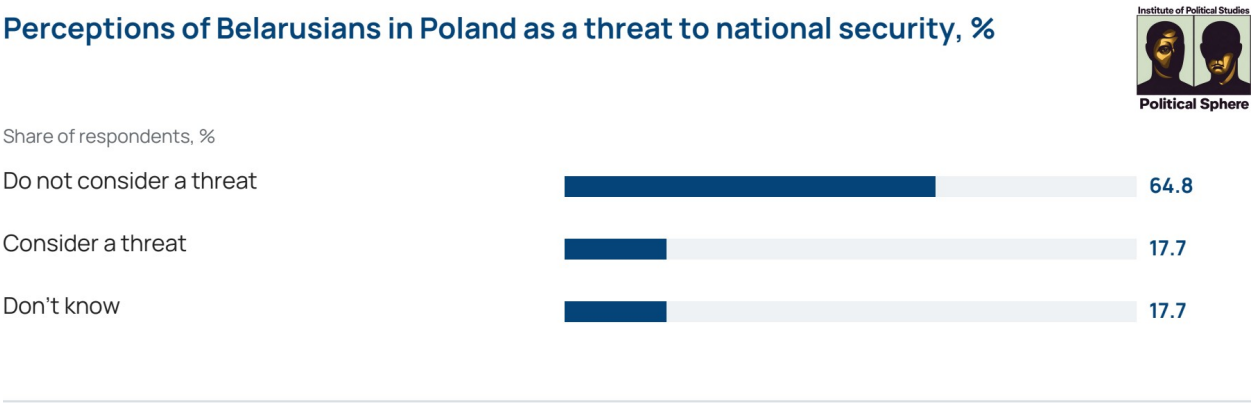


Figure 16. Perceptions of Belarusians in Poland as a threat to national security, %

Note: N=1006.

Of the 178 respondents who answered the conditional open-ended question, 29.8% could not name a specific source of threat. The most frequent specific mentions were espionage and intelligence activities (11.2%), links to Russia and the Belarusian authorities (7.9%), crime and violence (7.9%), and threats to the labour market (7.3%). The threats named thus relate more often to state activity and security than to Belarusians' everyday behaviour in Poland.

Some respondents acknowledge a risk but cannot identify its source. The most frequently mentioned specific reasons are espionage and intelligence activities, distrust of foreign nationals, links to Russia and the Belarusian authorities, and crime and violence.

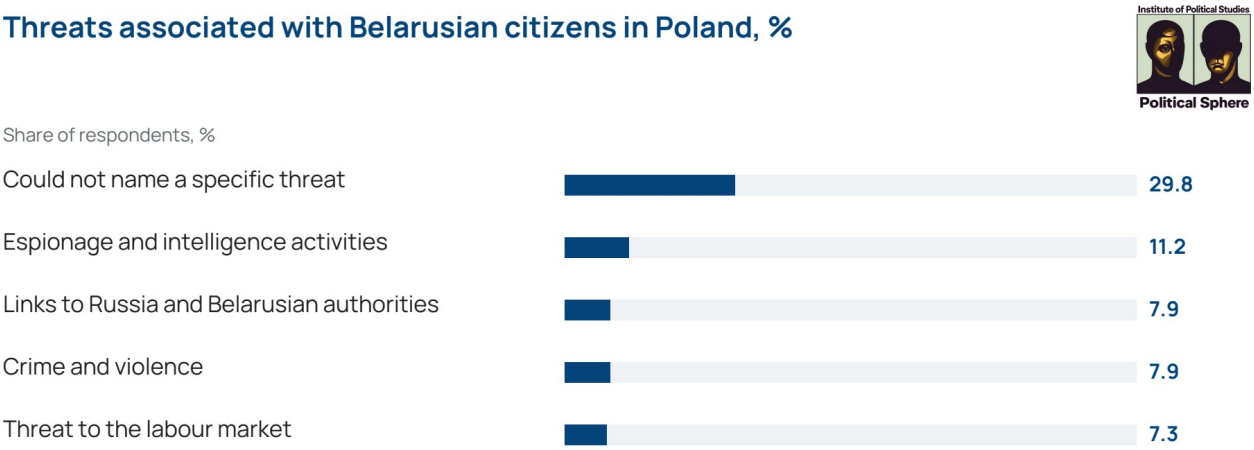


Figure 17. Threats associated with Belarusian citizens in Poland, %

Note: Open-ended question followed by coding; shares among the 178 respondents who gave a valid answer to the conditional question.

Belarusians' contribution to the Polish economy is viewed positively by 42.1% of respondents, negatively by 13.1% and neutrally by 24.3%; a further 20.5% are unsure. Positive assessments are given by 56.3% of those with positive attitudes towards Belarusians and 25.4% of those with negative attitudes. Among respondents who consider Belarusians' contribution substantial and positive, 81.8% view Belarusians in Belarus positively and 88.9% view those in Poland positively. Economic assessments are closely associated with overall attitudes towards Belarusians.

Assessments of economic contributions differ by gender, age, settlement size, employment, income, education and financial circumstances. The clearest divide concerns the latter: the contribution is assessed positively by 26.1% of respondents in the most vulnerable group and 53.9% among financially secure respondents.

Men assess the contribution positively considerably more often than women — 49.6% versus 35.1%. The gap is primarily associated with more "don't know" responses among women, rather than greater negativity. The patterns by age and settlement size are less consistent: favourable responses predominate among working-age respondents and residents of large cities, but there is no linear relationship. Overall, financial circumstances are more closely associated with perceptions of economic contributions than most other sociodemographic characteristics.

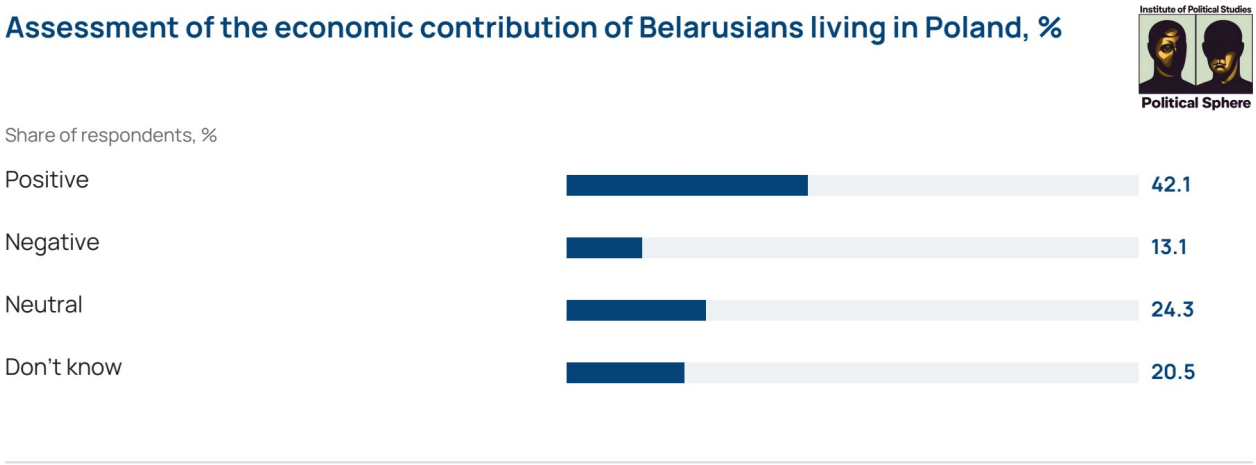


Figure 18. Assessment of the economic contribution of Belarusians living in Poland, %

Note: N=1006.

Opinions on labour migration from Belarus differ markedly. Reducing the number of migrants already in Poland is proposed by 22.6% of respondents, while a further 20.3% favour stopping further arrivals without reducing the current number. Entry under the general rules for citizens of non-EU countries is supported by 33.7%, and encouraging it by 6.0%; 17.5% are unsure.

Reducing migrant numbers is supported by 45.8% of respondents with negative attitudes towards Belarusians and 12.4% of those with positive attitudes. Applying general entry rules for non-EU citizens is favoured by 16.9% and 46.1%, respectively.

Responses on labour migration differ by gender, age, employment, income, education and financial circumstances. Women and respondents with limited means more often choose restrictions or are unsure. Those with higher incomes and education are considerably more willing to allow migration to remain at its current level or expand. Settlement size, voivodeship, marital status and language spoken at home play no significant role. Attitudes towards labour migration are therefore most closely associated with assessments of its economic consequences.

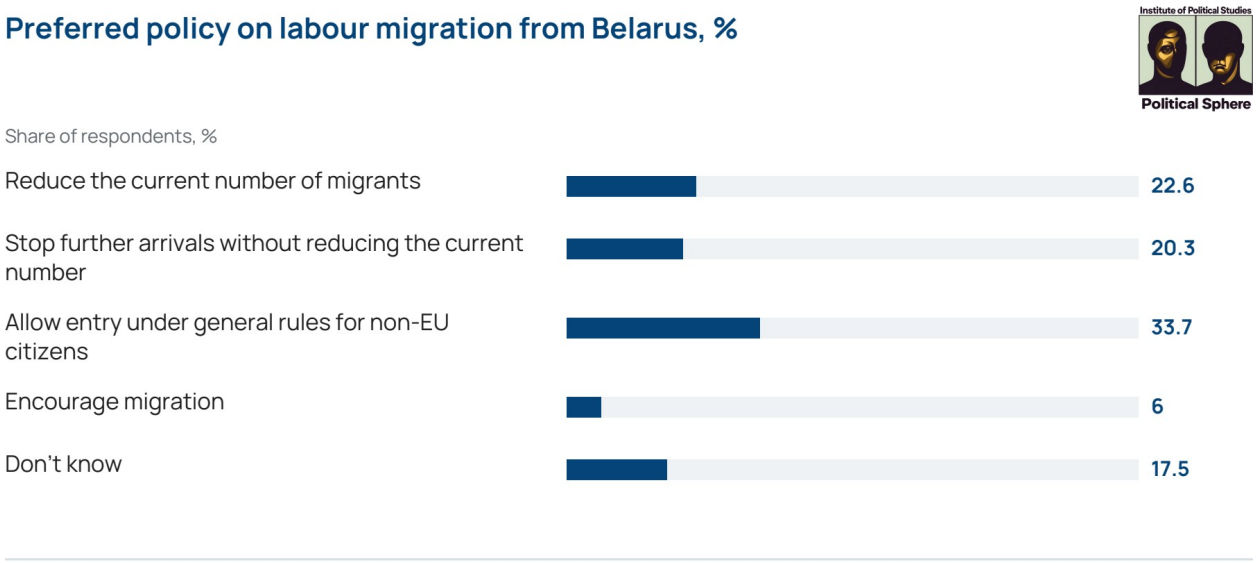


Figure 19. Preferred policy on labour migration from Belarus, %

Note: N=1006.

Opinions on the danger posed by the Belarusian state are split almost evenly. A low threat level — 1 to 3 on a ten-point scale — is indicated by 27.4% of respondents, a medium level — 4 to 6 — by 29.2%, and a high level — 7 to 10 — by 32.3%; a further 11.0% are unsure. High risk is reported by 43.5% of those with negative attitudes towards Belarusians and 30.7% of those with positive attitudes. Yet attitudes towards the state and towards people do not coincide: many who consider the Belarusian state dangerous view Belarusians positively.

Responses differ primarily by gender and financial circumstances. Men more often choose both high and low scores, while women more often choose the middle of the scale or are unsure. High risk is reported somewhat more often by the group in the most difficult financial circumstances, but the difference is smaller than on labour migration and economic contributions.

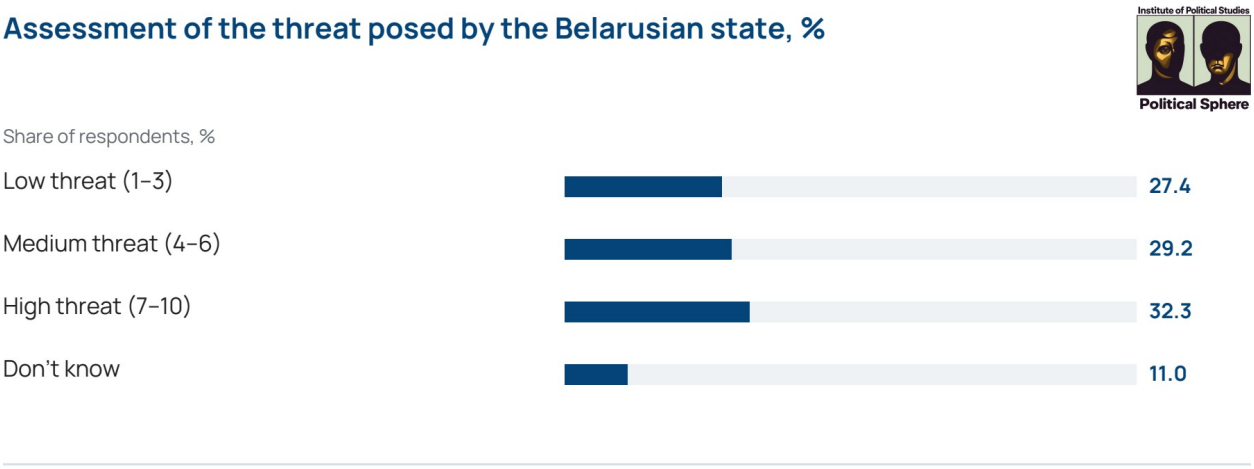


Figure 20. Assessment of the threat posed by the Belarusian state, %

Note: The original 1–10 scale is grouped into three ranges.

Heritage

The heritage of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Almost half of respondents — 45.9% — consider the political and cultural heritage of the First Commonwealth exclusively Polish. The more inclusive view that this heritage belongs to all the peoples who lived in it is chosen by 28.3%. Shared Polish–Belarusian heritage is supported by 4.4%. The exclusive position is noticeably more common among those with negative attitudes towards Belarusians — 62.1%, compared with 36.5% among those with positive attitudes.

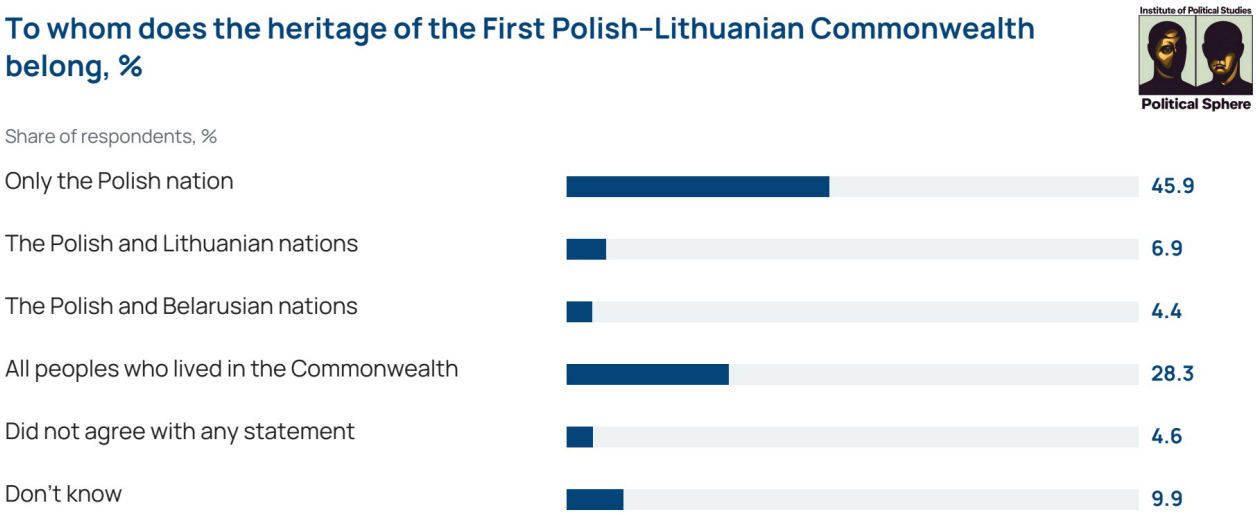


Figure 21. To whom does the heritage of the First Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth belong, %

Note: N=1006.

The idea of a new Belarusian coat of arms inspired by that of the Commonwealth does not receive broad support. Negative attitudes account for 36.3%, positive attitudes for 18.7% and neutral attitudes for 45.0%. Support reaches 28.7% among respondents with positive attitudes towards Belarusians, compared with 11.9% among those with negative attitudes.

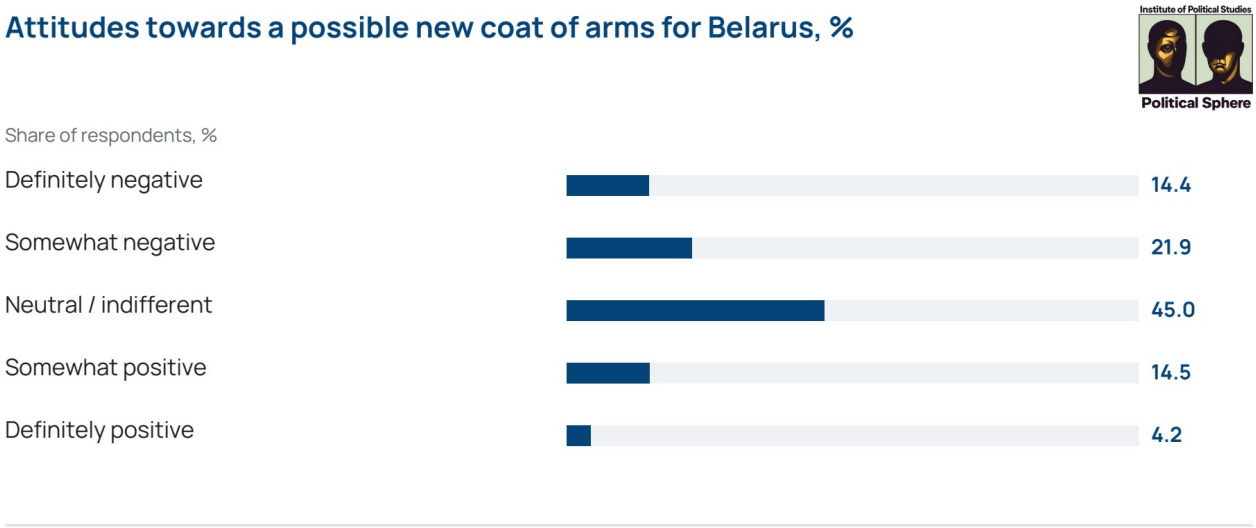


Figure 22. Attitudes towards a possible new coat of arms for Belarus, %

Note: N=1006.

Opinions on Belarusians' distinct national identity are split almost evenly: 39.2% regard them as a separate nation, 35.4% as a branch of the Russian nation and 5.9% as a branch of the Ukrainian nation; 19.6% are unsure. This position is closely associated with general attitudes towards Belarusians. Among respondents with positive attitudes, 50.7% recognise them as a separate nation and 27.7% associate them with the Russian nation; among those with negative attitudes, the figures are 22.0% and 58.8%, respectively.

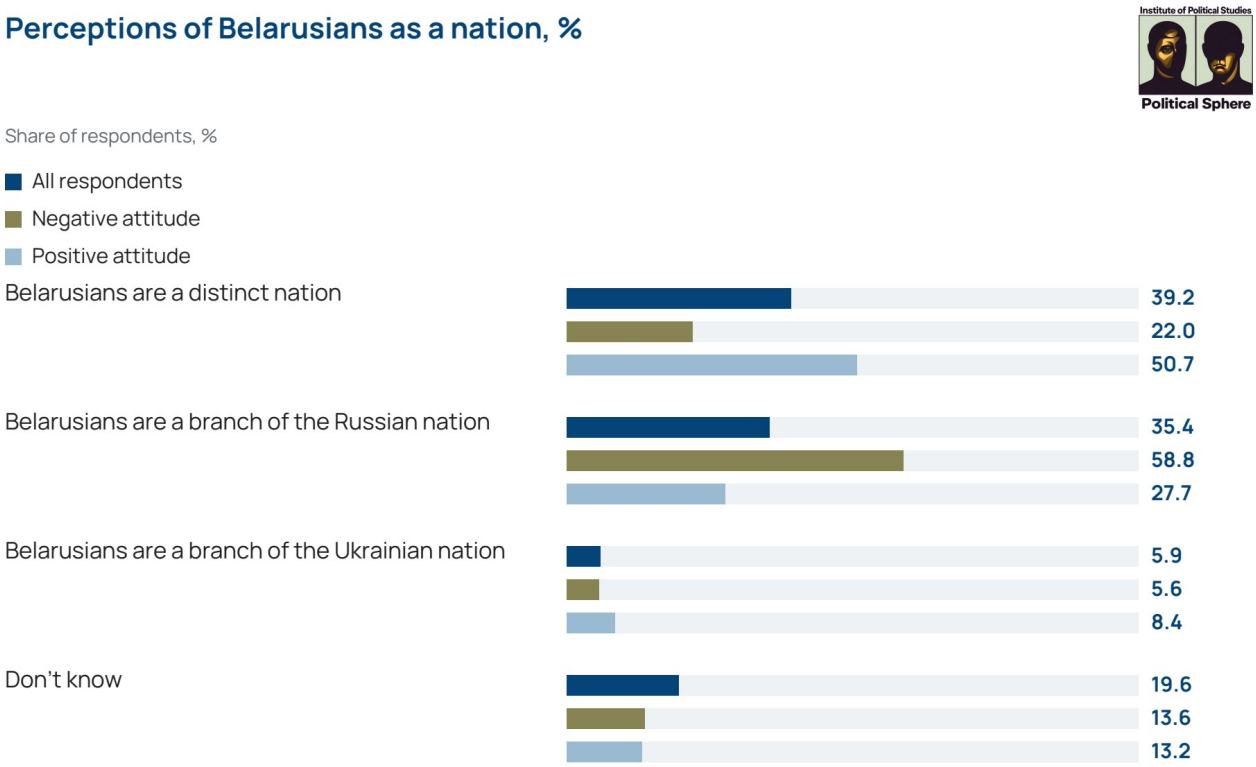


Figure 23. Perceptions of Belarusians as a nation, %

Note: Attitude groups are based on responses concerning Belarusians living in Belarus.

The inclusion of Adam Mickiewicz and Tadeusz Kościuszko in Belarusian historical and cultural heritage is viewed negatively by 41.7% of respondents, positively by 16.6% and neutrally by another 41.7%. Among those with negative attitudes towards Belarusians, 61.0% respond negatively, compared with 32.7% among those with positive attitudes. Positive responses account for 6.8% and 27.9%, respectively.

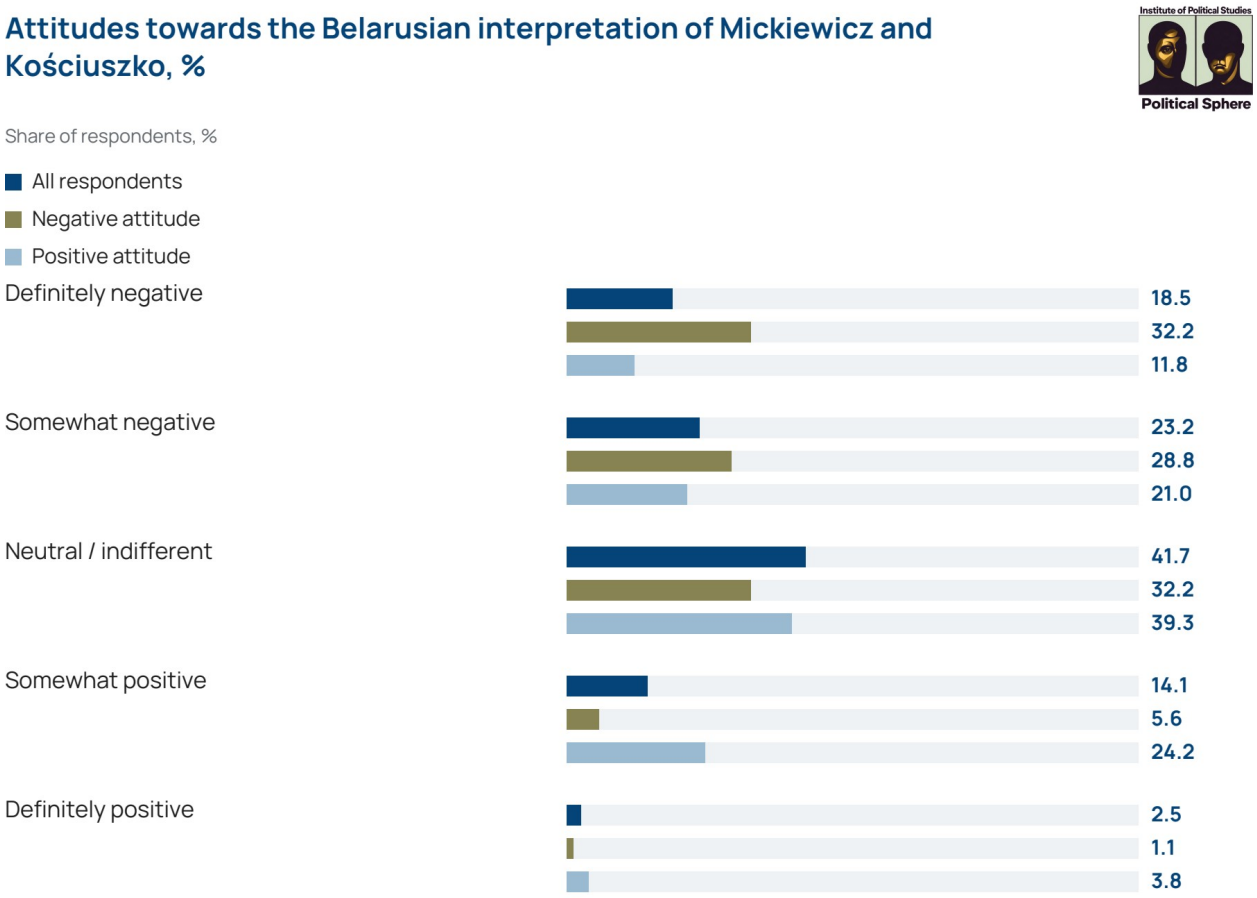


Figure 24. Attitudes towards the Belarusian interpretation of Mickiewicz and Kościuszko, %

Note: N=1006.

Culture

Knowledge of Belarusian historical and cultural figures remains low. None of the nine listed figures are known to 63.1%, and a further 9.1% are unsure. The best-known figures are Yanka Kupala — 10.3%, Kastus Kalinouski and Sviatlana Alexievich — 8.3% each, and Vseslav of Polotsk — 6.9%. Francysk Skaryna is known to 4.6%. Even among those with positive attitudes, a majority know none of the listed figures — 54.3%.

Limited knowledge does not mean that respondents have no opinion about Belarus. They may assess migration, the political regime or relations with Russia without knowing historical or literary figures. This matters for interpretation: in Polish public opinion, Belarus is far more visible as a political than a cultural subject. Knowledge of such figures is associated with more positive attitudes, but cultural awareness remains only one factor.

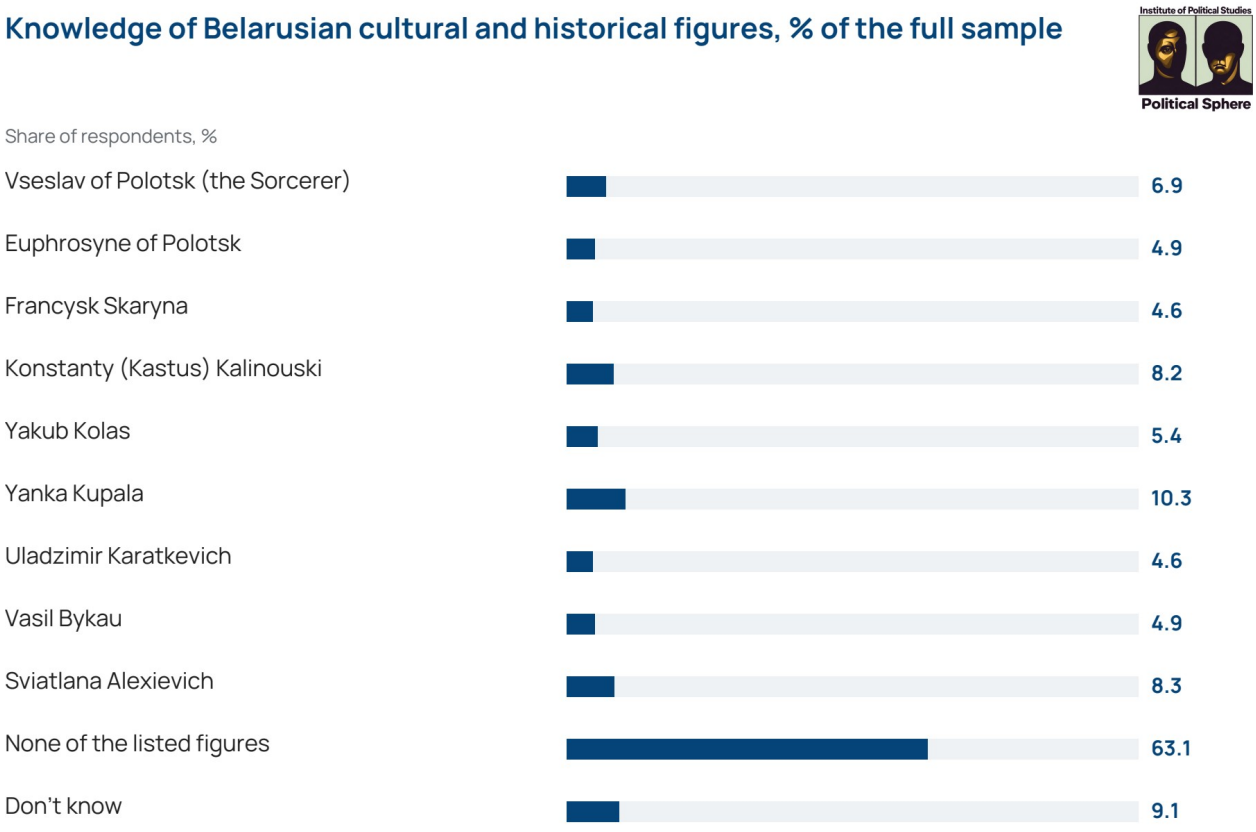


Figure 25. Knowledge of Belarusian cultural and historical figures, % of the full sample

Note: Multiple responses permitted; shares do not add up to 100%.

Knowledge of Belarusian historical and cultural figures is associated with attitudes towards Belarusians. At least one figure is recognised by 38.1% of those with positive attitudes and 22.0% of those with negative attitudes. This association is apparent in cross-tabulations but does not in itself mean that cultural knowledge produces sympathy towards Belarusians.

Responses to historical and cultural questions differ by respondents' social circumstances, but there is no single pattern. Views of the Commonwealth's heritage are associated with gender, age, settlement size, employment, income, education and financial circumstances. Views on a possible Belarusian coat of arms are associated primarily with gender, employment and education. Perceptions of Belarusians as a distinct nation also differ by marital status and language spoken at home. Only education is consistently associated with assessments of Mickiewicz's and Kościuszko's connection to Belarusian heritage.

More educated respondents more often recognise individual figures. There is no overall age pattern. Knowing the names, however, does not imply support for a Belarusian interpretation of shared heritage. In every age group, the view that the Commonwealth's heritage belongs exclusively to Poland predominates. Settlement size matters only for this question and does not affect attitudes towards the coat of arms or the inclusion of Mickiewicz and Kościuszko in the Belarusian historical and cultural tradition.

Education stands out as the most consistent factor: it is associated with responses about the Commonwealth, the coat of arms, the distinctness of the Belarusian nation, Mickiewicz and Kościuszko, and knowledge of individual figures. Yet even among respondents with higher education, the Belarusian interpretation of shared heritage does not predominate. Associations with marital status, voivodeship and language spoken at home appear only in individual cases and often involve small groups, so they cannot support broad regional or linguistic conclusions.

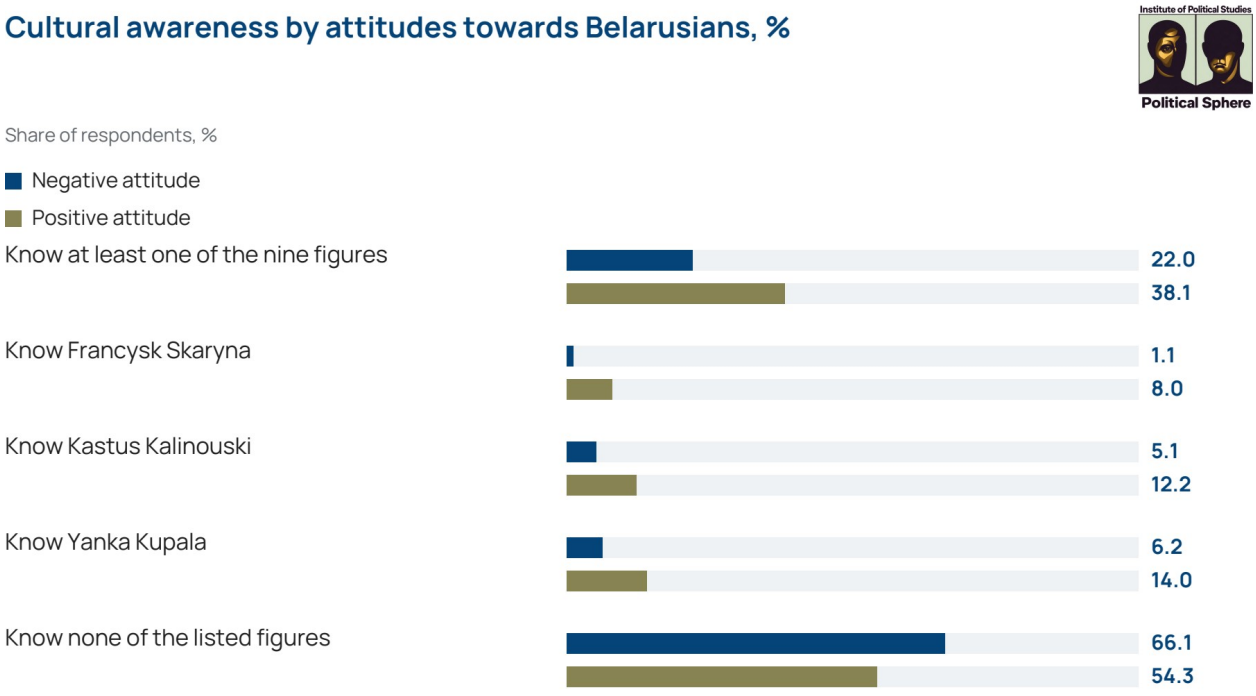


Figure 26. Cultural awareness by attitudes towards Belarusians, %

Note: Selected indicators are shown.

Comparison with other studies in Poland

Publications by CBOS, IPSOS Polska and the University of Warsaw's Faculty of Sociology were used for comparison, but they contain different types of data. CBOS is the only source that allows changes in attitudes towards Belarusians to be traced. IPSOS published one related indicator in 2024, but without the full response distribution. University of Warsaw studies provide scholarly context but no comparable percentage data. Materials from the three sources therefore cannot be combined into a single series.

The comparison uses 14 CBOS questions with complete response distributions and one partial IPSOS indicator. The remaining materials lacked sufficient information on wording, response options, survey dates and samples and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

These figures can be compared with the present 2026 study only in very broad terms. CBOS asks about attitudes towards "Białorusini" without specifying where they live and groups its seven-point scale into sympathy, indifference and antipathy. The new survey asked separately about Belarusian citizens living in Belarus and Poland and did not offer an "indifference" option. The share of positive responses in 2026 therefore cannot be added as another point to the CBOS chart. The new survey does not extend the earlier series; it reveals differences that the series does not capture.

Sources of Polish research and limits to comparability

Research sources

CBOS
35 publications; 14 fully verified question records; repeated attitude series for 2021–2025
Main quantitative source

IPSOS Polska
Five publications; 27% sympathy towards Belarusians published for 2024, without the full scale distribution
One qualified comparison only

University of Warsaw, Faculty of Sociology
Seven academic references from 2018–2023, without questions, percentages or sample bases
Thematic context, not a survey series

Figure 27. Sources of Polish research and limits to comparability

Note: Similar indicators from different organisations cannot simply be combined because questions, scales, methods and fieldwork dates differ.

Changes in attitudes towards Belarusians

The only fully comparable series is based on the recurring CBOS question "Jaki jest Pana(i) stosunek do Białorusinów?" — "What is your attitude towards Belarusians?" The wording specifies neither citizenship nor place of residence, so it cannot be linked directly to this study. Moreover, CBOS uses a grouped scale of sympathy, indifference and antipathy, whereas this survey distinguishes positive and negative assessments by intensity and asks separately about Belarusians in Belarus and Poland.

In February 2021, 47% expressed sympathy towards Belarusians and 17% antipathy. In January 2022, sympathy fell to 35% and antipathy rose to 29%. The sharpest shift occurred between the 2022 and 2023 waves: sympathy stood at 19% and antipathy at 51%. In 2024, the figures moderated somewhat — 24% and 47% — but in 2025 sympathy fell again to 20%, while antipathy stood at 48%. "Don't know" responses remained almost unchanged at 8–9%.

The difference between 2021 and 2025 is 27 percentage points for sympathy and 31 points for antipathy. The available publications provide no basis for attributing the change to a single factor. The period encompasses the migration crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Belarusian authorities' alliance

policy. The series records changes in public assessments but cannot separate the contribution of each event.

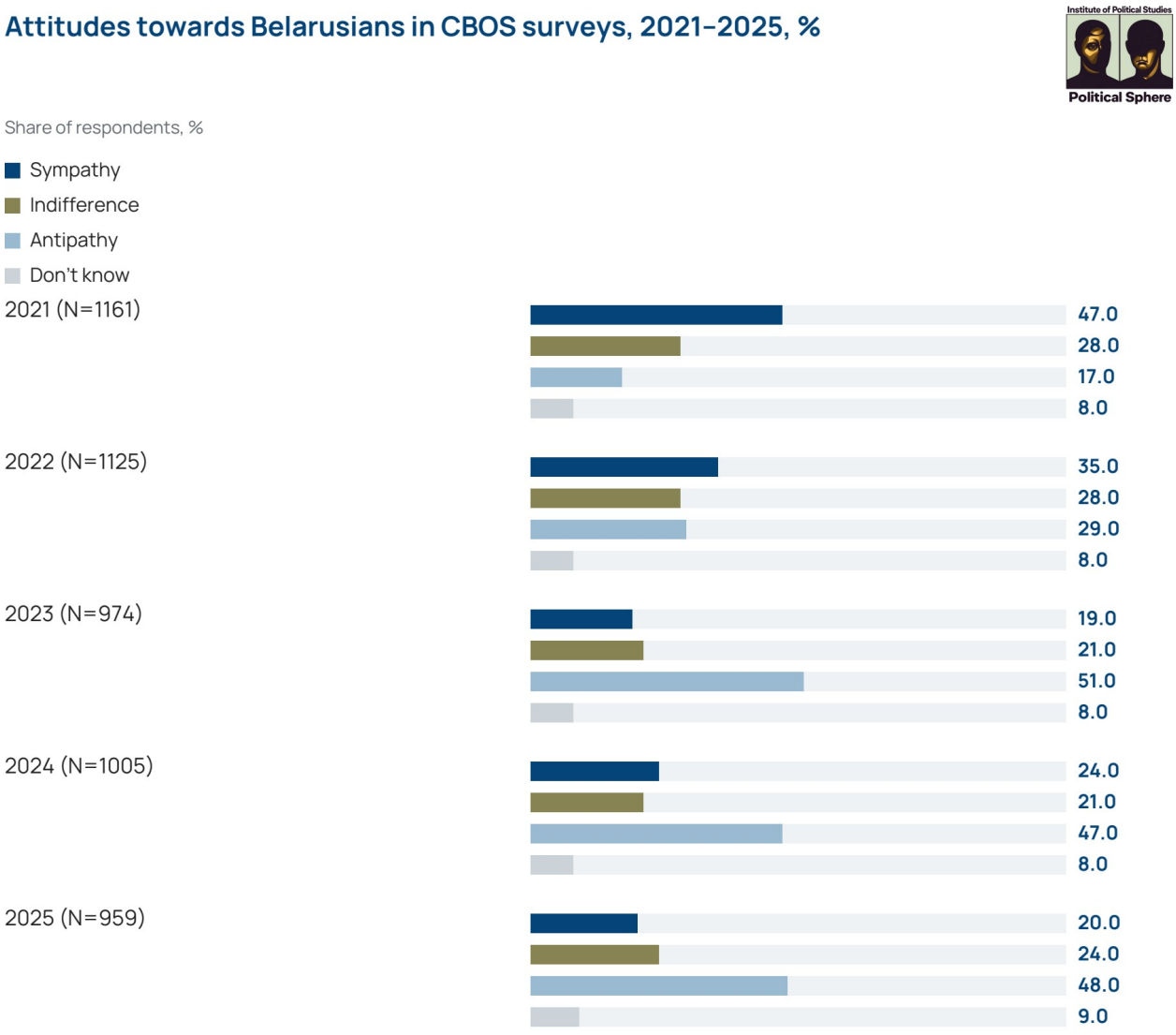


Figure 28. Attitudes towards Belarusians in CBOS surveys, 2021–2025, %

Note: Source: CBOS, Stosunek do innych narodów / Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów series. Totals differ from 100% in 2023 and 2025 because of rounding.

The changes were uneven. Between 2021 and 2022, sympathy fell by 12 percentage points and antipathy rose by the same amount. Deterioration continued in 2023: sympathy fell by another 16 points and antipathy rose by 22 points. The figures improved slightly in 2024 but did not return to the 2022 level. In 2025, negative

assessments changed little, while sympathy declined again. Unfavourable assessments thus predominated in 2023–2025, with no sustained recovery.

Indifference changed much less: 28% in 2021–2022, 21% in 2023–2024 and 24% in 2025. The main redistribution was between sympathy and antipathy rather than towards uncertainty. This distinguishes the CBOS series from the 2026 results, where "don't know" responses are very common. The difference may reflect both changing views and different scales: the neutral CBOS position and the absence of a definite assessment in the new survey are not equivalent categories.

In spring 2024, IPSOS recorded 27% sympathy towards Belarusians, while CBOS recorded 24% at roughly the same time. The three-point gap cannot be treated as a discrepancy between the surveys: wording, timing and methods differed, and IPSOS published only the positive-response share. This result therefore cannot be included in the CBOS series for other years.

The 2020 protests and Poland's policy

In September 2020, events in Belarus attracted considerable attention in Polish society: 14% were very interested and 59% somewhat interested; 26% were not interested. The officially announced presidential election result was considered falsified by 73%, while 6% disagreed and 21% were unsure. These figures relate to a specific political crisis rather than general attitudes towards Belarusians.

Protest participants received sympathy from 59%; 4% did not sympathise, and 29% were indifferent to the protests. Regarding Poland's policy, 58% chose support for Belarusians' pro-democratic aspirations jointly with other EU countries, and a further 13% favoured special support from Poland. Non-intervention was preferred by 20%. Support for the protests and a European approach therefore predominated, alongside substantial groups who were indifferent or favoured neutrality.

The situation in Belarus was considered a threat to Poland's security by 44%, while 41% disagreed and 15% were undecided. This almost even balance differs from the more clear-cut assessments of the election and protests. Polish society could simultaneously sympathise with protest participants and perceive risks associated with instability in a neighbouring country.

Interest in events

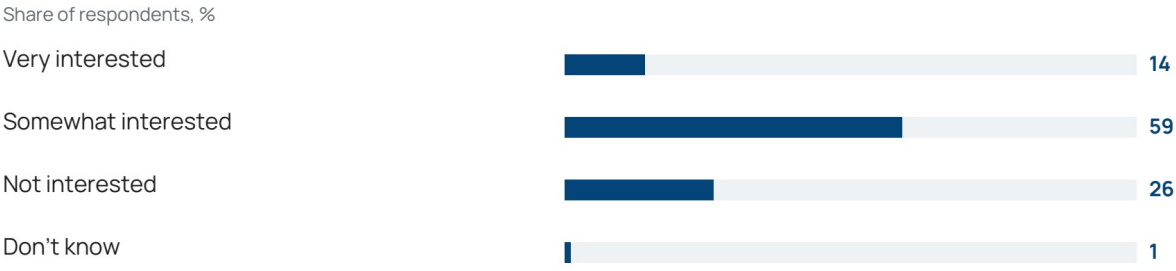


Figure 29. Assessments of events in Belarus and preferred Polish policy, CBOS, September 2020, % (1/5)

Election falsification

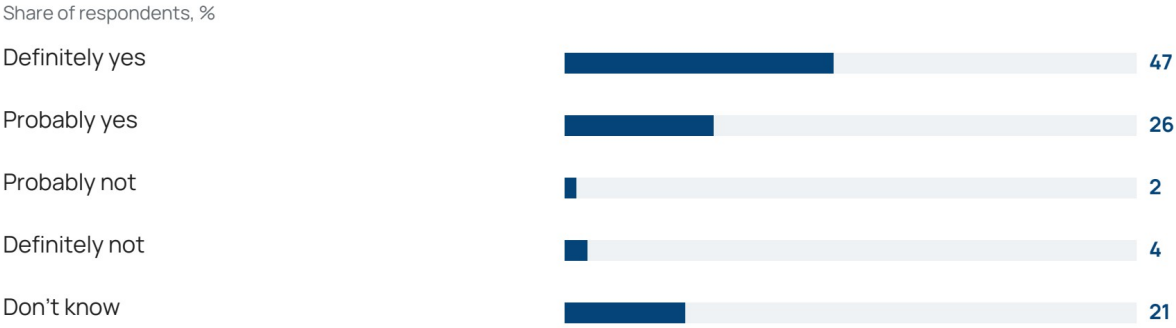


Figure 29. Assessments of events in Belarus and preferred Polish policy, CBOS, September 2020, % (2/5)

Attitudes towards protests



Figure 29. Assessments of events in Belarus and preferred Polish policy, CBOS, September 2020, % (3/5)

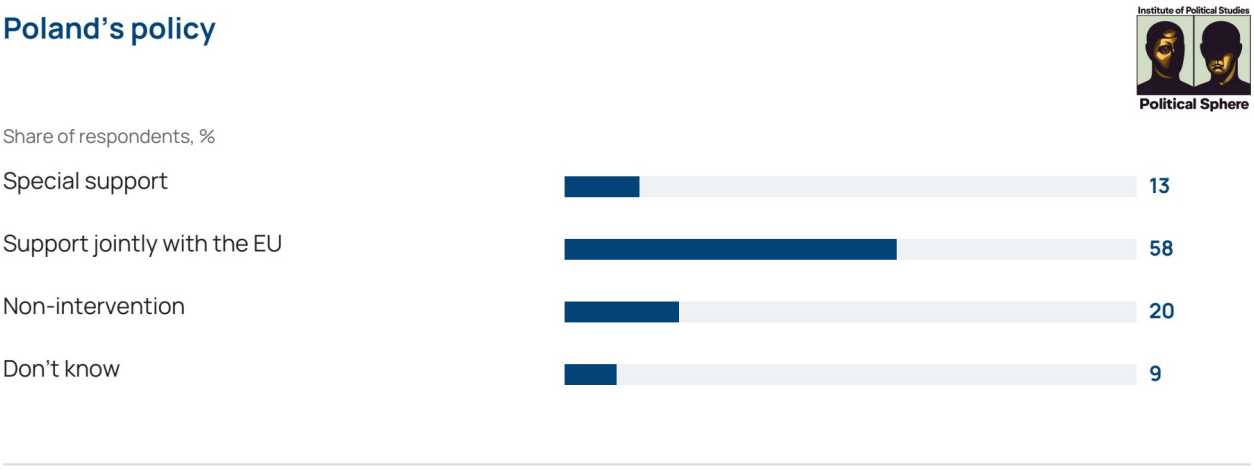


Figure 29. Assessments of events in Belarus and preferred Polish policy, CBOS, September 2020, % (4/5)



Figure 29. Assessments of events in Belarus and preferred Polish policy, CBOS, September 2020, % (5/5)

Note: Source: CBOS, Polacy o protestach na Białorusi; fieldwork 7–17 September 2020, achieved sample N=1149.

The border, migration and security in 2021

In the 2021 surveys, Belarus was mentioned primarily in connection with the crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border. Questions concerned migrants from third countries, asylum, construction of a border barrier and the likelihood of armed conflict. These data cannot establish attitudes towards Belarusian migrants or Belarusians in general.

Access to asylum for migrants at the Polish–Belarusian border was supported by 33% in both September and December 2021. Negative responses rose from 52% to 58%, while uncertainty fell from 15% to 9%. The September question included a detailed introductory statement about the Belarusian authorities organising migration flows, so the two observations are comparable only with qualifications and do not constitute a full trend.

In December 2021, construction of a border barrier was supported by 66% and opposed by 26%. Possible armed conflict arising from the border situation was feared by 64%, while 31% had no such fears. Both results concern border-control measures and risk perceptions. They do not show respondents' attitudes towards Belarusian citizens living in Poland.

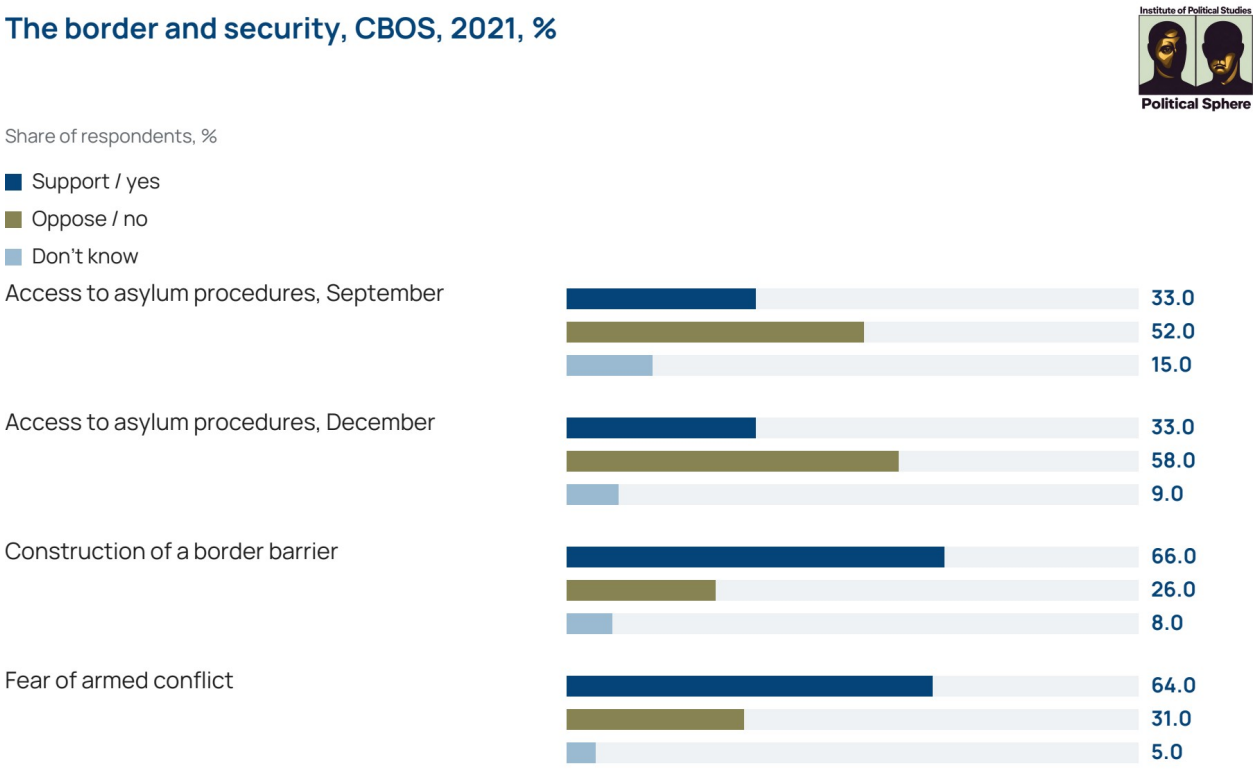


Figure 30. The border and security, CBOS, 2021, %

Note: Sources: CBOS, Opinia publiczna wobec uchodźców i sytuacji migrantów na granicy z Białorusią; Opinia publiczna wobec kryzysu na granicy z Białorusią.

Overall, Polish studies reveal several distinct processes. Belarusians retained a relatively favourable image until 2021, followed by a sharp rise in antipathy in the CBOS series. In 2020, protests and pro-democratic aspirations received broad support. In 2021, the border crisis strengthened demand for control and security. These dimensions cannot be reduced to a single trajectory: attitudes towards Belarusians, support for protests, assessments of the Belarusian authorities and attitudes towards migrants at the border concern different subjects and political situations.

General sympathy or antipathy towards Belarusians also matters. In the CBOS 2025 survey, Belarusians were among the groups for whom negative attitudes exceeded positive ones, alongside Russians, Roma, Ukrainians, Palestinians and Jews. Other

events have also affected attitudes since 2020: political emigration, protests, the border crisis, security concerns and the Belarusian authorities' support for Russia. The new survey shows that these factors operate differently. Most respondents do not regard Belarusians living in Poland as a threat, although many favour restricting labour migration. Criticism of the regime coexists with goodwill towards people, and support for the democratic opposition with reluctance to cooperate with the incumbent authorities.

Main findings

Positive attitudes towards Belarusians predominate but are not shared unreservedly throughout society. Belarusians in Belarus are viewed positively by 49.8% and negatively by 17.6%; almost a third are undecided. The positive share is higher for Belarusians in Poland — 55.7% — while the negative share changes little. Belarusians living in Poland are viewed positively somewhat more often than those living in Belarus, while negative-response shares are almost identical.

No single sociodemographic profile of those favourably or unfavourably disposed towards Belarusians emerges. Gender, employment, income, education, financial circumstances and sometimes language spoken at home distinguish responses, but associations with direct sympathy remain weak. Age is not associated with attitudes towards Belarusians in Poland, although it noticeably distinguishes political awareness and assessments of the regime, Lukashenka and the opposition. The most consistent social divide concerns financial circumstances: economically vulnerable groups are more cautious about admitting emigrants, Belarusians' contributions and migration.

Historical and cultural perceptions form a distinct component of attitudes towards Belarusians. Recognising Belarusians as a separate nation, an inclusive understanding of the Commonwealth's heritage and acceptance of Belarusian connections to shared historical figures more often accompany positive assessments. Cultural awareness nevertheless remains low: most respondents recognise none of the listed Belarusian figures. Education is associated with cultural awareness, while age is particularly strongly associated with awareness of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

Practical issues of migration, the economy and security produce the most noticeable differences. Most respondents do not regard Belarusians in Poland as a threat, and positive assessments of their economic contribution are considerably more common among supporters of an open migration policy. Income and financial circumstances are particularly important: cautious assessments are more common in financially vulnerable groups, while more secure groups more often assess economic contributions positively and support admitting emigrants.

Criticism of the Belarusian regime is far more widespread than negative attitudes towards Belarusians. Around seven in ten consider Belarus authoritarian, do not recognise Lukashenka as legitimate and describe the country's foreign policy as dependent on Russia. These assessments are more socially structured than direct sympathy towards people: older, more educated and financially secure respondents more often adopt a definite critical position, while younger and vulnerable groups more often give no answer.

A pragmatic approach towards the Belarusian authorities predominates: limited, economically beneficial contacts receive more support than complete isolation or active cooperation. Attitudes towards the democratic opposition are more open, but forms of support differ by gender, age, education and financial circumstances. Party differences are noticeable but do not create two entirely homogeneous camps.

Polish surveys from 2020–2025 provide the context in which these responses developed. After the 2020 protests, general sympathy towards Belarusians fell sharply in the CBOS series, while the border crisis connected Belarus with security and migration. The new survey refines this picture: attitudes towards Belarusians cannot be described by a single sympathy scale, since assessments of people, migrants, the state, the regime and the opposition differ markedly.

Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere"
Us or Them?
How Belarusians Are Perceived in Poland

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