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# BALTIC RESILIENCE IN TRANSFORMATION

**Trust, Belonging,  
and Public Attitudes  
under Geopolitical Pressure**

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**Baltic Resilience in Transformation:  
Trust, Belonging, and Public Attitudes under  
Geopolitical Pressure**

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Methodological note on survey coverage: the three country chapters are based on different longitudinal samples. The Estonian and Lithuanian chapters cover four annual survey waves conducted in November–December 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. This allows for trend analysis across the entire period since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Latvian chapter covers three waves (2023, 2024 and 2025) as systematic annual data collection began one year later. This means that Latvia's 2022 baseline is unavailable for direct comparison. Where cross-country comparisons are made in the synthesis, they are restricted to the three-wave period common to all three datasets. Therefore, readers should interpret references to 'four-year trends' as applying specifically to Estonia and Lithuania, and view the Latvian analysis as a three-year trajectory within the same regional context.

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## FOREWORD

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One question I am often asked is: "What exactly is resilience?" Since this usually comes from people who are not significantly involved with the topic, I will spare myself a scientific answer. I tend to reduce it to the attitude to life, including here in the Baltic states. It is the ability to radiate joie de vivre despite a high perception of danger. And I experience that quite often here. It is not a theoretical construct, but a daily reality.

Since February 2022, the people of the Baltic states have learned to live with sustained geopolitical pressure: with a war on Europe's border, with economic shocks, with hybrid attacks, and with the persistent question of what would happen in the event of a serious crisis. The study presented here seeks to map this experience systematically. Not from a position of military distance, but where it actually takes shape: in households, in neighbourhoods, and in the relationships between citizens and their institutions. This is where it is decided whether a society holds together.

What makes this study particularly valuable is its consistently societal perspective. Security is not reduced here to defence spending or alliance commitments, important as these are. Resilience is understood as a multi-layered fabric: the capacity of individuals to navigate their lives under pressure; the readiness of communities to support one another; and trust in public institutions to act effectively in moments of crisis. These three dimensions, individual, communal, and institutional, do not move in unison. This is precisely one of the central insights of the present volume.

The findings from 2022/2023 to 2025 paint a sober rather than triumphant picture. In Latvia, we see how private adaptive capacity has grown. At the same time, confidence in collective structures lags behind: many people have stabilized their everyday lives, yet a majority still consider their community unprepared for emergencies. In Estonia, it becomes clear that a single society can hold several parallel resilience realities,

and that divisions along linguistic and economic lines run deeper than any headline would suggest. Lithuania adds its own distinctive accents to this picture. It also acts as a bridging element between the Polish and Nordic discussion about security. Anyone who lays the data of the past 3-4 years side by side sees it quickly: three countries, three stories, and across all three the same lesson. Resilience is not a state that can be reached and then maintained. It is a process that must be earned anew every day.

This insight carries immediate political consequences. A society that takes its own capacity for endurance for granted will find itself exhausted at the very moment it needs that capacity most. The data show that awareness of threats is high, but that people often do not know what role they themselves are expected to play in a crisis. They show that institutional trust is built not through appeals, but through visible, fair, and accountable governance. And they show that what the European Union has described since 2025 in its Preparedness Union Strategy as a "whole-of-society approach" has in fact been put into practice in the Baltic states for years, with achievements as well as blind spots from which all of Europe can learn.

It is precisely here that an insight emerges which reaches far beyond the region itself. Germany and other Western societies have lived for decades in a privileged security environment in which societal resilience was often treated as a self-evident background condition. The Baltic experience is a reminder that comfort is over. We all have to learn this. Those exposed to a permanent threat environment learn earlier and more concretely what it means not to delegate crisis capacity, but to understand it as a shared civic responsibility. Over the past years, the Baltic states have built up a body of practical knowledge that in Germany and other Western European countries is only gradually returning to political and societal debate. Knowledge about civil defence, about schools and municipalities in preparedness, about disinformation, and, perhaps most importantly, about the necessity of seeing citizens not merely as subjects to be protected, but as actors in their own right. This study offers an opportunity to learn from a region that has become a forerunner not by theoretical inclination, but by geographical and historical necessity. For Berlin as much as for Brussels, this view towards the northeast is not an act of solidarity, but an investment in one's own future viability.

Therein lies the contribution this publication seeks to make: an evidence-based perspective on a region that finds itself on a geopolitical front line without being defined by it. Baltic societies are not fortresses. They are vibrant, plural communities whose strength rests precisely in their ability to recognise their own vulnerabilities and to work with them. All that together makes it very clear for me: resilience is not only a military term, it is a democratic one!

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung extends its gratitude to the partners without whose committed work this study would not have been possible: the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation in Riga, the National Centre of Defence and Security Awareness in Tallinn, and the Faculty of Communication at Vilnius University in Lithuania. We also thank the research institutes Bergs Research and Turu-uuringute AS, as well as the authors of the individual country chapters, whose analytical care gives this volume its profile.

Our hope is a simple one: that this study will be read in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius as well as in Berlin and Brussels, by political decision-makers, by civil society actors, by an interested expert audience and the media to spread it. The presentation of this volume in Riga in May 2026 marks the beginning of a discussion for us that we intend to continue with our partners in the Baltic states and beyond.

# ESTONIA

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## Introduction

Estonia's resilience landscape in late 2025 was defined by recovery — partial, uneven, and contingent. After a sharp deterioration in public confidence between 2023 and 2024, the most recent survey wave shows a genuine upturn in optimism, attachment to home, and willingness to cooperate. Yet this headline recovery conceals a more complicated reality: while the mood among Estonian-speaking respondents has remained broadly stable, the Russian-speaking community experienced a marked decline in institutional trust in 2024 and has since recovered only partially. As of the end of 2025, two distinct emotional and civic realities coexist within the same country — a divergence that is not new, but whose contours have sharpened in ways that matter for policy.

This chapter tracks how public attitudes have shifted across four annual survey waves (2022, 2023, 2024, 2025), what has driven those shifts, and what they mean for Estonia's resilience going forward. The analysis is grounded in the data; it measures public psychology and civic posture — the non-military inputs to societal resilience.

The chapter draws on a three-level resilience framework that distinguishes individual resilience (personal functioning and agency), community resilience (horizontal trust and local solidarity), and societal resilience (institutional trust and collective optimism).<sup>1</sup> These three levels are structurally distinct: they do not move together, and they cannot substitute for each other. The 2022–2025 data confirm this architecture with precision. Individual life satisfaction has remained stable throughout. Community cohesion has fluctuated modestly. Societal resilience — concentrated at the institutional level — has experienced the sharpest movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimhi, S. (2016). Levels of resilience: Associations among individual, community, and national resilience. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(2), 164–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105314524009>.

The mechanism linking these levels operates through a specific pathway: perceived danger shapes institutional trust, which shapes hope, which shapes overall societal resilience. Two structural forces modify this chain. Economic insecurity amplifies it – financial vulnerability does not independently collapse resilience, but it makes the trust-to-hope link more volatile and the trust decline steeper.<sup>2</sup> Identity strength buffers it – people with strong civic belonging show less resilience decline under comparable levels of threat.<sup>3</sup> This structure, visualised below, is consistent across both language groups in Estonia: Estonian and Russian speakers are not psychologically different actors; they are differently positioned within the same system, primarily because they begin from different baseline levels of institutional trust – a divergence with deep structural roots that predate 2022.<sup>4</sup>

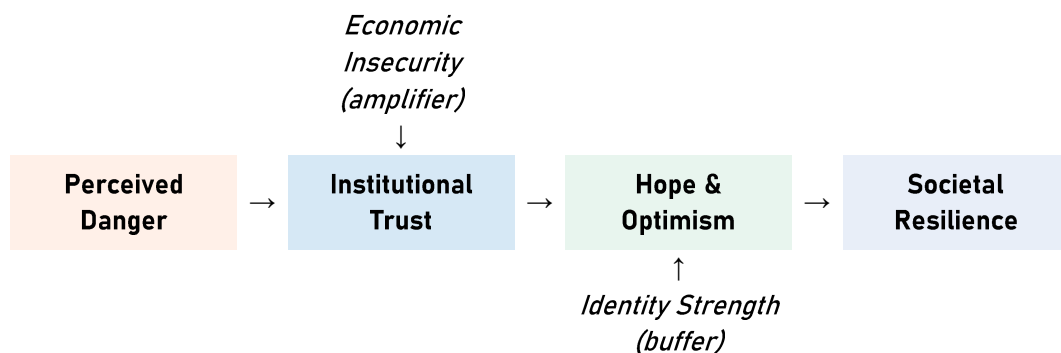


Figure 1. Structural pathway of societal resilience in Estonia, 2022-2025.

When the 2025 survey was conducted, Estonian society was living with a war that had entered its fourth year on their border, under ongoing economic pressure, and with a sense of security that was rebuilding but not yet restored. The proportion of Russian-speaking respondents describing their financial situation as difficult remained above 50% – more than twice the rate in 2022 – and over 50% in both 2024 and 2025 reported feeling that their social group is treated unfairly in Estonia. These are not abstract statistics; they are the backdrop against which every other finding in this chapter must be read.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Guiso L, Herrera H, Morelli M, Sonno T. Economic insecurity and the demand for populism in Europe. *Economica*. 2024;91(362):588-620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecca.12513>.

<sup>3</sup> Gajauskaite, I. (2026). Defining Societal Resilience as a Defensive Power. In: Smaliukiene, R., Schultz, D., Giedraityte, V. (eds) Democratic Resilience in the Baltics, Vol. 2. *Baltic Security and Defense*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4_1).

Gvineria, S., Bankauskaite, D., Struberga, S., Nazarov, M., Teperik, D. (2026). Exploring Interdependencies Between Identity and Resilience: Lessons from the War in Ukraine for the Baltic States. In: Smaliukiene, R., Schultz, D., Giedraityte, V. (eds) Democratic Resilience in the Baltics, Vol. 2. *Baltic Security and Defense*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4_10).

<sup>4</sup> Ekman, J. (2024). In the shadow of war: Public opinion in the Baltic states, 2014 and 2021. *Europe-Asia Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665241270812>.

<sup>5</sup> The 2025 survey was conducted in December 2025 as a nationally representative public opinion poll (n = 1010). Data collection was commissioned by the National Centre of Defence and Security Awareness (NCDSA) with support from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Baltic States (2024-2025), the Government Office of Estonia (2022-2023) and implemented by Turu-uuringute AS (CAWI method). Data were

## Mood, Safety, and Economic Anxiety

In 2022, at the shock of Russia's full-scale invasion, a majority of Estonian residents — regardless of their native language — reported heightened personal threat and anxiety. By 2023, something unexpected happened: morale briefly surged. Optimism about Estonia's future reached its highest point in the four-year series and community solidarity ticked upward. Trust in security and defence forces had also grown.

The degree to which indicators converged between ethnic Estonian and local Russian speakers makes the 2023 mobilisation peak analytically important because it demonstrates that the divide between Estonia's language groups is not a fixed cultural constant. The data do not permit a single causal attribution, but the pattern of convergence is consistent with three concurrent factors: credible communication reaching Russian-speaking audiences through various channels at a moment of genuine common purpose; the initial phase of wartime solidarity that briefly aligned both communities around Estonia's security posture; and the relatively favourable economic conditions of 2022–2023 compared to what followed. The subsequent reversal in 2024 was therefore not an inevitable return to baseline: it was a rupture, and the pattern points to structural causes beyond simple demobilisation. Comparative research across European states confirms that threat-driven surges in institutional confidence and solidarity are structurally temporary — deeper underlying orientations tend to return toward pre-crisis baselines as acute threat recedes and competing concerns reassert themselves.<sup>6</sup> This does not explain the full severity of the 2024 collapse in Estonia, which exceeded what normalisation alone would predict. But it provides essential context: the 2023 peak was partly a rally-under-threat, and some regression was always structurally probable. The same contextual sensitivity that enabled the 2023 convergence makes the subsequent collapse analytically tractable. What the data show is that the 2024 decline was

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weighted to the latest available population statistics. Surveys in 2022, 2023, and 2024 followed the same methodology, enabling longitudinal comparison. All findings are based on aggregated, harmonised, weighted data from the 2022–2025 waves. Unless otherwise noted, all percentage figures in this chapter are drawn directly from the NCDSA survey dataset across the 2022–2025 waves. Institutional trust emerges as the strongest and most stable predictor throughout, and the structural pathway linking perceived danger, trust, hope, and societal resilience remains consistent across linguistic and regional groups.

<sup>6</sup> Devine, D., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2024). Stability and change in political trust: Evidence and implications from six panel studies. *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(2), 478–497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12606>.

Johansson, B., Hopmann, D. N., & Shehata, A. (2021). When the rally-around-the-flag effect disappears, or: When the COVID-19 pandemic becomes “normalized.” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 31(sup1), 321–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1924742>.

Colloca, P., Roccato, M., & Russo, S. (2024). Rally 'round the flag effects are not for all: Trajectories of institutional trust among populist and non-populist voters. *Social Science Research*, 119, 102986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2024.102986>.

significantly steeper and more concentrated among the Russian-speaking residents than demobilisation alone would account for.

Between the 2023 and 2024 surveys, Russian-speaking respondents' confidence in Estonia's institutions fell sharply across every indicator. Government trust, security confidence, and national optimism each declined by roughly 11-25 percentage points within a single year — while equivalent Estonian-speaker figures held broadly steady. By 2024, the gap between the two ethnolinguistic groups on institutional trust had widened back to 2022 levels or beyond. The data do not establish a single cause, but three structural factors align with the timing: a sharp deterioration in socioeconomic circumstances specifically among Russian-speaking households; a policy environment increasingly perceived as adversarial — encompassing language legislation, denaturalisation debates, and monument removals; and the disruption of Russian-language information space through which a substantial share of this community had previously accessed communication about world news.

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*In 2024, more than 60% of Russian-speaking respondents described their financial situation as hard or very hard — a rate more than double that among ethnic Estonians, and double the same community's own rate in 2022. Regression analysis confirms that economic hardship is the strongest continuous predictor of institutional distrust, with each step down the financial security scale costing approximately half a scale point of government trust.*

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The mood recovered modestly in 2025: optimism about Estonia's future rose among Russian-speaking respondents to 49%, compared with 54% among ethnic Estonians. Attachment to Estonia as home remained strong in both ethnolinguistic groups — over 75% in each group said they did not intend to leave, one of the most stable findings in the entire series. Personal safety at home also improved. These are genuinely positive signals: the 2024 collapse has not hardened into permanent disengagement.

## Threat Perceptions

The overall sense of danger across Estonia has remained broadly stable over the four waves — fluctuating within a narrow band rather than escalating. This stability is analytically significant: it means the resilience changes observed after 2023 cannot be attributed to rising fear. Multivariate modelling consistently confirms that perceived danger exerts only a weak direct effect on societal resilience once institutional trust is included. The dominant pathway is indirect. Fear becomes destabilising not by itself, but when it coincides with weakened institutional credibility — and under conditions of high trust, the same threat level produces only modest optimism decline.<sup>7</sup> This is one of the most important structural insights of the four-wave series.

What the aggregate stability conceals is a meaningful divergence in the type of threat each ethnolinguistic group experiences as primary. For ethnic Estonians, the dominant concerns are security-related and existential: the war's proximity, the possibility of wider conflict. These have stabilised gradually as confidence in Estonia's defence posture and NATO commitments has consolidated. For local Russian-speaking respondents, socioeconomic threat consistently registered as the most pressing concern and had intensified sharply by 2024— nearly 60% rating economic hardship as a major personal threat, compared to around 30% among ethnic Estonians. This gap reflects genuine structural differences in income, employment sector, and exposure to energy price shocks.

Political threat perceptions among Russian speakers rose from 27% in 2022 to 43% in 2024 — the single sharpest upward movement in any threat category across the full dataset. This reflects the policy environment of 2023–2024: debates around denaturalisation, language requirements, restrictions on Russian-language media of foreign origins, monument removals, and other measures that scholars have described as desovietisation. These developments were directly visible and personally consequential for this ethnolinguistic group in a way they were not for ethnic Estonians. Research on the Baltic states has theorised this dynamic as the majority society's vicarious identification with Ukraine — a process of desovietisation

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<sup>7</sup> Chanley, V. A., Rudolph, T. J., & Rahn, W. M. (2000). The origins and consequences of public trust in government: A time series analysis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(3), 239–256. <https://doi.org/10.1086/317987>.

that is internally coherent as collective memory work, but that simultaneously signals adversarial intent to Russian-speaking minorities and contributes to their sense of political vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> A related body of scholarship has argued that securitising frames that treat Russian-speakers as a potential fifth column risk becoming self-fulfilling: policies designed to shore up security may generate the very disengagement and alienation they seek to prevent.<sup>9</sup>

Security threat is the one area of partial convergence: both ethnic Estonian and local Russian speakers show increased concern about safety and security in 2024 and 2025. Shared anxiety on this dimension coexists with sharply divergent threat on socioeconomic and political dimensions — a pattern that cautions against treating resilience as a single national metric. Ethnolinguistic communities can be simultaneously aligned on some risks and divided on others, and this divergence suggests that policy responses should address the specific threat configuration each group is experiencing.

## Community Resilience

Community-level resilience occupies a structurally distinct position within the Estonian resilience architecture. The three-level framework predicts that horizontal cohesion — rooted in repeated local interaction — should be less sensitive to short-term institutional fluctuations than vertical trust directed at public institutions.<sup>10</sup> The 2022–2025 data confirm this precisely: where institutional trust collapsed in 2024, community cohesion declined more moderately and has shown considerably greater stability across waves. The two are not interchangeable, and it would be analytically misleading to treat robust community ties as a substitute for weakened institutional credibility.<sup>11</sup> They are separate resources with different dynamics.

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<sup>8</sup> Budrytė, D. (2024). 'A decolonising moment of sorts': The Baltic states' vicarious identification with Ukraine and related domestic and foreign policy developments. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*. <https://cejiss.org/a-decolonising-moment-of-sorts>.

<sup>9</sup> Hoyle, A., Wagnsson, C., Ventsel, A., & Doosje, B. (2026). Identity through Discrimination? Responses by Russian Speakers in Estonia to Kremlin 'Russophobia' Narratives. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2026.2630898>.

Schulze, J. L., & Pupcenoks, J. (2025). Securitizing Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia: The frame-policy nexus before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Nationalities Papers*, 53(5), 1035–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.97>.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>11</sup> Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(1–2), 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6>.

Agreement that community members help one another reached its low point in 2024 for both ethnolinguistic groups, with Russian speakers showing the steeper decline.

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*By 2025, figures have partially recovered in both groups: 53% of ethnic Estonians and 37% of local Russian speakers agreed that people in their local community help and care for one another.*

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Community-level solidarity is more elastic than institutional trust — it can respond relatively quickly to improved socioeconomic circumstances and moderating anxiety. But the overall sample figure in 2025 (47%) remains considerably lower than in 2022 (58%), particularly among socioeconomically insecure respondents and in regions where institutional trust is structurally lower.

Ida-Viru county — the northeastern region with one of Estonia's largest concentrations of Russian-speaking residents — presents a more complex picture than simple characterisations as a trust deficit zone imply. By 2025, the government trust level among Russian-speaking respondents in Ida-Viru was not substantially different from the national Russian-speaker average, which remains comparatively low. What does distinguish the region is the behaviour of its ethnically Estonian residents, who form a local minority within the county but display unusually high institutional confidence, and the fact that Ida-Viru recorded the largest year-on-year improvement in willingness to cooperate with national government of any area in 2025. The region is not a single community — it is a place where two ethnolinguistic groups with very different institutional relationships live in close proximity, and both deserve specific attention.

One finding stands out for its resistance to change: residents' awareness of their own role in an emergency has remained low and flat for both groups across all four waves, hovering around 20% throughout. No event in the four-year period — not the shock of 2022, not the mobilisation of 2023 — has durably shifted this figure. Improving civic preparedness awareness requires sustained, embedded programming rather than episodic campaigns, and it remains a structural deficit in Estonia's resilience foundation.

## Trust, Preparedness, and Cooperation

Institutional trust is the load-bearing element of Estonia's resilience architecture. Factor analysis of the 2025 data confirms that trust in government, confidence in security and defence forces, and readiness to cooperate with national institutions move together as a single integrated construct — meaning the 2024 rupture was not a loss of government trust alone but a simultaneous fracture across the full civic engagement framework. They are not separable dimensions of attitude — they are expressions of an integrated civic orientation. When this orientation fractures, it fractures simultaneously across all its expressions.<sup>12</sup>

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*Among Russian-speaking respondents who feel unfairly treated in Estonia — a majority of that ethnolinguistic group in both 2024 and 2025 — government trust stands at 4%. Among those who do not feel unfairly treated, it stands at 28%. This 24-point within-group gap is one of the strongest associations in the dataset.*

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The perceived unfair treatment finding is analytically critical for two reasons. First, it shows that the language gap in trust is not culturally predetermined: Russian speakers who feel fairly treated express significantly higher institutional confidence. Second, it shows that trust is downstream of concrete experience. Institutional trust is not a fixed property of a group; it is a consequence of how people experience their relationship with the state. If that experience changes, the attitudes can change as well. The 2023 mobilisation peak — when local Russian-speaker optimism reached Estonian-speaker levels — demonstrates that this is not theoretical.

Crucially, the structural pathway linking institutional trust to hope and societal resilience operates identically across both ethnolinguistic groups. Estonian and local Russian speakers process institutional credibility in the same psychological sequence — the difference is not in the mechanism but in the starting point. This

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<sup>12</sup> Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 475–507.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2021). Building trust to reinforce democracy: Main findings from the 2021 OECD survey on drivers of trust in public institutions. *OECD Publishing*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en>.

Devine, D., Gaskell, J., Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2021). Trust and the coronavirus pandemic: What are the consequences of and for trust? *Political Studies Review*, 19(2), 274–285.

means the resilience gap is not a product of different civic values or incompatible orientations, but rather a product of different institutional experiences. This distinction is both analytically important and practically hopeful: a system where people have different values requires different policy responses for different groups; a system where people have the same values but different experiences requires a more equitable distribution of institutional responsiveness and policy benefits.

Cooperation willingness – the active readiness to work with institutions in a crisis – is somewhat more stable than trust itself, partly because it is anchored in local and community-level relationships that are more insulated from national policy signals. Willingness to cooperate with neighbours remains high across both ethnolinguistic groups in 2025 (77% of ethnic Estonians and 64% of local Russian speakers reported willingness to cooperate with neighbours during a crisis). Willingness to cooperate with national government remains lower (53% in 2025 among ethnic Estonians), particularly among Russian speakers, but has shown partial recovery: from 30% in 2024 to 35% in 2025 among local Russian speakers. The local level is the faster and more accessible point of re-entry for institutional relationship-building.

### **Hope, Belonging, and Future Outlooks**

One of the most stable findings across four years is also one of the most important: both ethnolinguistic groups overwhelmingly regard Estonia as their home and have no intention of leaving. More than 75% of both Estonian and Russian-speaking respondents affirmed this. Given that cross-border migration options exist for a meaningful share of this population, the persistence of this territorial commitment across four years of sustained external pressure, economic deterioration, and deepening institutional distrust is not a passive baseline – it is a structural resilience asset.

Optimism about Estonia's future tells a more nuanced story. After the 2023 peak – when Russian-speaker optimism briefly converged with that of ethnic Estonians around 67% – confidence fell sharply in 2024 before partially recovering. By 2025, approximately 49% of Russian-speaking respondents and 54% of Estonian-speaking

respondents expressed optimism about Estonia's future. The gap has narrowed from its 2024 nadir, though it has not returned to the near-parity of 2023. This recovery matters: it was not structurally guaranteed, and it confirms the system retains its capacity for restoration.

Hope operates differently at the personal and national levels, and this distinction is theoretically significant. Personal hope — the belief that one personally will emerge stronger from the current situation — has proven considerably more resilient than national optimism. Both ethnolinguistic groups maintain higher personal than national hope across all waves. This aligns with resilience research showing that individual self-efficacy tends to remain more stable under prolonged uncertainty, while collective efficacy assessments are more sensitive to institutional performance and contextual change.<sup>13</sup> It also matters for policy: individuals who retain personal hope are more likely to engage with opportunities for improvement when offered.

Civic identity functions as a resilience buffer: the pathway model predicts that identity strength should buffer against the decline in hope under institutional stress, and the 2025 data confirm this — and the 2025 figures on civic identity add an important and underreported dimension. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the sense that Estonian citizenship constitutes an important part of personal identity stood at 58% in 2023, fell to 49% during the 2024 institutional collapse, and recovered to 54% in 2025. This pattern is significant in two respects. First, it demonstrates that the collapse in institutional trust did not pull civic identity down with it: a group can lose confidence in government's decisions while maintaining its identification with the country itself. Second, the recovery in civic identification in 2025 is occurring concurrently with continued political tensions around various aspects of integration policies — evidence that the buffer mechanism is proving more durable than pessimistic accounts of majority-minority relations would predict.<sup>14</sup> Civic identity and institutional trust are not the same thing, and policy responses that conflate them risk dismantling the former in the attempt to rebuild the latter. Furthermore, when

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<sup>13</sup> Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–275.

Kimhi S. Levels of resilience: Associations among individual, community, and national resilience. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016;21(2):164–170. doi:10.1177/1359105314524009.

<sup>14</sup> Schulze, J. L., & Pupcenoks, J. (2025). Securitized Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia: The frame-policy nexus before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Nationalities Papers*, 53(5), 1035–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.97>.

asked to specify their identity using multiple choice, 80% of local Russian speakers selected identity categories indicating affiliation with Estonia — including ‘Russian-speaking Estonian’, ‘Estonia’s Russian’, and equivalent formulations — as distinct from categories expressing identification with Russia or another country.

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*This breadth of affiliation-oriented identity categories — chosen by roughly 80% of local Russian speakers — indicates that civic attachment to Estonia is considerably more widespread than the subset expressing optimism about institutional performance.*

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This matters because it identifies a resilience resource that is currently underused. Programming that builds on shared civic belonging — cultural participation, civic initiatives, integration activities centred on shared Estonian experience rather than language compliance — has a structural function in the pathway model that goes beyond social cohesion alone. Strengthening the civic identity buffer reduces the steepness of the trust-to-hope decline when institutional confidence is challenged. It does not substitute for institutional trust, but it insulates against its worst effects.

The belief that Estonia will emerge stronger from the current situation stands at approximately 37% among ethnic Estonians and around 16% among local Russian speakers in 2025 — a gap of more than 20 percentage points. Collective hope of this kind is not merely emotional: it affects cooperative behaviour, willingness to invest in shared goods, and readiness to engage in civic life. A social group without confidence in a shared future is, by the logic of hope theory, less likely to invest in it. Narrowing this gap requires progress on the upstream variables: institutional trust, socioeconomic security, and the perception of fair inclusion that makes a shared future feel genuinely available to everyone who lives here.

Self-efficacy — the belief that one’s future depends largely on one’s own choices — remains comparatively stable across the period, though with a modest downward adjustment after 2023. A clear majority in both ethnolinguistic groups continue to report strong personal agency. Overall agreement declines slightly from 80% in 2023 to 74% in 2024 and 72% in 2025, indicating moderation rather than erosion.

Among ethnic Estonians, agreement decreases from 82% in 2023 to 77% in 2024 and 75% in 2025, while disagreement remains low at 6% in 2025. Among local Russian speakers, the decline is somewhat more pronounced, from 74% in 2023 to 68% in 2024 and 67% in 2025, accompanied by a modest increase in disagreement from 8% to 15%. Despite this shift, a clear majority in both groups continues to believe that their future depends primarily on their own actions. Nevertheless, in late 2025, 35% of local Russian speakers and just 13% of ethnic Estonians disagreed that they have every opportunity for self-fulfilment in Estonia.

These results indicate that personal agency remains resilient even as national optimism moderates. The recalibration observed after 2023 therefore affects collective expectations more strongly than individual efficacy beliefs, reinforcing the broader finding that Estonia's resilience adjustment is concentrated at the societal level rather than in personal psychological functioning.

#### **Four Resilience Profiles**

Aggregate figures for 'ethnic Estonian' and 'local Russian speakers' are a necessary but insufficient lens. The population in 2025 is better understood through four empirically derived resilience profiles, produced by cluster analysis on the 2025 microdata across all four major dimensions — institutional trust, personal hope, community cohesion, and solidarity. These profiles cut across, though do not erase, the language divide.

The Resilient Mainstream (29%) is predominantly Estonian-speaking (88%), socioeconomically more secure, and sustains the headline indicators that make Estonia's aggregate resilience story look positive: mean institutional trust 3.77/5, strong personal hope, and continued community solidarity. Its stability is real but not guaranteed: socioeconomic deterioration or erosion of defence confidence could displace members toward other profiles. The cluster is also internally heterogeneous — it includes local Russian-speaking members with high institutional trust who are among the most analytically important residents in the dataset, demonstrating that trust is achievable across the language divide when the conditions support it.

The Pressured but Holding (29%) is another large cluster in 2025 alongside the Resilient Mainstream. Predominantly Estonian-speaking (81%) but with meaningful hardship exposure, this group combines moderate institutional trust (mean 2.94/5) with constrained community solidarity and declining personal hope. They are holding, but the margin is narrow. Their growth relative to the 2022 estimate (from approximately 25% to 29%) suggests that the pressures of the past three years have expanded the zone of precarity within the ethnic Estonian majority. Targeted socioeconomic stabilisation measures are as relevant to this group as to the groups with lower headline trust figures.

The Solidarity-Sceptics (23%) are ethnolinguistically mixed (60% Estonian, 40% local Russian-speakers), economically hard-pressed, and have decoupled personal wellbeing from civic orientation. Their distinctive signature is high community solidarity scores (mean 3.47/5) coexisting with very low institutional trust (mean 2.06/5) and near-collapsed personal hope (mean 1.81/5). This is not hostility to the state — it is resignation. They have functionally concluded that institutions do not serve their interests and have reorganised their lives accordingly. They are the hardest group to reach through conventional government communication precisely because they are not angry: the emotional register has moved past anger to disengagement.

The Disengaged Vulnerable (19%) are the highest-risk group for long-term resilience decline. This cluster has a mixed ethnolinguistic composition (55% ethnic Estonian, 45% local Russian speakers), high economic hardship, near-zero institutional trust (mean 1.54/5), low personal hope, and frozen community solidarity. This cluster's composition reflects the compounding of socioeconomic insecurity and political vulnerability that characterises the lower end of the local Russian-speaking income distribution. Reversing this orientation requires material change before civic investment: energy support, employment transition in the Ida-Viru context, and visible policy responsiveness to the specific grievances this community has consistently articulated across four survey waves.

Wave-specific clustering applied independently to each survey year reveals a consistent four-profile structure across 2022–2025, with meaningful shifts in relative cluster sizes. Table 1 confirms that in 2024 the Solidarity-Sceptics cluster was the

plurality profile (32%), indicating that the dominant public posture in that year was not institutional trust collapse but resigned disengagement alongside maintained community ties.

*Table 1. Cluster size (% of valid respondents) by wave 2022-2025.*

| Profile               | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Resilient Mainstream  | 35%  | 27%  | 30%  | 29%  |
| Pressured but Holding | 25%  | 26%  | 23%  | 29%  |
| Solidarity-Sceptics   | 24%  | 25%  | 32%  | 23%  |
| Disengaged Vulnerable | 16%  | 22%  | 15%  | 19%  |

## Conclusions

Estonia's resilience in 2025 was real, but it rests on structural foundations that the headline recovery figures do not fully surface. The question is whether it is distributed evenly enough to matter under pressure. The partial restoration of confidence among local Russian-speaking respondents remains fragile: it appears driven primarily by modest socioeconomic improvement, which means it can reverse if that improvement stalls under the combined pressures of ongoing defence spending demands, energy transition costs, and wage compression in the sectors where this social group is concentrated.

Estonia's resilience is genuine and its foundations remain intact: strong national attachment across major ethnolinguistic groups, recovering optimism, a civic identity among local Russian-speaking residents that survived the 2024 rupture, and community cohesion that has held through four years of sustained external pressure and accelerating domestic reforms. But a resilience architecture in which 29% of the population sustains the headline indicators while 19% have effectively withdrawn from the civic compact is structurally uneven. The task ahead is not to restore a pre-2022 status quo that never fully served all residents, but to build — through consistent fairness, predictable governance, material economic support, and genuine civic inclusion — the institutional trust that would make resilience genuinely collective and durable.

The structural pathway model, validated empirically across all four waves, offers a precise account of what happened and what can change it.<sup>15</sup> The 2024 collapse and 2025 partial recovery both follow the pathway precisely: socioeconomic insecurity amplified, then modestly relaxed, its pressure on the trust-to-hope transmission — with the 2025 figures confirming that the mechanism remains operative. The variables that determine outcomes are measurable. The policy implications are therefore not generic prescriptions but specific, sequenced interventions — and the most forward-looking of them concerns the cognitive infrastructure that the pathway requires.

Hope is the critical transmission variable between institutional trust and societal resilience. Yet hope, as the data consistently show, is more than a passive emotional register — it is the cognitive orientation that determines whether individuals and communities translate perceived security into anticipatory action or remain in a state of sustained endurance without forward investment.

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*What the 2022–2025 dataset cannot directly measure, but consistently implies, is the importance of future literacy as the competence that allows movement along the pathway under uncertainty: the capacity to use the future not as a source of anxiety to be managed, but as a resource through which present decisions and civic commitments can be oriented.*

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As the theoretical literature on futures literacy establishes, this capacity is learnable — a cognitive skill that allows individuals and communities to diversify their anticipatory repertoires, imagine plural futures, and act from that imagination rather than from fear.<sup>16</sup>

Evidence from Baltic fieldwork on resilience and future orientation points to an important asymmetry: where institutional trust is low, future-oriented cognitive agency can still be cultivated at the community level, making this pathway especially

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<sup>15</sup> Ploom, I., Veebel, V. (2026). Modelling and Measuring Resilience: Some Methodological Considerations in the Case of Estonia. In: Smaliukiene, R., Schultz, D., Giedraityte, V. (eds) Democratic Resilience in the Baltics, Vol. 2. *Baltic Security and Defense*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4_2)

<sup>16</sup> Miller, R. (Ed.) (2018). *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century*. UNESCO/Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351048002>

relevant for the *Solidarity-Sceptics* and *Pressured but Holding* clusters where community cohesion persists without institutional confidence.<sup>17</sup> The conceptual framework underlying this research is instructive: what it describes as "resistant futures" — the shift from passive resilience to forward-looking transformation — depends on what it calls "synchronised life strategies" encompassing simultaneously remembering, survival, endurance, and development.<sup>18</sup> This framing identifies precisely where the endurance–action gap tends to open: when communities have accumulated the coping dimension of resilience without the development orientation that allows them to imagine and invest in what comes next. The three layers of social cohesion identified in this research — geopolitical belonging, economic fair distribution, and everyday social trust through dialogue — map directly onto the chapter's three analytical levels, and suggest that future literacy is not a supplement to the resilience architecture but a condition of its durability under sustained pressure.

Incorporating a future literacy module into subsequent survey waves — alongside the existing hope, self-efficacy, and threat-perception items — would allow direct testing of whether anticipatory capacity moderates the hope-to-resilience transmission. That investment in measurement also points to the policy direction: curricula, civic programming, and communication frameworks designed for a society that must sustain resilience not through acute mobilisation but through the durable, forward-oriented practice of a citizenry that has genuinely learned to imagine and invest in the country it shares.

The most actionable diagnostic finding is also the most precisely bounded: perceived fairness is not a communication problem susceptible to reframing; it is a structural resilience variable that responds to the actual distribution of policy burdens and benefits. Formal interaction modelling confirms that the trust penalty associated with unfair treatment perceptions is substantial across both language groups, and that moving Russian-speaking respondents out of the near-universal unfairness perception into the range where fair treatment generates trust gains is among the

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<sup>17</sup> Teperik, D., Denisa-Liepniece, S., & Bankauskaitė, D. (2025). *GLUED: Linking Resilience and Youth Futures in the Baltics*. National Centre of Defence & Security Awareness, Tallinn. ISBN 978-9908-9709-1-2. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12470.77125>.

<sup>18</sup> Teperik, D., & Denisa-Liepniece, S. (2024). *Baltic Youth Resilience: Preparing the Next Generations for Resistant Futures*. National Centre of Defence & Security Awareness, Tallinn. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12033.11366>.

highest-leverage interventions available. The 2023 mobilisation peak demonstrates that the institutional trust gap is not predetermined. Convergence is structurally achievable. The question is whether the policy conditions that made it possible in 2023 can be reconstructed and sustained.

The 2023 mobilisation surge was structurally unlikely to persist — acute collective mobilisation under shared-threat conditions is not a sustainable foundation for resilience. Attempting to recreate that intensity through escalatory communication risks cyclical credibility loss when the emergency register proves unsustainable. Government communication should instead convey strategic patience and institutional competence: Estonia is managing a prolonged and demanding situation within an architecture that retains democratic accountability even as it faces serious distributional challenges.<sup>19</sup> This shift from crisis escalation to managed endurance is more accurate, more sustainable, and — when communicated credibly — more likely to rebuild the institutional confidence that societal resilience requires over the medium term.

Anchoring defence spending trajectories, energy pricing mechanisms, tax reforms, and social protection adjustments in multi-year plans with clearly communicated logic — and maintaining them consistently rather than revising them in response to short-term political pressures — reduces the anticipatory uncertainty that compounds economic insecurity. This is especially consequential for social groups concentrated in sectors with limited employment mobility, where economic hardship and institutional distrust already compound to produce near-zero confidence at the lower end of the income distribution.

Local government trust and cooperation intention have recovered faster than national-level equivalents across all groups. Local institutions are closer, more accountable, and more directly visible in daily life. Strengthening local governance capacity and funding civil society organisations operating at neighbourhood level are likely to generate greater trust returns per euro invested than equivalent investment in national-level communications campaigns.

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<sup>19</sup> Teperik, D. (2023). *The BEACON model for resilience building in the Baltics: Key lessons to learn from Ukraine* (The Rīga Conference Policy Brief). Latvian Transatlantic Organisation. [https://rigaconference.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/LATO\\_Broshura\\_5\\_2023\\_Teperik-WEB.pdf](https://rigaconference.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/LATO_Broshura_5_2023_Teperik-WEB.pdf)

Civic identification with Estonia is an underused resilience resource that has proven more durable than institutional trust through the 2024 rupture. The pathway model confirms that identity strength buffers the trust-to-hope decline during institutional crises. Policies that exclusively frame integration as language acquisition and compliance risk eroding a buffer that took years to build. Programming centred on shared civic participation, cultural exchange, and joint public life — alongside language support — strengthens that buffer while respecting the demonstrated reality that attachment to Estonia as a civic community is already present and does not require construction from scratch.

# LATVIA

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## Introduction

This chapter tracks how public attitudes have changed across three survey waves (2023, 2024, 2025), what drove those shifts, and what they reveal about Latvia's resilience trajectory.<sup>20</sup> Latvia's resilience landscape in late 2025 was defined not by recovery but by uneven adaptation, with household-level stabilisation alongside fragile collective confidence. The continued war in Ukraine, the after-effects of a severe inflation shock, and persistent uncertainty about Europe's security environment had all left their mark on public mood in Latvia. By the time the 2025 survey was conducted, everyday economic conditions had become less acute than during the peak cost-of-living period, and many residents had restored a degree of personal routine and control. Although this stabilisation had not yet fully extended to the community and institutional levels, the 2025 survey highlights clear opportunities for strengthening Latvia's resilience. This could be achieved by renewing community solidarity, developing civic preparedness further, and strengthening trust in representative political institutions.

The 2023 peak of the cost-of-living crisis had passed, but household financial security had not fully returned: roughly one third of respondents continued to report difficulty managing household expenses.<sup>21</sup> Political confidence remained depressed: in autumn 2025, pessimism and anger dominated public sentiment toward the government, with satisfaction reported by only 4% of respondents.<sup>22</sup> Both dynamics — the incomplete individual recovery and the persistent political crisis frame — run through every finding that follows. What Latvia's data demonstrate is that private adaptation can advance even when institutional trust is low, but this decoupling is inherently fragile:

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<sup>20</sup> The surveys were initiated by the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO) and conducted by the research company Bergs, with support from the State Chancellery of the Republic of Latvia. Unless otherwise noted, all percentage figures in this chapter are drawn directly from the three-wave LATO/Bergs survey dataset (2023–2025).

<sup>21</sup> Bergs. Latvijas sabiedrības noturības mērījums. November/December 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Figure draws on SKDS survey data as reported. Latkovskis, B. (2025, October 9). *SKDS aptauja: Silīņas valdības reitingi krītas – kas tālāk?* NRA.lv. <https://nra.lv/neatkariga/komentari/bens-latkovskis/503736-skds-aptauja-silinas-valdibas-reitingi-kritas-kas-talak.htm>.

individual resilience built without community and institutional support remains vulnerable to renewed shocks.

### **Mood, Safety, and Economic Anxiety**

Latvia entered the 2025 survey period in a state the data characterise as stabilised but not reassured. The acute disruption of 2022–2023 — the shock of a neighbouring war combined with a cost-of-living crisis that compressed household finances sharply — had given way to something more durable and more complex: a normalised crisis frame in which insecurity had become routine rather than acute.

The most precise indicator of this transition is the trajectory of perceived crisis depth. In 2025, 71% of respondents agreed that Latvia was undergoing a serious crisis — a small decline from 75% recorded in both 2024 and 2023, but still a clear majority. The perception of being in crisis had weakened modestly without dissolving. This is analytically significant: normalisation is occurring, but the underlying conditions that generate the crisis frame have not been resolved.

The personal safety picture is more reassuring. In 2025, 54% of respondents felt that life in Latvia was safe — a figure broadly stable from 2024. Personal home safety improved over the three-wave period. These positive signals at the individual level coexist, however, with a more troubled collective assessment: 54% regarded the Latvian state itself as rather unsafe. The divergence between how people feel in their homes and how they assess the country's strategic position is one of Latvia's most consistent findings across all three survey waves.

Economic anxiety has followed a meaningful trajectory. Latvia's 2023 inflation shock was severe: energy prices, food costs, and household expenditure compressed simultaneously against stagnating wages. By 2025, wages had risen and inflation had moderated from its peak, and the improvement is visible in the data — more respondents assessed their financial situation and everyday life positively, and a somewhat higher share reported confidence in their ability to manage household expenses over the following six months. Yet this improvement remained partial. Overall, 61% of respondents continued to report some level of insecurity in the current societal situation: 43% felt a sense of insecurity and 18% reported serious insecurity,

while only 24% indicated the situation caused them no such feelings. These figures are essentially unchanged from 2023 and 2024, indicating that the moderation in acute economic stress has not translated into a broader sense of security.

At the individual level, the three-wave trajectory shows a meaningful and consistent improvement. Compared with the acute disruption of 2023, more residents in 2025 reported managing household expenses with greater confidence, assessed their everyday lives and work positively, and saw opportunities for personal self-realisation — a recovery of personal agency after the compression of the inflation shock.

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*Home attachment remained strong and stable throughout the period: a clear majority of respondents continued to regard Latvia as their home with no intention of leaving, a finding that has proven resistant to the pressures of war, economic hardship, and institutional distrust alike.*

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These individual-level gains are the most encouraging feature of Latvia's 2023–2025 data and represent a genuine resilience resource — one that has not yet been matched at the community and institutional levels.

The central pattern emerging from Latvia's resilience story is therefore not one of stagnation, but of gradual and differentiated adaptation. Private resilience has strengthened, as people have adjusted, restored household routines, and recovered a degree of personal agency. While concerns about the broader strategic, economic, and political consequences of the prolonged situation remain, these concerns coexist with clear evidence of practical coping and renewed everyday stability. In this context, resilience is not a static concept; it is present and evolving, with individual-level adaptation offering a vital foundation for strengthening community and institutional resilience in the future.

## Threat Perceptions

The overall threat landscape in Latvia has not changed dramatically between 2023 and 2025. What has occurred is a recalibration: the profile of perceived threats has shifted even as the general level of anxiety has remained elevated.

The war in Ukraine continues to structure public fears, but not all threat dimensions move in the same direction. The dominant concern in 2025 remained financial: 57% of respondents reported being worried to a high or very high degree that Latvia would suffer financial damage because of Russia's war in Ukraine. More existential fears registered considerably lower. Only 31% believed Latvia's statehood was endangered by the war to a high or very high degree; 23% felt their own lives were in danger to that extent; and concerns for the lives of family members were even more diffuse, with nearly half reporting that the war threatened them only a little or not at all. This hierarchy is consistent across the three waves and suggests that Latvians interpret the war primarily through indirect systemic pressures — economic costs, political disruption, geopolitical uncertainty — rather than through immediate personal danger.

The pattern of personal threat perceptions reinforces this reading. By 2025, political threat had become the strongest threat category, narrowly ahead of economic difficulty, while climate-related threat remained the weakest. Political threat was identified as the principal source of insecurity by 31% of respondents in 2025, compared with 27% in 2024 and 28% in 2023. Concern about economic hardship, though still significant, declined over the same period: from 40% in 2023 to 38% in 2024 to 30% in 2025. Climate change remained the least salient threat category, with more than half of respondents reporting no sense of threat from it in each wave (43% in 2023, 46% in 2024, 54% in 2025).

The shift from economic to political threat as the leading concern is not incidental. Latvia's 2023 inflation shock made material hardship the unavoidable centre of public anxiety. By late 2025, wage growth and moderated inflation had eased the acute cost-of-living pressure, reducing the share prioritising economic threat. Part of the resulting anxiety appears to have migrated toward a more political register: distrust in decision-making, uncertainty about state performance, and concern about the

broader direction of the country. Geopolitical developments in 2025 likely contributed to this shift alongside domestic political pressures. The survey does not establish causation, but the parallel movement of improved household confidence and still-elevated political unease is consistent with this interpretation.

Rather than desensitisation, the data reveal war fatigue under conditions of routine adaptation. Latvians have partially stabilised their private lives, but they have not become meaningfully less worried about the cumulative strategic and political consequences of a prolonged situation. This distinction matters in a country that has consistently maintained strong public support for Ukraine and sustained its defence mobilisation: resilience here is not the same thing as reassurance.

### **Community Resilience**

Community-level resilience occupies a structurally distinct position within the Latvian resilience architecture. The three-level framework predicts that horizontal cohesion — rooted in repeated local interaction — should be less sensitive to short-term institutional fluctuations than vertical trust directed at public institutions.<sup>23</sup> Latvia's 2023–2025 data complicate this prediction: community cohesion has declined across the period and is not functioning as a stable buffer between household-level adaptation and formal crisis response.

In 2025, only 33% of respondents agreed that people in their community help and care for one another — a decline from 35% in 2024 and 42% in 2023. Confidence that community members can be relied upon in a crisis was lower still: only 31% agreed with this proposition, while 37% disagreed. These are not indicators of social breakdown, but they are weak for a society living under prolonged geopolitical pressure and sustained economic stress. The community layer is not yet functioning as a sufficiently robust buffer between household resilience and formal crisis response.

The pattern becomes more serious when attention shifts from social atmosphere to functional readiness. In late 2025, 44% disagreed that good relations existed between

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<sup>23</sup> Kimhi, S. (2016). Levels of resilience: Associations among individual, community, and national resilience. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(2), 164–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105314524009>.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

different groups in their community, 58% disagreed that residents were aware of their roles in an emergency, and 64% disagreed that their community was prepared for an emergency. The last two indicators are especially significant because they concern actionable capacity rather than sentiment. A society can remain cautious and even pessimistic yet still be resilient if local roles, routines, communication channels, and expectations are clearly defined. Latvia's data suggest that this operational layer remains underdeveloped.

Community resilience is understood in the research literature as a process linking adaptive capacities, relational resources such as community networks, information and communication sharing, and community competence as core components of effective response.<sup>24</sup> Perceived preparedness and collective efficacy are recognised as central dimensions of community resilience alongside local leadership and place-based attachment.<sup>25</sup> Latvia's weakest 2025 indicators are precisely those that depend on a community perceiving itself as organised, informed, and capable of coordinated action.

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*The issue is therefore not only whether neighbours are willing to behave decently toward one another; it is whether residents perceive their locality as a functioning crisis environment with understandable roles and usable channels of action.*

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The cognitive dimension further supports this conclusion. Protective action depends not only on awareness of threat but on whether people can interpret relevant signals correctly and identify realistic response options. If most respondents report that residents do not know their role in an emergency and that the community is not prepared, this reflects an absence of the cognitive maps that translate concern into

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<sup>24</sup> Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(1-2), 127-150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6>.

Cutter, S. L., Barnes, L., Berry, M., Burton, C., Evans, E., Tate, E., & Webb, J. (2008). A place-based model for understanding community resilience to natural disasters. *Global Environmental Change*, 18(4), 598-606. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2008.07.013>.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, O., Leykin, D., Lahad, M., Goldberg, A., & Aharonson-Daniel, L. (2013). The conjoint community resiliency assessment measure as a baseline for profiling and predicting community resilience for emergencies. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 80(9), 1732-1741. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2012.12.009>.

coordinated behaviour — a deficit in coping capacity rather than merely pessimistic mood.

Research grounded in the social identity approach shows that supportive behaviour in emergencies becomes more effective when people share a sense of common fate and membership; under such conditions, collective efficacy rises and support observed in the community is more likely to be converted into support provided.<sup>26</sup> Latvia's modest mutual assistance scores and poor evaluations of inter-group relations suggest that the transition from co-presence to coordinated collective agency is not occurring with sufficient strength. Communities may endure stress, but they are not yet widely experienced as psychologically coherent actors capable of mobilising under pressure.

This is not exceptional by European standards. A 2024 European Commission survey found that nearly two-thirds of EU citizens felt they needed more information to prepare for emergencies, while more than one third reported difficulty finding relevant information from authorities.<sup>27</sup> The EU's 2025 Preparedness Union Strategy responds to this gap by emphasising a whole-of-society approach, early warning systems, school-based preparedness, and minimum 72-hour self-sufficiency.<sup>28</sup> In this context, Latvia's comprehensive national defence framework — developed systematically since 2018 through civil-military cooperation mechanisms and public preparedness initiatives — positions the country comparatively well within the European Union. The challenge that remains is specifically at the community interface: between the household and the municipality, between concern and practical role knowledge, and between living near one another and being able to act together.

Therefore, the conclusion is not that community resilience in Latvia is absent, nor that national preparedness efforts are insignificant. Rather, the 2025 data suggest that Latvia has a solid foundation on which to build, although there is still

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<sup>26</sup> Drury, J. (2018). The role of social identity processes in mass emergency behaviour: An integrative review. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 29(1), 38–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2018.1471948>.

Gvineria, S., Bankauskaite, D., Struberga, S., Nazarov, M., & Teperik, D. (2026). Exploring Interdependencies Between Identity and Resilience: Lessons from the War in Ukraine for the Baltic States. In: Smaliukiene, R., Schultz, D., Giedraityte, V. (eds) *Democratic Resilience in the Baltics*, Vol. 2. *Baltic Security and Defense*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10146-4_10).

<sup>27</sup> European Commission (2024). *Special Eurobarometer: Disaster risk awareness and preparedness of the EU population*. Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3228>.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission. *EU Preparedness Union Strategy: Getting Ready to Respond to Crises*. 23 May 2025. [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/preparedness\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/preparedness_en).

considerable scope for further consolidation at the local social and operational levels. A reserve of solidarity is already present, and the next step is to translate this more consistently into shared preparedness, clearer roles, stronger inter-group trust and a greater sense of collective competence. The key development priority highlighted by the 2025 findings is not so much recognising threats as further embedding community resilience at the interface between households, municipalities, and the national preparedness system. Most importantly, this highlights the need to reinforce the civic norm that security is a joint responsibility of society and the state.

### **Trust, Preparedness, and Cooperation**

Institutional trust continues to play a central coordinating role in Latvia's resilience architecture. The 2025 data highlight an important dynamic: although vertical trust is more limited, there is a strong willingness to cooperate horizontally. This combination indicates both existing structural challenges and a significant reservoir of societal strength that could be mobilised to further reinforce Latvia's resilience.

At the level of national political institutions, confidence remains severely constrained. In 2025, only 17% of respondents agreed that the government makes the right decisions in a crisis; 57% rejected the proposition that Latvian society supports government and prime-ministerial decisions during a national crisis; and 60% disagreed that the government could successfully handle a multidimensional crisis. This is not a marginal problem. Societal resilience depends not only on the material resources of the state but on whether the public believes that crisis authority is competent and legitimate enough to coordinate collective action. In Easton's framework, political support operates at different levels of generality; subsequent research confirms that trust in specific institutions is shaped by perceived performance and responsiveness rather than by stable inherited dispositions alone.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Easton, D. (1975). A re-assessment of the concept of political support. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5(4), 435–457. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400008309>.

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*In 2025, 74% of respondents expressed distrust in the Saeima and 66% expressed distrust in the government.*

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The distribution of trust across institutions reveals a pronounced asymmetry. Latvia's protective institutions retain considerably more credibility than its representative-political ones. In 2025, 62% of respondents expressed trust in the police and 56% in the president. Civitta's parallel research, using a different methodology, records trust in the National Armed Forces at 62% and in the State Police at 55% – broadly consistent with the Bergs findings despite the differing survey instruments.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the Saeima faced distrust from 74% of respondents and the government from 66%. Parliamentary trust has followed a long-term deteriorating trajectory: where surveys conducted after the 2003 and 2012 elections recorded modest surges of public enthusiasm, the last three electoral cycles have generated no comparable sense of renewal, and in 2025, 66% of respondents believed the current parliament was not performing better than its predecessors – up from 63% in 2022 and 48% in 2018.<sup>31</sup> This points not simply to dissatisfaction but to a legitimacy deficit in crisis governance. Research on legitimacy and cooperation shows that willingness to comply with and assist authorities depends not only on formal authority, but on whether that authority is perceived as rightful, competent, and trustworthy.<sup>32</sup>

Protective institutions retain enough credibility to sustain short-term compliance and emergency response. Representative-political institutions do not command the same confidence when crisis management requires long time horizons, sustained sacrifice, or politically costly decisions. This asymmetry is a precarious foundation for protracted crises of the kind the current security environment makes likely.

Yet Latvia is not a society without cooperative reserves. Willingness to work with neighbours, colleagues, and fellow residents remains relatively high. In 2025, 66% of respondents were ready to cooperate with neighbours during a crisis, 71% with colleagues, and 77% with people in their area of residence. Cooperation with all

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<sup>30</sup> Civitta. Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību. Pētījuma rezultātu prezentācija. August 2024. NEPLP. <https://www.neplp.lv/lv/media/8772/download?attachment>

<sup>31</sup> Latkovskis, B. (2025, October 9). *SKDS aptauja: Silīnas valdības reitingi krītas – kas tālāk?* NRA.lv. <https://nra.lv/neatkariga/komentari/bens-latkovskis/503736-skds-aptauja-silinas-valdibas-reitingi-kritas-kas-talak.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Tyler, T. R., & Nobo, C. (2023). *Legitimacy-Based Policing and the Promotion of Community Vitality*. Cambridge University Press.

Latvian residents remained at 61% and with local municipalities at 51%. A pronounced drop-off appears only when the counterpart becomes the national government, where 36% were explicitly unwilling to cooperate. The social basis for resilience exists, but it is located in proximate and practical networks rather than in confidence in central political authority.

This cooperative willingness is not matched by equally strong interpersonal trust. In the same survey, only 48% reported full trust in people with whom they live, 35% in colleagues, and only 28% fully trusted their neighbours, while 21% expressed complete distrust toward neighbours. Generalised social trust remains thin: in 2024, 40% said most people can generally be trusted while 43% said the opposite; in 2023 the balance was even more negative, at 37% versus 48%. People in Latvia remain willing to act together in practical settings, but this willingness is not underpinned by deep generalised trust.

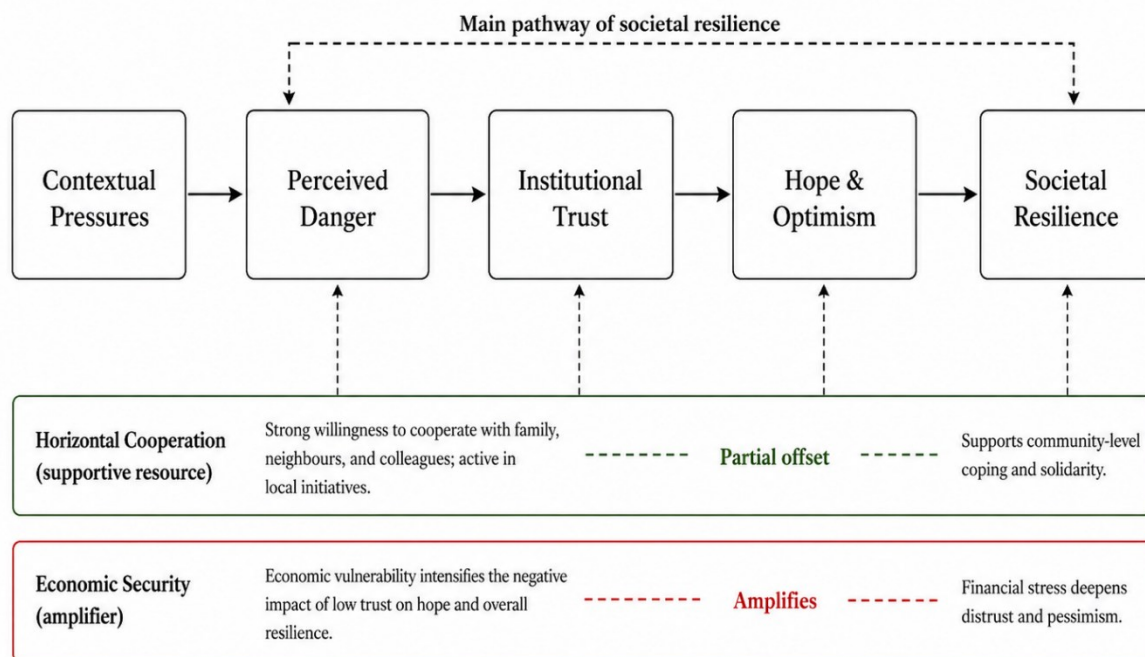
Taken together with the community resilience indicators, this picture becomes more consequential. The community resilience indicators documented above compound this picture: the absence of operational preparedness and role clarity means that Latvia's horizontal cooperative willingness has no social infrastructure through which to operate. Latvia's difficulty is therefore not simply low trust in politicians or a negative public mood. The deeper structural problem is that horizontal cooperation, vertical trust, and operational preparedness are not being effectively connected. Existing cooperative willingness is real but is not yet consistently translated into shared action, role clarity, or confidence that governance institutions can organise collective response.

Political trust research is clear that distrust should not be viewed as a fixed cultural constant. It responds to institutional performance and responsiveness, and it can improve when those conditions are consistently met.<sup>33</sup> Latvia's trust architecture is asymmetric: protective institutions — police, armed forces, president — command substantially more public confidence than representative-political institutions, because they are evaluated on proximate performance rather than on party-political grounds. This asymmetry is not cultural permanence; it is a record of perceived

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<sup>33</sup> Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 475–507. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475>.

institutional performance, and it can change. The strategic question is not how to increase trust in the abstract, but how to build institutional arrangements that make existing cooperative willingness visible, connect it to practical crisis roles, and demonstrate that national authority can coordinate collective response in a fair and competent manner.



Note: Solid arrows indicate the main causal pathway; dashed arrows indicate moderating or amplifying influences.

Figure 2. Structural dynamics of Latvia's resilience architecture (2025).

## Conclusions

Latvia's resilience trajectory between 2023 and 2025 is best characterised as uneven adaptation. Latvia's data trace a coherent pattern: the 2023 inflation shock amplified the decline in institutional trust, compressing public optimism and collective confidence. By 2025, the partial easing of economic pressure had allowed individual-level assessments to recover — but without the improvement in trust that would be needed for collective confidence to follow. This pattern is consistent with what the data show across all three waves: individual resilience has moved in the direction of recovery, while community and institutional confidence have not.

The evidence is clear on where resilience is genuine and where it remains structurally fragile. Individual adaptation has advanced meaningfully over the three-wave period. Place attachment is strong and has not weakened under sustained pressure. Cooperative willingness in proximate networks – neighbours, colleagues, local community – remains available as a latent resource. These are the foundations on which collective resilience can be built.

The structural vulnerabilities are equally clear. Trust in parliament and government stands near the lowest levels in the regional dataset. Community mutual assistance, preparedness, and role clarity have declined rather than recovered. The gap between cooperative willingness and operational preparedness means that Latvia's existing social capital is not being effectively channelled into crisis-ready behaviour. Political trust research is unambiguous that this is not a fixed condition: institutional trust responds to performance, transparency, and perceived fairness, and it can improve when those conditions are met consistently over time.

Three policy implications follow from the resilience analysis. First, institutional trust requires rebuilding through demonstrated performance rather than communication. The data show that Latvia's trust deficit is institution-specific: protective institutions retain credibility because they are perceived as effective in supporting people's everyday needs and challenges. The same logic applies to representative-political institutions: sustained transparency in decision-making, clear public explanation of difficult choices, and visible accountability when commitments are revised or delayed would address the performance-driven nature of the deficit more directly than reputational messaging alone.

Second, resilience policy should invest deliberately in bridging the gap between household adaptation and community organisation. The survey reveals that Latvia has the resilience resources, but lacks stronger connections between individual agency, community solidarity and the legitimacy of national institutions. Investing in intergroup dialogue, local civic projects, and community-level cooperation mechanisms that link social trust to practical problem-solving – rather than abstract cohesion promotion – would address the specific gap the data identify. The strategic objective is not to generate new resilience from the top down, but to make existing cooperative willingness visible, structured, and crisis-relevant.

Third, civic preparedness culture requires sustained investment. Awareness of threats is high; the deficit lies in the transition from awareness to a sense of personal duty to act. The comprehensive national defence system provides the institutional framework, but the preparedness culture that would give it social depth — the internalised norm that security is co-produced by society rather than only provided by the state — requires sustained embedding through education, visible role models, and consistent public communication. This direction is already present in Latvian policy; the 2025 data indicate that it requires intensification and deeper community-level embedding to close the gap between institutional architecture and public readiness.

Latvia's resilience in 2025 is built on a solid and promising, albeit uneven, foundation. The adaptation of individuals and households under sustained pressure is a significant achievement, demonstrating society's capacity to adjust, endure and maintain agency in difficult conditions. The next phase of resilience policy should build on this by strengthening institutional trust, community cohesion and a shared culture of preparedness, so that individual adaptation becomes more firmly embedded in collective resilience.

The practical challenge is clear: in the event of a future crisis, a Latvian resident willing to cooperate with neighbours must know what this cooperation entails, have confidence in the municipality's ability to coordinate it, and trust that the national government has established a reliable framework within which local action can be taken. While the 2025 data suggest that these connections are still developing, they also point to clear opportunities for improvement. Therefore, strengthening the link between citizens' willingness to cooperate, municipal coordination, and national preparedness should be a central priority for the next stage of Latvia's resilience policy.

# LITHUANIA

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## Introduction

For four consecutive years (2022–2025), the Faculty of Communication at Vilnius University has tracked societal resilience in Lithuania. The research explored how individuals, communities, and society as a whole perceive and respond to critical security situations and threats stemming from Russia's war against Ukraine. This chapter draws on those surveys to highlight shifts in public perceptions and emerging trends under conditions of prolonged geopolitical and economic pressure.<sup>34</sup>

Lithuania's societal resilience between 2022 and 2025 reflects adaptation to sustained uncertainty rather than escalating crisis. Despite Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and persistent security concerns, public assessments of daily life remained broadly positive throughout. At the same time, perceptions of crisis persisted at moderate levels, accompanied by growing ambivalence and cautious expectations. The period was also marked by strong economic performance: wages and pensions rose faster than the cost of living, and energy prices remained comparatively low – circumstances that distinguish Lithuania's trajectory from those of its Baltic neighbours.<sup>35</sup>

The chapter examines resilience across individual, community, and societal levels, tracing changes in personal wellbeing, threat perception, community preparedness, institutional trust, and future outlook. The findings reveal a consistent and analytically important pattern: strong individual endurance alongside more constrained collective mobilisation capacity. Citizens continue to cope, adapt, and remain firmly attached to

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<sup>34</sup> The surveys were conducted annually by the Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University, using nationally representative samples across four waves (2022, 2023, 2024, 2025). Unless otherwise noted, all percentage figures cited in this chapter are drawn from the Vilnius University Societal Resilience Survey dataset (2022–2025).

<sup>35</sup> Wrangé, J., Bengtsson, R., & Brommesson, D. (2024). Resilience through total defence: Towards a shared security culture in the Nordic-Baltic region? *European Journal of International Security*, 9(4), 511–532. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2024.15>.

the country; this does not, however, automatically translate into stronger institutional confidence or greater readiness for coordinated collective action.<sup>36</sup>

The 2025 public opinion survey indicates that society is experiencing a sense of crisis – 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Lithuania was in crisis, while 24% disagreed; the largest single group – 30% – neither agreed nor disagreed. Rather than consensus, this preponderance of uncertainty reduces the strength of the overall sense of crisis, reflecting the normalised character of the situation. The 2025 survey was conducted against a rapidly evolving security environment shaped by Russia's war against Ukraine and actions by other authoritarian regimes, alongside the political and military escalation in the Middle East and associated geopolitical realignments. Respondents thus navigated a multi-vector threat landscape in which acute emergency had given way to sustained, diffuse pressure.

### **Mood, Satisfaction, and Personal Agency**

Across the four survey waves, individual resilience in Lithuania remained strong. Positive evaluations of daily life stood at approximately 85% in late 2025, a figure that has held broadly stable throughout the period. This is one of the most consistent findings in the dataset, suggesting that personal functioning has not deteriorated under sustained external pressure.

The texture of that positivity has nonetheless shifted. Between 2023 and 2025, the proportion of respondents reporting their mood as good or very good fell from 52% to 46%, while those selecting moderate categories rose from 40% to 44%. Rates of clear dissatisfaction remained stable at around 8%. The pattern is one of cautious adaptation rather than deterioration: fewer respondents express straightforward contentment, more have settled into a measured middle ground, and the floor of genuine distress has not risen.

Daily life satisfaction confirms this trajectory – in 2023, a combined 45% expressed clear contentment with their lives; by 2025, this figure had increased to 52%, with 41%

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<sup>36</sup> Béné, C., Wood, R. G., Newsham, A., & Davies, M. (2012). Resilience: New utopia or new tyranny? Reflection about the potentials and limits of the concept of resilience in relation to vulnerability reduction programmes. *IDS Working Papers*, 2012(405), 1–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2012.00405.x>

Keck, M., & Sakdapolrak, P. (2013). What is social resilience? Lessons learned and ways forward. *Erdkunde*, 67(1), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2013.01.02>

describing daily life as good and 11% as very good. These are meaningful improvements even as emotional enthusiasm has moderated.

Emotional resilience, assessed by the ability to maintain a positive mood despite problems, has remained stable throughout four years of surveys. In 2023, 47% of respondents reported having this capacity, and in 2025, this figure was 46%. The modest change in mood over the four years of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the remarkable stability of Lithuanian society in maintaining a positive outlook. The absence of major economic disruption or political stress during this period should also be noted. It suggests that while the intensity of positive feeling has softened, the underlying coping resource has not eroded. At the same time, roughly 20–25% of the population only sometimes or only partly manage to maintain emotional equilibrium under difficulty, indicating a persistent minority who remain more vulnerable to stress and whose psychological support needs should inform policy.

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*Personal agency – the belief that one's future depends largely on one's own choices – registers among the highest scores in the Lithuanian dataset. In late 2025, 58% of respondents agreed that their future depends largely on their own choices, reflecting a solid internal sense of control.*

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Views on opportunities for self-realisation were more restrained: only 46% agreed they had full opportunities for self-expression and realisation in Lithuania – a noticeably lower share, pointing to a gap between personal efficacy beliefs and perceived structural opportunity.

Civic engagement data show a similar cautious orientation. In late 2025, 44% of respondents believed that people in Lithuania can actively express their views to influence change, while 39% believed they actually do. A substantial share in each case – 24% and 28% respectively – chose a moderate middle position. This ambivalence signals conditional rather than absent civic confidence: respondents acknowledge the capacity for civic expression in principle while remaining uncertain about its practical effectiveness in their lives.

A separate dimension worth noting is the perception of societal inclusiveness. In late 2025, around 80% of respondents agreed that certain groups in Lithuania are viewed unfavourably by society, with more than half expressing clear agreement. Yet a striking reversal appears when the question becomes personal: 64% rejected the idea that they themselves belong to an unfavourably treated group, while 29% reported feeling personally affected. This perception gap — widespread acknowledgement of prejudice combined with limited personal identification with it — points to a tendency to externalise social exclusion, seeing it as something that affects others rather than oneself. The 29% who do feel personally marginalised represent a significant minority whose sense of civic belonging warrants sustained policy attention.

### **Threat Perceptions**

The overall threat landscape in Lithuania has undergone meaningful recalibration between 2022 and 2025, even as the general level of concern has remained elevated. This recalibration follows two distinct tracks: declining perceived danger at the personal level alongside stable awareness of national vulnerability, and a pronounced shift in the composition of personal threat from economic to political and information risks.

Personal and family safety perceptions improved markedly over the period. The share of respondents reporting that their own life was "not at all" in danger rose from 14% in 2023 to 35% in 2025. For family safety, the equivalent figure increased from 14% to 28%. This convergence suggests active adaptation — what comparative research on psychological responses to prolonged conflict identifies as habituation: repeated exposure to the same stressor reduces acute stress reactions even when the stressor persists.<sup>37</sup> At the population level, this process runs parallel to what recent large-scale longitudinal research across 17 European countries found: that wellbeing declined sharply following the February 2022 invasion but recovered

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<sup>37</sup> Grissom, N., & Bhatnagar, S. (2009). Habituation to repeated stress: Get used to it. *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, 92(2), 215–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2008.07.001>.

toward baseline within weeks, as populations adjusted to living under sustained threat.<sup>38</sup>

The personal-level improvement did not, however, reduce awareness of national exposure to external threats. Perceptions of existential threat to Lithuania remained consistently high: 62% of respondents considered Lithuania to face an existential threat from the war in 2022, compared with 60% in 2025 — a stable level indicating no meaningful erosion of national threat consciousness across the four years. This divergence between declining personal risk perception and sustained national threat awareness is analytically important. It suggests that Lithuanians have adapted their psychological responses to the individual-level dimension of the threat while retaining a clear-eyed assessment of the country's strategic situation.<sup>39</sup>

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*What the data reveal is that Lithuanians have absorbed sustained pressure without converting that absorption into collective readiness. Lithuanians have partially normalised their private lives while continuing to regard the national security environment as genuinely dangerous.*

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Concern about economic and financial damage to Lithuania from the war in Ukraine remained broadly stable but moderated: the share who were considerably worried fell from 26% in 2023 to 20% in 2025, while moderate concern held steady at around 28–29%. Lithuania's comparatively strong economic performance — rising wages, controlled inflation, lower energy costs than its neighbours — provides a plausible explanation for this moderation. Concern about refugee arrivals from Ukraine similarly stabilised: 51% expressed moderate concern in 2025, compared with 53% in 2023, while the proportion reporting no concern at all rose from 14% in 2022 to 23% in 2025.

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<sup>38</sup> Scharbert, J., Humberg, S., Kroencke, L., Reiter, T., Sakel, S., ter Horst, J., ... & Back, M. D. (2024). Psychological well-being in Europe after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. *Nature Communications*, 15(1), 1202. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-44693-6>.

<sup>39</sup> Balžekienė, A., Echavarren, J. M., & Telešienė, A. (2025). The effect of proximity on risk perception: A systematic literature review. *Current Sociology*, 73(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921241250047>.

Holesch, A., & Martill, B. (2026). War fatigue? The politicisation of the Ukraine war. *Journal of European Integration*, 48(2), 167–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2026.2615100>.

The most analytically significant shift across the four-year period lies in the composition of personal threat perceptions. In 2022 and 2023, economic threat was the dominant personal concern, reported by 30% of respondents as a major risk. By 2025, this had fallen to 21%. Political threat, meanwhile, rose from 23% in 2023 to 42% in 2025 — the sharpest increase of any threat category in the dataset. Information and cybersecurity threats showed an equally dramatic rise, from 28% to 42%. Security threats also grew, from 23% to 31%. Health and climate concerns remained comparatively limited throughout.

The migration of public anxiety from economic to political, and information and cybersecurity threat is not incidental. Research on disinformation effects in the Baltic states confirms that Russian information operations specifically target political trust — aiming to amplify perceived distrust of government and institutions.<sup>40</sup> As economic pressure eased, it seems that anxiety has shifted towards governance, information and cybersecurity: distrust of decision-making processes, uncertainty about state performance and concern about the quality and security of the information through which citizens interpret geopolitical events. This shift is also consistent with the broader securitisation of disinformation across Europe, in which the Baltic states have played a leading institutional role in reframing information threats as an existential security concern.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, climate change remains the least salient personal threat by a substantial margin. The proportion reporting no concern about climate as a personal threat grew from 43% in 2023 to 54% in 2025 — a widening gap between Lithuania's institutional commitment to the green transition and its citizens' threat hierarchy, which prioritises the immediate over the structural.

## Community Resilience

Community-level resilience in Lithuania is characterised by a persistent ambivalence that has not meaningfully resolved across the four survey waves. Neither clearly

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<sup>40</sup> Morkūnas, M. (2022). Russian disinformation in the Baltics: Does it really work? *Public Integrity*, 25(6), 599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2022.2092976>.

<sup>41</sup> Vérité, S. L. (2025). The collective securitization of 'disinformation' and the EU's ban on Russia Today and Sputnik. *International Affairs*, 101(5), 1853–1876. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaaf139>.

Balčytienė, A., Dāvidsonė, A., & Siibak, A. (2025). What a human-centred approach reveals about disinformation policies: The Baltic case. *Media and Communication*, 13, Article 9548. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9548>.

consolidated nor clearly absent, it is better described as latent: present as a potential but not yet activated as a social fact.

Indicators of solidarity and interpersonal trust at the community level show limited consolidation. In both 2022 and 2025, only around one fifth of respondents — 23% and 22% respectively — agreed that community members trust one another. Perceived ability to rely on others in a crisis held steady at around 25–26%. Neutral responses consistently exceeded 40% across these measures, pointing to uncertainty and conditionality rather than outright rejection of community solidarity. Another study also confirms this: people neither confirm nor deny that their neighbours can be relied on — they adopt a waiting position.<sup>42</sup>

The picture becomes more concerning when attention shifts from social atmosphere to operational readiness. In 2022–2023, nearly half (49%) of respondents chose neutral responses when assessing their community's preparedness for critical situations, while 40% did so on the question of role awareness. By 2025, neutrality remained dominant at 40–45% across both indicators. The data do not point to active resistance to preparedness but to its absence as a lived social expectation. Research on everyday-life preparedness identifies this as the core challenge: when preparedness activities are experienced as exceptional rather than routine, they fail to generate the shared role clarity and mutual expectations that constitute genuine community resilience.<sup>43</sup>

This gap between institutional preparedness policy and lived community readiness reflects a structural pattern identified in comparable comprehensive-defence contexts. Analysis of Lithuania's total-defence framework documents a "responsibilisation" dynamic: citizens are assigned predetermined roles within national defence architecture and are expected to comply, but this assignment is not accompanied by the genuine empowerment and everyday embeddedness that would make those roles meaningful at the community level.<sup>44</sup> The result is paradoxical: although the institutional frameworks are comparatively advanced, the social fabric

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<sup>42</sup> Terry, G. S. (2024). Responsibilising total defence: Interrogating resistance, resilience, and agency in Finland, Sweden, and Lithuania. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 10(2), 26–51. [https://doi.org/10.57767/jobs\\_2024\\_012](https://doi.org/10.57767/jobs_2024_012).

<sup>43</sup> Kitagawa, K. (2019). Exploring 'everyday-life preparedness': Three case studies from Japan. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 34, 265–274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2018.11.025>.

<sup>44</sup> Terry (2024), cited above. See also: Veebel, V., & Ploom, I. (2018). Estonia's comprehensive approach to national defence: Origins and dilemmas. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 4(2), 10–22. <https://journalonbalticsecurity.com/journal/JOBS/article/50/info>.

that should bring them to life remains underdeveloped and has yet to produce the expected results.

A 2024 European Commission survey found that nearly two-thirds of EU citizens felt they needed more information to prepare for emergencies, while more than one third reported difficulty finding relevant guidance from authorities.<sup>45</sup> Lithuania shares this challenge while also possessing strengths in institutional architecture that many EU member states lack. The deficit lies specifically at the community interface – between household-level concern and the municipal and community structures that should translate that concern into shared action, role knowledge, and preparedness culture.

The deeper structural explanation lies in Baltic social capital trajectories. All three Baltic states began from very low interpersonal trust baselines following Soviet occupation, when surveillance, speech restriction, and suppression of private initiative systematically eroded community bonds and created expectations that the state – not citizens acting collectively – would manage crises.<sup>46</sup> Lithuania has made significant progress in total defence since regaining its independence, but this legacy partially explains why preparedness remains a cognitive aspiration rather than an embedded social norm. Strengthening community resilience will require sustained investment not in institutional architecture, which is already comparatively robust, but in the everyday social trust and shared civic identity that gives that architecture social meaning.

## **Societal Trust**

Trust in Lithuanian institutions exhibits a pronounced and consistent asymmetry: high and growing confidence in defence and security institutions coexists with declining and now majority-negative assessments of political institutions. This asymmetry is not a symptom of generalised cynicism; it is a differentiated evaluation based on perceived performance.

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<sup>45</sup> European Commission (2024). *Special Eurobarometer: Disaster risk awareness and preparedness of the EU population*. Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3228>.

<sup>46</sup> Beilmann, M., Lilleoja, L., & Realo, A. (2021). Learning to trust: Trends in generalized social trust in the three Baltic countries from 1990 to 2018. In A. Almakaeva, A. Moreno, & R. Wilkes (Eds.), *Social capital and subjective well-being: Insights from cross-cultural studies* (pp. 19–43). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75813-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75813-4_2).

In 2025, 62% of respondents did not believe the government would make the right decisions during a crisis — up from 49% in 2022. Similarly, 58% did not expect society to support government decisions in a national emergency, compared with 48% in 2022.

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*Trust in defence and security institutions — including the Lithuanian Armed Forces, law enforcement, and paramilitary organisations — rose substantially over the survey period, from around 56% in 2022 to 71–76% in 2024–2025. Trust in NGOs and civic movements in crisis or extreme situations also increased, from 58% in 2022 to 63% in 2025, indicating that society is increasingly ready to cooperate with them when facing emergencies.*

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Together, these trends represent one of the most pronounced positive movements in the dataset and reflects a genuine consolidation of public confidence in the security sector at precisely the moment when the security environment demanded it most. They also reflect the growing trust in the capacity of civic actors to contribute to crisis response. This increased confidence in NGOs and civic movements further highlights the strengthening of societal engagement in total defence at a time when it was most needed.

The contrast with political institutions is stark. Confidence in the government, parliament, and political leadership to manage crises effectively weakened significantly across the four waves. By 2025, majorities expressed scepticism about government crisis decision-making and collective support for institutional decisions. Research on post-communist trust consistently demonstrates that citizens evaluate institutions based on their perceived competence and integrity rather than on a fixed categorisation. Order institutions — military, police, academia — earn trust through demonstrated professional performance and non-partisan identity; partisan institutions earn distrust through perceived corruption, political conflict, and

accountability failures.<sup>47</sup> Lithuania's pattern reflects this logic precisely, and is broadly consistent with evidence from across the Baltic region.<sup>48</sup>

One finding stands out for its strength across the dataset: trust in academia reached 72% in 2025 — the highest level of any institution or social group measured. This is not incidental. Research on crisis trust dynamics across 12 countries finds that trust in scientists functions as a "*stabilising anchor*" during periods when political trust is volatile, with expert credibility serving as a substitute source of epistemic authority when citizens cannot rely on government communication to be either competent or politically neutral.<sup>49</sup> Lithuania's exceptionally high academia trust is therefore analytically significant beyond its headline number: it suggests that epistemic authority, rather than political legitimacy, is currently doing the work of crisis confidence in Lithuanian society.

Despite institutional distrust, cooperative willingness within proximate social networks remains substantial. In 2025, 66% of respondents trusted their neighbours, 68% their colleagues, and 62% people in their local area. Trust in Lithuanian residents more broadly remained at 59%. These figures represent a meaningful cooperative reserve — people are not withdrawing from social life. The critical challenge is that this willingness, concentrated in close and familiar networks, does not extend to the institutional level. Research on social capital and community resilience establishes that trust concentrated in bonding relationships within close networks is a necessary but insufficient basis for the collective action that crisis situations require: bridging and linking capital — connections across groups and with institutions — are what translate individual willingness into coordinated community response.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mishler, W., & Rose, R. (1997). Trust, distrust and skepticism: Popular evaluations of civil and political institutions in post-communist societies. *Journal of Politics*, 59(2), 418–451. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381600053512>.

Mishler, W., & Rose, R. (2001). What are the origins of political trust? Testing institutional and cultural theories in post-communist societies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(1), 30–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034001002>.

<sup>48</sup> Lühiste, K. (2006). Explaining trust in political institutions: Some illustrations from the Baltic states. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39(4), 475–496. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2006.09.001>.

Bove, V., Di Leo, R., & Giani, M. (2024). Military culture and institutional trust: Evidence from conscription reforms in Europe. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2), 714–729. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12745>.

<sup>49</sup> Algan, Y., Cohen, D., Davoine, E., Foucault, M., & Stantcheva, S. (2021). Trust in scientists in times of pandemic: Panel evidence from 12 countries. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(40), e2108576118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2108576118>.

Bromme, R., Mede, N. G., Thomm, E., Kremer, B., & Ziegler, R. (2022). An anchor in troubled times: Trust in science before and within the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLoS ONE*, 17(2), e0262823. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262823>.

<sup>50</sup> Aldrich, D. P., & Meyer, M. A. (2015). Social capital and community resilience. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(2), 254–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214550299>.

The Lithuanian pattern — strong bonding trust, weak institutional trust — precisely describes the challenge. Existing cooperative willingness is real and should not be dismissed; but it is not yet consistently channelled through the institutional and community structures that would make it available for coordinated crisis response.

### **Hope, Belonging, and Future Outlook**

Indicators of national attachment and future optimism remained broadly strong across the four-year period, though with a modest softening in intensity that mirrors the general pattern of cautious adaptation observed across all other resilience dimensions.

Attachment to Lithuania as home held at high levels throughout. In 2022, 79% of respondents agreed that Lithuania was their home and that they did not intend to leave in the face of crisis. By 2025, this figure stood at 74%. The modest 5-percentage-point decline — occurring largely within the margin of survey error — reflects a slight cooling in the intensity of the strongest category of attachment rather than any meaningful erosion of the underlying commitment. Research on place attachment identifies territorial belonging as a key mechanism sustaining protective and place-based civic behaviour, particularly under security threats: strongly attached populations are more likely to remain, to engage in protective action, and to invest in collective goods.<sup>51</sup>

Optimism about Lithuania's future showed comparable stability with a similar softening. In 2022, 72% expressed optimism; by 2025, this stood at 69%. The proportion of those completely certain about an optimistic future declined from 22% to 17%, while 13% disagreed and 17% remained neutral. The overall picture is one of sustained but more measured confidence — broader agreement than doubt, but with a growing centrist middle that neither endorses nor rejects optimism. Pessimism remains uncommon, and strongly negative future expectations are not widespread.

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<sup>51</sup> Andžāns, M., & Sprūds, A. (2020). Three-decade evolution of the willingness to defend one's own country: The case of the Baltic States. *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 18(1), 195–220. <https://doi.org/10.47459/lasr.2020.18.9>.

Bonaiuto, M., Alves, S., De Dominicis, S., & Petruccioli, I. (2016). Place attachment and natural hazard risk: Research review and agenda. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 48, 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2016.07.007>.

Life domain evaluations offer a complementary picture of personal wellbeing. Family relationships were the most positively evaluated domain in 2025, with 86% of respondents reporting favourable assessments, including 64% rating them as good or very good — indicating that close personal ties remain the strongest source of stability and wellbeing. Daily life and life overall were also viewed positively by 85% of respondents, while work received somewhat lower but still largely positive evaluations at 80%.

National pride provides a further indicator of collective identification. In 2025, 37% of respondents reported an average level of pride in Lithuania, while 39% reported being proud or very proud — forming a solid base of national confidence. Only 11% reported no pride at all. Overall, positive sentiment clearly outweighs negative views, and national identification appears stable despite four years of compounded external pressure and signs of societal polarisation.

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*Civic identity is also reasonably strong. In 2025, 58% agreed that Lithuanian citizenship constitutes an important part of their personal identity. This is a meaningful baseline — more than half of the population identifies meaningfully with the civic community — though somewhat lower than the home attachment figures, suggesting that civic belonging is experienced partly through territorial rather than formal citizenship categories.*

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Taken together, these findings confirm that hope and belonging function as genuine resilience resources in Lithuania. The society's psychological foundations — territorial commitment, personal optimism, family stability, national pride — have withstood four years of sustained external pressure without significant erosion. The challenge is not that these resources are weak, but that their collective potential has not been fully activated into civic mobilisation, community preparedness, or institutional confidence. Endurance is present; the conditions for transforming that endurance into coordinated collective action remain incomplete.

## Conclusions

The 2022–2025 societal resilience survey points to a Lithuania that has held up well under sustained and multi-dimensional pressure. Individual-level resilience is genuine, reflected in stable emotional coping, improving life satisfaction, strong family bonds, and continued national attachment. Threat perceptions have recalibrated from acute personal danger toward more diffuse political and information risks. And the society retains substantial cooperative reserves in proximate social networks. These are meaningful strengths.

Yet the data also identify a structural gap that the headline figures obscure. Resilience in Lithuania operates primarily in absorptive mode: it is strong in endurance and coping, but weaker in the transformative dimension that would translate individual stability into collective mobilisation.<sup>52</sup> People adapt; communities do not yet act as coherent crisis-ready units. Citizens cope individually; they are less convinced that institutions can coordinate collective response. Lithuania's resilience profile is internally coherent but structurally incomplete. Personal foundations — territorial belonging, emotional coping capacity, family stability, national pride — have held across four years of sustained pressure and represent genuine societal strength. What is missing is not individual will but the organised social environment in which that will can be collectively expressed: community structures with defined roles, institutions trusted to coordinate action, and a civic norm that treats security as something co-produced rather than externally provided.

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*The 2025 data do not reveal a society that has failed; they reveal a society whose individual resilience has run ahead of its collective architecture.*

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This pattern has three specific manifestations. Community-level trust and preparedness have not consolidated despite four years of geopolitical pressure and sustained institutional investment in comprehensive defence. Confidence in political institutions has weakened rather than strengthened, while trust in non-partisan

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<sup>52</sup> Bourbeau, P. (2013). Resiliencism: Premises and promises in securitisation research. *Resilience*, 1(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765738>; Béné et al. (2012) and Keck & Sakdapolrak (2013), cited above.

authority — academia, defence institutions — has grown. And the civic engagement data suggest that belief in one's own capacity to act is somewhat ahead of beliefs about whether such action actually occurs and produces results.

The endurance–mobilisation gap points to three specific intervention priorities. First, public trust in political and governmental institutions requires rebuilding through consistent, demonstrated performance rather than communication campaigns. The data show a performance-driven trust deficit: citizens who perceive institutional competence respond with confidence, while perceptions of incompetence or political capture suppress it. For the Seimas, the government and ministries, this means sustained transparency in crisis decision-making with clear public accountability when commitments are revised. For the National Crisis Management Centre and the Ministry of National Defence, which already commanded substantially higher public confidence, it means visibly anchoring their public communication in what institutions have delivered rather than what they intend — reinforcing the performance logic that has made the security sector the most trusted part of the institutional landscape.

Second, community preparedness requires a shift from exceptional campaign-mode engagement to embedded everyday practice, and this shift must be institutionally owned. Municipal governments are the logical primary vehicle: they are proximate, are already engaged in civil protection planning under the respective laws, and are the level of governance most visible in residents' daily lives. School systems offer the second major embedding point — preparedness curricula integrated into civic education from secondary level would address both the role-awareness deficit and the generational transmission of preparedness norms that the data identify as structurally absent. The Lithuanian Riflemen's Union represents existing community-level institutions with established crisis roles that could serve as visible anchors for regional and local preparedness culture, given adequate resourcing and public visibility.

Third, the migration of public anxiety toward political and information threat calls for expert communication to be treated as a strategic resilience resource rather than a supplementary activity. Lithuania's exceptionally high trust in academic researchers — 72%, the highest institutional trust figure in the dataset — represents an underused policy asset. The Lithuanian universities and the Research Council of Lithuania are

the natural institutional partners for sustained, crisis-relevant expert communication. Channelling science trust into preparedness messaging, disinformation resilience, and security literacy – through regular public engagement rather than episodic campaigns – would address the information threat gap the survey identifies while drawing on the one institutional anchor that commands majority public confidence across all demographic groups.

Lithuania's resilience in late 2025 is substantial but directional: strong in endurance, still consolidating in mobilisation. The task ahead is to build on the stable foundations – territorial belonging, personal agency, strong family ties, expanding civic confidence – and construct the community structures and institutional credibility that would make endurance collectively durable when the next phase of sustained pressure arrives.

## SYNTHESIS ON THE BALTIC RESILIENCE

Taken together, the three national surveys reveal a regional resilience pattern that is more consistent than the country-specific findings might suggest. Across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, personal and household-level adaptation has proven considerably more durable than community or institutional confidence. Citizens have adjusted, maintained territorial belonging, and preserved functional family and social ties even as geopolitical pressure has intensified and economic disruptions have accumulated. This individual resilience is genuine and should not be understated. But it coexists, in all three countries, with a persistent gap at the community level — where preparedness remains aspirational rather than embedded, cooperative willingness is not consistently translated into crisis-ready action, and the social norm that security is co-produced rather than state-provided has not yet taken hold. This is the defining structural feature of Baltic societal resilience in 2025: strong at the personal level, fragile at the collective interface between household and institution.

The trust landscape is equally consistent across the region, and equally asymmetric. Security and defence institutions have gained public confidence substantially in all three countries since 2022, reflecting both demonstrated institutional performance and the clarity of the threat environment. Political institutions have not. In Estonia, the political trust deficit is most acute along the ethnolinguistic line; in Latvia, it spans the entire population and is among the most severe in the European Union; in Lithuania, it coexists with exceptionally high trust in academia as a compensating source of epistemic authority. These are distinct configurations, but they share a common logic: citizens differentiate between institutions they assess as competent and those they do not, and the current security environment has sharpened rather than softened this discrimination. The practical consequence for crisis governance is the same in all three countries: states that depend on public confidence in central political institutions to coordinate a prolonged crisis response are working against a structural headwind that will not resolve without sustained, demonstrated performance.

These regional commonalities point to a shared policy challenge that exceeds the scope of any single national government. Baltic preparedness culture — the internalised civic norm that translates individual concern into collective readiness and total defence — requires sustained, coordinated investment across all three countries simultaneously. Citizens in the region share a threat environment, consume overlapping information spaces, and observe each other's institutional performance. A preparedness culture that is robust in one country and thin in its neighbours creates asymmetric vulnerabilities in a region that has staked its security on collective deterrence. The Baltic states have demonstrated considerable capacity for coordinated institutional development in other domains — energy infrastructure, digital governance, defence cooperation — and the same coordination logic applies here. Establishing shared benchmarks for community preparedness indicators, coordinating public communication on civic roles across national borders, and investing jointly in the research infrastructure that tracks resilience dynamics across the region would address the structural gap the three surveys consistently identify: not a shortage of individual willingness, but an absence of the organised collective environment in which that willingness can be put to use.

Translating these shared patterns into policy requires moving beyond the national frame. Three coordinated investments would address the structural gap the three surveys consistently identify.

- ❖ First, establishing shared preparedness benchmarks — agreed minimum thresholds for community role awareness, household self-sufficiency capacity, and local coordination readiness — would allow the Baltic states to measure progress against a common standard and identify where national investments are producing results and where they are not. The current absence of such benchmarks means that each country is improving in isolation, without the mutual accountability that shared metrics create.
- ❖ Second, coordinating public communication on civic roles across national borders would address the information environment that all three populations share. Citizens in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania consume overlapping digital media spaces and observe each other's institutional performance; communication strategies designed and deployed only within national borders

are working against the grain of the information environment they seek to shape.

- ❖ Third, and most concretely, investing jointly in the research infrastructure that monitors resilience dynamics across the region — through a standing Baltic resilience measurement programme with harmonised instruments and annual publication — would sustain the evidence base that this volume demonstrates is analytically powerful and policy-relevant. The cost of such an investment is modest relative to the strategic value of knowing, with precision and in real time, where the region's societal resilience is strengthening, where it is fragile, and what is driving the difference.

The logical next step is to extend this measurement framework northward and westward. Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Poland share the same threat environment and face structurally similar challenges at the community-institutional interface; their inclusion in a common societal resilience monitoring architecture would transform a Baltic regional instrument into a northern European one, generating the comparative evidence base that national defence planners, EU institutions, and NATO's resilience agenda all currently lack. The Baltic states are well positioned to lead this expansion — not as the most exposed members of a vulnerable region, but as the countries that have been measuring, analysing, and acting on societal resilience data the longest.



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