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# Multi-ethnic societies and willingness to defend one's own country: Russian-speakers in the Baltic states

This article contributes to research which covers individual's willingness to defend their own country. To achieve this end, a case study is undertaken which looks at the Baltic states, with a special focus on the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the region. The mapping out of historical and present day quantitative data corroborates the finding that there is a gap in terms of willingness to defend one's own country between Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian-speakers on the one hand and Russian-speakers on the other. At the same time, data from two nationally-representative surveys across the Baltics leads one to the conclusion that there are no fundamental differences in reasoning along ethnic and linguistic lines, ie. why individuals express willingness (not) to defend their own country. Consistent differences can be observed only in some smaller categories which generally mirror trends in contrasting historical memories and the perceptions of domestic and international issues.

## Introduction

'Willingness to defend one's own country' and 'willingness to fight for one's country', along with related notions such as 'willingness to fight wars' and 'willingness to support warfare', has occasionally been investigated in the social sciences. It is not only scientists but also policymakers who have been looking into causalities behind either a low or a high degree of willingness to fight for and defend one's own country.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have had strained relationships with its eastern neighbour. Russia is widely perceived as being the ultimate source of risk to the national security of all three nations, especially since the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict began to unfold in the previous decade. Meanwhile, considerable numbers of inhabitants in both Estonia and Latvia are ei-

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ther of direct Russian descent or are from other Eastern Slavic branches. What matters more, however, is the fact that their views on certain domestic and foreign policy issues tend to differ from those of the ethnic majority populations of Latvia and Estonia.

This article focuses on a particular gap in research, one which pertains to willingness to defend one's own country: involving considerations and motivations which are involved in ethnically and linguistically diverse societies in general, along with the differences in the Baltic states between Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian-speakers on the one side and Russian-speakers on the other. As previous studies have concluded, the situation inside a nation state can diverge more than can a situation which covers a region of states (see, for instance, Díez-Nicolás, 2009, p. 264). Therefore more attention has to be devoted to internal factors in order to better understand domestic dynamics and causes. As previous studies have demonstrated, both Estonia and Latvia can provide cases in which the ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of respondents produce different results (see Andžāns et al., 2017, p. 17; Rutkauskas, 2018, p. 60; Bērziņa & Zupa, 2020a, p. 5; Bērziņa & Zupa, 2020b, p. 10; Andžāns & Sprūds, 2020a, p. 19-20; Andžāns & Sprūds 2020b, p. 211). While Lithuanian society is more amalgamated in ethnic and linguistic terms, it still serves as a benchmark for the Latvian and Estonian situation as the most similar country to them in terms of size, history, external allegiances, economic development, and more. Also, the issue of divergent attitudes in regard to certain matters amongst ethnic and linguistic groups has not lost its relevance in Lithuania.

## 1. Willingness to fight for and defend one's own country, and the Baltic states

A considerable amount of quantitative data has been gathered by global and regional-level surveys regarding individual willingness to fight for a country. Most notably, these surveys include the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2020), and the European Values Study (2021). These have served as the cornerstone of many academic studies, some of which are further elaborated in this chapter.

The most comprehensive attempt to determine the holistic causes which underlie an individual's willingness to fight for their own country has been conducted by Inglehart et al. (2015). They established a link between, firstly, life opportunities, secondly, 'pro-choice' values and, thirdly, willingness to fight. The higher was the first, the more widespread was the second

and the lower the third; a notable exception to this rule were the Nordic countries (Inglehart et al., 2015, p. 432). In addition, oft-considered and rather reliable indicators for explaining and predicting the level of willingness tend to include national pride and confidence in one's own armed forces (see, for instance, Díez-Nicolás, 2009, p. 264 & 272; Inglehart et al., 2015, p. 28 (appendix); Puranen, 2015, p. 269 & 276-7; Torgler, 2003, p. 276; Anderson et al., 2018, p. 5 & 31-2), along with the historical, social, and/or political context within the country in question (see, for instance, Inglehart et al., 2015, p. 420 & 428; Puranen, 2015, p. 271; Díez-Nicolás, 2009, p. 265; Torgler, 2003, p. 276; Anderson et al., 2018, p. 32; WIN/Gallup International, 2015, p. 3), and gender (see, for instance, Inglehart et al., 2015, p. 28 (appendix); Torgler, 2003, p. 276; Puranen, 2015, p. 277; WIN/Gallup International, 2015, p. 1).

Amongst the Baltic-centric studies, only a handful have made this issue the primary focus of the study. As with small countries and minor powers, they have focused on the defensive dimension of it, ie. willingness to fight for one's own country or to defend one's own country in case it is attacked, rather than any willingness to support warfare per se. Therefore the defensive dimension and the 'willingness to defend' will be emphasised throughout this article. As Yeh and Wu have put it in regard to public support for wars, this is support for wars of necessity or self-defence, rather than support for wars of choice (Yeh & Wu, 2019, p. 1-2), or wars which do not necessarily constitute an existential threat to one's own country (when compared to the conceptualisation by Haas (2009), Yeh and Wu place the spotlight on national self-defence and the public perception of wars of necessity).

Remaining on the same point, there is a clear difference between a 'willingness to fight wars' and a 'willingness to support warfare' on the one hand, and a 'willingness to defend one's own country' and a 'willingness to fight for one's country' on the other. The former designates willingness to engage in or support wars per se, as has often been observed in studies which cover societies within great powers where liberty and ability to fight wars far beyond their borders is taken for granted (see, for instance, a study by Horowitz & Levendusky, 2011). However, there is only a nominal difference between the terms 'willingness to defend one's own country' and 'willingness to fight for one's country'. Both focus on attitudes towards the actions which are directed towards securing one's own country, either by 'fighting for it' or 'defending it'. Thereby, both terms need to be treated hereby as having generally the same meaning, and the latter is used as the main term in the findings of this particular study.

Baltic-centric studies include the 2018 study by Rutkauskas which covered all three Baltic states, plus two 2020 studies by Bērziņa & Zupa which fo-

cussed on Latvia (Bērziņa & Zupa, 2020a; 2020b), and two other 2020 studies which again covered all three Baltic countries, by Andžāns & Sprūds (2020a; 2020b). In addition, other Baltic-centric studies have touched upon the issue as part of a wider research issue. In this regard see, for instance, Vileikienė & Janušauskienė (2016), Andžāns et al. (2017), and Ramonaitė et al. (2018).

Rutkauskas assessed quantitative data which came from surveys which had been conducted in all three Baltic states, covering rather diverging years for each country: 1990 and 2011 for Estonia; 1990 and 1997 for Latvia; and 1990, 1997, 1999, and 2015 for Lithuania. He concluded that in all three countries, national pride along with trust in government and the armed forces were the main denominators which backed up willingness to fight for one's country. Meanwhile, other socio-economic indicators produced results which were not consistent across all three countries. Importantly within the context of this study, he also made the observation that the ethnic factor was an issue in Estonia and Latvia (Rutkauskas, 2018, p. 55 & 60-1).

A 2020 study by Andžāns & Sprūds assessed statistical data from 1990 through to 2019 which covered willingness to defend one's country. Their mapping out of the information arguably confirmed the assumption that Estonia's inhabitants constantly exemplified the highest degrees of willingness to defend their country, while Lithuania's citizens exhibited the lowest degree of willingness. They concluded that the Baltic case seemingly affirms the assumption which was reached by Inglehart et al, that growth in life opportunities has a negative impact upon one's willingness to fight. At the same time, they noted that the increasing levels in recent years of willingness to defend one's own country seems to contradict the assumption which was reached by Inglehart et al. Furthermore, based on a simultaneous tri-national representative survey, they found that out of the various inter-societal indicators only the male gender could credibly predict any respondent willingness to defend one's own country, not national pride, nor any trust in the government, or anything else. Ethnic background or the language spoken within the family were both deemed to be credible factors in Estonia and Latvia, although this factor was registered at a significantly lower level in Lithuania (Andžāns & Sprūds, 2020b, p. 219).

Bērziņa and Zupa in 2020 produced the only study so far which places the ethnic factor as the central issue. Basing their findings on interviews in one of Latvia's major cities, they corroborated the finding that willingness to fight for Latvia is lower amongst Russian-speakers than it is with ethnic natives. Importantly, they noted, for some Russian-speakers willingness to fight depends upon the hypothetical assailant, ie. they would be unwilling to fight Russia. Amongst causes behind the inconsistencies in willingness to fight

among Latvian and Russian-speakers are diverging opinions on both historical and current issues. Bērziņa and Zupa also underlined the finding that such an oft-referred-to factor as national pride can not only provide different answers, but can also mean different things to different people. Russian-speakers in Latvia tend to be more local-patriotic and tend also to distinguish more often between Latvia as a nation state and Latvia as a more nebulous land or territory (Bērziņa & Zupa, 2020b, p. 10).

## 2. Polarisation in the Baltic states within an ethnic and linguistic context

Ethnic Estonians make up slightly more than two thirds of Estonia's population (68.6%), while Russians make up almost a quarter of the population (24.7%). Also, a total of 1.9% are Ukrainians and 0.9% are Belarussians (Statistics Estonia, 2020). In Latvia, ethnic Latvians make 62.6% of the total population, while Russians, identically to Estonia, constitute 24.7%, of the total, and other ethnic groups include Belarussians at 3.2%, Ukrainians at 2.3%, Poles at 2.0%, and Lithuanians at 1.2% (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2021). Lithuania's ethnic composition is more uniform. Ethnic Lithuanians make up 85.9% of the total population, while Poles are the second largest ethnic group at 5.7%, ahead of Russians at 4.5%, Belarussians at 1.7%, and Ukrainians at 1.2% (Statistics Lithuania, 2020).

The reasons behind the current structure of the ethnic composition of the Baltics, and for Latvia and Estonia in particular, result from the Soviet occupation (from 1940 through to 1991, intermittent with the Nazi occupation during the World War Two). The ethnic compositions of Latvia and Estonia were altered considerably: the share of Latvians went down from 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989, whereas the share of Russians in the same duration went up from 8.8% to 34% (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2021); and the share of Estonians went down from 88.1% in 1934 to 61.5% in 1989, while the share of Russians in the same period increased from 8.2% to 30.3% (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2008, p. 1).

Nevertheless, the situation is more complex than can be suggested by the current statistics on ethnic backgrounds. For considerable swathes of Eastern Slavic inhabitants, their native tongue and/or main language of communication is Russian. The latest available representative data regarding languages comes from the 2011 census. In Estonia, the Estonian language was declared to be native by 68.5% of inhabitants, while Russian was being used

by 29.6%, ie. Russian was the mother tongue for a considerable percentage of non-ethnic Russians (Statistics Estonia, 2011). In Latvia, the census registered the language mostly spoken at home as primarily being Latvian, at 62.1% of the total population, ahead of Russian which was used by 37.2% of population, ie. more than three-quarters of Belarussians, Ukrainians, and Poles in the country spoke Russian language at home (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2011). Finally, the Lithuanian language was classed as being the mother tongue for 84.9% of Lithuania's inhabitants, while Russian was at 7.2%, and Polish at 5.3%. Most of Lithuania's Belarussians and Ukrainians declared Russian as their native language, and Russian was the secondmost widespread mother tongue for Poles (Statistics Lithuania, 2011).

Given the aforementioned details, language of communication will be used further in this study as the primary differentiating factor when investigating the views of the Baltic populations. In this approach, the work will also follow the way in which other, similar Baltic-centric studies have approached this delicate issue, including the two 2020 studies by Bērziņa & Zupa (2020a, p 5; 2020b, p. 10), and two 2020 studies by Andžāns & Sprūds (2020a, p. 19; 2020b, p. 211). At the same time, in order to avoid overemphasising the language factor alone, a combination both of ethnic and linguistic factors will be used where possible, similarly to the process which was employed by a study on polarisation in the Baltics by Kaprāns & Mieriņa (2019, p. 21 & 33).

It is also worth underlining the fact that the issue is not the language per se, but rather perceptions with which the respective parts of these societies can largely be associated. It is equally important to note that neither of the groups, be it Latvian-speakers, Estonian-speakers, or Russian-speakers, is homogenous and static in their perceptions. The diverging perceptions are most notably underpinned by different and often polarising historical memories, and the stratification of the information space which is further reinforced by Russia's compatriot policy. As a result, and as Kaprāns & Mieriņa have recently concluded, there is still a meaningful degree of ideological polarisation when it comes to geopolitical positioning between Estonians and Latvians on the one hand, and their Russian-speaking co-nationals on the other; in Lithuania, polarisation along the lines of ethnic background is less significant Kaprāns & Mieriņa (2019, p. 21-2, 68, & 77).

### 3. A retrospective look at polarisation in (un)willingness to defend one's country in the Baltics

Willingness to defend one's own country has constantly been monitored in sociological polls. Depending upon the approach and the purpose of such polls, respondents are asked either one or several questions. Such information has been gathered not only for academic purposes. State institutions have also ordered polls to be conducted which, amongst other issues, have addressed this question. The following figures - 1 to 3 - map out data from public nationally-representative surveys in which information is provided on the ethnic or linguistic background of respondents.

For Estonia, the majority are those surveys which were conducted for the Estonian Ministry of Defence from mid-2003 to 2021. Depending upon the survey, respondent's answers are distinguished either by nationality (Estonian or non-Estonian), or by language of command (Estonian or 'other'; 'Russian' was used with 'other' intermittently, depending upon the survey in question); these categories were used in the mapping (Faktum Uuringutekskus, 2003a, p. 11; 2003b, p. 12; 2004a, p. 33; 2004b, p. 38; 2004c, p. 21-2; 2005a, p. 41; 2005b, p. 41; 2005c, p. 51; Turu-uuringute, 2006a, p. 31; 2006b, p. 31; 2006c, p. 42; 2007a, p. 31; 2007b, p. 35; 2008, p. 29; 2009a, p. 25; 2009b, p. 28; 2010a, p. 27; 2010b, p. 36; 2011a, p. 30; Saar Poll, 2011b, p. 27; 2012a, p. 29; 2012b, p. 30; 2013a, p. 30; 2013b, p. 30; 2014, p. 29; Turu-uuringute, 2014, p. 28; 2015a, p. 29; 2015b, p. 30; 2016a, p. 30; 2016b, p. 29; 2017a, p. 30; 2017b, p. 30; 2018a, p. 30; 2018b, p. 32; 2019a, p. 39; 2019b, p. 41; 2020, p. 41).

Some earlier information from the same source - from 2001 and 2003 - provides only a classification of respondents as Estonians, other ethnic backgrounds as citizens, or other ethnic backgrounds as non-citizens (in some cases this was broken down into male Estonians and non-Estonians) (see Ministry of Defence of Estonia, 2021). As these reports do not reveal cumulative values for non-Estonians, they are not included in Figure 1.

Figure 2 for Latvia includes information from three surveys which were conducted for the Latvian Ministry of Defence between 2014 and 2016 (SKDS, 2014, p. 37; 2015, p. 39; 2016, p. 43). The same figure also includes information from a 2017 survey which was conducted for the study by Andžāns et al. (2017, p. 17), and from 2019 from a study by Bērziņa & Zupa (2020a, p. 5). These sources provide background details in regard to the language spoken within the family - either Latvian or Russian - which is therefore used as an indicator in Figure 2 for all of these studies.

All three figures also include 2019 data from a study by Andžāns & Sprūds (2020a, p. 20), as well as information from two rounds of surveys

which were conducted for this study in 2020 and 2021 (the methodology and results are further discussed in the next chapter). From this information for Latvia and Estonia, details on language spoken within the family - either Latvian or Estonian respectively - are included in Figures 1 and 2.

The same mapping exercise for Lithuania is more complex. Not only is Lithuania's population more homogenous. Few data are available from surveys which reveal the views of the various ethnic and linguistic groups. Although, in most ways, this information was acquired methodologically consistently, it does not provide the same classification of linguistic and ethnic factors: the 2019 and 2021 polls provide details on language spoken within the family, while the 2020 one focuses on nationality; the 2019 poll distinguishes only between the Lithuanian and Russian languages, while the 2020 and 2021 polls split non-Lithuanian respondents into Polish, Russian, and 'others' by nationality or language spoken within the family respectively. Taking into account these intricacies, non-Lithuanian respondents in Lithuania are further referred to as non-Lithuanians.

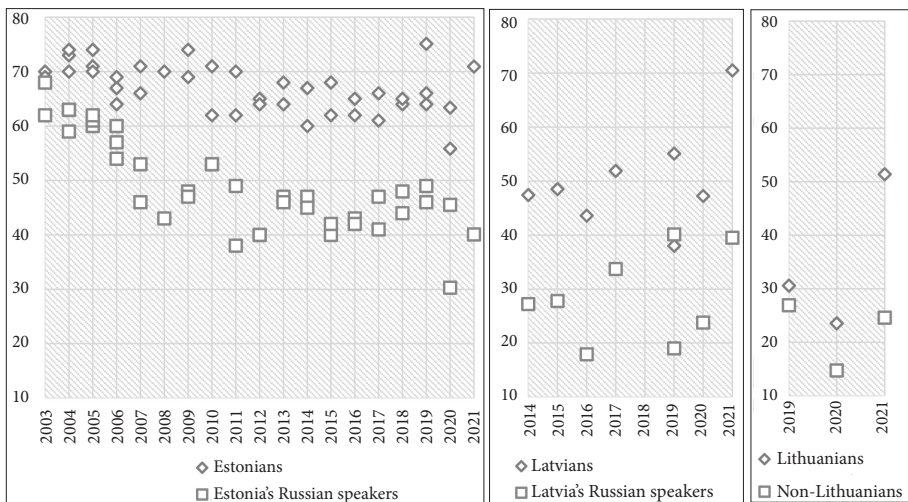


Figure 1. Willingness to defend one's own country in Estonia: Estonian-speakers and Estonia's Russian-speakers (percentage of respondents in a survey).<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2. Willingness to defend one's own country in Latvia: Latvian-speakers and Latvia's Russian-speakers (percentage of respondents in a survey).

Figure 3. Willingness to defend one's own country in Lithuania: Lithuanian-speakers and non-Lithuanians (percentage of respondents in a survey).

<sup>1</sup> For Figures 1 to 3, the entries - using rhombuses and squares - on the y axis correspond to one survey for the respective year; if two surveys each year have been added to the axis then there will be double the number of entries on the y axis; if three surveys each year have been added to the axis then there will be triple the number of entries on the y axis.



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Although methodological approaches often differed within the aforementioned surveys, the mapping produces rather consistent results, save for a few exceptions. In many ways the results of mapping speak for themselves. Most notably, there is considerably more information available for Estonia than for either of the other countries. The lowest levels of available information are for Lithuania, not only in regard to the ethnic and/or linguistic factor, but also regarding willingness to defend one's country across the entirety of the country's society. Also, and proportional with the overall population, the number of non-Lithuanian respondents in each of the polls has been smaller than in Estonia and Latvia. Therefore data on Lithuania provide a valuable source of insight into the situation there, but more care is needed in terms of generalising that information.

If a scarcity of information is an issue for Lithuania, the situation is different both for Estonia and Latvia, for which information from multiple polls each year serves both to enrich and complicate the relevant figures. Even though, from the figures alone, one cannot distinguish the source of the information for each year, no single survey which has provided figures has come up with a higher level of willingness amongst Russian-speakers (or non-Lithuanians).

While in Estonia the margins between Estonian-speakers and Russian-speakers were rather narrow between 2003 and 2006 (and even negligible in a 2003 survey), the gap expanded considerably in 2007, when protests and riots were triggered by the relocation of a Soviet era monument in Tallinn. In the period since then, the medium difference when it comes to defending one's own country between the Estonian-speakers and Russian-speakers was slightly above 20%. A similar but slightly higher difference was visible in Latvia for the period between 2014 and 2021, where such details are available.

The most recent information from 2021 suggests an even larger gap between ethnic and linguistic groups. According to the poll which is further elaborated upon in the next chapter, the difference is slightly above 30% both in Estonia and Latvia, and below that figure in Lithuania. In addition, the gap in Lithuania is considerably higher when compared to the other two polls. Future polling results will determine whether this has been an exception or is an indicator of a new trend.

## 4. Polarisation of reasoning in (un)willingness to defend one's country: a quantitative study in 2020 and 2021

As has been elaborated in the first chapter, there are various proto-theoretical assumptions about why people are (un)willing to defend their country. Most of these have relied on interpretations of quantitative survey data, ie. answers to one or more questions, along with the background information for the respondents such as gender, age, income level, or ethnic background. Most Baltic-centric studies have followed the same route (see Rutkauskas, 2018; Andžāns & Sprūds 2020b), while Bērziņa & Zupa (2020b) have recently complemented this approach by engaging Latvian and Russian-speakers in a major Latvian city with qualitative interviews.

This study complements previous research. It quantitatively examines the motivation of respondents. For this purpose, two consequent nationally-representative surveys were conducted across all three Baltic states, in 2020 and 2021. The first round consisted of face-to-face interviews in November and December 2020 (although in Lithuania this took place in December alone): a total of 1,003 respondents were reached in Latvia, while 876 respondents were contacted in Estonia, and 970 in Lithuania. The second round consisted of computer-assisted telephone interviews in March 2021, totalling 1,000 respondents in each country. Both rounds of polling were conducted as a part of what are known as omnibus surveys in which questions from multiple sources (customers) are bundled into one single poll.

Each respondent was asked two questions. The first was a close-ended question: 'If [Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania] was attacked, should the inhabitants of [Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania], in your opinion, take up arms to defend themselves in all situations, even if the outcome seemed uncertain?' Notwithstanding the unified methodology, save for the mode of interaction with the respondents, both rounds produced considerable differences in terms of answers to the first question. The first round provided considerably more answers which didn't have an opinion (slightly less than one third in Estonia and Latvia, and over a third in Lithuania), as well as some of the lowest levels of willingness to defend own country in all three countries to date, ostensibly in terms of those respondents who had difficulties in formulating an answer.

In addition, the gap between Russian-speakers (and non-Lithuanians),<sup>2</sup> and others was considerably higher in the second round and even more so in Lithuania (see Figures 1 to 3; in Figure 1, for the year 2020 please refer to the lowest values). Possibly the rigor of carrying out the polls and the attitudes of the respondents were both subject to the evolving effects of the global pandemic, such as lockdowns and progress in terms of vaccinations.

The second was an open-ended follow-up question. This asked each respondent why they had provided either a positive or a negative answer. Responses received for this question were subsequently categorised. Those categories which consisted of the most frequently-voiced answers across all three countries in both rounds of the survey are presented in the visualisations below: Figure 4 for Estonia, Figure 5 for Latvia, and Figure 6 for Lithuania.

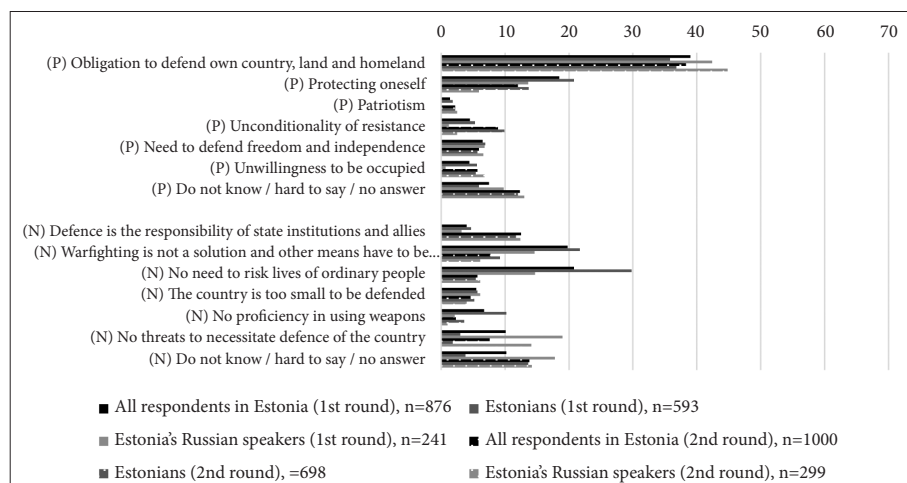


Figure 4. Motivation in terms of (un)willingness to defend one's own country in Estonia: percentage of all respondents, including native Estonians and Estonia's Russian-speakers.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As with most other, similar polls, those which were conducted as a part of this research required knowledge of the ethnic or linguistic background of the respondent (as with other respondent characteristics), which are based on a self-assessment by the respondents themselves. Therefore all exceptions, such as respondents with two native languages or respondents who refused to disclose their native language or ethnic background, could not be followed through. Due to this, Figures 4 to 6 have had to exclude respondents who did not express any clear affinity to a language or ethnic background, removing them from further analysis in regards to their motivation when it came to potential (un)willingness to defend their own country.

<sup>3</sup> In Figures 4 to 6, '(P)' designates the percentage from the positive answer, while '(N)' designates the percentage from the negative answers.

The category 'Do not know / hard to say / no answer' denotes respondents who either did or did not express willingness to defend their own country but would not name a reason for that answer. The category does not include those respondents in the 'Do not know / hard to say / no answer' section under the study's first question.

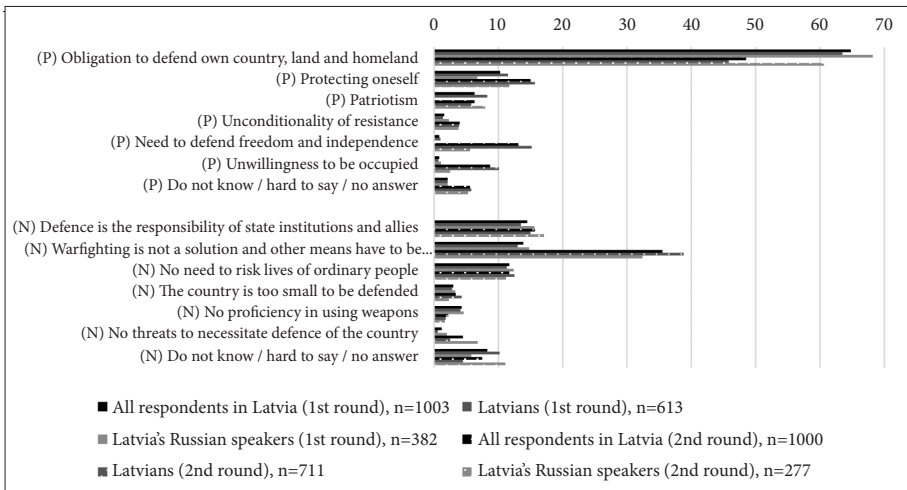


Figure 5. Motivation in terms of (un)willingness to defend one's own country in Latvia: Latvian-speakers and Latvia's Russian-speakers.

Importantly, the small number of non-Lithuanian respondents and the ample distribution of their answers made it difficult to produce a credible interpretation in most of the categories, especially so for the negative answers and in the second round. Therefore those categories which consisted of a handful of answers alone are not depicted in Figure 6 in order to avoid a risk of producing unrepresentative results. As a result of this, only the number one choice categories in both positive and negative answers depict the perceptions of non-Lithuanians.

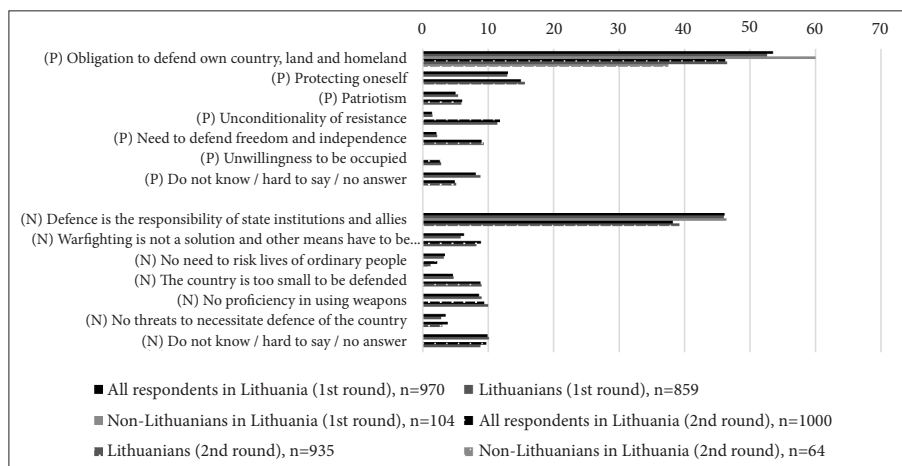


Figure 6. Motivation in terms of (un)willingness to defend one's own country in Lithuania: native Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians.<sup>4</sup>

As with the responses to the first question, the results of the second also revealed differences between both rounds which served to underline the need for caution when interpreting and generalising the information. Therefore only an approximate percentage will be provided in the forthcoming paragraphs in order to better explain the main tendencies which are exemplified by the information. More detailed information is available in Figures 4 to 6 for further analysis.

As for why respondents would be willing to defend their own country, the prevalent category amongst all respondents was the perceived obligation to defending their own country, their land, and their homeland. This category came first in all three countries in both rounds of polling, with results ranging from approximately 40% to 65% of those answers which were positive. This reason was more frequently mentioned in Latvia but less so in Estonia; in both countries and in both polling rounds it was more frequently mentioned by Russian-speakers, with a difference between them and Latvian and Estonian-speakers ranging within the margins of roughly 5-15%. In ethnic and linguistic terms in Lithuania, each round provided contradictory results, being at a lower level amongst Lithuanians in the first round, while being higher in the second; this could be a result of the small number of non-Lithuanian respondents. Meanwhile the situation in Latvia and Estonia could be attributable to

<sup>4</sup> Out of the positive answers, none of these were mentioned by non-Lithuanians in either round: 'Protecting oneself', 'Need to defend freedom and independence', 'Unwillingness to be occupied'. In addition, the categories of 'Patriotism' and 'Unconditional resistance' were not brought up by non-Lithuanians in the first round.

the local-patriotic attitudes of Russian-speakers (as opposed to country or state-patriotic attitudes), as was found in a study on Latvia by Bērziņa & Zupa (2020b, p. 10). However, bundling into one category the perceived obligation to defend 'country', 'land', and 'homeland' in this study did not make it possible to verify the aforementioned assumption.

A related category, that of patriotism, was a reason for expressing willingness to defend one's country from around 5% of all responses in Latvia and Lithuania, while only around half that share of answers was received in Estonia. The small number of respondents and the contradictions between the results in both rounds do not make it possible to provide any definite conclusions along ethnic and linguistic lines.

Another frequent reason in terms of willingness to defend one's country was the responsibility to protect oneself. This category produced around 10-20% of answers in all three countries, and on both polling occasions. This reason was, on all occasions, less frequently voiced by Russian-speakers.

Due to there being a lower share and, therefore, a lower level of representation in terms of other answers, it is furthermore difficult to generalise the remaining categories. These included the desire to defend freedom and independence, unwillingness to be occupied again, as well as the unconditional nature of any resistance. Although out of a relatively small number of respondents, reasoning regarding freedom and independence was more pronounced amongst Latvian and Lithuanian-speakers, while resistance was more popular with Estonian-speakers and Lithuanian-speakers.

The overall picture was more fragmented when it came to negative answers, notably in terms of why respondents chose to say that they were not willing to defend their own country. Nevertheless, some tendencies can be identified from the results. One of the most frequent answers was that defence of one's own country is first and foremost the task of state institutions, such as the national armed forces and NATO allies, rather than being a task for ordinary people. This reason was by far the foremost for respondents in Lithuania, gaining around 40% of the total responses in both rounds of surveying. It was also one of the main reasons given in Latvia across both rounds, being mentioned by around 15% of those who would decline to defend their country. The same answer was a rather frequent reason in Estonia, especially in the second polling round when the response figure was close to Latvia's. This category also did not reveal any significant differences in terms of willingness when it came to ethnic and linguistic lines.

Another major reason cited by the unwilling-to-defend respondents was that fighting wars is not the best solution, and that other means should instead be sought to handle potential conflict should the situation come to

that. This reason was voiced more frequently in Latvia and Estonia, being the number one choice amongst negative answers in Estonia during the first round, and in Latvia in the second, with around 20-35% of respondents respectively voicing it, but the figure was less than half that number in the other rounds. This response was also rather frequently mentioned in Lithuania in both rounds, within the margins of around 5-10%.

Other, related reasons were also voiced when it came to showing unwillingness to defend one's own country, including the opinion that there was no need to risk the lives of ordinary people, with this being mentioned by slightly more than 10% of negative respondents in Latvia in both rounds, and twice the number in the first round in Estonia; that country's second round - and in both rounds in Lithuania - saw this particular reason being less prominent (under 5%). Other respondents mentioned that their country is either too small or too weak to be defended, amounting to roughly 5% of respondents in all three countries in both rounds (in the second round in Estonia and Lithuania more than 10% mentioned a similar power imbalance with potential assailant; this category is not visualised in the graphs in line with the approach of depicting only those categories which are notable across all three countries and in both rounds). Similarly, it was reasoned that respondents are not proficient in handling weapons, although the second round produced rather small numbers of such answers in Latvia and Estonia. There were no significant or consistent differences in willingness along ethnic and linguistic lines in the reasons mentioned in this and the previous paragraph.

A final, rather consistent, category across all three countries in both rounds was the perceived lack of threats which would necessitate any armed defence of the country. This category was more evident in Estonia, where it was mentioned in both rounds by around 10% of the not-willing-to-defend respondents. In this demographic, the share of Russian-speakers was significantly higher. Similar conclusions regarding the latter point can also be drawn for Latvia, although this reason was less frequently voiced there, especially in the first round.

## Conclusions

Historical and current information corroborates the finding that, in terms of willingness to defend one's own country, there is a gap between Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian-speakers on the one hand, and Russian-speakers (non-Lithuanians) on the other. The gap has consistently been significant amongst Estonians and non-Estonians since around 2007, while in

Latvia the same gap becomes visible from 2014, since public records became available. Over these periods, the medium level of difference in both countries between Latvian and Estonian-speakers on one side and Russian-speakers on the other has been slightly above 20%. As less information is available regarding the more ethnically and linguistically homogenous Lithuania, carrying out a generalisation in its case is rather more complex. Nevertheless, the scarce information available indicates that there is also a gap here between Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians.

Two nationally representative surveys in 2020 and 2021 with both closed-ended and open-ended questions gathered information regarding the reasoning being used by respondents. In terms of willingness to defend, the main categories for all respondents were duty to defend one's country and (home)land, and individual self-defence. In terms of unwillingness to defend one's country the main reasons, although less conclusively, were that defence of the country is the duty of the state's own forces and its allies, as well as the perception that avoiding violence altogether is a better option.

Despite notable differences in the proportion of those who were willing and unwilling to defend their own country between ethnic and linguistic groups, especially in Estonia and Latvia, there were no fundamental differences in the proportion of reasons for willingness or unwillingness to defend one's own country. In other words, the motivation to be (un)willing to defend one's own country was rather similarly distributed across different ethnic and linguistic groups. However, Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia who confirmed that they would be willing to defend their country more frequently voiced the perceived obligation to defend one's country, land, and homeland, which could be attributable to a more pronounced form of local patriotism. Russian-speakers less often emphasised the motivation to defend oneself. Among those who were unwilling to defend their country the only category, although not a major one, which produced consistently different answers in Estonia and Latvia was a different perception of threat, with Russian-speakers noting that threats which would necessitate the defence of their own country being less pronounced.

The aforementioned findings lead to a conclusion that a notable gap remains in terms of societal integration, especially in Estonia and Latvia, even thirty years after both countries regained their independence from the Soviet Union. At the same time, it should be noted that a significant proportion of Russian-speakers (and non-Lithuanians) are in fact willing to defend the country they inhabit. As for reasons behind the still-divergent perceptions, however, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions. At least partially, the choices voiced mirror general discrepancies in historical memories and cur-



rent perceptions of domestic and international politics.

Many previous studies have focused on issues surrounding willingness to defend at the national level, and in the comparison of national-level information in the regional and global context. This study underscores that attitudes towards (un)willingness to defend one's own country tends to vary quite significantly within countries. The ethnic and linguistic factor is amongst those causes which can considerably influence attitudes. Future studies should further address intra-societal attitudes. In this regard, the precision and the explanatory power of future findings will benefit from more comprehensive and regularly-collected information, as well as from a combination of research methods.

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