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Willingness to Fight for One's Own Country: New Variables to Look at the Estonian Leadership among the Baltic States

The article delves into the willingness of citizens in the Baltic States, particularly Estonia, to fight for their countries in the face of rising threats, notably the Russian threat following the Crimean annexation. With historically weaker NATO defenses and relatively small armed forces, Baltic States like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia rely on allied support and their residents' determination to defend their homeland. The study explores variables that influence this willingness, focusing on Estonia's leadership in this aspect. The article consists of three main sections: a literature review, a comparative case analysis, and conclusions. The literature review examines past data from global, regional, and national perspectives, touching upon the theories of renowned researchers like Ronald F. Inglehart. The comparative case analysis delves into new variables—civic engagement, government functionality, and corruption levels—exploring their correlation with citizens' readiness to fight for their country. The analysis uncovers distinct patterns in Estonia, which consistently outpaces Latvia and Lithuania in civic engagement, efficient governance, and lower corruption levels. Ultimately, the research emphasizes that civic engagement positively associates with willingness to defend one's country, exemplified by Estonia's higher voter turnout and volunteering rates. Effective government functioning also contributes to citizens' willingness to fight, with Estonia's robust governance over the past decades potentially boosting resilience. Furthermore, low corruption levels appear to enhance citizens' confidence in their state, potentially encouraging them to defend it. The study concludes that understanding these multifaceted factors can guide policymakers and community leaders in bolstering citizens' determination to protect their countries, particularly in Latvia and Lithuania.

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Introduction

With the rise of the Russian threat, especially after the Crimean annexation, the attention of the Baltic States and their defence capabilities has been on the rise. Historically being one of the weakest NATO flanks and having relatively small armed forces, all three Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, should be able to count on the allied support and the assumption that their residents will fight for their own country. Over the last three decades, there has been constant sociological research and academic analyses discussing the will of each nation's citizens to fight for their own country. All of them have sought to find out the fundamental variable(s) determining the will to fight for one's own country. However, fragmented data suggests various conclusions as to why a certain Baltic state's citizens have or do not have the will to defend their own country in the face of danger. It creates an issue for policymakers to determine which problem must be tackled in order to boost a will to fight for one's own country. Moreover, public surveys suggest that, in comparison with the other Baltic States, Estonia maintains a high percentage of residents who have expressed a willingness to defend their homeland in the last two decades. As a result, this paper seeks to bring up-to-date previous analyses and will try to ascertain why Estonia maintains its significant position concerning its population's willingness to fight for its own country.

This paper is divided into three parts: firstly, a literature review of the previous data about the Baltics will be scrutinised, and secondly, to distinguish differences among all three Baltic States, a comparative case analysis of three new variables (civic engagement, functioning of government, and corruption level) that influence the will to fight for one's own state will be reviewed and contrasted, and lastly, conclusions will be drawn.

Literature Review

Concerning the will to fight for one's own country, there are several layers of data that could be observed: global, regional and national. Historically, the World Values Surveys (World values survey, 2022) and European Values Studies (European Values Studies, 2022) have been the main sources of data on this topic. The main researchers in this field, Ronald F. Inglehart, Bi Puranen, and Christian Welzel, have analysed data from these studies and have developed an evolutionary theory with four hypotheses. According to their theory,

those from more developed societies place more emphasis on pro-choice values and are, therefore, less willing to fight for their country when it is threatened; societies with the strongest pro-choice values have experienced the sharpest decline in willingness to risk their lives; whereas individuals in societies with widespread pro-choice values are less interested in fighting. The experience of the Second World War had a significant impact on a country's population's willingness to fight, with countries that were part of the Axis powers displaying a decline in willingness while countries like the Nordic countries, which were threatened by empires, showed an increased willingness to fight (Inglehart, Puranen, & Welzel, 2015).

Similar to WVS and EVS, Gallup International analyses provide global and regional insights concerning the will to fight for one's own country. Gallup International has also conducted global and regional surveys on willingness to fight for one's own country. M.E.N.A. region has the highest willingness to fight (83%), while Western Europe has the lowest (25%). Countries with a history of recent conflict, such as Japan (11%) and Germany (18%) tend to have less willingness to fight, while the UK (27%) and France (29%) have a higher willingness (WIN/Gallup, 2022). In regard to the national layer, over the last three decades, in the Baltic States, dozens of surveys (World values survey, 2022; Kaitseministeerium, 2022; SKDS, 2022; Vilmorus, 2006; Sprinter tyrimai, 2010; Baltijos Tyrimai, 2010, 2011; Baltijos pažangių technologijų institutas, 2014) and research papers (Vileikienė & Janušauskienė, 2016; Andžāns, Bruģe, & Sprūds, 2017; Ramonaitė, Petronytė-Urbonavičienė, Skirkevičius, & Vosylius, 2018; Sutkus, 2017; Janušauskienė, & Vileikienė, 2016; Janušauskienė, Vileikienė, Nevinskaitė, & Gečienė-Janulionė, 2017) have been published for the purpose of looking for variables among the Baltic residents determining the will to fight for one's own country. However, most of them are based on a national perspective, and only a few of them combine data for all three Baltic states. In his recent research, Virgilijus Rutkauskas analyses 16 factors⁸ affecting willingness to fight in all three Baltic States combines them into formulas and presents ultimate values. According to the author, in all three aforementioned nations, the most significant factors influencing the willingness to fight are: attitude towards national pride, confidence in government and armed forces, financial satisfaction and socioeconomic factors like gender, age, employment, education and marital status (Rutkauskas, 2018). It is necessary to note that this research was based on data collected

between 1990 and 2015, and in most categories, the collected data is fragmented and, in some cases, leads to doubtful conclusions. Moreover, Virgilijus Rutkauskas claims that confidence in armed forces and the government is one of the most important factors contributing to the people's strong will to fight for their countries in all three Baltic states; however, only the population of Estonia exhibits a decent amount of trust in the government, whereas Latvia and Lithuania have a historically negative attitude towards their respective governments/parliaments.

The most notable research about all three Baltic States was conducted by Māris Andžāns and Andris Sprūds, who, using multiple sources,⁹ test Ronald F. Inglehart, Bi Puranen and Christian Welzel's four hypotheses concerning the willingness to fight for one's own country. Even though some surveys about Lithuania are not included in this analysis (Baltijos Tyrimai, 2010 (44% Yes), 2011 (46% Yes); Baltijos pažangių technologijų institutas, 2014 (41,7% Yes)), authors conclude that the willingness of the residents of three Baltic countries has decreased; however, since 2014, there has been a slight increase in the willingness to fight among Latvians and Estonians. Moreover, the authors claim that, though there must be higher support for a willingness to fight among states that have greater support of the armed forces and their governments, it cannot be fully observed among the Baltic States where the trust in the respective governments is significantly low, especially in case of Lithuania. Besides that, history and involvement in conflicts are not the main factors influencing a population's willingness to fight. As an example, the authors provide observations from Lithuania, where the will to fight for one's country reduced even after 2014. Eventually, value systems, political legitimacy, perceptions and practice of patriotism, as well as the efficiency of democratic institutions, are among the most important variables that contribute to society's resilience and shape specific individual preferences, including the willingness to defend one's own country (Andžāns & Sprūds, 2020).

As a result of that, the next section will dive deeper into this field and will scrutinise new variables that have not been observed over the last two decades. The civic engagement, the functioning of a government, and corruption level variables will be analysed and contrasted with the willingness to fight for one's own country in all three Baltic states.

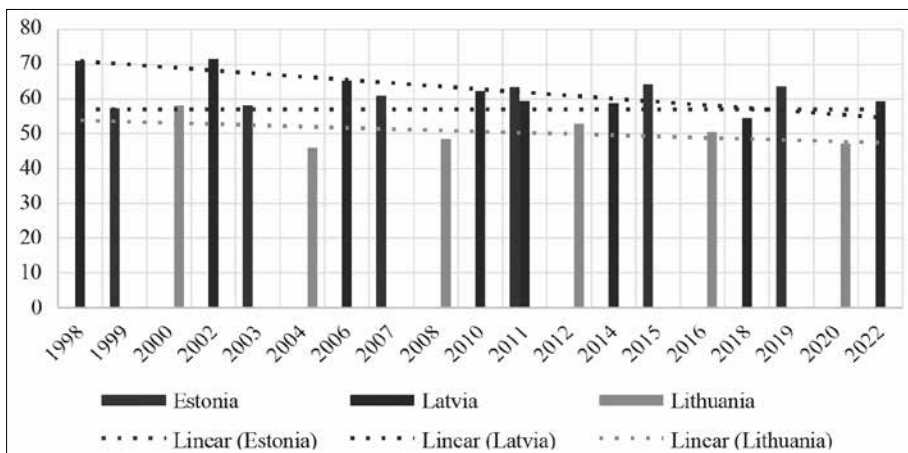
Comparative Case Analyses

Civic Engagement

The first variable that could be examined in relation to willingness to fight in the Baltic States is civic engagement, or the level of involvement and participation in the community and political processes by citizens. Higher levels of civic engagement can indicate a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility for the community, which, in turn, could lead to a greater willingness to fight to protect the nation the community belongs to. This variable could be measured through survey data on voter turnout, involvement in community organizations, and participation in political activities. This research will observe two variables that describe civic engagement to measure civic engagement: firstly, the last two decades of participation in parliamentary elections will be reviewed, and secondly, the surveys of citizens volunteering in the last 12 months will be scrutinised. Both indicators provide a clearer picture of active citizenship within the Baltic states.

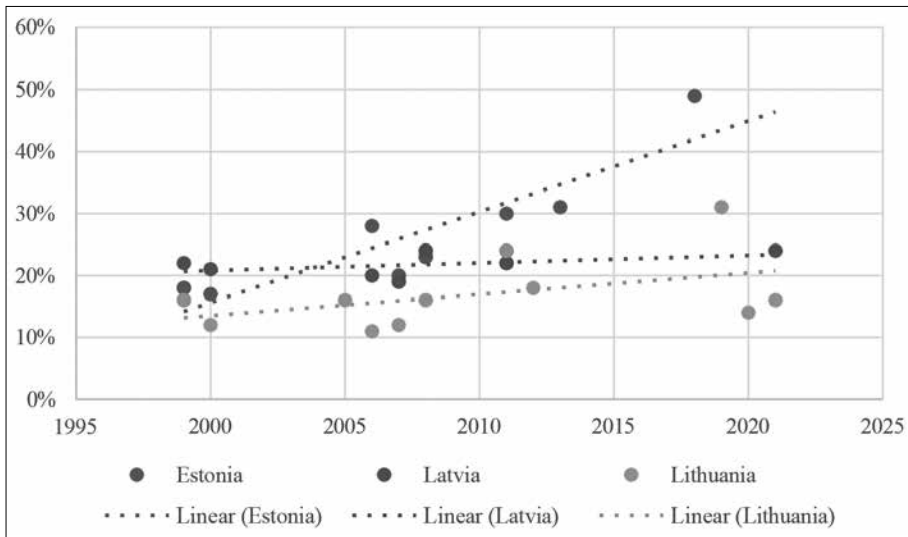
Observations of Estonian parliamentary elections reveal a steady low increase from 1999 to 2019 (57.43% to 63.67%). Meanwhile, in Latvia and Lithuania, participation in parliamentary elections has exhibited a declining trend, especially among Lithuanians. In Latvia, from 1998 to 2022, civic engagement reduced from 71% to 59.43%, while in Lithuania, the years 2000 to 2020, exhibited a decline from 58.18% to 47.2% (See Table 1). A linear trendline indicates that assuming the present pattern holds, Estonia's residents will continue to participate in the parliamentary elections at a higher rate than those of Latvia and Lithuania.

Table 1. Turnout in the Parliamentary Elections in the Baltic States (Election Guide, 2020).



When considering the residents' participation in voluntary work, Estonia once more stands out. Over the last two decades, the number of Estonian residents who participate in volunteering has been on a steep rise. Meanwhile, Latvia and Lithuania show only a slight increase in these types of activities (See Table 2). Even though additional surveys are required for a better comprehension of volunteering, the linear trendline presents the wide gap between Estonia and the other two Baltic States.

Table 2. A Percentage of People Volunteering in the Last 12 Months in the Baltics (Gavelin, Svedberg, & Pestoff, 2020).



Analysing both variables of voting in the parliamentary elections and volunteering, there is an obvious difference between Estonia on the one hand and Latvia and Lithuania on the other. Estonia displays a constant increase among active citizens, while Latvia and Lithuania's results over the years are more humble. The greater involvement in volunteering and voting might suggest that active citizens would be eager to protect their environment, within which they have invested more personal time and effort compared to inactive citizens.

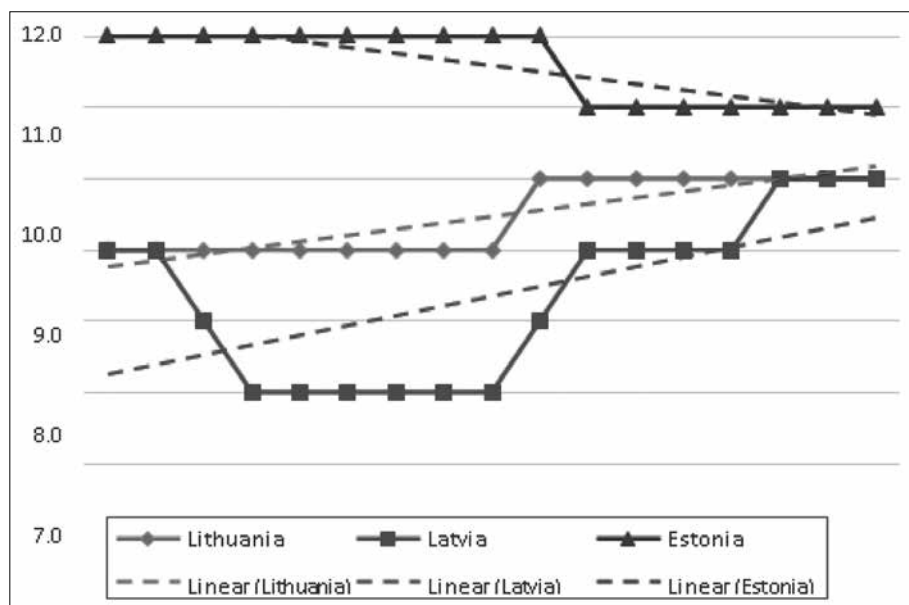
Functioning of a Government

The second variable to consider is the functioning of government in the Baltic States. If citizens have confidence in their government and believe it is working effectively to address their needs and concerns, they may be more likely to support it and be willing to defend it. On the other hand, if citizens

feel that their government is unable to effectively address their needs, they may be less likely to support it or fight for it. This variable could be measured through survey data on trust in government.

This analysis will use data provided by Freedom House to learn more about the functioning of a government, which, for the last two decades, has been analysing the level of democracy, including the functioning of the governments of the Baltic states. This feature is part of the Freedom House methodology and seeks to cover three main parts: firstly, it shows whether the elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government; secondly, it analyses if safeguards against official corruption are strong and effective; and thirdly, it tries to ascertain if the government operate with openness and transparency (Freedom House methodology, 2022). The functioning of a government is evaluated from a maximum of 12 to the lowest of 1 point (See Table 3).

Table 3. **Functioning of a Government in the Baltic States**
(Freedom House, 2022).



In the period 2006 to 2022, Estonia has a stable functioning government, which is evaluated between 11 to 12 points. The same outcomes could be seen among such developed countries as Finland and New Zealand. Meanwhile, in Latvia, since the year 2006, the functioning of the government has been decreasing, and only since 2015 it has gradually started to grow again, reaching

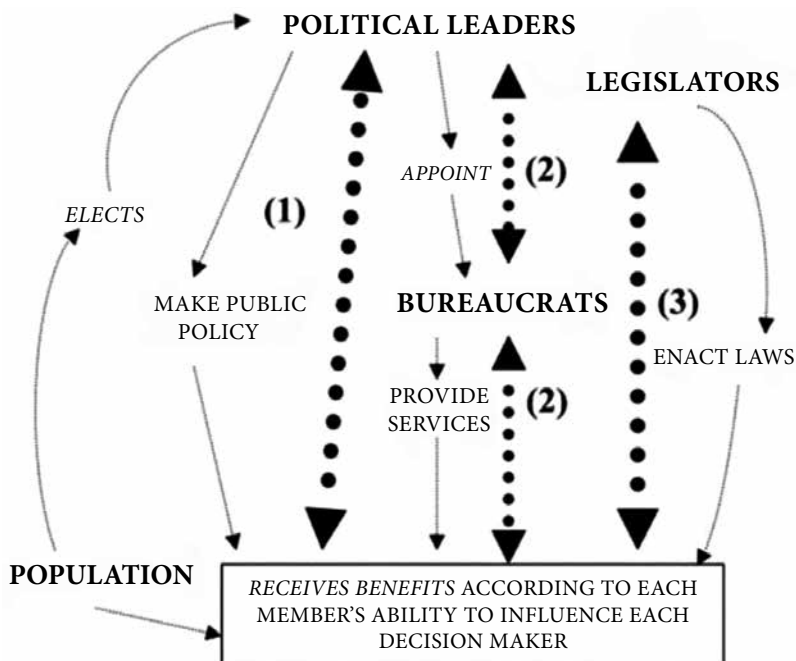
10 out of 12 points in 2022. In Lithuania, in the period 2006 to 2022, there has been a minor increase from 9 to 10 points. Both countries, Latvia and Lithuania, have not yet reached the level that Estonia has maintained since 2006. This data also interacts with the population's trust in the government itself, where Estonia has the highest level among all three Baltic States. Polls showing the population's trust in the government do not reflect the people's true desire to defend their country. The functioning of the government is a more accurate indicator that reflects the real situation inside the country, where residents face state institutions and the bureaucracy itself. Therefore, it can be assumed that states with an efficient state apparatus will be protected more than those that do not safeguard the interests of their citizens.

Corruption

Corruption is a third variable to consider in relation to the population's willingness to fight in the respective Baltic States. If citizens perceive that their government is corrupt or that there is widespread corruption in their country, they may be less likely to support it or to be willing to fight for it. Corruption can erode trust in government and undermine its legitimacy, leading to a decrease in the population's willingness to defend it.

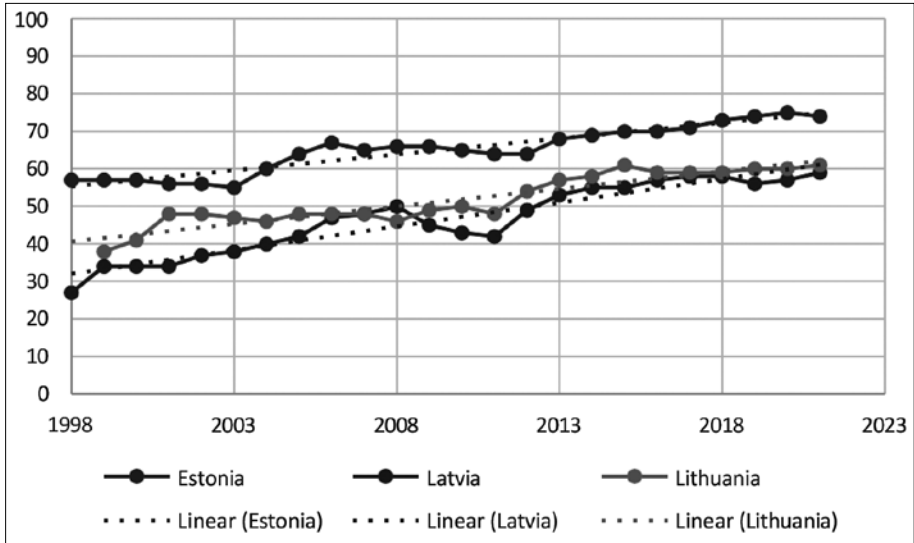
This paper focuses on Arvind K. Jain's ideas on corruption that focus on corruptive activities in which public officials, bureaucrats, legislators, and politicians use power delegated to them by the public to further their interests at the expense of the common good (Arvind, 2001: 71-121) (See Picture 1). The level of corruption is closely related to the effective functioning of governmental and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the final beneficiaries are people who are the main indicators showing whether the system is operating according to their needs.

Picture 1. **Corrupt relationships in a democratic society** (Arvind, 2001: 74).



Concerning the assessment of the corruption level within the state, Transparency International is one of the leading organizations of long-lasting data and archives. Contemporary methodology claims that the higher the number, the less corruption there is in a nation (100 is the maximum; the higher the point, the less corruption there is). Analysing the data from the Baltic States, the corruption index shows that Estonia is more advanced in fighting corruption compared to Latvia and Lithuania (see Figure 2). The recent data from 2021 presents that Latvia and Lithuania have reached a corruption level of 59 and 61, respectively, which Estonia has already achieved in 2004. Currently, Estonia has 74 points, which is the same as countries such as Ireland, Iceland, Canada and Austria. Possessing a low corruption within a state, Estonia reduces potential dissatisfaction among its citizens; therefore, this paper claims that with a lower corruption in a state, people will tend to exhibit more trust in their governmental and law enforcement agencies and, eventually, will seek to fight for the “beneficial system”.

Figure 2. **Corruption Index of Estonia, Latvia 1998-2021 and Lithuania 1999-2021**
(Transparency International index, 2021).



Conclusions

This paper sought to expand the scope of previous academic works that analyse the population of the Baltic State's willingness to fight for their country. Civic engagement, the functioning of a government and corruption are interrelated with each other.

This analysis suggests the following three key insights:

1. There is a visible coherence between civic engagement and a willingness to fight for one's country. For the last two decades, an increase in volunteering and voting among Estonians has been observed. Moreover, participation in Estonian parliamentary elections provides additional arguments that the population care about their national politics. The opposite situation can be observed in Latvia and Lithuania, where volunteering only slightly increased and voting in parliament elections dropped in the last two decades. As a result, **it is likely that there will not be a notable shift in people's willingness to fight for their countries if there is a low level of long-term civic involvement.**

2. In addition to civic engagement, the functioning of a government has been observed and contrasted with the will of the

population to fight for their country. Using Freedom House statistics, it is evident that Estonia managed to achieve a level of functional government by the middle of the 2000s, whereas Latvia and Lithuania are only now, in the year 2022, approaching the same result. Having a well-operating government for almost the last two decades, Estonia had an advantageous position to boost various governmental reforms, including increasing its people's resilience and willingness to fight for the homeland. Meanwhile, Latvia and Lithuania's governments faced additional challenges that prevented them from conducting full spectrum reforms, increasing the willingness to fight for their own countries in the last two decades. As a result of that, **the functioning of the government indirectly influences the population's desire to protect its institutional system. The better it operates, the more it is likely to be safeguarded.**

3. Even though the corruption index has been rising in all three Baltic States, in 2021, Latvia and Lithuania reached the corruption index that was indicated fifteen years ago in Estonia. Having a low corruption level within a state can not by itself increase the efficiency of statehood but also might influence residents' will to fight for the state. **When threatened, more corrupt regimes are more likely to see their citizens support them less vigorously than more transparent states.**

Overall, willingness to fight for one's own country is a complex and multifaceted issue, and it is important to consider a range of variables in order to fully understand it. In the Baltic States, historical data and recent studies have identified a number of factors that influence willingness to fight, including national pride, confidence in government and armed forces, and socioeconomic factors. However, there has not yet been a comprehensive analysis of the influence of newer variables such as civic engagement, functioning of government, and corruption level. In this paper, by examining these variables alongside historical data, it is possible to gain a more complete understanding of willingness to fight in the Baltic States and to identify areas for improvement. Estonia, with its consistent and smooth development in these fields, managed to become a leader among the Baltic States. This development could be valuable for policymakers and community leaders as they work to increase their willingness to fight and defend the countries in Lithuania and Latvia.

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Notes

¹ Gender, age, education, confidence in armed forces, national pride, confidence in government/parliament, level of income, financial satisfaction, marital status, employment status, number of children, religiosity, political orientation, autocratic government, democratic governing, place of living.

² Baltic States surveys include analyses from Virgilijus Rutkauskas, 42 surveys conducted for the Estonian Ministry of Defence (2000 through 2019), three surveys conducted for the Latvian Ministry of Defence (2014 through 2016), one survey from the research of Andžāns et al. (2018), as well as three surveys conducted for research of Māris Andžāns and Andris Sprūds (2020).