

BELARUSIAN IDENTITY IN 2023: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Belarus has emerged as a well-established, modern, and inclusive nation, although the concept of «Belarusianness» remains hotly contested.



People from polarised segments of society are less open to understanding and helping those in the «opposing» group.



Despite a generally positive attitude towards Russia, Belarusians prefer to maintain a certain distance from the neighbouring country.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have marked an era of significant events for Belarus, altering the living conditions and perceptions of many. The political crisis that began in 2020 continues to affect the current situation in the country. This is compounded by the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has polarised Belarusian society, alongside subsequent shifts in global international politics. Belarusian society finds itself divided across a number of different mindsets, with national identity occupying a key position. For many, it serves as the prism through which they perceive both current events and Belarus' future. In this context, the study of national identity is relevant not only for understanding the current state of the society but also for predicting what lies ahead.

Our approach to the study of national identity is based on the idea that as of today, two main national projects compete in Belarus: the Russian-Soviet and the National-Romantic. The first one is closely connected to the Soviet legacy; it is focused on Russia and brings the state to the forefront as a nation-forming institution. The second one is oriented toward the pre-Soviet, and more likely even pro-European, legacy and considers the Belarusian culture as the main element shaping the nation. The contestation and interaction of these projects, as well as the influence of the modern Russian identity, cosmopolitanism, and nationally indifferent attitudes determine the characteristics of the national identity of Belarusians. The description of these characteristics is the main goal of the study.

We also analyse the way the characteristics of national identity are related to socio-political conflict within Belarus and at the international level.

The report consists of three main sections.

In the first section, we identify five segments of the Belarusian society based on the characteristics of their national identity. We describe the way Belarusians feel about their national culture, language, history, what it means to them to be a Belarusian, and what national symbols and significant events give them a feeling of affection.

In the second section, we analyse the specifics and dynamics of the internal political conflict: in what way the position of Belarusians in relation to the current government is related to the characteristics of their national identity. A highlight of the report is the analysis of mutual empathy between the opposing sides, showing how deeply political disagreements affect the social attitudes of the Belarusian society.

In the third section, we describe how Belarusians' foreign policy preferences — assessment of the general foreign policy vector of the country, attitude toward Russia and Ukraine, and perception of the war — reflect the characteristics of their national identity and political position.

In addition to the main sections, the report includes a section on theoretical foundations and research methodology. In this part, we provide a justification of our approach to the study of national identity and demonstrate the way it relates to other studies of similar topics in Belarus, as well as classical theories of nations and national identity in the social sciences. It also provides definitions of the main concepts used in the report and contains a description of the data collection methodology. This part may be of interest for an additional in-depth understanding of the results of our work.

The "Resume" section contains the main conclusions of the study. A brief summary is also provided at the beginning of each section and subsection.

This report is the fourth work in a series of annual national identity studies conducted by our team. It makes it possible to track changes in the Belarusian society related to the events of recent years. However, in the current report, we do not focus on dynamics, although we provide a description of the dynamics on certain issues. This is because a different sampling frame was used for data collection in the current work.

RESUME

Five main segments can be identified among the Belarusian society according to their attitudes towards national identity: At the extreme poles of the national identity spectrum are the **Conscious** and the **Soviet**, both of which are more closely associated with the main Belarusian national projects as compared to other segments.

- The **Conscious (13%)** are involved in the National-Romantic project, which is expressed in a maximum orientation towards national culture and language, as well as the pre-Soviet historical heritage. Among national symbols and significant dates, they have a feeling of affection for the Pahonia and the white-red-white flag, vyshyvanka, folk and historical holidays such as Kalyady, Dzyady, and the day of proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). The Conscious believe that Belarusians are a separate nation in the European space, with its own history and culture. At the same time, they are more focused on global identity and multiculturalism as compared to other segments. Their interest in various cultures is due to this being the most economically and socially active segment: its representatives more often have higher levels of education and income and live in Minsk.
- The **Soviet (37%)** are linked with the Russian-Soviet national project with its focus on the heritage of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), proximity to Russia, and attribution of a key role to the state as a nation-forming institution. For the Soviet, the Belarusian nation is not perceived as a fully autonomous entity, being part of a broader project of a triune Slavic nation and the heir of the Soviet period. The main symbols and significant dates for the Soviet are the red-green flag, state enterprises, official parades on July 3 and May 9, and Dozhinki. This is the oldest segment, which likely strengthens its loyalty to the Soviet past.

Somewhere in between the polarised supporters of the main national projects are the Emerging and the Indifferent.

- The **Emerging (19%)** combine the characteristics of both national projects, and also display significant interest in global identity and multiculturalism. Representatives of the segment are often highly

educated, which makes them highly culturally involved. This is the youngest segment, which informs their openness to different, even contradictory, characteristics of national identity.

- The **Indifferent (27%)**, on the contrary, are not involved in national projects and are the most nationally indifferent segment, which is associated with the lower level of education of its representatives. Their idea of Belarusianness has the least cultural and political implications: common citizenship, territory, and nature. The same neutrality is manifested in the national symbols close to them: draniki, Nesvizh Castle, vyoska, etc.

Some Belarusians even consider themselves Russians, not Belarusians, making them more likely to be connected with the modern Russian Imperial project. At the same time, the **Russified (4%)** are characterised by a strong attachment to the Russian-Soviet component.

Depending on the degree of trust in state and non-state institutions and groups in the Belarusian society, four segments of social conflict are distinguished. Two of them are at opposite poles of political confrontation:

- **Ardent Opponents (10%)** of the current government strongly distrust state institutions and groups but have a feeling of trust towards non-state ones.
- **Ardent Supporters (23%)** of the current government are opposed to the previous segment; they strongly trust state institutions and do not trust non-state institutions at all.

Between these two segments are the two more moderate segments. **Moderate Opponents (28%)** of the current government are the most centrist segment, having little trust in both state and non-state institutions, although they are more inclined to trust the latter. **Moderate Supporters (39%)** are much more strongly aligned with the pole of support for the current government: they are only slightly more likely than Ardent Supporters to trust non-state institutions and not to trust the state ones.

The above political segments are strongly linked to identity segments. Among **Ardent Opponents**, 64% are representatives of the **Conscious**, and 69% of **Ardent Supporters**

are representatives of the Soviet. In addition, segments of social conflict are in separate information bubbles: **Ardent Supporters** are mainly the audience of state media, while **Ardent Opponents** are mainly the audience of non-state media.

Over the past year, the number of **Ardent Opponents** has significantly decreased and the number of **Ardent Supporters** has increased. At the same time, the general satisfaction of society with the situation in the country has decreased somewhat, mainly due to a decrease in the assessments of the supporters of the current government.

The socio-political conflict within the Belarusian society is also reflected in the level of empathy towards other people. Representatives of polarised segments are less willing to demonstrate Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards a person in a difficult situation if they are a representative of the opposite group. Moreover, this is true regardless of the nature of the situation, be it connected with politics (like a politically motivated dismissal) or everyday situations (like a sprained ankle). Moderate segments are significantly more empathic towards people of opposing views.

Belarusians' foreign policy preferences are closely intertwined with internal political contradictions and differences in national identity.

- At the general assessment level, approximately 40% of Belarusians prefer the country to be oriented towards an alliance with Russia, sympathise with it in the war, and support integration. Such attitudes are associated with the prevalence of the Russian-Soviet identity component. Responsiveness to propaganda also plays a role; up to half of Belarusians are convinced that nationalists and neo-Nazis are in

power in Ukraine. In addition, the prevailing supporters of the current government in society see Russia as the country's political ally.

At the same time, at the level of specific steps forward, pro-Russian sympathies turn out to be quite moderate. By integration with Russia, its supporters primarily mean interstate cooperation in the field of science and technology, visa policy, and other areas where Russia and Belarus already have fairly close relations. Distancing from Russia is also manifested in the cultural aspect: the majority of Belarusians, including those who are pro-Russian, believe that Russians coming to Belarus should adopt the local culture and way of life to the same extent as visitors from other countries. Even those who sympathise with Russia in the war not only do not support Belarus' participation in it but are also inclined to advocate for establishing friendly relations with Ukraine in the areas of mutually beneficial trade, border services, and diplomacy.

- Neutral positions, i.e., joining alliances with both the EU and Russia or remaining outside of any unions, have about the same share of supporters as the pro-Russian vector. These views are mainly held by moderate segments: the **Emerging** and the **Indifferent**. Neutrality and detachment are especially evident in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war; the majority of Belarusians do not follow it closely, and approximately one-third do not support either of the sides. This is largely due to the strong negative emotions the war evokes.
- The pro-European and direct support for Ukraine in the war vectors are the least common among Belarusians. Such views are mainly held by the **Conscious** and **Ardent Opponents** of the current government. Moreover, even among them, only half supports orientation towards the EU.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, we justify our approach to studying national identity, define the main concepts used, and describe the data collection methodology.

SPECIFICS OF STUDYING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN BELARUS

Our approach to the study of national identity is built around the concept of the main Belarusian national projects. Below we substantiate this concept and reveal the connection between national projects and the national identity that is widespread in Belarusian society.

MAIN NATIONAL PROJECTS IN BELARUS

According to the classical definition, **by nation we mean an imaginary political community, which is limited and sovereign within its borders**¹. The first nations emerged as a result of the English Revolution, the French Revolution, and the independence movements in the Americas. This experience became the model and similar projects were implemented around the world,² accompanying the emergence of modern-type bureaucratic states and rational capitalism.

In the process of nation formation, social, political, and cultural organisations play an active role. These actors promote varying visions of the nation, which differ in the symbols and rituals used, views of language and history, national identity markers, and ideas about the degree of the nation's external autonomy. The sets of views and ideas that are similar to each other in this area are defined by us as **national projects**. To varying degrees, the com-

petition between these projects continues in already formed nations.³

As a number of studies show, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several variants of national projects emerged **in Belarus, which can be reduced to two main projects**: the **National-Romantic** and the **Soviet**. Both of these projects offer their own versions of Belarusian identity. At the same time, the residents of Belarus are also influenced by the **Russian Imperial** identity project.

Thus, Nellie Bekus identifies two ideas of Belarusianness:^{4,5}

- The first is presented in the official discourse of power and is built on the basis of succession with regard to the Soviet legacy.
- The second idea of Belarusianness is promoted by the national movement and refers to the period of national revival at the beginning of the twentieth century.

When analysing the concepts of the Belarusian nation presented in intellectual and political texts of 1990–2009, Andrei Kazakevich identifies⁶ similar groups:

- 3 This process is described, for example, by Rogers Brubaker in his analysis of the politics of commemoration in Hungary in 1998. It is shown how Hungarian politicians with different views on national identity place the same historical event in different frames – that is, in essence, how different national projects struggle with each other. Брубейкер, Р. 1848 в 1998: Коммеморативная политика в Венгрии, Румынии и Словакии / **Этничность без групп** – М.: Изд. дом Высшей школы экономики, 2012 (стр. 293–294) // Brubaker, R. 1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia / *Ethnicity without groups* – Moscow: Publishing House of the Higher School of Economics, 2012 (p. 293–294).
- 4 Bekus, N. Two Ideas of "Belarusianness" / *Struggle Over Identity* – Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013 (p. 163–168).
- 5 «Беларуская нацыя» в свете различных стратегий национального строительства / Материалы конференции «Змена пакаленняў, або беларускія адрознасці ў мэтах, каштоўнасцях і стратэгіі», 2008 // "Belarusian Nation" in the Light of Various Nation-Building Strategies / *Proceedings of the conference The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy*, 2008
- 6 Казакевіч, А. **Канцэпцыі (ідэі) беларускай нацыі ў перыяд незалежнасці** – Палітычная сфера, 2010. (стар. 21–40) // Kazakevich, A. Concepts (Ideas) of the Belarusian Nation During the Period of Independence – *Political Sphere*, 2010 (p. 21–40).

1 Бенедикт, А. **Воображаемые сообщества** – М.: Кучково поле, 2016 (стр. 47) // Benedict, A. *Imagined Communities* – Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2016 (p. 47).

2 Бенедикт, А. **Воображаемые сообщества** – М.: Кучково поле, 2016 (стр. 153) // Benedict, A. *Imagined Communities* – Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2016 (p. 153).

- Strongly intersecting ethnocultural and cultural-political concepts. The former describes the Belarusian nation as a community with a common origin, language, history, and culture. The latter, speaking about cultural community, also focuses on Belarusian citizenship as an element common to members of the nation. In both concepts, the national state is a derivative of the political nation.
- The state-and-political concept, on the contrary, brings the state to the fore, understanding the nation as the population of the Republic of Belarus. An important element of this concept is succession with regard to the political and cultural past. National culture here is considered as the ethnographic characteristics of Belarusians.
- The Russocentric concept emphasises the idea of a triune Russian people, consisting of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. In this concept, Russian culture (civilisation) is much more valuable than ethnic Belarusian characteristics. The Russocentric concept promotes the Russian Imperial identity. In a sense, it cannot be considered a concept of the Belarusian nation, because sovereignty, as one of the central elements of the nation (see definition above), is transferred beyond the borders of Belarus. The author notes that this concept is also associated with the Soviet legacy because for a long period, it was a component of the ideology of the Soviet state.

A content analysis of the largest media outlets in Belarus carried out by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) in 2020 demonstrates⁷ that these national projects exist not only at the level of intellectual concepts but are also promoted among a wide audience. The analysis shows that in August 2020 — January 2021, the main components of the official discourse on national identity were the ethnographic characteristics of Belarusians and condemnation of the use of the white-red-white flag as a national symbol. On the contrary, various non-state actors actively promoted the white-red-white flag and discussed the values and personality traits of Belarusians (strong, honest, etc.).

The processes of formation of national identity in 2014–2019 was analysed by Juljan Jachovič in his doctoral dissertation⁸ based on expert interviews and content analysis of state and non-state media and public communication of the Belarusian authorities. He identified two main models that differ in historical, cultural, political, psychological, and territorial dimensions:

- The official model of identity is built around the Soviet period in history and victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Multi-vector foreign policy and the sovereignty of Belarus are combined with cooperation with Russia as a "brotherly country". In this regard, literature and sports are recognised as cultural elements that are distinctive for Belarusians.

- The unofficial discourse is less homogeneous, including both a negative attitude towards Russia and a neutral one, appealing both to the bilingualism of Belarusians and to the priority of the Belarusian language. This model is dominated by the recognition of the significant role of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the history of the Belarusian nation and a positive attitude towards the uprisings of Kalinowski and Kosciuszko, but the perception of the period of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) is inconsistent.

Thus, a number of studies demonstrate the coexistence and competition of three main national projects in Belarus, which are promoted through social movements, mass communication, and public policy: National-Romantic, Soviet, and Russian Imperial.

WHAT IS NATIONAL IDENTITY

Each of the abovementioned national projects is associated with national identities that are widespread in the Belarusian society.

By identity, we mean a set of identification and categorisation schemes that people use to describe themselves and others.⁹ National identity encompasses those aspects

of identification and categorisation that belong to one of the national projects. Cosmopolitanism, in turn, is also a form of national identity to the extent that it refers to national categories and classifications, albeit to their negation. In other words, national identity is those schemes for describing oneself and others that social actors and individuals themselves consider as national ones.

Identity has a relational nature, emerging in individual social interactions rather than existing in the form of objective social groups. At the same time, identity is not completely situational and reinvented in every interaction: identification and categorisation schemes constitute a stable "baggage" for individuals, which they activate when necessary. This set of identification and categorisation schemes available to individuals can be united under the concept of "identity". This stability of identity is confirmed by our and other empirical studies: individual components of identity demonstrate widespread prevalence over many years, and stable

⁷ Індекс ідэнтычнасці. Выпуск 1. Выпуск 2 – Беларускі інстытут стратэгічных даследаванняў, 2021 // Identity Index. Issue 1, Issue 2 – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021

⁸ Jachovič, J. The Reconstruction of Belarusian National Identity: Discourses and Processes, 2014–2019 / Vilnius University, 2022

⁹ This definition is based on the theoretical work of Rogers Brubaker, but we do not, as the author suggests, abandon the concept of "identity". See Брубейкер, Р. За пределами идентичности / Этничность без групп – М.: Изд. дом Высшей школы экономики, 2012 (стр. 89–94) // Brubaker, R. Beyond "Identity" Ethnicity without Groups – Moscow: Publishing House of the Higher School of Economics, 2012 (p. 89–94).

and statistically significant relationships are observed between these components.

Individuals with similar identities form segments (clusters). Several stable segments of the population exist with statistically significant differences in national identity. Among these segments, three main ones are distinguished:^{10,11}

- The Conscious, who are more often characterised by the identity components of a National-Romantic project.
- The Soviet, with identity components of the Soviet national project.
- The Russified, who are characterised by identity components of the Russian Imperial national project.

The above segments should be understood as analytical categories, i.e., social groups "on paper", and not real social groups. That is, the clusters identified in our research, for example, the Russified or the Conscious are not the categories that Belarusians actually use to describe themselves and others. In addition, the segments represent statistical categories, which means that the boundaries between them are arbitrary; the distribution of characteristics that unite and differentiate individuals has a continuous nature. The segments represent "condensations" in this space of continuous distributions rather than clearly defined groups. Consequently, it is not possible to say with certainty to which segment each individual belongs.

The connection between the national projects promoted at the macro level of social structure and widespread national identities¹² is observed not only in quantitative, but also in qualitative studies. For example, based on focus group data, Maria Rogova demonstrates¹³ what markers are used by individuals to identify themselves and others as Belarusians. These identification schemes coincide both with those that promote various national projects, and with those that are observed in quantitative studies: language, national symbols, historical memory, etc.

Thus, the conceptualisation of the landscape of Belarusian national identity, which reduces its components to two main national projects and the Russian Imperial project, fits into the classical constructivist approach to the study of

nationalism, and is also observed in a number of analytical materials and empirical studies.¹⁴ We use this conceptualisation as a starting point for the operationalisation of Belarusian national identity in the current study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was collected through a Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method from November 2 to November 5, 2023.

Sample size: 1,205 respondents.

Sampling type: quota.

The sample represents the population of Belarusian cities with a population of 20 thousand or more aged 18–65 years. The sample structure corresponds to the structure of the general population by gender, age, city size, and education. To repair the sample, a Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting procedure was used. The socio-demographic structure of the sample is provided in Appendix 1.

Respondent recruitment method: online panel with non-probabilistic selection of participants.

The data collection method used involves two types of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the data.

1. Risk of coverage error. Although in general 92% of city residents use¹⁵ the Internet, the share of users is significantly lower among the 55–64-year-old group – 84%.¹⁶ This resulted in a certain sampling bias: approximately 15% of the oldest age group could not be represented in the sample. It can be assumed

¹⁴ The above series of publications can be supplemented by works that do not cover the general landscape of national identity, but reveal individual national projects or their aspects:

Ластовский, А. **Русский национализм как идеологический проект белорусской идентичности** – Форум новейшей восточноевропейской истории и культуры, 2011 // Lastovsky, A. Russian Nationalism as an Ideological Project of Belarusian Identity – Forum of Contemporary Eastern European History and Culture, 2011

Рудкоўскі, П. **Ад «хворага» да «здоравага» нацыяналізму** – Беларускі інстытут стратэгічных даследаванняў, 2018 // Rudkouski, P. From "sick" to "healthy" nationalism – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018.

Шелест, О. **«Новые The Soviet» беларусы: характеристики и распространенность идентификации с «советским народом»** – Центр европейской трансформации, 2017 // Shelest, O. "New Soviet" Belarusians: Characteristics and Prevalence of Identification with the "Soviet People" – Centre for European Transformation, 2017.

¹⁵ **Удельный вес населения, использующего сеть Интернет** – Белстат, 2023 // Share of Population Using Internet – Belstat, 2023.

¹⁶ **Информационное общество в Республике Беларусь** – Белстат, 2023 (стр. 51) // Information Society of the Republic of Belarus – Belstat, 2023 (p. 51)

¹⁰ Биканов, Ф. **Национальная идентичность белорусов** – Годна, 2021 // Bikanov, F. National identity of Belarusians – Godna, 2021.

¹¹ Биканов, Ф. **Белорусская национальная идентичность в 2022 году: опыт количественного исследования** – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022 // Bikanov, Ph. Belarusian Identity in 2022: A Quantitative Study – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022

¹² In this regard, the relationship between the micro level and the macro level has a bidirectional nature. On the one hand, national projects structure the identities of individuals acting at the micro level. On the other hand, actors operating at the macro level rely on the characteristics of identities that are widespread in society.

¹³ Rohava, M. **Identity in an Autocratic State: Or What Belarusians Talk about When They Talk about National Identity** / East European Politics and Societies, 2017 (p. 639–668).

that people aged 55–64 who do not use the Internet may have views more like those broadcasted by state television channels. Therefore, the distributions of some answers may contain a certain degree of error due to the under-representation of these people.

2. At the same time, the main alternative for an online survey, the median duration of which was 32 minutes, is face-to-face interviews. Such interviews on political topics cannot be organised in Belarus due to the Belarusian regime's continued repression, therefore, an online survey remains the only realistic alternative.
3. Fear factor. As of today, political surveys in Belarus are at risk of bias because Belarusians may be afraid to express their opinions and talk about actions that could be persecuted by the government. An analysis by the Chatham House Belarus Initiative¹⁷ demonstrates that as a result of this effect, respondents are somewhat more likely to provide neutral answers and chose the "Difficult to answer" option. Therefore, the distribution of answers provided may differ from the actual thoughts of people on the most sensitive issues, for example, regarding national symbols that the government considers as extremist.
4. To reduce the influence of the fear factor, we avoided sensitive wording in the survey, for example, direct questions about attitudes towards Lukashenko or actions that constitute violations of the law. In the beginning of the questionnaire, each respondent was assured of the anonymity of the survey. In addition, most of the research conclusions are based on answers not to one question, but to a whole series of questions that measure the required parameter from different angles. All these measures, combined with the use of multidimensional analysis methods, make it possible to minimise the impact of the fear factor.

This report is the fourth annual study to analyse changes in national identity within Belarusian society. However, in the current wave, our focus is not on assessing the dynamics. This year, we adjusted the sample structure to align with the 2019 census data. In previous waves, the quota target overestimated the share of young people and included population groups over 65 years old.

Notwithstanding this change, in certain sections, such as Sections 2.1 and 2.2, we provide data on the dynamics and can assert that they are not linked to adjustments in the sample structure but reflect the actual processes taking place in society. Specifically, to assess the impact of changes in quotas on responses regarding trust in state institutions, two approaches were employed:¹⁸

- In the first case, 10,000 samples were simulated from the 2023 sample, replicating the age structure of 2022. There were no significant discrepancies between the original 2023 data and the obtained distribution.
- In the second case, a statistical model was built to evaluate the impact of a participant's affiliation with a specific wave based on their responses, irrespective of age. This analysis indicates that this effect is substantial in strength and statistically significant.

Both analyses demonstrate that the observed changes cannot be explained by adjustments in the age structure of the sample.

¹⁷ Астапеня, Р. Фактор страха при исследованиях на политическую тематику в Беларуси – Chatham House, 2021 // Astapenya, R. How the 'Fear Factor' Affects Political Surveys in Belarus – Chatham House, 2021.

¹⁸ Analysis by Alexander Kozlov, Lead Data Scientist, external expert

1

NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE BELARUSIAN SOCIETY

Five main segments can be identified among the Belarusian society according to their attitudes towards national identity: the Conscious, the Emerging, the Indifferent, the Russified, and the Soviet. Representatives of each segment tend to have different ideas about what it means to be a Belarusian; they often express affection towards different national symbols and rituals, and they have different attitudes towards history.

At the extreme poles of the spectrum of national identity are the Conscious and the Soviet, both of which are more closely associated with the main Belarusian national projects as compared to other segments.

- The **Conscious (13%)** are involved in the National-Romantic project, which is expressed in a maximum orientation towards national culture and language, as well as the pre-Soviet historical heritage. Among national symbols and significant dates, they have feelings of affection for the Pahonia and the white-red-white flag, vyshyvanka, and folk and historical holidays such as Kalyady, Dzyady, and the day of proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). The Conscious believe that Belarusians are a separate nation in the European space, with its own history and culture. At the same time, they are more focused on global identity and multiculturalism as compared to other segments. Their interest in various cultures is derived from this being the most economically and socially active segment; its representatives more often have a higher level of education and income and live in Minsk.
- The **Soviet (37%)** are connected with the Russian-Soviet national project, with its focus on the heritage of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), proximity to Russia, and attribution of a key role to the state as a nation-forming institution. For the Soviet, the Belarusian nation is not perceived as a fully autonomous entity, being part of a broader project of a triune Slavic nation and the heir of the Soviet period. The main symbols and significant dates for the Soviet segment are the red-green flag, state enterprises, official parades on July 3 and May 9, and Dozhinki. This is the oldest segment, which likely strengthens its loyalty to the Soviet past.

Somewhere in between the polarised supporters of the main national projects are the Emerging and the Indifferent.

- The **Emerging (19%)** combine the characteristics of both national projects, while also demonstrating significant interest in global identity and multiculturalism. Representatives of the segment are often highly educated, which makes them highly culturally involved. At the same time, this is the youngest segment, which determines their openness to different, even contradictory, characteristics of national identity.
- The **Indifferent (27%)**, on the contrary, are not involved in national projects and are the most nationally indifferent segment, which is associated with the typically lower level of education of its representatives. Their idea of Belarusianness has the least cultural and political implications: common citizenship, territory, and nature. The same neutrality is manifested in national symbols close to them: draniki, Nesvizh Castle, vyoska, etc.
- Some Belarusians even consider themselves Russians, not Belarusians; in this sense, they are more likely to relate to the modern Russian Imperial project. Given a high level of national indifference towards the manifestations of Belarusian national projects, the **Russified (4%)** are still closer to the Russian-Soviet characteristics of national identity.

1.1 SEGMENTS OF THE BELARUSIAN SOCIETY WITH REGARD TO NATIONAL IDENTITY

The national identity of Belarusians is strongly connected with the main national projects, involvement in which determines the characteristics of national identification and self-identification, attitude towards symbols and rituals, and perception of history and culture. These ideas are also associated with the manifestations of cosmopolitanism and national indifference. Depending on the characteristics of national identity, Belarusian society can be divided into five main segments, which are described further in this section.

Figure 1.1

COMPONENTS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

RUSSIAN-SOVIET

- If I had to choose where to immigrate — to Russia or to Western Europe — I would choose Russia.
- It would be nice if Belarus and Russia finally united.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great tragedy.
- I don't see any difference between Russians and Belarusians at all.
- I have an equally positive attitude towards the successes of Belarusians and Russians.
- Ukrainians themselves are to blame for what happened in Donbas.
- We shouldn't get rid of the Soviet legacy.
- We do not have any infringement of the Belarusian language.
- The proclamation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) in 1919 was a positive event.

BELARUSIAN

- I would like there to be more Belarusian language in our lives.
- Kastus Kalinowski is an outstanding historical figure who made a great positive contribution to the development of the Belarusian nation.
- Many of the problems our country is faced with are related to the fact that we have forgotten our culture and language.
- I would be willing to pay a little more tax if these funds were spent for the development of the Belarusian culture.
- I feel bitterness and resentment when the rights of the Belarusian-speaking population are infringed.
- Events such as the Battle of Grunwald or the Battle of Orsha are events in our history that are worth being proud of.
- I am interested in modern Belarusian culture: music, literature, cinema, etc.

NATIONALLY INDIFFERENT

- National culture and patriotism only create unnecessary barriers between people.
- In my opinion, the existence of cultural differences causes too much harm and leads to conflicts.
- I don't think that national culture and language are important in the modern world.
- The presence of multiple languages in the modern world is an extra barrier dividing people.
- Preserving cultural heritage is not what should be a priority in the modern world.

COSMOPOLITAN

- I'm interested in learning about the different cultures that exist in the world.
- To be successful, you need to be able to use materials, information and knowledge from different cultures around the world.
- Communicating with foreigners and having friends around the world is interesting.
- I want to learn news about events from all over the world.
- I believe that all people are brothers and sisters, regardless of their nation.

The degree of connection of a variable with the component:

- Maximum
- Strong
- Medium
- Weak

For technical characteristics of the scale used, please see Appendix C.

National identity in the Belarusian society consists of four main components:

The **Russian-Soviet** component reflects an orientation towards the Soviet heritage and the idea of a close connection between the Belarusian nation and Russia.

The **Belarusian** component measures the degree of connection of identity with the Belarusian national culture, language, and history of Belarus before the Soviet period.

The **Cosmopolitan** component measures orientation toward global identity and multiculturalism.

The **Nationally Indifferent** component reflects the degree of indifference to the components of national identity. The concept refers to a term from thematic literature,¹⁹ but without an emphasis on antagonism in relation to the national and geographical localisation of indifference.

These components were identified using factor analysis (for details, see [Appendix C](#)). We asked respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with 26 statements²⁰ and, based on their responses, mathematically calculated four latent factors (components), each of which determined agreement with one of four groups of statements (see Figure 1.1).

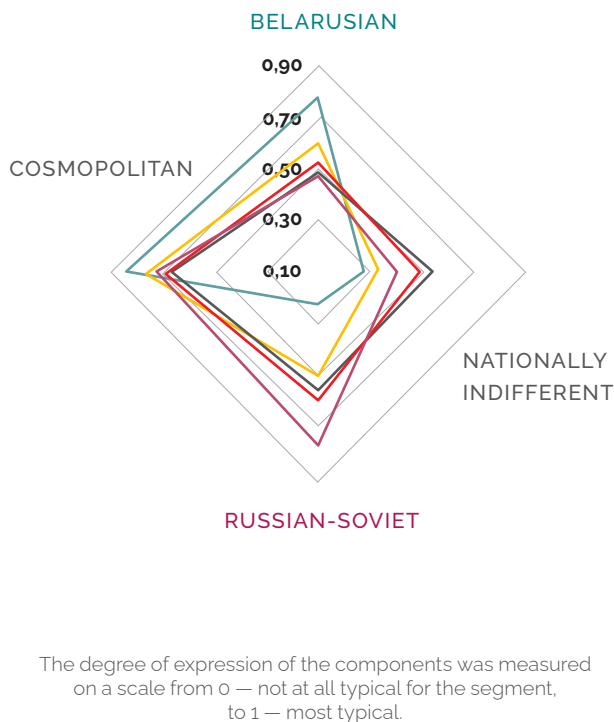
The degree of connection of a variable with the component: maximum, strong, medium, weak

Some of the components turned out to be interconnected. Thus, the Belarusian and the Soviet components have an inverse correlation: in those who are characterised by the former, the latter will be expressed to a lesser extent. In addition, the Belarusian component is directly related to the Cosmopolitan component and inversely related to the

¹⁹ Miller, A. *National Indifference as a Political Strategy?* / Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 2019.

²⁰ In the current wave, in order to fully cover the components of national identity, statements related to history, culture, as well as commitment to global identity and multiculturalism were added to the scale, which were not present in previous waves. See [Appendix C](#) for more details on the development of the scale and its technical characteristics.

Figure 1.2.
NATIONAL IDENTITY SEGMENTS



- 13% — the Conscious
 - Most characteristic are the Belarusian and Cosmopolitan components of national identity
 - Least characteristic are the Russian-Soviet and the Nationally Indifferent components of national identity
- 19% — the Emerging
 - Almost equal presence of the Belarusian and Russian-Soviet components
 - Low level of indifference
- 27% — the Indifferent
 - Most characteristic is the Nationally Indifferent component
 - Average presence of the Russian-Soviet component
 - Low presence of the Belarusian and Cosmopolitan components
- 4% — the Russified
 - The segment consists of those who consider themselves Russian
 - Rather characteristic is the Russian-Soviet component and not characteristic are the Belarusian and Cosmopolitan components
 - Above-average presence of the Nationally Indifferent component
- 37% — the Soviets
 - Most characteristic is the Russian-Soviet component
 - Average presence of the Nationally Indifferent and Cosmopolitan components
 - Low presence of the Belarusian component

Nationally Indifferent component. This means that if the Belarusian component is expressed in national identity, then the Cosmopolitan component will probably be expressed as well, and the Nationally Indifferent one, on the contrary, will be less expressed.

Depending on the intensity of each of the four components of national identity, five segments are distinguished in the Belarusian society (see Figure 1.2). These segments were obtained using cluster analysis based on the 26 variables described above.²¹

To detail the characteristics of national identity for each of the segments, we analysed by what markers they identify themselves and others as Belarusians, how they differ in terms of self-identification, and towards which national symbols and ritual events they feel affection. These differences are summarised on the map of the symbolic space of Belarusian national identity (see Figure 1.3). Each of these aspects is described in detail in sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.

The main characteristics of segments with regard to national identity are described below.

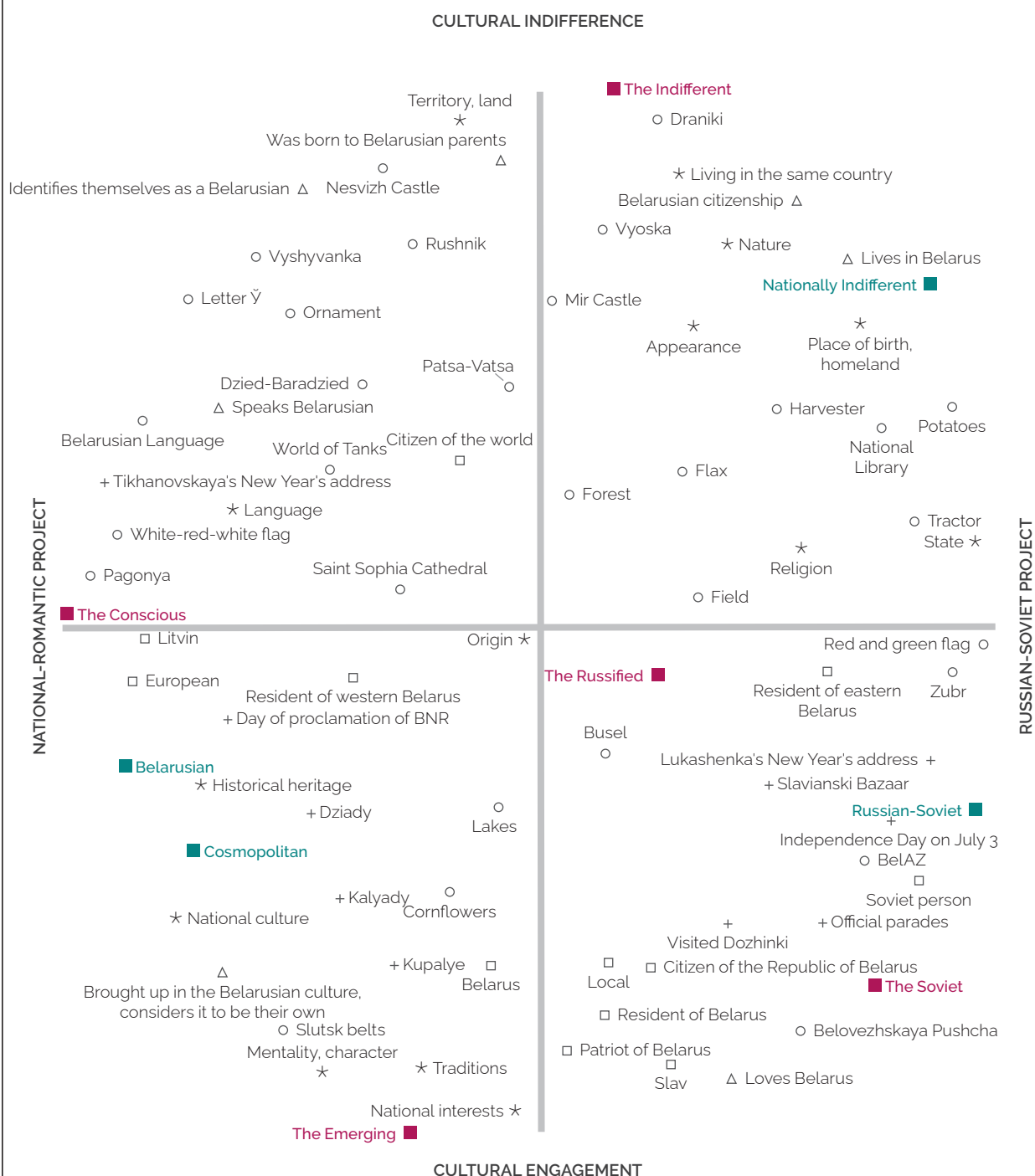
The Conscious (13%). This is a segment associated with the National-Romantic project.

- This is the most culturally oriented segment: the Conscious most often mention the Belarusian language and culture as national characteristics. For them, more often than for other segments, the general history of the national community is important, besides they are more focused on the pre-Soviet period, for example, on the figure of Kastus Kalinowski, the Battle of Grunwald, and the Battle of Orsha.
- The Conscious feel most affection for the symbols and rituals of the National-Romantic project: the white-red-white flag and Pahonia, vyshyvanka, the day of proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR), Dziady and other traditional holidays, Tikhanovskaya's New Year's address.
- Representatives of this segment are focused on global identity and multiculturalism, are more likely to speak English, and consider themselves to be Europeans. This may be due to their socio-economic status; representatives of this segment are more likely to have a higher education (44%), be qualified specialists (33%), and be somewhat more likely to work in the IT sector (12%).²² In short, the Conscious have an increased likelihood of being included in the multicultural

²¹ Hierarchical cluster analysis was employed using Ward's method (the square Euclidean distance was used as a measure).

²² Sociodemographic differences between segments are provided in [Appendix B](#).

Figure 1.3
SYMBOLIC SPACE OF BELARUSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY



How to read the figure:

- The closer the points are to each other, the stronger the connection between them: in the questionnaire, they are more often reported by the same people.
- In the centre are the points that have the weakest connection with other points. For example, they are characteristic of all segments to an equal degree.

At the same time, the degree of prevalence of points, that is, how many people reported them, is not displayed in this figure. The points in the centre can be generally either less common (for example, "Patsa-Vatsa", "Forest") or widespread (like "Lakes", "Origin"). Similarly, the points on the edges of the figure can be characteristic of both a small number of people ("Litvin") and a large number of people (for example, "Zubr" is one of the most popular symbols among all segments, although it gravitates towards the Russian-Soviet vector).

Source: The figure shows the result of multidimensional scaling based on the variables of affiliation with clusters, national identity components, and the main characteristics of national identity (the square Euclidean distance was used as a measure). The method allows numerous variables to be reduced to a two-dimensional space and the connections between them to be clearly demonstrated.

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

information and economic structures of post-Fordist production.²³ In this case, the simultaneous orientation towards global and national identity can be explained by the glocalisation effect — globalisation around the world is accompanied by increased interest in local culture.

- Within this segment, there is a larger proportion of men, residents of Minsk, and people with high income.

The Emerging (19%). This segment simultaneously gravitates towards the National-Romantic and the Russian-Soviet projects.

- It does not stand out from other segments by the national identification patterns used by its representatives.²⁴ An exception is the idea of a common character which binds them with other Belarusians.
- The Emerging have the strongest national self-identification; they more often associate themselves with Belarusians, as citizens and residents of the country.
- A simultaneous connection with the Russian-Soviet and National-Romantic projects is reflected in the almost symmetrical participation in the rituals of both. The Emerging are characterised by participation both in Dzyady, Kalyady, and Kupalye, as well as in official Dozhinki and parades on July 3 and May 9.
- This segment is distinguished by a high level of education; its representatives are more likely to be specialists and employed in the service sector, less often as labourers. In this regard, they are close to the Conscious segment, however, unlike the latter, there is an increased proportion of women and young age groups in the Emerging segment.
- Involvement in both national projects may be related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the segment. Having a higher level of education and being employed in positions that require a high level of qualification, the Emerging have the required resources for cultural involvement. For example, they visit museums just as often as the Conscious. At the same time, the simultaneous affection towards the elements of both national projects may be associated with a younger age:
 - The first explanation is that young people are still in the process of identity formation, which takes a long time. Thus, a meta-analysis of 124

studies of the identity of adolescents and young adults demonstrated²⁵ that as they age, more and more people reach the final stages of identity formation, when they have already explored various alternatives and formed their own beliefs. By the age of 36, only about half have a fully formed identity, and this process continues²⁶ with age. In other words, being younger, representatives of the Emerging segment may not have had time yet to sufficiently become familiar with the dominant national discourses and form their preferences.

- Another explanation is that because the most active phases of identity formation among a significant part of the segment's representatives coincided with the period of the strongest simultaneous influence of both national projects. From 2011–2012 to 2020, the authorities implemented a policy of "soft Belarusization".²⁷ This means that, along with the Russian-Soviet project, the government also promoted certain elements that are more characteristic of the National-Romantic project. At the same time, this period witnessed the culmination of the massive spread of the Internet, expanding access to different points of view on the Belarusian nation. Under such circumstances, the formation of an overdetermined identity could intensify²⁸ — that is, an identity that is simultaneously characterised by elements of several conflicting discourses.

The Indifferent (27%). This segment is distinguished by the highest level of indifference to national identity.

- The indifferent often feel affection to the least culturally related and most politically neutral nationality characteristics: place of birth, territory, general nature, citizenship, and self-identification.
- Cultural indifference is also manifested in most national symbols that are close to the Indifferent: draniki, the Nesvizh Castle, the National Library, vyshyvanka, ornament. These symbols are more often perceived as not being culturally and politically loaded and are less often associated with individual national projects. The Indifferent are less

²³ Водолажская, Т. **Новые группы и социальная структура** – Летучий университет, 2021 // Vodolazskaya, T. *New Groups and Social Structure* – Flying University, 2021

²⁴ Since the Emerging are not characterised by their own specific markers and symbols, on the map of symbolic space some points appear next to this segment only because they are not characteristic of other segments: "traditions", "national interests", "Slutsk belts".

²⁵ Kroger J., Martinussen M., Marcia James E. **Identity status change during adolescence and young adulthood: A meta-analysis**, / *Journal of Adolescence*, 2010.

²⁶ Fadjukoff P., Pulkkinen L., Koko k. **Identity Formation in Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study from Age 27 to 50** / *Identity*, 2016.

²⁷ Рудкоўскі, П. Ад «хворага» да «здоравага» нацыяналізму – Беларускі інстытут стратэгічных даследаванняў, 2018 // Rudkouski, P. From "sick" to "healthy" nationalism – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018.

²⁸ Филлипс Л., Йоргенсен М. В. **Дискурс-анализ: теория и метод** – Харьков: Гуманитарный центр, 2008 (стр. 81) // Phillips L., Jorgensen M.V. *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* – Kharkiv: Humanitarian Centre, 2008 (p. 81)

likely than the representatives of other segments to visit museums and participate in national rituals.

- Among the Indifferent, younger age groups predominate, with their representatives often having secondary education.

The Russified (4%). The representatives of this segment are close to the Russian-Soviet project and the Indifferent, but in general, they belong to the modern Russian Imperial project as they consider themselves Russians rather than Belarusians.

- The representatives of this segment are often indifferent to manifestations of Belarusian identity, however, in those aspects where they have an interest, they are close to the Soviet, for example, they more often than others consider themselves Soviet people.
- The Russified are the least likely to identify themselves with a national level of identity: residents of Belarus, patriots of Belarus, etc.
- The segment is characterised by the predominance of older age groups and residents of cities with a population of 100,000 or more.

The Soviet (37%). This is the segment that is associated with the Russian-Soviet national project.

- In the perception of national characteristics, its representatives are focused mainly on the state and emotional attachment; they often define belonging to a nation through loyalty to the state and love for Belarus.
- As national symbols, the Soviet prefer the red-green flag, Belovezhskaya Pushcha, zubr, and industrial state-owned enterprises, for example BelAZ. Important symbolic events for the representatives of this segment are the parades on July 3 and May 9, Dozhinki, Slavic Bazaar, and Lukashenko's New Year's address.
- The Soviet perceive the Belarusian nation as part of a larger project, often considering themselves to be Soviet people and Slavs, supporting the idea of a triune nation.
- The Soviet are the oldest segment with a higher proportion of pensioners. This may partly explain the increased affection towards the Soviet past. In addition, the representatives of this segment often have a lower income and level of education.

1.2 COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITY OF BELARUSIANS

Depending on the characteristics of their identity, Belarusians have different ideas about what it means to be a Belarusian, what symbols and common personality traits unite the nation.

In general, Belarusians have a very inclusive idea of the nation: to be considered a Belarusian, most often it is enough to consider the Belarusian culture as your own, consider yourself a Belarusian, and love the country. For most Belarusians, origin, appearance, and, in general, biological characteristics do not play any role in determining a person's nationality.

At the same time, with regard to their own national identification, Belarusians are more often guided by characteristics independent of them: place of birth, nationality of parents, and character. In terms of personality traits, there is even a stable image of a Belarusian as a hard-working, peaceful, hospitable, kind, and patient person. Moreover, peacefulness and patience are the stereotypes that are most inconsistent with reality: Belarusians are much less likely to believe, when they meet in person, that such personality traits are inherent to them, than when attributing these traits to a hypothetical "typical Belarusian".

The unifying national symbol for them is zubr — the most popular image among all segments. The Conscious are much less likely to feel affection towards most other symbols.

Besides national symbols, other aspects of identity vary significantly from segment to segment:

- The Conscious are the most culturally oriented; for them, a nation is, first and foremost, a cultural and linguistic community, and language for them often carries important symbolic meaning. The Conscious differ from other segments in their perception of the image of Belarusians, more often considering them quiet and cowardly, meek, and patient.
- The Soviet more often perceive the state as a unifying feature, and precisely in the aspect of political commitment to the current government. In addition, the Soviet tend to emphasise emotional attachment to the national community; to be a Belarusian for them means to love Belarus.
- For the Indifferent, the state also plays an important role as a national characteristic, but they view it more in terms of territory and citizenship. In this regard, the cultural and political aspects of the community are least important to them.

The main content of national identity is the perceptual schemes by which people identify themselves and others. In this process, various markers of national identity are used: country of residence, citizenship, language, origin, personality traits, etc. Different ideas about the symbols representing the national community and used to describe it are also common in Belarusian society. Depending on the nature of the national identity markers, a nation may be more or less inclusive, and national identity may be perceived as a more or less natural characteristic. In this

section, we reveal these aspects by describing the main content of national identity: what Belarusians mean when they talk about nationality and how their ideas relate to the main projects of the Belarusian nation.

We divided all the markers that people use to identify themselves and others as Belarusians into two categories:

- Essentialising, which are considered natural, for example, appearance and origin. The use of such markers means that people perceive nationality as something unchangeable and inherent to people against their will.
- Acquired, which are believed to largely depend on the will of the person: they can be acquired or gotten rid of at will. For example, place of residence and citizenship.

For most Belarusians, the connection with other members of the nation lies in a common place of birth (see Figure 1.4). There is also a widespread opinion that Belarusians are united by certain personality traits, the nationality of their parents, and a common state. In this regard, the main markers used for self-identification are the essentialising ones.

Instead of essentialising markers that are used for self-identification, in the process of identifying others, on the contrary, acquired markers come to the fore, such as culture, self-identification and love for the country (see Figure 1.5). Most of the national characteristics that are considered mandatory to be considered a Belarusian are also the acquired ones: considering yourself a Belarusian, feeling love for the country, considering the Belarusian culture to be your own, visiting Belarus, having Belarusian citizenship, and doing something for the benefit of the country (see Figure 1.6). On the contrary, only a small proportion of Belarusians are guided by the essentialising characteristics: having Belarusian parents, being raised in Belarusian culture, and having a certain character or appearance.

Such a difference between self-identification markers and markers that are used for the identification of others suggests that Belarusians perceive their own nationality rather as something natural and acquired by birth, while the nationality of others is more likely as something cultural and, if necessary, acquired by their own free will. This combination ensures the sustainability of the Belarusian national community and makes it largely inclusive.

Self-identification markers and markers used for the identification of others vary significantly between segments.

Among the markers of common identity with other Belarusians, the **Conscious** more often than others specify culture, language, and history, which are important for the National-Romantic project. When identifying others, they are guided mainly by the markers of Belarusian culture and the person's self-identification. In this regard, the identity of the **Conscious** is most closely aligned with the ethno-

cultural concept of the nation,²⁹ and in those variants that do not focus on origin, since the identity of the **Conscious** turns out to be the freest from the essentialising markers.

In determining whether the person is a Belarusian, emotional attachment — love for Belarus is much more important for the **Soviet** than for other segments. This can be explained by the generally increased role of emotional motivation for political and identity choice among the **Soviet** in comparison with rational and value-rational motives. Our previous research had demonstrated that the **Soviet** segment in general is often characterised by irrational thinking, as exemplified by their belief in astrology.³⁰ This is also confirmed by the lower level of education in this segment.

In addition to the increased importance of emotional attachment, for the **Soviet**, more often than for other segments, a common state is important as a marker of national identity, which is the main conductor of the Soviet project of Belarusian national identity.

The perception of the state as a component of the national community varies greatly between segments. For the **Conscious**, it is much less important, while for the **Indifferent** and the **Soviet** it plays a central role. At the same time, the **Indifferent** understand the importance of the state rather in terms of citizenship, which makes their identity closer to the civil-political concept of the nation, although without an emphasis on national culture. The **Soviet** understand the importance of the state rather in their commitment to the current government, which indicates the closeness of their identity to the state-and-political concept.

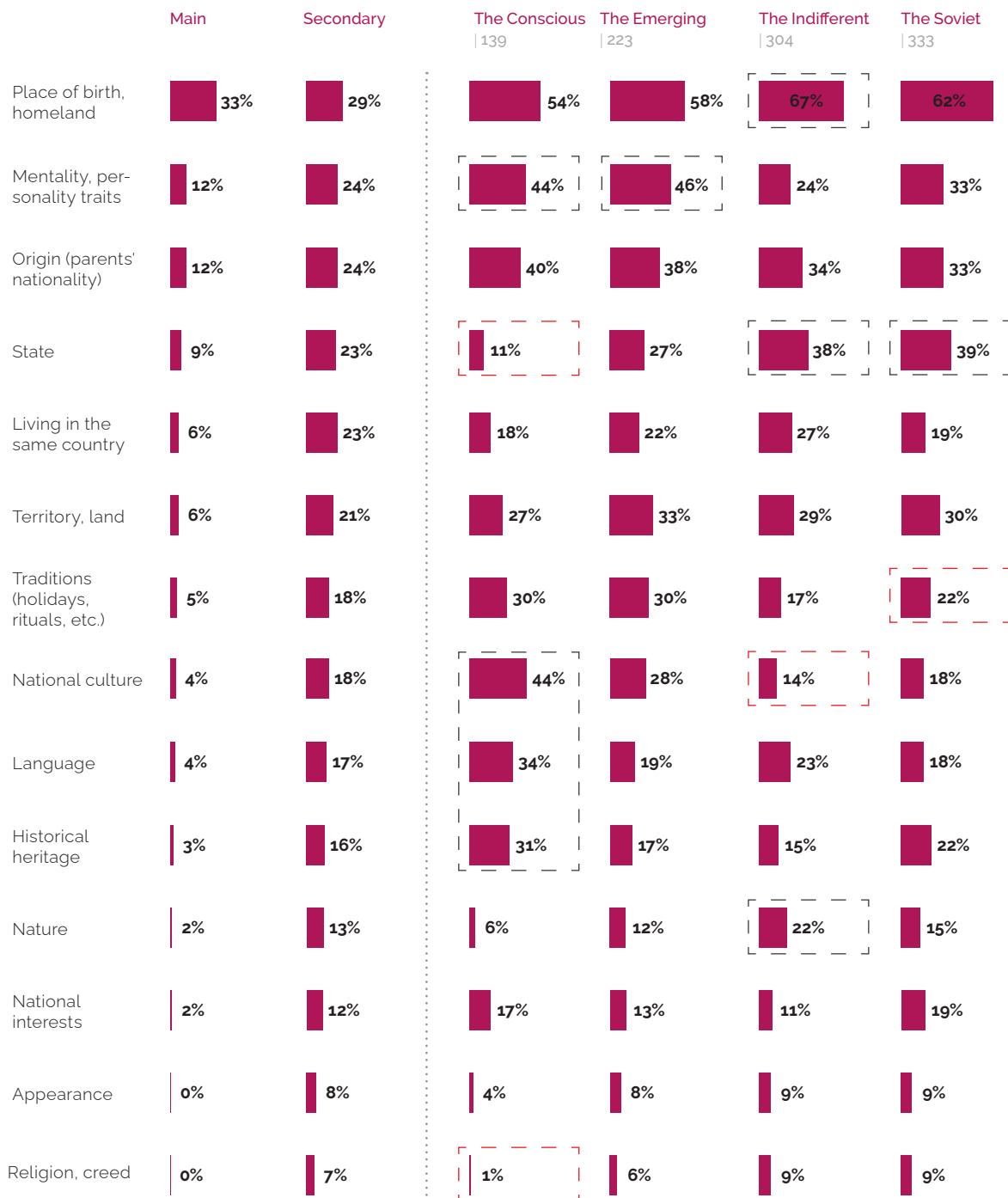
The number of mandatory markers of national identity (see Figure 1.6) also allows us to compare the degree of inclusiveness of national identity between segments. The **Soviet**, like the **Conscious**, mention on average three criteria, which indicates a fairly equal level of inclusiveness of the two main national projects. The most open view of national identity is found among the **Indifferent**, who mention on average two criteria that are mandatory for a person to be considered a Belarusian, the main ones being to identify oneself as a Belarusian, to love Belarus, and to have visited it at least once.

Today, the Belarusian language is used more as a component of self-identification rather than a marker for the identification of others. It is practically not mentioned as a marker by which a Belarusian can be identified. However, every

²⁹ For the main concepts of the Belarusian nation, see the section Theoretical Foundations and Research Methodology. Details: Казакевич, А. Канцэпцыі (ідэі) беларускай нацыі ў перыяд незалежнасці – Палітычная сфера, 2010. (стар. 21-40) // Kazakevich, A. Concepts (Ideas) of the Belarusian Nation During the Period of Independence – Political Sphere, 2010 (p. 21-40).

³⁰ Биканов, Ф. Беларуская нацыянальная ідэнтычнасць у 2022 годзе: вопыт колькаснага даследавання – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022 (стр. 27) // Bikanov, Ph. Belarusian Identity in 2022: A Quantitative Study – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022 (p. 27).

Figure 1.4.
MARKERS OF NATIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION



Significantly more frequently/less frequently than among other segments

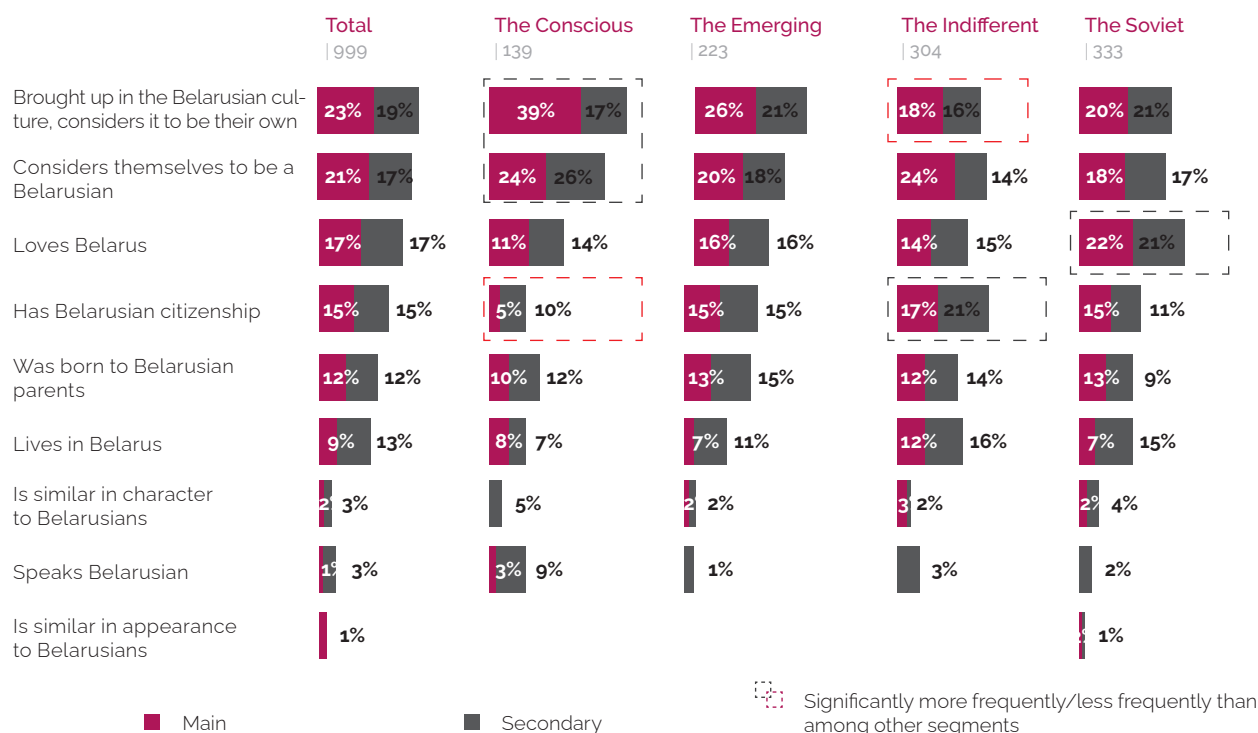
Source: Answers to the question "What unites (connects) you most with people of your nationality? And what else?"
Sampling frame: those who consider themselves to be Belarusians, n=999

fifth person mentions the Belarusian language as a feature that unites them with other Belarusians, and approximately half consider Belarusian their native language (see Figure 1.7). At the same time, approximately a third consider both Russian and Belarusian to be their native languages. The

use of language only for self-identification is because the vast majority of Belarusians use Russian for everyday communication. Therefore, the Belarusian language is rarely used as a marker of nationality but remains an important cultural value and component of Belarusian identity.

Figure 1.5.

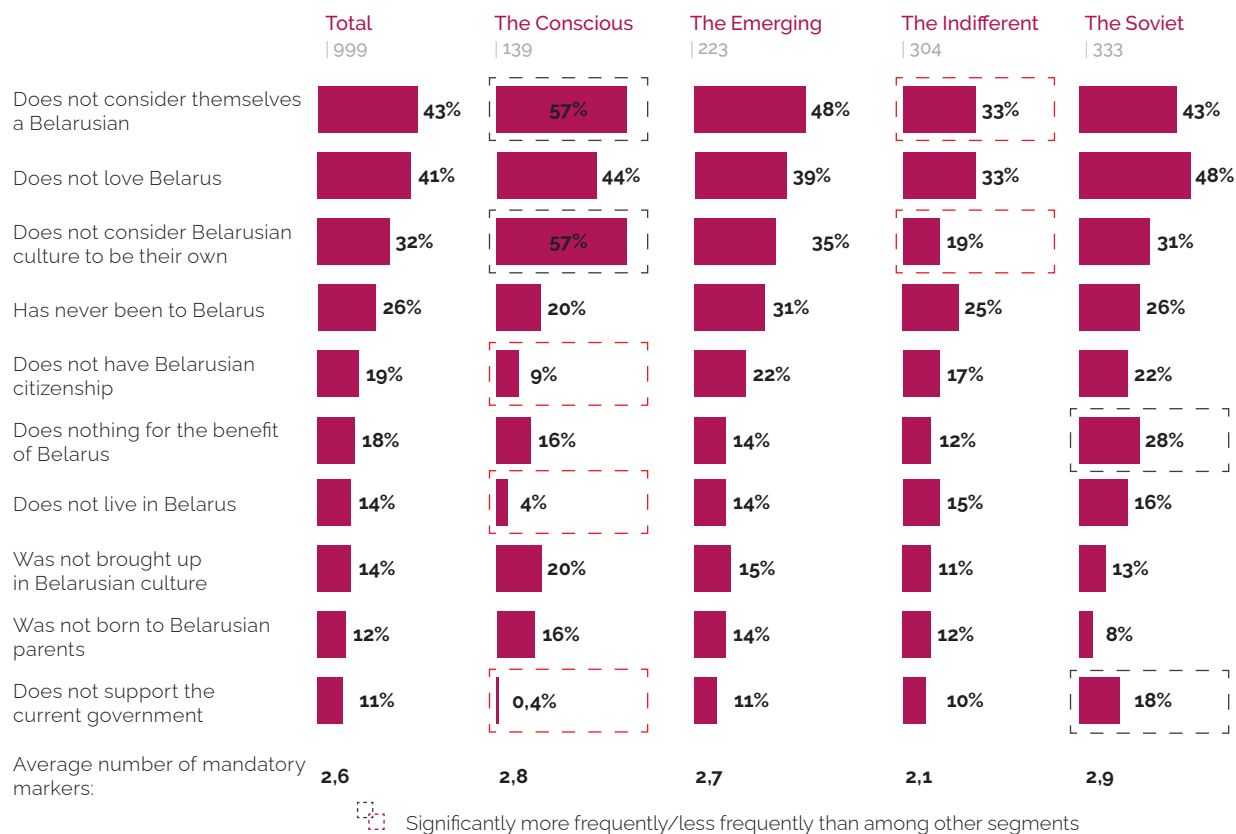
MAIN MARKERS OF NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: WHO CAN BE CONSIDERED A BELARUSIAN



Source: Answers to the question "Who, in your opinion, can be considered a Belarusian first and foremost? Who else?"
Sampling frame: those who consider themselves to be Belarusians, n=999

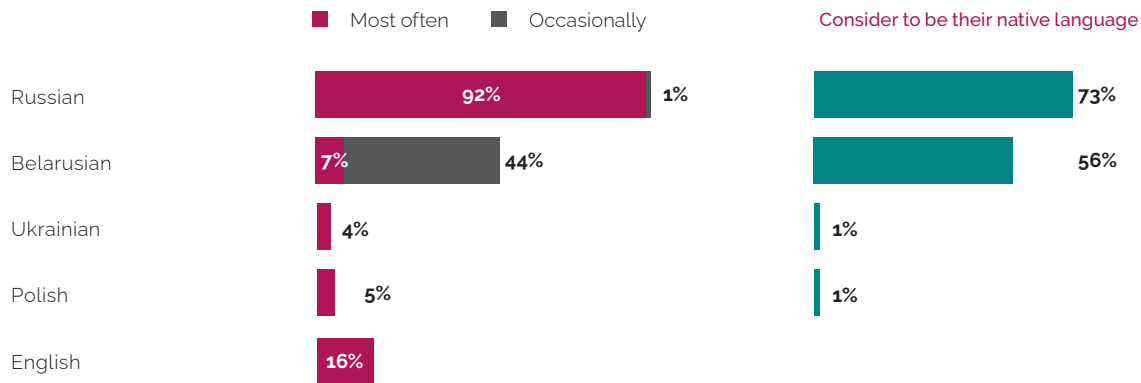
Figure 1.6.

TOP 10 MANDATORY MARKERS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: WHO CANNOT BE CONSIDERED A BELARUSIAN



Source: Answers to the question "Who, in your opinion, cannot be considered to be a Belarusian, even if according to some other characteristics they are close to Belarusians?"
Sampling frame: those who consider themselves to be Belarusians, n=999

Figure 1.7.
USE AND PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGES



Source: Answers to the questions "What language do you speak at least occasionally? What language do you speak most often? What language do you consider to be your native language?"
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

The Belarusian language is most important for the **Conscious** segment. Its representatives use the Belarusian language significantly more often than representatives of the other segments (75% from time to time, including 14% — most often) and consider it to be their native language (84%). The **Conscious** are also more likely to use English than other segments (28% occasionally). A similar attitude to the Belarusian language is observed in the **Emerging** segment, while for the **Soviet** and the **Russified**, on the contrary, the Russian language plays a key role both in the instrumental aspect and in terms of self-identification. In short, the role of language in the context of various segments of Belarusian identity remains unchanged since last year; it occupies a central place for the **Conscious** and is much less important for other segments.

The inclusiveness of the Belarusian national identity is also confirmed by the low degree of its **naturalisation, that is, the idea of identity as an inherent characteristic**. This is evidenced by the results of a special survey experiment, in which respondents were asked to assess how likely a person would be to have markers of Belarusian identity, depending on their origin. Respondents were shown a description of a person and asked to assess how likely it is that they would "love Belarus", "identify themselves to be a Belarusian", "consider Belarusian culture to be their own", etc. For the control group, it was indicated that this person was born and raised in a Belarusian family in Belarus. In the experimental group, other countries of birth and nationalities of the parents were randomly indicated, but it was also indicated that this person was adopted by Belarusians immediately after birth and was brought up in Belarus. For more details on the methodology, see [Appendix D](#).

In general, Belarusians are statistically significantly more likely to admit that a person will be characterised by

signs of "Belarusianness" if they were born in Belarus to Belarusian parents. This means that among Belarusians there is still a certain amount of deflagration of nationality. Moreover, such opinions are widespread mainly among the **Indifferent** and the **Soviet** — in other segments, the differences in assessments between the control and experimental groups are not statistically significant (see Figure 1.8).

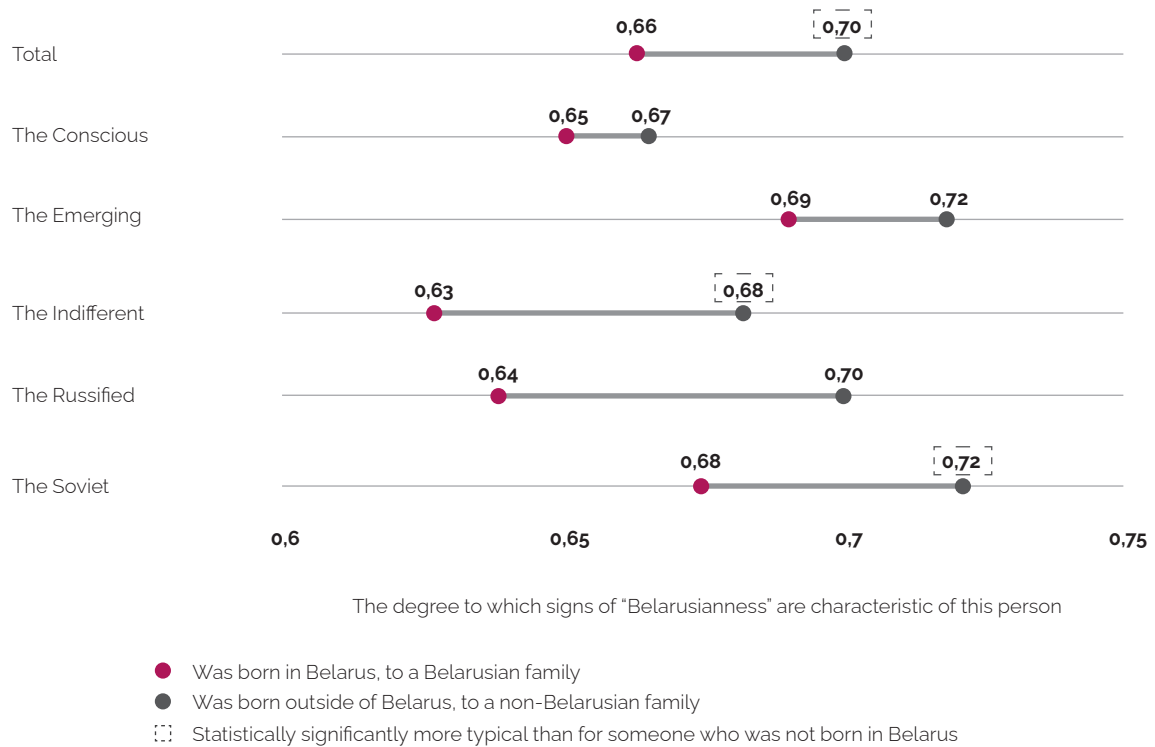
Although the prevalence of naturalisation of national identity is statistically significant, we are talking about only a maximum of 10% of Belarusians to which it is characteristic (see Figure 1.9). Conversely, for at least 90% of Belarusians, a person's origin is not connected with their national identity. Thus, 17% stated that a person who was not born in Belarus but was brought up in the country would probably not consider himself Belarusian, while only 7% provided similar answers with regard to a person born in Belarus. In other questions, a similar gap in answers was less than 10%.

Thus, the naturalisation of national identity is not typical for the vast majority of Belarusians, although it cannot be said that it is completely absent, mainly due to the deflagration views of the **Indifferent** and the **Soviet**. Most likely, naturalisation is also characteristic of the **Russified**; since this segment has a small base in our sample (n=47), the calculation does not show a statistically significant effect of naturalisation, but it would probably be observed with a larger sample.

The low degree of naturalisation of Belarusian identity is also due to the extremely rare consideration of character traits as identification markers. Thus, only 2–5% of Belarusians consider character as a main, secondary, or obligatory marker — this number falls within the limits of measuring error.

Figure 1.8.

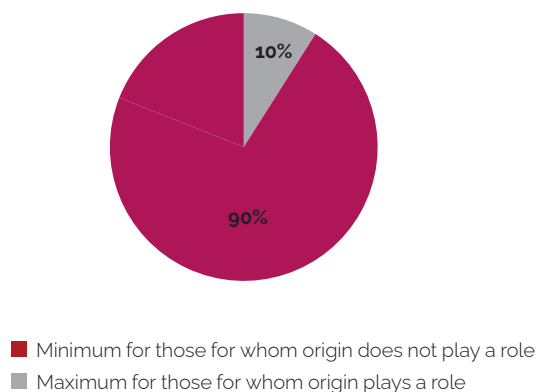
ASSESSMENT BY BELARUSIANS OF THE DEGREE TO WHICH MARKERS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY ARE CHARACTERISTIC FOR A PERSON DEPENDING ON THEIR ORIGIN, ON A SCALE FROM 0 – “THE PERSON DESCRIBED CAN BY NO MEANS BE IDENTIFIED AS A BELARUSIAN” TO 1 – “THE PERSON DESCRIBED CAN BE COMPLETELY IDENTIFIED AS A BELARUSIAN”



Source: survey experiment to determine the degree of naturalisation of national identity markers (see Appendix D).

Figure 1.9.

THE INFLUENCE OF A PERSON'S ORIGIN ON THE PERCEPTION OF THEIR NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS



Source: Answers to the question "How likely is it that Jan has the following traits? Identifies himself as a Belarusian."

The figure shows the difference between the share of those who believe that the trait would be characteristic of someone born in Belarus in a family of Belarusians and the share of those who believe that it would be characteristic of someone born outside of Belarus in a family of non-Belarusians (provided that the person has lived in Belarus since early childhood). For more details about the experiment, see Appendix D

Despite this, there is a fairly stable image of a Belarusian in terms of their character and personality traits. Representatives of all segments most often consider Belarusians peace-loving, hard-working, hospitable, kind, and patient (see Figure 1.10).

To measure the actual prevalence of these characteristics in society, we used a third-person technique by asking respondents to randomly think of someone they know and describe their traits.

A majority of the most common characteristics are also the most prevalent in society. Therefore, the main perceived traits of Belarusians are hard work, kindness, peacefulness, and hospitality. At the same time, peacefulness turns out to be the characteristic with the largest gap between the share of those who believe that it is characteristic of a "typical Belarusian" and its actual occurrence. This may be due to the specifics of the measurement; such a characteristic is probably more often associated with the collective level of "all Belarusians" than with real acquaintances.

At the same time, patience turned out to be a negative stereotype, which is often mentioned when speaking about

Figure 1.10.
PERCEIVED CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY TRAITS OF BELARUSIANS



Source: Answers to the questions "From your point of view, what is a typical Belarusian like?"

To answer the following question, please think about someone you know. It could be anyone: your relative, friend, colleague, neighbour, etc. It doesn't matter what gender or age; the only condition is: you need to think of a real person you know and answer the question specifically about this person. Here is a list of characteristics; please select those that, in your opinion, characterise the person you have in mind. Choose up to three adjectives that best describe this person.

The classification of responses by tonality was based on data from the previous waves of the study (2020, 2021 and 2022).

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

an abstract Belarusian but is rarely considered as such by real people when they meet in person. Education, honesty, responsiveness, and simplicity are characteristics that are common in society, but are rarely a characteristic of the image of a Belarusian.

The vast majority of Belarusians mention positive characteristics when describing the features of a "typical Belarusian" (see Figure 1.11). Representatives of the **Emerging** and the **Soviet** segments describe Belarusians in a positive way significantly more often than representatives of the other segments. In addition, the **Soviet** segment is more likely than others to mention love for Belarus as a factor of national identification (see Figure 1.5) and is prouder of being Belarusian (see Figure 1.17). From this we can conclude that the Soviet element has a strong emotional attachment to the country. In other words, they love Belarus.

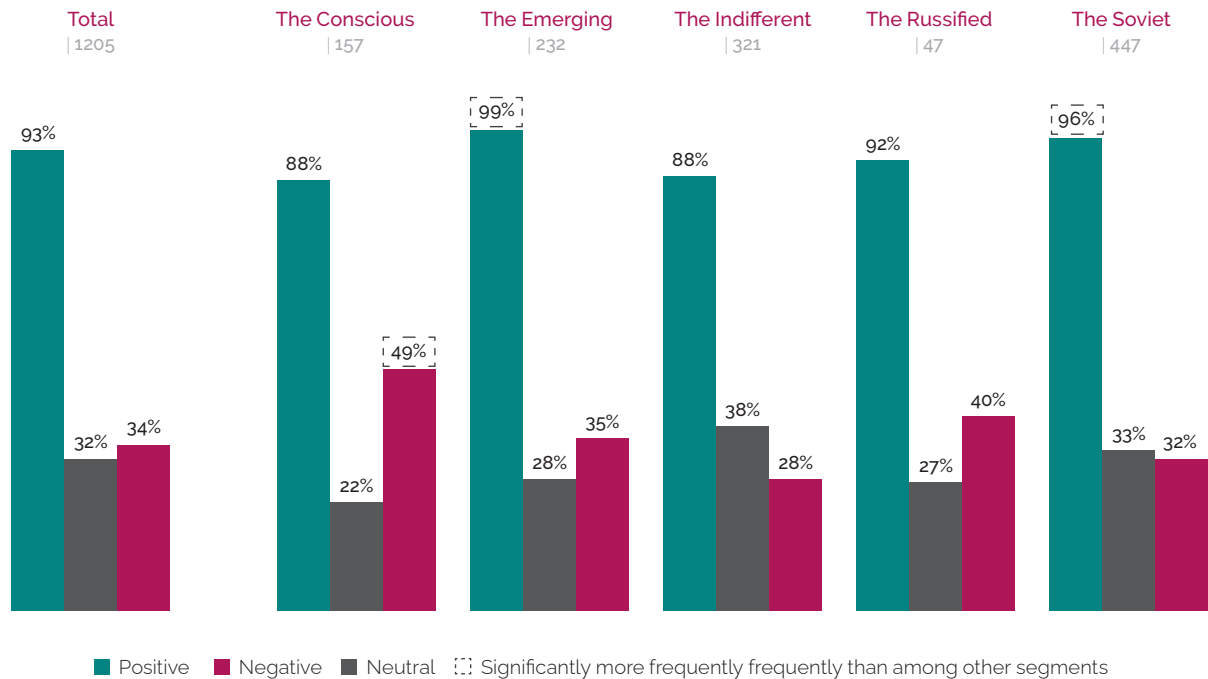
The **Conscious** more often than others perceive the image of Belarusians negatively, believing that they are quiet and cowardly, meek, and patient. A similar situation was observed in the study until August 2020, although in 2021 and 2022, the **Conscious** were less like-

ly to indicate negative characteristics of the image of Belarusians. Probably, the inspiration caused by the social uprising, which forced the **Conscious** to improve their ideas about Belarusians, has ceased to take effect as of today.

An important component of the identification process are national symbols used as distinctive features of the community. The most popular of them are zubr and draniki (see Figure 1.12).

Moreover, zubr turns out to be a unifying symbol — it ranks first among all segments. At the same time, it gravitates somewhat towards the Russian-Soviet pole of identity. Among the **Conscious**, it was mentioned by 42%, and among the **Soviet** — 51%. With regard to its role as the main symbol, this gap is even larger; zubr is noted by 11% among the **Conscious** and 20% among the **Soviet**. This is because the **Conscious**, when choosing the main symbol, prefer more politicised and culturally loaded ones: the Belarusian language (24%), Pahonia (15%), etc. The same effect of "politicisation of symbols" is also characteristic of the **Soviet**: they most often choose the red-green flag as the main

Figure 1.11.
TONALITY OF PERCEIVED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAGE OF A BELARUSIAN



Source: Answers to the questions "From your point of view, what is a typical Belarusian like?"
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

national symbol (28%). However, zubr still ranks second among the **Soviet**. Thus, although the polar segments are more strongly attached to more politicised symbols, zubr still remains a unifying symbol that Belarusians with different identities are willing to accept.

As for other popular symbols, the opinion of the **Conscious** differs significantly from other segments: among them, the most popular are the Belarusian language (39%) and Pahonia (32%).

Brands constitute a separate category of national symbols — they are also used for community's self-description, for example, to explain what Belarus is to those who do not know about such a country.³¹ Among such Belarusian brands, BelAZ (36%), MAZ (23%), MTZ (19%), and Belaruskali (14%) are most often mentioned. Regardless of the segment, these brands are considered to be the most outstanding national achievements, but they are much more often mentioned by the **Soviet** — this may be due to the fact that all these enterprises are state-owned and are viewed as part of the Soviet heritage. The **Conscious** also often mention the video game company Wargaming (14% of the segment).

1.3 NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE IDENTITY STRUCTURE OF BELARUSIANS

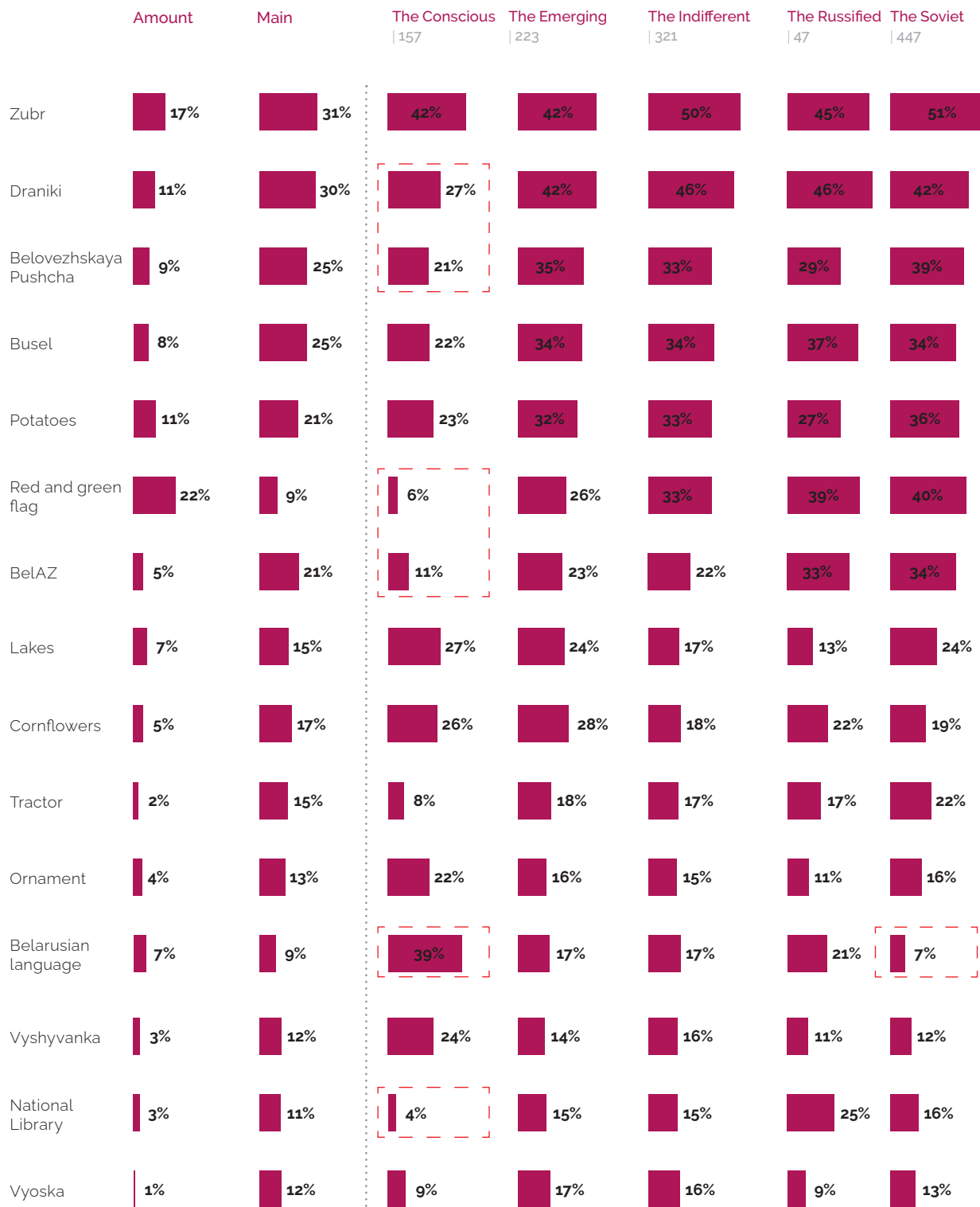
Most Belarusians have a strong self-identification with national-level identities, considering themselves to be Belarusians, residents, and citizens of the country. An exception is the Russified, who, although they recognize themselves as residents and citizens of Belarus, generally consider themselves to be Russians rather than Belarusians.

Strong national self-identification also manifests itself in emotional attachment to the national community: the majority of Belarusians in all segments are proud to be Belarusians. Such pride is most characteristic of the Soviet and least characteristic of the Indifferent. The increased national pride of the Soviet is associated primarily with support for the country's current course and the increased role of emotions. At the same time, the importance of the national component of identity itself among the Soviet and the Conscious has increased to almost equal that of other segments.

Supranational self-identification is much less pronounced. In addition, its content varies significantly from segment to segment. The Soviet more often than others call themselves Slavs and Soviet people, while considering Belarusians to be part of a triune nation. In this regard, the Russian-Soviet project is not fully autonomous, considering the

³¹ Rohava, M. *Identity in an Autocratic State: Or What Belarusians Talk about When They Talk about National Identity* / East European Politics and Societies, 2017 (p. 639-668).

Figure 112.
TOP 15 SYMBOLS OF BELARUS

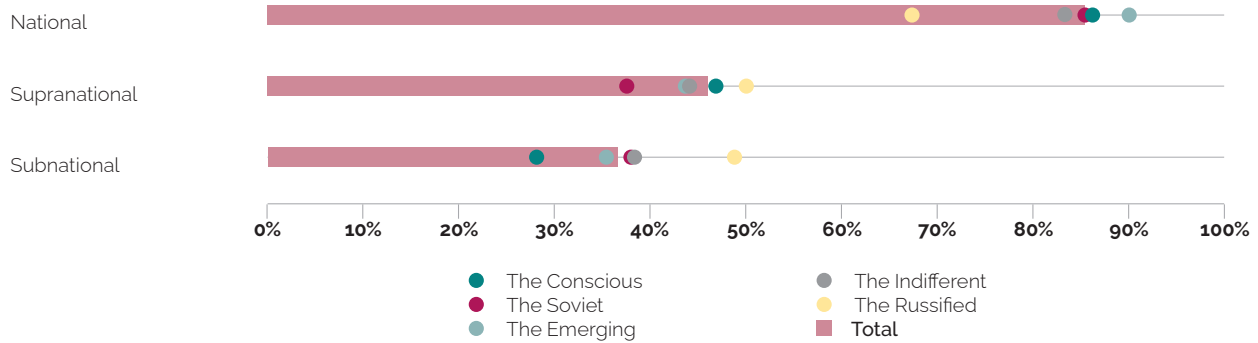


Significantly more frequently/less frequently than among other segments

Source: Answers to the question "When we hear "Belarus", various images can appear in our heads, they can be either prosaic or poetic, positive or negative. Let's try to bring together all the most positive images that are associated with Belarus, and designate it with some kind of symbol. Which of the following would be most suitable for this? Which symbol of those you chose is most suitable? Select up to two symbols."

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 1.13.
DEGREE OF SELF-RELATION WITH IDENTITIES OF THE THREE LEVELS



Source: The degree of self-relation is a calculated indicator based on the grouping of answers to the questions "Who do you feel you are first and foremost?" "Who else?" and "Who do you perceive (consider) yourself to be first and foremost?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Belarusian nation as part of a broader project. The **Conscious**, on the contrary, are more often oriented towards European identity as a space of coexistence of autonomous nations with their own history and culture.

Subnational self-identification is the least common, although a significant part of respondents still considers themselves residents of a city, locals, or residents of the eastern and western parts of Belarus. The latter identification is directly related to the area of residence.

In addition to content, national identity is characterised by its place in the overall structure of the individual's identity. In this section, we examine the prevalence of national identification in comparison with supranational and subnational ones, the importance of the national component of identity to Belarusians, and the strength of their emotional attachment to today's national community.

Belarusians, in general, identify themselves more strongly with national than with subnational or supranational identities. When choosing from a number of identities of different levels, people more often consider themselves residents of Belarus, citizens of the Republic of Belarus, or Belarusians (see Figure 1.13). This is especially true for the **Emerging** segment. Conversely, the **Russified** relate themselves least of all to national-level identities: in general, they consider themselves Russians, but their national level of identification is not equal to zero since many of them perceive themselves as residents of Belarus, as well as citizens and patriots.

The degree of self-relation is a calculated indicator based on the grouping of answers to the questions "Who do you feel you are first and foremost?" "Who else?" and "Who do you perceive (consider) yourself to be first and foremost?"
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Supranational identities rank second in terms of prevalence. In general, identities at this level are distributed among the

different segments fairly equally. However, supranational identities differ in content (see Figure 1.14). Thus, the **Conscious** more often consider themselves Europeans, and the **Soviet** more often consider themselves Slavs and Soviet people. The latter identity is also widespread among the **Indifferent**. A significant portion of Belarusians also consider themselves citizens of the world, while only 6% consider themselves residents of Eurasia.

The importance of Slavic and **Soviet** identity among the Soviet is explained by the fact that within the Russian-Soviet project, the Belarusian nation is not perceived as a fully autonomous entity but as being part of the broader Russian Imperial project. Thus, the majority of the **Soviet** consider Belarusians to be part of a triune Slavic nation (see Figure 1.15). At the same time, the National-Romantic project is focused on Europe as a space of coexistence of autonomous nations: most of the **Conscious** believe that Belarusians are a separate people.

The least common identities among Belarusians are those at the subnational level. The most prevalent of them are "local" and "resident of one's city or village" (50%).

Approximately one-third of Belarusians also consider themselves residents of eastern or western Belarus. This division by region is directly related to the area of residence. Respondents living in the Grodno and Brest regions consider themselves residents of the western part of Belarus, and respondents living in the Mogilev, Gomel, and Vitebsk regions consider themselves residents of the eastern part (see Figure F.1). At the same time, there is no common idea among Belarusians whether residents of the eastern and western parts of the country differ in their national characteristics: 42% believe they rather differ, while 39% believe there are no differences. The **Conscious** believe in this difference more so than others (57%), while the **Soviet**, on the contrary, more often believe there are no differences (49%). Probably, the **Conscious** are more likely to believe

Figure 1.14.
DEGREE OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION ON A SCALE FROM 0 TO 100



Source: Answers to the question "Who do you perceive (consider) yourself to be first and foremost? Answer the question: "WHO AM I" using the statements below."

Answer options: "I do not identify myself as ...", "I identify myself as ... to a minimal extent", "I identify myself as ...", "I identify myself as ... to the maximum extent".

The figure shows the average responses standardised on a scale from 0 to 100.

The figure does not show the Russified segment who consider themselves to be Russian.

The grouping of identities is analytical.

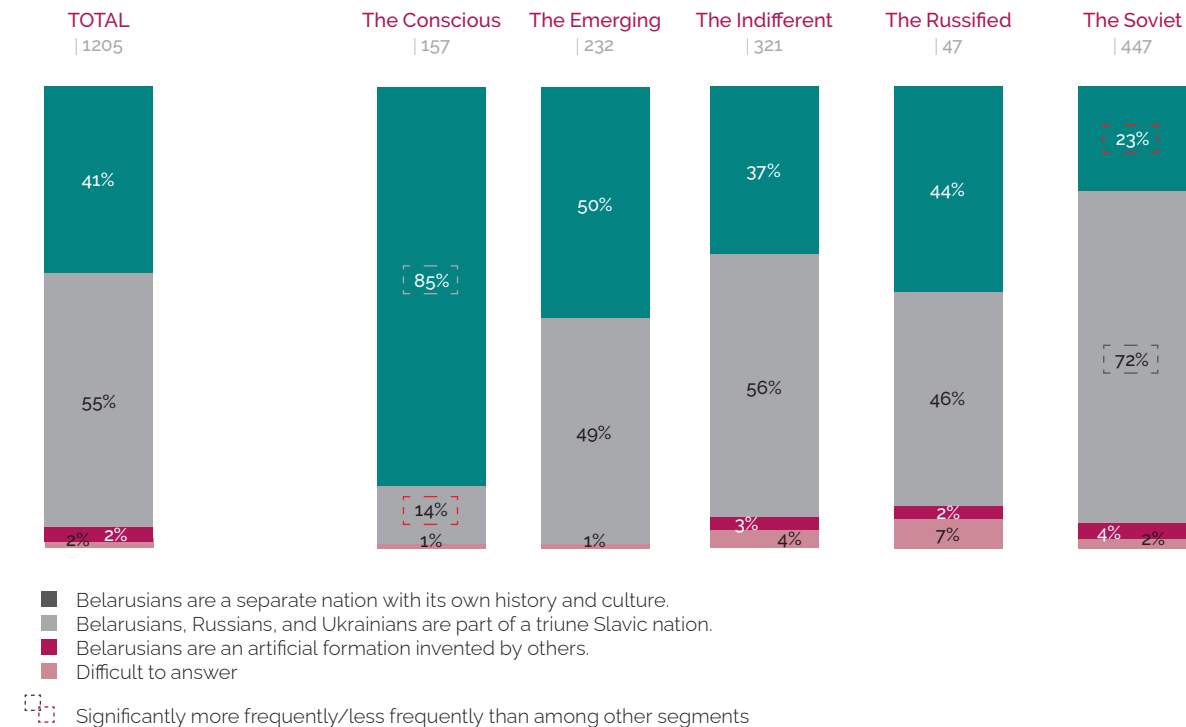
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

residents of the eastern regions are less involved in the Belarusian national culture due to their proximity to Russia; therefore, the **Conscious** are significantly less likely to indicate that they consider themselves residents of eastern Belarus (53%). This may also be because almost half of the **Conscious** segment resides in Minsk.

The dynamics of how individuals relate to identities at different levels align with those observed in previous years

(see Figure 1.16). Belarusians are increasingly identifying themselves as residents of the country as a whole and the residents of their locality, while somewhat less frequently identifying themselves as residents of Europe and the world as a whole. If this trend continues, then the national and subnational levels will strengthen in the structure of Belarusians' identity at the expense of the supranational level. However, the observed dynamics may be associated with a change in the sample structure: in the current wave, the

Figure 1.15.
PERCEPTION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BELARUSIAN NATION



Source: Answers to the question "Which of the following statements do you most agree with?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

proportion of young people, who more often consider themselves residents of the world as a whole and less often residents of Belarus, has decreased (see Introduction). Therefore, to speak confidently about such dynamics, it must not be repeated in subsequent measurements.

The prevalence of self-identification at the national level is due to Belarusians' strong emotional attachment to the national community. The vast majority in all segments indicate that they are proud to be Belarusians, with more than one-third reporting a strong degree of pride. The **Soviet** segment demonstrates this affection more often than other segments. The **Indifferent** segment more often finds it difficult to answer, reflecting their nationally indifferent attitudes.

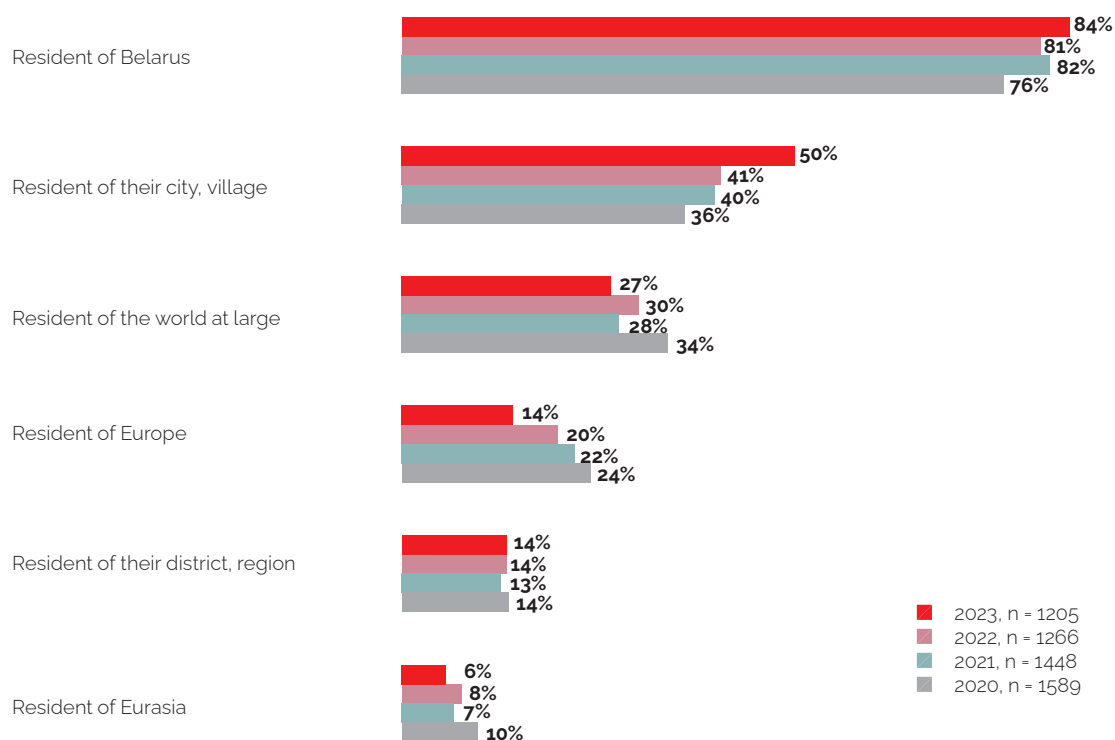
The degree of emotional attachment to the national community today is strongly influenced by the assessment of the situation in various areas (see Figure F.2). The increased national pride observed among the **Soviet** segment is directly linked to their pride in Belarus' achievements in politics, economics, sports, and other areas. Moreover, for the **Soviet**, emotional attachment to Belarus is most likely to be a crucial factor in national identification (see Figure 1.5). The majority of the **Conscious** take pride in their country's history and, more often than others, in Belarusian culture and art. Therefore, despite extremely low scores in other areas, they maintain average levels of emotional attachment to national identity.

To assess the importance of the national components of identity for Belarusians, we examined the degree of interest³² and the formation of positions on an issue related to national themes, specifically asking respondents how likely it was that they would support a conversation about a triune nation (see Figure 1.18). Respondents were randomly introduced to one of three situations in which the interlocutor raised the topic: a driver in a taxi, a boyfriend or girlfriend at home, and a colleague at work. Although the question addressed only one of many topics related to national identity, it concerns a topical issue on which Belarusians have little difficulty expressing their opinion (see Figure 1.15). Therefore, the data obtained makes it possible to initially assess the degree of interest in national issues and the formation of positions on national issues in general.

More than half of Belarusians are ready to discuss national issues, and about 30% demonstrate active interest in

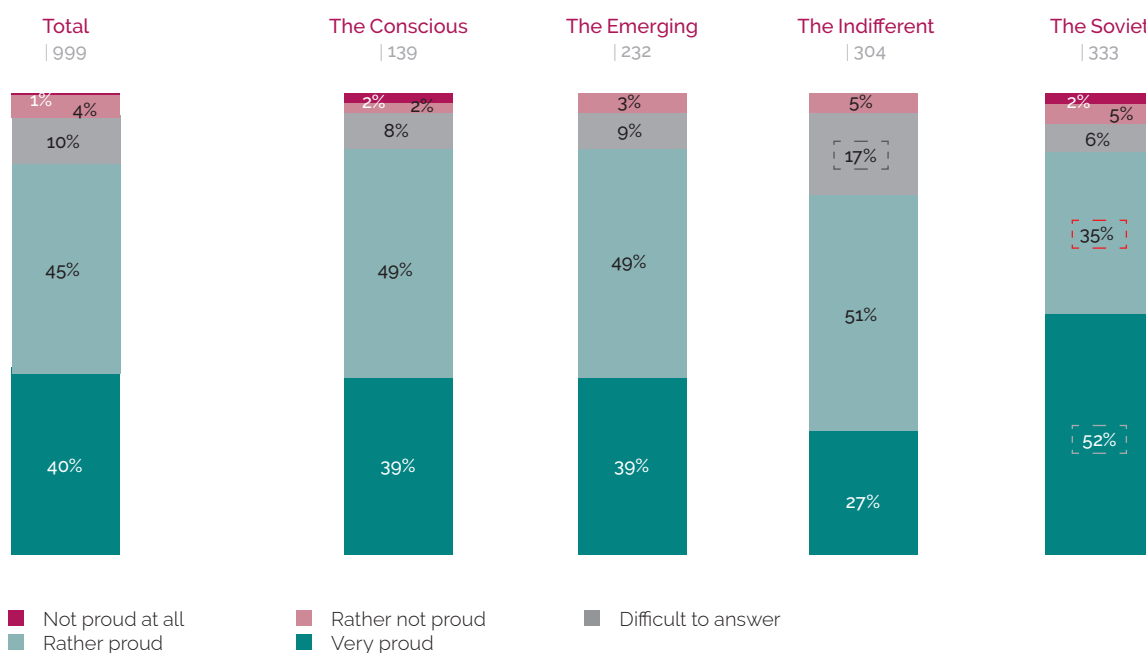
³² The degree of interest in national issues and the formation of a position on such issues does not come down to the willingness to discuss it, and the analysis of only this indicator cannot be considered an exhaustive study of interest. For example, interest can also be manifested in reading thematic literature or other sources, using national symbols, attending thematic events, as well as in the attitudes of individuals that do not manifest in their actions. We used this indicator of interest because discussion is one of the simplest and least effortful expressions of interest. Thus, this indicator allowed us to draw certain conclusions about the importance of national components of identity.

Figure 1.16.
DYNAMICS OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION



Source: Answers to the questions "Who do you feel you are first and foremost? Who else?"
Historical data has been reweighted and distributions may differ slightly from those published in previous reports.

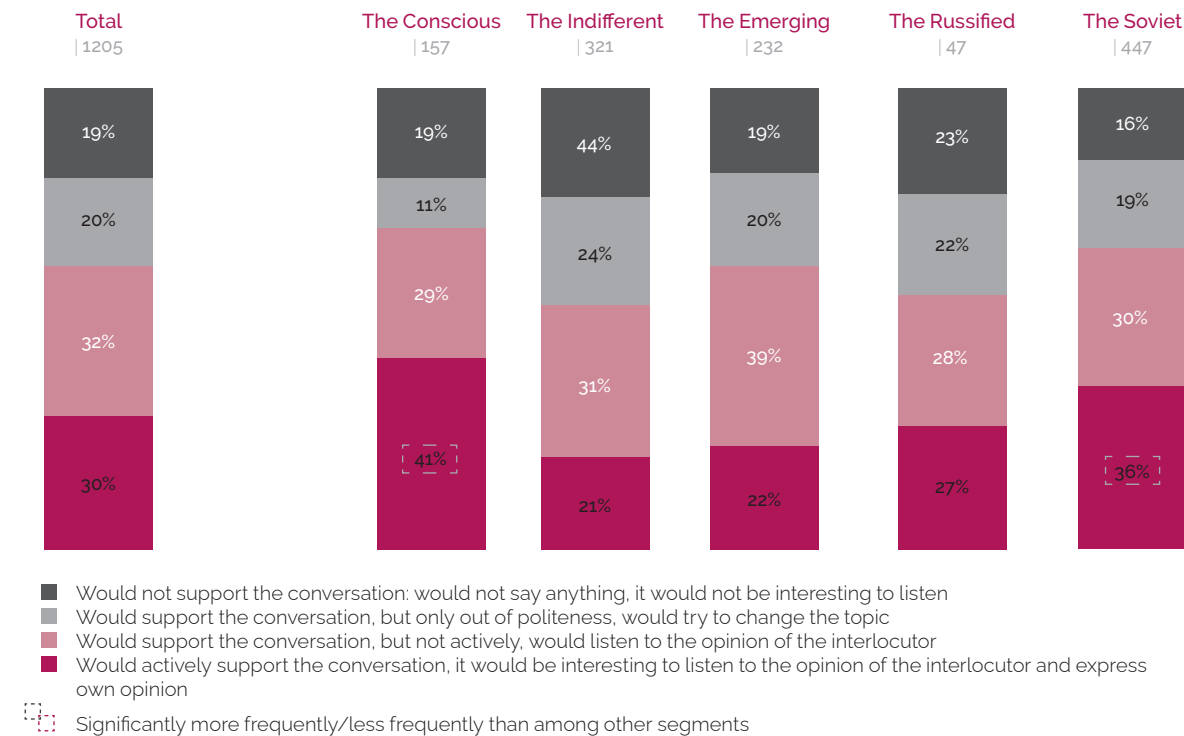
Рис. 1.17.
NATIONAL PRIDE



Legend:
■ Not proud at all
■ Rather not proud
■ Difficult to answer
■ Rather proud
■ Very proud
[] Significantly more frequently/less frequently than among other segments

Source: Answers to the question "Are you proud to be a Belarusian?"
Sampling frame: those who consider themselves to be Belarusians, n=1205

Figure 1.18.
INTEREST IN DISCUSSING NATIONAL ISSUES



Source: Answers to the following questions:

Imagine a situation. You are in a taxi and talking to the driver. At some point he brings up the following topic: "Some people say that Belarusians are part of the same people along with Russians and Ukrainians, others say that they are not..." How would you react to this?

On your day off, your friend comes to visit you. At dinner you discuss different topics. At some point he/she brings up the following topic: "Some people say that Belarusians are part of the same people along with Russians and Ukrainians, others say that they are not..." How would you react to this?

You are having lunch at work with a colleague. At lunch you discuss different topics. At some point he/she brings up the following topic: "Some people say that Belarusians are part of the same people along with Russians and Ukrainians, others say that they are not..." How would you react to this?

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

such topics. This probably indicates the high degree of importance of the national aspect of identity for Belarusians. In this regard, the **Conscious** and the **Soviet** more often express their readiness to be actively involved in the discussion of such a topic. For these segments, the national components of identity turn out to be more important than for others, which is natural for people who are most actively involved in existing national projects. Interest in national issues is also associated with gender socialisation: men are significantly more likely than women to express readiness for discussion (38% of men and 22% of women would actively support the conversation).

1.4 PRACTICES OF REPRODUCTION OF BELARUSIAN IDENTITY

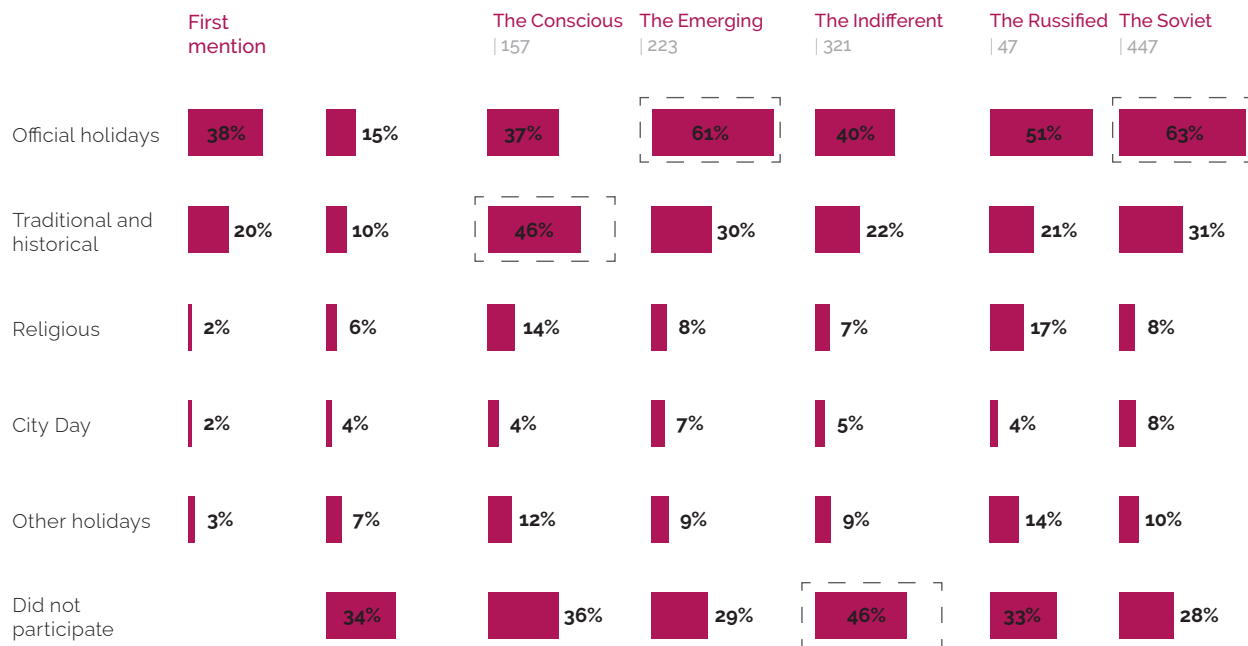
The features of the national identity of Belarusians are associated with the national rituals that they attend, as they enshrine national symbols, views on history, and other collective ideas. The most popular of these rituals are official state celebrations and traditional folk holidays: the

President's New Year's address, parades on July 3 and May 9, Kupalye, Kalyady, Dzyady, etc. The Soviet, who are oriented towards the state and the Soviet past, more often attend official holidays, while the Conscious feel more attached to traditional folk rituals and historical holidays, like the day of proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). The Emerging are most likely to attend both types of rituals, while the Indifferent people tend not to attend any of them at all.

Unlike national holidays and celebrations, visiting museums is not associated with national identity. Museums are more likely to be visited by people with higher levels of education, therefore, the Conscious and the Emerging generally visit museums more often than other segments, including those museums that promote the symbols and views of history characteristic of the Russian-Soviet national project.

Participation in national holidays, visiting museums, and other rituals function as symbolic practices, during which collective ideas, including national identification

Figure 1.19.
PARTICIPATION IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOLIDAYS: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION



Significantly more frequently/less frequently than among other segments

Source: Answers to the question "What Belarusian holidays, solemn or memorable events have you ever participated in? Please write down events that are or were celebrated specifically in Belarus, but not in most countries of the world (for example, not New Year or birthdays)." (open-ended question)

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

schemes, are reproduced and consolidated.^{33,34} Therefore, the characteristics of Belarusians' national identity are interconnected with the holidays and rituals in which they participate.

In general, the most common national rituals are watching the New Year's address, attending parades on July 3 and May 9, as well as celebrating traditional holidays — Kupalye, Kalyady, Dzyady, and Maslenitsa.

Speaking about their participation in specifically Belarusian holidays and events, primarily recall official holidays (see Figure 1.19), including Independence Day on July 3, May 9, Dozhinki, Slavianski Bazaar, etc. Approximately one-third of Belarusians also mention traditional and historical events such as Kupalye, Kalyady, Maslenitsa, etc. Respondents mentioned such holidays and events in response to an open-ended question, meaning there was no predetermined list of answer options; participants had to inde-

pendently recall and write down the names. This means that not only are rituals of this type the most attended, but they are also more often associated with specifically Belarusian events and more often remembered than others.

Depending on the type, Belarusian holidays are popular to varying degrees among the segments (see Figure 1.18):

- The **Soviet**, being more oriented towards the state and the Soviet past, more often mention official holidays.
- The **Emerging** are also more active than other segments in talking about official holidays as well as specifically Belarusian celebrations that they attended.
- The **Conscious** on the contrary more often attend traditional folk and historical holidays, which is explained by the more ethnocultural orientation of the National-Romantic project.
- The **Indifferent** are naturally less likely to mention any holidays than other segments, as for them, in general, the cultural component of national identity is less important.

A more accurate idea of the proportion of people participating in various national rituals is revealed through re-

³³ Бенедикт, А. *Воображаемые сообщества* – М.: Кучково поле, 2016. (стр. 290-300) // Benedict, A. *Imagined Communities* – Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2016 (p. 290-300).

³⁴ Хобсбаум, Э. *Изобретение традиций* – Вестник Евразии, 2000 // Hobsbawm, E. *The Invention of Tradition* – Bulletin of Eurasia, 2000.

sponses to the closed question (see Figure 1.20).³⁵ Over the last three years, the most popular events have been July 3, May 9, and Kupalye, drawing attendance from between one-third and one-half of Belarusians. Kalyady, Maslenitsa, and Dozhinki also enjoy high popularity. Besides holidays, the most common ritual is viewing the President's New Year's address (usually Lukashenka's address among the **Soviet** segment and Tikhonovskaya's address among the **Conscious** segment).

A significant portion of the most common holidays is popular not only in Belarus but also in other countries. Typically, these holidays have traditional ethnic roots (for example, Maslenitsa, common among East Slavic peoples) or are a continuation of Soviet traditions (like May 9). The popularity of such holidays is likely associated with the widespread prevalence of supranational identities that are reproduced during such rituals, such as "Slav" and "Soviet person" (see Figure 1.14).

Unlike holidays, the nature of the museums visited has no obvious connection with the national identity of Belarusians. The **Conscious** more often than representatives of other segments visit not only museums related to the pre-Soviet history of Belarus, but also museums related to the war and the Soviet past (see Figure 1.21). Differences between segments are more likely related to the level of education, which influences cultural practices. Generally, the higher the level of education, the more people are inclined to visit museums.³⁶ Therefore, the **Conscious** and the **Emerging**, among whom there are more people with a higher level of education, visit more museums on average, regardless of their subject matter.

³⁵ Similar holidays are among the three most frequently mentioned in responses to the open question about specifically Belarusian holidays attended.

³⁶ There is a direct correlation between the number of museums visited and the level of education (Spearman's correlation, $\rho=0.35$ with a significance level of <0.001).

Figure 1.20.
PARTICIPATION IN BELARUSIAN HOLIDAYS AND RITUALS: CLOSED QUESTION³⁷



Source: Answers to the question "Which of the following have you done in the last three years?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Note: the distribution does not coincide with that presented in Figure 1.19, since the distribution of answers to an open-ended question is shown there (respondents had to remember and write down the name of the event), and in this case, the distribution of answers to a closed question is shown (respondents were offered a list of answer options as a hint).

³⁷ Due to the influence of the fear factor, the percentage for the options "Tikhanovskaya's New Year's address" and "the day of proclamation of the BNR" is probably underestimated, since people tend to perceive such questions as a test of their attitude towards the current government. In addition, this issue turns out to be more sensitive, as it is associated not just with opinion, but with specific actions, which may be even perceived by the state as a possible offense. Conversely, the percentage of responses for options such as "Lukashenka's New Year's address" or "independence day July 3" is probably overestimated, as under the influence of the fear factor, people tend to choose this option as "correct" from the point of view of the authorities to conceal their real opinion. This happens because when filling out a questionnaire, respondents have no confidence that their answers will actually be confidential.

Figure 1.21.
VISITING OF BELARUSIAN MUSEUMS



Source: Answers to the question "Which of the listed Belarusian museums have you ever visited?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

The figure shows museums that scored 5% or more.

2

SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS IN MODERN BELARUSIAN SOCIETY

2.1 MAIN SEGMENTS IN THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS

In general, four main groups can be distinguished to describe the social contradictions present in the Belarusian society depending on the degree of trust in state and non-state institutions. In reality, social conflict can be delineated into two segments:

- Ardent Opponents demonstrate an extremely high level of trust in non-state institutions and groups, while having a strong distrust of state ones.
- Ardent Supporters have extremely strong trust in state institutions and do not trust non-state institutions at all.

The above political segments are strongly linked to identity segments. 64% of Ardent Opponents are from the Conscious segment and 69% of Ardent Supporters are from the Soviet segment. Additionally, it is common for these segments to exist in their own information bubbles: Ardent Supporters are mainly the audience of state media, while Ardent Opponents are mainly the audience of non-state media.

At the same time, the composition of the groups is dynamic; for example, over the last year, the number of Ardent Opponents has significantly decreased, and the number of Ardent Supporters has increased.

This block focuses on the issues that involve satisfaction with the general direction of the country's development and trust in state and non-state institutions. We believe that these issues are among the most "sensitive" for the respondent, as they can be perceived as a test of attitude and loyalty to the current government and state institutions. "Wrong" answers (according to respondents) may be those that could be perceived by the state as an offence. In this way, respondents may be expressing uncertainty that their responses are truly anonymous and that their personal data is not being shared with third parties.

Therefore, we are inclined to believe that estimates of the general level of trust in non-state institutions and groups may be somewhat underestimated, while the level of trust in the government in general may be overestimated.

Nevertheless, we cannot attribute the unmistakable dynamics observed in this section solely to the fear factor, although it certainly contributes to some bias in the results.

As in the previous study, in this work, we identified four main groups based on the level of trust in 17 different social institutions and groups. Respondents were asked to assess how much they trust or distrust, for example, "the police" or "people who are called political prisoners". This series of questions informed a Social Conflict Segmentation, with the segments generally divided into two groups:

Figure 2.1.
Distribution of internal political segments

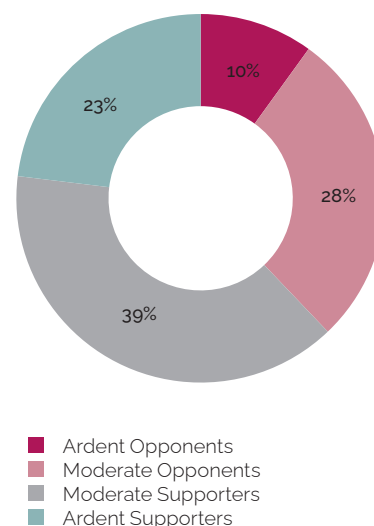
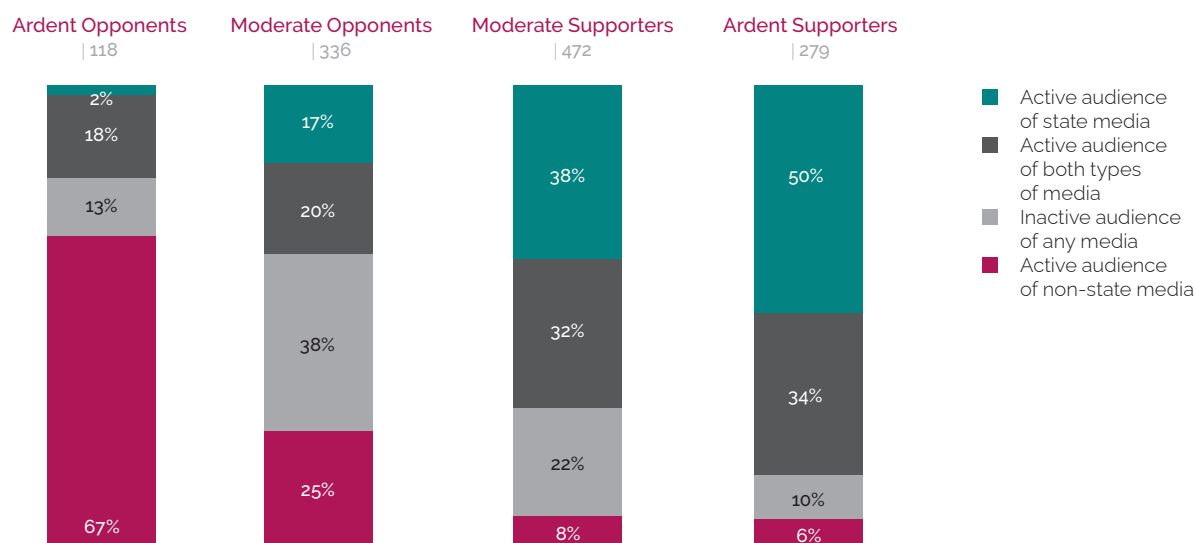


Figure 2.2.
Political segments depending on media consumption



- The polarised groups serve as carriers of the main social contradictions, providing the most effective prism for describing social conflict.
 - **Ardent Opponents (10%)** are characterised by a high degree of trust in non-state institutions and opposition communities and an extremely low degree of trust in traditional state institutions and positions.
 - Most often, representatives of this segment are men (58% — this is the most “male” segment) and residents of the city of Minsk, and less often residents of cities with a population of 20–100 thousand people (only 9%).
 - They most often note that what they have in common with Belarusians is their mentality (34%), historical heritage (34%), and national culture (31%).
 - They more often consider themselves Ukrainians (4%) and Poles (9%) by nationality and Europeans (a total of 69%) to one degree or another.
 - They more often believe that residents of western and eastern Belarus differ from each other (53%).
 - They consider Pahonia (21%) and the Belarusian language (12%) to be their main national symbols.
 - To a great extent (see Figure 2.2.), they are active viewers of non-state media (67%).
 - **Ardent Supporters (23%)** are characterised by a high degree of trust in state institutions and an extremely low degree of trust in non-state institutions.
 - They more often say they are connected to other Belarusians by the state (43%) and, secondly, by national interests (25%).
 - Representatives of this segment are the most likely to believe that those who love Belarus should be considered Belarusians first and foremost (30%). In addition, they are the most likely to be proud of Belarus' history (59%).
 - One-third note that those who do not support the current government (30%), do not live in the Republic of Belarus (22%), do not have Belarusian citizenship (26%), or do nothing for the benefit of the country cannot be considered Belarusians (33%).
 - They are most likely to consider Belarusian society to be quite homogeneous (52% noted that residents of western and eastern Belarus do not differ from each other).
 - For them, the main national symbol is the red-green flag (41%).
 - Their main source of information (see Figure 2.2.) is state media (50% are active viewers).
- Centrist groups do not demonstrate obvious trust or distrust in various social institutions. In this study, they are referred to as **Moderate Opponents (28%)** and **Moderate Supporters (39%)**, depending on their inclination towards opposition or pro-state institutions, respectively. Their identity portraits are similar to those with more overt views but are less pronounced overall.

The size of the clusters has altered dramatically, which cannot be explained solely by a change in the general

sampling frame. The share of **Ardent Supporters** has increased significantly (+13 p.p. compared to 2022) and the share of **Ardent Opponents** has decreased (–9 p.p. compared to 2022). This may be due to several reasons:

1. **Mass emigration.** Events in 2020 and 2022 triggered political migration in addition to the usual labour migration of Belarusians to Lithuania. The number of Belarusian migrants to Lithuania increased by 17,776 persons or 57.3% compared to the previous year, marking the highest rise on record. Approximately 9 to 12,000 Belarusians have immigrated for political reasons alone since 2021, according to the Lithuanian Migration Department.³⁸ Estimating the number of people who immigrated to other countries for political reasons is more challenging. However, the overall immigration of Belarusians to other countries is also on the rise. At the beginning of 2023, over 100,000 Belarusians were permanently living in Poland, compared to less than 45,000 at the end of 2020.³⁹
2. **Economic growth.** The country's economy has experienced a slight recovery, particularly in terms of real wages, which are growing rapidly, and rising consumption, which increased throughout 2023, only beginning to drop recently.⁴⁰ These factors are tangible for the population. For example, over the course of 2022–2023, the consumer confidence index has steadily grown, and the proportion of people reporting a reduction in their income has decreased. Additionally, more than 70% of respondents note that they expect their salary to remain the same or increase.⁴¹ Since economic factors such as rising prices, low wages, and a slowdown in economic development are typically the most pressing problems for

a country's population,⁴² a more positive assessment of the economic situation could be a reason for a general increase in loyalty to the current government.

3. **Anti-war consensus.** Another reason is the growing support for the current government against the backdrop of anti-war consensus in the society, demonstrated by approximately 88% of respondents opposing the participation of the Belarusian army in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Simultaneously, the view that the country's army should take part in the war on the side of Russia has gained popularity. Both statements (about neutrality and support for Russia in the war) are closely associated with the Belarusian government's official discourse regarding support for Russia and the "non-interference" of Belarus in the war.⁴³ Thus, support for this point of view could have contributed to increased loyalty to the current government.
4. **Adaptation to the new reality.** It is worth considering the presence of simple adaptation to the new reality after the turbulent 2020–2022 period. Belarusians now must live in new conditions characterised by much greater control of the media by the state, conditionally "closed" borders, etc. In this regard, the attitudes of neutral groups in society may shift towards the attitudes broadcasted by the regime. As a result, trust in state institutions and distrust in non-state institutions may increase.

The groups are still strongly associated with national identity segments: for example, **Ardent Supporters** mainly consist of the **Soviet** (69%), while more than half of **Ardent Opponents** is represented by the **Conscious** (see Figure 2.3).

It is worth noting that, compared to the previous study, there is a significant increase in the **Indifferent** among the **Moderate Supporters** and **Moderate Opponents**. This translates to a 12 p.p. increase among those who trust the current government and a 14 p.p. increase among those who trust non-state and oppositional institutions. Conversely, the share of the **Emerging** in their structure decreased significantly due to a drop in the share of young people in the overall sampling frame.

At present, the proportion of the **Indifferent** within these segments amounts to approximately 30%. This is the largest share of the **Moderate Opponents** and, along with the **Soviet**, a significant portion of **Moderate Supporters**.

38 A. Kazakevich, V. Velichkaite, Gathering the facts: migration from Belarus to Lithuania before and after the start of the 2020 crisis. – Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere", European Network for Belarus, 2023.

39 A. Luzgina, V. Koreyvo, Analysis of the flow of migrants from Belarus to Poland, Lithuania and other countries of the European Union in 2021–2022. – BEROB Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center, 2023.

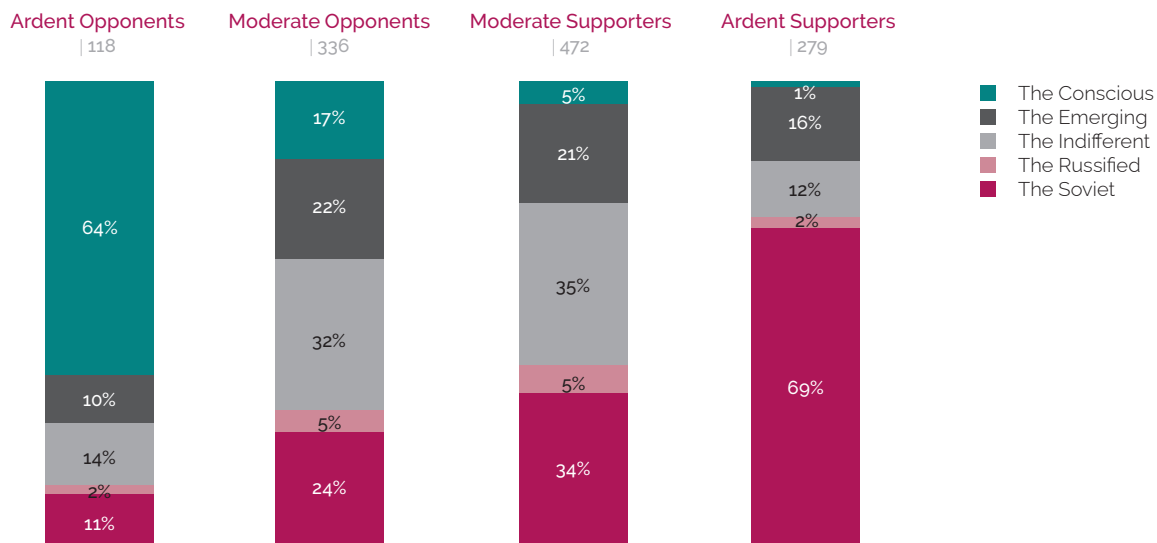
40 Крук, Д., **Макроэкономическая ситуация.** Основные тренды. – [Презентация в рамках Мониторинга экономики Беларуси] – Центр экономических исследований BEROB, 2023 // Kruk, D. *Macroeconomic Situation. Main Trends.* – [Presentation as part of the project Monitoring of the Belarusian Economy] – BEROB Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center, 2023.

41 Панасевич, В., **Индекс потребительской уверенности. Результаты опроса домохозяйств в октябре.** – [Презентация в рамках Мониторинга экономики Беларуси] – Центр экономических исследований BEROB, 2023 // Panasevich, V. *Consumer confidence index. Results of a Household Survey in October.* – [Presentation as part of the project Monitoring of the Belarusian Economy] – BEROB Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center, 2023.

42 Биканов, Ф., **Беларусская национальная идентичность в 2022 году: опыт количественного исследования.** – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022 // Bikanov, Ph. *Belarusian Identity in 2022: A Quantitative Study* – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022.

43 Слюнькин, П., Шрайбман, А. и др., **Беларусский трекер перемен. Экспертные оценки: март–май 2023 г.** // Slyunkin, P., Shraybman, A. et al., *Belarus Change Tracker. Expert Assessments: March–May 2023* – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

Figure 2.3.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL SEGMENTS AND IDENTITY SEGMENTS



2.2 SATISFACTION WITH THE DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT AND TRUST IN VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Although overall satisfaction levels have decreased in 2023 compared to 2022, they remain at an average level. The decrease in satisfaction is primarily observed among Ardent and Moderate Supporters of the current government.

Ardent Opponents of the current government remain consistently extremely dissatisfied with the direction of the country's development, but satisfaction among Moderate Opponents is on the rise.

In 2023, the level of trust in state institutions and groups increased significantly, and the level of trust in non-state institutions decreased significantly. The top five most trusted institutions include the armed forces, the government, people who trust the authorities, the KGB, and the Prosecutor's Office. A second wave of similar dynamics has already been observed, suggesting that the trend towards increasing trust in state institutions will continue in the future.

Only one segment – Ardent Opponents of the current government – harbours extreme distrust towards state institutions. Moderate Opponents are characterised by fairly equal degrees of trust in both types of institutions, making it the most centred segment.

Although Moderate Supporters trust non-state institutions more than Ardent Supporters, they trust state institutions and groups to a much greater extent.

The overall level of satisfaction with the direction of the country's development in 2023 is assessed by city residents at an average level (5 out of 10). This marks a small but significant drop from 2022 when the satisfaction level amounted to 5.3.

Ardent Supporters of the current government are the most satisfied. However, over the year, the overall satisfaction of supporters of the current government has significantly decreased. Last year, **Ardent Supporters** rated their overall satisfaction at 8.6, and **Moderate Supporters** at 6.5. In 2023, these segments rated their satisfaction at 6.5 and 5.2, respectively (see Figure 2.4.). Last year, the Russian-Ukrainian war may have served to reinforce the views of the current government's supporters. This year, however, the presence of this topic in the information space has greatly diminished, and accordingly, the subjective need to support the current path of development has also lessened.

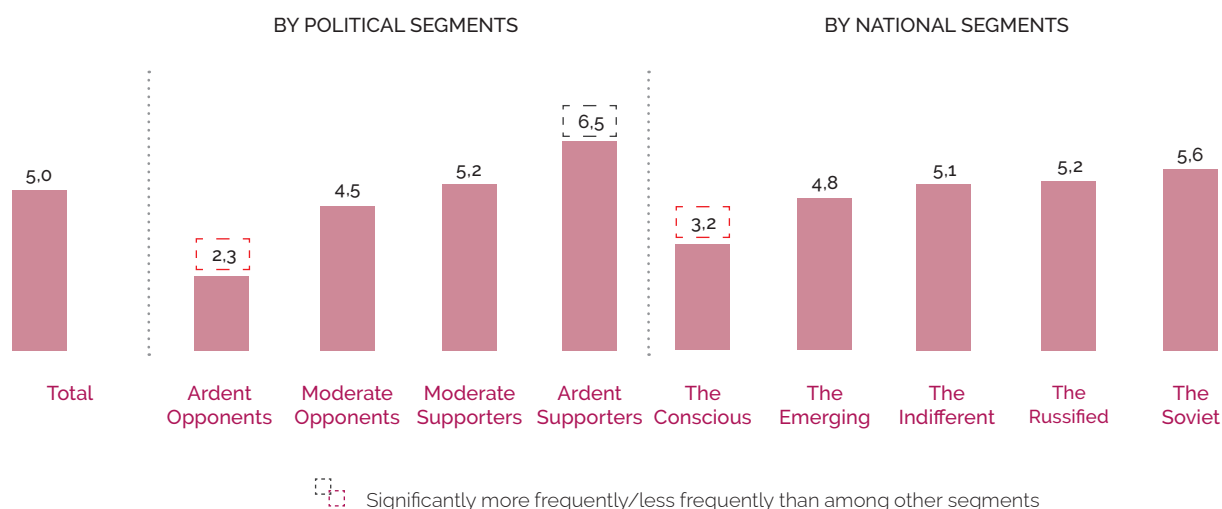
Meanwhile, **Ardent Opponents** remain extremely dissatisfied with the direction of the country's development this year (at 2.3), remaining largely unchanged compared to 2022 (see Figure 2.4.).

Moderate Opponents of the current government, although generally rather dissatisfied with the present situation, are significantly more satisfied than their polarised counterparts, the level even increasing from 4.2 to 4.5.

It is noteworthy that when evaluating the overall satisfaction with the country's development by national component segments, the satisfaction in all segments, except for the **Conscious** and the **Soviet**, is fairly average.

The **Conscious**, despite their general dissatisfaction (at 3.2), are broadly more satisfied than the segment of **Ardent**

Figure 2.4.
Overall satisfaction with the direction of development of the Belarusian state over the past year



Source: Answers to the question "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the general direction of development of the Belarusian state over the past year?" Please mark on a scale from 1 to 10, where "1" means "totally satisfied" and "10" means "totally dissatisfied".

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Opponents of the current government (at 2.3). According to last year's data, the satisfaction of both segments was at the same level (2.7 and 2.6, respectively).

By analogy with the **Ardent Supporters**, overall **Soviet** satisfaction dropped significantly over the year from 7.1 in 2020 to 5.6 in 2023.

In 2023, as compared to 2022, trust in state institutions and groups also continued to grow (and the level of trust increased significantly). According to this year's data, the top five most trusted institutions include the armed forces, the government, people who trust the authorities, the KGB and the Prosecutor's Office. Conversely, trust in all non-state institutions decreased significantly, ending up at the bottom of the list; less than one-third of the population stated their trust in these institutions.

The noteworthy difference in trust in government groups and institutions between **Ardent Supporters** and **Moderate Supporters** relates to trust in state media and officials: the centrist segment trusts them to a significantly lesser extent than the polarised ones. In addition, more than half of **Moderate Supporters** expressed trust in non-state institutions, most often mentioning non-state media, people who left the country for fear of persecution, and people who do not recognise the results of the 2020 elections.

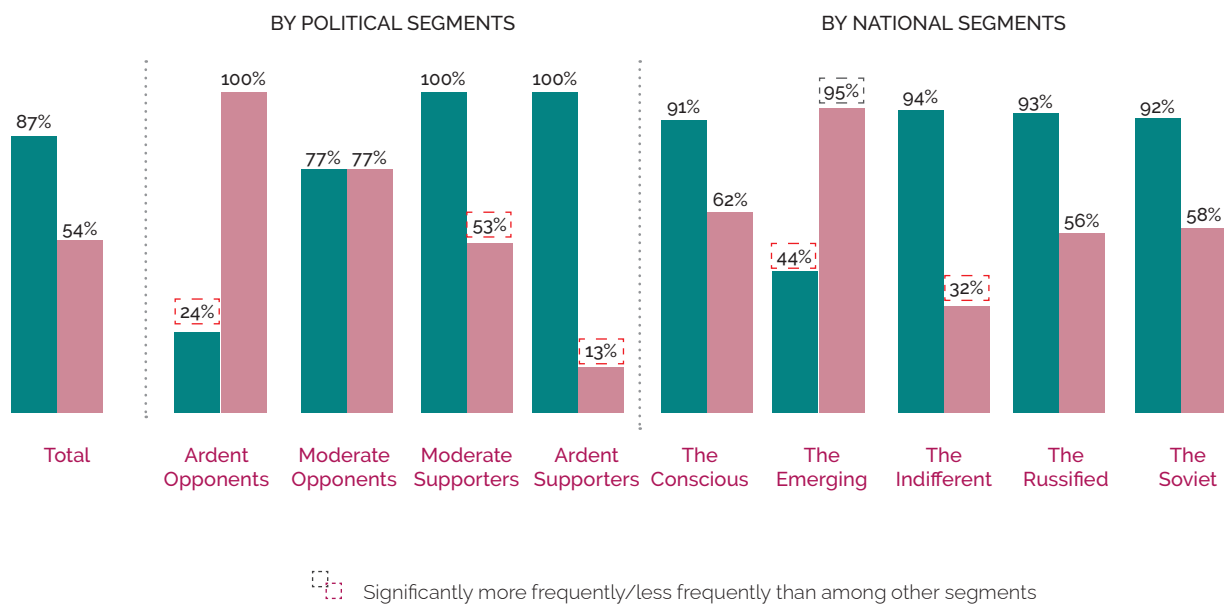
An extremely low degree of trust in non-state institutions is typical only for the **Ardent Supporters** segment of the current government: only 13% of respondents admitted their trust in non-state institutions and groups to one degree or another.

Nevertheless, the differences in trust in institutions and groups among the opponents of the current government are extremely pronounced. While the **Ardent Opponents** segment has an exceptionally high degree of trust in non-state institutions, **Moderate Opponents** rate their trust in these institutions the same as in the institutions of the current government (see Figure 2.6). They indicate the greatest degree of trust in those who do not trust the authorities (38%), including people who left Belarus abroad for fear of persecution (37%) and people who do not recognise the results of the presidential elections (32%), followed by the armed forces (32%) (see Figure 2.6).

In the case of the identity segments, the **Conscious** is the only segment with an extremely high level of trust in non-state institutions and relatively low trust in non-state institutions (although this is more than one-third of the segment). All other segments admit their relatively equal trust in at least one of the state institutions (in general, the degree of trust amounts to about 90%). In addition, the **Indifferent**, the **Emerging**, and the **Russified** indicated about equal levels of trust in non-state institutions and groups (see Figure 2.6).

- Those representatives of the **Indifferent** who admit their trust in at least one non-state institution or structure demonstrate the highest degree of trust in people who do NOT recognise the results of the 2020 elections (84%, almost all respondents)
- The same is typical for **Soviet** respondents who admitted their trust in at least one non-state institution (72%).

Figure 2.5.
Trust in state and non-state institutions by segments



Source: Answers to the question "How much do you trust or distrust the following organisations, institutions, and representatives of social or professional groups?"

The degree of trust in state institutions is measured as the percentage of those who admitted their trust in at least one of the state institutions and groups (for example, the armed forces, the government, people who trust the authorities, etc.);

The degree of trust in non-state institutions is thus calculated as the share of those who admitted their trust in at least one of the non-state institutions or groups (for example, people who left the country for fear of persecution; non-state media; people who do not recognise the results of the 2020 elections, etc.)

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

The most obvious differences naturally lie between the **Conscious** and the **Soviet**. Broadly speaking, they repeat the same pattern as the **Ardent Opponents** and **Ardent Supporters**. The former admit their trust in all non-state institution to a greater extent and less often trust in state institutions. Apart from the above, the top trusted state institutions among the **Conscious** are the law enforcement and military agencies, such as the armed forces, the prosecutor's office, the police, and the KGB. The **Soviet**, on the contrary, have extremely strong trust in state institutions and much less trust in non-state and oppositional institutions (see Figure 2.8).

2.3 POLITICAL INTERGROUP EMPATHY

In previous waves of research on national identity, we observed that among some segments, such as supporters and opponents of the current government, the Soviet and the Conscious, certain and quite pronounced social contradictions exist.

Thus, in the 2021 national identity study, it became evident that representatives of opposing groups define each other primarily on political grounds, forming the basis for the increasing level of social tension. They are ready

to demonstrate solidarity only with members of their ingroup and prefer to have virtually no contact with other groups. The study elucidated potential reasons for this, including that Ardent Opponents, when faced with massive repression from the state, feel extremely unsafe and insecure about their rights, while for Supporters of the current government, this indicator is at an average level. Opponents feel they are being treated unjustly by the regime. At the same time,

Supporters claim that the regime is entirely fair. Thus, already in 2021, there were reasons to believe that these two opposing forces could not understand or accept each other on political issues.^{44,45}

Indeed, the 2022 study found that Ardent Supporters and Ardent Opponents, who have extremely different

⁴⁴ Грамадская арганізацыя Годна, Нацыянальная ідэнтычнасць беларусаў 2021 г.: другая волна даследавання // Public Organization Godna, National identity of Belarusians in 2021: the Second Wave of Research

⁴⁵ In the 2021 study, the methodology for the determination of Supporters or Ardent Opponents of the current government differed from the one used in 2022-2023. However, both segmentation methods make use of essentially the same semantic units – *Author's note*.

points of view regarding how the Belarusian state should develop in the future, display strong hostility towards each other. This confrontation is also observed in the identity segments. As these ideologically opposing groups exist in their own information bubbles, it seems impossible to imagine a situation where both segments could even simply understand the political point of view of the other group, let alone engage in dialogue on state policy issues.⁴⁶

Thus, the hostility towards political opponents is obvious and understandable. However, several questions remained unanswered:

- How deeply held is this hostility towards outgroup members?
- Does this hostility concern only (near) political issues and situations, or does the awareness of belonging to the “outsiders” determine a person’s vision of the situation and assessment, even if this does not concern political issues?
- If there is a high level of hostility, is it even possible for the two groups to engage in dialogue on non-political issues?
- Is there any difference in empathy between Ardent Supporters and Ardent Opponents?

The following section represents our attempt to answer these questions.

2.3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

As part of the study, we assessed whether it is difficult for supporters and opponents of the current government in Belarus to demonstrate empathy and sympathy towards their political opponent.

As empathy itself is a fairly broad and general concept, we define it in this study as understanding the misfortunes of another person and having compassion for them with the urge to reduce their suffering.

To measure political intergroup empathy, we used a tool developed and validated for empathy studies among adherents of opposing parties — liberals and conservatives in the United States and Great Britain — described in a 2023 article.⁴⁷

Respondents were shown a description involving a typical

male or female resident of Belarus (gender was determined randomly) who found themselves in a situation that should elicit empathy. The following scenarios were posed to the respondents.

The first situation involves a person finding themselves in a conditionally neutral unhappy situation. An example of such a situation is as follows: *“A few days ago, Aleksander severely sprained his ankle with a partial rupture of the ligaments. A plaster cast was placed on his leg for the duration of the recovery period, and he is forced to walk on crutches. When walking, he constantly experiences discomfort, and often a sharp pain in his leg.”*

In the second case, a scenario unfolds in which an employee is fired from his job due to differences in political views with the management of the enterprise. An example situation is as follows: *“Dmitry worked in trade, but six months ago he was fired. The management of the private enterprise where he was employed opposes the current government. Therefore, when the management found out about Dmitry’s political views, they made it so that he was forced to quit. Due to his age, Dmitry has not been able to find a job for six months, which is why his morale has deteriorated greatly.”*

The third scenario describes a similarly neutral situation as in the first case: *“A few days ago, a man was hospitalised with pneumonia. He feels very sick and cannot get out of bed, and is also worried about the potential complications that the disease could have on his existing heart problems.”* The fundamental difference in this case is the use of other experimental factors (they are described in more detail below).

To assess the degree of empathy towards ingroup and outgroup members, an experimental factor about the respondent’s political orientation or adherence to one of two versions of the national flag was introduced into the description.

After hearing the above descriptions, respondents were asked to answer a number of questions, which were reduced to four main indicators during processing:

— EMPATHIC CONCERN

Empathic concern was defined as the average of the respondents’ ratings of the degree of compassion, concern, warmth, and empathy they actually or hypothetically felt for a character in the story.

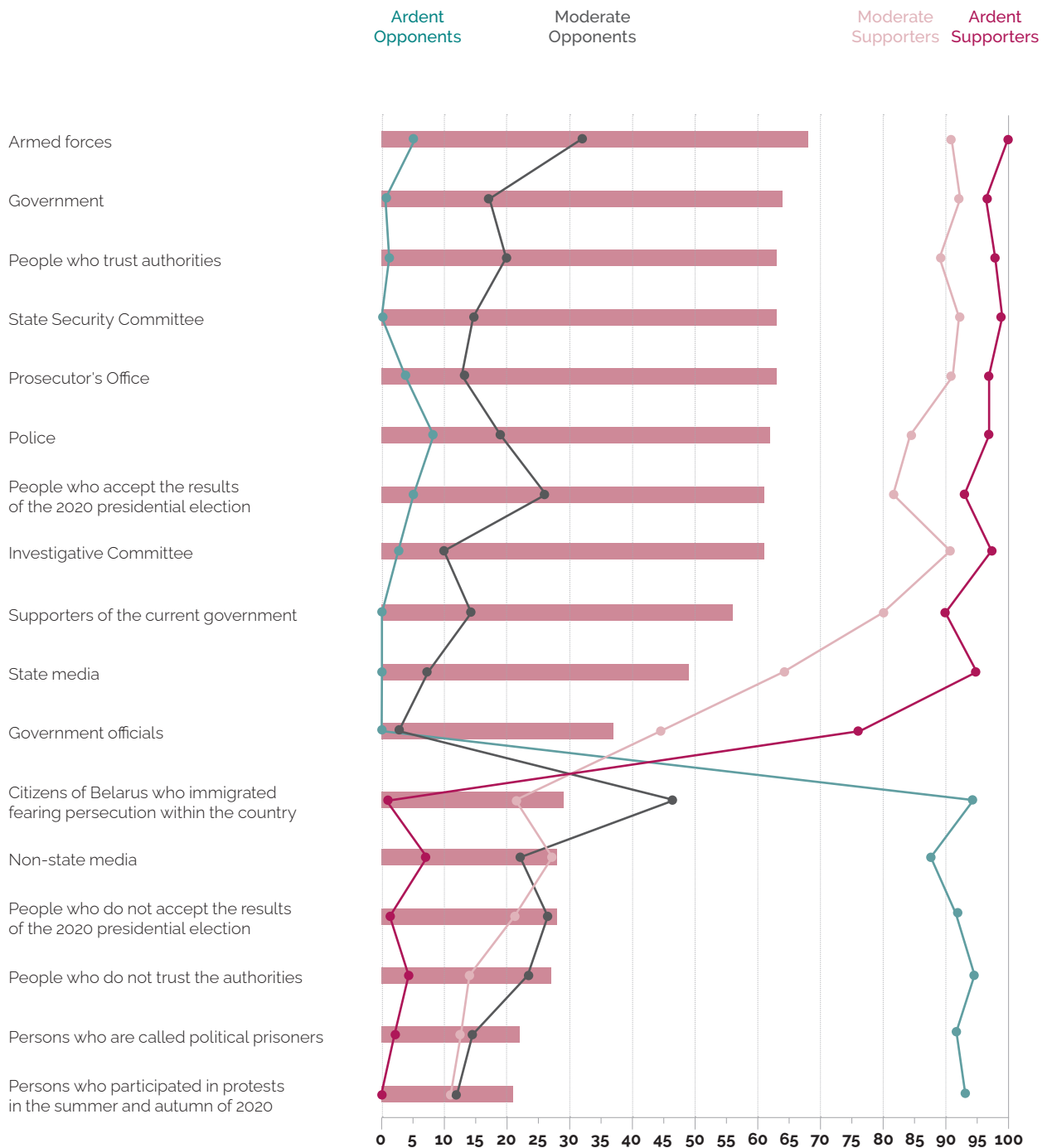
— PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

This indicator was measured by averaging the degree of agreement with the following two statements: *“I can imagine how this person feels”* and *“I understand what this person is going through”*, which were rated on a 7-point scale, where “1” corresponds to “Completely disagree” and “7” corresponds to “Completely agree”.

⁴⁶ Биканов, Ф. *Беларусская национальная идентичность в 2022 году: опыт количественного исследования* – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022 // Bikanov, Ph. *Belarusian Identity in 2022: A Quantitative Study* – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022

⁴⁷ Casey, J. P., Vanman, E. J., & Barlow, F. K. (2023). Empathic Conservatives and Moralizing Liberals: Political Intergroup Empathy Varies by Political Ideology and Is Explained by Moral Judgment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231198001>

Figure 2.6.
Trust in various institutions by segments, %



Significantly more frequently/less frequently than among other segments

Source: Answers to the question "How much do you trust or distrust the following organisations, institutions, and representatives of social or professional groups?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

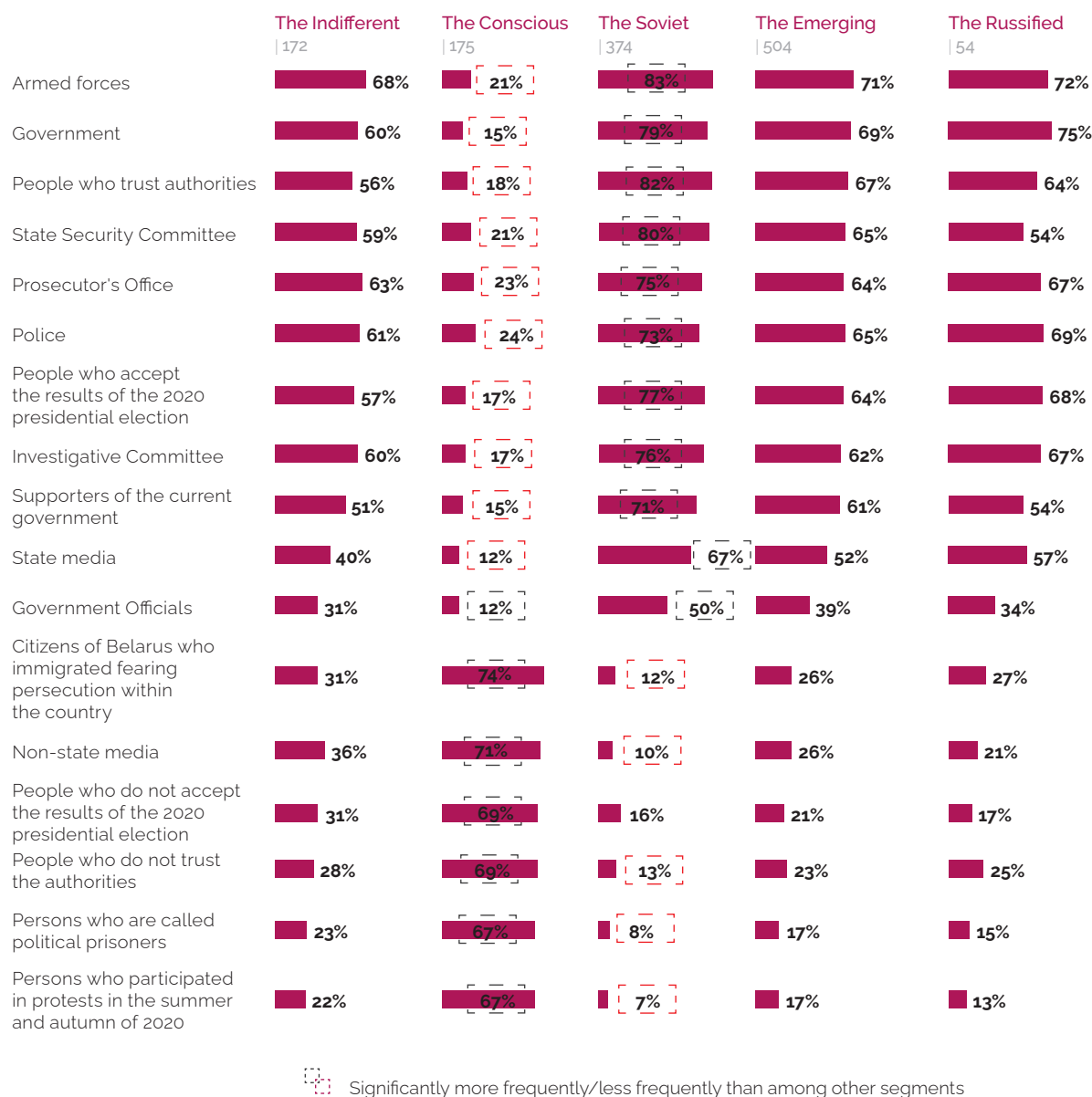
— EMPATHIC INTENTIONS

To measure this indicator, two other statements were used: "I would try to encourage this person when talking to them" and "I would do everything possible to help this

person if they asked me to do so", which were also rated on a 7-point scale, where "1" corresponds to "Completely disagree" and "7" corresponds to "Completely agree".

Figure 2.7

Trust in various institutions and groups by identity segments



Source: Answers to the question "How much do you trust or distrust the following organisations, institutions, and representatives of social or professional groups?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

— EMPATHIC AVOIDANCE

This indicator was also measured as the average degree of agreement with the following two statements: "I would avoid communicating with this person", "This person deserved what happened to them", which were rated on a 7-point scale, where "1" corresponds to "Completely disagree" and "7" corresponds to "Completely agree".

We then examined how the mean ratings among the representatives of these groups differed in significance de-

pending on which experimental (or control) factor was introduced to the respondent. Thus, we were able to determine the attitudes in different groups of supporters or opponents of the current government towards ingroups, outgroups, and neutral groups.

In this work, we understand ingroups as those political groups that a person identifies as being a part of and in which they trust to the greatest extent. Accordingly, outgroups are understood as those political groups with which a person does not wish identify and which they trust to

Table 2. 1
Correspondence of experimental factors to demonstrated situations

	Situations with a sprained ankle	Situation with dismissal	Situation with pneumonia
Factor 1	The person described is an ardent supporter of the current government; in 2020 he attended rallies in support of Lukashenka.		The organisers call on all citizens to attend the holiday celebration with a red and green flag. The person learned about this call and really wanted to attend the event. In addition, he has a red and green flag, which he considers to be the true national symbol of Belarus.
Factor	The person described is an ardent opponent of the current government; she attended protest rallies in 2020.		The organizers call on all citizens to attend the holiday celebration with a red and green flag. The person learned about this call and reacted in an extremely negative way. She believes it is not worth going to such events and the true national symbol of Belarus is a white-red-white flag.
Control Group	No experimental factors we introduced		

a lesser extent. Neutral groups in this case are represented control statements that do not in any particular way emphasise political commitment or support for a particular variant of the national symbol.

As part of our research, we correlate outgroups and ingroups with political segments as follows:

- For **Ardent Opponents** and **Moderate Opponents**, ingroup members are convinced opponents of the current government, who took part in protests in 2020, or those who believe that the national symbol of Belarus is a white-red-white flag and avoid celebrating National Flag Day in support of the current red and green flag. An outgroup for the above segment is ardent supporters of Lukashenka who attended rallies in 2020 in support of the current government or consider the red and green flag to be the national symbol of Belarus and are willing to celebrate National Flag Day with great enthusiasm.
- On the contrary, for **Ardent Supporters** and **Moderate Supporters**, the ingroup is represented by ardent supporters of the current government and people who consider the red and green flag to be their national symbol. The outgroup, accordingly, are those who are ardent opponents of the current government and consider the white-red-white flag to be their national symbol.

2.3.2. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS BY POLITICAL SEGMENTS

The socio-political and identity polarisation is also reinforced by a psychological one: representatives of polarised segments are less willing to demonstrate Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards others if they are representatives of an opposing group. It makes no difference whether the "outsider" finds them-

selves in a situation of ideological injustice or a difficult situation that generally has nothing to do with politics (as in the case of a sprained ankle).

Conventionally, centrist groups in this regard are much more open, expressing more empathy towards outgroup members than the representatives of polarised groups.

The Ardent Opponents and Ardent Supporters of the current government are the bearers of the acute social conflict. It is representatives of these groups who demonstrate the least amount of empathy towards representatives of an opposing group. However, they are very empathic towards their ingroup. Moreover, Ardent Opponents of the current government are slightly more empathic towards both the ingroup and outgroup as compared to Ardent Supporters (see Figure 2.9).

A closer look reveals **that the main differences in empathy lie in the area of Perspective-Taking**. While Ardent Opponents — the segment that suffered the most from the repression launched by authorities in August 2020 — are characterised by a moderate-to-strong Perspective-Taking towards outgroup members, **Ardent Supporters demonstrate a general lack of Perspective-Taking towards their opponents**. In parallel, it seems that it is lack of Perspective-Taking that leads Ardent Supporters to generally exhibit less Empathic Intent than Ardent Opponents (see Figure 2.10).

It is likely that the reason for the lack of Perspective-Taking towards their opponent among **Ardent Supporters** is the active absorption of state media products. Perhaps an ideology that portrays members of society with oppositional views as the enemy works more for **Ardent Supporters**. As a result, this leads to the actual dehumanisation of the opponents.

At the same time, the **Ardent Opponents segment is least likely to demonstrate Empathic Avoidance towards**

a member of their ingroup in scenarios with a description of political position (but not in scenarios with the two versions of the national symbol). Thus, this is the segment that is most in solidarity with its ingroup.

This makes productive dialogue between representatives of these two segments improbable. Ardent Supporters who demonstrate the lack of Perspective-Taking towards their opponents will likely be inclined to immediately resort to aggression against "outsiders". Meanwhile, Ardent Opponents, who are characterised by the greatest support for their ingroup and consolidation in a situation when they are opposed, will be forced to hold their line and defend themselves.

Active public dialogue, apparently, is possible only among representatives of moderate groups, as they demonstrate a balanced empathy for both their ingroup and outgroup. While this dialogue is likely already underway, the censorship and banning of independent media that actively presents oppositional political views may contribute to **Moderate Supporters becoming slightly more polarised in their views and Moderate Opponents actively reconsidering their views.** In general, Moderate Supporters exhibit somewhat more empathy towards their outgroup than Moderate Opponents. Conversely, Moderate Opponents show a slightly lower level of empathy towards their outgroup compared to Moderate Supporters. This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that the Moderate Opponents segment places equal trust in both state and non-state institutions, while Moderate Supporters clearly place greater trust in state institutions. Additionally, they are more likely to acknowledge watching Belarusian state media (see Figure 2.9).

In fact, **the Moderate Supporters segment is the most challenging and interesting to consider for several reasons:**

Strictly speaking, it cannot be asserted that the ingroup of this segment comprises exclusively representatives of the opposition or people who consider the white-red-white flag as their national symbol. Likewise, it cannot be stated with absolute certainty that the outgroup for them consists solely of supporters of the current political regime in Belarus or people who consider the red and green flag as their national symbol. As can be seen from the results provided in Section 2.2 of this study, this segment is characterised by equal trust in both state and non-state institutions.

This fully explains the higher degree of empathy towards outgroup members (in their case, supporters of the current government or people who consider the red and green flag to be their national symbol) compared to other segments.

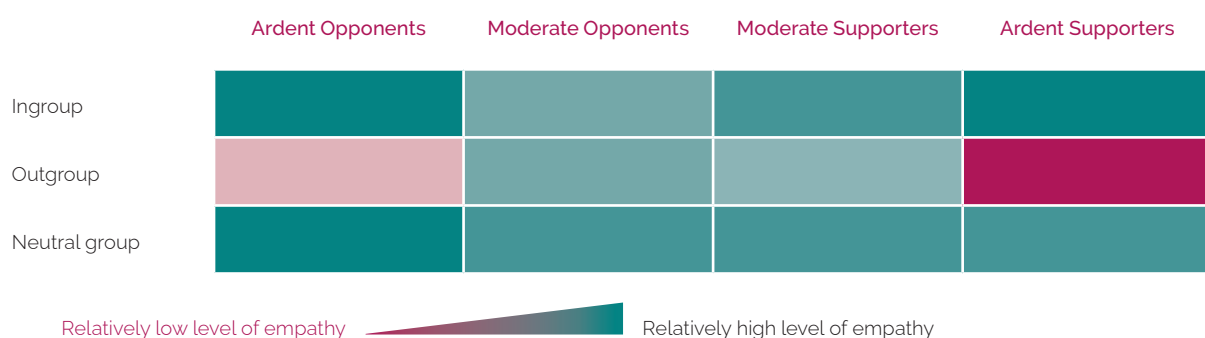
However, this factor alone does not adequately account for the lower level of empathy towards members of the ingroup (i.e., people who are opponents of the current government or people who consider the white-red-white flag as their national symbol). This is likely due to the "fear factor": representatives of this group may perceive it as dangerous to express a high degree of support for their ingroup, even on an emotional level within the context of the survey.

Next, we will consider in more detail how the level of empathy was distributed in each scenario according to the parameters described above.

SITUATION 1. SPRAINED ANKLE

Let us revisit the first scenario, which involves a situation requiring unconditional empathy based on existing moral

Figure 2.8.
Overall level of empathy by political segments



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

and ethical standards. In this case, the character suffers a severe ankle sprain, has been placed in a plaster cast, and persistently experiences the associated discomfort, including sharp pain in his leg.

As an experiment, a variable concerning his political position is introduced into the character's description. In one scenario, he is an ardent supporter of the current government, having attended rallies in support of Lukashenka in 2020. In the other scenario, he is an ardent opponent of the current government, having attended protest rallies in 2020.

The fundamental assumption that can be put forward re-

garding the study results is that the inclusion of a person's political position in the description should not, in any way, influence the expression of empathy. This is grounded in the notion that the situation the person finds himself in, namely the physical discomfort and pain due to the ankle injury, is unrelated to politics.

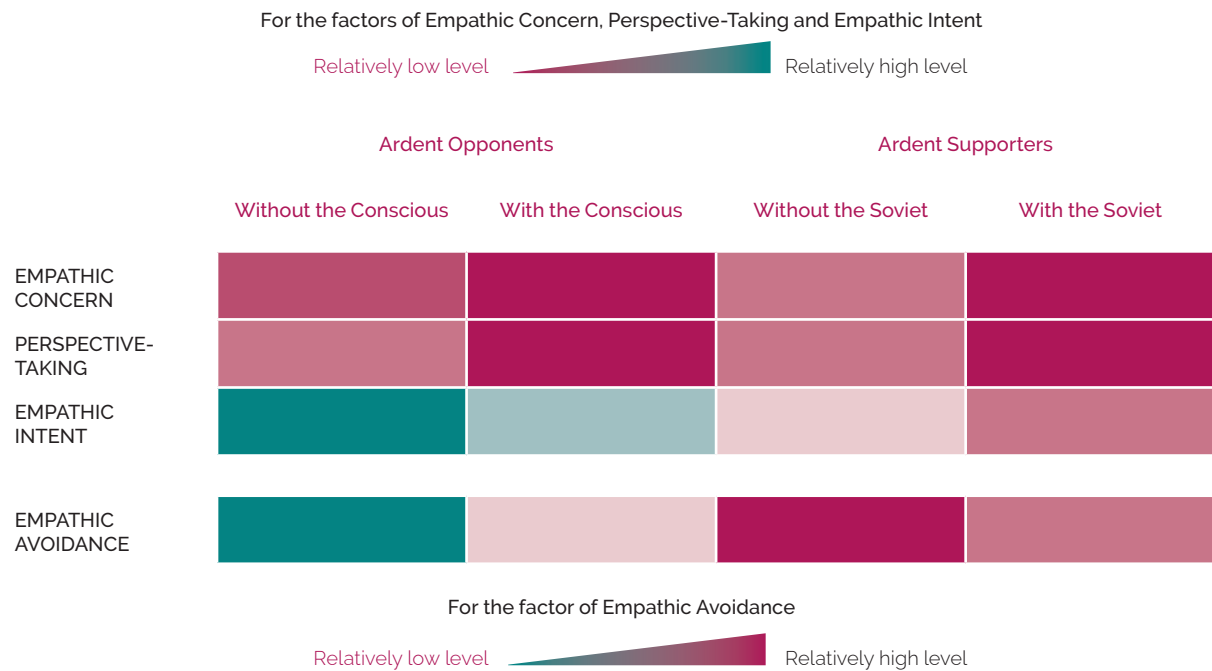
However, the obtained results revealed discernible **differences in the level of empathy for ingroup and outgroup members based on the person's political position**. Notably, representatives of different segments demonstrated approximately the same degree of empathy when presented with a completely neutral situation that did not specify the person's political views.

Figure 2.9.
OVERALL SCORES FOR EMPATHY FACTORS BY SEGMENTS



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 2.10.
LEVEL OF EMPATHY TO OUTGROUPS BY FACTORS AMONG POLAR GROUPS



Polar opposite segments exhibited higher degrees of Empathic Concern and Empathic Intent in scenarios involving an ingroup member, and lower degrees in scenarios involving an outgroup member, compared with representatives of conventionally centrist groups.

Concerning Perspective-Taking towards an outgroup member, all segments, with the exception of Ardent Supporters, evaluated the situation to a similar extent based on this factor. Ardent Supporters representatives admitted that they have less understanding of the feelings and situation experienced by the person with a sprained ankle, solely because the description characterised the person as an opponent of the current Belarusian government.

This results in the largest gap between ingroup and outgroup perspectives, with polarised segments generally demonstrating higher levels of Perspective-Taking towards their ingroup. Notably, the Ardent Supporters have the largest and most significant gap between Perspective-Taking towards ingroup and outgroup members.

Furthermore, Ardent Opponents of the current government are more inclined to demonstrate Empathic Intent towards outgroup members than their opponents. In a neutral situation requiring empathy, Ardent Opponents are more willing to encourage or help their opponents. Nonetheless, overall estimates for this parameter among representatives of centrist views are higher.

A noteworthy observation emerges from representatives of Moderate Opponents, who are significantly more likely than all other segments to demonstrate Empathic Avoidance towards ingroup members and simultaneously, exhibit the lowest level of Empathic Avoidance towards outgroup members. Even in the situation involving the sprained ankle, individuals in this segment are afraid to show support or commitment to opponents of the current government.

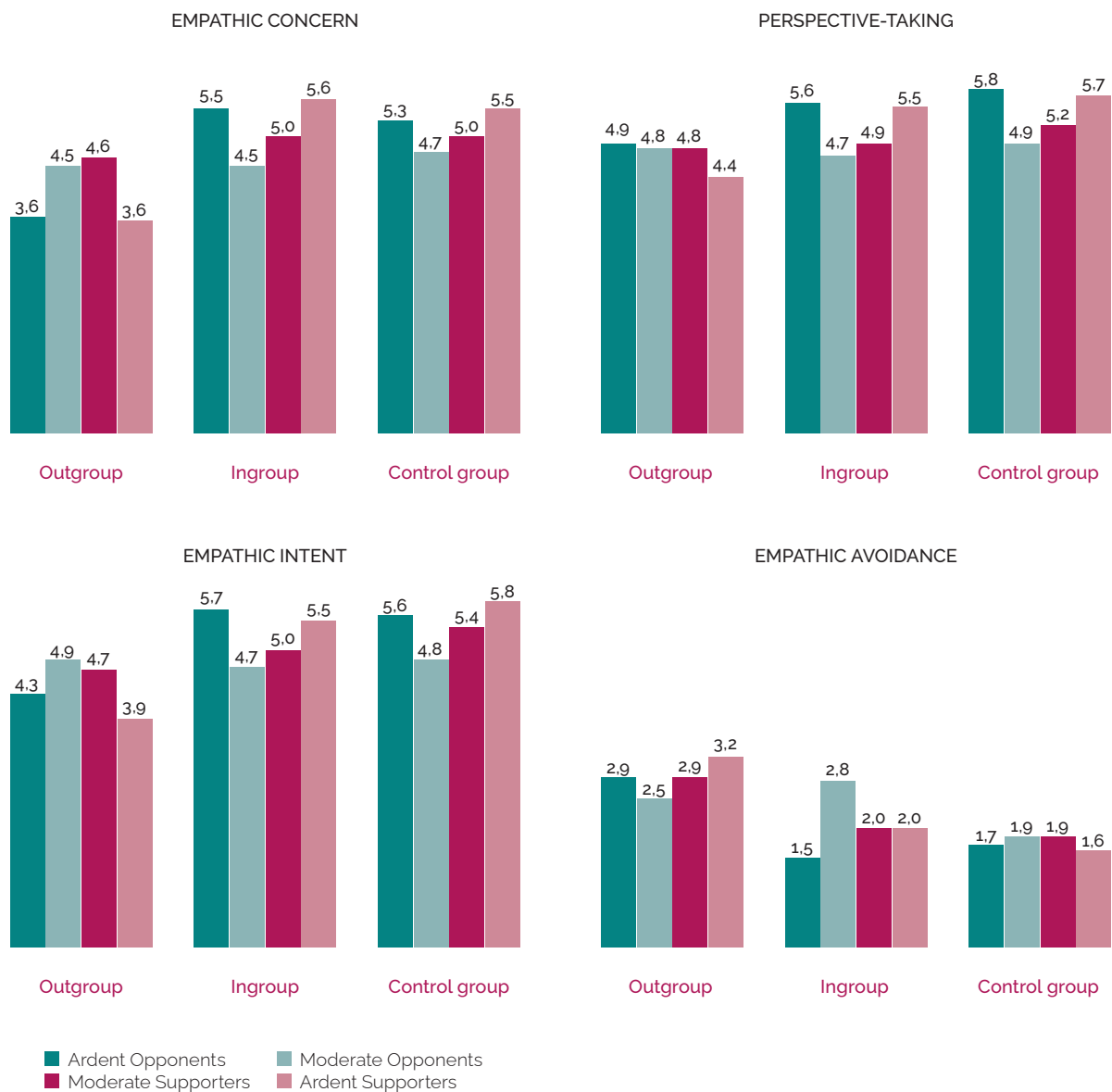
SITUATION 2. DISMISSAL FROM WORK

The case with the dismissal from work differs from the first case in that, while the person is placed in a situation that generally elicits empathy, this situation is intricately tied to their political stance. Therefore, it serves to demonstrate one of the contradictions in modern Belarusian society.

In this case, the behaviour patterns identified in the situation with a sprained ankle are further reinforced: polarised groups generally demonstrate more Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards members of their ingroup, less so towards a character with an opposing political position. All segments express a greater degree of Empathic Avoidance towards the members of their outgroup.

Representatives of polar opposite views exhibit significantly lower Empathic Concern towards their opponents. In this regard, there are no significant differences between Ardent Supporters and Ardent Opponents. A mir-

Figure 2.11.
Average ratings for empathy factors in the situation with a sprained ankle



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

rored situation concerning the Empathic Concern parameter is observed in relation to the ingroups: polarised segments, in general, demonstrate more Empathic Concern towards their ingroup than the representatives of moderate segments. At the same time, they tend to demonstrate Empathic Avoidance towards members of their ingroup to a much lesser extent.

It is important to understand that in a situation where a member of their ingroup is faced with repression due to their political views, **Ardent Opponents begin to show even more solidarity** and demonstrate a higher level of Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards a member of their ingroup. In addition, they

are less likely to demonstrate Empathic Avoidance towards their ingroup.

However, in this situation, **centrist groups display a decrease in Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards their ingroup**, likely due to a desire to avoid sensitive and dangerous topics and a higher level of trust in opponents of the current government.

Similarly to the situation with the sprained ankle, Moderate Opponents indicate the lowest levels of empathy towards their ingroup. Moreover, they demonstrate a greater tendency towards demonstrating Empathic Intent towards their outgroup compared to the repre-

Figure 2.12.

AVERAGE RATINGS FOR EMPATHY FACTORS IN THE SITUATION WITH DISMISSAL FROM WORK



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

sentatives of other segments. Furthermore, they consistently demonstrate a lower degree of Empathic Intent towards their ingroup.

SITUATION 3. PNEUMONIA

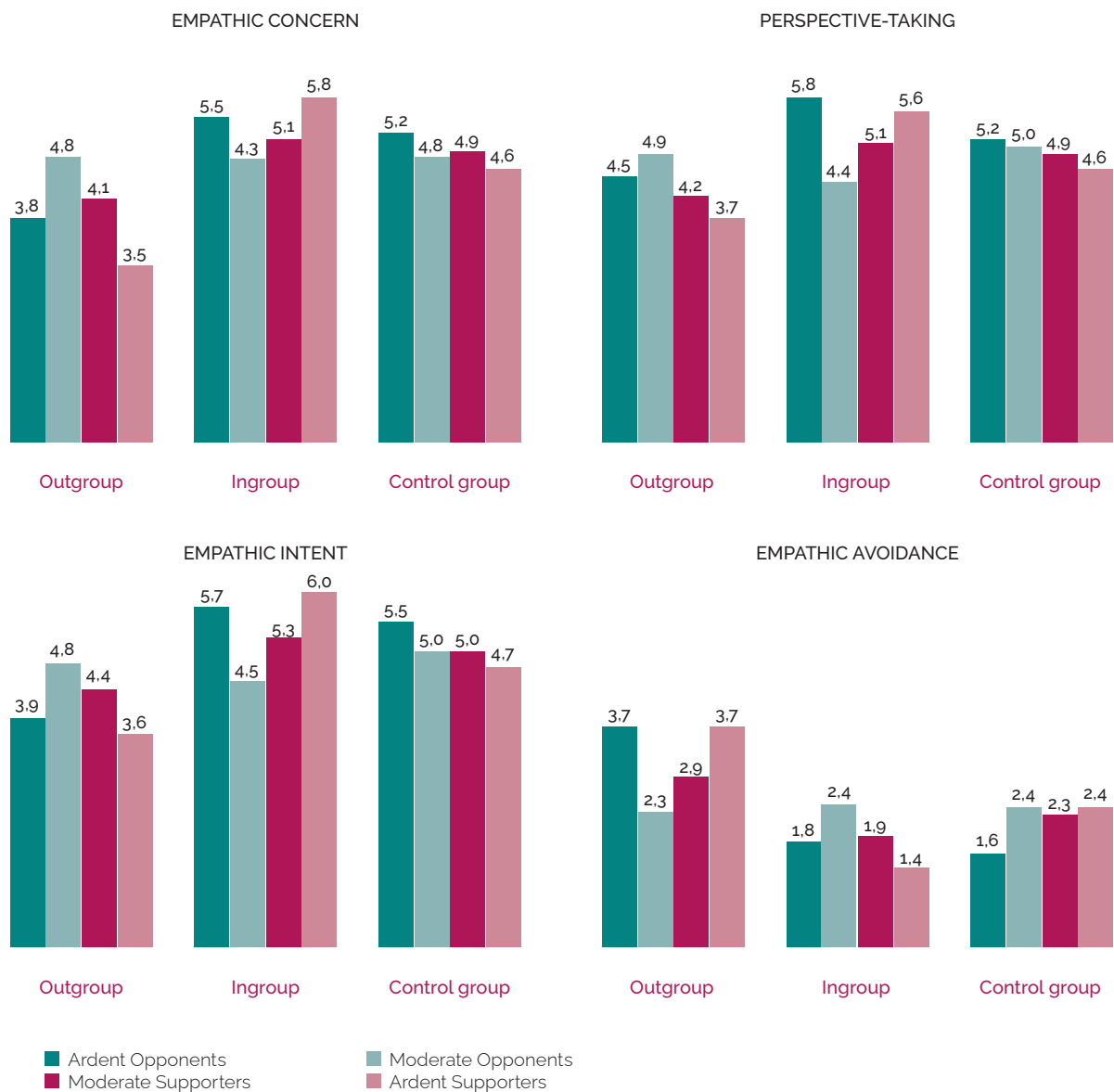
The third situation differs from the first one in that it uses attitudes toward one of the two versions of the national symbol as a variable. This case describes a situation in which a city is celebrating National Flag Day, in honour of which a ceremonial event is planned. The organisers call on all citizens to attend the holiday car-

rying a red and green flag. The character learns about this call and reacts extremely negatively (if they believe that the national symbol is a white-red-white flag) or very positively (if they believe that the national symbol is a red-green flag).

Subsequently, the narrative transitions to a situation where the character finds themselves in a hospital with pneumonia, leading to heart complications.

However, the formulation of the situation itself presents a number of limitations. Firstly, two alternative versions of the flag were chosen as national symbols, whereas in reali-

Figure 2.13.
AVERAGE RATINGS FOR EMPATHY FACTORS IN THE SITUATION WITH PNEUMONIA



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

ty, the red-green flag is widely acknowledged as an important national symbol, while only 1% of respondents consider the white-red-white flag as such. Moreover, the majority of those respondents fall within the Ardent Opponents segment (16%). Thus, it cannot be claimed that a person identifying the white-red-white flag as a national symbol is an ingroup member for both Ardent Opponents and Moderate Opponents.

Secondly, in a situation in which a character is a supporter of the red-green flag, it is mentioned that, upon hearing the call, they "wanted to attend the event", whereas the supporter of the white-and-white symbols believes that such an event should not be attended. These situations are fundamentally different; in the first case, the person who contracts pneumonia, not only faces health complications but also loses the

opportunity to attend the event. In the second case, the person had no intention of attending the event in the first place. Consequently, the nature of the situations may potentially skew the results, leading to an "overestimation" of empathy towards the adherent of the red-green flag and an "underestimation" in the case of the white-red-white flag enthusiast.

Thirdly, the widely broadcasted "extremist" status of the white-red-white flag in state media may instill a justifiable level of fear among respondents, deterring them from openly expressing their true beliefs.

Regarding the overall findings, **notable distinctions emerge between representatives of centrist and polarised groups in displaying Empathic Concern to-**

Figure 2.14.

Comparison in assessment according to empathy factors among the Conscious and the Soviet segments.



Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

wards individuals supporting the "alien" symbol. Both Ardent Opponents and Ardent Supporters exhibit significantly lower levels of Empathic Concern toward their outgroup.

In parallel, **Moderate Supporters demonstrate the lowest level of Empathic Concern, Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards their ingroup than the rest of the segments.** This is probably due to the extremist status of the white-red-white flag. As a result, the formulation of the situation seems particularly dangerous for this segment. In addition, it is worth understanding that in general this segment does not consider this symbol to be theirs.

In the scenario with National Flag Day, opponents of the current government (both centrist and ardent) generally demonstrate a higher level of Perspective-Taking towards members of their outgroup.

In this instance, Ardent Supporters exhibit the lowest level of Perspective-Taking towards members of their ingroup. This trend is likely attributed to the fact that, for this segment, identity is largely expressed through their love for Belarus, with the state flag serving as the most significant symbol. Consequently, the apparent lack of interest in National Flag Day by Ardent Supporters may imply that Ardent Opponents view this group as "external" and "alien" rather than part of their ingroup.

Concerning the Empathic Intent parameter, the same pattern persists as observed in the Empathic Concern parameter. Representatives of both Ardent Opponents and Ardent Supporters display Empathic Intent toward their outgroup significantly less frequently compared to centrist segments. Notably, **Moderate Opponents of the current government are more “disposed” to demonstrating Empathic Intent than Moderate Supporters.**

In the case of a control statement, the Empathic Avoidance factor is least pronounced in the Ardent Opponents segments.

2.3.3. RESULTS BY NATIONAL SEGMENTS

We also examined the differences in the level of empathy between the Soviet and the Conscious as the carriers of social conflict. **Overall, both segments show similar results on various empathy factors** in the situation with a sprained ankle and situation with dismissal from work. They, as in the case of Ardent Opponents and Ardent Supporters, demonstrate a lower level of Empathic Concern,

Perspective-Taking, and Empathic Intent towards members of their outgroup than towards members of their ingroup (see Figure 2.14).

The main differences lie in the Empathic Avoidance factor. Thus, for example, **the Soviet demonstrate a higher level of Empathic Avoidance towards members of their outgroup than the Conscious** in the situation with a sprained ankle, when the case has no political context. However, the Conscious tend to demonstrate a greater level of Empathic Avoidance towards representatives of the neutral group.

In the case of dismissal from work due to different political views with the management, the **Conscious exhibit a higher level of Empathic Avoidance towards members of their ingroup than the Soviet.**

In the case of the two different versions of the national flag, the Conscious demonstrate a higher level of Empathic Concern towards members of their outgroup than the Soviet. Moreover, **they demonstrate a lower level of Empathic Avoidance towards adherents of the red-green flag than the Soviet.**

3

FOREIGN POLICY IN THE PUBLIC OPINION OF BELARUSIANS

The foreign policy preferences of Belarusians, that is, their views on the position and actions of the state in relation to other states, are closely intertwined with internal political contradictions and differences in national identity.

At the general assessment level, approximately 40% of Belarusians prefer the country to be oriented towards an alliance with Russia. This is also manifested in support for integration and sympathy for Russia in the current war.

- Such attitudes are associated with the prevalence of the Russian-Soviet identity component — it is the Soviet who support the orientation toward Russia more strongly than others.
- Sensitivity to propaganda also plays its role. For example, up to half of Belarusians are convinced that nationalists and neo-Nazis are in power in Ukraine.
- In addition, the prevailing supporters of the current government in society see Russia as the country's political ally.

At the same time, at the level of specific steps forward, pro-Russian sympathies turn out to be quite moderate.

- By integration, its supporters mean interstate cooperation rather than a merger of key government institutions. This refers to science and technology, visa policy, and other areas where Russia and Belarus already have quite close relations.
- Distancing from Russia is also manifested in the cultural aspect: the majority of Belarusians, including those who are pro-Russian, believe that Russians coming to Belarus should adopt the local culture and way of life to the same extent as visitors from other countries.
- Even those who sympathise with Russia in the war not only do not support Belarus' participation in it but are also inclined to advocate establishing friendly relations with Ukraine for mutually beneficial trade, border services, and diplomacy.

Neutral positions — alliances with both the EU and Russia or being outside of any unions — overall have about the

same share of supporters as the pro-Russian vector. These views are mainly held by moderate segments: the Emerging and the Indifferent.

Neutrality and detachment are especially evident in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war. The majority of Belarusians do not follow it closely, and approximately one-third do not support either side or do not have their own opinion on the matter. This is largely due to the fact that war is associated with strong negative emotions.

The pro-European vector, as well as direct support for Ukraine in the war, are the least common among Belarusians. Such views are mainly held by the Conscious and Ardent Opponents of the current government. Moreover, even among them, only half supports orientation toward the EU.

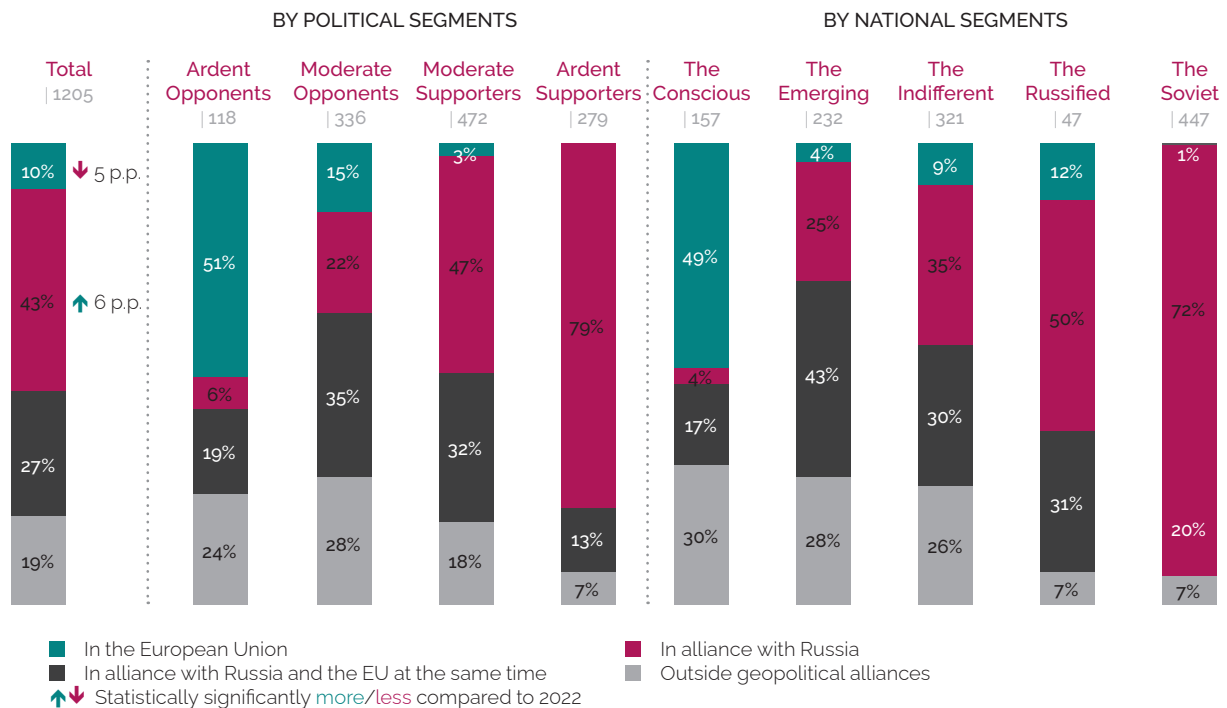
3.1 PERCEPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL VECTOR OF BELARUS

Although Belarusians do not have a common position on the country's foreign policy vector, the largest share chooses orientation towards Russia. This is especially typical for the Soviet, who see Russia as a historically and culturally close state, as well as a political ally of the current government.

Neutral positions are the second most popular among Belarusians. The share of Belarusians supporting the idea of a simultaneous alliance with Russia and the EU or generally being outside of any international alliances is almost the same as the share of Belarusians supporting the pro-Russian vector. This position is most characteristic of moderate political segments.

Belarusians demonstrate the lowest preference for orientation towards the EU; even among ardent opponents of the current government, only half adheres to this position. In general, Belarusians have a worse attitude towards the governments of "Western" countries than, for example, towards Russia, China, and Kazakhstan.

Figure 3.1.
FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION



Source: Answers to the question "Which geopolitical alliance is it better for the Belarusian state to be in?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

The largest share of Belarusians supports an alliance with Russia (see Figure 3.1)⁴⁸. At the same time, less than half adhere to this point of view; almost the same number of Belarusians favour neutral options, preferring to be outside of international alliances or in concurrent alliances with the EU and Russia.⁴⁹

The foreign policy preferences of Belarusians are directly related to their position on domestic political issues and the characteristics of their national identity:

- The position of the **Soviet** is the most consolidated, with the majority advocating the pro-Russian vector.
- Among the **Russified**, the most popular orientation is towards Russia, although there is no clear unity in views; half of the segment prefers either a neutral position or an alliance with the EU.
- The **Emerging** and the Indifferent are the most neutral; among them, half or even more are

supporters of an alliance with both sides or being outside of international alliances.

- The **Conscious** are the most pro-European-minded segment, although even among them there is no consolidated position; approximately half favours neutrality.

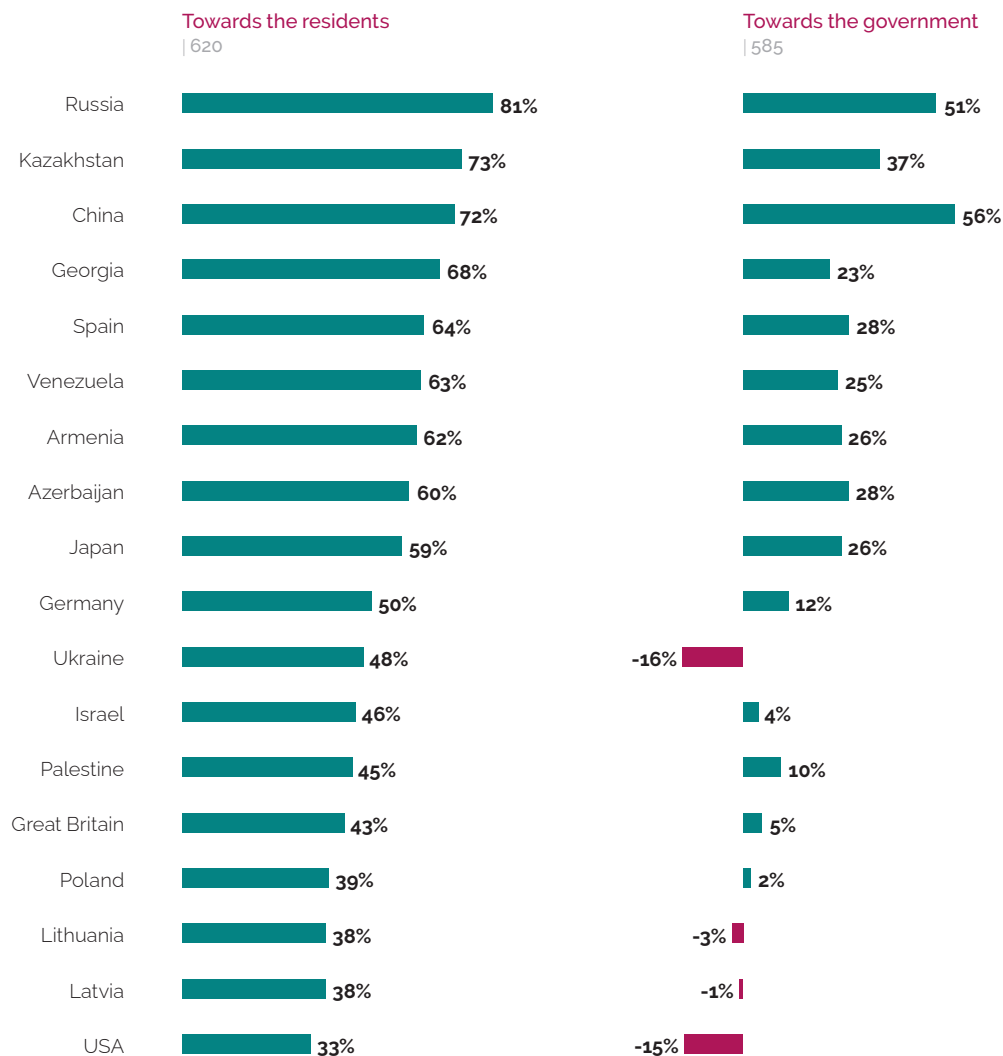
Compared to last year, the share of supporters of an alliance with Russia has increased slightly and the share of supporters of an alliance with the EU has decreased. This is probably due to growth in the pro-government segments (see Section 2.1). As a result, the pro-Russian vector has almost equalled the sum of neutral positions, whereas it was noticeably weaker than it last year, and has consolidated as the most popular position among Belarusians.

In general, a positive attitude towards both the residents and the governments of all countries prevails among Belarusians (see Figure 3.2). At the same time, Belarusians perceive the government in a much worse light than the residents. Attitudes towards residents and the government are directly interconnected: the more positive the attitude towards the country's residents, the more positive the attitude is towards its government as well. The exception is Ukraine, where a positive attitude towards its residents strongly predominates, while a rather negative attitude towards its government persists.

⁴⁸ The dynamics shown in the figure may be due in part to a change in the sampling frame from the previous measurement.

⁴⁹ Although the total share of neutral positions is 46%, which is higher than the 43% share of those who prefer an alliance with Russia, it cannot be said that neutral positions prevail. This is due to the specifics of measurement that do not allow an equal comparison of the share of one option and the sum of the shares of two options: two answer options have obviously a greater chance of getting more answers in total than only one option.

Figure 3.2.
INDEX OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER COUNTRIES



Source: Answers to the question "How do you generally feel about the government/residents of each of the following countries?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

The widespread pro-Russian orientation is manifested in a positive attitude towards Russia, which enjoys the most sympathy among Belarusians. For comparison, Belarusians regard Germany, one of the central countries of the EU, in a much worse light, especially the country's government. The same effect, which is further reinforced by the current war, is true in relation to Ukraine.

The positive attitude towards Russia is comparable only to the attitude towards China: the majority of Belarusians have a positive attitude towards both the country's residents and government. Of any country, Belarusians have the worst outlook towards the United States, the global rival of China and Russia, applied equally to the country's residents and government.

Belarusians exhibit a notably more negative attitude towards their neighbouring countries compared to their stance towards Russia. Responses are evenly split between positive and negative opinions towards the government of these neighbouring countries, while a predominantly positive outlook prevails when it comes to their residents. These findings suggest a relatively strong affinity among Belarusians for Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, despite extensive state propaganda attempting to shape a negative perception.

Countries such as Japan, Venezuela, and Spain, which are more distant from Belarus and receive less coverage in the information agenda, including propaganda, generally elicit positive attitudes. The overwhelming majority of Belaru-

sians express positive sentiments towards the residents of these countries and, to a large extent, harbour more favourable than unfavourable views of their government.

Belarusians maintain fairly equally positive attitudes towards both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are actively in conflict with each other. Notably, this positive outlook extends to residents as well as the respective governments of these countries. Similarly, Belarusians hold a consistent attitude in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: they often express positivity towards residents on both sides while maintaining an equal level of ambivalence towards their governments. However, the perspective of the Conscious differs noticeably. They hold a significantly more positive attitude towards Israel compared to Palestine and, to a somewhat greater extent, a positive attitude towards Armenia over Azerbaijan.

The figure illustrates the disparity between the proportion of individuals with a positive attitude and those with a negative attitude.

Attitudes towards countries are closely tied to the stance on the current government and its promoted international politics. **Ardent Supporters** are much more likely to hold positive views towards both the government and residents of "anti-Western" countries such as Russia, Venezuela, China, and Palestine. **Ardent Opponents** more frequently express a positive attitude towards European countries, the USA, Japan, and Ukraine. In this sense, the internal political conflict in Belarus is intricately linked to the foreign policy dimension.

3.2 ATTITUDE TOWARDS INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA

Although fewer than half of Belarusians are supporters of integration, they still outnumber the opponents, reflecting the widespread prevalence of pro-Russian sentiment. At the same time, even supporters of these views maintain a certain distance from Russia in their perspectives on specific aspects of integration.

By integration, supporters mean international cooperation rather than the creation of a common state. We mean those areas where active cooperation is already in place: science and technology, visa policy, energy, the military sector, and trade. Directions related to the unification of key government institutions are not popular, such as law enforcement and judicial authorities, supranational authorities, and the introduction of a common currency.

Distancing from Russia is also evident in the cultural aspect: the majority of Belarusians believe that Russians coming to Belarus should adopt the local culture and way of life to the same extent as visitors from other countries. Even among supporters of the country's pro-Russian orientation, such views prevail.

Belarusians are more likely to support than not to support integration with Russia, although neither supporters nor opponents constitute a majority (see Figure 3.3). More often than others, the **Soviet** support integration, while the **Conscious** oppose it. Moreover, the Conscious are more consolidated in their attitudes, while among the Soviet, almost a third are still undecided or do not support integration.

Supporters of integration with Russia most often advocate for areas of cooperation that do not imply the merger of key government institutions (see Figure 3.4): science and technology, visa policy, energy, and quality control of goods. The exception here is the creation of joint armed forces, which is likely due to the already existing close cooperation between Belarus and Russia in this area. At the same time, areas related to the merger of key institutions, including a common currency, supranational authorities, and the unification of law enforcement and judicial bodies, are not supported by more than a third, even among those who support integration.

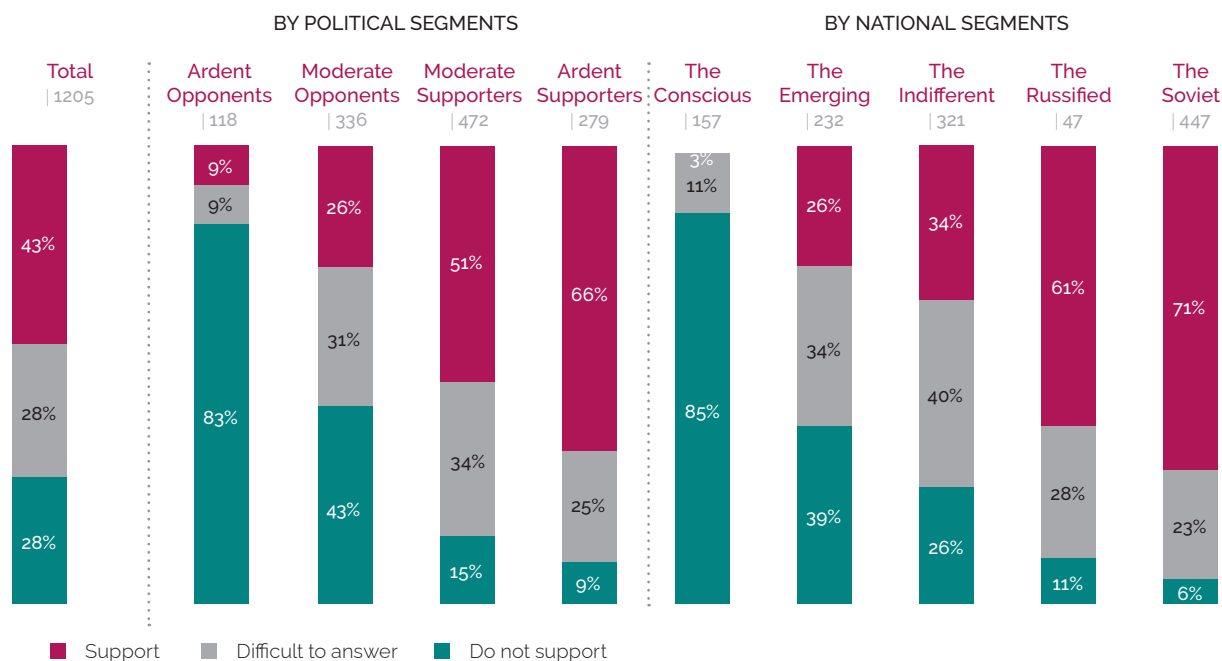
That is, although more than one-third of Belarusians support the idea of integration with Russia, we are talking about close international cooperation, and not about the creation of a common state. In this regard, even pro-Russian Belarusians maintain a significant degree of distance from Russia.

A positive but distancing attitude towards Russia is also evident in the issue of cultural integration of visiting Russians: Belarusians believe that they should adopt the local culture, norms, and way of life to the same extent as visitors from other countries (see Figure 3.5).

An assessment of the need for cultural integration of Russians is directly related to the perceptions of Belarusians about their own culture (see Figure 3.6).

- The **Conscious** segment are the most likely to believe that Russians need to integrate into the local culture. This inclination is likely rooted in political attitudes that prioritise overcoming Russia's colonial influence on Belarus. Consequently, the Conscious are more likely to assert that Russians should adopt the local culture even more than individuals from Uzbekistan and Poland, which objectively differ more significantly in terms of culture and language.
- The **Soviet**, on the contrary, much less often believe that Russians need to integrate. In addition to political loyalty towards Russia, this attitude is probably associated with the idea of the Belarusian nation as part of a triune Slavic nation.
- The **Indifferent**, being the most nationally indifferent segment, are generally less likely than others to believe that those coming to Belarus from other countries need to adopt local culture, norms, and way of life.

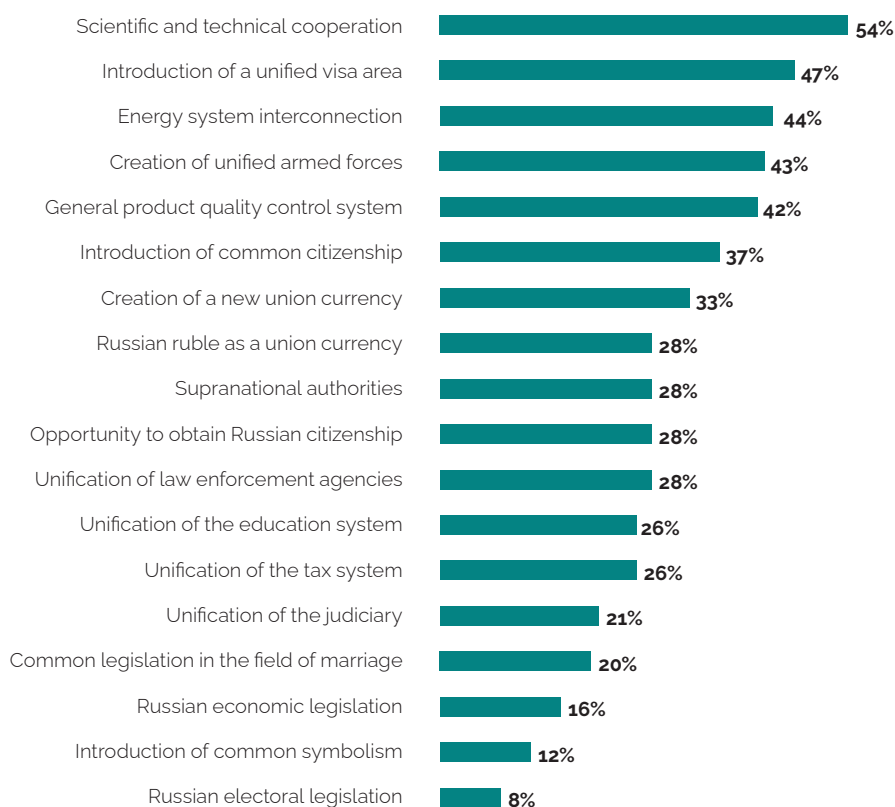
Figure 3.3.
ATTITUDE TOWARDS INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA



Source: Answers to the question "How do you personally feel about the idea of integration of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 3.4.
DIRECTIONS FOR POTENTIAL DEEPENING OF INTEGRATION AMONG SUPPORTERS OF INTEGRATION



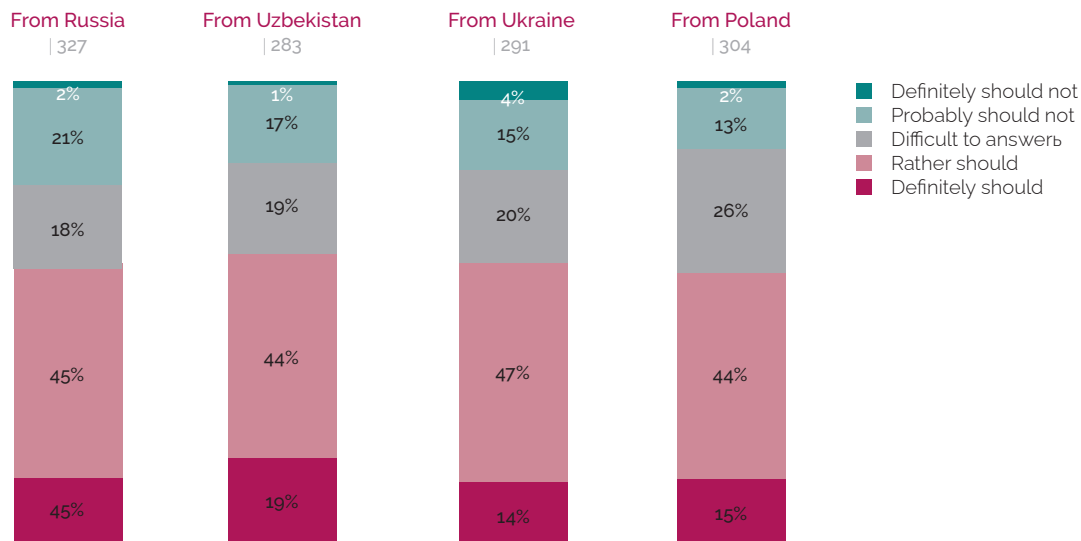
Source: Answers to the question "In the event of deepening of integration between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation, what should this integration consist in?"

Sampling frame: those who support integration with Russia, n=521

The Conscious segment is not shown in the figure because among its representatives there is a low number of integration supporters (n=5)

Figure 3.5.

ASSESSMENT OF THE NEED FOR CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF VISITORS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

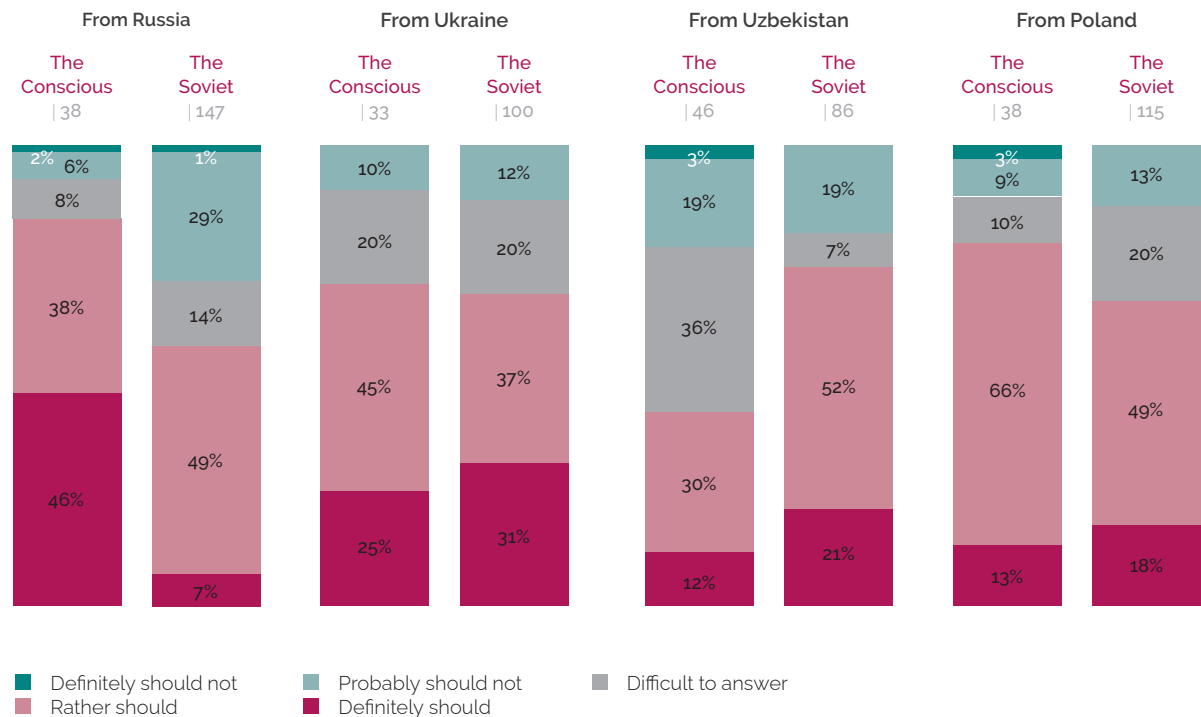


Source: Answers to the question "A certain number of people from other countries regularly move to Belarus for permanent residence. Do you think those who move from Russia / Ukraine / Uzbekistan / Poland should study local culture, adopt norms of behaviour, appearance, lifestyle?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 3.6.

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF VISITORS AMONG NATIONAL IDENTITY SEGMENTS

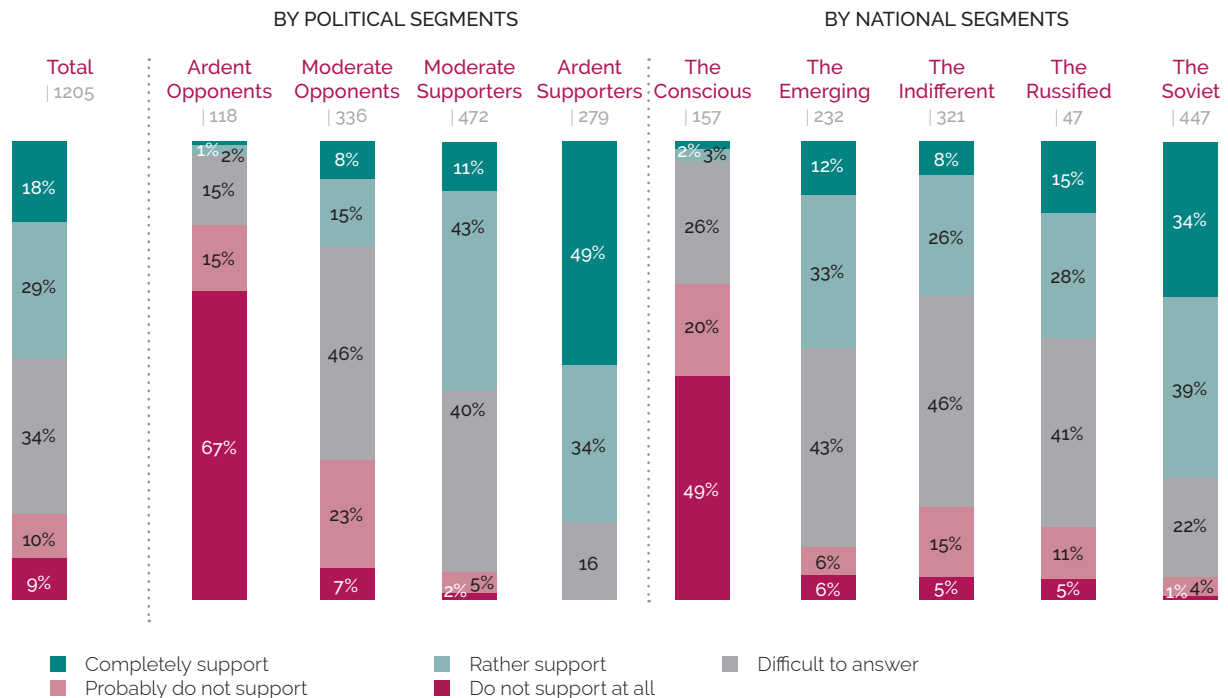


Source: Answers to the question "A certain number of people from other countries regularly move to Belarus for permanent residence. Do you think those who move from Russia / Ukraine / Uzbekistan / Poland should study local culture, adopt norms of behaviour, appearance, lifestyle?"

Sampling frame: the Conscious segment (n=157) and the Soviet segment (n=447)

Figure 3.7.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT POLICY OF THE AUTHORITIES TOWARDS UKRAINE



Source: Answers to the question "To what extent do you generally support or not support the policy of the current government in Belarus towards Ukraine?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

3.3 ATTITUDE TOWARDS UKRAINE

While the majority of Belarusians hold a positive attitude towards the residents of Ukraine, their perception of the country's government is notably less favourable. This discrepancy is driven by ideological beliefs, as up to half of Belarusians believe that nationalists and neo-Nazis are in power in Ukraine.

Despite these ideological assessments, there is a widespread demand among Belarusians for improved relations with Ukraine. Belarusians express the need in the current context for mutually beneficial trade, cooperation between border authorities, and diplomatic relations with Ukraine. This sentiment persists even among those who maintain the belief that nationalists and neo-Nazis govern Ukraine. Consequently, there exists a noticeable gap between Belarusians' ideological attitudes and practical positions.

Nearly half of Belarusians endorse Belarus' current policy towards Ukraine (see Figure 3.7), with the majority of support coming from segments loyal to the current government. Conversely, opponents of the current government largely do not support the current policy.

Despite supporting the current policy towards Ukraine, a notable portion of these proponents (43% of those who fully support the current policy) express a belief in the need

to enhance cooperation with Ukraine. This suggests that their approval may be based on a focus on the positive aspects of current policies or on potential mitigating factors that have not yet materialised.

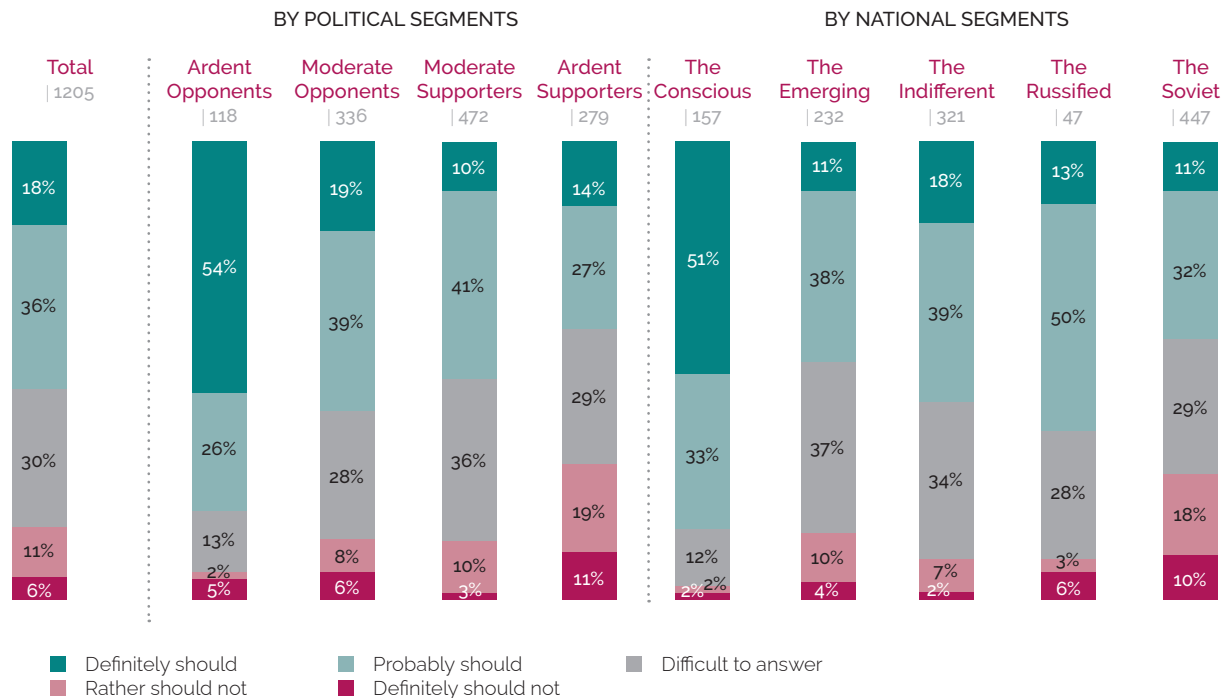
Overall, about half of Belarusians advocate for improving relations with Ukraine (see Figure 3.8). This sentiment is prevalent across all segments, with the **Conscious** segment expressing this view more frequently than the others. Even among **Ardent Supporters** of the current government, there is a prevailing inclination to support the improvement of relations with Ukraine.

Most often, Belarusians believe that it is necessary to establish mutually beneficial trade with Ukraine, enhance cooperation between border services (for example, improving travel options for citizens), and foster diplomatic cooperation (see Figure 3.9).

Despite widespread support for establishing friendly relations with Ukraine, up to half of Belarusians are susceptible to propaganda about Nazis in Ukraine (see Figure 3.10). They tend to believe that nationalists and neo-Nazis are in power there, manipulated by the West in the struggle against Russia. However, only about a third of Belarusians believe that the Ukrainian people endorse Nazi ideology. Although this is still a considerable proportion, it is still less than those who believe that neo-

Figure 3.8.

SHOULD THE AUTHORITIES IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE IN THE CURRENT CONDITIONS



Source: Answers to the question "In your opinion, in the current conditions, should the Belarusian authorities make efforts to establish more friendly relations with Ukraine?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Nazis are in power in Ukraine. This underscores the distinction Belarusians often make between the residents and the government of Ukraine, a sentiment reflected in their general attitude. Belarusians commonly harbour positive feelings towards the residents of Ukraine, while frequently maintaining a negative view of the government of Ukraine (see Figure 3.2).

While there is broad agreement with ideological clichés, it does not necessarily translate into a consistently hostile position towards Ukraine. Among those who completely agree that nationalists and neo-Nazis are in power in Ukraine, 42% still believe that Belarus should improve current relations with Ukraine, while 38% believe otherwise. That is, even those who subscribe to propaganda about Nazis are still inclined to believe that establishing friendly relations with Ukraine is necessary.

3.4 PERCEPTION OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

As of today, Belarusians are largely detached from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The majority do not closely follow events, and over a third express no sympathies for either side. Definite opinions about the war are predominantly found among segments positioned at the extremes of the internal political conflict.

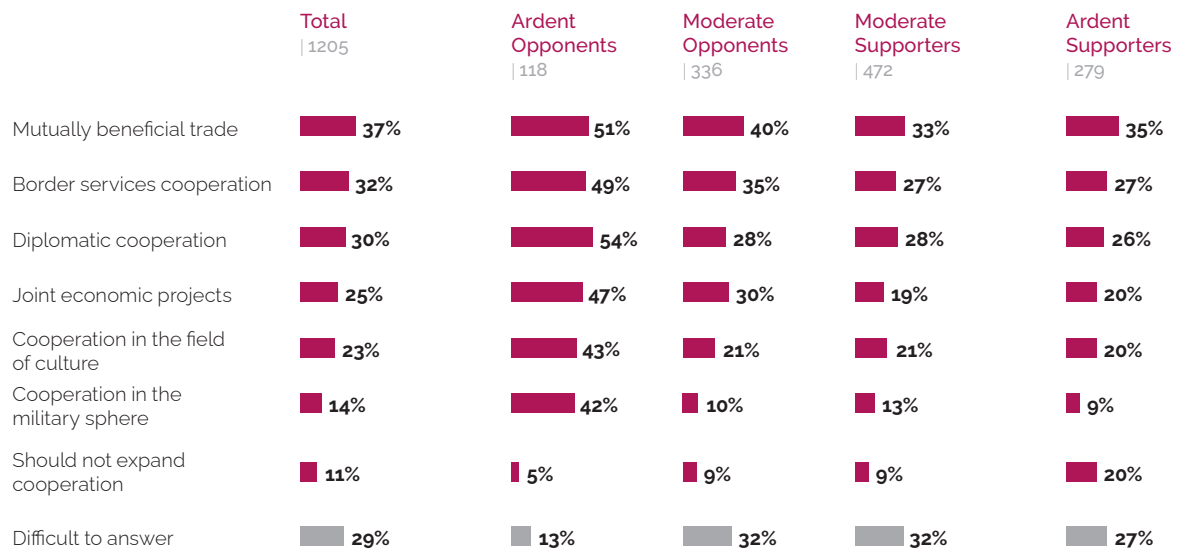
While those who have formed opinions often lean towards supporting Russia, their sympathy is somewhat detached. Their sympathy for Russia is more on an ideological level, and in practice, they not only refrain from supporting Belarus' entry into the war but also advocate for establishing friendly relations with Ukraine.

This detachment among Belarusians regarding the war is linked, in part, to strong negative emotions evoked by the parties to the conflict. These emotions primarily include feelings of sadness, wariness, fear, and anger.

As of today, more than half of Belarusians do not closely follow the Russian-Ukrainian war (see Figure 3.11). Moreover, low interest in the war is widespread not only among the more neutral segments of society, but also among the most engaged ones. 31% of **Ardent Opponents** and 52% of **Ardent Supporters** of the current government do not follow the war at all or pay little attention to it. Interest in the war is directly related to age and gender, with older age groups following the war more closely than younger ones, and men more than women.

Limited attention to the war explains the significant percentage of individuals who remain undecided in their sympathies for the parties to the conflict. When posed with such questions, over one-third of Belarusians acknowledge that they do not support either of the sides or find it difficult to answer

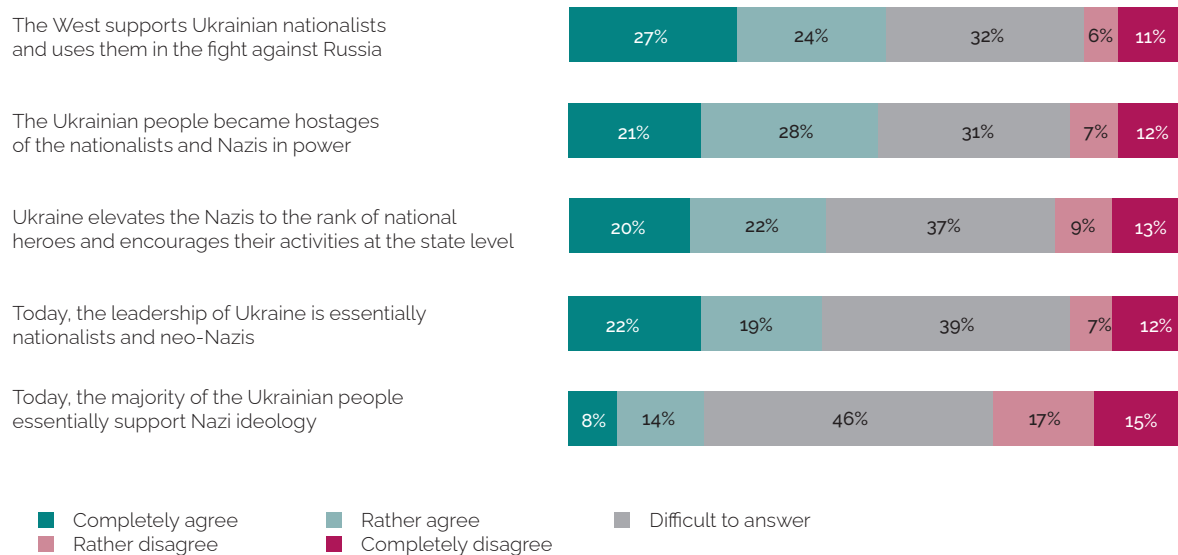
Figure 3.9.
DIRECTIONS FOR EXPANDING COOPERATION WITH UKRAINE



Source: Answers to the question "In your opinion, in the current conditions, in what areas should the Belarusian authorities strive to expand relations with Ukraine?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 3.10.
PERCEPTION OF THE PROPAGANDA NARRATIVE ABOUT NAZIS IN UKRAINE



Source: Answers to the question "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

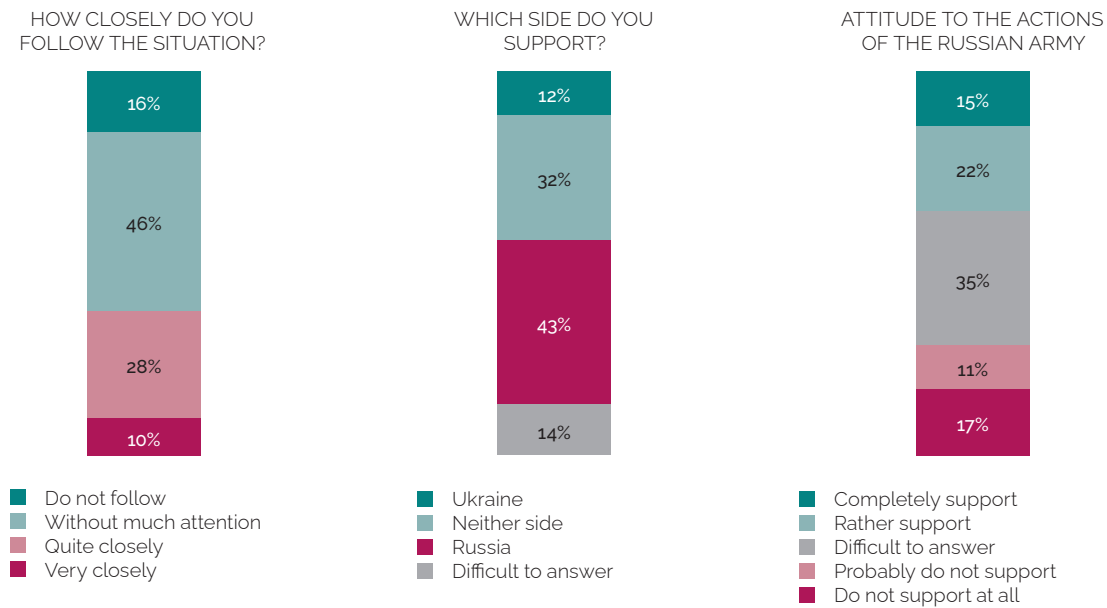
(see Figure 3.11). Among those who do not closely follow the war, the share of such responses increases to half.

About one-third of Belarusians sympathise with Russia in the ongoing war, a proportion that aligns closely with the share of undecided individuals. This distribution of opinions

corresponds to the overall foreign policy attitudes of Belarusians (see Figure 3.1).

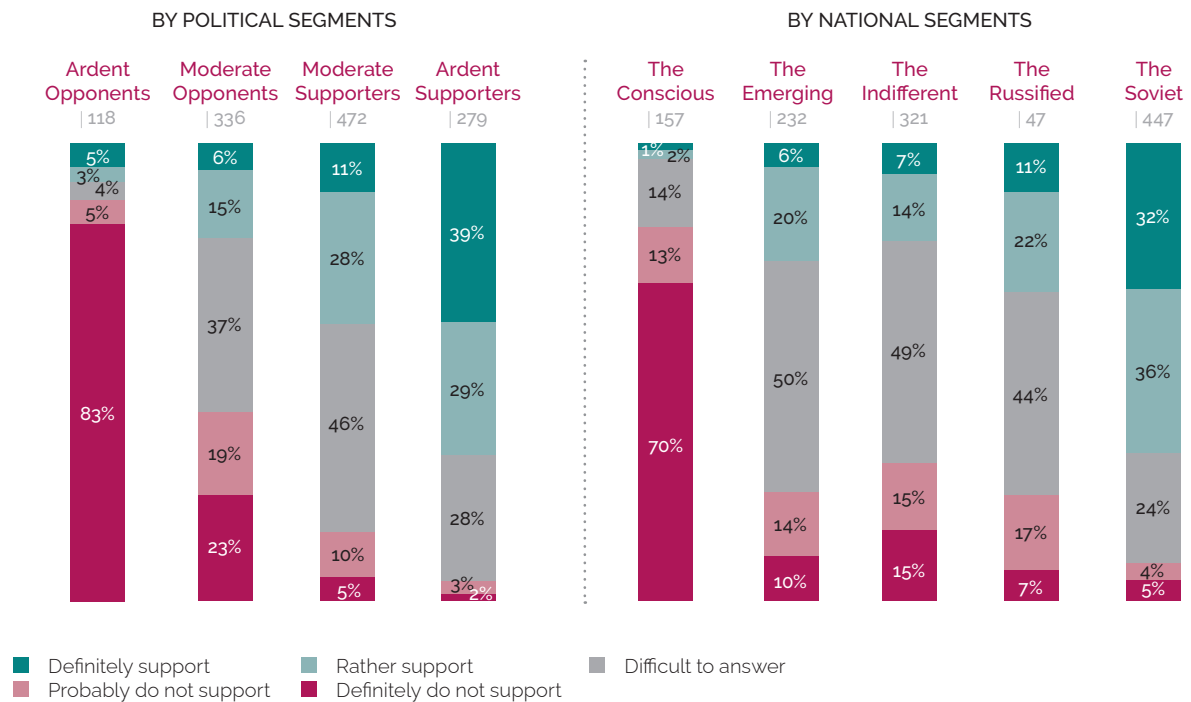
Perspectives on the parties to the conflict are closely tied to positions on the internal political conflict and views on national identity (see Figure 3.12):

Figure 3.11.
GENERAL PERCEPTION OF THE WAR



Source: Answers to the questions "Are you following the situation around Ukraine? In the current situation between Russia and Ukraine, which side do you support? Do you personally approve or disapprove of the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine?"
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

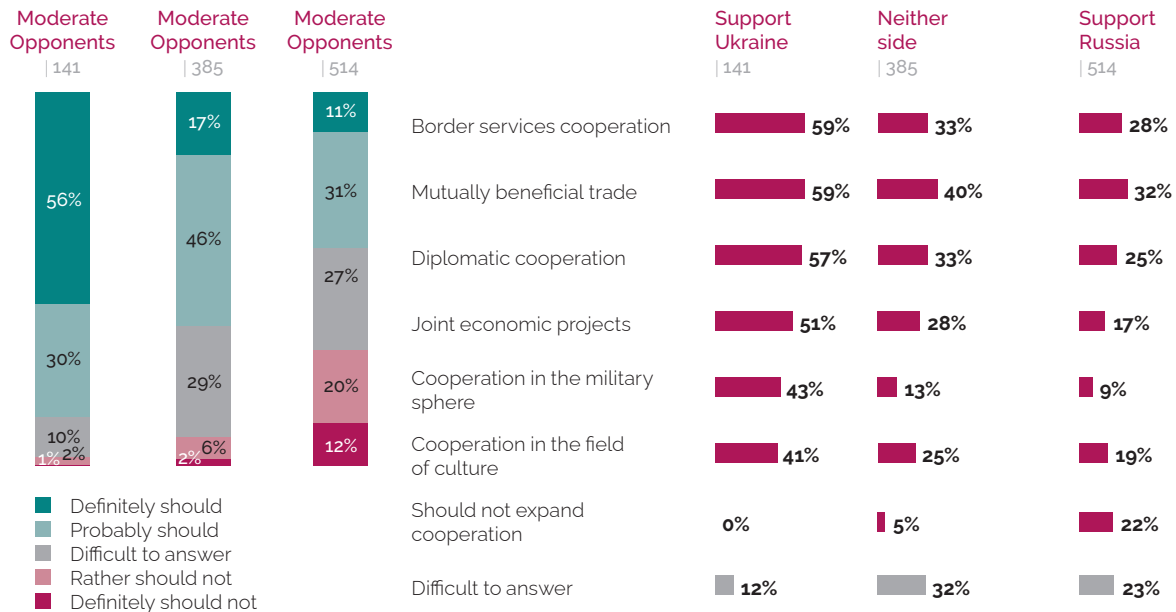
Figure 3.12.
ATTITUDE TO THE ACTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY AMONG THE SEGMENTS



Source: Answers to the question "Do you personally approve or disapprove the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine?"
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

Figure 3.13.

SHOULD THE AUTHORITIES IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE IN THE CURRENT CONDITIONS DEPENDING ON THE SUPPORT OF THE PARTY TO THE CONFLICT



Source: Answers to the questions "In your opinion, in the current conditions, should the Belarusian authorities make efforts to establish more friendly relations with Ukraine?"

In your opinion, in the current conditions, in what areas should the Belarusian authorities strive to expand relations with Ukraine?"

Sampling frame: those who support Ukraine, Russia or neither side of the conflict (those who selected "Difficult to answer" are excluded), n=1,039

- The **Conscious** more often support Ukraine (60%) and do not support the actions of the Russian army.
- Among the **Emerging** and **Indifferent**, half or more find it difficult to answer the question or do not support either of the sides.
- Up to half of the **Russified** have no opinion, and among those who have formed opinions, support for Russia predominates.
- The **Soviet** for the most part support Russia (74%) and the actions of the Russian army.

Socio-demographic characteristics also impact stances on the warring parties. Older age groups are more likely to support Russia, and Ukraine is more often supported by younger ones. Women tend to lean towards more moderate answers and often express no specific sympathies. People with higher education are more likely to support Ukraine.

At the same time, even supporters of Russia in the current war not only do not want Belarus to be drawn into the conflict⁵⁰, but also tend to support the establishment of friendly relations with Ukraine (see Figure 3.13). In particular, those who sympathise with Russia believe that Belarus should establish mutually beneficial trade with Ukraine, improve coordination between border services, and foster

diplomatic cooperation. Among those who do not have definite sympathies for either of the warring parties, the focus on improving relations with Ukraine is even more prevalent.

Belarusians' detachment from the war can be attributed, among other reasons, to the association of this topic with strong negative emotions. When thinking about the warring parties, Belarusians predominantly experience wariness, sadness, apprehension, grief, stress, and frustration (see Figure 3.14). Notably, among those emotionally engaged in the conflict, supporters of Russia outnumber supporters of Ukraine. Consequently, positive emotions such as trust and calmness are more frequently associated with the perception of the Russian army, while the Ukrainian army is often viewed with disgust and irritation.

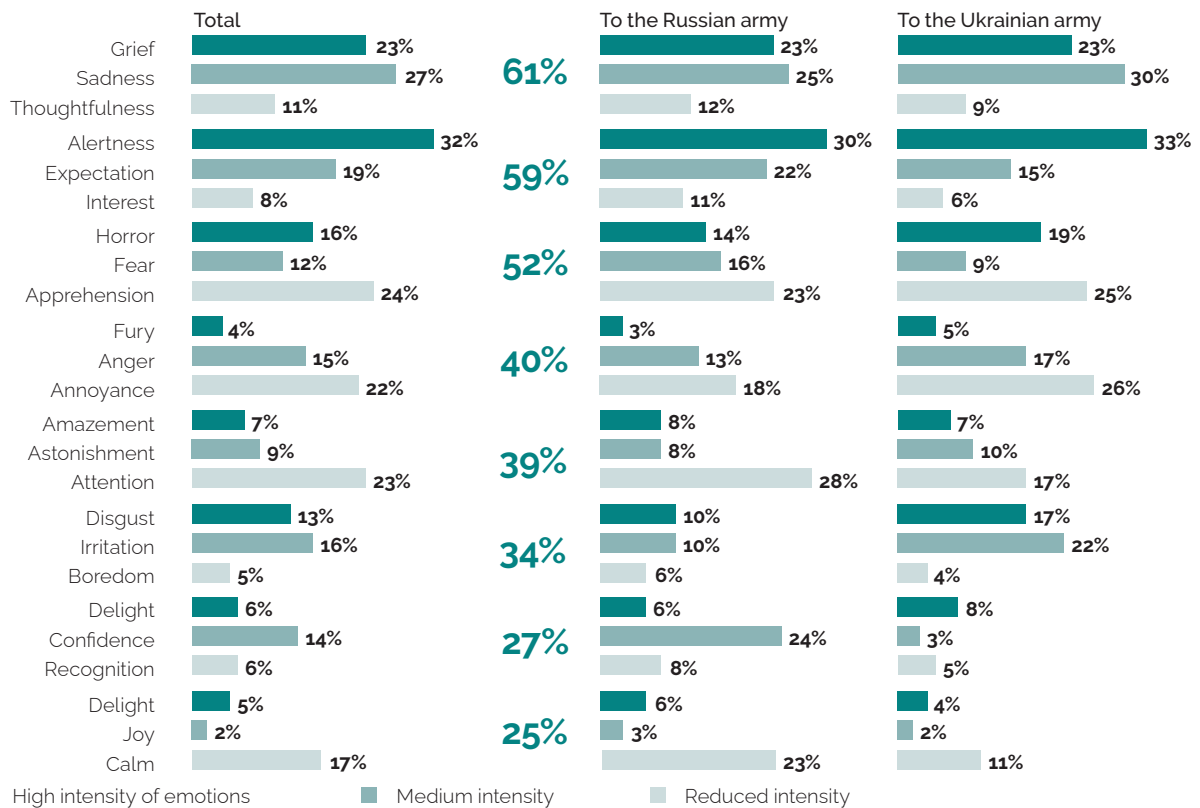
To further analyse the differences in emotions between segments, we combined the entire set of basic emotions into eight component feelings (see Figure 3.15).

On average, both sides of the conflict evoke more negative than positive emotions in Belarusians. The general perception has shifted from sympathy and optimism towards hostility, hatred, and contempt. This bias is most pronounced among **Indifferent** and **Emerging**, as they tend to experience more negative than positive emotions in relation to both the Ukrainian and Russian armies. It is also characteristic that these segments, being the most de-

⁵⁰ For additional information about the anti-war consensus, see *Belarus Change Tracker (June-August 2023)*.

Рис. 3.14.

BASIC EMOTIONS IN RELATION TO THE ARMIES OF RUSSIA AND UKRAINE



How to read the figure: not only the prevalence of individual emotions should be assessed, but also the overall prevalence of the group, since the respondents were asked to sequentially select only one emotion in each of the eight groups, or check "none of them". The groups have been sorted by the total prevalence of the three emotions included in them.

Source: Answers to the question "Which of the following emotions best describes your feelings towards the Russian/Ukrainian army in the context of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine?"

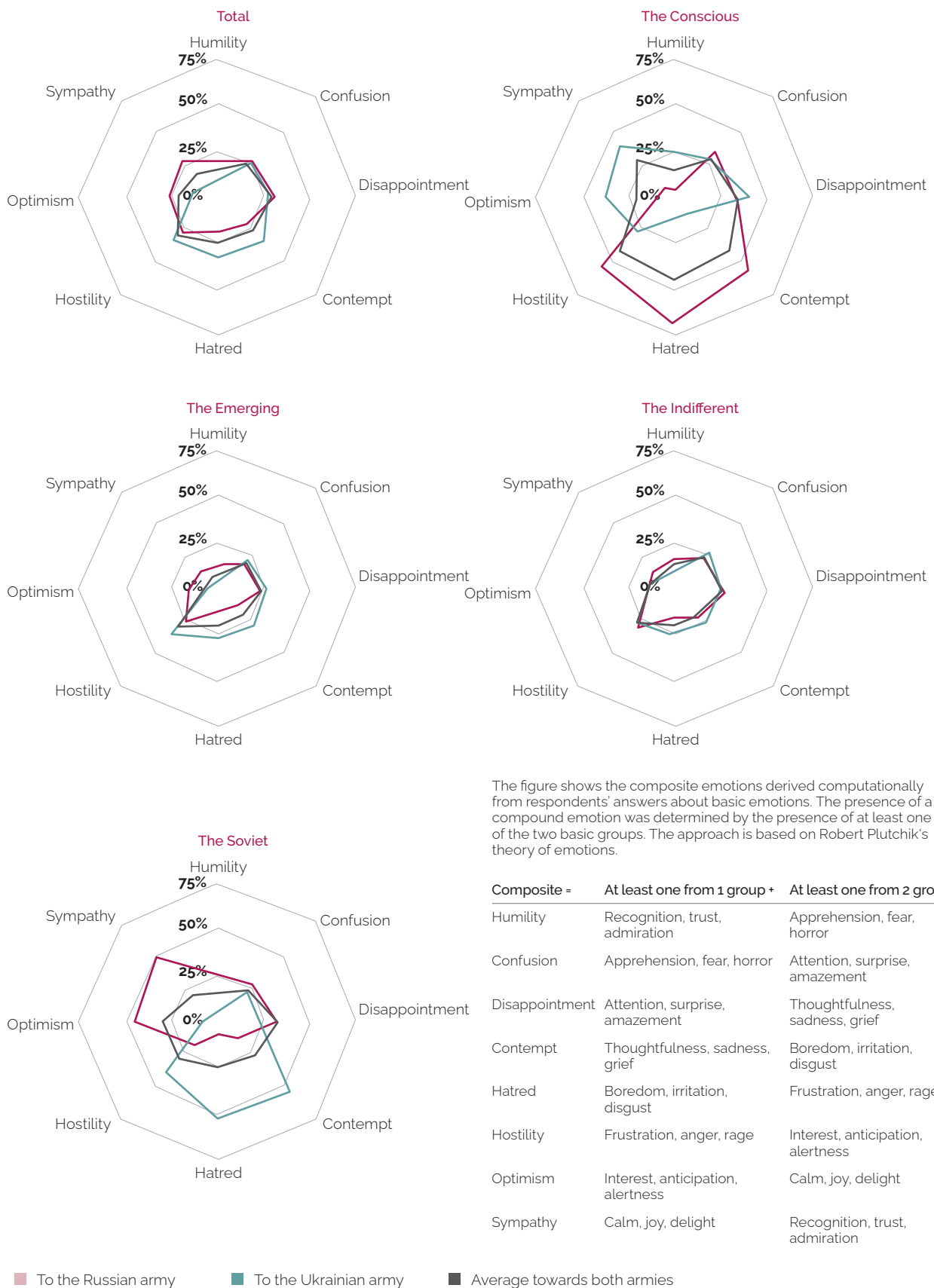
Sampling frame: all respondents, n=1,205

tached from the conflict, are less likely to experience any emotions at all in relation to the warring parties.

The **Conscious** and **Soviet** are more often involved in the conflict emotionally and hold contrasting perceptions of the parties involved. The **Soviet** segment is much more likely to experience hostility, hatred, and contempt for the Ukrainian army, while expressing optimism and sympathy

for the Russian army, with the **Conscious** experiencing the reverse. At the same time, the strength of the positive and negative emotions differs. While the **Soviets** fairly equally express a negative attitude towards the Ukrainian army and a positive attitude towards the Russian army, the **Conscious** experience much more hostility, hatred, and contempt for the Russian army than optimism and sympathy for the Ukrainian army.

Figure 3.15.
COMPOSITE FEELINGS TOWARDS THE ARMIES OF RUSSIA AND UKRAINE



The figure does not show the Russified segment due to the low sampling frame (n=17 for questions about the Russian army and n=30 for questions about the Ukrainian army)

APPENDIX

A. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLING FRAME

		Distribution before weighing	Distribution after weighing
Sex	Men	46%	47%
	Women	54%	53%
Age	18-25	13%	13%
	26-35	25%	25%
	36-45	23%	23%
	46-55	19%	19%
	56-65	20%	20%
Settlement size	Minsk	33%	33%
	100K+ cities	49%	49%
	20-100K cities	18%	18%
Education level	Secondary (school)	6%	21%
	Secondary specialised, vocational and technical (technical school, college, vocational school, etc.)	33%	45%
	Higher (including incomplete), master's degree, postgraduate studies, academic degree	61%	33%

B. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEGMENTS BY NATIONAL IDENTITY

		The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Russified	The Soviet
Sex	Men	[62%]	36%	43%	41%	50%
	Women	38%	[64%]	57%	59%	50%
Age	18-25	15%	[22%]	15%	7%	[6%]
	26-35	22%	34%	31%	17%	18%
	36-45	20%	20%	29%	13%	22%
	46-55	16%	13%	14%	[32%]	[25%]
	56-65	28%	[10%]	[11%]	31%	28%

		The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Russified	The Soviet
Settlement size	Minsk	49%	39%	30%	20%	29%
	100K+ cities	41%	46%	47%	71%	51%
	20-100K cities	10%	15%	23%	8%	20%
Education level	Secondary (school)	19%	10%	27%	7%	26%
	Secondary special and vocational education	31%	45%	46%	61%	49%
	Incomplete higher education	5%	6%	4%	4%	1%
	Higher education and further	44%	39%	24%	28%	24%
Employment	Full-time employment	62%	57%	62%	48%	59%
	Part-time employment	5%	5%	7%	5%	5%
	Self-employed	9%	7%	8%	8%	8%
	Parental leave	5%	15%	13%	17%	5%
	Retirement	11%	5%	6%	9%	15%
	Student	3%	9%	2%	7%	2%
	Other	5%	2%	2%	6%	7%
Type of occupation	Head, manager, director	10%	8%	10%	6%	8%
	Specialist, clerk	43%	35%	22%	16%	23%
	Skilled worker	22%	20%	34%	40%	34%
	Unskilled worker	9%	7%	10%	7%	13%
	Service worker	5%	19%	15%	13%	13%
	Entrepreneur	6%	4%	3%	7%	5%
	Other	6%	6%	6%	11%	4%
	Total	120	161	248	29	319
Area of activity	Agriculture, forestry, fishery	3%	2%	5%	0%	5%
	Construction	8%	8%	12%	18%	13%
	Trade, repairs	15%	15%	23%	16%	16%
	Hotels and restaurants	2%	5%	0%	0%	3%
	Agriculture, forestry, fishery	9%	4%	7%	8%	7%
	Construction	3%	2%	1%	1%	2%
	Trade, repairs	12%	12%	7%	5%	7%
	Hotels and restaurants	3%	8%	8%	8%	3%
	Utility services	3%	1%	3%	0%	2%
	Public service	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%
	Security and law enforcement sector	1%	1%	1%	4%	4%
	Industry	19%	20%	14%	20%	19%
	Services	3%	9%	10%	9%	4%
	IT sector, computer services	7%	3%	2%	0%	4%

		The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Russified	The Soviet
Area of activity	Other	12%	8%	6%	12%	10%
	Total	153	211	314	44	439
Household income per person	Below average (403 BYN and less)	21%	29%	33%	36%	31%
	Average (403 to 927 BYN)	49%	53%	51%	56%	59%
	High (927 and more)	30%	18%	16%	8%	10%
	Total	157	232	321	47	447
Marital status	Unmarried	43%	35%	36%	42%	40%
	Married	57%	65%	64%	58%	60%

C. CALCULATION OF THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY: FACTOR ANALYSIS

To measure the characteristics of the national identity of Belarusians, a special scale was developed consisting of 26 statements and measuring four main components of identity: Belarusian, Russian-Soviet, Nationally Indifferent, and Cosmopolitan.

To do this, we used exploratory (by the method of isolating principal components, varimax rotation) and confirmatory factor analysis.

This method is used to group variables and calculate latent factors, each of which determines responses to one of the groups of variables. The mathematical procedure was implemented in such a way that variables falling into one group are strongly interrelated with each other and weakly interconnected with variables from other groups.

For example, the same respondents tended to agree with the statements "The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great tragedy", "I don't see any difference between Russians and Belarusians", and others (see Figure 1.1). Therefore, behind these answers, there is a common interest in the Russian-Soviet national project.

The development of the scale and calculation of the components were carried out in several stages.

STAGE 1.

A pilot survey with the participation of 304 respondents included 50 statements with which respondents were asked to agree on a five-point scale:

- 1 — Completely disagree
- 2 — Rather disagree
- 3 — Difficult to answer
- 4 — Rather agree
- 5 — Completely agree

The list of statements included those statements that we used in previous waves, as well as new ones:

- Concerning assessments of historical events and personalities: the formation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) and the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR), the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, "victory in the Great Patriotic War", etc.
- Concerning Belarusian culture: folk culture and folklore, modern music and literature, classical authors (Yakub Kolas, Vasil Bykov, etc.).
- Concerning global identity and multiculturalism: interest in events and cultures from around the world, the priority of the universal over the national, etc.

STAGE 2.

After mathematical processing using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, we reduced the number of statements to 26. Our selection was guided by maximising the fit of the model to the data and its theoretical relevance.

STAGE 3.

We used the selected 26 statements in the main survey. Below are certain technical indicators of the quality of the scale used based on the results of reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

TABLE C.1
RELIABILITY INDICATORS OF THE SCALE

COMPONENT	Cronbach's Alpha (0 to 1)
Russian-Soviet	0,881
Belarusian	0,732
Nationally indifferent	0,703
Cosmopolitan	0,610

Figure C.1.
MAIN COMPONENTS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: FACTOR MODEL

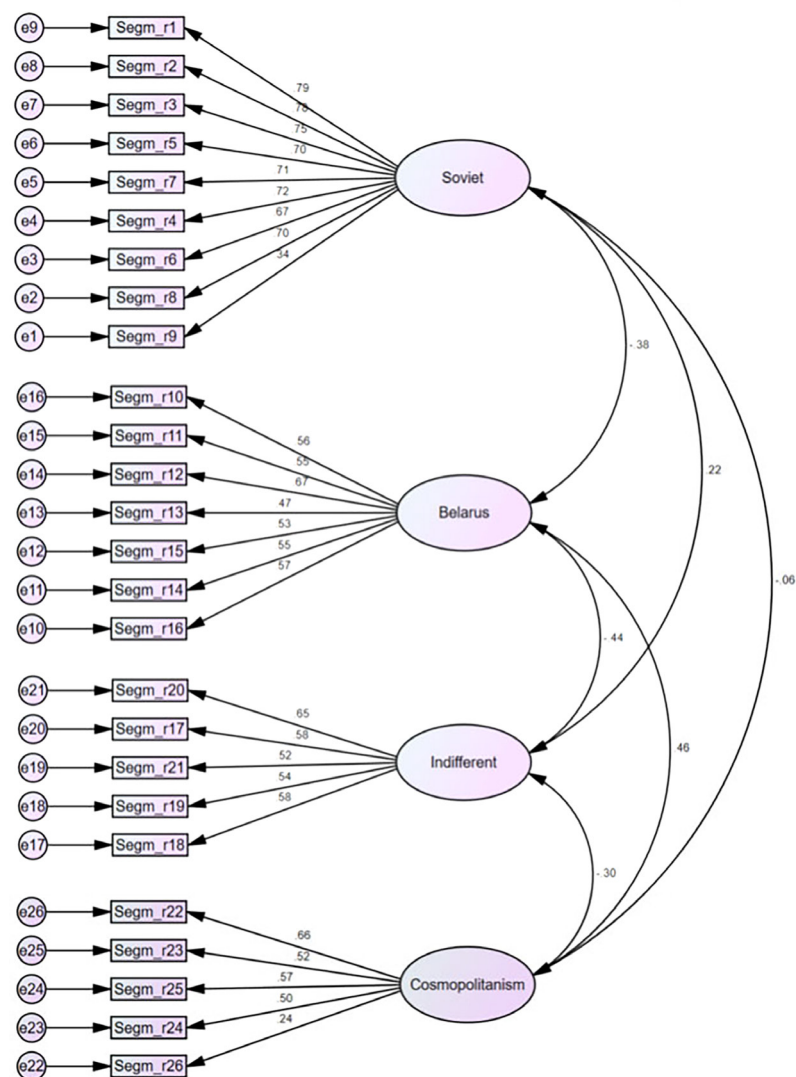


Таблица С.2
QUALITY INDICATORS OF THE FACTOR MODEL
(MODEL FIT)

INDICATOR	VALUE
CFI	0,876
RMSEA	0,057

D. NATURALISATION OF IDENTITY: SURVEY EXPERIMENT METHODOLOGY

To assess the degree of naturalisation of national characteristics in the eyes of Belarusians, a survey experiment was used. Survey experiment methodology was developed based on a study of the naturalisation of gender and national identity on an American sample.⁵¹

The sample was randomly divided into six parts. Of these, five parts constituted the control group and one was the experimental group. The control group was given a description of a person who was born and raised in Belarus in a Belarusian family. Experimental groups were given a description of a person who was born in another country and into a non-Belarusian family, but was adopted at an early age by Belarusians and grew up in Belarus (see Table D.1).

QUESTION FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP	QUESTION FOR THE CONTROL GROUP
<p><i>Please read the text below, imagine the person described therein and answer the question about him.</i></p> <p><i>Ian was born in [L], his biological parents are [L]. However, Ian was adopted by a Belarusian family almost immediately after his birth, and he grew up in Belarus. His new parents took good care of him and he had a good childhood. Ian has lived in Belarus all his life.</i></p> <p><i>How likely is it that Ian has the following traits?</i></p> <p>For each of the five subgroups, one of the following countries and nationalities of the parents was substituted in square brackets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Poland", "Poles" (n=206) 2. "Ukraine", "Ukrainians" (n=194) 3. "Russia", "Russians" (n=199) 4. "Italy", "Italians" (n=196) 5. "Africa", "indigenous Africans" (n=202) 	<p><i>Please read the text below, imagine the person described therein and answer the question about him.</i></p> <p><i>Ian was born in Belarus, his biological parents are Belarusians. However, Ian was adopted by a Belarusian family almost immediately after his birth. He grew up in Belarus. His new parents took good care of him and he had a good childhood. Ian has lived in Belarus all his life.</i></p> <p><i>How likely is it that Ian has the following traits?</i></p>
<p>Both groups were presented with the same list of traits that were asked to be assessed. These traits are among the most common acquired characteristics used by Belarusians for the national identification of others.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Loves Belarus 2. Identifies himself as a Belarusian 3. Considers Belarusian culture to be his own 4. Has a Belarusian mentality and character 5. Considers Belarusian to be his native language <p>Answer options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Definitely not characteristic 2. Rather not characteristic 3. Rather characteristic 4. Definitely characteristic 	

Depending on the answers for the experimental and control groups, a summary indicator for assessing the degree of specificity of national identification markers was calculated: the average degree of specificity was calculated, which is standardised on a scale from 0 to 1. In other words, we calculated the extent to which representatives of the control and experimental groups, on average, consider the national identification markers to be characteristic of the described person.

We then compared the resulting scores of specificity of national identification markers among the control and experimental groups. This made it possible to identify the connection between a person's origin and the perception of their national identification markers: in the control group, significantly more often than in the experimental group, the respondents believed that the person would be characterised by these identification markers. We implemented a similar comparison procedure for each national identity segment (see Figure 1.8). The statistical significance of the difference was calculated using a T-test (with a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$).

Thus, the survey experiment helped to identify the influence of biological factors — place of birth and nationality of parents — as national identification markers.

⁵¹ Siddiqui, H., Rutherford, M.D. "Go Faster!": Adults' Essentialist Representation of Gender and National Identity, but Not Race, Is Revealed by Cognitive Demand / *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 2021.

E. SEGMENTATION BY MEDIA CONSUMPTION

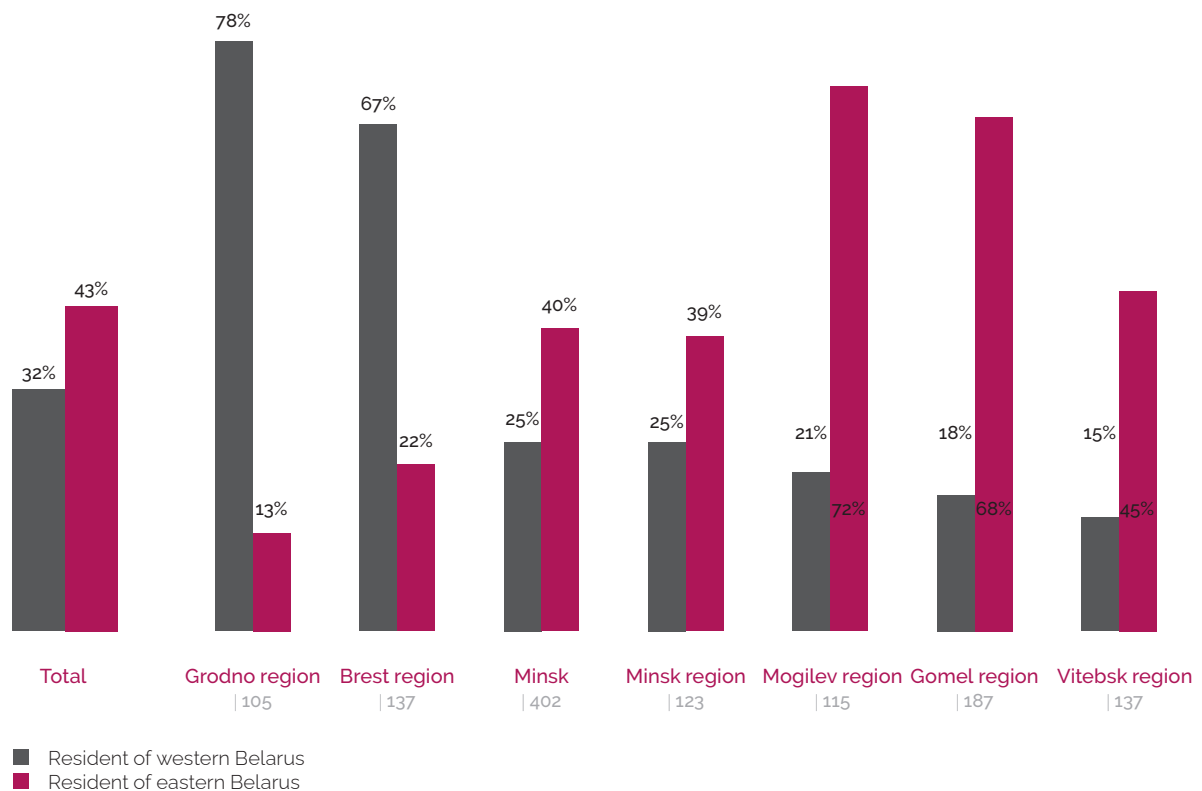
The active audience of state / non-state media includes respondents who consume information from state / non-state channels once a week or more frequently.

- Examples of state media:
 - at least one of the following TV channels: ONT, Belarus-1, STV
- Examples of non-state media:
 - at least one of the following media: Zerkalo, Nasha Niva, Euroradiyo, Radio Svaboda, Belsat (on their websites, YouTube pages, Telegram or otherwise)

		Audience of state media	
		Yes	No
Audience of non-state media	Yes	Active audience of both types of media 28%	Active audience of non-state media 18%
	No	Active audience of government media 31%	Inactive audience of any media 23%

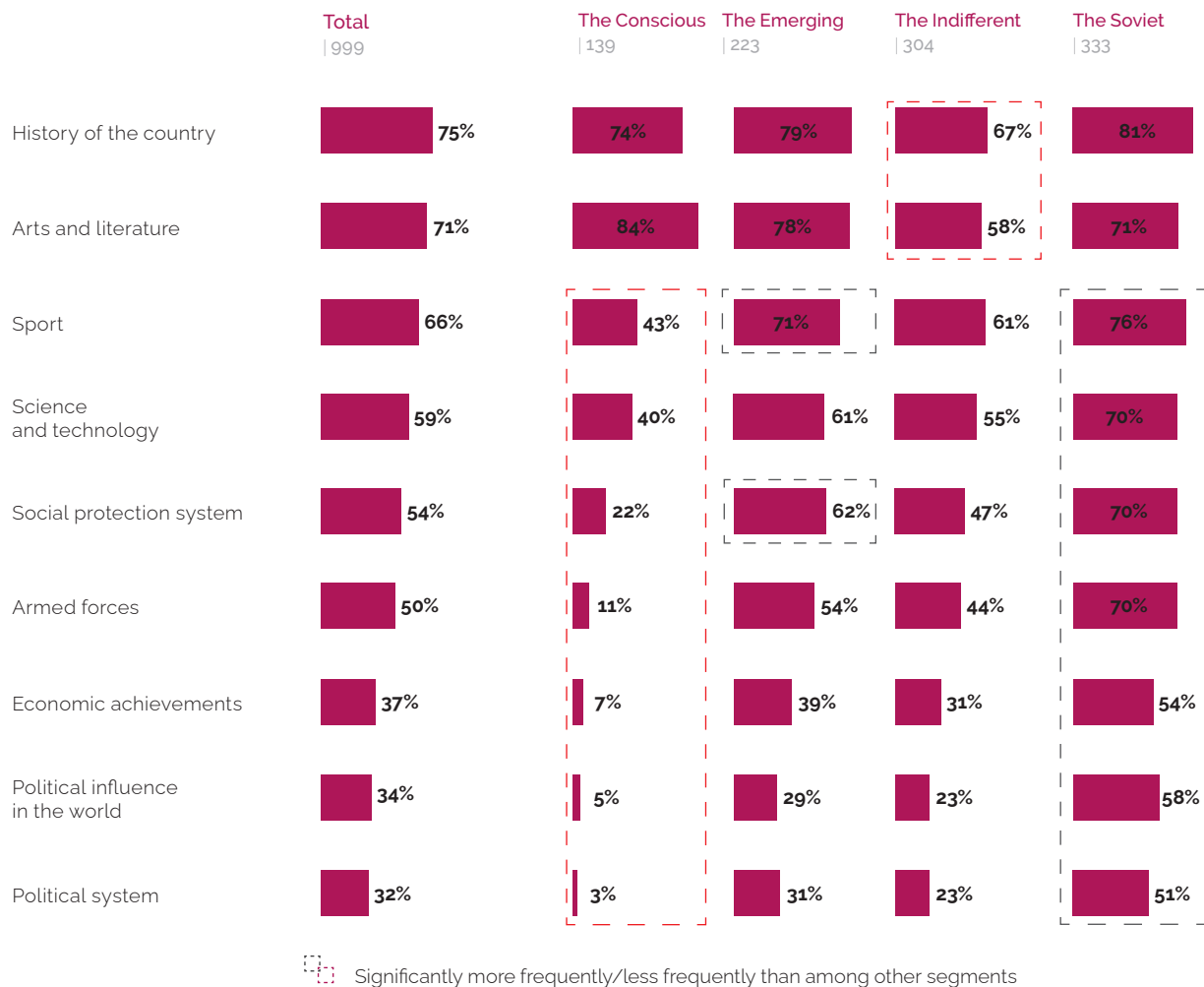
F. ADDITIONAL DATA

Figure F.1.
SHARE OF THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES RESIDENTS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN BELARUS BY REGIONS



Source: Answers to the question "Who do you perceive (consider) yourself to be first and foremost? Answer the question: "WHO AM I" using the statements below."

Figure F.2.
NATIONAL PRIDE OF BELARUSIANS



Source: Answers to the question "How proud or not proud are you of Belarus' achievements in the following aspects?"

Sampling frame: those who consider themselves to be Belarusians, n=999

ANSWERS TO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

In this section, we briefly summarise the results of our research: what does the data obtained say about the Belarusian society?

IS BELARUS AN ESTABLISHED NATION?

Residents of Belarus clearly recognise themselves as members of a national community: Belarusians, residents of the country, citizens, and patriots. The majority are proud of this affiliation and are interested in national issues.

The nation is united by common symbols: zubr (European bison), busel (stork), lakes, and cornflowers. An image of Belarusians as hard-working, kind, and hospitable people is also commonly shared.

Regardless of their attitudes towards the government and foreign policy views, all Belarusians are united by the idea of their own state, friendly to all peoples.

In short, the Belarusian nation and strong national identity represent an already established social fact. This implies that, in the foreseeable future, Belarus will remain a nation, irrespective of any political upheavals.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BELARUSIAN?

The Belarusian nation is an inclusive community. Its members are ready to welcome to their ranks anyone who considers themselves a Belarusian, accepts Belarusian culture, and loves the country. For most Belarusians, appearance, place of birth, and nationality of parents are not considered to be a barrier to inclusion in the community.

EVERY FIFTH BELARUSIAN IS TORN BETWEEN TWO MAIN NATIONAL PROJECTS

The Emerging segment is mainly represented by socially and culturally active young people with a high level of education, often attending cultural events and museums. In terms of cultural involvement, they share similarities with supporters of the National-Romantic project. However, the

Emerging align with the Russian-Soviet perspective on the Belarusian nation to the same extent.

It is likely that, in the future, representatives of this segment will gravitate towards one of the national projects as their views crystallise with age. They may retain a paradoxical combination of ideas, primarily because their identity was shaped in the 2010s when they had broad access not only to the official point of view on the Belarusian nation but also to the viewpoints of the National-Romantic project. At that time, the state pursued a policy of "soft Belarusization", and the Internet, with its diverse array of perspectives, spread widely. As a result, a kind of "relativism graft" took place.

IS BELARUS TURNING A NEW PAGE?

The level of distrust of pro-democratic communities and institutions continues to grow, accompanied this year by an increase in trust in state institutions. Moderate Opponents of the current government are the primary driver of this dynamic.

While we acknowledge the limitations of the survey and the influence of the fear factor on the responses of survey participants, a thorough check and comparison of the data lead us to conclude that structural factors contribute to these changes. Loyalty and legitimization of the current Belarusian government are on the rise in society. It appears we are witnessing a gradual return to moderate trust in the regime, a trend typical for an authoritarian regime and characteristic of Belarusian society before the political crisis of 2020.

Furthermore, due to government purges of the media space (banning and blocking of independent media and information channels), there is likely not only a disconnect between democratic forces and the audience inclined to trust the authorities but also the conditionally pro-democratic audience within the country.

DOES SOCIAL CONFLICT EXIST?

A political, national, and psychological conflict does exist within society. Moreover, the main conflicting groups harbour extreme antipathy towards each other: they lack empathy, understanding, and readiness to accept each other. This lack of understanding extends beyond polit-

ical ideas; it primarily manifests as a conflict of national projects. Consequently, empathy for the outgroup is at its lowest among adherents of the two main competing national projects: the Russian-Soviet and the National-Romantic.

At the same time, it is crucial to recognise that the modern Belarusian state is guided by an ideology that predominantly reinforces the Russian-Soviet national project. Within this framework, propagandists often resort to hate speech, infusing their rhetoric with animosity towards perceived "enemies".

Considering the current situation of independent media in the Belarusian media space, it can be surmised that if the existing political configuration persists over an extended period, the National-Romantic national project may become marginalised. However, it is unlikely that the National-Romantic project will be completely eradicated due to the state's moderate interest in the most important component of this project — the Belarusian culture.

DISTANCING AND CONTRADICTIONARY PERCEPTIONS OF RUSSIA, UKRAINE, AND THE WAR

Although pro-Russian views generally prevail in the country, they are embraced by only slightly more than one-third of Belarusians. Almost an equal number lean towards neutrality in foreign policy. This prevalence of support for neu-

trality amidst global polarisation in international relations suggests a high degree of distancing from these topics among Belarusians.

Even those who hold pro-Russian views maintain a significant degree of distancing from Russia. For example, they believe that visiting Russians should integrate into the local culture. Moreover, by integration with Russia, proponents mean interstate cooperation rather than a merger of key governmental institutions.

Even those who sympathise with Russia in the war also tend to advocate for the establishment of friendly relations between Belarus and Ukraine. It can be asserted that the desire for rapprochement between Belarus and Ukraine amidst the ongoing conflict is the mainstream public opinion of Belarusians.

In light of this, pro-Russian sentiment among Belarusians often remains declarative, reflecting ideological attitudes rather than support for real political steps aimed at rapprochement with Russia.

Distancing from the war is also amplified by the strong negative emotions of fear, grief, and anger that this issue evokes in Belarusians.

Additionally, the surprisingly low share of pro-Russian sentiment despite the predominance of state-controlled media sources indicates that Belarusians maintain a fairly robust level of resistance to state propaganda.

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BELARUSIAN IDENTITY IN 2023: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY



Belarus has emerged as a well-established, modern, and inclusive nation, although the concept of «Belarusianness» remains hotly contested.



People from polarised segments of society are less open to understanding and helping those in the «opposing» group.



Despite a generally positive attitude towards Russia, Belarusians prefer to maintain a certain distance from the neighbouring country.