

BELARUSIAN IDENTITY IN 2024: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Belarusians are most polarized regarding expressions of "Sovietness."



Belarusians see in the Belarusian language as a value rather than a practical benefit.



Russian influence in cinema, literature, and music is smaller than Western influence.

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EXPERIENCE OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth issue of the annual study of the national identity of Belarusians. For this project, we use quantitative methods to explore different aspects of what it means to be Belarusian.

In previous issues, we have looked in detail at differences in identity within Belarusian society, highlighting segments centered on different nation-building projects in Belarus. The present report focuses on the common features that unite all Belarusians, rather than on the differences between them. We also analyse cultural consumption, the influence of Russian culture, and the perception of the Belarusian language.

The first section describes segments of national identity. It analyses the links between the peculiarities of identity, political views and socio-demographic characteristics.

The second section reviews the features of national identity and culture common for most Belarusians, irrespective of segment.

The third section analyses the perception of the Belarusian language, its place in the national identity, and the peculiarities of its image.

The fourth section assesses the level of consumption of Russian culture by Belarusians and their perception of it, revealing the connection between the consumption of Russian content and the peculiarities of national identity.

Each section starts with a brief summary.

Theoretical Framework. This study uses the constructivist approach, according to which social movements, political organisations, cultural figures and other actors play an active role in nation building. They promote different visions of national identity, and competition between various projects can persist even in formed nations. In Belarus, two main projects coexist: the Soviet project supported by the current authorities, and the national romantic project promoted by non-state and opposition actors. More details on the theoretical framework can be found in the previous issue¹.

Methodology. A Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method was used for data collection. The quota sample (n=800) corresponds to the structure of the urban population of Belarus aged 18–64 years by gender, age, city size, area of residence and education. The socio-demographic structure is presented in Appendix 1. The respondents were recruited through an opt-in panel. In the current survey, we changed the data collection operator (panel), so the results cannot be directly compared with the data from previous surveys.

¹ P. Bikanau, K. Nesterovich, *Belarusian Identity in 2023: A Quantitative Study* / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

SUMMARY

There are five segments in Belarusian society that differ in their perceptions of the Belarusian nation.

The **Conscious** (11%) and the **Soviet** (24%) segments are two opposites in the modern Belarusian identity. The former embrace the national romantic project and appreciate the Belarusian language, culture and pre-Soviet history. The Soviet is the oldest segment that values Soviet heritage and orients towards Russia.

Between these two extremes of Belarusian identity there is the youth segment — the **Emerging** (25%), which is characterised by cultural involvement and interest in elements from both national projects.

Another segment is the **Indifferent** (32%), whose representatives are generally less interested in national themes. The **Russified** segment (7%) is similar to the Indifferent in terms of its characteristics, but its representatives consider themselves Russians, not Belarusians.

Acceptance of manifestations of “Belarusianness” and cosmopolitanism is common in all segments. Even the Soviet and Russified segments reject social exclusion of those who speak Belarusian or actively promote national culture. At the same time, displays of “Sovietness” and national indifference can lead to social tension and contradictions between segments.

There is also a **stratum of Belarusian culture that unites all segments**. The band “Pesnyary”, writers Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, and draniki — this is what most urban residents know and consider to be common Belarusian culture, regardless of the preferred national project. The common brands are Kommunarka and BELAZ.

Although Russian content holds a considerable place in Belarusians' cultural consumption, especially in the categories of bloggers and comedians, it does not dominate their consumption. In most cases, favourite films and TV series are Western, while music is Belarusian. The choice of Russian content is likely connected with identity features: “it is about people like us”, “it is in the language that we understand”. At the same time, the main reason for not liking Russian cinema and music is their low quality.

About half of the urban residents are satisfied with the current spread of the Belarusian language, as it is not an important part of their national identity. However, about one-third would like this language to be more widespread in different spheres of life. These people are more likely to consider the Belarusian language “native”, “beautiful”, and “unique”. The image of the Belarusian language would improve if it were considered less rural and more often associated with the language of the youth and intellectuals.

1

SEGMENTS BY NATIONAL IDENTITY

Belarusians perceive the Belarusian nation, its culture, history, language and interrelation with other nations in different ways. In other words, people are carriers of different features of national identity. Statistical analysis shows that these features can be grouped into **four main components of national identity**:

- The **Russian-Soviet** component includes elements characteristic of the nation's Soviet project, such as orientation towards their Soviet past and close ties with Russia.
- The **Belarusian** component covers perceptions of the significance of the Belarusian language, national culture, pre-Soviet past and other aspects of the national romantic project.
- The **Nationally Indifferent** component reflects indifference to the national theme, with ideas that national differences do not matter.
- The **Cosmopolitan** component reflects interest in global identity, global community and multiculturalism.

The components above were identified using a factor analysis² of answers to a questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the 26 statements presented in Figure 1. Each component (factor) combines groups of statements that are more strongly associated with a particular component than with others. That is, if respondents agree with one statement in a group, they are more likely to agree with other statements in that group. For example, if a person would prefer to emigrate to Russia, they are also likely to consider the collapse of the Soviet Union a tragedy.

Depending on the degree of expression of each component in a person's identity, five segments of Belarusian society were identified: the Conscious, the Emerging, the Indifferent, the Soviet, and the Russified. These segments make it possible to estimate the spread of various variants of Belarusian identity (Figure 2).³

² Principal component method followed by varimax orthogonal rotation was used. KMO: 0.884. Bartlett's test: p-value < 0.000. Proportion of variance explained: 50.1%.

³ Segments are not real groups in Belarusian society but rather statistical categories. Segments describe people with similar features of identity, but within these segments people may be

The segments identified differ in terms of national identity, views on the situation in the country, foreign policy, and socio-demographic characteristics. The main differences are summarised below.

The Conscious (11%) is a segment whose national identity features are associated with the national romantic project of the Belarusian nation.

- This segment has the lowest national indifference.
- Representatives of this segment are more likely to consider the Belarusian language to be of value compared to others, want it to be more present in their lives, and consider it their native language. They also support the development of national culture and believe that its underdevelopment leads to problems in the country.
- This segment is also characterised by increased interest in other cultures, multiculturalism, and integration into the global community. In this sense, while being most oriented towards local national identity, this segment has the strongest global identity.
- Representatives of the Conscientious segment have pro-European orientation, although they are more likely than others to prefer seeing Belarus outside international alliances. They also do not support the Russian army's activities in Ukraine.
- Pro-democracy views prevail among this segment, and the proportion of them who are economically dissatisfied is also higher.
- In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the segment differs from the others by the larger proportion of men, and older people aged

very different. Moreover, the boundaries between segments are arbitrary: if a person is a point in space, then two points between which the boundary passes will be more similar to each other than to the "ideal" representatives of their segment. The segments were identified as a result of hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method with the Squared Euclidean Distance as a measure of dissimilarity. The cluster analysis is implemented on the same 26 variables used to identify the national identity components described above. The Russified segment was not derived from the hierarchical cluster analysis but identified at a later stage. It includes the representatives of the Emerging and the Indifferent segments who consider themselves Russians rather than Belarusians.

Figure 1.

Components of Belarusian national identity

RUSSIAN-SOVIET

- If I had to choose where to emigrate to —Russia or Western Europe — I would choose Russia
- The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great tragedy
- I don't see any difference between Russians and Belarusians at all
- There is no infringement of the Belarusian language
- We shouldn't get rid of our Soviet legacy
- It would be nice if Belarus and Russia finally united
- Ukrainians themselves are to blame for what happened in Donbas
- I have an equally positive attitude towards the successes of Belarusians and Russians
- The proclamation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) in 1919 was a positive event

BELARUSIAN

- I would be willing to pay a little more tax if these funds were spent for the development of Belarusian culture
- I would like there to be more Belarusian language in our lives
- Many of our country's problems stem from the fact that we have forgotten our culture and language
- I am interested in modern Belarusian culture: music, literature, cinema, etc.
- 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
- Kastus Kalinowski is an outstanding historical figure who made a great positive contribution to the development of the Belarusian nation

COSMOPOLITAN

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

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
- 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
- I don't think that national culture and language are important in the modern world

■ Maximum significance

■ Medium significance

■ Weak significance

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Answer options: "Totally disagree", "Rather disagree", "Hard to say", "Rather agree", and "Totally agree".

55–64 living in Minsk. It also has a higher proportion of people with higher education and most of all those working in IT.

The Emerging (25%) segment is the youth segment characterised by moderate interest in both Russian-Soviet and Belarusian aspects of national identity, as well as cosmopolitanism.

- Representatives of the Emerging segment combine the features of both projects for the Belarusian nation. For example, they consider it important to develop the Belarusian language and culture, while believing that the Soviet heritage should not be abandoned. Representatives of this segment are also interested in different cultures and consider it interesting to have acquaintances in other countries.
- In terms of foreign policy orientations, people in the Emerging segment are more like the Conscious: they are more likely than others to support Belarus's accession to the European Union, as well as

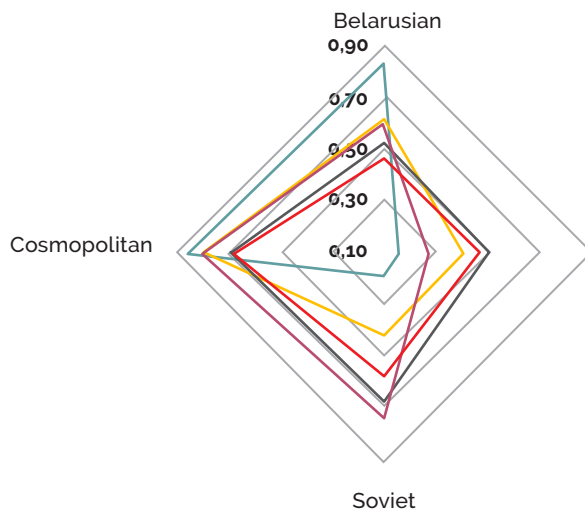
non-aligned status; they do not support Russia in the current war.

- Representatives of this segment are economically dissatisfied more often than others.
- Young people of up to 34 years of age dominate the segment and they are more likely to live in Minsk.

The Indifferent (32%) segment is the one most indifferent to the national theme.

- This segment is most distinguished by national indifference. Its representatives are more likely than others to believe that national culture and language are not important in the modern world and create unnecessary barriers between people.
- At the same time, this segment gravitates towards Russian-Soviet features of identity and is less involved in the national romantic project.
- In terms of domestic political views, the Indifferent are mostly neutral. In foreign policy they tend towards pro-Russian views, are more likely to

Figure 2.
Segments by national identity



The degree of the prominence of components was measured on a scale from 0 — not at all typical for the segment, to 1 — most typical.

- Conscious (11%) are distinguished by the greatest expression of the Belarusian and cosmopolitan components. The indifferent and Russian-Soviet components are expressed less than among others.
- Emerging (25%) have an average expression of all components.
- Indifferent (32%) show the highest Indifference, while the Russian-Soviet component is more prominent, whereas the Belarusian and cosmopolitan components are below average.
- Soviet (24%) have the most pronounced Russian-Soviet component of all, while Belarusian and cosmopolitanism are average. Indifference is not characteristic.
- Russified (7%). Their component distribution is similar to the Indifferent group, but the Russian-Soviet component is less prominent. At the same time, they identify as Russians rather than Belarusians.

support Russia in the war or find it difficult to answer.

- Compared to other segments, there are slightly more women, regional residents and people with a secondary education among the Indifferent.

The Soviet (24%) is the oldest segment age-wise, consisting of supporters of the Soviet project of the Belarusian nation.

- Compared to others, representatives of the Soviet segment particularly value the connection between Belarusians and Russians. At the same time, they are not characterised by national indifference and have an average interest in the Belarusian culture and language.
- The Soviet segment are more likely than others to take a pro-governmental position, positively assessing both the general course of the country, the economic situation and the presence of a "firm hand" in power.
- Orientation towards Russia prevails in this segment's foreign policy preferences. This is the only segment where almost half of representatives support the Russian army's actions in Ukraine.
- The Soviet segment is dominated by older social groups (45+), while in terms of other socio-demographic characteristics they do not stand out against the other segments.

The Russified (7%) segment is the one with people with a Russian identity. Through their national identity peculiarities, they are similar to the Indifferent segment, but they consider themselves Russians rather than Belarusians. They are probably migrants from Russia or people who simply associate themselves with this country.

In the previous issues of the study, we detailed the characteristics of national identity for each segment, including the specific markers by which they identify themselves and others as Belarusians, their differences in terms of local and supranational self-identification, and national symbols and rituals that are close to them. These differences are summarised on the map showing the symbolic space of Belarusian national identity in the 2023 issue.⁴

The Conscious segment are characterised by a European identity; they have affection for the Pahonia emblem and the white-red-white flag; they attach importance to the day of the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR), and folk and historical holidays such as Dzyady. The Soviet and the Russified segments have the red-green flag as their symbol; they are likely to consider themselves as a Soviet people, to attend Dozhynki, official parades, and the Slavonic Bazaar. The Emerging segment are less likely to care about the supranational level of identity; they

⁴ P.Bikanau, K.Nesterovich, *Belarusian Identity in 2023: A Quantitative Study* / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

enjoy holidays such as Dzyady and Kalyady, but also participate in Dozhynki and parades. The Indifferent segment are closer to culturally and politically neutral markers, such as draniki, common territory, and citizenship; they rarely attend national holidays.

2

WHAT UNITES BELARUSIANS

The previous section showed the differences in the peculiarities of Belarusians' national identity, singling out five segments with distinctive representations of each. The present section focuses on the unifying elements of national identity. We have analysed the manifestations of national identity accepted by all segments and the culture that unites Belarusians.

Each subsection starts with a brief summary.

2.1 "BELARUSIANNES" AND COSMOPOLITANISM AS POTENTIALLY UNIFYING ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY

Manifestations of "Belarusianness" and cosmopolitanism are not unacceptable for most Belarusians. Even the Soviet and Russified segments reject social exclusion of those who speak Belarusian or actively promote national culture. Similarly, displays of cosmopolitanism, such as having many connections with foreigners or a deep interest in different cultures, are not condemned in any of the segments.

From the national identity viewpoint, Belarusians are the most polarised with regard to manifestations of "Sovietness". The Conscious segment are likely to support social exclusion of those who do not see any differences between Russians and Belarusians, who stand for the unification of the two countries, or who consider the Soviet Union's collapse a tragedy. This position in the Conscious segment is the opposite of the views of the Russified and Soviet segments.

The previous analysis shows that different segments of Belarusians look at the Belarusian nation in different ways. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are negative about each other's views. To understand these relationships, we analysed manifestations of national identity which most Belarusians are ready to accept, and which, on the contrary, cause social tension.

Our analysis looked at the degree of acceptance and non-acceptance of four main components of the national identity: the Belarusian, the Cosmopolitan, the Soviet and the Indifferent segments (Figure 3). Non-acceptance means

the desire to exclude those who support these components from public life. For example, one manifestation of non-acceptance of the Belarusian component is the idea that Belarusian-speaking people should not spread their views, occupy important state positions, or work in mass media.

The data show that **urban Belarusian residents mostly accept manifestations of "Belarusianness"**. None of the segments support the exclusion from social life of those who speak the Belarusian language or actively support the national culture and language. At the same time, the Indifferent and Russified segments are somewhat more likely than others to be negative about those who support the Belarusian component. However, even among these segments, the majority either accept such manifestations or treat them in an indefinite manner.

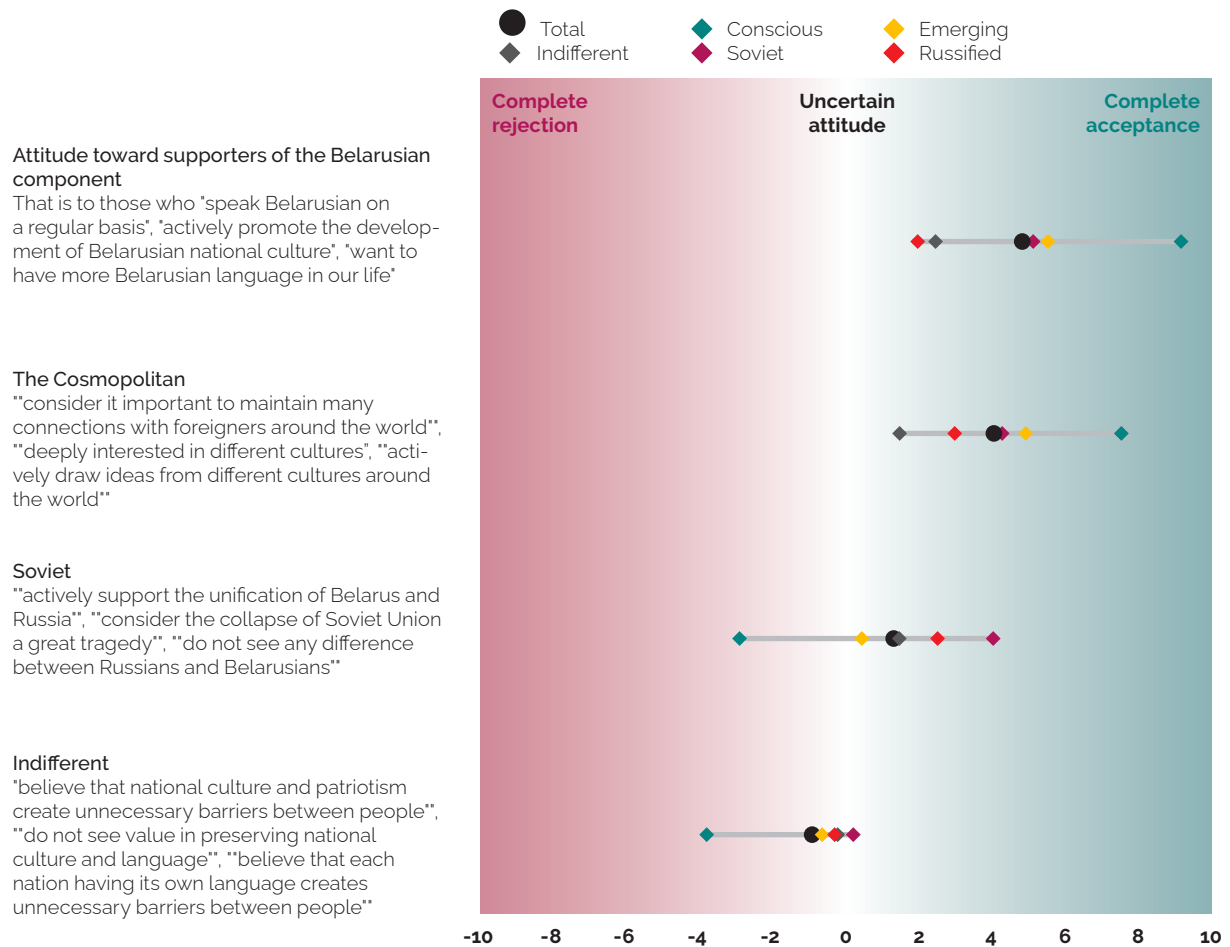
All segments are also likely to accept people with cosmopolitan views, those who actively interact with foreigners or show a deep interest in different cultures. The exception is the Indifferent, who have a predominantly undefined attitude towards such people. This is due to the fact that the Indifferent segment often finds it difficult to answer questions related to identity and socio-political themes.

Belarusian society is polarised towards manifestations of "Sovietness", such as laments about the collapse of the Soviet Union and active support of Belarus's unification with Russia. The Conscious are most likely to support social exclusion of people with such views. In contrast, the Soviet and Russified segments are convinced that such views should be accepted by society. The Emerging and Indifferent segments have an undefined attitude to those who support the Soviet component.

Most Belarusians are uncertain about people who are nationally indifferent, that is, those who do not see value in patriotism, national culture, and language, considering them a cause of unnecessary barriers between people. Meanwhile, the Conscious are likely to support the social isolation of such people. In this sense, indifference causes social tension and cannot be considered a potentially unifying element of identity.

In terms of attitudes towards "otherness", **the Conscious are the most intolerant segment**. They are the only ones

Figure 3:
Attitudes towards those who support the main components of national identity between the segments, on a scale from -10 "total non-acceptance" to 10 "total acceptance"



The attitude is calculated based on the average respondents' agreement or disagreement with five statements: "Important public positions in Belarus should NOT be occupied by those who [...]", "For the good of the country, it is necessary to limit the opportunities to spread their views to those who [...]", "It would be good if there were simply none of those in our country who [...]", "It would be good if those who [...] were not allowed to work in culture and mass media in Belarus", "The views of those who [...] are condemnable". Instead of gaps, one of the descriptions of typical supporters of the main components was randomly inserted into the statements, for example, "speak Belarusian on a permanent basis".

who would support the social isolation of those whose views of the nation are not close to their own. The reasons for this attitude require additional study, but it is probably connected to political tension within Belarusian society. The Conscious probably project their negativity regarding the current government on to all those sharing similar ideas with this regime. If this is so, it is important to convey to the Conscious segment that their aversion to others is not mutual. Regardless of the government's position, neither the Russified nor the Soviet segments are inclined to support the social isolation of people who show "Belarusianness".

Therefore, manifestations of the Soviet and Indifferent components play a part in social tension, whereas manifestations of the Belarusian and Cosmopolitan components are ready to be accepted by the majority across all segments.

The acceptance of "Belarusianness" and cosmopolitanism does not mean that these elements are already a common denominator for Belarusians with different views. It is important, however, that these manifestations of national identity do not cause rejection, and, therefore, they should be particularly emphasised by socio-political forces seeking to overcome the identity division in Belarusian society.

2.2 COMMON CULTURE

Belarus has a cultural stratum — music, literature and national cuisine — that unites segments that diverge on many other issues. Belarusians are united by being proud of *Kommunarka* and *BELAZ* and considering Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas and the band "Pesnyary" important for national culture, and *draniki* for national cuisine. These are the

elements that all Belarusians regard as national, irrespective of their preferred national project.

National culture is one of the main markers of national identification. For example, in 2023, 42% of urban residents agreed⁵ that one can be considered Belarusian if they are raised with Belarusian culture. In this section we explore what exactly is meant by national culture in music, literature and cuisine, as well as how these perceptions differ between segments. For this purpose, open-ended questions were used allowing for spontaneous answers — that is, what Belarusians remember well and can name without prompting.

The band “Pesnyary” is most often mentioned as the music that unites all Belarusians (Figure 4). This is typical for all Belarusians, including the otherwise opposed Conscious and Soviet segments. The band “Syabry” is another popular example of Belarusian culture in all segments.

There are significant differences between the segments in perceptions of national music. Thus, the Conscious segment are more likely to mention the band “Lyapis Trubetskoy” and “N.R.M.”, while for the Soviet segment it is the band “Verasy” and Alexander Solodukh.

Among the literati, writers Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas are common figures for all segments (Figure 5). Vasil Bykau and Uladzimir Karatkievich are also among the most mentioned authors.

There are practically no differences between the segments in their perceptions of national literature. At the same time, the Indifferent in general name fewer authors and are more likely to find it difficult to answer, which reflects their lower cultural involvement.

Belarusians across all segments consider draniki to be the main national dish. Machanka and babka also feature at the top of the dishes that most Belarusians know and like (Figure 6).

As in the case of literature, there are few notable differences in perceptions of national cuisine between the segments.

Previous qualitative studies show⁶ that brands also play an important role in national self-identification. If we ask Belarusians to explain who Belarusians are, one way to do it is to name famous Belarusian brands. The quantitative analysis shows that **Belarusians most often consider Kommunarka and BELAZ as national brands** (Figure 7). These brands are among the top-5 most frequently mentioned in all segments.

There are noticeable differences between the segments in their perception of significant national brands. For example, the Conscious segment mention Wargaming more often than others, which may be due to the higher share of IT workers in this segment and the fact that this company is private and not affiliated with the state. This segment is also less likely to report being proud of large state-owned enterprises, such as Atlant, MAZ, Belaruskali. On the other hand, the Soviet and Indifferent segments mention Belaruskali more often than others.

The band “Pesnyary”, writers Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, draniki, Kommunarka and BELAZ are therefore elements that all Belarusians consider national, regardless of the segment they belong to. These cultural elements can be used by public and cultural figures targeting audiences outside the polarising segments to create meanings that are close and understandable to the majority of Belarusians.

⁵ P.Bikanau, K.Nesterovich, *Belarusian Identity in 2023: A Quantitative Study* / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

⁶ 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 4:
Music considered common for all Belarusians



■ Among the most mentioned across all segments

What Belarusian music would you call common for all Belarusians? Please write down the names of Belarusian performers or the names of compositions which, in your opinion, Belarusians know and love. You can write down one to five options (Open-ended question)
The options that scored 3% or more are shown. The sample was randomly divided into two parts - one was asked about music and cuisine, the other about literature.

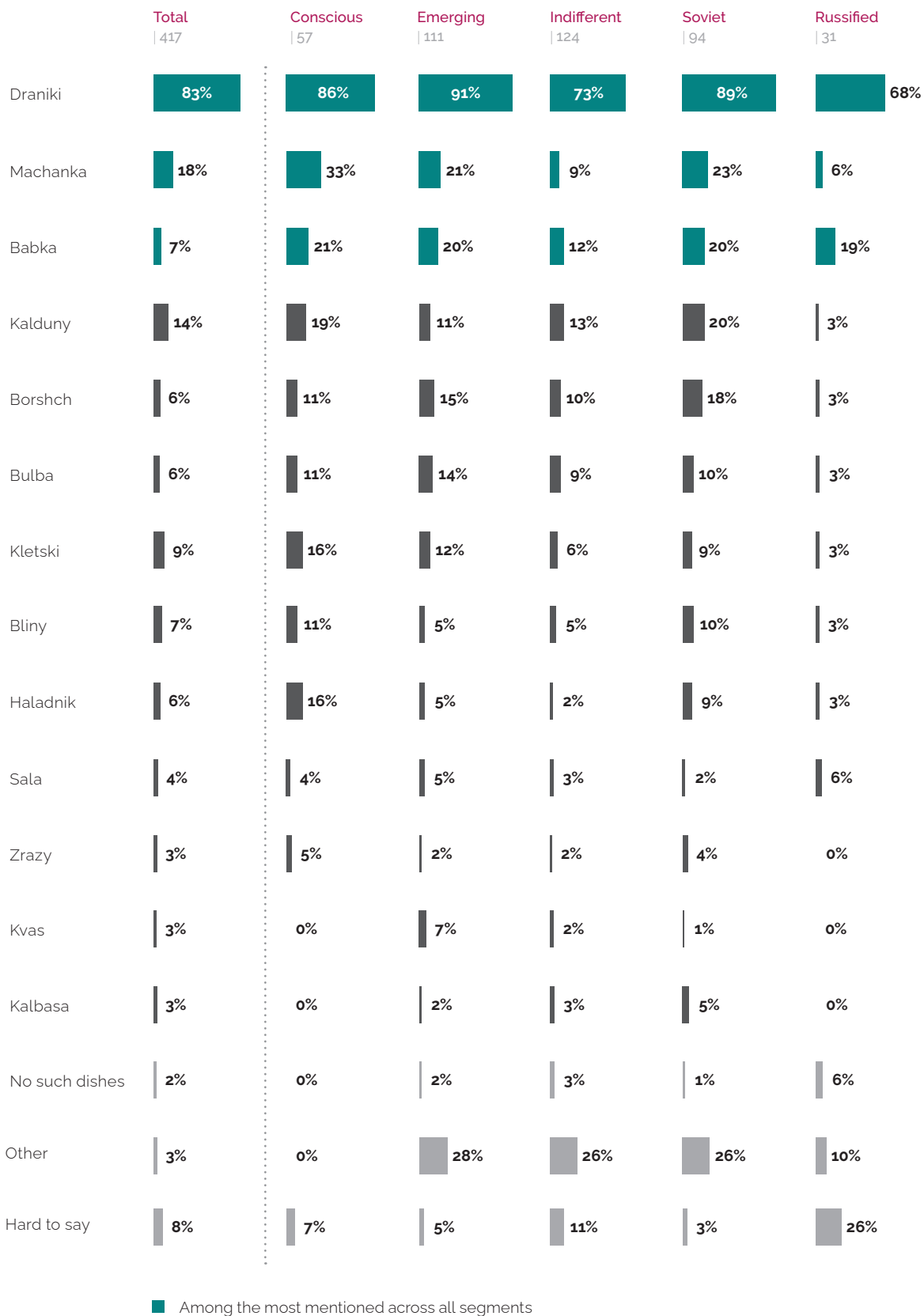
Figure 5:
Literature considered common for all Belarusians



■ Among the most mentioned across all segments

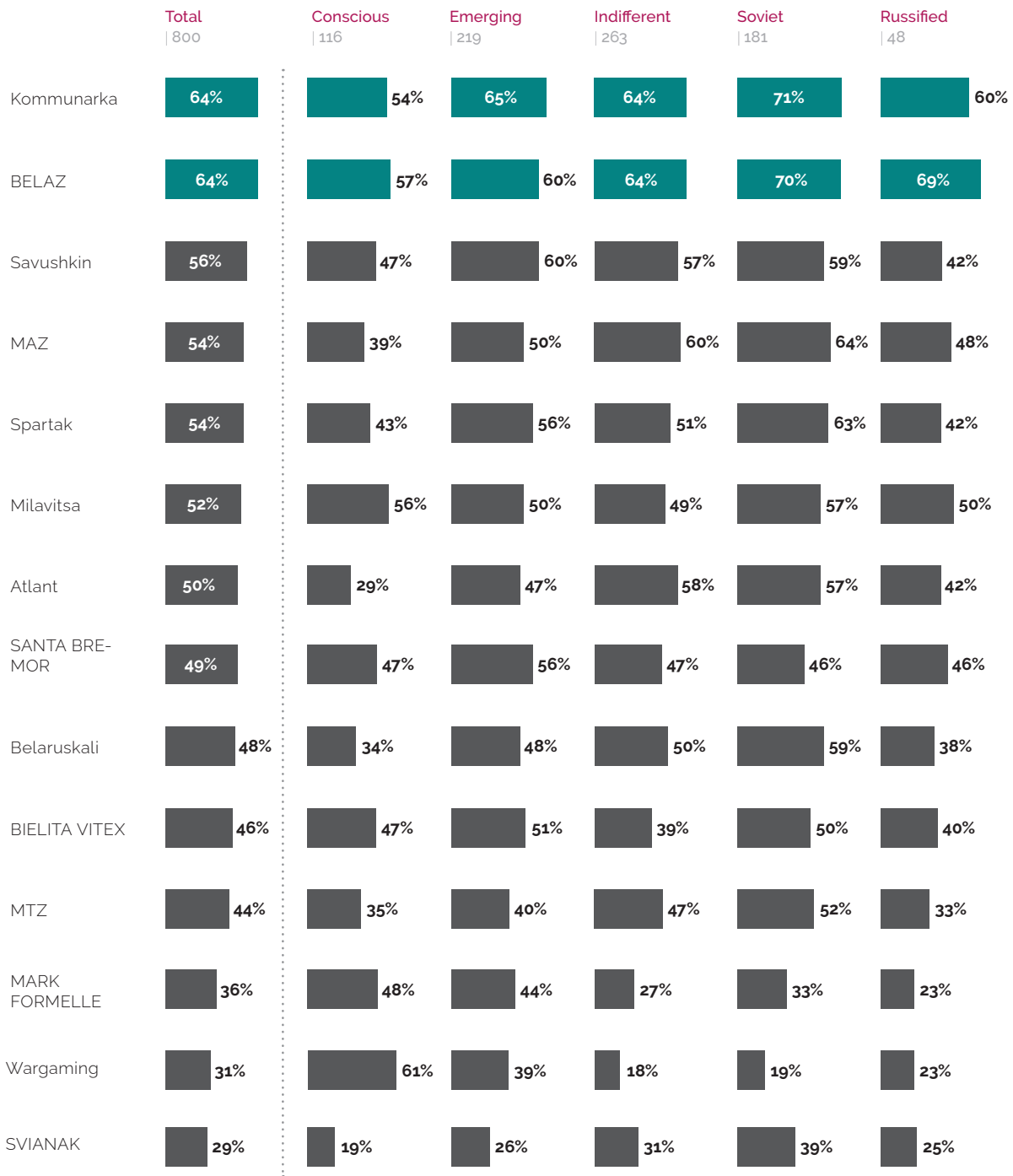
What Belarusian literature would you call common for all Belarusians? Please write down the names of Belarusian writers or titles of books, which, in your opinion, Belarusians know and love. (Open-ended question)
The options that scored 3% or more are shown. The sample was randomly divided into two parts - one was asked about music and cuisine, the other about literature. The Russified segment is not shown due to an insufficient base for analysis (n=17).

Figure 6:
Dishes from Belarusian cuisine considered common for all Belarusians



What Belarusian dishes would you call common for all Belarusians? Please write down the names of the dishes of Belarusian cuisine, which, in your opinion, Belarusians know and love (Open-ended question)
The options that scored 3% or more are shown. The sample was randomly divided into two parts - one was asked about music and cuisine, the other about literature.

Figure 7:
Brands that Belarusians are proud of



■ Included in Top 5 in each segment

In your opinion, which brands or companies can Belarus be proud of, i.e. which of them can be considered an achievement? (Closed question)
The options "Other", "None" and "Hard to say" together scored 4%.

3

RUSSIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Russian cultural influence is most noticeable in the spheres of blogging and comedy content. At the same time, Western content dominates in cinema and literature, while Belarusian's music preferences are more often connected with domestic performers. Russian bloggers and comedians are mostly liked by the Emerging and Soviet segments.

In Belarusians' perception, the main positive feature of Russian cinema is its cultural closeness: "people similar to us", "about people like us". Some Belarusians consider Russian music beautiful. On the contrary, the main reason not to consume Russian music and cinema is their low quality.

To determine the level of Russian cultural influence, we estimated the share of Russian content in the cultural consumption of Belarusians. For this purpose, we used open-ended questions asking respondents to write down the names of their favourite films, music, books, plays, bloggers and comedians. Then we calculated what share of the specified content is Russian, and what share is Belarusian, Soviet, Western, etc.

To understand why people like or dislike Russian content, we used projective methodology, asking a question not about the respondent personally, but about his or her "relative". This allowed us to assess the image of Russian music and cinema without distortions caused by the social desirability effect.

3.1 BELARUSIANS' FAVOURITE CREATIVE WORKS

In terms of the cultural consumption of Belarusians, Russian content prevails in blogging and humour. Although most Belarusians cannot name their favourite comedians or bloggers, Russians lead by a large margin in these categories (Figure 8).⁷ **Russian bloggers and channels are particularly often mentioned by the Emerging segment (the youngest).**

As in the case with bloggers, most Belarusians do not have favourite theatrical productions. Those who do have them

name Russian and Belarusian theatrical works equally often. The Russian content in this category leads only in the Indifferent segment.

The Russian influence is much weaker in other categories. **The majority of films, TV series and books much-loved by Belarusians were created in the West** (the United States, the United Kingdom, etc.).

Music is the only sphere where Belarusian content prevails. A significant number of respondents recalled performers from the times of Soviet Belarus, (for example, "Pesnyary", "Syabry"), especially the Conscious segment, but even more people named contemporary Belarusian performers, such as "Lyapis Trubetskoy" and Max Korzh. Neither Russian nor Soviet music is mentioned as often in all segments except for the Soviet one.

The Indifferent segment were less likely to name their favourite music, bloggers / channels and books. The reason for this is that these people probably have fewer interactions with culture.

Therefore, Russian cultural influence on Belarusians is strongest in the sphere of blogging and humour, where it primarily influences the Emerging and Soviet segments. In other spheres, it is inferior either to the Western influence — in films and books, or to the Belarusian one — in music.

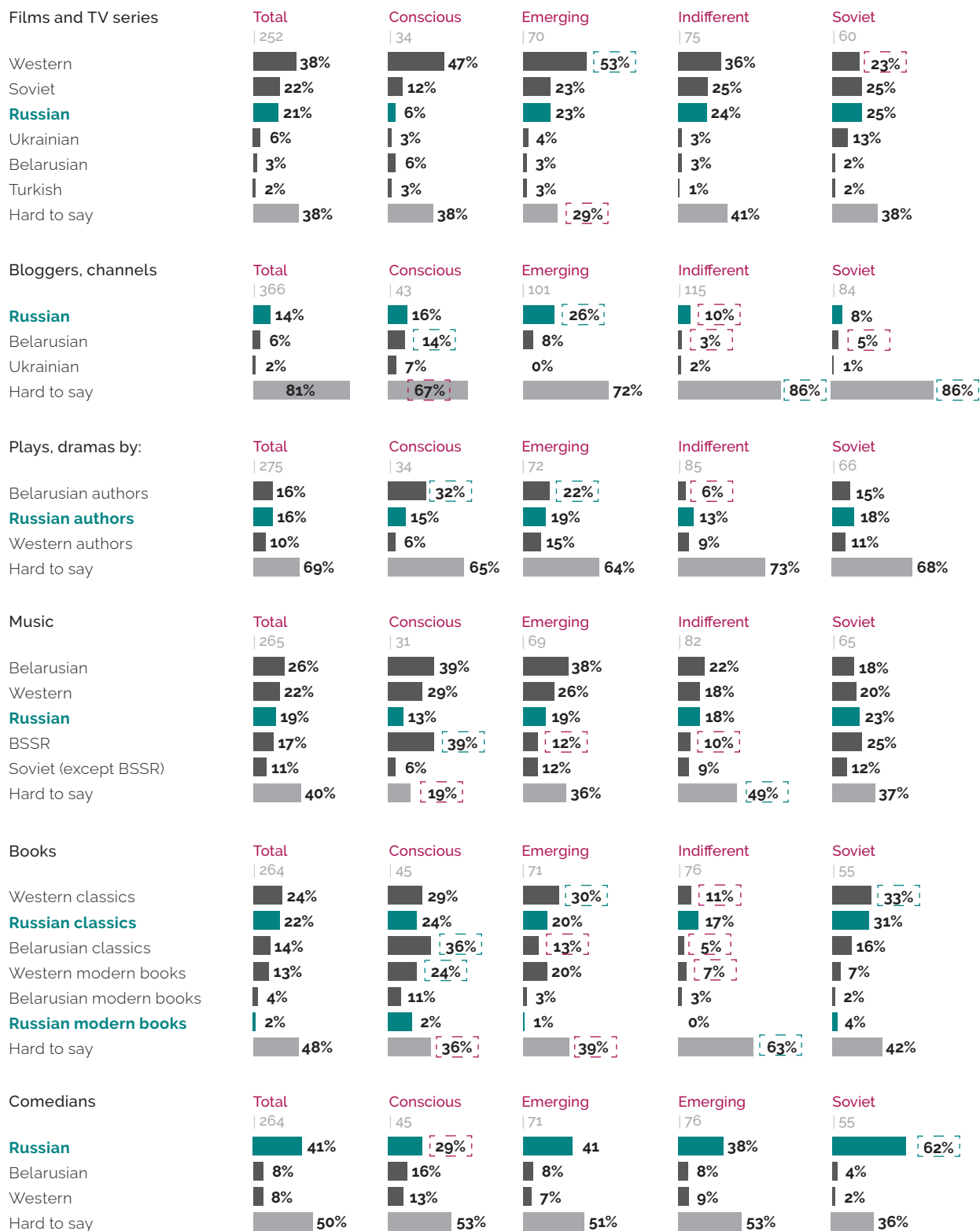
3.2 PERCEPTION OF RUSSIAN CONTENT

The largest share of respondents believe that people watch Russian films because they are interesting. However, this answer can be seen as "default", and the main perceived reason for choosing Russian cinema is **identity-based**, as people associate themselves with the characters and plots: **"they are about people like us"** and **"close to us"**. This is typical for all segments except for the Conscious. **Another 9%** admitted that they choose Russian-made films and TV series because of the Russian language, which they understand (Figure 9).

Compared to other segments, **the Conscious** are much more likely to note that watching Russian cinema is **stupid and shows a lack of taste**. In the case of this methodolo-

⁷ In this section, the "Russified" answer base is insufficient to analyze the results

Figure 8.
Belarusians' favourite creative works by country of production

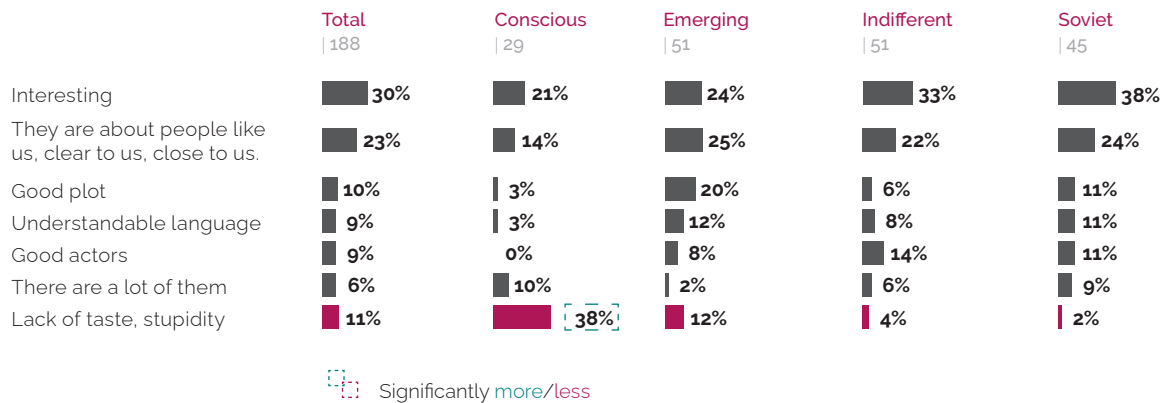


■ Among the most mentioned in all segments

□ Significantly more/less

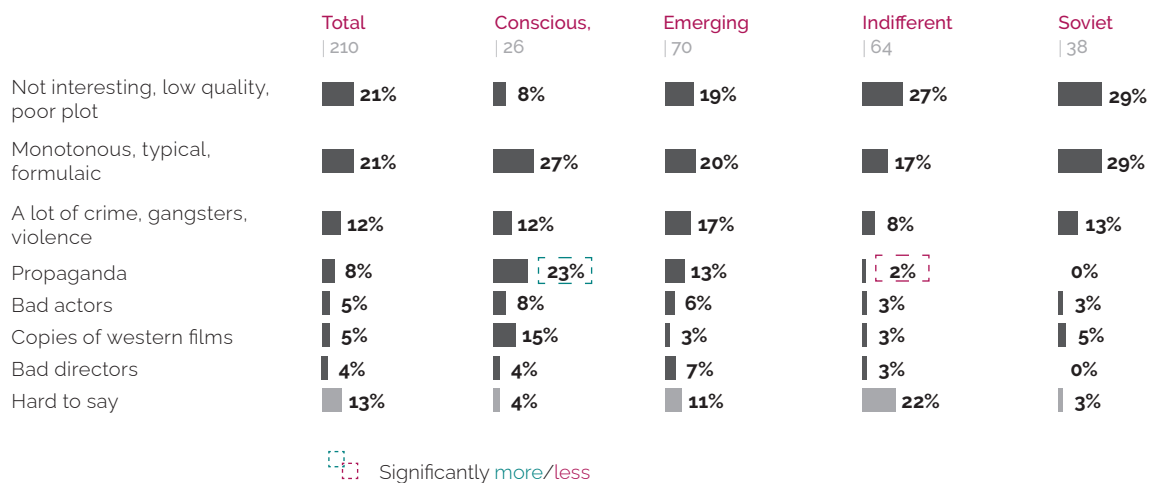
What are your favourite films or TV series? Who are your favourite bloggers? What are your favourite plays, theatre productions? What are your favourite music bands or artists? What are your favourite books? Who are your favourite comedians, humourists? Please write down one to five names, each on a separate line. (Open-ended questions)
The options 'Other country', 'Unknown country', 'Other' together did not score more than 5%.

Figure 9.
Reasons for liking Russian films and TV series



Please imagine the fictional situation described below and continue the sentence.
One weekend, your relative comes to visit you. Over dinner, you discuss various topics and the conversation turns to cinema. During the discussion, your relative says: "I like many Russian films and TV series because ...". CONTINUE
Write down your free-form answer in as much detail as possible. You may suggest several ways to continue the sentence. (Open-ended question)
The answer "Hard to say" scored less than 3%

Figure 10.
Reasons for disliking Russian films and TV series



Please imagine the fictional situation described below and continue the sentence.
One weekend, your relative comes to visit you. Over dinner, you discuss various topics and the conversation turns to cinema. During the discussion, your relative says: "I DON'T like most Russian films and TV series because ...". CONTINUE
Write down your free-form answer in as much detail as possible. You may suggest several ways to continue the sentence. (Open-ended question)

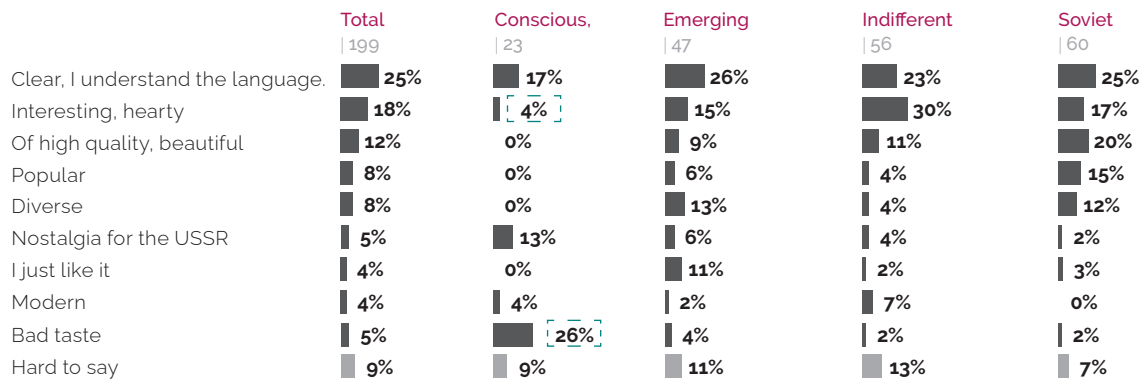
gy, such answers should be interpreted as a negative attitude towards Russian content.

In contrast to preference, dislike for Russian-made cinema and its low share among Belarusians' favourite films is mostly **explained by its low quality** rather than by identity or cultural connection. Only the Conscious identify "propaganda" as one of top-3 reasons for a negative attitude, while most urban residents in Belarus simply consider such films and TV series **uninteresting, poor in**

quality, and one-type: always about gangsters, police, and violence (Figure 10).

The reasons why people like Russian performers differ from the reasons for choosing films (Figure 11). The **factor of self-identification is less significant** here, although an understandable language is one of key factors (17%). **Emotion and quality** are much more important, being in the top 3. While films and TV series are probably perceived as something ordinary and mundane, where the plot is the main thing,

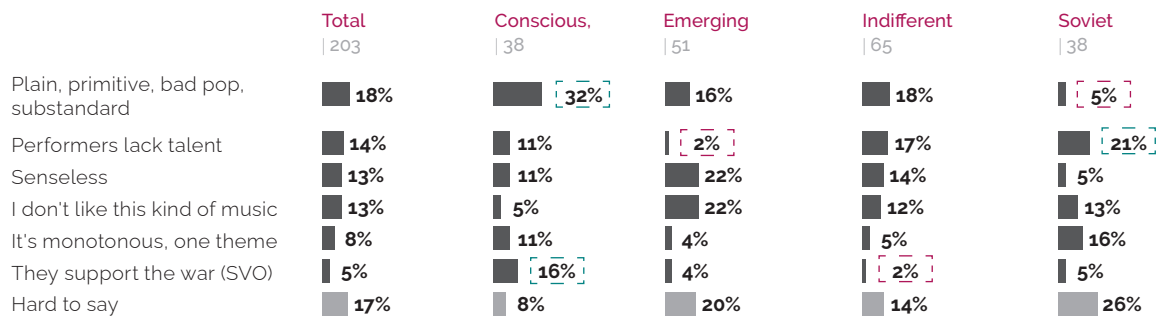
Figure 11. Reasons for liking Russian bands and performers



Significantly more/less

Please imagine the fictional situation described below and continue the sentence. One weekend, your relative comes to visit you. Over dinner, you discuss various topics and the conversation turns to music. During the discussion, your relative says: 'I like the music of many Russian performers because ...' CONTINUE Write down your free-form answer in as much detail as possible. You may suggest several ways to continue the sentence. (Open-ended question)

Figure 12. Reasons for disliking Russian bands and performers



Significantly more/less

Please imagine the fictional situation described below and continue the sentence. One weekend, your relative comes to visit you. Over dinner, you discuss various topics and the conversation turns to music. During the discussion, your relative says: 'I DON'T like the music of most Russian performers because ...' CONTINUE Write down your free-form answer in as much detail as possible. You may suggest several ways to continue the sentence. (Open-ended question)

music is something more personal: people usually listen to it alone and, accordingly, **choose it more carefully.**

The Conscious segment is the only one for whom the quality of Russian music does not matter — most of them are simply negative about music by Russian performers, in particular, **considering it lowbrow.**

When explaining the reasons for disliking Russian music, **quality also played a major role:** representatives of all segments believe that it is either primitive, or monotonous, or meaningless, or that the performers lack talent (Figure 12).

The performers' political beliefs are only important for the Conscious segment (16%). The Emerging segment often

cannot answer this question because they mostly listen to Western music, and the Soviet segment usually prefer Russian singers. At the same time, it is representatives of the Soviet segment who most frequently consider modern Russian singers to be untalented because they compare them with Soviet singers.

Therefore, Russian films and TV series are usually chosen for self-identification reasons, and the performers for the quality of the music and emotions it evokes. Nevertheless, only about 30% of Belarusians name them as their favourites. Instead, most Belarusians prefer Western films, Western and Belarusian music, and the main reason for this is probably the perceived low quality of Russian creative works.

4

PERCEPTION OF THE BELARUSIAN LANGUAGE

Only a small share of the urban population uses the Belarusian language permanently, and this significantly affects its perception:

- The language is not a significant part of their identity for most Belarusians, as it is rarely used as a marker determining one's nationality.
- Belarusians often see no practical usefulness in the Belarusian language, believing that it lacks developed scientific and technical terminology, interesting content, and that it is useless at work.

As a result, Belarusians do not view the current spread of the Belarusian language as a problem, although they do not want the language to fade away.

Perceptions of the language's practical value would probably improve if more people, including influencers, spoke it. However, there are image aspects that could be improved right now. The perception of the Belarusian language today is built around value and identity characteristics: it is seen

as "native", "beautiful", "for those who love their country", and "unique". These features are the strengths of the language and encourage people's desire to use it. To further develop this effect, it is important to stop seeing the Belarusian language as a rural language, and to promote it as the language of youth and intellectuals.

4.1 ROLE OF THE BELARUSIAN LANGUAGE IN NATIONAL IDENTITY

For most urban residents in Belarus, **language is not a key component of national identity.**

Although more than half consider the Belarusian language to be their mother tongue (Figure 13), only one in five respondents names it as a characteristic that unites them with other Belarusians. **Language remains a secondary marker of national self-identification**, coming behind such elements as "place of birth", "mentality", "origin", and

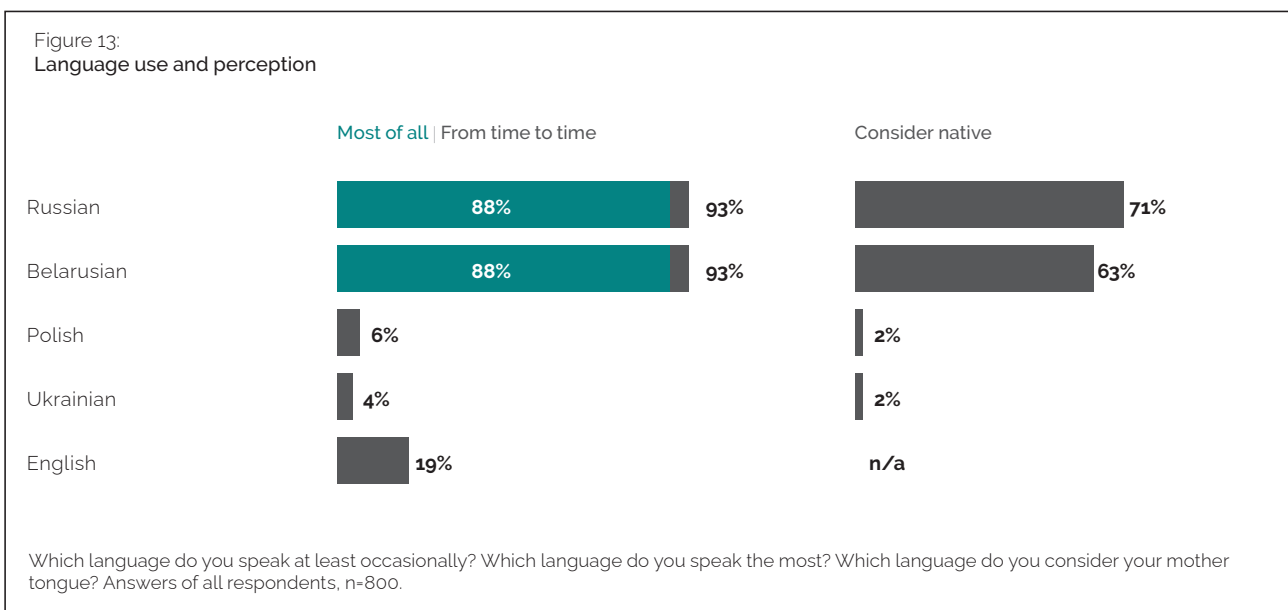
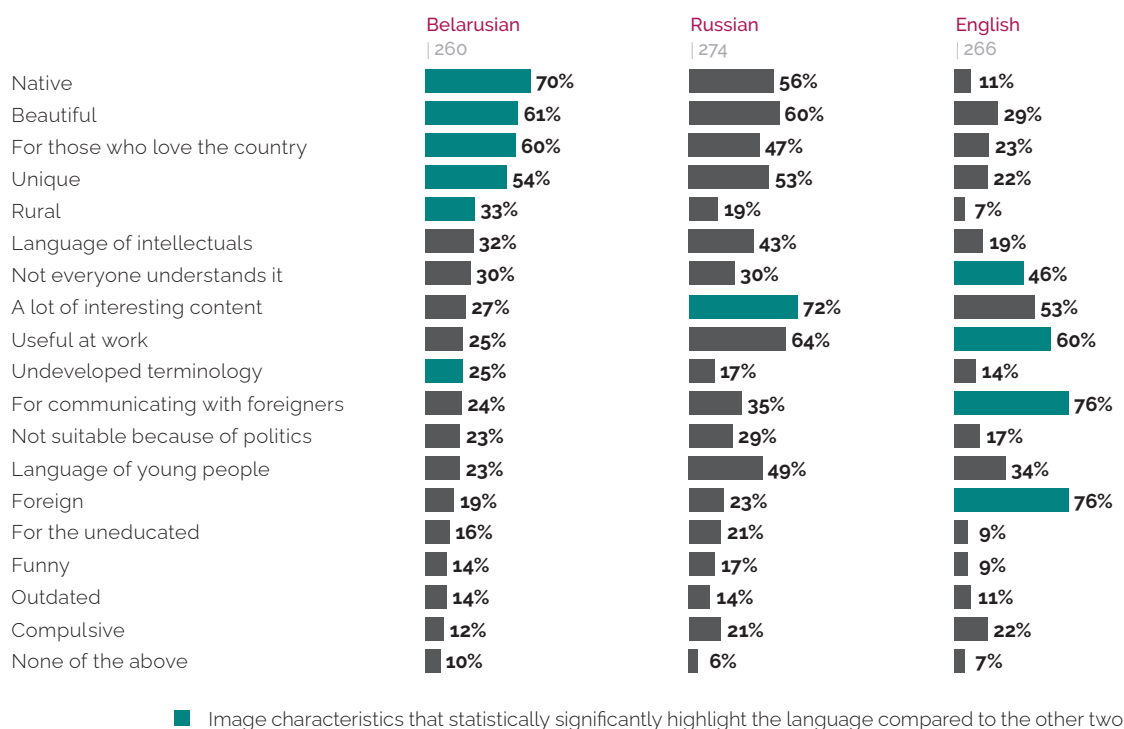


Figure 14.
Image of Belarusian, Russian and English languages in the perception of Belarusians
% of those who think that the characteristic suits the language



In your opinion, to what extent do these characteristics suit the [Belarusian / Russian / English] language? respondents answered on a scale from 1 - 'Not suitable at all' to 7 - 'Totally suitable'. The slide shows the proportion who chose 6 or 7. The sample was randomly divided into three parts, each of which was asked about only one language. Significant differences were calculated by standardised residuals analysis, which takes into account not only how much the proportion of those who selected a characteristic is greater than among other languages, but also how much this proportion is greater than the proportion of other characteristics of the same language.

"state".⁸ The only exception is for the Conscious segment, for whom language is a centrepiece of national identity.

Moreover, although the Belarusian language is important for many urban residents as an element of self-identification, it is **virtually unused as a marker of identification for others**. Only 3% of respondents mention the language as an important characteristic that makes it possible to consider a person as Belarusian.⁹

This is due to the fact that only a small proportion of the country's population speaks Belarusian on a permanent basis (Figure 13), that is, in most cases it is difficult to understand whether a person is Belarusian based on the language they speak. In comparison, in most European countries, where the national language dominates everyday communication, about 90% consider it a key marker of national

belonging.¹⁰ For example, in Belarus's closest neighbour — Poland — language is the main marker of national identity, as 86% name knowledge of the Polish language as a key factor for considering someone to be a Pole.¹¹

Therefore, the Belarusian language functions as a secondary marker of self-identification for many people and it is not used as a marker of identification of others. To an even lesser extent, the Belarusian language fulfils the communicative function.

4.2 IMAGE OF THE BELARUSIAN LANGUAGE

Belarusians see in the Belarusian language as a value rather than a practical benefit. Compared to

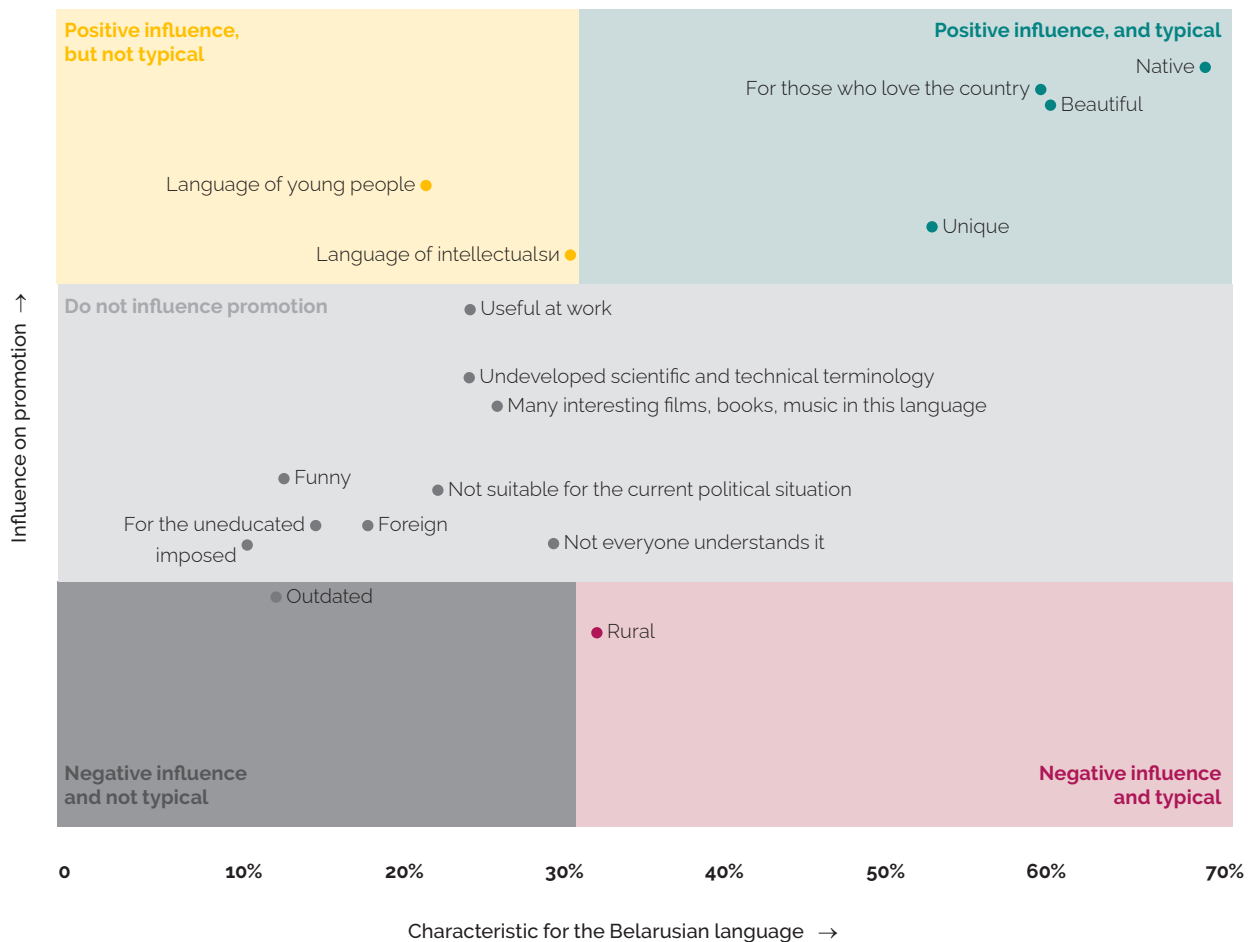
8 P.Bikanau, K.Nesterovich, *Belarusian Identity in 2023: A Quantitative Study* / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

9 P.Bikanau, K.Nesterovich, *Belarusian Identity in 2023: A Quantitative Study* / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

10 Huang Ch., Clancy L., Austin S. *Language and Traditions Are Considered Central to National Identity* / Pew Research Center

11 "Gorzki to chleb jest polskość?": raport na temat patriotyzmu i zainteresowania historią w Polsce / PAN, Nauka dla społeczeństwa, 2022.

Figure 15.
Image map of the Belarusian language



The vertical axis — values of Pearson's correlation coefficients between the assessment of the attribute's characteristic and support for the spread of the Belarusian language. In the middle area there are characteristics with no significant correlation. The horizontal axis — the share of urban residents in Belarus who think that the attribute is characteristic of the Belarusian language (see Figure 14). The middle area is the average share of characteristic for all attributes.

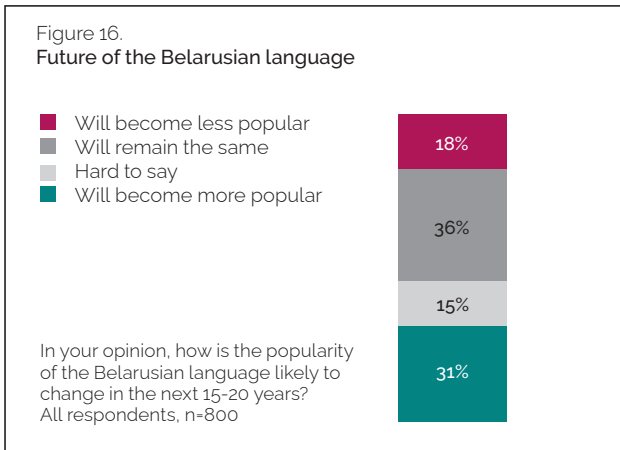
Russian or English, the image of the Belarusian language is dominated by emotional and identity characteristics: "native", "beautiful", "unique", and "for those who love the country" (Figure 14). At the same time, Belarusians note the insufficient development of scientific and technical terminology, the lack of interesting content in Belarusian, and its limited usefulness in professional activity.

The low association of the Belarusian language with practical usefulness is because only a small proportion of the country's population uses it regularly. Therefore, this image would likely change by itself with the increasing presence of Belarusian in workplaces, in scientific publications, in technical universities, and with the production of more Belarusian language content.

However, in addition to the lack of usefulness, the language's image includes value and identity aspects that

could be improved. The analysis¹² shows that **if Belarusian is considered less rural but more often associated with the language of youth and intellectuals, this will have a positive effect on Belarusians' desire to use it.**

¹² To better understand particular characteristics that influence the promotion of the Belarusian language, we looked at how they correlate with support for its spread. First, we identified a group of Belarusians who want the Belarusian language to be more present in our lives and at the same time speak it at least occasionally (the dichotomous variable of group membership). Then we calculated the correlation of belonging to this group with the evaluations of the characteristic of each of the attributes for the Belarusian language (on a seven-point scale). In this way we obtained a correlation coefficient for each attribute reflecting the strength of its connection with the desire to support the spread of the Belarusian language. We interpret this connection as an influence: for example, if people consider Belarusian a rural language, then they will be less inclined to use it and spread it for this reason.



4.3 FUTURE OF THE BELARUSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE EYES OF BELARUSIANS

Despite the infrequent use of Belarusian on a permanent basis, most Belarusians do not expect this language to disappear. Only 18% believe that its popularity will decrease, while one-third think that it will grow. Roughly the same number of Belarusians are sure that it will remain at the current level (Figure 16).

Such expectations are probably conditioned by the role of the Belarusian language in national identity. Some Belarusians would like the Belarusian language to become more popular, as it is an important part of their self-identification. Thus, the idea of it becoming more popular is the most widespread among the Conscious (77%).

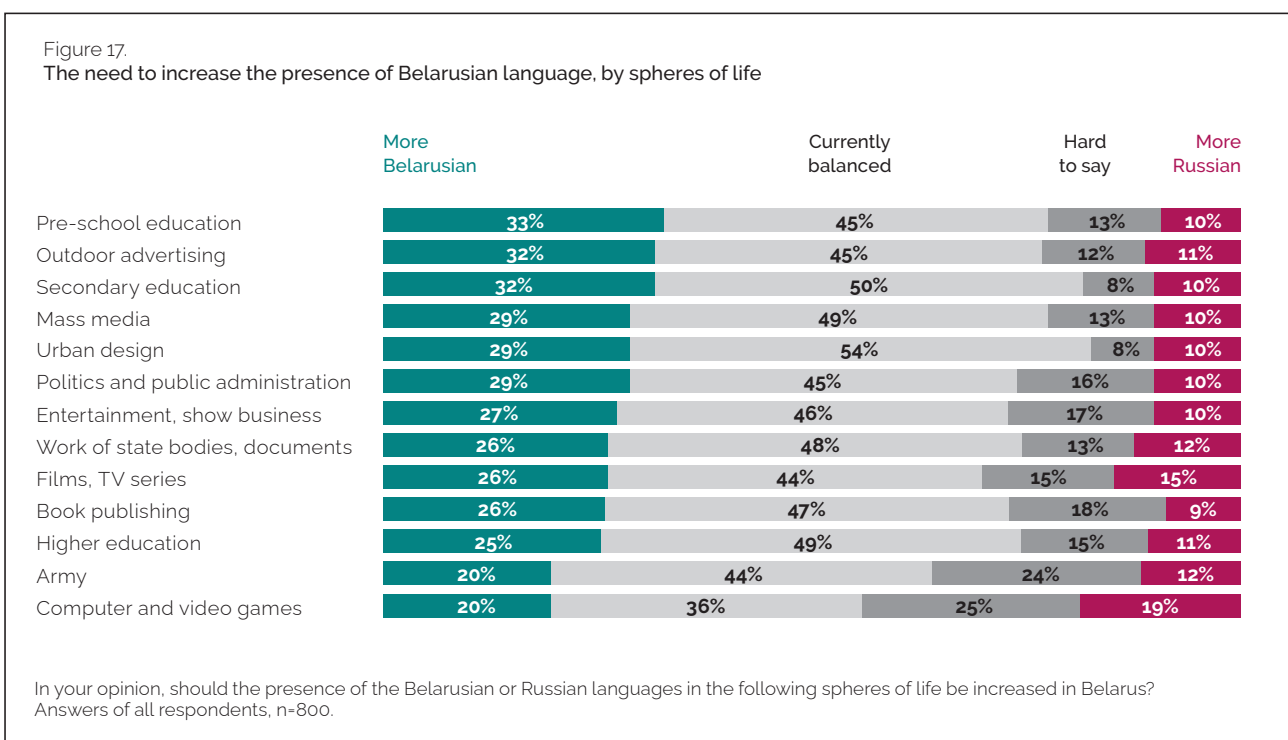
As seen in Figure 15, about one-third of urban residents consider the Belarusian language rural, which negatively affects its attractiveness.

On the contrary, such characteristics as "youth language" and "language of intellectuals" add to the desire to speak Belarusian. Many Belarusians already think that these descriptions suit the language. If the proportion of such people increases a little, "youthfulness" and "intellectuality" will become image advantages of the Belarusian language.

The main strengths of the image of the Belarusian language today are the value aspects, such as "native", "beautiful", "unique" and "for those who love the country". If we promote its image as the language of young people and intellectuals, these characteristics will also become strengths. On the contrary, associating Belarusian with a rural language is something that hinders its spread.

Another, somewhat larger segment of the population considers the current spread of the Belarusian language comfortable because it is not an important part of their identity. For example, 51% of respondents from the Soviet segment assume that the Belarusian language's popularity will not change. This is confirmed by the fact that the largest proportion of Belarusians consider the presence of the Belarusian and Russian languages in the main spheres of life to be balanced, with half of the urban population thinking that there is no need to change the current situation (Figure 17).

At the same time, about one-third of urban residents would like to have more Belarusian, mainly in preschool and secondary education, outdoor advertising and dec-



oration of cities, mass media and state administration. The Conscious and Emerging segments are the main supporters of such changes.


Therefore, the ideas about the future of the Belarusian language are connected with its main functions in society. For some people, it is an important element in their self-identification, and they expect more presence of Belarusian language in the future. However, the prevailing perception is that the presence of Russian and Belarusian is currently balanced.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE

		Total	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Gender	Male	47%	63%	47%	42%	45%	52%
	Female	53%	37%	53%	58%	55%	48%
Age	18–24	12%	3%	20%	12%	9%	6%
	25–34	20%	24%	27%	19%	12%	24%
	35–44	27%	20%	23%	34%	26%	29%
	45–54	21%	22%	17%	20%	26%	20%
	55–64	20%	32%	13%	16%	26%	21%
City size	Minsk	33%	52%	49%	22%	28%	20%
	Cities 100K+	47%	38%	33%	56%	49%	59%
	Cities 20–100K	20%	10%	18%	22%	23%	21%
Employment	Secondary	23%	10%	28%	25%	21%	31%
	Secondary special and vocational	45%	29%	38%	51%	51%	50%
	Higher+	31%	61%	34%	23%	28%	19%
Sphere of work	Full-time	61%	49%	57%	62%	67%	61%
	Part-time	4%	5%	6%	3%	3%	2%
	Self-employed	11%	34%	12%	8%	7%	12%
	On maternity leave	7%	1%	4%	9%	7%	14%
	Retired	7%	7%	5%	8%	8%	6%
	Students	4%	0%	10%	5%	2%	0%
	Not working	4%	4%	5%	4%	3%	5%
	Other	2%	0%	1%	2%	4%	0%
	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	4%	1%	3%	5%	4%	6%
	Construction	10%	11%	8%	13%	9%	8%
Trade, repair	17%	14%	21%	14%	17%	21%	
Hotels and restaurants	3%	7%	2%	3%	0%	4%	

	Total	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Transport and communication	4%	2%	2%	5%	5%	0%
Finance, real estate	3%	5%	4%	4%	2%	0%
Education	8%	7%	11%	5%	9%	5%
Healthcare, social services	8%	8%	7%	10%	5%	13%
Utility services	3%	1%	2%	4%	4%	2%
Public service	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Power and law enforcement agencies	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Industry	16%	13%	17%	15%	18%	19%
Service sector	7%	5%	6%	9%	7%	4%
IT and computer services	9%	[21%]	11%	[5%]	6%	15%
Other	6%	4%	5%	[3%]	[12%]	0%
Total	734	83	172	238	187	54
Married (?)						

 Significantly more/less frequent than other segments

ANNEX 2. SEGMENTS BY ASSESSMENT OF THE COUNTRY'S SITUATION

To analyse the links between the peculiarities of national identity and assessment of the socio-political situation in the country, we used a tool¹³ **that identifies four main political positions among Belarusian citizens:**

- **Pro-government (18%).** Politicised segment with high satisfaction with both the general course and the economic situation in the country. High support for authoritarian values.
- **Neutral (42%).** Segment with low interest in politics and medium satisfaction with the country's situation. Rather low support for authoritarian values.
- **Pro-democratic (21%).** Segment with rather high politicisation and with total dissatisfaction with the country's situation. No support for authoritarian values.
- **Economically dissatisfied (19%).** Segment with low satisfaction with the country's situation and high politicisation. Rather high support for authoritarian values.

Segments are identified mathematically¹⁴ based on respondents' agreement or disagreement with five statements about the country's situation (Table 1).

Table 1. Relationship between political segments and national identity segments

% agreeing with the statement	Neutral	Pro-government	Economically dissatisfied	Pro-democratic
Authoritarian values "The country needs a strong leader who makes important state decisions independently"	38%	93%	61%	4%
Interest in politics "I am interested in politics"	13%	85%	85%	64%
Support for reform "Belarus needs reforms in many areas"	32%	38%	81%	100%
Satisfaction with economic situation "In general, I am satisfied with the current economic situation in Belarus"	42%	97%	4%	0%
Acceptance of the country's overall direction "Generally, things in the country have been moving in the right direction over the last year"	46%	94%	19%	0%
Number of respondents, n	336	144	149	171

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the current situation in the country?

The segment sizes are only approximate estimates of the prevalence of the corresponding positions. Based on these distributions, it is safe to say that the "neutral" political position prevails among the urban Belarusian population, while the remaining three positions are much less widespread.

The peculiarities of national identity are meaningfully connected with assessments of the country's situation.

Thus, most of the Conscious segment adhere to "pro-democratic" views, while the majority of the Indifferent and Russified segments takes a "neutral" position.

¹³ A similar tool is used in other studies in Belarus, see, for example: [Belarusians' perception of the West and connections with it](#) / Chatham House, June–July 2024.

The discrepancy in segment sizes compared to the Chatham House data may be due to both the volatility of the hierarchical cluster analysis results and a different sample composition: our sample does not represent either the population of cities under 20K or the 65+ age group.

¹⁴ Hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method with the Squared Euclidean Distance as a measure of dissimilarity.

Although identity and political position are strongly linked, they are not perfect matches for each other. For example, none of the political positions dominates within the Soviet and Emerging segments, despite the fact that the former leans towards “pro-government” views and the latter has a higher proportion of “economically dissatisfied” and “pro-democratic” views.

Table 2. Relationship between political segments and national identity segments

	Conscious	Emerging	Indifferent	Soviet	Russified
Neutral	[6%]	[36%]	[59%]	45%	[58%]
Pro-government	[5%]	[8%]	22%	[34%]	17%
Economically dissatisfied	16%	[29%]	15%	14%	15%
Pro-democratic	[73%]	[27%]	[4%]	[7%]	10%
No. of respondents, n	116	219	236	181	48

 Statistically significantly less/more than among other segments

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BELARUSIAN IDENTITY IN 2024: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY



Belarusians are most polarized regarding expressions of "Sovietness."



Belarusians see in the Belarusian language as a value rather than a practical benefit.



Russian influence in cinema, literature, and music is smaller than Western influence.