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## **Political views of ethnic minorities: the case of the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia**

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**Universiteit  
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**Political views of ethnic minorities:  
the case of the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia**

**MSc International Organization**

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**Final Thesis**

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### **Abstract**

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all ex-Soviet states had Russian ethnic minorities who migrated there before 1991. Some countries have strong connections with Russia. Others, such as the Baltic States, have preferred to follow the path of European integration. However, it is unclear how Russian ethnic communities forming a tangible diaspora within some non-Russian states would develop their political views. The Russian-speaking community of Latvia represents a quarter of the country's population. This community is not homogenous and has a variety of political opinions. Focusing on the social identity theory, this study collects evidence of how the Russian ethnic minority includes pro-European or pro-Russian attitudes on sanctioning policies against Russia introduced in response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine. In the study, Russian speakers residing in Latvia are invited to participate in a questionnaire about their views on the European Union, Russia, and sanctions against Russia. Data collected through the questionnaire seeks to analyse how ethnic background influences political opinions. Findings of the study suggest that within one ethnic minority, people can express diametrically different views, regardless of the shared ethnic background.

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## Introduction

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, in former Soviet countries, large Russian ethnic communities faced the dilemma of either staying in their country of residence or returning to Russia, with which they often barely had any connections left. In most cases, Russians relocated to professional duties, such as military service, building infrastructural objects, teaching, or other activities. This mobility had been a part of the job placement system and implied the distribution of specialists graduating from the most prominent universities to different parts of the Soviet Union (Kotlia, 1984).

Usually, Russians lived in tight groups and were reluctant to study local languages using Russian as the primary language of communication (Heleniak, 2004). Regardless of not integrating into local societies, most Russians had lived for a long time outside of Russia and had their children born and raised in the countries of their residence. For many Russians, returning to Russia would mean leaving their new homes; thus, many opted not to return after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Flynn, 2003). Religion was another critical factor determining whether Russian settlers would leave the non-Russian states or remain there (Heleniak, 2004). Countries with mostly Christian, in particular, Orthodox, traditions were more culturally relatable for Russians, unlike, for example, Tajikistan or Turkmenistan, where Islam became an essential factor in nation-building (Yemelianova, 2019) and motivated many Russians to migrate back to Russia.

In all former Soviet states apart from Latvia and Estonia, ethnic minorities, including Russians, were automatically granted citizenship and enjoyed their full rights as citizens of newly formed states (Heleniak, 2004). According to the decision of national governments, in Latvia and Estonia, only those who had citizenship of one of the two countries before 1940, when the

Soviet occupation of the Baltics began, and their descendants were eligible to be recognised as citizens. Former citizens of the USSR who relocated to Latvia or Estonia during the Soviet occupation needed to go through naturalisation procedures, including passing Latvian and Estonian language exams. Those who refused to follow the procedures or could not do it received 'non-citizen' passports and limited electoral and working rights. Non-citizens of Latvia and Estonia cannot participate in elections and work for public or judiciary services (Likumi, 1995). The division in the citizenship status is associated with the escalation of ethnical tensions between the titular population and ethnic minorities (Aasland, 2002; Hughes, 2005). Russia has repeatedly used the non-citizenship issue to criticise the two countries and illustrate how the rights of Russian speakers outside Russia are oppressed (Croft, 2016).

Former Soviet states have different relations with modern Russia varying from mutual support to teetering on the edge of severance of diplomatic relations. Belarus has become the closest ally of Russia creating a supranational organisation of the Union State aimed at deepening integration between the two states. In contrast to participation in integrational organisations with Russia, the Baltic States have chosen Euro-Atlantic integration and in 2004 became members of the EU and NATO. Diplomatic relations between Russia and the Baltic States have been deteriorating dramatically amid reciprocal expulsion of diplomats and enthusiastic approval by the Baltic governments of restrictive policies against Russia (Reuters, 2022). The Baltic governments draw parallels between the narrative used by Russia of protecting the interests of Russian speakers in Ukraine and the criticism voiced by Russia towards the Baltic states (Matthews, 2020).

However, it is unclear how Russian ethnic minorities are forming their political views in response to the actions of their governments, especially if it involves imposing restrictive

measures against Russia. On the one hand, Russian speakers residing outside Russia or their predecessors chose not to return to Russia after the breakup of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, they still widely use the Russian language and have historical ties with Russia. This dichotomy motivates the core research question of this thesis:

*How do ethnicity and belonging to an ethnic minority group influence political opinions?*

The case selected for this study is Latvia and its Russian-speaking population. Russians represent Latvia's largest ethnic minority group, accounting for more than a quarter of the local population (Minority Rights Group, 2021). Latvia is not unique and shares a historical past with Lithuania and Estonia. The three countries were part of the Soviet Union and are neighbours with modern Russia. However, Latvia is still the extreme case since it has the largest share of the Russian-speaking population amongst all members of the European Union (Minority Rights Group, 2021). The study focuses on attitudes towards sanctions against Russia as an example of political opinions.

This thesis uses a questionnaire to collect data on how the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia reviews sanctions imposed against Russia (Diem, 2002). The ethnic minority is studied through the social identity theory, which predicts that participants' reactions will depend on the group to which they belong. Since Latvia has shared a historical past with Russia and is now integrating into European institutions, this thesis studies the division between pro-Russian and pro-European groups. The framework and methodology used in the study can be adopted and generalised to the other Baltic States, European countries that were close allies of the Communist Bloc, and countries where pro-Russian sentiment is widely present. Although Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania are the only EU members with a Russian-speaking diaspora of

this size, several EU countries are home to tangible social groups that do not support restrictive measures against Russia (Weiss, 2020).

### **Literature review**

#### ***Russian ethnic minority of Latvia***

To study the attitudes of national governments towards Russian ethnic minorities, Anna Batta builds a theory of minority inclusion versus exclusion (Batta, 2021). She examines the state-building of countries that formerly were a part of the Soviet Union and thus had historical connections to Russia. The theory predicts less likelihood of the newly formed states to accommodate a sizable minority if that would threaten the autonomy of the seceded state, leading to discrimination against the ethnic minority. This theory does not look into the political attitudes of the Russian ethnic minority. However, it attempts to provide the rationale behind governments' actions concerning the Russian ethnic minority. This theory can subsequently help understand the relationship between a national government and ethnic minorities.

Batta (2021) claims that the emerged state does not have the reassurance that it would survive in the international environment at the early stages of state creation. Establishing new political institutions within a country that has been previously dominated by the mother state might be challenging. Moreover, a 'rump state' may still seek to reassert its power and regain its territories while border agreements are not completed. A sizable ethnic minority within the newly formed state may claim its autonomy and thus threaten the state, creating favourable conditions for separatist movements in the region amid potential help to separatists from the kin state. One striking example of this scenario is the war in Donbas, where the Russian government indirectly supported separatists (Katchanovski, 2016). This theoretical approach applies to Latvia since it is a considerably young state, has a sizable Russian ethnic minority, and seeks to protect itself from escalating potential threats from the Russian side (Andžāns &



Veebel, 2017). The theory looks at ethnical minorities from a different angle, presenting how a government treats them. This perspective contributes to understanding the reasons behind certain behaviours of the Russian ethnic minority. However, the theory of minority inclusion versus exclusion does not account for different groups that presumably exist within the ethnic minority. While some community members may seek autonomy or reestablish the previous status quo, others may be loyal to the new state.

Ieva Bērziņa and Uldis Zupa (2021) compare Latvian and Russian speakers in Latvia using the theory of the willingness to fight for a country. Quantitative approaches proposed in earlier studies of the theory (Atran et al., 2014; Inglehart et al., 2015) provide insights into factors that affect the willingness to fight among citizens of various countries. Although the theory does not primarily focus on ethnic minorities, Latvia's case showed differences between Latvian and Russian speakers. In data from 2021, 18% of respondents using Russian at home and 44% using the Latvian language expressed their willingness to fight for Latvia (Bērziņa & Zupa, 2021). This theoretical approach provides evidence supporting the heterogeneity of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia and can be easily replicated. The willingness to fight for a country, though, represents an extreme scenario of potential war and hardly can be used to assess political views.

Existing data about Russian speakers in Latvia does not provide clarification for numerous political opinions that presumably exist among the group. Vihalemm et al. (2019) identify four fundamental patterns of identity development among Russian speakers. The first is an ethnocultural identity that refers mainly to commonly shared attributes such as language and religion. The second is an emerging civic identity with ethnolinguistic and territorial/local identity elements. The other two are connected to values and beliefs: a diaspora identity,

combining 'Soviet nostalgia' with positive sentiments about 'Russian imperial attitudes; a cosmopolitan identity formed from a European or global perspective. This division in identity development indicates that Russian speaking population is not homogenous and instead presents a heterogenic entity with multiple opinions that often can be contradictory, such as conflicting identities based on either 'Soviet nostalgia' or 'European perspective' (Vihalemm et al., 2019). Understanding the heterogeneity of the ethnic minority is vital for appropriate analysis of its political views and attitudes toward foreign and domestic policies. This thesis aims to study varying opinions within the ethnic group and explore its heterogeneity.

### ***Political and economic consequences of sanctions and public opinion on sanctioning policies***

Research on how sanctions are effective against targeted states usually looks at state-level data, and data on individual-level reactions are minimal (Sejersen, 2020). State-level data implies that mainly processes happening on the governmental level are examined, for example, how sanctions influence democratisation in authoritarian states or economic ramifications on the national level (Brooks, 2002; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014).

Sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 following its annexation of Crimea are believed to have had a 'detrimental' effect on Russia's economic performance (Korhonen, 2019). Economic sanctions mainly resulted in a 'worsening investment climate that was never particularly good' (Portansky, 2014). The Russian economy was also affected by the dramatic drop in oil prices, with a price swing from 100 US dollars per barrel in 2014 to 30 US dollars per barrel in 2016. (Pestova & Mamonov, 2019; Korhonen, 2019; Smeets, 2018). In response to the sanctions imposed against Russia by most Western countries, including the European Union and the USA, Russia also introduced its countersanctions. The most noticeable measure introduced

with the Russian countersanction was a ban on importing food products from the West. According to Volchkova et al. (2018), this decision of the Russian government had mixed effects. On the one hand, Russian food producers had very little competition, and local suppliers could obtain larger market shares. However, Russian countersanctions led to increased commodities prices in the domestic market and declined consumption of goods (Volchkova et al., 2018).

In contrast, Kholodilin and Netšunajev (2018) suggest that no strong data support the significant effect of the sanctions imposed against Russia in 2014 on the Russian economy. They believe that while sanctions targeting the Russian economy are unlikely to be an efficient instrument for political pressure on Russia, lifting these sanctions has the potential to 'de-escalate tensions in the political sphere' (Kholodilin & Netšunajev, 2018).

Sanctioning mechanisms are mainly studied on the national level, focusing on political regimes and macroeconomic factors (Brooks, 2002; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014). Minimal research has been done on the perception of sanctions among the general population of targeted states and those who impose sanctions. Usually, the matter of personal reaction towards sanctions is addressed by sociological reports, for example, the Levada-center (Levada, 2018) that currently studies opinions of Russian citizens towards sanctions and countersanctions. Several studies observing reactions among the general population to sanctions have noticed the appearance of the rally-around-the-flag effect (Sejersen, 2020; Verdier & Woo, 2011). This effect is observed in the targeted states where the population begins to support their leader and government instead of trying to overthrow it, as could be expected due to economic recession caused by foreign restrictions on the national economy.

There is a clear gap in the academic literature regarding the reaction of ethnic minorities representing the targeted country but living outside of it. In the case of sanctions against Russia, no information is available on how Russian ethnic minorities residing in the European Union, one of the main initiators of the sanctions, perceive sanctions imposed by countries in which they reside.

### **Theoretical framework**

This thesis will use the social identity theory to predict the political opinions of Russian speakers in Latvia. Huddy (2001) points out that the social identity theory applies to studying intergroup conflicts, conditions under which a group status can lead to collective action, compliance to group norms, and the factors leading to affiliation with a particular group. Social identity theory can explain political partisanship (Huddy & Bankert, 2017), which in the studied case of the Latvian Russian ethnic minority translates into support of Russian or European political values. To answer the research question of how ethnicity influences the political views of an ethnic minority, it is important not to study the ethnic group as one solid body but to consider different opinions existing within the community.

Henri Tajfel and John Turner first proposed social identity theory as a part of social psychology (Tajfel, 1974; Turner et al., 1979). Social identity theory originates from social psychology and predicts that particular behaviour of individuals depends on their perceived participation in a social group. Social groups are often based on nationalities, sexual orientation, ethnicities, gender, sports preferences, and religious or political views. Social identity theory looks at intergroup relationships and how members of their group (the in-group) perceive themselves against the other group (the out-group) (Turner et al., 1979; Stets & Burke, 2000). The theory

involves studying how social identities can influence people's attitudes depending on their in-groups and categorisation (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Leaper, 2011).

Social identity theory went beyond social psychology and became a valuable tool for research in political science. Theoretical mechanism based on social identity principles has been used to study collective identity inherent to active social movements (Davis et al., 2019), public opinions towards immigration (Mangum & Block, 2018), and anti-migrant movements (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015). Curley (2009) uses the social identity theory to study policies supporting or rejecting the European Union's expansion (EU). He examines to what extent the European identity of Britain, France, and Germany influenced their position towards membership of Turkey in the EU. In addition, another phenomenon that has been studied through the lens of social identity theory is partisanship and its influence on political behaviour (Bankert et al., 2016; Huddy et al., 2015; Huddy & Bankert, 2017; West & Iyengar, 2020).

According to Huddy and Bankert (2017), social identity theory explains the potential dynamics of partisan identity strength. They compare it to sports games, where weakly identified team supporters are likelier to attend their games only when the team succeeds. However, the strong identified supporters will attend a game even if a team has low chances of winning to motivate the team they support and increase the likelihood of its victory. Consequently, Huddy and Bankert argue that active partisans personally view failures or successes and stimulate further political action.

In this research, the concept of social identity is viewed as the self-identification of oneself based on assumed membership in a social group likely to influence their views and behaviour. This study will focus on people belonging to supporters of pro-European sentiments and, in

contrast, those who prefer closer affiliation with Russia. The first, 'pro- Russian' group, is conceptualised as a group of people who favour the Russian governmental agenda, prioritising a deeper connection with Russia over further European integration. The conceptualisation of the second 'pro-European' group implies that a group favours European integration and the European Union's political actions.

The division between 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' groups is associated with how members of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia would react to sanctions against Russia, for example, the ban on Russian media broadcasting. This projected distinction and the in-group / out-group approach within the social identity theory lead to the first hypothesis of this study. Russian media broadcasting is conceptualised as TV channels originating from Russia but broadcasted to other countries, particularly Latvia, available through public broadcasting services or as a part of basic TV packages. As of this writing (May 2022), Latvia's number of sanctioned TV channels exceeded 20, including the most popular channels such as Rossiya 24 (Russia 24), TNT, and NTV 24.

The conceptualisation of all variables addressed in the study is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. The conceptualisation of the relevant variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Conceptualisation</b>
<b>Russian ethnic minority</b>	People who moved from Russia or their descendants to other countries and considered themselves Russians, regardless of their citizenship
<b>Russian ethnic minority of Latvia</b>	People residing in Latvia with citizen or non-citizen status, who consider themselves Russians. They or their relatives relocated to Latvia from Russia during the USSR
<b>Sanctions against Russia</b>	Economic sanctions against Russia imposed by the European Union in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. The sanctions concern Russian TV broadcasting, financial sector, energy sectors, state-owned enterprises, trading operations and multiple related spheres
<b>Pro-Russian social group</b>	People who favour the Russian governmental agenda, prioritising a deeper connection with Russia over further European integration
<b>Pro-European social group</b>	People who favour European integration and the European Union's political actions
<b>Attitudes towards sanctions against Russia</b>	Reaction to statements about sanctions against Russia

Social identity theory predicts that people will support their 'in-group' while distinguishing themselves from an 'out-group' (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the case of the Russian ethnic minority, it would mean that people who are socially affiliated with either 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian' group would express opinions supporting the 'in-group'. In contrast, they would have negative views towards the 'out-group'.

*H1. Participants supporting the pro-Russian group are likely to be critical of favourable statements of the pro-European group and vice versa.*

Hypotheses 2 and 3 predict how affiliation with either 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian' groups will influence attitudes to sanctions against Russian media broadcasting. The hypotheses are focused on Russian media broadcasting since it is one element of anti-Russian sanctions, which is very close to the Russian ethnic minority residing in Latvia. Members of the minority may have less prior understanding of other sanctions against Russia, for example, restrictions on high-technology imports to Russia.

*H2. Members of the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia identifying themselves as pro-European are more likely to support sanctions against Russian media broadcasting in the region.*

*H3. Members of the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia identifying themselves as pro-Russian are more likely to oppose sanctions against Russian media broadcasting in the region.*

## **Methodology**

### ***Case selection***

The case of a Russian ethnic minority residing in Latvia is examined to answer the research question. While Latvian officials have been actively supporting and calling for intensifying sanctions against Russia (LETA, 2022), Latvia has the largest Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic States and the EU. In 2018 people belonging to the Russian ethnic group accounted for 25.2% of the population of Latvia. In 1989 before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people of Russian ethnicity represented 32.8% of the Latvian population (PMLP.gov.lv, 2022). Since then, the Russian population in Latvia has been decreasing. Numerous Russian speakers migrate from Latvia to other European countries for either economic reasons or the perception of being discriminated against on linguistic grounds (Woolfson, 2009; Hughes, 2005).



Apart from having a controversial citizenship law, ethnical tensions between Latvians and Russians were fueled by educational reforms in the early 2000s. Back then, 24% of schools in Latvia were Russian, with the national curriculum entirely taught in Russian. In 2006 all Russian schools were introduced a bilingual system implying that starting from the secondary level of education, all courses should be taught at least 60% in Latvian (Lindemann, 2011). Further actions to limit the use of the Russian language in schools were taken in 2017 when Latvian president Raimonds Vējonis signed a law forcing all Russian schools, as well as schools for other ethnic minorities, to switch to solely teaching in the Latvian language gradually. Both in 2017 and 2006, these actions provoked protests in Riga, where Russian speakers represent 50% of the population, and in cities closer to the Russian border, with 80% of the local population using Russian as their first language (Euronews, 2018). These political actions also have been used by Russia to criticise the Latvian government.

According to the Latvian government, during the active vaccination phase against Covid-19 Russian speakers were more reluctant to get a vaccine (eurotopics.net, 2021). A lack of information about the vaccination in the Russian language is believed to be a reason for that. However, the Latvian government did not approve of producing informative materials in Russian since it could breach the national language policy that restricts the dissemination of official materials in foreign languages, including Russian, without a particular demand (LSM.lv, 2022).

On February 24th, 2022, when Russia began a military invasion of Ukraine, Latvia was one of the first countries to take immediate measures against Russia. Latvia suspended the retranslation of television broadcasting originated from Russia due to its 'blatantly biased Russian government propaganda' (Latvian Public Broadcasting, 2022). This reaction is not new

to the Latvian government. The same policies were used previously in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea. However, the restrictions were cancelled three months later (Latvian Public Broadcasting, 2014). The consumption of Russian media in Latvia is very active, with Russian channels being in the top 10 most viewed TV channels (Berzina, 2018). Russian speakers of Latvia are considerably affected by this decision. However, Russian speakers express different views towards actions against the Russian government and their reaction to this decision is not easily predicted (Vihalemm et al., 2019). Through the lens of social identity theory, which indicates that individuals with a more substantial 'in-group' feeling are more likely to protect their group, this study examines how self-affiliating with a particular group can influence political opinions, in particular, the reaction of the Russian ethnic minority towards anti-Russian sanctions (Tajfel, 1974; Turner et al., 1979). To illustrate the anti-Russian sanctions, this thesis uses the ban on Russian media broadcasting introduced by the Latvian government.

The question of attitudes expressed by the Russian-speaking population in Latvia is relevant for several reasons. First, Russian speakers form a significant share of the Latvian people, and many strongly align with narratives diffused by the Russian government (Vihalemm & Juzefovičs, 2020). Consequently, most of the Russian-speaking population enjoy voting rights, and their attitudes towards Russia-oriented policies can play an essential role in their electoral preferences. In a situation where a large population possesses cultural and linguistic connections with Russia, the state government should consider the opinions of those people when adopting restricting policies against Russia.

A choice of a single case study instead of a cross-case comparison allows to examine the country of interest in more depth and invest existing resources in forming a more representative sample within the selected case. Although a single case study does not generalise its results to

other cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Toshkov, 2016), the theoretical framework and methodology used in this research can be applied to other countries. For example, to Estonia and Lithuania because they have a very similar ethnic composition to Latvia.

Since the concept of political views is too broad and challenging to operationalise, the study focuses on the attitudes to a particular political event - sanctions against Russia. Although participants are asked about overall anti-Russian sanctions, the survey also contains questions about the prohibition of Russian TV broadcasting in Latvia. Latvian citizens can experience the results of this decision by the Latvian government as they will not be able to watch Russian TV channels that are popular in Latvia (Berzina, 2018).

### ***Method of data collection***

This thesis uses a questionnaire to collect data for further analysis. Questionnaires have several advantages that make this method appropriate for studying the attitudes of the Russian-speaking population to sanctions against Russia, particularly restrictions against Russian media broadcasting (Gillham, 2008). First of all, using a structured questionnaire is less time-consuming whilst it gives a possibility to reach out to more respondents. The questionnaire can be easily distributed among potential participants, creating a snowball effect (Noy, 2008).

Another advantage of a questionnaire is its anonymity. Sometimes people are reluctant to talk about their political views and may feel more comfortable expressing their position if their identities are not revealed. However, multiple participations can occur since participants do not need to confirm their details. Only one participation from one IP address is allowed to avoid this potential issue.

In addition, questionnaires help avoid interviewer bias, where the unconscious reaction of the interviewer may lead to confusion or increased tension among participants. Biases that occur due to the personal qualities of the interviewer can be crucial for the results of a study, reducing its validity and reliability (Salazar, 1990).

However, this data collection method has certain limitations (Brigham, 1975; Gillham, 2008). Respondents can interpret some questions differently, and the responses will not be accurate. Questions should be cautiously formulated to make them simple and understandable to the general public. Unlike in interviews, when filling in a questionnaire, participants cannot provide additional information to clarify their answers, and a researcher is unable to continue with follow-up questions based on received responses. To tackle these limitations, contact details where participants could send their questions were provided with the link for the questionnaire.

The core hypotheses of this thesis are focused on political views associated with an affiliation with a particular social group and their attitudes to sanctions placed on Russia.

According to the social identity theory, people who have a stronger connection with a specific group are more likely to exhibit particular behaviour aimed at protecting or supporting the group they are aligned with (Turner et al., 1979; Stets & Burke, 2000). The questions of the study are designed to examine relations between two variables: political views and affiliation with a particular group, which is an independent variable; attitudes to sanctions imposed on Russia, representing the study's dependent variable.

The data is collected through the Survey Monkey platform since it is affordable for academic use, restricts participation from one IP address, and has multiple tools for data analysis. The questionnaire includes three sections focused on the concepts included in the hypotheses.

### ***Independent variables***

The statistical significance of the collected data will be evaluated through the SPSS Statistics software. In sections two and three, participants need to choose an answer to a question or a statement (Strongly agree; Agree; I am struggling to say; Disagree; Strongly Disagree). Each answer is given a value (1-2-3-4-5), and each response is included in the final dataset. Answers from sections two and three will form three indices, representing affiliation with 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' groups and attitude towards sanctions imposed on Russia.

Two sets of questions will investigate the participants' views on the self-identification, political actions, and foreign policies of Russia and the EU and their connection to Latvia. Questions used in previous research on European identity were viewed as a starting point for developing a questionnaire for this study. Previous studies included questions such as 'Do you ever think of yourself as a citizen of Europe?', 'How attached do you feel to Europe?', 'Would you say you are proud to be European?' (Johns, 2008; Mendez & Bachtler, 2018).

To test the affiliation with pro-Russian views, the same questions used in the 'pro-European' part will be used, but with paraphrased wording. The question 'People have more equal opportunities in Europe' is presented as 'People have more equal opportunities in Russia' for the 'pro-Russian' part (Luhmann, 2017).

### ***Dependent variables***

The third section measures the dependent variable related to the anti-Russian sanctions, Russian media and restrictions on its broadcasting. Previous sociological surveys on attitudes

towards sanctions included questions such as 'Are you concerned about Russia's international isolation as a result of the position that Russian authorities have taken regarding Ukraine?' and 'Are you concerned by the political and economic sanctions that Western countries have imposed against Russia?' (Levada, 2018). These questions serve as an inspiration for the statements that participants need to reflect on. The third section includes statements such as 'I support 'Latvia's decision to ban Russian TV broadcasting' and 'Ban of Russian TV broadcasting in Latvia makes it harder for Russia to disseminate its political agenda abroad'.

### ***Sampling***

Participants for this study are selected through non-probability sampling techniques, mainly snowball sampling and convenience sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). A link to the questionnaire was posted in Latvian Facebook groups where members predominantly speak the Russian language. Participants of the study were also asked to spread the questionnaire among family members, friends, and acquaintances.

These methods are associated with certain downsides (Barakso et al., 2013; Taherdoost, 2016). Respondents approached through convenience sampling may have a lower representation of the general population. For example, everyone who came through Facebook may prefer social media as a source of information over television. For that reason, snowball sampling will also be used to approach those who are not as present online.

Another issue that might increase selection bias is that participants who decided to answer the questionnaire may have a more active position. Thus they are more willing to share their views. A neutral cover letter mitigating potential concerns should be added to the questionnaire so people of all political views and preferences would choose to participate.

### Analysis

The sample for this study consisted of 160 participants who provided their responses to the questionnaire, covering general background information, political opinions on the European Union and Russia, and attitudes towards sanctions imposed against Russia. The independent and dependent variables represented average values of reactions to sets of 5 statements related to each variable. For instance, five statements presented in Table 2 concerning the European Union have options varying from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), representing pro-European attitudes of the participants, with an average grade for each participation.

Table 2. *Reaction to statements favourable to the European Union*

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
I am proud to be a European citizen	42.11% 72	30.41% 52	16.37% 28	7.02% 12	4.09% 7	171
The European Union upholds human rights more than other regions or countries.	28.24% 48	38.82% 66	10.59% 18	12.35% 21	10.00% 17	170
It is important that Latvia keeps its focus on European integration.	47.95% 82	21.64% 37	8.19% 14	12.28% 21	9.94% 17	171
People have more equal opportunities in Europe than elsewhere.	22.81% 39	38.01% 65	18.71% 32	13.45% 23	7.02% 12	171
European Union has chosen the right strategy in response to the Ukrainian crisis.	23.53% 40	24.71% 42	11.18% 19	23.53% 40	17.06% 29	170

Reaction to statements related to attitudes towards Russia illustrated in Table 3 measured the pro-Russian attitudes of the participants.

Table 3. *Reactions to statements favourable to Russia*

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
I am proud to have cultural and historical ties with Russia	35.29% 60	24.12% 41	17.65% 30	16.47% 28	6.47% 11	170
Russia upholds human rights more than other regions or countries.	5.23% 9	14.53% 25	15.12% 26	18.60% 32	46.51% 80	172
People have more equal opportunities in Russia than elsewhere.	5.88% 10	9.41% 16	20.59% 35	22.94% 39	41.18% 70	170
Latvia was not supposed to join the European Union, but rather to strengthen relations with Russia	12.87% 22	18.13% 31	12.28% 21	15.20% 26	41.52% 71	171
I support Russia's decisions in foreign policy	11.76% 20	10.00% 17	11.76% 20	14.12% 24	52.35% 89	170

Consequently, Table 4 shows five statements related to the anti-Russian sanctions, which provided showed an average value for the attitude towards sanctions.

Table 4. *Reactions to statements about sanctions against Russia*

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
I support sanctions imposed by the EU and Latvia against Russia.	29.81% 48	19.25% 31	7.45% 12	16.15% 26	27.33% 44	161
I believe that the news broadcast by Russian TV channels cannot be trusted.	46.30% 75	21.60% 35	9.88% 16	11.11% 18	11.11% 18	162
I support Latvia's ban on broadcasting Russian TV channels	25.93% 42	14.81% 24	6.79% 11	17.28% 28	35.19% 57	162
The ban on the broadcasting of Russian TV channels will make it difficult to spread the political agenda of Russia in Latvia	25.47% 41	34.78% 56	14.29% 23	12.42% 20	13.04% 21	161
Residents of Latvia will not suffer from the ban of broadcasting of Russian TV channels	30.86% 50	20.37% 33	14.20% 23	18.52% 30	16.05% 26	162

The data collected through the survey is used to answer the research on how ethnicity influences political views. Since the research looks at this matter with the social identity approach, two social groups, pro-Russian and pro-European, within the Russian ethnic



minority are compared. It is crucial to gather evidence on how people categorise themselves in terms of pro-Russian and pro-European orientation and how it reflects their views. The relationship between positive or negative attitudes towards anti-Russian sanctions and pro-Russian or pro-European affiliation should be evaluated to test the stated hypotheses. This relationship is assessed with the use of correlation analysis. The correlation analysis allows seeing which variables have the strongest relationship (Cogtay & Thatte, 2017) with attitudes about sanctions against Russia. Reasons behind strong associations found through the correlation analysis can be examined in further research. The correlation analysis of all variables is presented in Table 5.

The study findings show curious insights about the Russian ethnic minority of Latvia, which were not that evident prior to the survey. Most participants (74%) indicated Russian as the primary language in which they receive information (Table 6). However, the indication of their nationality had less extreme results. 50% of the participants would name their nationality Russian, and 27% would say they have Latvian nationality (Table 7). For instance, only 8.5% of the participants said they primarily receive Latvian information. It can be speculated that people have different approaches to their nationality. In contrast, for some, nationality is associated with their cultural ties and language use, whereas for others, nationality is mainly based on their citizenship. Self-identity of the Russian ethnic minorities in Latvia is a complex subject, and several researchers have attempted to find a holistic definition for the group (Cheskin, 2010, 2012, 2014; Hughes, 2005; Stasulane, 2021; Karklins, 1998).

**Table 5.** Correlation analysis of data on political views and attitudes towards sanctions restricting Russian media broadcasting

		Attitudes towards sanctions	Pro-Russian Attitudes	Pro-European Attitudes	Age	Education	Languages known	Source of information	Language of information	Self-categor.
Pro-Russian Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	-.831**								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000								
Pro-European Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.804**	-.761**							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000							
Age	Pearson Correlation	0,015	-0,082	0,050						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,854	0,305	0,532						
Education	Pearson Correlation	-0,066	0,066	-0,009	.209**					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,412	0,409	0,909	0,008					
Languages known	Pearson Correlation	-0,022	0,051	-0,065	-.386**	.237**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,778	0,518	0,416	0,000	0,003				
Source of information	Pearson Correlation	.163*	-.198*	.203**	.236**	-0,031	0,004			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,040	0,012	0,010	0,003	0,698	0,959			
Language of information	Pearson Correlation	0,041	-0,090	0,117	0,031	-0,042	0,003	0,123		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,611	0,257	0,141	0,696	0,602	0,971	0,121		
Self-categorization	Pearson Correlation	0,092	-0,090	0,114	0,089	0,018	0,055	-0,030	0,033	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,247	0,256	0,152	0,263	0,824	0,493	0,705	0,676	
Favorite TV programmes	Pearson Correlation	.344**	-.361**	.330**	.277**	-0,073	-0,121	.319**	0,072	-0,011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,360	0,129	0,000	0,368	0,885

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6. *Answers to the question about the primary language in which the participants receive information*

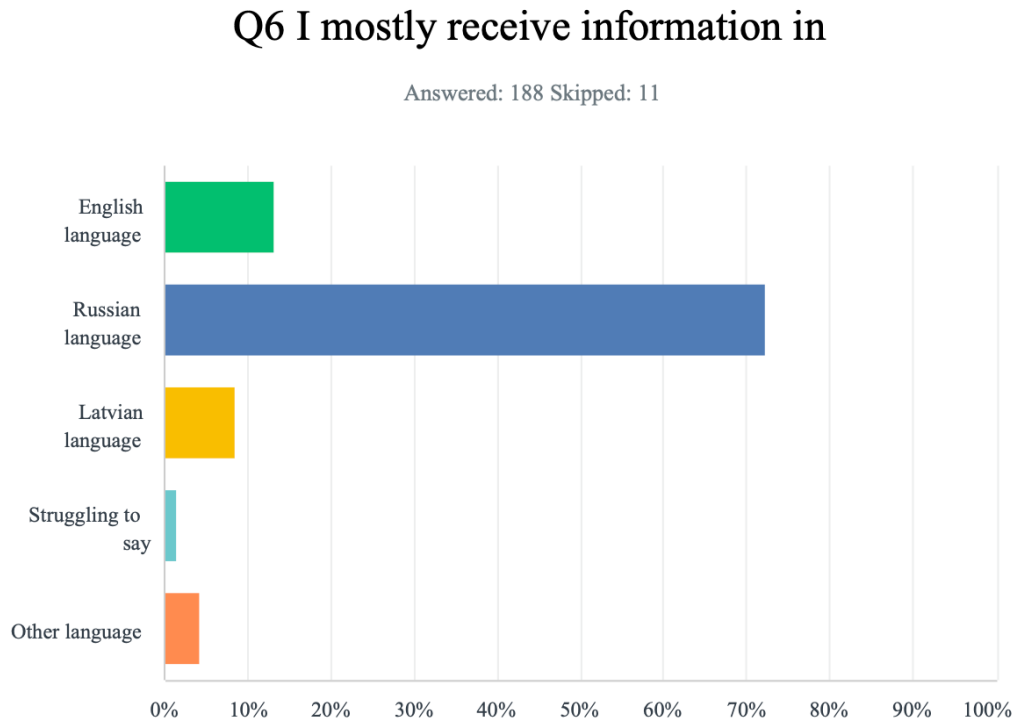
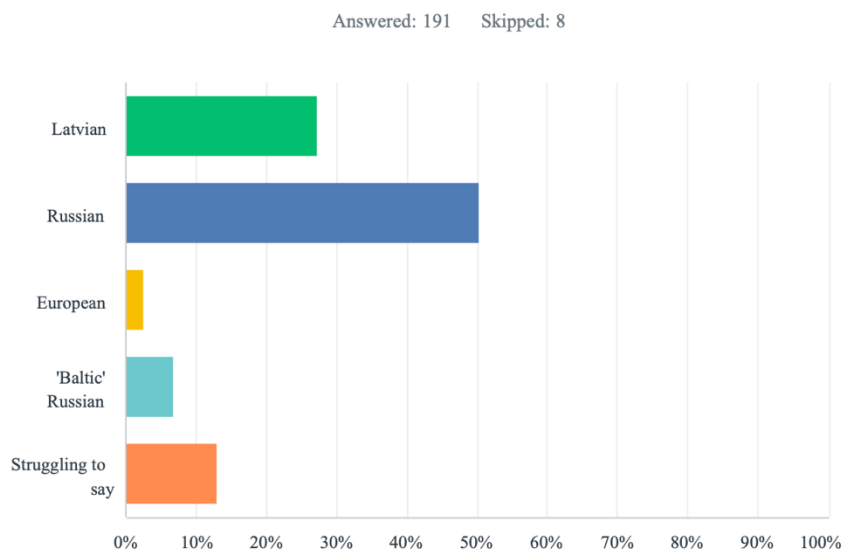


Table 7. *Answers to the question about the nationality of the participants*

**Q4 When people ask me what nationality I belong to, I will first of all say:**



According to the results, people have opposing views towards the EU, Russia, and sanctions against Russia. The existing dichotomy shows that belonging to an ethnic minority does not necessarily define a person's political views. Being categorised as a member of the Russian ethnic minority presumably has less influence than belonging to a social group with pro-Russian or pro-European attitudes. As the social identity theory predicted, self-identification will likely play a more critical role in forming opinions.

Curiously, more participants chose 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' to statements favourable to the EU (Table 3), even though they identify their nationality as Russian (Table 6) and Russian is their primary language for receiving information (Table 7). The research does not give insights into why adhere to a particular social group. It may be speculated that factors such as willingness to participate in an educational survey, or using social media, where the survey was primarily distributed, have a crucial role in attitudes towards Russia and the EU. However, the study does not provide data that would deny or support these assumptions.

The results provided empirical data to test the hypotheses. According to the social identity theory, the first hypothesis suggested that participants are likely to be highly supportive of the 'in-group' with which they feel affiliated. They would also express negative opinions on the opposite 'out-group' (Turner et al., 1979; Stets & Burke, 2000). In this thesis, affiliation with a social group should mean supporting statements favourable to Russia or Latvia. This connection was tested by comparing pro-Russian and pro-European attitudes. There is a significant negative correlation between opinions on the European Union and Russia, which provides evidence for H1. People support their 'in-group' and express a negative attitude towards the 'out-group'.

*H1. Participants supporting the pro-Russian group are likely to be critical of favourable statements of the pro-European group and vice versa.*

The second and third hypotheses studied how affiliation with one of the groups would influence attitudes of the Russian ethnic minority towards the restriction of Russian media broadcasting in Latvia. The collected evidence supports both hypotheses. There is a significant positive correlation between belonging to a social group with pro-European attitudes and being supportive of the sanction against Russia.

*H2. Russian ethnic minority of Latvia identifying themselves as pro-European are more likely to support sanctions against Russian media broadcasting in the region.*

A significant negative correlation between belonging to a social group with pro-Russian attitudes and not being supportive of sanctions has been found.

*H3. Russian ethnic minority of Latvia identifying themselves as pro-Russian are more likely to oppose sanctions against Russian media broadcasting in the region.*

The survey also collects data for categorical variables with questions where people should select one answer among offered options (Iacobucci, 2012). The first set of questions includes information about age, education, and command of foreign languages. These questions aim to collect more background data about the participants and measure control variables for the hypotheses. Testing the correlation between the level of education, age, or other parameters and attitudes toward policies against Russia may reveal whether other factors are accountable for the findings. Age may determine the opinions of Russian speakers towards anti-Russian

sanctions as people who lived in the period of Soviet occupation and younger generations raised in the European Union might have different views on Russia. The level of education may affect how well people are familiar with the history of ongoing political events. In addition, the questionnaire includes questions on how many languages a participant knows well enough to consume information in these languages; what they would consider as their primary source of information; which language they use most frequently to receive information; favourite TV programs. These parameters may reveal differences in the information consumed, leading to different attitudes towards the ban of Russian media broadcasting. Finally, one of the control variables is the national identity of people. Participants categorise themselves as Latvians, Russians, or Europeans. Although all participants are members of the Russian ethnic minority, they may be reluctant to call themselves 'Russians' as long as they hold Latvian passports. This self-categorization may influence views on anti-Russian sanctions.

Among seven control variables, only the primary source of information and the choice of favourite TV programs significantly correlated with the dependent variables. However, the correlation coefficients are within low coefficient intervals. Although variables such as age, education, and self-categorization as Latvians, Russians, or Europeans were expected to be correlated with views on sanctions against Russia, these expectations were not proved by the findings.

Overall, the findings support the social identity theory showing that out-group and in-group categorisation is essential for defining opinions and attitudes (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Leaper, 2011). The theory has not previously been applied to studying ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, it has been widely used for other political matters. For instance, Huddy and Bankert (2017), through the lens of the social identity theory, look at how political partisanship is related to

political engagement and the intense emotions involved in the process. They found that more vigorous political partisanship is associated with an increased emotional response towards parties. These results can be studied along with the findings of the sentiments of the Russian ethnic minority. The high correlation between pro-European or pro-Russian affiliation and attitudes towards sanctions suggests that the stronger people felt their connection with a particular group, the more confident were their attitudes towards sanctions targeting Russia.

### **Conclusion**

In most cases, Russian ethnic minorities residing outside Russia became citizens of their new countries of residence. They have voting rights in their countries of residence, and their political opinion influences the national political climate. In countries such as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, the national governments have imposed sanctions against Russia. It is unclear how local Russian ethnic minorities would react to these measures. To what extent ethnicity of people would influence their political attitudes? This study looks into how the Russian ethnic minority reacted to the sanctions against Russia imposed by Latvia following the European guidelines. Russian speakers of Latvia form the largest Russian ethnic minority within the European Union. For that reason, the case of Latvia was selected for the research.

The Russian ethnic minority is studied through the lens of the social identity theory. Previous studies view the Russian ethnic minority as a homogenous unity where people share the same identity and political views (Cheskin, 2014; Hughes, 2005; Stasulane, 2021; Karklins, 1998). The findings of this study suggest that there are multiple opinions amongst Russian ethnic minorities. Some express pro-Russian sentiments and others favour pro-European views. As predicted by the theory (Tajfel, 1974; Turner et al., 1979), affiliation with a pro-European or

pro-Russian group resulted in a more negative or positive reaction to the sanctions against Russia.

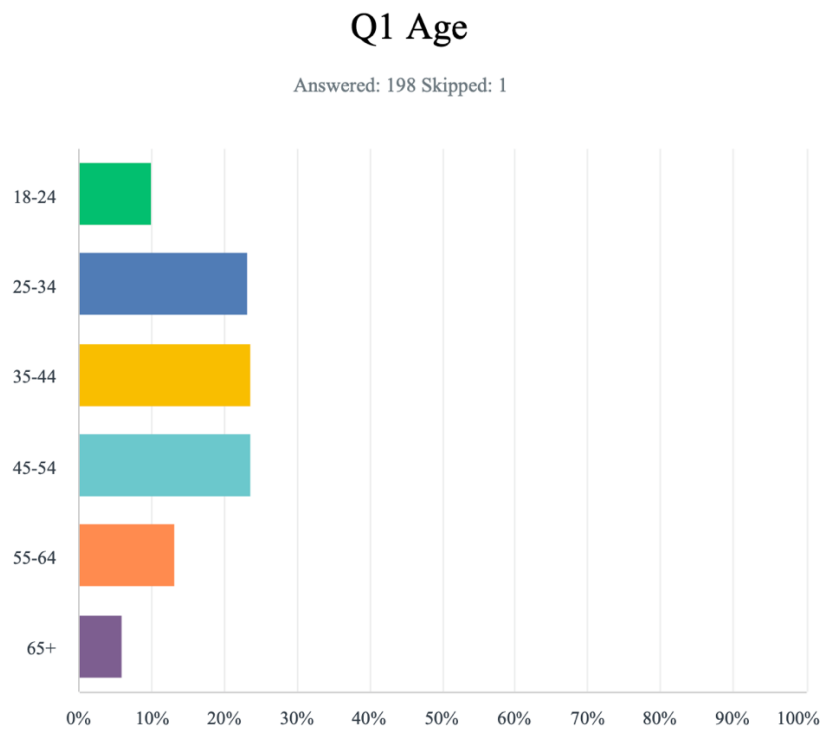
Regarding the research question, the study concludes that the fact of belonging to an ethnic minority does not have the primary role in defining political opinions. Ethnicity has limited influence on political views since people of Russian ethnicity express two different sets of opinions regardless of having the same ethnic background. Thus, an ethnic minority should not be treated as a homogenous group and should be studied as a heterogeneous entity.

### ***Constraints and Recommendations***

The research conducted for this thesis has several limitations that should be considered for further replications of the methodological framework or when generalising the results for other cases. First, this research only looks into the case of Latvia; thus, it has low external validity. Nevertheless, the selection of the single case allowed studying the Latvian example in depth.

Second, the sampling techniques used in the research is accessing different age groups could reduce the representation of certain groups. 70.71% of participants represent the 25-54 age group, whereas only 19.19% of participants were aged 55-65+. The questionnaire was mainly disseminated on social media. Those who do not use social media or messengers could not find out about the study and thus are not represented in the findings (Barakso et al., 2013; Taherdoost, 2016). Further research should include alternative ways of reaching out to potential participants to increase the sampling representativeness. Nevertheless, the present study shows diverse age group representation, as seen in Table 8.



Table 8. *Age groups of the participants*

Third, the study's findings show the correlation between political views and attitudes towards sanctions against Russia without giving an insight into why people initially choose either pro-European or pro-Russian social groups. Although the study shows this political partisanship (Huddy & Bankert, 2017), it does not provide background context. The lack of statistical significance between the control variables, such as age, education, and others, shows that these factors are barely connected with affiliation with either group. A question of what determines the choice of a group could be answered through other forms of data collection, for example, interviews, where people would be able to elaborate on their opinions. However, the main aim of this research was to trace the existing relationship between variables, and that aim has been achieved.

### ***Implications of the research***

First, this study develops the idea of how heterogenic an ethnic minority can be. Like any other community, it has several social groups that may have very different or even opposite views.

Further academic research can compare these groups or study them independently. In the case of Latvia, reasons that motivate people to adhere to either pro-European or pro-Russian groups are to be explored.

This thesis also contributes to academic research on ethnic minorities by evaluating relations between ethnic minorities and their 'parental' state. In the questionnaire used in this study, members of the Russian ethnic minority shared their views on sanctions against Russia and overall opinions about Russian political actions. Similar methodological approaches can be used to assess the opinions of minorities representing other ethnicities.

In addition, the study contributes to the development of the social identity theory. The theory has been applied to study European identities (Curley, 2009), political partisanship (Huddy & Bankert, 2017), and anti-immigrant movements (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015). However, this thesis proposes a new dimension for the theory by applying it to ethnic minorities, who have the same rights as the titular nation within the country and are not migrants.

The research findings can have political implications for enriching dialogue between the Latvian government and members of the Russian-speaking population. The Latvian government sees the Russian community as a homogenous entity focusing on its linguistic features rather than political views. Erroneous treatment of the ethnic minority may result in wrong strategies for approaching both 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' groups. An example of that could be seen in the Covid-19 (LSM.lv, 2021) vaccine case, where Russian speakers had lower vaccination rates than the Latvian population. Most local pundits associated it with the lack of information about vaccines available in the Russian language. However, it could be the case that those Russian speakers who refused to get vaccinated had pro-Russian views and

instead wanted Sputnik, the vaccine produced in Russia, rather than vaccines recognised by the European Union. In this case, the Latvian authorities could have targeted a specific social group within the community instead of focusing on the Russian ethnic minority as a whole.

Finally, the findings of this study may imply changes in communication with Russian speaking population of Latvia in light of its electoral decisions. Results of the study show how different attitudes could be towards restricting measures against Russia. Some Russian-speaking voters may base their voting preferences on how politicians reacted to sanctions or Russian foreign policies. The thesis shows how different social groups can be within one ethnic community; hence, specific approaches must be adopted for every social group.

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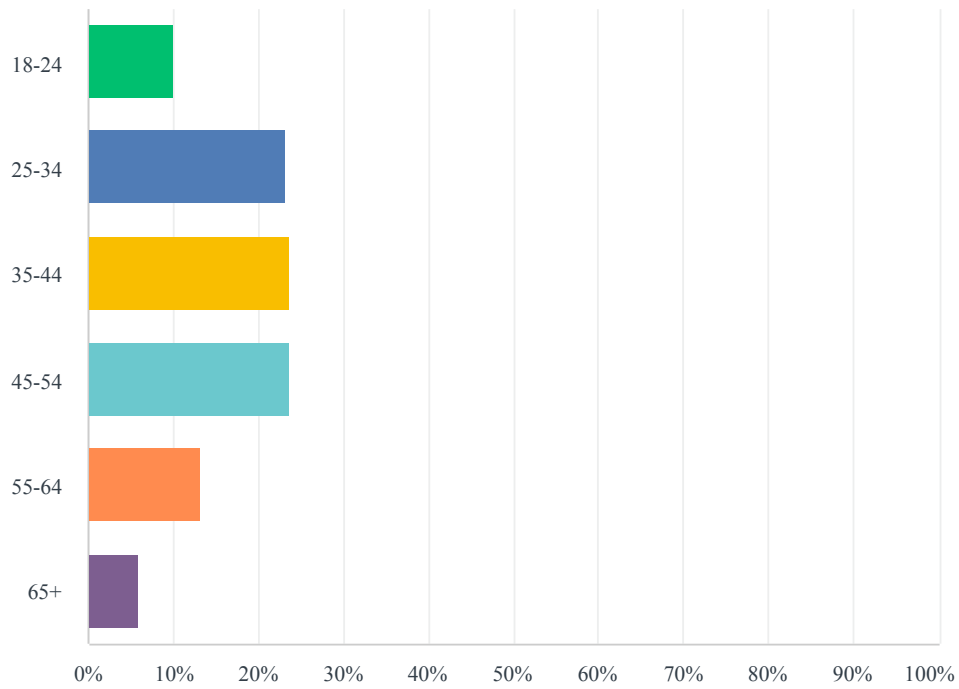
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**Appendix**

**Full results of the questionnaire**

**Q1 Age**

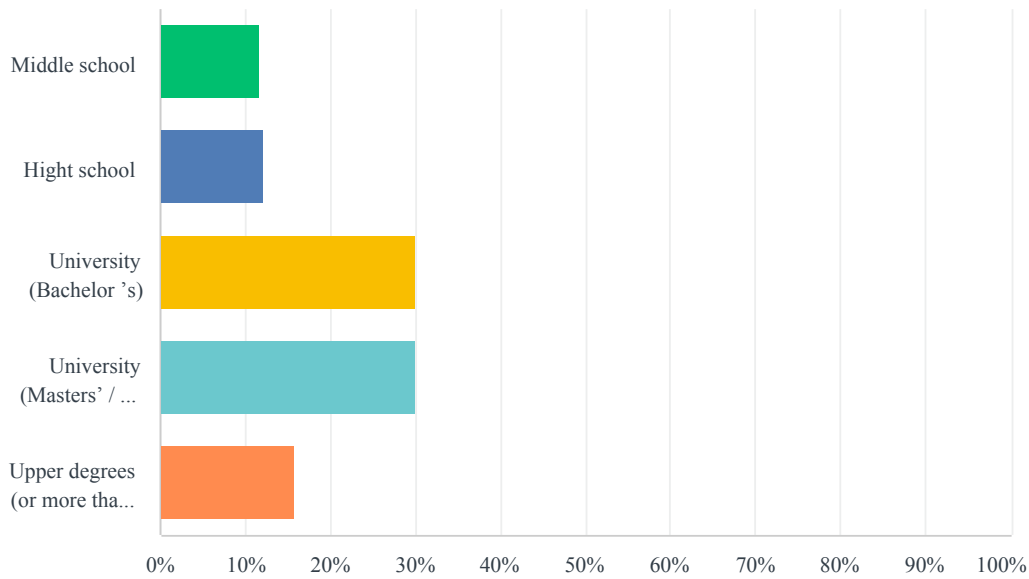
Answered: 198 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-24	10.10%	20
25-34	23.23%	46
35-44	23.74%	47
45-54	23.74%	47
55-64	13.13%	26
65+	6.06%	12
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>198</b>

## Q2 Level of your education

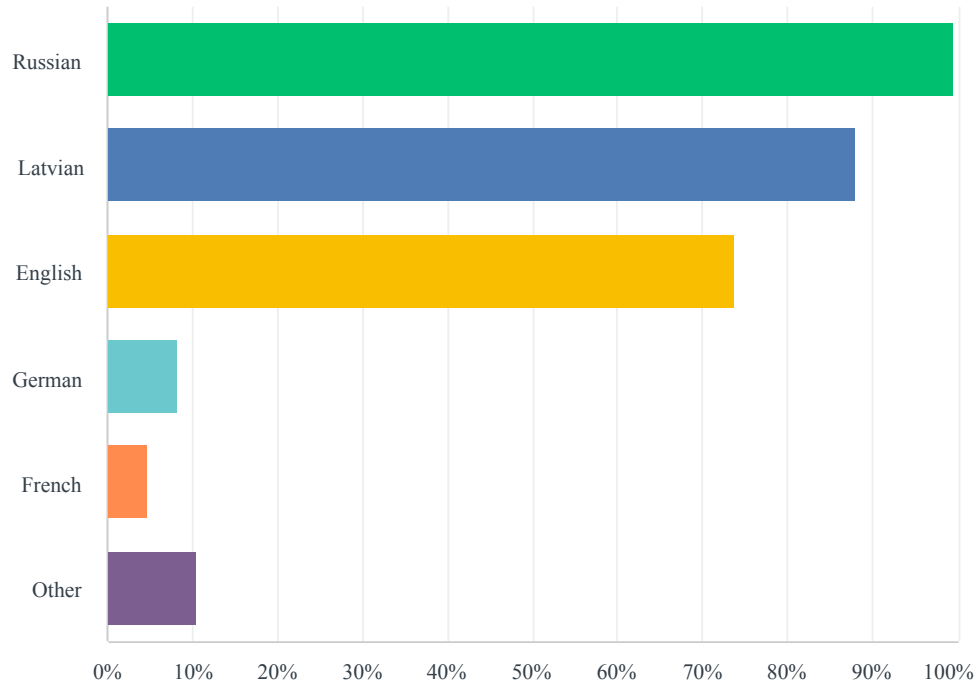
Answered: 196 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Middle school	11.73%	23
High school	12.24%	24
University (Bachelor's)	30.10%	59
University (Masters' / 5+ years – Specialist degree)	30.10%	59
Upper degrees (or more than one degree)	15.82%	31
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>196</b>

### Q3 What languages do you speak well enough to understand the news in those languages? (The selected answers do not necessarily mean that you regularly follow the news in these languages)

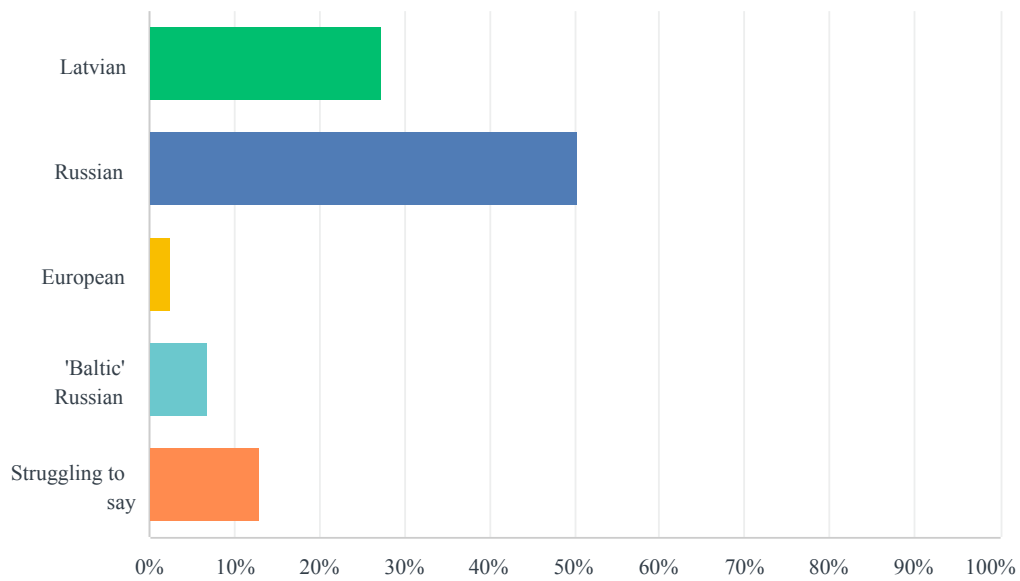
Answered: 191 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Russian	99.48%	190
Latvian	87.96%	168
English	73.82%	141
German	8.38%	16
French	4.71%	9
Other	10.47%	20
Total Respondents: 191		

### Q4 When people ask me what nationality I belong to, I will first of all say:

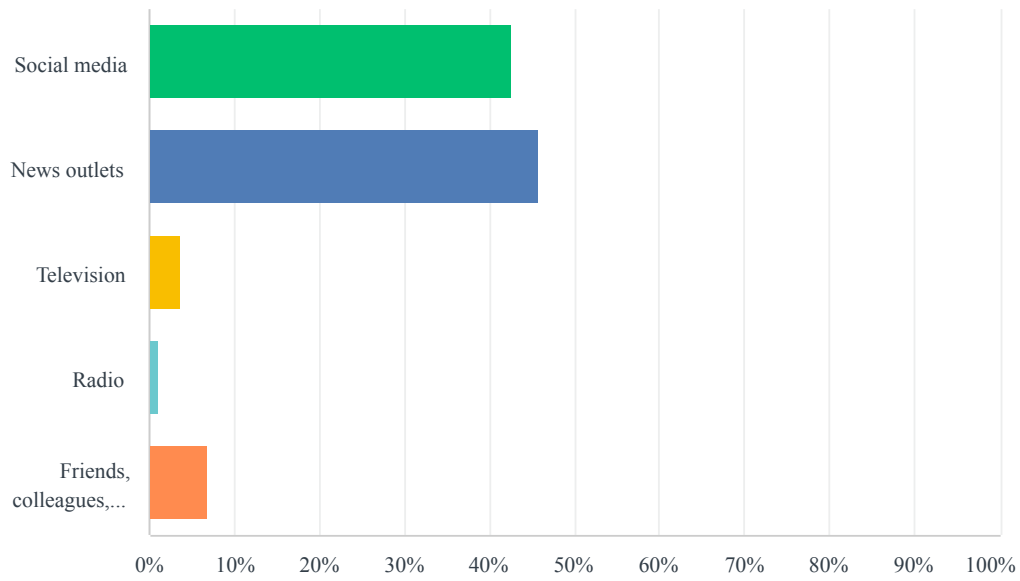
Answered: 191 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Latvian	27.23% 52
Russian	50.26% 96
European	2.62% 5
'Baltic' Russian	6.81% 13
Struggling to say	13.09% 25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>191</b>

### Q5 My main source of information is

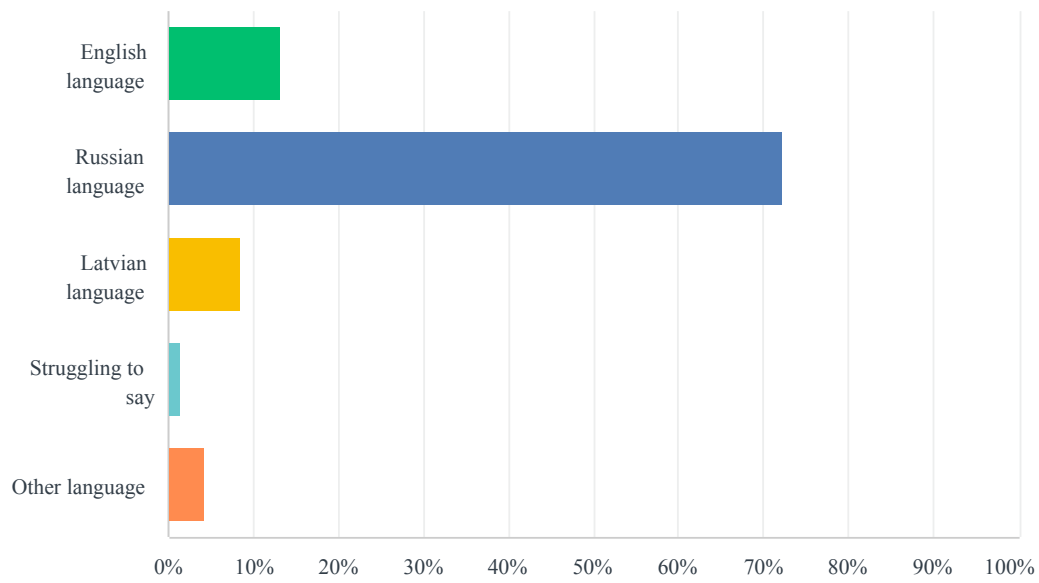
Answered: 188 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Social media	42.55%	80
News outlets	45.74%	86
Television	3.72%	7
Radio	1.06%	2
Friends, colleagues, family members	6.91%	13
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>188</b>

### Q6 I mostly receive information in

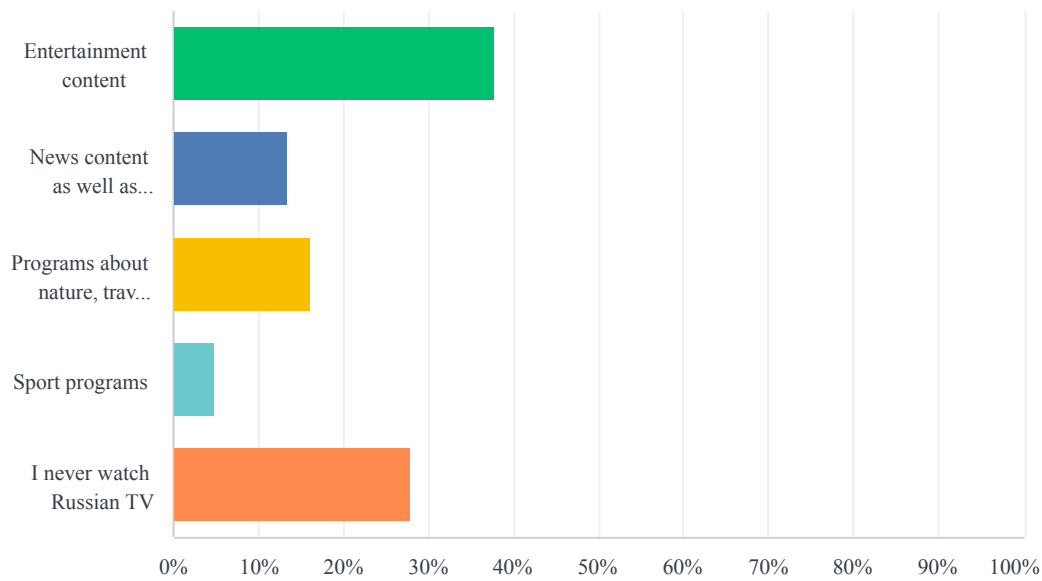
Answered: 188 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English language	13.30%	25
Russian language	72.34%	136
Latvian language	8.51%	16
Struggling to say	1.60%	3
Other language	4.26%	8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>188</b>

## Q7 My favorite Russian TV programs are

Answered: 186 Skipped: 13

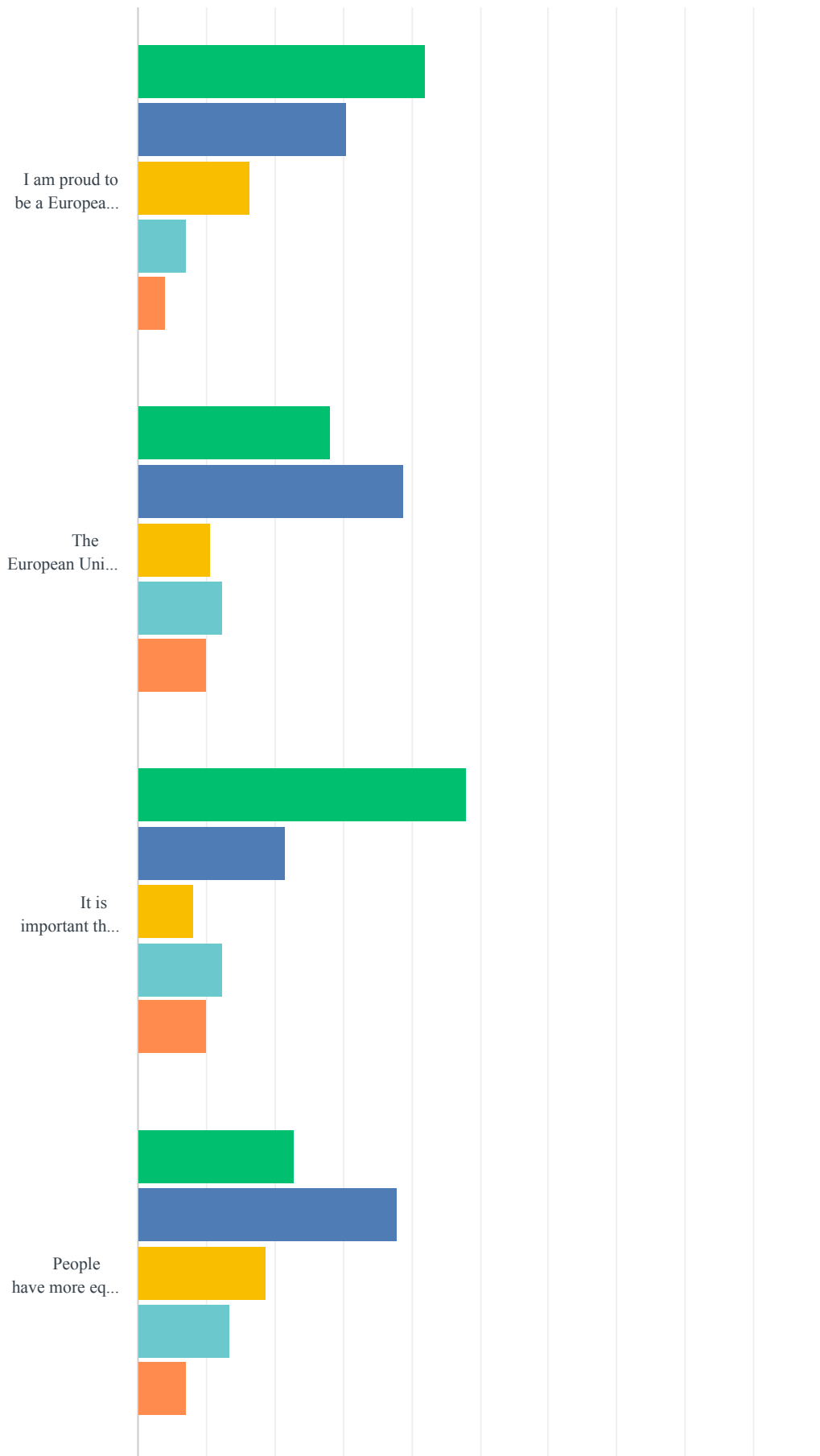


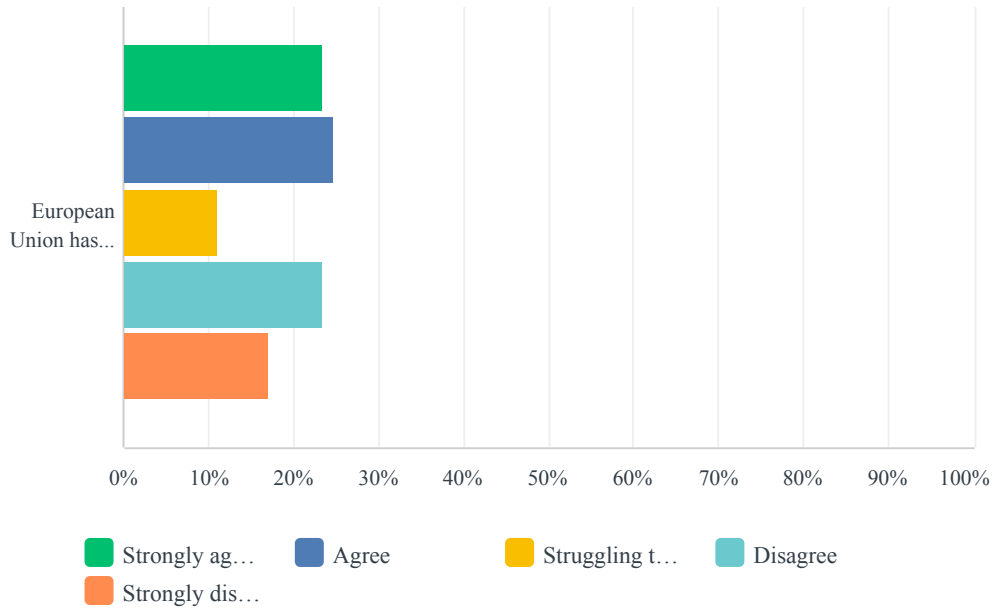
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Entertainment content (TV series, comedy shows)	37.63%	70
News content as well as political talk shows	13.44%	25
Programs about nature, travel, repair (anything that does not have political information)	16.13%	30
Sport programs	4.84%	9
I never watch Russian TV	27.96%	52
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>186</b>



# Q8 Latvia and the European Union

Answered: 171 Skipped: 28

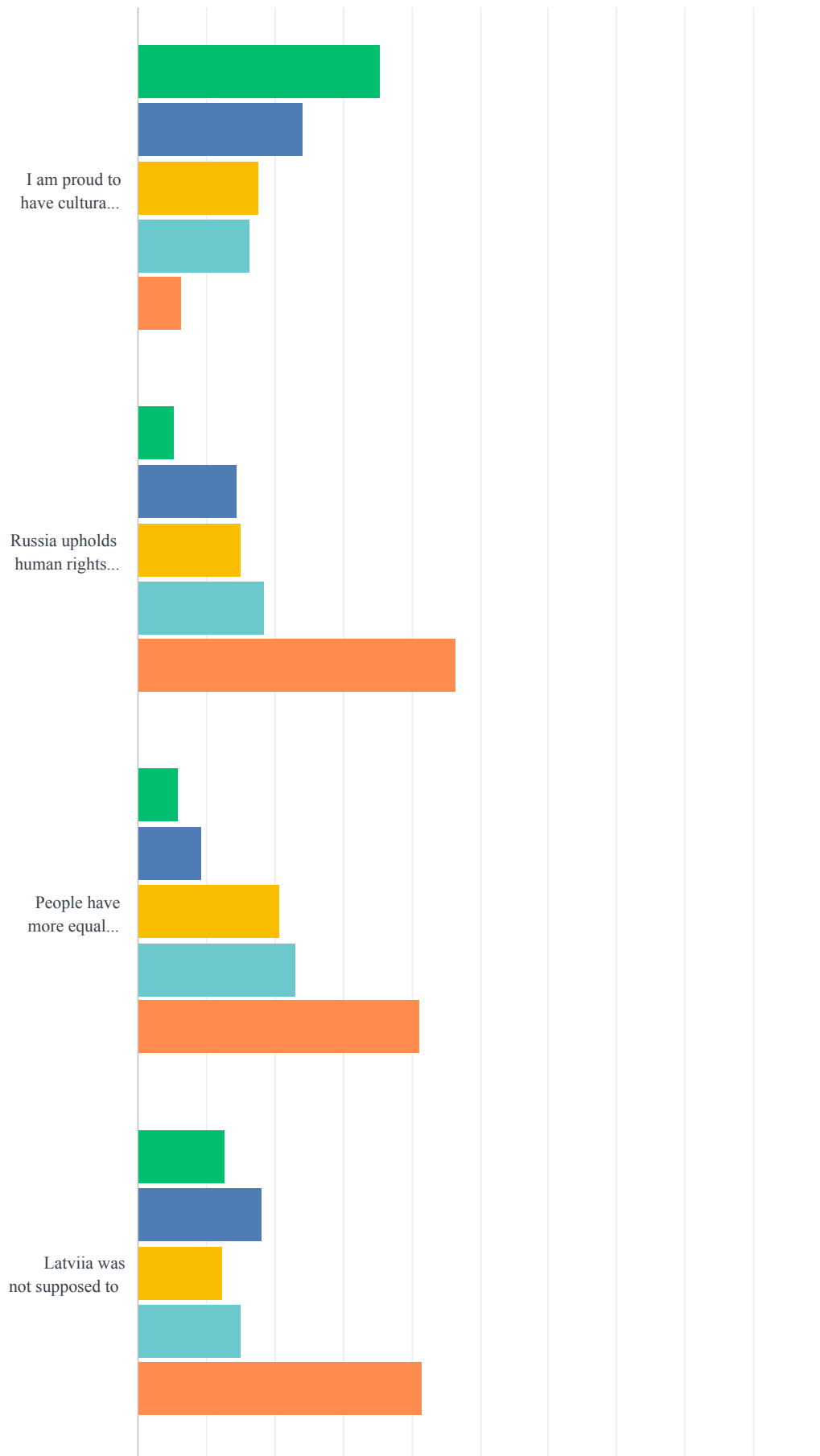


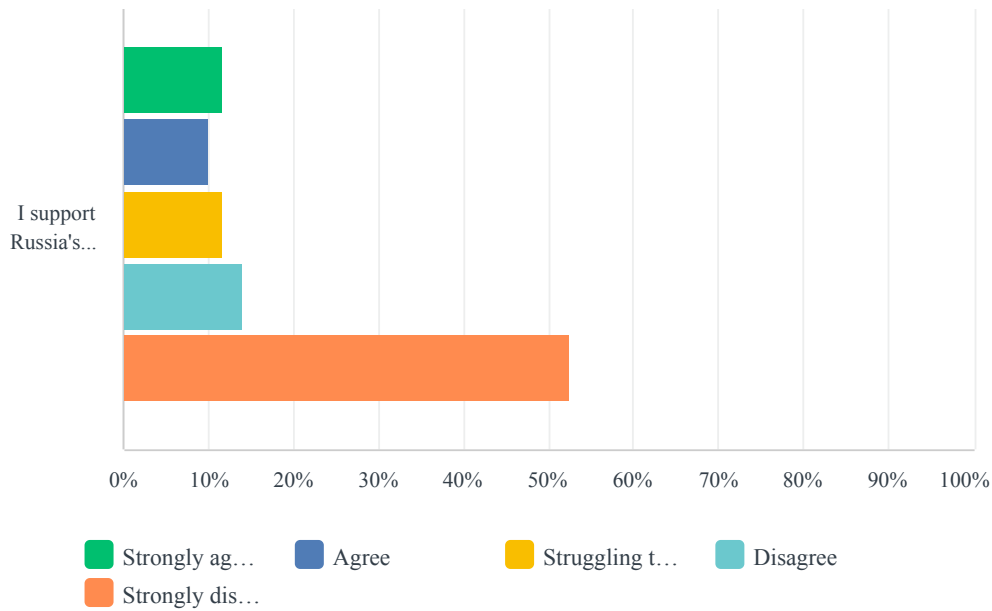


	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I am proud to be a European citizen	42.11% 72	30.41% 52	16.37% 28	7.02% 12	4.09% 7	171	3.99
The European Union upholds human rights more than other regions or countries.	28.24% 48	38.82% 66	10.59% 18	12.35% 21	10.00% 17	170	3.63
It is important that Latvia keeps its focus on European integration.	47.95% 82	21.64% 37	8.19% 14	12.28% 21	9.94% 17	171	3.85
People have more equal opportunities in Europe than elsewhere.	22.81% 39	38.01% 65	18.71% 32	13.45% 23	7.02% 12	171	3.56
European Union has chosen the right strategy in response to the Ukrainian crisis.	23.53% 40	24.71% 42	11.18% 19	23.53% 40	17.06% 29	170	3.14

# Q9 Latvia and Russia

Answered: 172 Skipped: 27

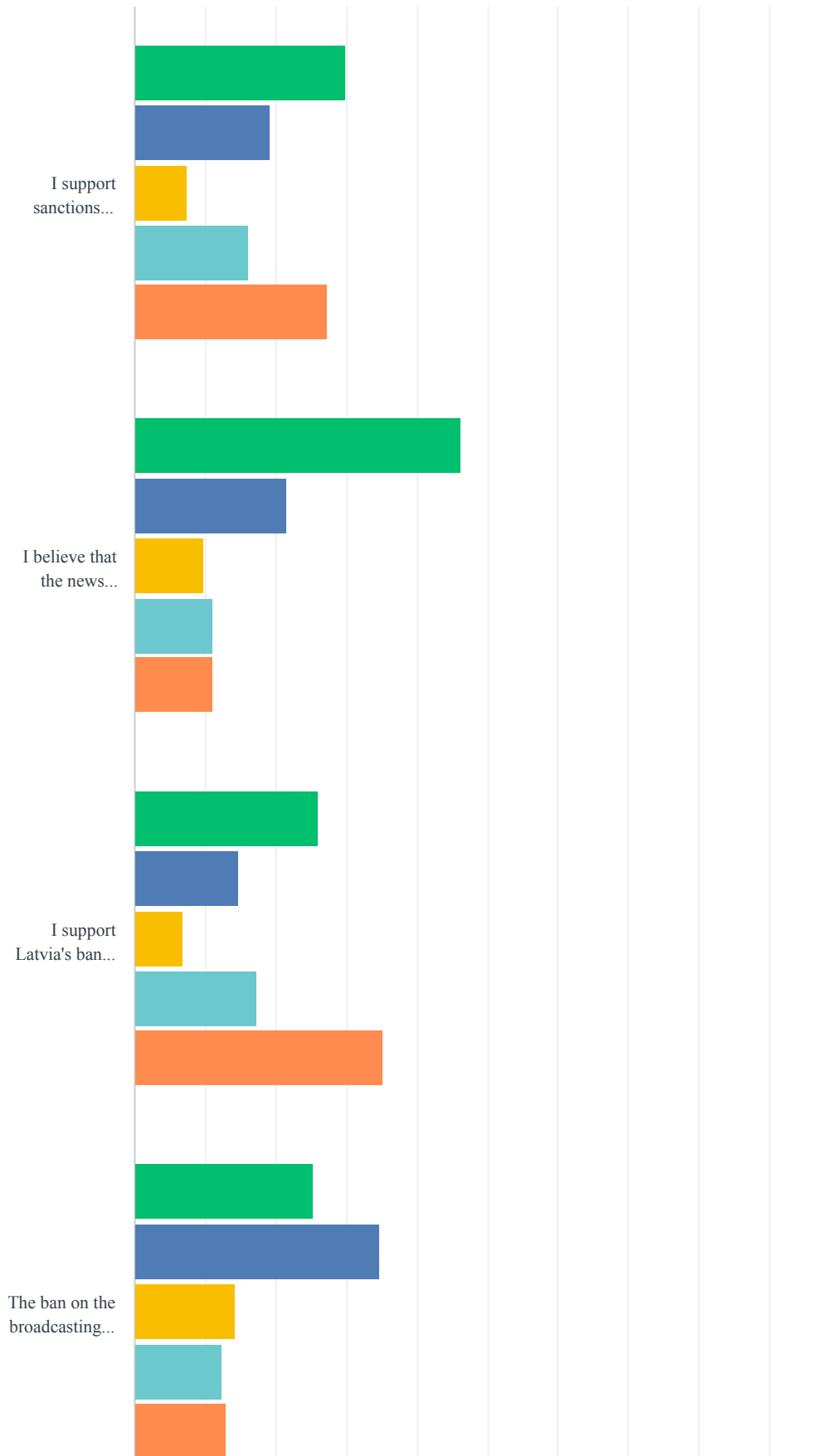


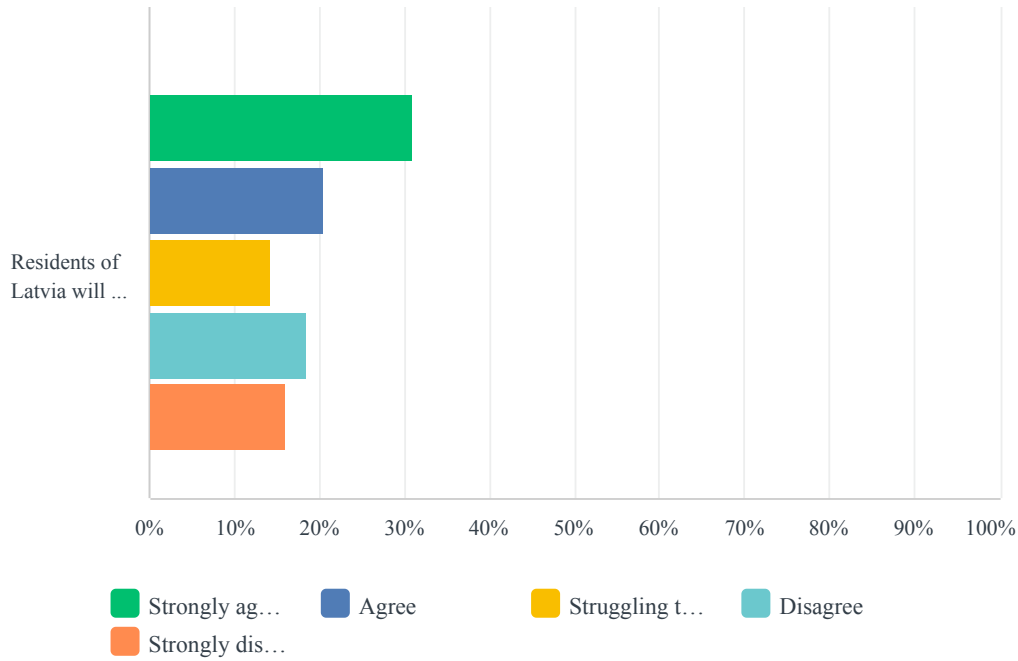


	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I am proud to have cultural and historical ties with Russia	35.29% 60	24.12% 41	17.65% 30	16.47% 28	6.47% 11	170	2.35
Russia upholds human rights more than other regions or countries.	5.23% 9	14.53% 25	15.12% 26	18.60% 32	46.51% 80	172	3.87
People have more equal opportunities in Russia than elsewhere.	5.88% 10	9.41% 16	20.59% 35	22.94% 39	41.18% 70	170	3.84
Latvia was not supposed to join the European Union, but rather to strengthen relations with Russia	12.87% 22	18.13% 31	12.28% 21	15.20% 26	41.52% 71	171	3.54
I support Russia's decisions in foreign policy	11.76% 20	10.00% 17	11.76% 20	14.12% 24	52.35% 89	170	3.85

### Q10 Sanctions against Russia, in particular the ban on the rebroadcasting of Russian TV channels in Latvia

Answered: 163 Skipped: 36





	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRUGGLING TO SAY	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I support sanctions imposed by the EU and Latvia against Russia.	29.81% 48	19.25% 31	7.45% 12	16.15% 26	27.33% 44	161	3.08
I believe that the news broadcast by Russian TV channels cannot be trusted.	46.30% 75	21.60% 35	9.88% 16	11.11% 18	11.11% 18	162	3.81
I support Latvia's ban on broadcasting Russian TV channels	25.93% 42	14.81% 24	6.79% 11	17.28% 28	35.19% 57	162	2.79
The ban on the broadcasting of Russian TV channels will make it difficult to spread the political agenda of Russia in Latvia	25.47% 41	34.78% 56	14.29% 23	12.42% 20	13.04% 21	161	3.47
Residents of Latvia will not suffer from the ban of broadcasting of Russian TV channels	30.86% 50	20.37% 33	14.20% 23	18.52% 30	16.05% 26	162	3.31