

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

DESIRE FOR STABILITY VERSUS DESIRE FOR CHANGE:

Polarization of Attitudes During Latvia's
General Elections of 2022

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In the second half of 2022, Latvian citizens lived in very diverse emotional and informational environments. One was dominated by a desire for stability, the other by anxiety and resentment, and the third by a desire for change. These competing desires determined the election results, increasing the representation of the leading party of the previous government, while allowing several new parties to enter the parliament.



The voter survey shows a deep polarisation of Latvian society, with linguistic (family language) and social (income level) lines of polarisation.



For the first time in many years, the votes of Latvia's Russian-speaking citizens were deeply divided – they went to eight different parties. In the 2022 elections, the winner of the previous four elections, "Harmony", failed to break the 5% barrier. The main reasons for this are: a more intense competition, a weak social media campaign, and the desire of Russian-speaking Latvians to vote for change.



Differences of opinion between different groups of people in Latvia about its vulnerability, resentment towards the state, and perceptions regarding the level of corruption of public officials are evidence of a divided society. There is a huge ethnic difference in assessments of whether anyone in Latvia can express their opinion on politics freely and without fear. 61% of Latvian-speaking citizens believe this is possible, while only 23% of Russian-speakers agree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A/P!	Party association “Development/For!” (<i>Attīstībai/Par!</i>)
AS	Party association “THE UNITED LIST – Latvian Green party, Latvian Regional Alliance, Liepāja party” (<i>APVIENOTAIS SARAKSTS – Latvijas Zaļā partija, Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība, Liepājas partija</i>)
JV	Party association “New UNITY” (<i>Jaunā VIENOTĪBA</i>)
K	Party “Conservatives” (<i>Konservatīvie</i>)
KK	Party “FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE” (<i>KATRAM UN KATRAI</i>)
LKS	Party “Latvian Russian Union” (<i>Latvijas Krievu savienība</i>)
LPV	Party “LATVIA IN FIRST PLACE” (<i>LATVIJA PIRMAJĀ VIETĀ</i>)
NA	National Alliance “All for Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK” (<i>Nacionālā apvienība “Visu Latvijai!” – “Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK”</i>)
PRO	Party “PROGRESSIVES” (<i>PROGRESĪVE</i>)
S!	Political party “For Stability!” (<i>Stabilitātei!</i>)
Saskaņa	Social Democratic Party “Harmony” (<i>“Saskaņa” sociāldemokrātiskā partija</i>)
SV	Party “SOVEREIGN POWER” (<i>SUVERĒNĀ VARA</i>)
ZZS	Party association “Greens and Farmers Union” (<i>Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība</i>)

SUMMARY OF MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- The **high level of electoral turbulence is reflected** in the fact that, a week before the elections, around 45% of citizens had not yet made a final decision on who to vote for. In these elections, late voting was a characteristic feature of both citizens who speak Latvian at home and those who speak Russian. Four years ago, Russian-speaking citizens made their final choice significantly earlier.
- In these elections, **the difficulty of finding a suitable party** affected both Latvian and Russian-speaking citizens equally. Four years ago, Russian-speaking citizens found their electoral choice much easier. “New Unity” voters most often found their choice to be straightforward. The choice was most difficult for “Sovereign Power” voters.
- In the 2022 elections, three parties represented **stability, the current course** in the eyes of voters: “New Unity”, “National Alliance” and “Conservatives”. The most important criterion for voters of “New Unity” was the ability to entrust the party to lead the country in a crisis (76% of JV voters chose this as the most important criterion). “National Alliance” voters felt that the party’s advocacy on specific issues relevant to their interests was particularly important. Seven parties **represented an alternative course** in the eyes of the voters: “For Stability!”, “Latvia in First Place”, “Progressives”, “Harmony”, “For Each and Every One”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “Sovereign Power”. ZZS and “The United List” voters rated these parties higher as potential crisis-busters, lower – as offering an alternative course.
- A month and a half before the 2022 elections, Latvian voters were particularly interested in **two blocs of issues**: 1) inflation, price increases and 2) the parties’ attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine. A large share of voters also indicated that they were interested in reducing social inequalities.
- There are **significant ethnic differences in the responses of Latvian citizens** on the importance of the parties’ attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine, assistance to Ukrainian refugees and compulsory military service in their electoral choices.
- **Younger generations were more interested than other age groups** in Covid-19 restrictions, climate change mitigation and civil partnership regulation. Generational differences in interest in regulating civil partnerships are very clear (70% of citizens aged 18–24 marked this issue as important in their electoral choices, but only 25% of citizens over 45).
- **Supporters of the different parties are united** by their high interest in inflation and reducing social inequalities.
- In August 2022, the previously high **interest in Covid-19** restrictions had fallen sharply, even for those parties that had used these issues to mobilise their potential voters at the beginning of the year (e.g., “Latvia in First Place”, “For Each and Every One”).
- In the 14th *Saeima* elections, Latvian citizens who spoke Latvian and Russian in their families mostly voted for different political parties. **Parties that are popular almost exclusively among Latvians**: “New Unity”, “National Alliance”, “The United List”, “Conservatives”. **Russian-speaking Latvian citizens vote mostly for** “For Stability!”, “Harmony”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “Sovereign Power”. In the 14th *Saeima* elections, after a long break, parties have emerged whose popularity is similar for both Latvians and Russian-speaking citizens. They are ZZS and “Progressives”. Party “Latvia in First Place” is much more popular among Russian-speaking Latvian citizens, but a significant number of Latvians also vote for this party.
- In Latvia, there is partly not only ethnic but also social segregation of parties. Several parties are able to **appeal mainly to either high-income earning voters or the poorest section of society**. Among the parties that are clearly popular among the wealthier sections of society, “New Unity”, “Progressives” and the party alliance “Development/For!” Meanwhile, the parties “For Stability!” and ZZS are more successful in attracting the votes of the very poorest part of society, while appealing significantly less to wealthier citizens. The socially balanced voter base in the 2022 elections was for “The United List” and “Harmony”.
- Different groups of the Latvian population lived in quite **different emotional environments** a month and a half before the elections. **Anxiety was the most common emotion**, but it was much more prevalent among the Russian-speaking population. For Russian-speaking citizens, anxiety was often combined with outrage.

Meanwhile, Latvian-speaking citizens more often felt hope.

- Public opinion polls show **a great polarisation of attitudes in Latvian society**. Compared to 2018, the sense of threat has increased significantly, the overall demand for change in Latvian politics has decreased slightly, citizens' resentment towards the State has increased slightly, but at the same time the feeling that most representatives of the Latvian government are corrupt has decreased.
- Voters **who voted for the 2019–2022 government parties**, as well as for the parties forming the new government, are hopeful about Latvia's future, are less likely to want change, feel less vulnerability to Latvia as a country, and believe that freedom of speech functions well in Latvia. Meanwhile, political forces such as "For Stability!", "Sovereign Power", "Latvian Russian Union", "For Each and Every One" and "Latvia in First Place" **have managed to mobilise an electorate that is disappointed with Latvian politics**, considers the Latvian political elite corrupt, feels offended and is not free in its expressions. These are mostly people who speak Russian at home and people with low income.
- Differences of opinion between different groups of people in Latvia about Latvia's vulnerability, resentment towards the Latvian state, and perceptions of corruption of public officials are **evidence of a divided society**. Particularly worrying is the huge ethnic difference in assessments of whether anyone in Latvia can express their opinion on politics freely and without fear. 61% of Latvian-speaking citizens believe this is possible, while only 23% of Russian-speakers agree.
- The number of voters who choose a list based on the recommendations of friends has fallen over the past four years. At the same time, **the importance of parties' and candidates' activities on social networks has increased**. Among campaign methods, the performance of parties and candidates in pre-election debates remains of particular importance, with relatively low importance for face-to-face meetings with parliamentary candidates. Recommendations from friends, family and colleagues were relatively more useful in these elections for young people and for people who speak Russian in the family. Older generations pay more attention to the recommendations of well-known people. Pre-election debates as a criterion for choosing one's electoral preferences are strongly characteristic of people with higher education, as well as Latvian as a spoken language. People with primary education pay more attention to printed materials of political parties.
- **The performance of the candidates in the pre-election debates** was particularly important for those voters who wanted to maintain the current political course in Latvia but find an alternative to the current government. This is why the performance in the debates proved to be such an important factor for the "Progressive" and "The United List" voters. Several parties **campaigning mainly through social networks, face-to-face meetings with voters and the distribution of printed materials** – these methods are less visible to the general public who are not potential supporters of the party in question, which is why the good results of some of these parties (especially "For Stability!" and "Sovereign Power") seemed unexpected.
- It was already clear in mid-August 2018 that voters would basically remain loyal to "New Unity" and "National Alliance". **It was also evident that the three parties of the previous parliament would have great problems withstanding the much fiercer competition of these elections**. "Development/For!" had already lost a large part of its 2018 voters to "New Unity" and "Progressives". Only a small percentage of "New Conservatives" voters were going to support the party again. Many had become "New Unity" supporters in the interim. Less than 30% of the 2018 "Harmony" voters planned to vote for the party again.
- **If participation in the 2022 elections had been compulsory, ZZS would have benefitted the most**, with a relatively large number of citizens who did not participate in the 2022 elections casting their votes for it. The other parties had little chance to improve their electoral results at the expense of the more politically passive voters. As in 2018, young people aged 18–24 were relatively more likely not to vote (although less so than in 2018), people with low incomes and people who speak Russian at home (the difference is not significant, only a few percentage points).
- **The good electoral result of "New Unity"** is largely due to the party's ability to persuade voters to vote for it who could just as well have voted for "National Alliance", "Development/For", "Progressives", "The United List" and "Conservatives". For the "New Unity" voters, the most important electoral criterion was the need to find a responsible force to entrust with the leadership of the country in a crisis. It is also interesting that the lists that targeted Russian-speaking voters ("For Stability!", "Harmony", "Sovereign Power", "Latvian Russian Union", "Latvia in First Place") won a total of votes that was close to the maximum possible.
- The four lists that made it into the *Saeima* are particularly disliked by voters of at least 4–6 other lists each. These lists are "For Stability!", "New Unity", "National Alliance", "Latvia in First Place". **The dislike of voters of several parties towards the party association "New Unity"**, which has led the government for the past four years and is now forming the new government, **is particularly strong**. Two parties – "The United List" and "Progressives" – polarise voters of other parties only slightly, i.e., a majority of supporters of any other party would have no objection to these parties being in government.

INTRODUCTION

19 party lists participated in the elections to the Latvian Parliament (*Saeima*) held on 1 October 2022. This is a high number of participants, considering that four years ago 16 lists took part in the *Saeima* elections and eight years ago – 13 lists.

The 14th *Saeima* elections took place against a backdrop of information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the announced mobilisation, particularly high inflation in the economy (annual inflation reached a record high of 21.5% in July) and uncertainty about heating prices in the autumn and winter.

Even before the elections, the Providus think tank and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung commissioned the research centre SKDS to conduct a pre-election survey in mid-August¹. Immediately after the elections, SKDS was commissioned to conduct a post-election survey² from 7 to 19 October. This

report is also based on comparisons with the 2018 post-election survey conducted by SKDS for Providus and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence³.

The data collected was compiled and analysed by analysts from the Providus think tank.

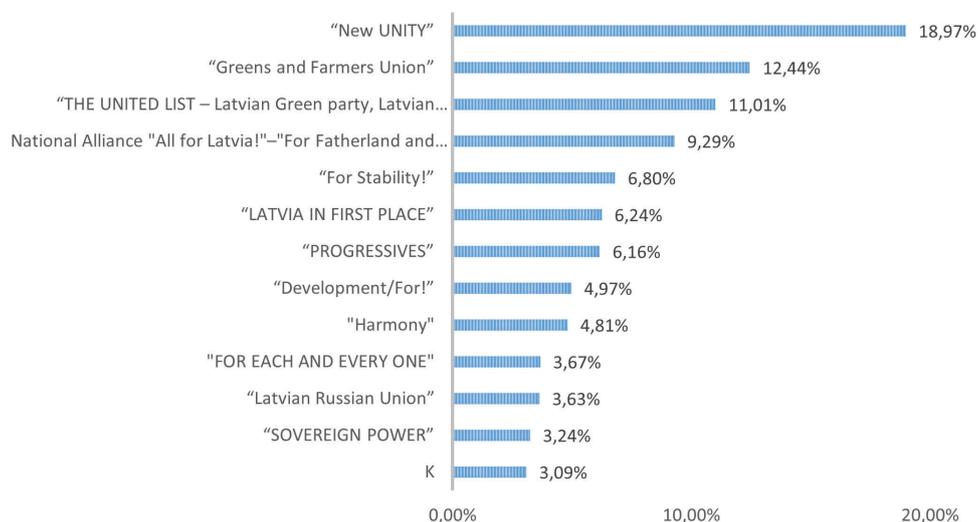
13 lists won at least 2% of the vote in the elections (see Figure 1). These lists are specifically analysed in this report. Of these 13 lists, seven broke the 5% barrier and entered the parliament. The other six lists that remained below the electoral barrier became eligible for public funding over the next four years.

For the purposes of this report, the word “party” is sometimes used to refer to party associations – this refers to those party associations that had put forward a joint list of candidates to run in the 2022 elections.

Figure 1.

Number of votes obtained by the most successful lists in the 1 October 2022 parliamentary elections (percentage, CEC data)

Results of the 1 October 2022 *Saeima* elections (parties with at least 2% of the vote)



1 The technical parameters of the August survey were as follows: general population: residents of Latvia aged 18–75, planned sample size: 1000 respondents (representative sample for the general population), achieved sample size: 1005 respondents (including 947 citizens of Latvia), sampling method: quota sampling, data were weighted according to the data of the Population Register of the OCMA of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia on 08.02.2022. Respondents: members of the SKDS Research Centre WEB panel. Survey method: web survey (CAWI). Geographical coverage: the whole territory of Latvia. Time of survey: 11.08.2022–16.08.2022.

2 The technical parameters of the October survey were as follows: general population: permanent residents of Latvia aged 18–75, planned sample size: 2005 respondents (representative sample for the general

population), achieved sample size: 2005 respondents (including 1821 citizens of the Republic of Latvia), sampling method: stratified random sampling (F2F), quota sampling (CAWI). Respondents (CAWI): members of the SKDS Research Centre WEB panel. Stratification characteristics (F2F) – administrative-territorial. Survey method – face-to-face interviews at the place of residence, internet survey (CAWI). Geographical coverage – all regions of Latvia (128 sample points). Time of survey: 07.10.2022–19.10.2022.

3 2018 post-election study “What affected voters’ decisions in the 6 October 2018 parliamentary elections?” available on the Providus website <https://providus.lv/raksti/parskats-kas-ietekmeja-veletaju-izveles-2018-gada-6-oktobra-velesanas>

1. WHAT DO THE RESULTS OF THE 14TH SAEIMA ELECTIONS SHOW?

1.1. VOTERS ARE ONCE AGAIN RAPIDLY CHANGING THEIR VOTING HABITS

The 2018 parliamentary elections witnessed extreme turbulence in the Latvian political environment, with three new political parties entering the *Saeima* with good results, which also became the largest parties in the government formed a few months later.

On the surface, the results of the 1 October 2022 elections could signal even more political turbulence (see Figure 2). The party that had won the most votes in several previous elections, “Harmony”, did not enter the *Saeima*. Before the elections were even held, the second biggest winner of the 2018 elections, KPV LV, collapsed. The next biggest parties, which had symbolised change in 2018, also did not make it into the new parliament: the “Conservatives” (formerly the party “New Conservative”) and “Development/For!”. Four new lists entered the *Saeima*: “The United List”, which brought together members of several parties that had already been in the *Saeima* with

some new politicians, “For Stability!”, “Latvia in First Place” and “Progressives”.

At the same time, the significance of this change was tempered by the fact that two “core parties” of the previous government – “New Unity” (the party of Krišjānis Kariņš, Latvia’s Prime Minister for the past four years), as well as the “National Alliance” – entered the *Saeima*. Both of these parties are central to the negotiations for the new government, so there is no sense in much of Latvian society that the elections have brought fundamental change. “New Unity” improved its results substantially over the four years, going from a party that barely made it into parliament in 2018 to an election winner.

1.2. AS IN 2018, VOTERS MAKE THEIR FINAL CHOICE LATE

In this year’s elections, only a small proportion of voters knew for sure who to vote for a month before the elections and did not change their choice during the campaign (see Figure 3). In the turbulent 2018 elections, such uncertainty was mainly

Figure 2.
Number of votes received by electoral lists: 2018 and 2022 (CEC data)
Number of votes received in the 2018 and 2022 elections

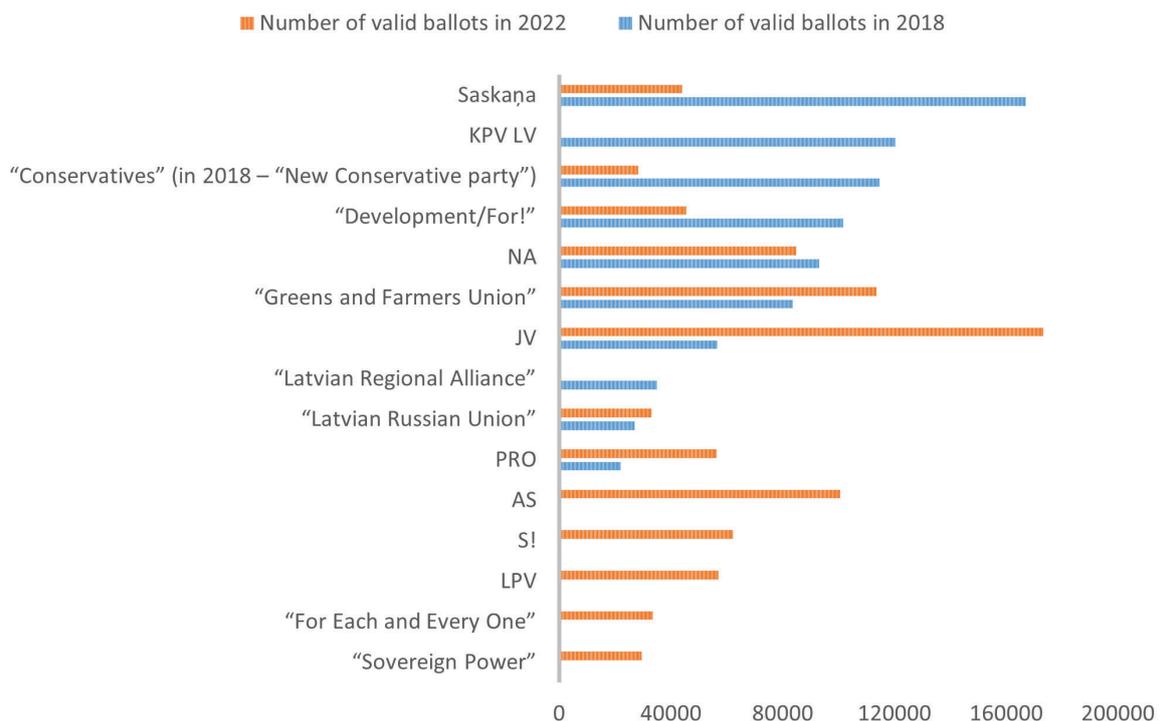


Figure 3.
Percentage of voters who had decided on a list at least one month before the election
 The final decision was taken at least one month before the elections

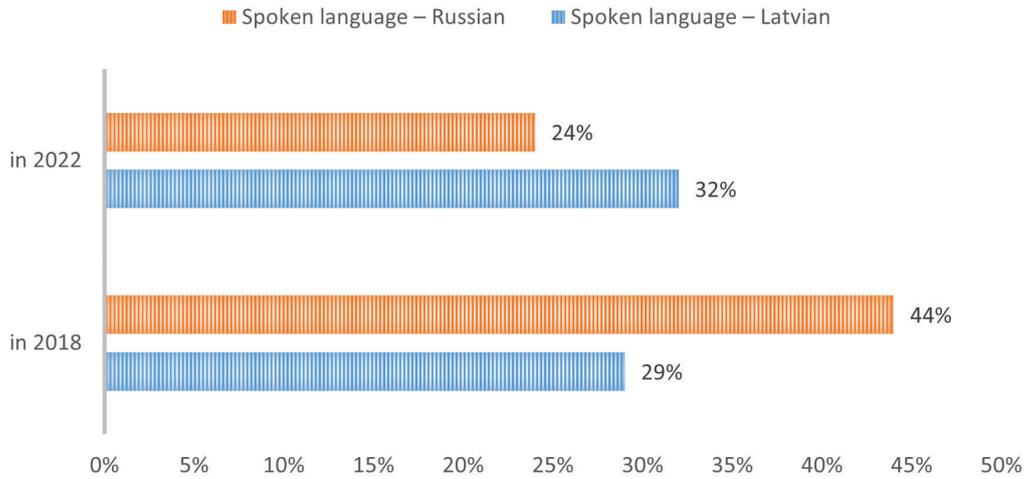


Figure 4.
Voters who only chose a party in the last week of the campaign
 The final decision was taken in the last week before the elections

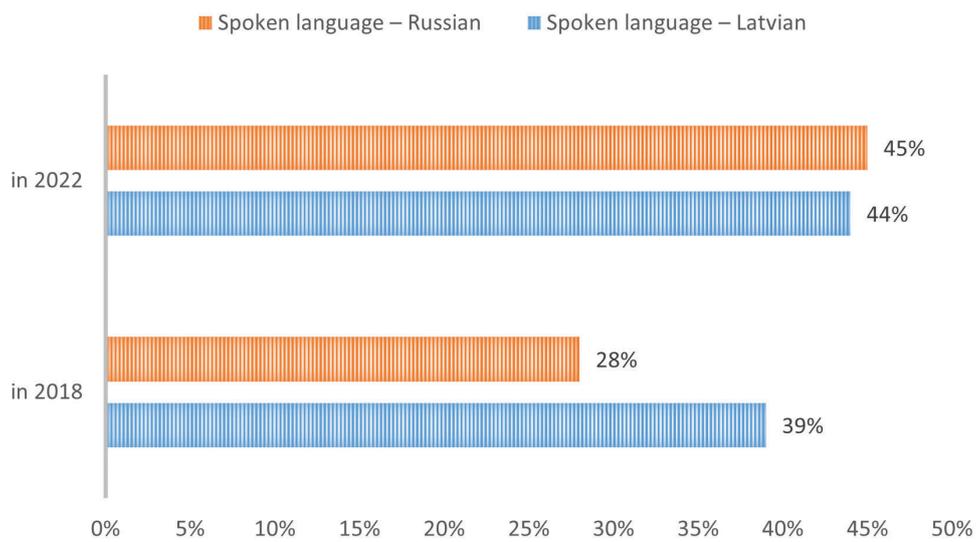


Figure 5.
Ease or complexity of electoral choice, 2018 and 2022
 How easy or difficult was it to choose who to vote for?

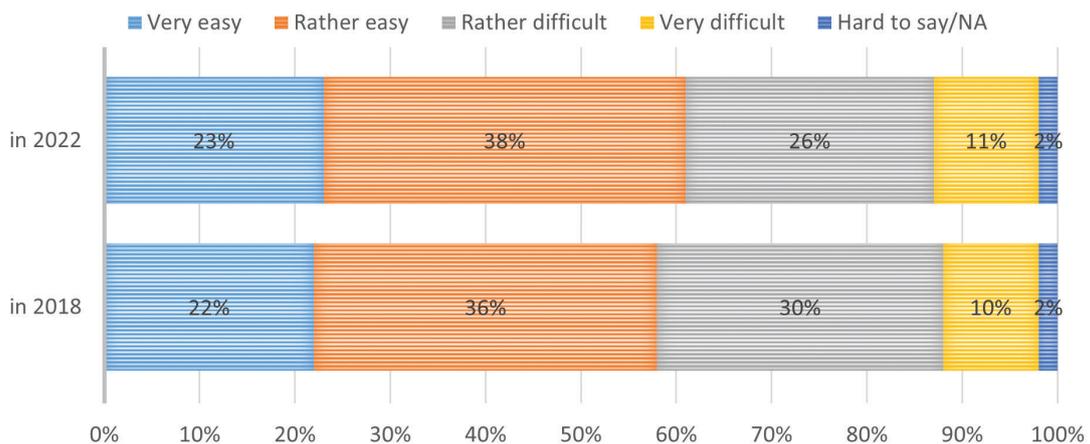


Figure 6.
Proportion of citizens who found it easy to choose who to vote for
 Citizens who found it easy to choose a party to vote for

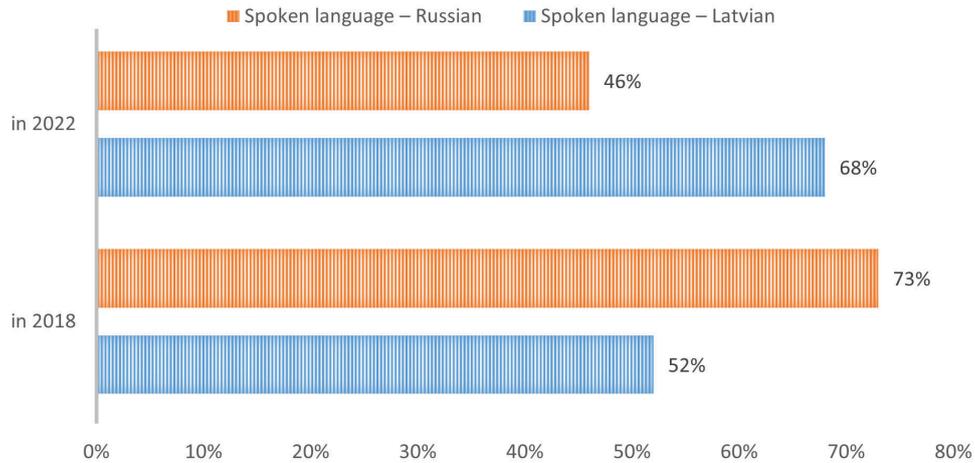
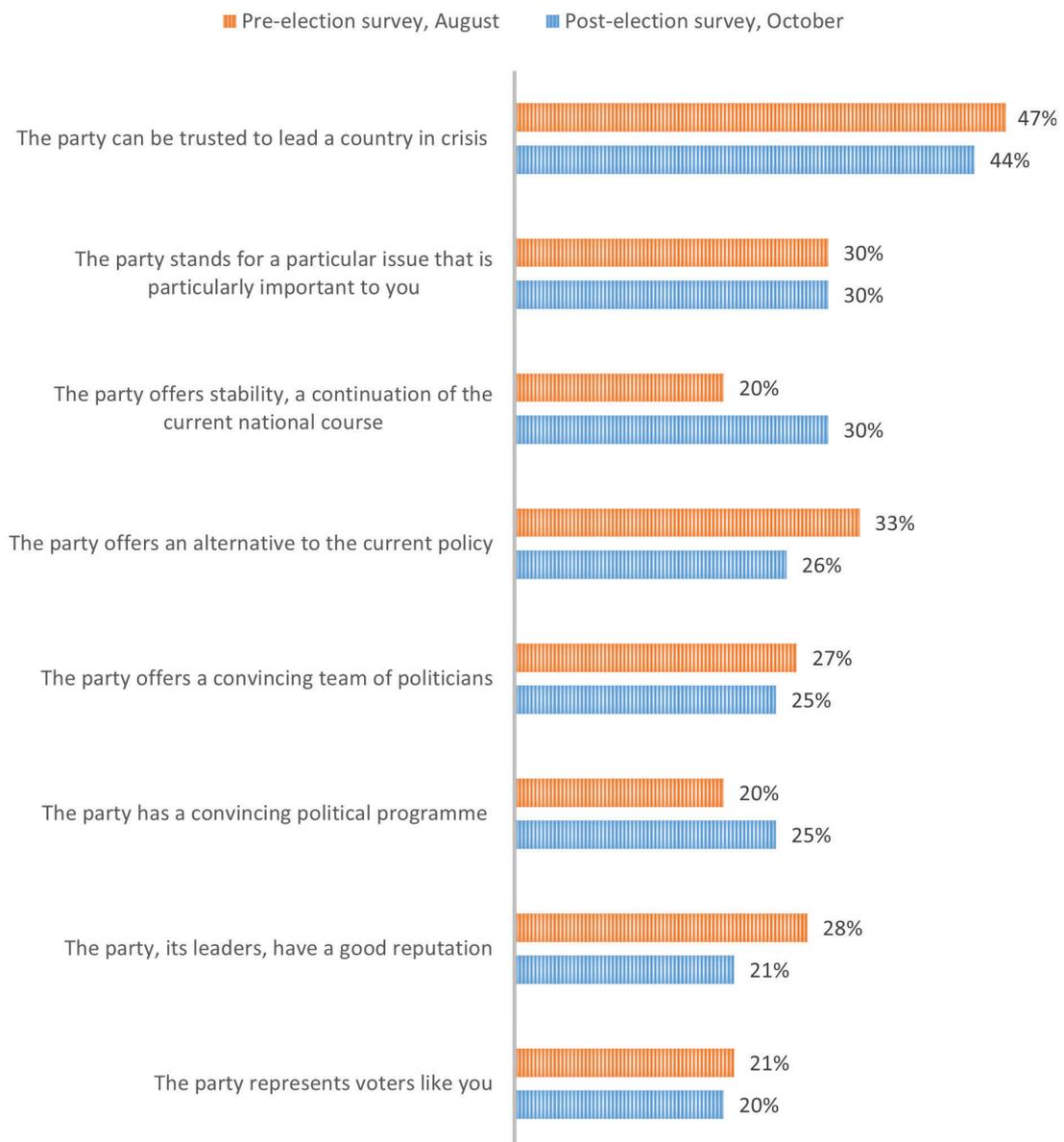


Figure 7.
Electoral preference criteria – before and after the elections (post-election survey)
 Most important criteria for making a decision in the elections on 1 October 2022



characteristic of those citizens who communicate in Latvian at home. This year, Russian-speaking citizens also did not know for a long time who to vote for.

Almost half of all voters only made their final choice about their vote in the last week of the campaign (see Figure 4). Voters of “The United List” (67%) were the most likely to make their decision in the last week, while those of “National Alliance” (42%) and “New Unity” (42%) were the least likely.

1.3. THE CHOICE WAS EASIER FOR LATVIAN-SPEAKING CITIZENS

Although Latvian voters generally rated the choice as rather easy (Figure 5), there are clear ethnic differences when looking deeper into the data. In 2018, Latvian-speaking voters found it harder to choose who to vote for in the elections than Russian-speaking voters (Figure 6). In 2022, the situation was reversed. Only 46% of Russian-speaking voters found the choice easy (compared to 68% of Latvian-speaking voters).

“New Unity” voters most often found their choice to be straightforward (82%). The choice was the most complex for “Sovereign Power” voters (only 39% of this party’s supporters chose the answer “easy”).

1.4. VOTERS’ DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA

Figure 7 shows that in the last two months of the campaign (August, September) the criteria for voters’ decision-making were much less constant – i.e., there were two main motivations competing with each other:

- 1) the motivation for stability and a reliable political force to be trusted to lead the country in a crisis;
- 2) the motivation for an alternative political course.

At the time of the elections, the desire for an alternative had diminished and the desire for stability had increased.

Each respondent had the opportunity to tick only three of the eight motivations mentioned in the figure above. When examining the data by party supporters, it can be seen that the most important electoral criteria for supporters of different parties varied. Table 1 shows, for each party, the eight motivations in order of priority: most important (1) to least important (8). Those motivations that were marked as particularly important by at least half of the party’s voters are coloured green. Those motivations which were marked as important by only a small number of the party’s voters (20% or less) are coloured yellow.

As can be seen, In the 2022 elections, three parties represented stability, the current course in the eyes of voters: “New Unity”, “National Alliance” and “Conservatives”. The most important criterion for voters of “New Unity” was the ability to entrust the party to lead the country in a crisis (76% of JV voters chose this as the most important criterion). “National Alliance” voters found the party’s advocacy on specific issues important to their interests particularly important (50% of the party’s voters marked this as one of the most important criteria for their electoral choice).

Seven parties represented an alternative course in the eyes of the voters: “For Stability!”, “Latvia in First Place”, “Progressives”, “Harmony”, “For Each and Every One”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “Sovereign Power”. For the majority of voters of these parties, this motivation was combined with a specific

Table 1

Post-election survey: criteria for voters’ choice by party, in order of priority of supporters (1 – most frequently mentioned; 8 – least frequently mentioned)*

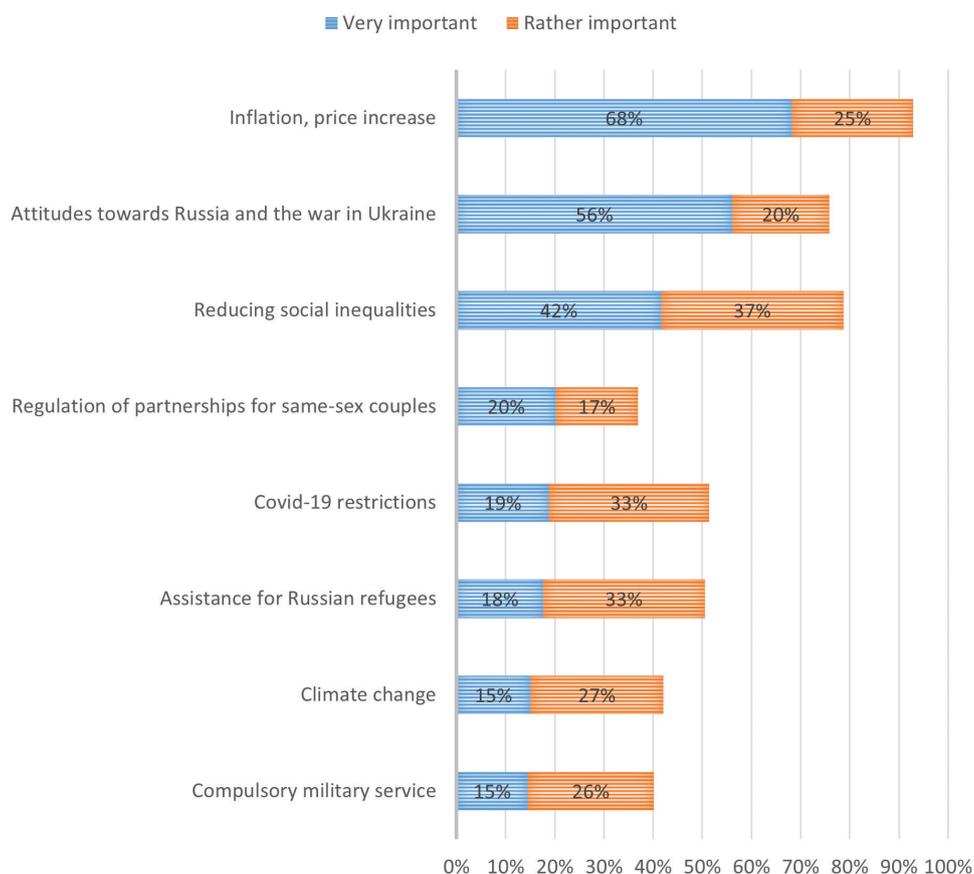
	JV	ZZS	AS	NA	SI	LPV	PRO	A/P!	Saskaņa	KK	LKS	SV	K
The party can be trusted to lead a country in crisis	1	1	1	3	3	2	5	1	3	4	4	3	1
The party offers an alternative to the current policy	8	3, 4	4	8	1	1	2	8	1	2	1	2	8
The party offers stability, a continuation of the current national course	2	6, 7	5	2	5	7	8	4	8	8	8	8	2
The party has a convincing political programme	5	5	6	4	4	4	3	3	4, 5	5	5	5, 6	5
The party stands for a particular issue that is particularly important to you	7	3, 4	8	1	2	5	1	2	2	1	2, 3	1	3
The party offers a convincing team of politicians	3	2	2	6	7	3	7	5	6	6	6	7	4
The party, its leaders, have a good reputation	4	8	3	7	8	6	6	6	7	7	7	5, 6	6
The party represents voters like you	6	6, 7	7	5	6	8	4	7	4, 5	3	2, 3	4	7

* The green coloured boxes are those where the criterion was chosen by half or more of the voters of the party concerned. The yellow coloured boxes are those where only 20% or less of the party’s voters chose the criterion.

Figure 8.

Voters' assessments of issues that matter to them (pre-election survey)

How important is the party's position when deciding who to vote for (August survey)?



issue that was important to their interests, which the party represented. The exception is “Latvia in First Place”, where voters considered the party’s team and ability to lead the country in a crisis to be more important.

ZZS and “The United List” represented parties that could be trusted to lead the country in times of crisis in the eyes of their voters – this consideration was apparently based on voters’ assessment of the teams offered by both lists, which was the second most frequently cited motivation for their electoral choices.

Interestingly, voters of the two lists in these elections were only marginally interested in the programmatic goals of the parties – the programme and advocacy of specific issues of interest to voters were very low on the list of priorities. These parties are “New Unity” and “The United List”.

1.5. ISSUES, TOPICS MOST IMPORTANT TO VOTERS

As you can see in Figure 8, two blocks of issues were of particular interest to Latvian voters a month and a half before the 2022 elections: 1) inflation, price increases and 2) the parties’ attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine. A large share of voters also indicated that they were interes-

ted in reducing social inequalities. This did not, however, become an issue whose solutions were then specifically discussed in the pre-election debates:

It is worth noting that interest **in inflation** was high across all demographic groups, as was interest in reducing social inequalities.

Significant ethnic differences can be observed in the responses **on attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine, assistance to Ukrainian refugees** and **compulsory military service** (see Table 2).

The assessment of the importance of different issues also revealed important differences between generations. For example, there was one in August 2022 **on Covid-19 restrictions** (more interest for younger generations). Younger generations also had a markedly higher interest in **climate change mitigation** (67% of respondents in the 18–24 age group considered this issue important). **The issue of civil partnership regulation** is a typical generational issue, with 70% of citizens aged 18–24 rating it as important and only around 25–26% of citizens over 45. Similarly, people with higher education give more importance to this topic.

Table 3 shows that the importance of the topic also varied considerably between supporters of different parties. This is

Table 2

Ethnic differences in positions on issues of public importance (pre-election survey)

	The spoken language in the family is Latvian	The spoken language in the family is Russian
Considers the parties' attitude towards Russia and the war in Ukraine important	86%	56%
Considers assistance to Ukrainian refugees important	66%	19%
Considers the introduction of compulsory military service an important issue	47%	27%

the case above all with regard to the parties' attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine – for example, 100% of the party “Conservative” voters were interested in this position, but only 26% of “For Each and Every One” voters. There are also significant differences between the supporters of Latvian parties in the importance they attach to the regulation of same-sex partnerships (from 82% of “Progressives” voters to 15% of “Harmony” and “Latvian Russian Union” voters). Interestingly, only 26% of “Latvia in First Place” voters consider these issues to be important, despite the fact that they were very important in the party’s election campaign. Attitudes towards assistance to Ukrainian refugees also vary widely between the parties.

Supporters of the different parties are united by their high interest in inflation and reducing social inequalities.

Table 3 shows that by August 2022, the previously high interest in Covid-19 restrictions had fallen sharply, even for those parties that had used these issues to mobilise their potential voters at the beginning of the year (e.g., “Latvia in First Place”, “For Each and Every One”).

1.6. PORTRAITS OF PARTY VOTERS

“New Unity”. Gender and age balanced electorate. People with higher education were significantly more likely than average to vote for JV. People who speak Latvian in the family voted for the JV – only 5% of the JV’s voters are Russian speakers. Unpopular among people with low incomes, popular among people with middle and high incomes. Balanced popularity in all regions except Latgale

Table 3

The assessment of potential supporters in August 2022 of the importance of the parties' positions (share of voters rating the position as “very important” or “rather important”)

	Very important	Moderately important	Less important/unimportant
Inflation, price increase	Saskaņa (100%); SV (100%); KK (100%); LKS (98%); LPV (97%); K (97%); AS (94%); ZS (94%); S! (93%); JV (92%); PRO (88%); A/P! (85%); NA (85%)		
Attitudes towards Russia and the war in Ukraine	K (100%); A/P! (97%); JV (97%); PRO (94%); NA (93%); SV (91%); AS (90%)	ZS (68%); LKS (60%); LPV (57%)	S! (40%); Saskaņa (39%); KK (26%)
Reducing social inequalities	KK (94%); S! (93%); Saskaņa (91%); K (91%); LKS (85%); PRO (84%); ZS (83%); SV (82%)	JV (79%); AP (78%); AS (96%); LPV (68%); NA (64%)	
Regulation of partnerships for same-sex couples	PRO (82%)	A/P! (59%); SV (55%); JV (52%); NA (44%)	K (40%); S! (31%); AS (29%); LPV (26%); ZS (21%); KK (19%); Saskaņa (15%); LKS (15%)
Covid-19 restrictions		A/P! (63%); JV (62%); PRO (59%); S! (57%); LPV (55%); SV (55%); NA (52%); ZS (52%); AS (51%); K (56%)	LKS (37%); Saskaņa (31%); KK (30%)
Assistance for Russian refugees	JV (87%); K (85%)	A/P! (74%); NA (70%); PRO (68%); AS (65%)	ZS (39%); LPV (22%); KK (19%); SV (19%); Saskaņa (18%); S! (9%); LKS (5%)
Climate change		A/P (72%); PRO (68%); JV (56%); K (55%); ZS (47%)	AS (40%); SV (37%); NA (36%); S! (34%); Saskaņa (19%); KK (19%); LKS (16%); LPV (12%)
Compulsory military service		K (69%); A/P (65%); AS (61%); NA (50%); JV (47%); ZS (42%)	S! (37%); PRO (37%); SV (37%); Saskaņa (31%); LPV (21%); LKS (20%); KK (12%)

(low). Representing people from Riga, other cities and rural areas.

ZZS. Gender-balanced electorate. Under-represents young people and people with higher education. 27% of voters communicate in Russian at home. Proportionally more low- and middle-income earners, few high-income earners. Popular in cities outside Riga, as well as in rural areas.

“The United List”. Gender, age, education level balanced electorate. 12% of voters communicate in Russian at home. Voters include citizens of all income levels. Popular in cities outside Riga, as well as in rural areas.

“National Alliance”. Gender-balanced electorate, also age-balanced in these elections (older generations dominated in 2018). Voters with higher education are slightly more likely to be represented. Only 4% of voters speak Russian at home. Represents citizens with different income levels, more successful in reaching voters in rural areas.

“Latvian in First Place”. Gender, age, education level balanced electorate. 60% of voters communicate in Russian at home. Is more able to reach out to middle-income voters. More successful in Riga than in other cities or rural areas.

S! Gender and age balanced party. Appeals less to people with higher education. 86% of voters communicate in Russian at home. More representative of people on low and middle incomes. Party in Riga, with a visible but lower representation in other cities and rural areas.

“Progressives”. Gender and education level balanced electorate. The party is particularly popular among the youth (age group 18–34). 27% of voters communicate in Russian at home. It is more successful in reaching out to people with middle and high incomes. Party in Riga, with a visible but lower representation in other cities and rural areas.

“Development/For!” Gender-balanced electorate. The party is particularly popular among young people (18–34), unpopular among seniors (64+). 17% of the electorate speak Russian at home. Appeals to people with middle and high incomes. These elections (unlike the 2018 elections) have a balanced electorate by type of place of residence (Riga, other cities, rural areas – the profile of the electorate corresponds to the general location of the Latvian population).

“Harmony”. Gender-balanced electorate. There is little appeal to young people (18–34). More citizens with higher education among voters. 78% of voters with Russian spoken in the family. A strong party in Riga, with a visible but lower representation in other cities and rural areas.

“For Each and Every One”. Age-balanced electorate, with little appeal to the youngest (18–24) and oldest (64+)

voters. Less popular among citizens with higher education. 29% of voters communicate in Russian at home. The party appeals to voters with different incomes, but more to low- and middle-income voters. Regionally more successful in rural areas.

“Latvian Russian Union”. Electorate: more than 75% men. Age group of most typical supporters: 45–63. Few voters with higher education. 90% of voters speak in Russian at home. Low- and middle-income level voters. Popularity particularly high in Latgale. Almost no representation among the rural population, the party is popular in urban areas.

“Sovereign Power”. Electorate: strongly female (69%). Diverse electorate in terms of age and education. 79% of voters with Russian spoken in the family. Higher popularity among people with low or medium incomes, unpopular among people with high incomes. Party of Riga and other cities.

“Conservatives”. Gender, age, income level balanced electorate. Better able to appeal to citizens with higher education. Only 6% of voters communicate in Russian at home. Voter base: cities outside Riga and rural areas.

1.7. ETHNICALLY AND SOCIALLY MARKED VOTE

Figures 9 and 10 show that, as in all previous elections, there are signs of a strong ethnic vote.

In the 14th *Saeima* elections, Latvian citizens who spoke Latvian and Russian in their families mostly voted for different political parties. Parties that are popular almost exclusively among Latvians: “New Unity”, “National Alliance”, “The United List”, “Conservatives”. Russian-speaking Latvian citizens vote mostly for “For Stability!”, “Harmony”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “Sovereign Power”.

In the 14th *Saeima* elections, after a long break, parties have emerged whose popularity is similar for both Latvians and Russian-speaking citizens. They are ZZS and “Progressives”. Party “Latvia in First Place” is much more popular among Russian-speaking Latvian citizens, but a significant number of Latvians also vote for this party.

At the same time, as the number of Russian speakers among Latvian citizens is smaller, it is important to pay attention to the significant share of these citizens in the total electorate of some parties. It can be seen in Figure 11. The figure shows four parties that mainly appeal to Russian speakers, as well as another five parties that mainly appeal to Latvians. “Latvia in First Place”, which mainly appeals to Russian-speaking citizens, also has a significant number of Latvian voters, while “For Each and Every One”, “Progressives” and ZZS are also voted for by a large number of Russian-speaking Latvian citizens.

Figure 9.

Saeima election results if only citizens who communicate in Latvian in the family vote (post-election survey)

Approximate results of the Saeima elections if only citizens whose spoken language is Latvian vote

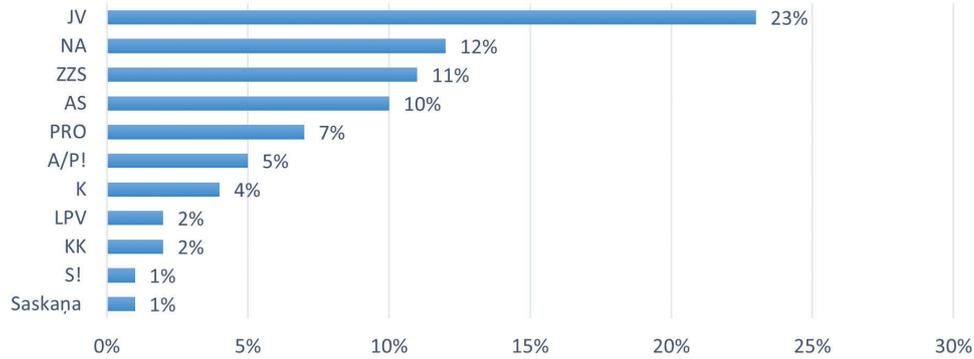


Figure 10.

Saeima election results if only citizens who communicate in Russian in the family vote (post-election survey)

Approximate election results if only Russian-speaking citizens took part in the elections

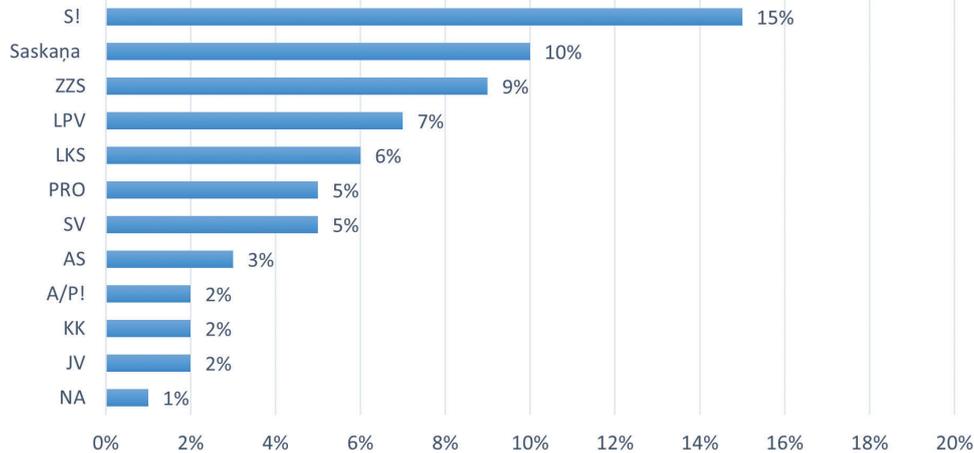


Figure 11.

Share of Russian-speaking voters in the electorate of different parties (post-election survey)

How important is the Russian-speaking electorate (percentage of the party's electorate) for the parties?

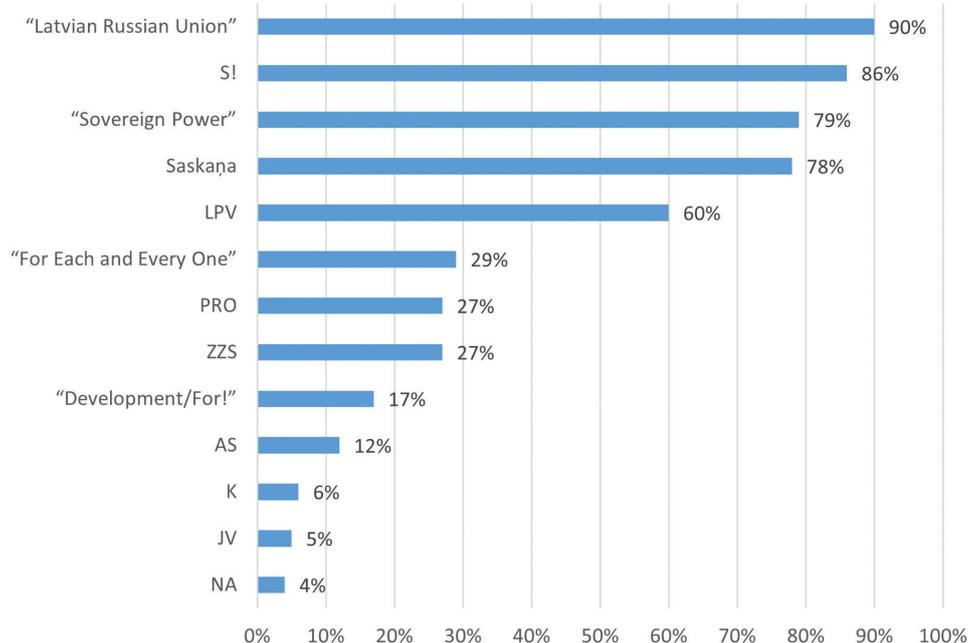
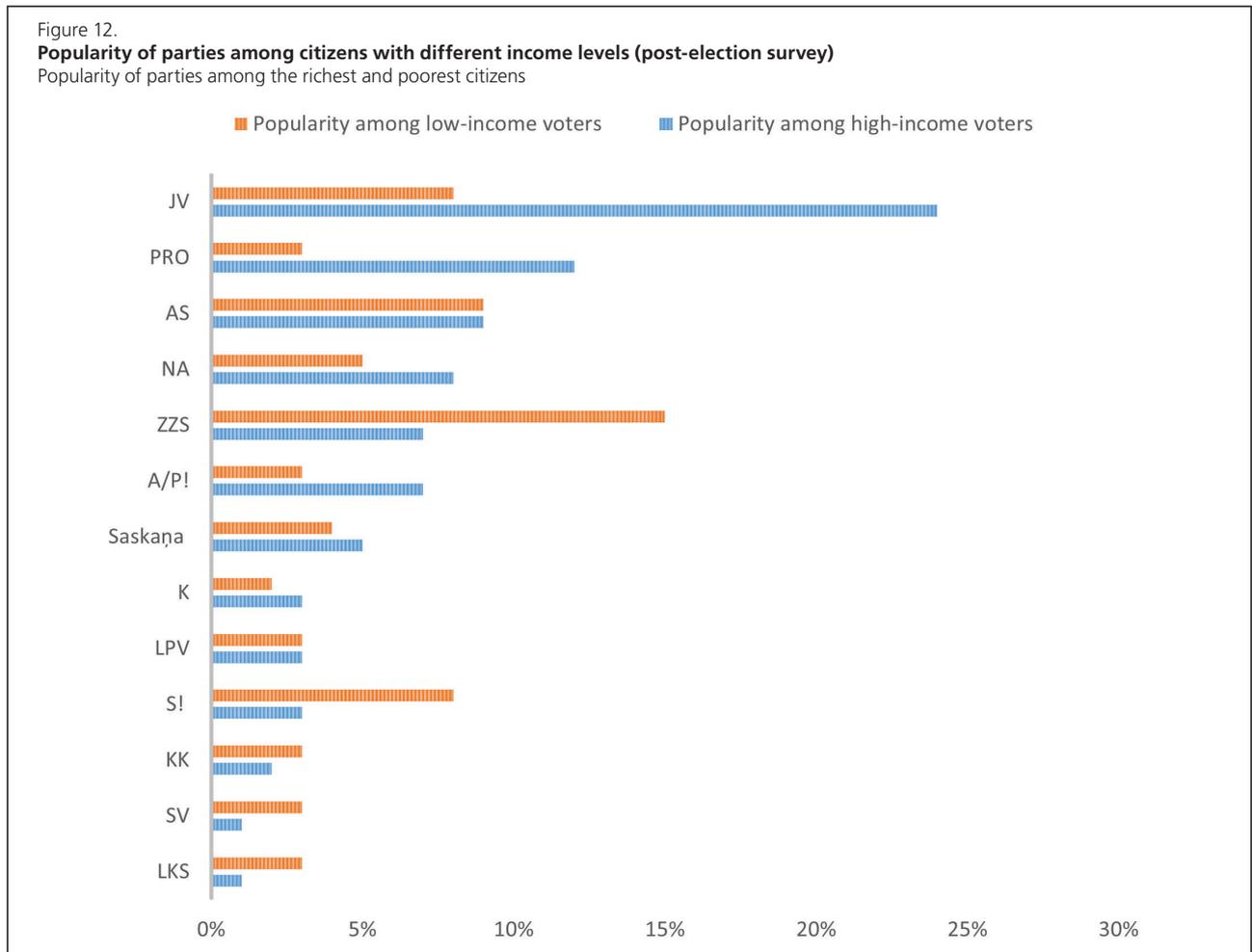


Figure 12 shows that Latvia is partly ethnically segregated, but also socially segregated. Several parties are able to appeal mainly to either high-income earning voters or the poorest section of society.

the party alliance “Development/For!”. Meanwhile, the parties “For Stability!” and ZZS are more successful in attracting the votes of the very poorest part of society, while appealing significantly less to wealthier citizens.

Among the parties that are clearly popular among the wealthier sections of society, “New Unity”, “Progressives” and

The socially balanced voter base in the 2022 elections was for “The United List” and “Harmony”.



2. EMOTIONAL AND ATTITUDINAL BACKGROUND BEFORE THE ELECTIONS

2.1. EMOTIONAL BACKGROUND – ANXIETY FOR SOME, HOPE FOR OTHERS

Different groups of the Latvian population lived in quite different emotional environments a month and a half before the elections. Anxiety was the most common emotion, but it was much more prevalent among the Russian-speaking population. For Russian-speaking citizens, anxiety was often combined with outrage, while Latvian-speaking citizens were more likely to feel hope. As can be seen in Table 4, “National Alliance” voters even reported relatively high levels of energy and elation.

2.2. POLARISED ATTITUDES

Table 5 shows a rather high polarisation of attitudes in Latvian society. Compared to 2018, the sense of threat

has increased significantly, the overall demand for change in Latvian politics has decreased slightly, citizens’ resentment towards the State has increased slightly, but at the same time the feeling that most representatives of the Latvian government are corrupt has decreased.

Voters who voted for the 2019–2022 government parties, as well as for the parties forming the new government, are hopeful about Latvia’s future, are less likely to want change, feel less vulnerability to Latvia as a country, and believe that freedom of speech functions well in Latvia.

Political forces such as “For Stability!”, “Sovereign Power”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “For Each and Every One” and “Latvia in First Place” have managed to mobilise an electorate that is disappointed with Latvian politics, considers the Latvian political elite corrupt, feels offended and is not free in its expressions. These are mostly people who speak Russian at home and people with low income.

Table 4
Prevailing emotions in Latvian society in August 2022 (pre-election survey)

Emotions	Proportion among voters in August 2022	More often in such groups	Less often in such groups	Often for supporters of such parties	Rarely for supporters of such parties
Anxiety	50%	Spoken language – Russian (66%)	Spoken language – Latvian (42%)	KK (88%); S! (80%); Saskaņa (67%); LKS (61%)	NA (31%); SV (37%); ZZS (40%); A/P! (41%); LPV (41%); K (41%); PRO (44%)
Hope	36%	18–24 age group (44%); Spoken language – Latvian (43%); high income (41%)	Spoken language – Russian (23%); low income (22%)	K (66%); JV (59%); NA (52%); AS (50%); PRO (47%); A/P! (44%)	Saskaņa (23%); LKS (10%); SV (9%)
Fear	26%	18–24 age group (48%); 25–34 age group (35%)		PRO (42%); KK (36%)	LPV (16%); ZZS (17%)
Pessimism	26%	Low income (37%); spoken language – Russian (36%)	High income (17%); 64–75 age group (21%)	LKS (47%); Saskaņa (35%)	JV (12%); K (13%); A/P! (17%); NA (18%); ZZS (20%)
Outrage	26%	Spoken language – Russian (42%); medium-low income (34%); secondary education (32%)	Public sector employees (20%); Spoken language – Latvian (19%); medium-high income (18%)	S! (60%); LKS (53%); KK (50%); SV (44%); Saskaņa (43%); LPV (32%)	A/P! (20%); PRO (18%); NA (12%); AS (11%); JV (9%)
Optimism	16%	High income (26%); 18–34 age group (21%)	Low income (10%); Spoken language – Russian (9%)	K (37%); NA (27%); JV (26%); A/P (21%)	KK (0%); S! (4%); LKS (8%)
Energy	7%		Low income (3%)	K (22%); NA (18%)	LPV, SV, S! (0%)
Indifference	6%			Saskaņa (14%); AS (12%)	JV (1%)
Elation	2%	18–24 age group (4%)	Spoken language – Russian (0.3%)	NA (9%); PRO (6%)	AS, KK, LPV, LKS, SV, S!, Saskaņa (0%)

Particularly worrying is the huge ethnic difference in assessments of whether anyone in Latvia can express their opinion on politics freely and without fear. 61% of Latvian-speaking citizens (81% of JV voters!) believe in this possibility, while among Russian-speakers only 23% agree (only 5% of “Sovereign Power” supporters!).

The large differences in perceptions and opinions of different groups of Latvian citizens in terms of feeling threatened, resentment towards the Latvian state, and perceived corruption of officials are evidence of a divided society.

Table 5
Prevailing attitudes in Latvian society in 2022 (post-election survey)

Attitude	Proportion of voters in October 2022	Proportion of voters in October 2018	More often in such groups	Less often in such groups	Often for supporters of such parties	Rarely for supporters of such parties
Looking forward to the future of Latvia with hope	63%	Was not asked	Spoken language – Latvian (73%); High income (71%)	Spoken language – Russian (46%)	JV (89%) A/P! (88%) K (78%) NA (77%) AS (71%)	SV (28%) LKS (32%) Saskaņa (38%) S! (42%) KK (51%)
Believes that any change in Latvian politics is better than no change	61%	68%	Low income (69%); secondary education (67%)	Higher education (54%); High income (55%)	S! (75%) LPV (74%) KK (73%) SV (69%) ZS (67%) AS (67%)	JV (48%) K (51%) PRO (55%)
Disappointed in Latvian politics	59%	Was not asked	Spoken language – Russian (77%); Low income (72%)	High income (45%); 18–24 age group (49%); Spoken language – Latvian (49%); Higher education (52%)	S! (93%) KK (93%) LKS (89%) SV (81%) Saskaņa (76%) LPV (74%) ZS (69%)	JV (23%) A/P! (28%) K (43%) NA (45%) PRO (50%) AS (51%)
Believes that most representatives of the Latvian state are corrupt	58%	69%	Low income (67%); Spoken language – Russian (72%)	High income (45%); 18–24 age group (47%); Spoken language – Latvian (49%); Higher education (52%)	S! (87%) LKS (82%) LPV (79%) KK (79%) SV (78%) Saskaņa (69%)	JV (28%) A/P! (35%) K (39%) NA (41%) PRO (50%)
Believes that Latvia's future is under threat	53%	37%	Spoken language – Russian (59%); Low income (58%)	High income (47%)	LKS (76%) SV (75%) KK (69%) S! (67%) ZS (60%) LPV (57%)	JV (38%) A/P! (38%) NA (43%) K (46%)
Believes that everyone in Latvia can express their views on political issues freely and without fear	47%	Was not asked	Spoken language – Latvian (61%); medium-high income (60%); high income (58%)	Spoken language – Russian (23%); low income (32%); medium-low income (38%)	JV (81%) A/P! (69%) NA (68%) K (65%) PRO (65%) AS (65%)	SV (5%) LKS (16%) S! (16%) LPV (23%) KK (28%) Saskaņa (30%)
Believes that proven political forces are needed in Latvian politics today more than new political forces	38%	Was not asked	Spoken language – Latvian (47%); high income (45%)	Spoken language – Russian (23%)	JV (76%) NA (62%) K (59%) A/P! (45%)	LKS (29%) Saskaņa (29%) PRO (27%) LPV (21%) KK (19%) S! (18%) SV (11%)
Feels resentment towards the Latvian state	36%	31%	Spoken language – Russian (55%); low income (44%)	High income (24%); Spoken language – Latvian (25%); 18–34 age group (30%); higher education (30%)	LKS (82%) S! (65%) SV (64%) KK (51%) Saskaņa (46%)	JV (10%) K (16%) AS (17%) A/P! (19%) NA (23%) PRO (28%)

3. CAMPAIGN METHODS

Figure 13 shows that the number of voters who choose a list based on recommendations from friends has decreased over the last four years. At the same time, the importance of parties' and candidates' activities on social networks has increased.

The importance of other factors is comparable to 2018:

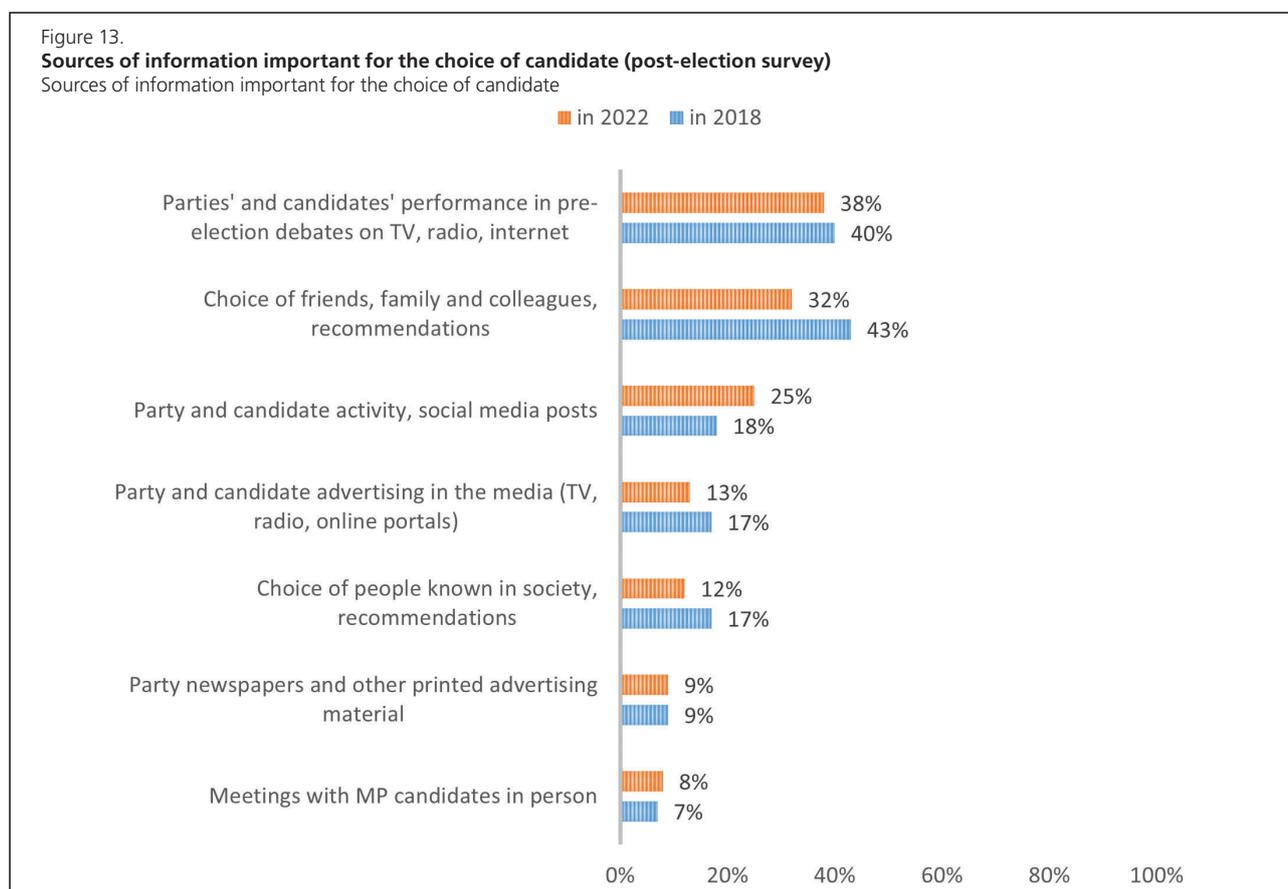
- the performance of parties and candidates in pre-election debates remains of particular importance, with relatively low importance for face-to-face meetings with parliamentary candidates.
- Recommendations from friends, family and colleagues were relatively more useful in these elections for young people and for people who speak Russian in the family.
- Older generations pay more attention to the recommendations of well-known people.

- Pre-election debates as a criterion for choosing electoral preferences are strongly characteristic of people with higher education, as well as Latvian as a spoken language.

- People with primary education pay more attention to printed materials of political parties.

At the same time, this overall picture captures important differences in the electoral tactics and preferences of different parties. This is probably why the election results came as a surprise to some of the public.

As Table 6 shows, the performance of the candidates in the pre-election debates was particularly important for those voters who wanted to maintain the current political course in Latvia but find an alternative to the current government. This is why the performance in the debates proved to be such an important factor for the "Progressive" and "The United List"



voters. Table 7, on the other hand, shows those parties that mainly campaigned through social networks, face-to-face meetings with voters and distribution of printed materials – these methods are less visible to the general public who are not potential supporters of the party in question, which is why the good results of some of these parties seemed unexpected.

general public methods used by “Sovereign Power” to reach out to its potential voters. The election campaign of the party “Harmony” is also worth paying attention to – even those voters who went to vote for this party hardly noticed the party’s campaign. Similarly, the campaigns of ZZS and “National Alliance” stood out little against the general background.

Particularly noteworthy are the “For Stability!” social media activity, as well as the multifaceted but invisible to the

Table 6

Campaigning methods noticeable to the general public – how important a factor for the voter of the list*

List	Performance in the pre-election debates (average 38%)	In advertisements (average 13%)
“PROGRESSIVES”	60%	22%
“THE UNITED LIST”	59%	12%
“Development/For!”	48%	11%
“New UNITY”	45%	12%
“For Stability!”	43%	22%
“LATVIA IN FIRST PLACE”	41%	23%
ZZS	38%	13%
“SOVEREIGN POWER”	37%	11%
K	37%	17%
“National Alliance”	31%	13%
“Harmony”	27%	18%
“FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE”	27%	7%
“Latvian Russian Union”	21%	17%

* Here and in the table below, the lists whose voters found this factor particularly important are highlighted in green (compared to the average for all parties as a whole)

Table 7

Campaigning methods unnoticeable to the general public – how important a factor for the voter of the list

List	Social media activity of parties, candidates (average 25%)	Social media activity of party supporters (average 12%)	Party newspapers (average 9%)	Meetings with MP candidates in person (8% on average)
“For Stability!”	50%	17%	8%	20%
“FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE”	46%	24%	8%	23%
“SOVEREIGN POWER”	44%	33%	22%	25%
“PROGRESSIVES”	43%	19%	6%	6%
“Development/For!”	39%	13%	2%	7%
K	38%	14%	14%	19%
“Latvian Russian Union”	32%	14%	8%	17%
“LATVIA IN FIRST PLACE”	29%	23%	9%	17%
“THE UNITED LIST”	25%	7%	13%	6%
“New UNITY”	23%	8%	7%	3%
“Harmony”	22%	10%	9%	10%
“National Alliance”	20%	6%	10%	3%
ZZS	18%	9%	11%	7%

4. REALISED AND UNREALISED POTENTIAL OF ELECTORAL OPPORTUNITIES

The pre-election survey conducted at the beginning of August 2022 already gave an insight into the expected electoral results. For three parties, the data showed very high loyalty among 2018 voters: “New Unity”, “National Alliance” and “Progressives”. The uncertainty was about ZZS 2018 voters, a large share of whom had not yet decided whether to consider voting for “The United List”.

At the same time, for three parties/party associations, the survey painted a bleak picture of the loyalty of their former voters:

- “Development/For!” had already lost a large part of its 2018 voters to “New Unity” and “Progressives”, and many of the list’s former supporters were still considering their electoral choices.
- Only a small percentage of the party “New Conservatives” voters were going to support the party again. Many had become “New Unity” supporters in the interim.

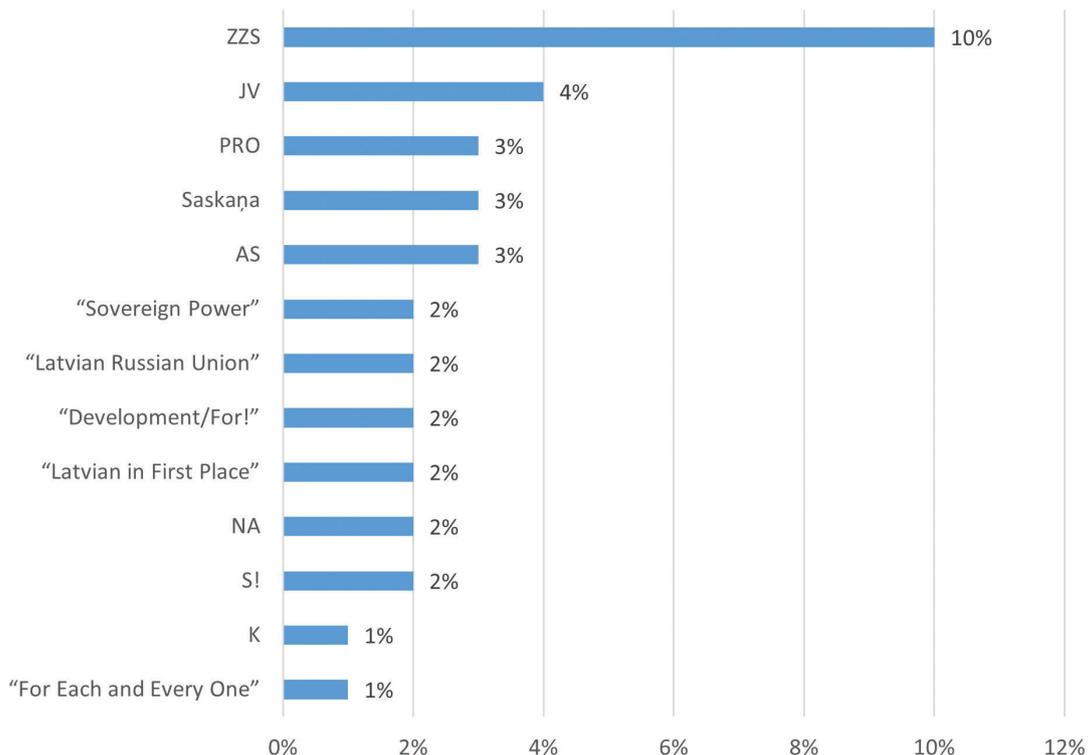
- Less than 30% of the 2018 “Harmony” voters planned to vote for the party again. Around a third of the party’s former voters did not yet know who to vote for, while the rest had decided to vote for other parties or not to vote at all.

The KPV.LV 2018 electoral votes were spread almost across the entire spectrum of political parties in Latvia, with no decisive advantage for any party yet in August.

4.1. WHO WOULD THE VOTERS WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE 1 OCTOBER 2022 ELECTIONS HAVE VOTED FOR?

If participation in the 2022 elections had been compulsory, ZZS would have benefitted the most, with a relatively large number of citizens who did not participate in the elections casting their votes for it. The other parties had little chance to

Figure 14. **Choices of citizens who did not participate in the elections if the elections had been compulsory***
How would the votes of those who did not vote have been distributed?



* Respondents who did not vote in the 1 October elections: “Which party would you most likely have voted for on 1 October if the elections had been compulsory?”

improve their electoral results at the expense of the more politically passive voters.

As in 2018, young people aged 18–24 were relatively more likely not to vote (although less so than in 2018), people with low incomes and people who speak Russian at home (the difference is not significant, only a few percentage points).

Interestingly, there is also a relatively large category (4%) of citizens who refused to name their electoral preference to the sociological surveyors or had forgotten it. This category is characterised by the following features: women, spoken language in the family – Russian.

4.2. ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTRACT VOTERS FROM OTHER PARTIES, RISK OF LOSING VOTERS

As Table 8 and Table 9 show, a number of lists had quite a high potential to both increase their vote share and lose

voters to other parties in a successful campaign. The data of both of these tables show a good electoral result of “New Unity”, which is largely due to the party’s ability to persuade voters to vote for it who could just as well have voted for “National Alliance”, “Development/For”, “Progressives”, “The United List” and “Conservatives”. At the same time, “New Unity” retained a high potential (10 percentage points) to attract even more voters from these and other parties.

It is also interesting that the lists that targeted Russian-speaking voters (“For Stability!”, “Harmony”, “Sovereign Power”, “Latvian Russian Union”, “Latvia in First Place”) won a total of votes that was close to the maximum possible. They were competing for a very similar electorate.

The situation was unusual for ZZS, whose main competitor in the 2022 elections was “The United List”, but which also had a wide potential to expand its electorate with “Latvia in First Place” and “For Stability!” voters.

Table 8
Potential for second choice or additional votes (post-election survey)

The name of the list	What % of voters from other parties would have voted as their second choice?	From which party could a particularly large number of voters potentially have been attracted?	Other closest competitors
AS	10%	–	ZZS, JV, NA
JV	10%	NA	PRO, A/P!, AS
ZZS	9%	AS	LPV, SI, JV, KK
NA	8%	JV	AS, ZZS
PRO	7%	JV	A/P!, K, AS, ZZS
A/P!	7%	JV	PRO
LPV	5%	–	ZZS, SI
SI	4%	–	Saskaņa, ZZS, LKS
K	4%	JV	NA, PRO
SV	3%	SI	KK
Saskaņa	3%	SI	LKS, ZZS, SV, PRO, LPV
KK	2%	SI	LPV, ZZS, AS
LKS	2%	–	Saskaņa, ZZS, SI

Table 9
Risk of losing own voters (post-election survey)

Voter’s choice in the 1 October elections	20% or more of the voters on this list had the following second choice:	10–19% of voters had the following second choice:	5–9% of voters had the following second choice:
JV	–	NA, A/P!, PRO, AS, K	ZZS
ZZS	AS (22%)	LPV	NA, JV
AS	–	ZZS, NA, JV	PRO
NA	JV (30%), AS (20%)–	K, ZZS, A/P!, LPV	AS, ZZS
SI	–	LPV, ZZS, SC, Saskaņa, KK	“The Power of People’s Power”
PRO	JV (23%)	A/P!	K, AS, ZZS, NA
LPV	ZZS (34%)	–	KK, SV, SI, Saskaņa

5. MUTUAL DISLIKE BETWEEN PARTY VOTERS – PREFERRED AND UNDESIRE COALITIONS

In the post-election survey, respondents were asked which parties they would definitely not want to see in the government. This question was asked to find out which parties are more polarising and which are more neutral in the eyes of Latvian citizens. Table 10 shows the overall results of Latvian citizens. As can be seen, the most polarising party in Latvia after the 2022 elections was the “Latvian Russian Union”, the least polarising – “The United List”.

Table 11 shows a more detailed breakdown of the same question by party. Voters’ answers show that the four lists that made it into the *Saeima* are particularly unpleasant for voters of several (4–6) parties each. These lists are “For Stability!”, “New Unity”, “National Alliance”, “Latvia in First Place”. If it is common in Latvian politics for the parties forming governments to set “red lines” (sanitary cordons) against inviting some of the other parties represented in the parliament to join the government; it is less well known that the voters of the parties not invited to these governments might have even greater objections if these parties were to become allies of the parties forming the government.

Two parties – “The United List” and “Progressives” – polarise voters of other parties only slightly, i.e., a majority of supporters of any other party would have no objection to these parties being in government.

Table 10
The most polarising parties

The name of the list	What % of Latvian citizens would not like to see this party in the government?
LKS	52%
Saskaņa	45%
KK	41%
SI	40%
LPV	35%
JV	33%
SV	31%
NA	24%
ZZS	22%
K	22%
A/P!	21%
PRO	18%
AS	11%

Table 11
Party supporters’ assessment of undesirable coalitions (post-election survey)

The name of the party	Parties for which a majority of supporters do not want to see this party in a coalition	Parties where 25–49% of voters do not want to see these parties in coalition	Parties where voters have no particular objection to these parties being in the government
JV	SI 82%; SV: 81%; LKS: 79%; KK: 76%; LPV: 71%; Saskaņa: 50%	ZZS: 47%	AS: 23%; PRO: 22%; NA: 15%; A/P!: 15%; K: 10%
ZZS		PRO: 49%; K: 43%; JV: 45%; A/P!: 33%; NA: 31%; LKS: 27%	AS: 16%; SI: 11%; SV: 9%; KK: 7%; Saskaņa: 5%; LPV: 4%
AS		LKS: 40%	SV: 17%; KK: 17%; Saskaņa: 16%; JV: 15%; SI: 14%; K: 14%; A/P!: 11%; ZZS: 8%; LPV: 8%; NA: 4%
SI	JV: 70%; A/P!: 69%; AS: 67%; NA: 67%; K: 62%; PRO: 61%	ZZS: 29%	Saskaņa: 23%; LPV: 20%; LKS: 15%; SV: 11%; KK: 7%
NA	LKS: 79%; SI: 60%; Saskaņa: 58%; SV: 54%	LPV: 44%; KK: 44%; PRO: 31%	ZZS: 24%; A/P!: 20%; JV: 10%; AS: 9%; K: 6%
PRO		LKS: 34%; LPV: 31%; KK: 29%; NA: 28%; SI: 26%	K: 24%; AS: 23%; ZZS: 18%; A/P!: 18%; SV: 17%; JV: 13%; Saskaņa: 8%
LPV	JV: 67%; PRO: 64%; K: 61%; A/P!: 57%; NA: 56%	AS: 44%; LKS: 26%	ZZS: 20%; Saskaņa: 14%; SV: 9%; SI: 9%; K: 5%

6. MAIN REASONS FOR THE POOR PERFORMANCE OF “HARMONY”

In the October 1, 2022 elections for Latvia’s Parliament, the political party “Harmony” failed to reach the 5% threshold and therefore did not gain any seats in the Parliament. This seemed surprising, as the party had consistently performed well in previous elections compared to other political parties. However, it had never been invited to be part of the government, as other parties formed a “cordon sanitaire” around it, suspecting it of being pro-Kremlin. “Harmony” represented the votes of Russian-speaking citizens of Latvia, uniting politicians of different political persuasions even though it characterized itself as being socially democratic.

“Harmony” performed poorly in the 2022 elections for three main reasons:

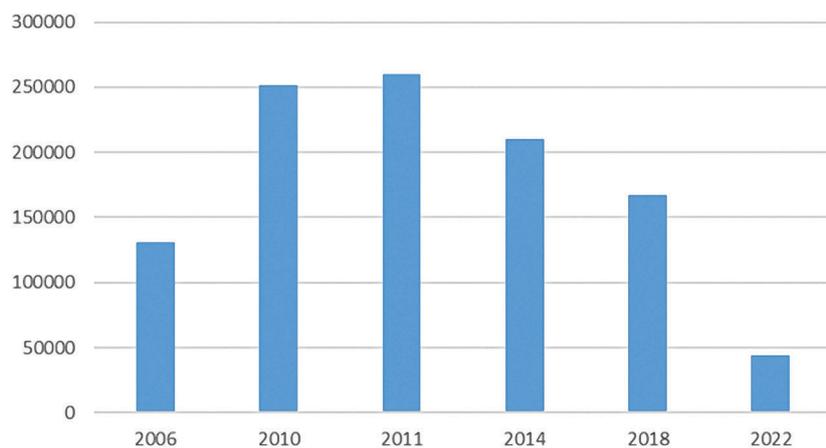
- 1) There was intense competition for the votes of Russian-speaking citizens, with eight political parties having a substantial voting share from this group. This is unprece-

ented, as usually only 3-4 parties compete for Russian-speaking voters.

- 2) These were social media-centric elections, with parties competing for the Russian-speaking vote being particularly active on social networks. In contrast, “Harmony’s” election campaign was boring and almost invisible.
- 3) Russian-speaking voters were particularly willing to seek change and look for alternatives to the existing political elite. “Harmony” did not fit well with this desire for something new, and had not managed to attract new political leaders.

A sense that “Harmony” is a political party in decline could have already been felt over a number of election campaigns with its popularity in steady decline (see Figure 15). More intense competition and insufficient energy during the election campaign removed it from the Parliament altogether.

Figure 15.
Votes for “Harmony” in 6 Parliamentary Elections
 Votes for „Harmony” (previously „Harmony Center”) in parliamentary elections



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iveta Kažoka is the director and lead researcher of Latvia-based think tank Providus. Providus is an organization that since 2022 has monitored several pre-election campaigns and produces voting advice applications (previously "Try on a Party!", currently "Party sorter"). Iveta Kažoka also wrote an analytical report about the results of 2018 parliamentary elections in Latvia.

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DESIRE FOR STABILITY VERSUS DESIRE FOR CHANGE: Polarization of Attitudes During Latvia's General Elections of 2022



In 2022 elections, voters once again rapidly changed their voting habits. The difficulty of finding a suitable party affected both Latvian and Russian-speaking citizens equally.



Among citizens there were two main motivations competing with each other: 1) the motivation for stability and a reliable political force to be trusted to lead the country in a crisis; 2) the motivation for an alternative political course. Elections were won by a party ("New Unity") representing stability and trustworthiness for its voters. This is the political party that led the previous government and will lead the new one.



The data analyzed in this research indicates a divided society. The voters' choice on parliamentary elections was ethnically marked and to some extent also socially marked. All three political parties that will be forming the new government ("New Unity", "National Alliance", "The United List") were the choice almost exclusively of Latvian-speakers.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<https://baltic.fes.de>