ISSN 1648-2603 (print)
ISSN 2029-2872 (online)

VIEŠOJI POLITIKA IR ADMINISTRAVIMAS
PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION
2025, T 24, Nr. 3/2025, Vol. 24, Nr. 3

DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Vytautas Valentinavičius

Kaunas University of Technology,
A. Mickevičiaus st. 37-1100, LT-44244 Kaunas, Lithuania

Vaidas Morkevičius

Kaunas University of Technology,
A. Mickevičiaus st. 37-1100, LT-44244 Kaunas, Lithuania

Eglė Butkevičienė

Kaunas University of Technology,
A. Mickevičiaus st. 37-1100, LT-44244 Kaunas, Lithuania

https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.ppaa.24.3.42178

Abstract. *This article examines the relationship between civil society, civic participation, and democratic resilience in Lithuania within a European Union (EU) comparative frame. A mixed-methods design integrates a nationally representative public survey (N = 1,255; May–July 2024) with indicators from the EU Resilience Dashboards (data through 2022). To substantiate inferences, we report an ordinal association matrix (Kendall's τ-b) alongside a compact logistic model with average marginal effects. Readiness to engage in active protest is positively associated with civic engagement (+4.9 percentage points per one-step increase on a 0–3 scale) and with perceiving a citizens–government conflict (+12.1 pp), and declines modestly with age (−0.19 pp per year); the association with institutional trust is small and only marginal. In EU comparison, Lithuania ranks above the EU average on the geopolitical dimension, around the average on digital, and below the average on social-economic and green dimensions. We argue that cultivating civic habits and ensuring credible channels for voice constitute proximate (micro-level) levers of democratic resilience, while addressing capacity shortfalls identified by the dashboards operates at the meso/macro level. The study contributes an integrated micro–macro account of democratic resilience in a geopolitically exposed EU member state and clarifies where policy leverage is likely to be most effective.*

Keywords: *democratic resilience, civil society, civic participation, Lithuania, EU resilience, public trust*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *demokratinis atsparumas, pilietinė visuomenė, pilietinis dalyvavimas, Lietuva, ES atsparumas, visuomenės pasitikėjimas*

Introduction

In evaluating the condition of a society and its overall health, there has been a sustained focus on its resilience – its capacity to endure diverse challenges that are becoming increasingly apparent in a geopolitically challenging world. Social resilience refers to a community's ability to absorb, adapt to, and recover from adverse events (Alessi et al., 2020; Dewaele & Lucas, 2022). A resilient society values cultural diversity and promotes the political, economic, and social inclusion of all individuals, thus strengthening social

cohesion (Norris et al., 2008). Comparative research suggests that key drivers of social resilience include civic participation, social capital, inclusive governance, and citizens' capacity to critically engage with social issues within their local context (Carmen et al., 2022). However, existing studies often fail to explore how democratic and social resilience interact in contexts facing high geopolitical pressure and external threats.

Democratic resilience, the ability of democratic systems, institutions, political actors, and citizens to withstand and respond to internal and external challenges, has never been more critical in times of geopolitical instability, particularly in regions facing hybrid threats and democratic backsliding. Merkel and Lührmann (2021) argue that the more democracies exhibit resilience at all four levels of the political system: the political community, institutions, actors, and citizens, the less vulnerable they are to crises, now and in the future. Research on citizenship (Martini & Quaranta, 2020) underscores that active civic participation strengthens decision-making processes, producing outcomes that benefit society at large. Furthermore, informed and engaged citizens are more likely to collaborate, make rational decisions, and hold governments accountable, all of which contribute to a society's ability to endure and recover from crises. In an era of increasing digital misinformation, the ability to critically assess information, understand scientific data, and use technology responsibly has become a crucial component of democratic resilience (Doyle et al., 2020; Yacoubian, 2017).

Public participation and engagement in democratic processes have emerged as essential elements in nearly all indices evaluating democracies. The importance of civic participation within democratic processes was examined by early political theorists in their scholarly discourses (see Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835; John Stuart Mill, 1859) and further expanded upon by subsequent scholars who focused on the decline of social capital and its ramifications on civic engagement (Putnam, 1995), as well as the function of the public sphere in which rational discourse among citizens strengthens democracy (Habermas, 1996). The significance of participatory democracy in fostering political efficacy and inclusion was additionally elaborated by Pateman (1970).

This paper examines the intricate relationship between social and democratic resilience, particularly in the context of geopolitical transformations that have contributed to the decline of democratic societies and the growing tendency toward autocratic governance (The Democracy Index, 2024). While civil society and citizen participation are widely recognized as fundamental to democratic processes, their role in fortifying both democratic and social resilience remains a critical and underexplored area of analysis. Against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical instability and democratic challenges within the European Union (EU), this study investigates the resilience of democracy in Lithuania, focusing on the key factors that influence its development and stability. Specifically, it aims to (1) analyze how civil society and civic participation contribute to democratic resilience, (2) assess Lithuania's democratic resilience in comparison to broader EU trends, and (3) propose policy measures to strengthen democratic institutions and civic engagement based on empirical evidence. Despite extensive scholarly discourse on democratic resilience, there remains a gap in understanding how civic participation tangibly enhances resilience, particularly in geopolitically vulnerable states like Lithuania. To address this, the article employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating survey data on Lithuanian citizens' perceptions with EU resilience metrics to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors shaping Lithuania's democratic resilience and the transformations it has undergone in recent years. Building on these aims and the mixed-methods design, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) In what ways do civil society and civic participation contribute to the strengthening of democratic resilience in Lithuania? (2) How does Lithuania's democratic resilience compare with broader European Union trends, and what do any observed divergences reveal about potential strategies for enhancing resilience? (3) Which policy measures, as identified through the empirical evidence presented in this study, hold the greatest potential to reinforce democratic institutions and foster sustained civic engagement in Lithuania?

The remainder of the article first reviews the relevant scholarly literature, situating the study within existing debates on democratic resilience. It then outlines the data sources and methodological approach

employed in the analysis. This is followed by the presentation of findings derived from the national survey and the EU resilience dashboards. The discussion section interprets these findings in light of the theoretical framework and broader policy context, and the article concludes by offering evidence-based policy recommendations.

Literature review

The examination of democratic resilience is gaining momentum and capturing the interest of scholars, while simultaneously transitioning into a subject of focus for decision makers (Holloway and Manwaring, 2022). The assessment of democratic resilience presents challenges, as it encompasses more than mere resilience and necessitates an examination of democracy itself. Scholars have observed that a democratic system does not exhibit resilience independently. The vitality of democracy is intricately linked with the condition of distinct yet interrelated systems, including economic and social systems (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Quinn & Woolley, 2001, Holloway and Manwaring, 2022). Bernhard et al. (2015) assert that the functionality of a democratic system is contingent upon the efficacy of its constituent sub-systems, which include institutionalized party systems exemplified by robust, stable, and strong party organizations, the electoral system that entails the configuration and operation of electoral procedures to sustain democratic norms and practices, and civil society, which acts as an organizational intermediary between the state and individual life. Bourbeau presents a tripartite classification of resilience: resilience as maintenance, resilience as marginality, and resilience as renewal. Resilience as maintenance denotes efforts to preserve the status quo following a disturbance. In contrast, resilience as marginality is defined by actions that provoke alterations at the periphery without fundamentally questioning the core of a policy or societal framework. Finally, resilience as renewal entails a transformation of foundational policy premises (2018, pp. 30). Furthermore, Bahadur et al. distinguish the core characteristics of resilience: diversity, effective governance (institutions), acceptance of uncertainty and change, community involvement, preparedness and readiness, equity, social values and structure, non-equilibrium system dynamics, learning, cross-scalar perspective (2010, pp. 14-18).

In response to critiques regarding the responsibility for bolstering or expanding democratic resilience, Holloway and Manwaring (2022) argue that a resilient democratic system arises from the joint contributions of both citizens and the state. Nonetheless, the state undeniably plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of institutions and their readiness for change, advancing equity and diversity, creating opportunities for inclusive participation, and facilitating learning from systemic shocks. There exist limited scholarly efforts to align resilience theory with democratic resilience (see Boese et al., 2021; Merkel & Lührmann, 2021; Holloway and Manwaring, 2022); however, researchers have delineated various definitions of democratic resilience. In their study, Burnell and Calvert define democratic resilience as the enduring commitment to democratic ideals and the continued advocacy for these ideals despite hostility from officially prescribed values and norms, and apparent indifference to many societal elements (1999). Authors identify several key factors contributing to democratic resilience, including the persistence of democratic ideals; the continued belief in and advocacy for democratic values, even in the face of significant opposition; historical memory, a commitment to democratic values; institutional and social support; adaptation and problem-solving; external and internal support (Burnell and Calvert, 1999). Sisk asserts that the attributes associated with "resilience as applied to democracy" encompass flexibility: the capability to absorb stress or pressure; recovery: the capability to surmount challenges or crises; adaptation: the capability to transform in response to systemic stress; and innovation: the capability to modify in a manner that more efficiently or effectively addresses the challenge or crisis (2017, pp. 5). Meléndez and Kaltwasser articulate democratic resilience as the enduring nature of democratic institutions and practices, persisting notwithstanding the presence of political forces that implicitly or explicitly oppose the liberal democratic regime (2021, pp. 955). Moreover, Lieberman et al. articulate that the resilience of a

democratic system is characterized by its capacity to endure significant disruptions, such as the emergence of extreme polarization, while continuing to execute essential functions of democratic governance, including electoral accountability, representation, the effective limitation of excessive or concentrated power, and collaborative decision-making (2022, p. 7). As evident in the various definitions, each encompasses the state's ability to endure diverse shocks without compromising the democratic fabric of society, along with the pivotal role of societal engagement through representation and decision-making. Furthermore, Merkel and Lührmann (2021) assert that democracies that demonstrate resilience at all four levels of their political system – the political community, institutions, actors, and citizens – are less susceptible to crises, both present and future. Levitsky and Way conceptualize democratic resilience as the capacity of democratic systems to endure and maintain stability despite adverse global conditions. They attribute this resilience to structural factors such as economic development, urbanization, and the inherent challenges of consolidating and sustaining authoritarian rule within competitive political environments. The authors argue that contrary to prevailing concerns about a global authoritarian resurgence, numerous democracies have demonstrated remarkable endurance, preserving their institutional frameworks and democratic governance (Levitsky and Way, 2024).

Rosenthal contends that prevailing theories often fail to adequately acknowledge the significance of resilience and the affective resources essential for sustaining democratic engagement in the face of adversity. The author advocates for a more nuanced conceptualization of democratic resilience, emphasizing the necessity of integrating capacities for mourning, dissidence, and the development of novel modes of interaction. Rosenthal defines democratic resilience as the ability of marginalized or disempowered citizens to sustain their struggles and persist in democratic participation, even within adverse and unresponsive sociopolitical environments (Rosenthal, 2016). Guaasti asserts that democratic resilience refers to the capacity of institutional veto points and civil society to resist efforts by technocratic populists to undermine accountability. According to the author, the most effective constraints on technocratic populists in power are the judiciary, a free press, and an engaged civil society, which collectively serve as a critical safeguard against democratic backsliding. However, the author emphasizes that while an active civil society can mitigate democratic erosion, it lacks the capacity to fully reverse it once it has taken hold (2020). Finally, Cheeseman et al. argues that democratic resilience is the capacity of a political system to withstands crises and adapt without compromising core democratic principles, institutions, or processes. It ensures governance integrity, protects civil liberties, upholds the rule of law, and fosters political pluralism while enabling structural reforms to strengthen democracy (2024).

Table 1. *Definitions of Democratic Resilience*

Definition	Author(s)
Democratic resilience is the enduring commitment to democratic ideals despite hostility and indifference.	Burnell and Calvert (1999)
Democratic resilience as applied to democracy includes flexibility, recovery, adaptation, and innovation.	Sisk (2017)
Democratic resilience is the persistence of democratic institutions and practices despite opposition.	Meléndez and Kaltwasser (2021)
The resilience of a democratic system is its ability to endure disruptions while maintaining key democratic functions.	Lieberman et al. (2022)
Democratic resilience is the ability of marginalized citizens to sustain democratic engagement in adversity.	Rosenthal (2016)
Democratic resilience is the capacity of institutional veto points and civil society to resist technocratic populists.	Guaasti (2020)
Democratic resilience is the ability of a political system to withstand crises without compromising democracy.	Cheeseman et al. (2024)
Democratic resilience ensures democracies endure and counteract autocratization through institutional and societal mechanisms.	Croissant and Lott (2024)
Democratic resilience depends on economic development, political structure, and institutional robustness.	Levitsky and Way (2024)

Measurement of Democratic resilience

Croissant and Lott give high weight to measuring the resilience of democracy. The authors assert that assessing democratic resilience is essential for understanding how democracies can effectively counteract autocratization, respond to democratic backsliding, and reinforce existing democratic institutions, practices, and processes. This analytical approach is crucial for developing strategic frameworks aimed at safeguarding and strengthening democratic systems in the face of evolving threats and challenges (Croissant and Lott, 2024). Assessing democratic resilience is crucial for evaluating the stability and robustness of democratic institutions, ensuring their capacity to withstand and recover from challenges. It provides policymakers with empirical insights necessary for designing strategies that reinforce democratic institutions and mitigate democratic backsliding. Additionally, measuring democratic resilience facilitates comparative analysis across different democratic systems, identifying key factors that contribute to their resilience and informing best practices for democratic sustainability (Volacu and Aligica, 2023). Measuring democratic resilience is essential for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of democratic systems, pinpointing areas for improvement, and developing strategies to safeguard and strengthen democracy. It enables the design of targeted interventions to prevent democratic erosion, reinforce institutions, and ensure the long-term sustainability of democratic governance (Cheeseman et al., 2024). According to Cheeseman et al. (2024) measuring democratic resilience requires evaluating key factors that influence a system's stability and adaptability. These include structural factors (economic development and industrialization), social factors (equality and political polarization), normative factors (support for democratic values), institutional factors (state capacity and institutional design), and actor-centric factors (the role of key groups in resisting autocratization).

Croissant and Lott offer different approach to measuring democratic resilience. In their work they argue that democratic resilience should be assessed through resilience performance and resilience capacity. Resilience performance evaluates changes in democratic quality over time using the Delta Approach, where declines indicate weaker resilience and stability, or improvement reflects strength. The Episode approach examines resilience through three phases: onset resilience (preventing autocratization), breakdown resilience (avoiding democratic collapse), and bounce-back resilience (recovering and strengthening democracy after setbacks). Resilience capacity focuses on structural and political factors that sustain democracy, including macro-institutional factors (democracy stock, executive constraints, rule of law), political actors (anti-pluralist party index, political polarization), civic culture and civil society (civil society robustness, power distribution), and political community (trust in democracy). These indicators are integrated into the Resilience Capacity (ResCap) Index, which combines additive and multiplicative models to provide a comprehensive measure of a country's ability to maintain democratic stability (2024).

Popescu-Zamfir and Sandu (2021) offer a different approach to measurement of democratic resilience. The Democratic Resilience Index developed utilizes a comprehensive framework to assess a country's ability to withstand and recover from democratic challenges. This framework is organized into a multi-dimensional assessment matrix that evaluates four primary domains: Politics and Governance, Media and Civil Society, Economy, and External Affairs. Within each domain, the Democratic Resilience Index further categorizes resilience drivers into four horizontal categories: Institutions and Structures, Elite Agency, Critical Junctures and Path Dependency, and Buffers and Legacies. This structured approach enables a nuanced analysis of both the institutional frameworks and the roles of political actors in maintaining democratic resilience. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) provides the Resilience Dashboards, which measure resilience across five dimensions—economic, social & cohesion, green, digital, and geopolitical. Each dimension consists of multiple quantitative indicators sourced from institutions like Eurostat and the OECD, which are normalized to ensure comparability The indicators are aggregated using weighted averages, and a final Resilience Index Score is calculated to assess and compare countries' ability to withstand and adapt to various shocks (2024).

Table 2. *Approaches to Measuring Democratic Resilience*

Measurement Approach	Author(s)
Resilience performance and resilience capacity assessed via the Delta and Episode approaches. The Delta approach measures changes in democratic quality over time, while the Episode approach evaluates resilience in three phases: onset (preventing autocratization), breakdown (avoiding democratic collapse), and bounce-back (recovering democracy after setbacks).	Croissant and Lott (2024)
A multi-dimensional assessment framework analyzing four domains: Politics and Governance, Media and Civil Society, Economy, and External Affairs. Each domain is further categorized into resilience drivers such as institutions, elite agency, critical junctures, and historical legacies.	Popescu-Zamfir and Sandu (2021)
The Resilience Dashboard measures resilience across economic, social, green, digital, and geopolitical dimensions. Indicators are sourced from Eurostat and the OECD, normalized for comparability, and aggregated into a composite Resilience Index Score to assess a country's adaptability to shocks.	European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), 2024

Methodology

We use a mixed-methods design to examine Lithuanian citizens' perceptions of democracy, civic engagement, and resilience. Triangulation across methods, data sources, and analytical lenses is used to mitigate bias and strengthen inference in the study of complex social–political phenomena (Denzin, 2009; Patton, 2014; Creswell, 2017).

Survey of Lithuanian residents. A multi-stage, geographically stratified probability design (by settlement size and administrative unit) was implemented for residents aged 18+. Two selection procedures were used: probability-address sampling from the national Register of Addresses and route-based sampling where the frame was incomplete. Interviews were conducted face-to-face (CAPI, Lithuanian) from 22 May to 27 July 2024 (n = 1,255), in line with ESOMAR ethical standards (Butkevičienė et al., 2026). Fieldwork visited 4,855 households; contact was established in 80.3 percent, and the final participation rate was 27.9 percent (reported as AAPOR RR3: completes / (known eligible + e·unknown eligible), with e estimated from contacted cases), no post-stratification weights were used. Interviewer quality assurance included 10 percent back-checks by phone. Descriptive estimates report base Ns; single-item statistics use available cases (pairwise deletion). For multi-item indices, scores were computed when ≥50 percent of items were answered; otherwise, the index was set to missing. No imputation was applied. Key risks are standard non-response and response biases given the participation rate.

Analytical checks. To complement the descriptive figures, we report two compact analyses on the same survey sample. First, a Kendall's tau-b correlation matrix across five constructs—institutional trust (national authorities), civic engagement (0–3), perceived corruption (1–5), perceived citizen–government conflict (binary), and protest engagement (0–2)—with two-sided significance tests; tau-b is appropriate for ordinal data with many ties. Second, a binary logistic regression estimates the probability of active protest (1 = would actively participate in at least one of three scenarios; 0 = support-only or no action). Predictors are civic engagement, institutional trust, perceived corruption, and perceived citizen–government conflict; controls are age, sex (female = 1), and settlement type coded urban (1 = metropolitan/city; 0 = village). We report average marginal effects (AMEs) with 95 percent confidence intervals. *Missing data.* For the Kendall correlations (Table 4), we used listwise deletion across the five constructs (one consistent analytic sample). For the logit (Table 5), we used complete cases across outcome, predictors, and controls.

EU Resilience Dashboard analysis. To situate Lithuania comparatively, we analyse the European Commission–Joint Research Centre (JRC) Resilience Dashboards (*Dataset_Resilience_Dashboards_-_Timeline.*

csv), which organize indicators into four dimensions—social-economic, green, digital, and geopolitical—consistent with the Strategic Foresight framework (European Commission, 2021; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024). Indicators are normalized within year to percentile scores in [0,1] for cross-scale comparability; variables for which "lower is better" are direction-adjusted prior to ranking (Krishnan, 2022). The EU reference is computed by taking the cross-country mean for each indicator-year and mapping it onto the same within-year percentile distribution (i.e., the proportion of country values below that mean). For each dimension, Lithuania's annual score is the median of its indicator percentiles (robust to outliers); the overall score is the mean of the four-dimension medians, with equal weights at both steps (Li et al., 2019). Coverage extends through 2022. The exact indicator set and metadata are publicly available on the European Commission's Resilience Dashboards page (codes and labels as listed there).

Operational definitions (dashboard dimensions). Following the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report, the dashboards assess vulnerabilities and capacities across four interconnected dimensions: (i) social-economic (inequalities, social impact, health, education, employment, economic stability), (ii) green (mitigation/adaptation, sustainable resource use, ecosystems/biodiversity), (iii) digital (digital inclusion, industry/public-space digitalization, cybersecurity), and (iv) geopolitical (open strategic autonomy, exposure in trade/finance/energy, security threats). These provide a forward-looking, policy-relevant lens for tracking progress and gaps (European Commission, 2021; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024).

Limitations. Survey estimates may be influenced by non-response patterns; dashboard coverage to 2022 may omit the most recent developments. These considerations motivate cautious interpretation of year-to-year changes and the use of triangulation to corroborate findings. Listwise deletion reduces N slightly (wider CIs), but it ensures a single, comparable sample across all coefficients in Table 4 and prevents inconsistent, pair-dependent Ns.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: Civil Society and Civic Participation in Lithuania

Newport posits that polling employs scientific methodologies to systematically ascertain the insights, emotions, and attitudes prevalent within a society's population. These aggregated perspectives represent substantial wisdom, and polling continues to be the most effective and efficient mechanism for extracting such insights. Instead of disregarding or fearing its influence, it is imperative to focus on the responsible and strategic utilization of polling data (2004). Consequently, comprehending public opinions concerning resilience is crucial, as it provides a comprehensive assessment of a society's capacity to endure various crises and internal or external disturbances. The survey results show that 43 percent of respondents disagree that Lithuanian society is prepared to withstand crises, 31.5 percent agree, and 24.5 percent neither agree nor disagree. A large proportion of respondents (48 percent) also disagree with the statement that Lithuanian society is ready to recover from crises, while only 30.2 percent agree with this statement. More than half of the Lithuanian population also agrees with the statement that Lithuanian society is divided (54 percent) and even 70.2 percent of respondents agree that there is a conflict between ordinary people and the government.

Our result that more frequent civic engagement strongly predicts willingness to *actively* protest ($\tau \approx 0.18$; AME $\approx +4.9$ pp) is consistent with the Civic Voluntarism Model – participation grows from resources, motivation, and recruitment networks; habits formed in civil society lower the costs of action and ease mobilization (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). The finding also resonates with the idea of a civic habitus – durable dispositions to act civically that are cultivated through practice and group life (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Milani et al., 2021). Recent work strengthens this link: contemporary studies show protest as part of broader participation repertoires, where those already engaged civically are more likely to "show up" in the streets (Oser, 2021; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018; Giugni & Grasso, 2019). Large-scale reviews similarly document that individual values, engagement, and organizational embeddedness help explain who protests (Cantoni, Kao, Yang & Yuchtman, 2024) and that insiders vs. outsiders in civic/

organizational fields differ in protest uptake (Borbáth, 2024). Taken together, these literatures align with our evidence: people already "doing" civic life are those most ready to defend democratic institutions when they perceive them to be at risk (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Oser, 2021; Giugni & Grasso, 2019). The small, negative and only marginally significant association for institutional trust (AME ≈ −2.6 pp) fits comparative evidence: lower political trust often links to non-institutional participation (e.g., protest), while higher trust favours institutional channels (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Likewise, the negative age gradient (≈ −0.19 pp per year) is consistent with research on life-cycle/generational differences in repertoires – older adults lean more to institutional participation, younger cohorts to street forms (Grasso, 2019; Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Perceived corruption shows little independent association with active protest once civic engagement and conflict frames are considered. This aligns with the grievance-plus-mobilization view: grievances rarely suffice; they need mobilizing structures and compelling frames to convert into action (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014).

The necessity of enhancing public trust may be further substantiated by the Ministry of Interior report, which identifies a decline in public trust in state institutions in 2023 (see Table 3). Although the level of distrust in state institutions is not as pronounced as it was during 2013-2015, it has intensified since 2019, reaching its peak in 2022-2023. The increase in distrust toward state institutions may be linked to several factors. The COVID-19 pandemic and the strict measures imposed by the government led to public dissatisfaction with state authorities. Additionally, the 2021 migration crisis in Lithuania and Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have further contributed to overall dissatisfaction, as these crises tested the resilience and effectiveness of the state apparatus.

Table 3. *Trust in State Institutions (2013-2023).*

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Trust institutions	41	40	51	71	65	70	65	64	56	61	54
Distrust institutions	36	36	28	18	19	19	24	25	23	26	25
Did not answer	23	24	21	11	16	11	11	11	21	13	21

Notes. Prepared by the authors according to data published in the Vileikiene and Gelčytė (2024) report "Report on citizens' confidence on trust in state and municipal institutions and assessment of the quality of service".

The findings of this study indicate that civic engagement in Lithuania remains relatively low (see Figure 1), with a large proportion of the population displaying reluctance to participate in voluntary or political activities. While 42.4 percent of respondents reported never engaging in community or voluntary activities – and not intending to do so in the future – only 12.1 percent had participated within the past year. Additionally, despite widespread support for democratic values, active participation in protests or other forms of political engagement is limited. To fully understand this phenomenon, it is essential to examine structural and psychological barriers that shape civic behaviour. One of the key factors influencing

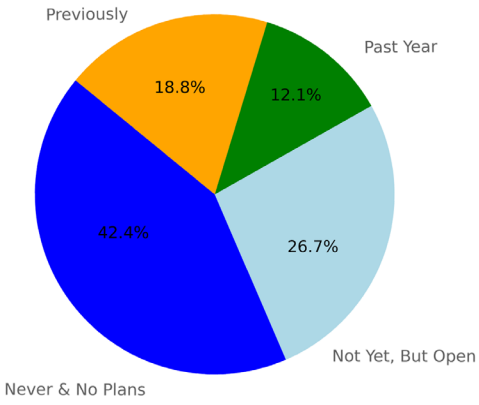

Figure 1. *Civic Engagement Distribution in Lithuania.*
Source: Authors.

low civic engagement is the concept of civic habitus, as introduced by Jethro Pettit (2016). Drawing from Bourdieu's theory of habitus, Pettit argues that citizens internalize historical experiences of powerlessness, leading to tacit compliance with existing power structures rather than active participation. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in post-Soviet societies, where past experiences with authoritarian governance have conditioned citizens to view political engagement as ineffective or even risky. In Lithuania, lingering distrust toward political institutions, coupled with a historical memory of top-down governance, may contribute to a culture of disengagement. Research suggests that low civic participation is not merely a rational decision based on cost-benefit analysis but is also shaped by deeply ingrained social norms and lived experiences (Pettit, 2016).

Many citizens do not actively choose to disengage; rather, they subconsciously internalize expectations that their participation will not lead to meaningful change. This aligns with the survey results, where more than half of respondents perceive Lithuanian society as divided and 70.2 percent believe that there is a conflict between ordinary citizens and the government. This widespread sense of detachment from political institutions fosters a self-reinforcing cycle of political passivity. Despite relatively low participation in voluntary activities, there exists a notable propensity to uphold democratic principles through protest actions (see Figure 2). In the event that politicians attempt to diminish democratic processes in Lithuania, 34.1 percent of respondents demonstrated a willingness to actively participate in protests, whereas a larger proportion of 39.7 percent expressed support for these actions without engaging directly. A similar trend is evident regarding possible threats to judicial independence and media freedom. Specifically, concerning judicial independence, 25.7 percent would choose to actively protest, whereas 45.0 percent would lend support without direct involvement. In situations involving constraints on media and free speech, 29.8 percent would actively protest, with 42.4 percent providing passive support. This data implies that although direct activism is limited, a significant segment of the population recognizes the importance of protecting democratic institutions and is willing to demonstrate solidarity.

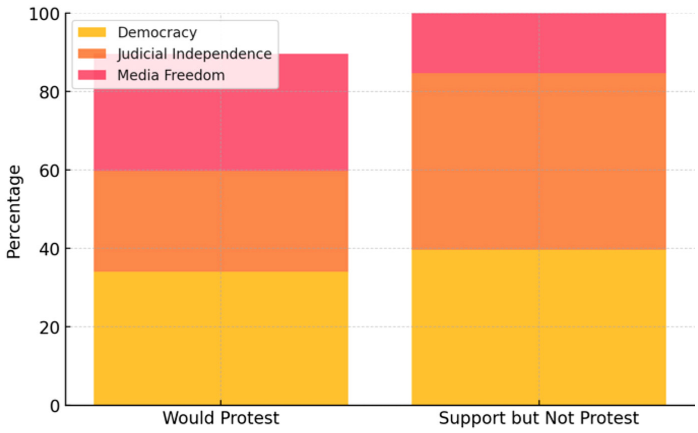

Figure 2. *Protest Support by Cause.*

Source: Authors

Kendall's tau-b correlations (Table 4) align with the descriptive patterns: protest engagement is higher among respondents with more frequent civic engagement ($\tau = 0.18$, $p<0.001$) and among those who perceive a citizen–government conflict ($\tau = 0.11$, $p<0.001$), and slightly lower (non-significant) with higher institutional trust ($\tau = -0.03$, $p = 0.25$). The association with perceived corruption is near zero ($\tau = 0.01$, $p = 0.65$). These ordinal, tie-robust associations are consistent with the regression results reported next.

Table 4. *Kendall's tau-b correlations among key constructs (N = 1,109; two-sided tests)*[1]

	(1) Trust	(2) Civic eng.	(3)corruption	(4) Conflict	(5) Protest
(1) Trust (higher = more)	1.00	−0.06**	0.23***	0.20***	−0.03
(2) Civic engagement (0–3)	−0.06**	1.00	−0.10***	0.05	0.18***
(3) Perceived corruption (1–5)	0.23***	−0.10***	1.00	0.17***	0.01
(4) Citizen–govt conflict (1 = yes)	0.20***	0.05	0.17***	1.00	0.11***
(5) Protest engagement (0–2)	−0.03	0.18***	0.01	0.11***	1.00

Notes. Kendall's tau-b; two-sided tests; stars mark significance (p<.05 = **; p<.01 = **; p<.001 = ***). DK/NA treated as missing. Trust = confidence in national authorities (P17_2, 1–5; higher = more trust). Civic engagement = composite from P2_1…P2_8 (0–3; higher = more frequent). Perceived corruption = v50 (1–5; higher = worse). Conflict = v53 recoded 1 if agree (1–2), 0 otherwise (3–5). Protest engagement = from P11_1–P11_3 (0 = no support; 1 = support-only; 2 = active).

The Kendall pattern provides a simple ordinal map: the strongest monotonic association is with civic engagement, followed by perceived conflict, while trust is small and corruption is near zero. A parsimonious logit (Table 5) expresses associations as average marginal effects on the probability of active protest. Civic engagement (+4.9 pp, p<0.001) and perceived citizen–government conflict (+12.1 pp, p<0.001) increase the probability of active participation, whereas age lowers it (−0.19 pp per year, p = 0.030). The association with institutional trust is negative but only marginal (p = 0.095); perceived corruption is near zero. (Model discrimination is modest: AUC = 0.60, 95 percent CI 0.57–0.63.)

Table 5. *Predictors of active protest (binary logit; average marginal effects in percentage points), N = 1,057*

Predictor	AME (pp)	95% CI	p
Civic engagement (higher = more frequent)	**+4.9**	2.3 to 7.6	**<.001**
Institutional trust (higher = more trust)	−2.6	−5.7 to 0.5	.095
Perceived corruption (higher = worse)	+1.3	−2.0 to 4.6	.429
Perceived citizen–government conflict (1 = agree)	**+12.1**	5.5 to 18.7	**<.001**
Age (years)	**−0.19**	−0.36 to −0.02	**.030**
Sex (female = 1)	−4.9	−10.6 to 0.9	.095
Settlement: urban (1 = metropolitan/city)	−0.7	−6.8 to 5.4	.832

Notes. Outcome = 1 if respondent would actively participate in protests in any of the three scenarios (P11_1–P11_3); 0 if support-only or no action. Entries are average marginal effects (AMEs) on the probability of active protest (percentage points). Predictors: Civic engagement = composite from P2_1…P2_8 (0–3), Institutional trust = P17_2 (1–5), Perceived corruption = v50 (1–5), Conflict = v53 (1–2 = agree). Controls: Age, Sex (female = 1), Settlement: urban (1 = metropolitan/city; 0 = village). DK/NA treated as missing. Estimates unweighted; model-based SEs. Model fit: McFadden pseudo-R^2 = 0.023; AIC = 1421.1; AUC = 0.598 (95% CI 0.566–0.631).

Expressed as average marginal effects, a one-step increase on the 0–3 engagement scale corresponds to +4.9 pp higher probability of active protest; agreeing there is a citizens–government conflict adds +12.1 pp, whereas each year of age lowers the probability by 0.19 pp. Model discrimination is modest (AUC =

[1] Ns differ because Table 5 uses complete cases across all predictors and controls, whereas Table 4 uses complete cases across the five constructs only.

0.60), which is typical for parsimonious attitudinal models; our aim is to estimate associations, not to predict individual behaviour.

Table 4 reports Kendall's tau-b correlations and Table 5 present a compact logistic model in average marginal effects (AMEs), i.e., percentage-point changes in the probability of active protest. Both analyses converge. Civic engagement is positively related to protest readiness ($\tau = 0.18$, $p<0.001$) and, in the multivariate model, each one-step increases on the 0–3 engagement scale is associated with +4.9 percentage points ($p<0.001$) higher probability of active participation. Perceiving a citizen–government conflict shows a similar pattern ($\tau = 0.11$, $p<0.001$; AME +12.1 pp, $p<0.001$). Age is negatively associated (AME −0.19 pp per year, $p = 0.030$; roughly −1.9 pp per decade). The association with institutional trust is small and only marginally significant ($\tau = -0.03$, $p = 0.25$; AME −2.6 pp, $p = 0.095$), while perceived corruption is near zero once other factors are held constant ($\tau = 0.01$, $p = 0.65$; AME +1.3 pp, $p = 0.429$). In plain terms: people who are already civically active and who see a citizen–government conflict are the most likely to say they would show up if democratic institutions were threatened; greater trust very slightly lowers that readiness, and corruption perceptions alone do not move it much when other factors are considered. Model discrimination is modest (AUC = 0.60, 95% CI 0.57–0.63), which is typical for parsimonious attitudinal models in general-population surveys; our goal here is to estimate associations, not to predict individual behaviour. As the data are cross-sectional, results should not be interpreted as causal effects.

Perceptions of corruption further exacerbate the erosion of trust in public institutions (see Figure 3). A substantial proportion of respondents perceives corruption as pervasive, with 37.1 percent asserting that a moderate number of public servants are corrupt and 35.9 percent considering corruption to be widespread. Notably, 12.0 percent believe that nearly all individuals in public service are corrupt, while only a minuscule fraction (1.1 percent) opine that corruption is virtually non-existent. These perceptions indicate a profound distrust in the integrity of governmental entities, potentially leading to diminished civic engagement and public participation.

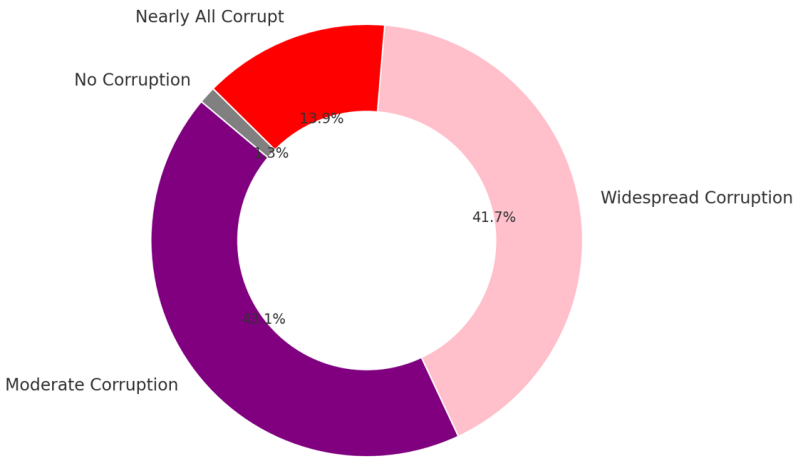

Figure 3. *Perceived Corruption Levels in Lithuania.*

Source: Authors.

Another crucial factor influencing civic disengagement in Lithuania is the role of patronage and institutional trust. Pettit (2016) highlights that in societies where patron-client relations dominate, civic engagement often remains transactional rather than voluntary. Citizens may feel that engaging in democratic

processes – such as voting, protesting, or community activism – yields fewer benefits than personal networks and informal exchanges. In Lithuania, public perceptions of corruption remain high, with 85 percent of respondents believing that corruption is a widespread issue in government institutions. This erodes trust in the democratic system and discourages participation, as people may feel that collective action is unlikely to produce meaningful institutional change. Pettit's findings suggest that when public institutions are seen as unresponsive, citizens adapt by withdrawing from formal civic processes and instead seeking solutions through informal networks or individual strategies for survival. Beyond institutional distrust, psychosocial factors also contribute to low civic participation. Pettit's study underscores that individuals who have historically faced exclusion or political repression may develop an internalized sense of disempowerment (2016). This is consistent with research on post-Soviet political culture, which indicates that citizens in former authoritarian states often display lower levels of political efficacy and higher scepticism toward civic engagement (Levitsky and Way, 2024).

RQ2: Lithuania's Democratic Resilience in the EU Context

Lithuania's high-income inequality and regional disparities further reinforce barriers to engagement. Economic insecurity and social stratification can limit the ability of lower-income groups to participate in voluntary or political activities. In Pettit's framework, poverty and marginalization are not just economic conditions but also psychological constraints, as individuals may perceive civic engagement as a privilege of the elite rather than a viable tool for change. All methodologies for assessing democratic resilience encompass civic engagement and participation in national governance through various civic activities. The survey data reveals several concerning aspects, including low trust in political institutions and insufficient civic engagement in political actions deemed necessary to safeguard democratic institutions. Public opinion polls offer insights into societal beliefs and attitudes. However, assessing the comprehensive democratic resilience of a state necessitates examining data pertaining to various facets of democratic resilience. The Resilience Dashboard provides such data, measuring resilience across economic, social, environmental, digital, and geopolitical dimensions. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of the fluctuations within the components of democratic resilience and their correspondence with the societal sentiments. Another crucial factor influencing civic disengagement in Lithuania is the role of patronage and institutional trust. Pettit (2016) highlights that in societies where patron-client relations dominate, civic engagement often remains transactional rather than voluntary. Citizens may feel that engaging in democratic processes – such as voting, protesting, or community activism – yields fewer benefits than personal networks and informal exchanges.

An examination of the four indicators reveals that Lithuania exceeded the European Union level solely in the geopolitical indicator, while in the other aspects, particularly the green and socio-economic indicators, Lithuania remained below the EU average. There has been a slight increase in the green indicator since 2014 and in the Social economic indicator since 2015; however, Lithuania stays below the overall EU level in 2022. Lithuania's resilience within the geopolitical sphere can be attributed to its strategic awareness of its perennial vulnerability to external influences, such as Russian aggression and the hostility of neighbouring Belarus. This awareness eased Lithuania's accession to NATO, informed by its historical experiences of occupation. Furthermore, following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Lithuania deliberately revised its security policy by reintroducing conscription, enhancing the number of professional troops (Valentinavičius, 2022), and significantly augmenting its contribution to NATO.

In addition, Lithuania's strategic pursuit of energy independence has proven coherence, starting with the Government of Lithuania's decision to break away from the Gazprom monopoly by constructing a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in 2010. This initiative was further advanced in 2014 with the development of a floating LNG terminal aimed at facilitating gas shipment and aiding neighbouring countries in averting potential supply disruptions (LRT English, 2019). Moreover, this progression persisted with the synchronization of electricity systems with the Continental European Synchronous Area, which has been formalized as a strategic goal within Lithuanian energy policy.

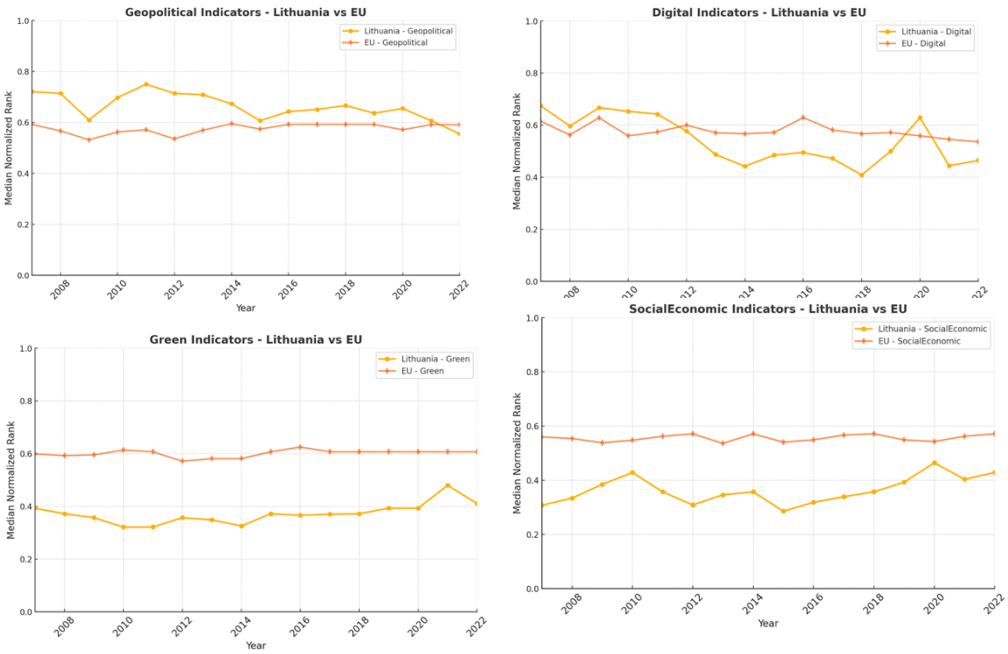

Figure 4. *Resilience indicators for Lithuania prepared by authors utilizing EU resilience dashboard data (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024).*

Lithuania, a member of the European Union, has been at the forefront of discussions on social and economic inequalities. A notable report titled "Inequalities in Lithuania" sheds light on the country's challenges. Despite rapid economic growth, Lithuania faces significant income inequality, as evidenced by its high Gini coefficient of 37.6 in 2017, the highest among EU member states. This disparity is attributed to a limited progressive tax system, disparities between low- and high-skilled workers, and an inadequate benefit system. In 2016-2017, approximately 29.6 percent of the population was at risk of poverty, with rural areas (39.5 percent) being more affected than urban areas (24.7 percent). Gender disparities are also clear, with the gender wage gap increasing from 14.4 percent to 15.2 percent between 2016 and 2017 (Kaluinaitė et al., 2019). In addition, the European Commission's 2024 Country Report on Lithuania highlights a reversal in the positive trends of decreasing poverty and income inequality observed between 2017 and 2021. In 2022, income inequality increased, positioning Lithuania as the country with the third-highest income disparity in the EU. This growing inequality has been a significant point of concern for the European Commission. The report also emphasizes that while public spending on social protection has been increasing, it stays significantly below the EU average, resulting in low levels and coverage of social benefits, with old-age pensions among the lowest in the EU compared to employment incomes. Additionally, the report names significant regional disparities in productivity, connectivity, and social indicators (European Commission, 2024a).

The OECD's 2021 Environmental Performance Review of Lithuania reveals that despite ambitious climate goals, existing policies are insufficient to meet targets for 2030 and beyond. Greenhouse gas emissions have remained stable over the past decade, with notable increases in the transport sector (OECD, 2021). Lithuania ranks 18th globally in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), placing it among the medium performers. The country receives high ratings in energy use and medium ratings in greenhouse gas

(GHG) emissions and renewable energy categories. However, it scores low in climate policy (Germanwatch, New Climate Institute, & Climate Action Network, 2025). According to the Environment Performance Index (EPI), Lithuania ranks 35th out of 180 countries, with a score of 52.4 in Climate Change Mitigation. The index highlights areas such as the adjusted emissions growth rate for carbon dioxide, where Lithuania ranks 74th with a score of 48.9, suggesting moderate progress in reducing CO_2 emissions (Yale Centre for Environmental Law & Policy and Centre for International Earth Science Information Network, 2024).

Lithuania has made progress in its digital transformation, aligning its strategies with the EU's Digital

Decade targets, as shown by the Digital Decade Country report 2023. The country has excelled in digital public services, surpassing the EU average in areas such as online medical records and electronic identification. However, there are some challenges. SMEs are struggling to integrate advanced technologies like AI and cloud solutions, which is reflected in the report's findings (European Commission, 2024b). The Digital Decade Country Report 2024 highlights Lithuania's potential to contribute to the EU's Digital Decade target in the field of health care. While 78.1 percent of households are currently covered by VHCN, the country is slightly below the EU average (78.8 percent) and has not shown any growth in 2023. On the other hand, Lithuania has made significant strides in the 5G coverage target, exceeding the EU average (89 percent) with 98.9 percent of populated areas covered since 2020. Additionally, with 52.9 percent of its population having basic digital skills, Lithuania has the potential to further contribute to the EU's Digital Decade target in this area. However, the current attainment for basic digital skills is below the EU average (55.5 percent) (European Commission, 2024b).

Democratic resilience index reveals a lower performance compared to the EU. Lithuania's democratic resilience significantly declined in 2014 and persisted until 2018. However, there was a notable increase in democratic resilience in 2019 and 2020. Furthermore, separate indicators for social economic, digital performance, and geopolitics (see Figure 4) also show a rise during these years. The decline in democratic resilience coincided with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While Lithuania's democratic resilience curve may not exhibit the same level of stability as the European Union as a whole, the observed increase in democratic resilience since 2019 has effectively maintained stability and has not shown a decline (see Figure 5).

Despite all indicators indicating improved performance in 2020, geopolitical indicators demonstrated the best performance, potentially contributing to Lithuania's enhanced overall democratic resilience. As Levitsky and Way (2024) emphasize, democratic resilience is contingent upon economic development, political structure, and institutional robustness. Consequently, the criteria for assessing democratic resilience are pivotal in evaluating the health of democracies and their ability to withstand various internal and external crises. The disparity in the level of indicators underscores the fact that Lithuania exhibits varying degrees of strength across different regions, resulting in heightened vulnerability in certain areas. Recognizing these vulnerabilities is essential in measuring democratic resilience, as it serves as a means of identifying areas for improvement and bolstering overall democratic performance.

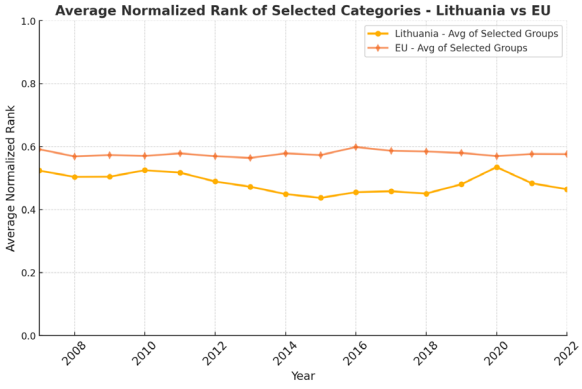

Figure 5. *Democracy resilience index generated by authors utilizing EU resilience dashboard data. Source: European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024).*

Our dashboard comparison (stronger geopolitical/digital; relatively weaker socio-economic/green) maps cleanly onto the distinction between resilience capacity (stocks of adaptive resources) and resilience performance (maintaining democratic quality under stress). The EU Resilience Dashboards explicitly track vulnerabilities vs. capacities across four dimensions, which clarifies where Lithuania's structural levers sit (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024; Benczúr et al., 2023). Framing the national results in capacity–performance terms strengthens the theoretical contribution beyond description (Croissant, 2024).

Taken together, the findings suggest that (i) building civic habits (opportunities for everyday participation) and (ii) addressing conflict perceptions with credible, just frames and channels for voice are proximate levers for democratic resilience at the micro-level, while (iii) closing capacity gaps in the dashboard dimensions is the meso/macro lever at the system level. This dual micro–macro reading situates the paper within recent scholarship on the diversification of citizen participation and on civic embeddedness (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018; Giugni & Grasso, 2019; Oser, 2021), mobilizing frames and collective-action psychology (van Zomeren, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020), and EU-level resilience capacity monitoring and frameworks (European Commission JRC, 2024; Benczúr et al., 2023; Croissant, 2024). Finally, recent overviews of protest participation also converge on this micro–macro linkage (Cantoni et al., 2024; Borbáth, 2024).

RQ3: Policy Measures to Strengthen Democratic Institutions and Civic Engagement

The survey findings suggest a substantial degree of scepticism among Lithuanians concerning their society's capacity to withstand crises. Moreover, the results indicate a prevalent lack of confidence in collective crisis management and recovery mechanisms. This may reflect apprehensions about governance, institutional effectiveness, social cohesion, or past crisis experiences that have influenced public perception. The feeling of societal division is also significant, with more than half of respondents affirming that Lithuanian society is divided. This observation corresponds with the finding that an overwhelming majority perceive a conflict between ordinary citizens and the government. Such a prominent level of perceived division suggests profound dissatisfaction with political leadership, policies, or broader social and economic inequalities. The results write down potential challenges for policymakers and civil society in cultivating trust, unity, and resilience. Should a significant segment of the populace lack confidence in their society's capacity to endure and recover from crises, this may undermine collective responses to forthcoming challenges, such as those of an economic, political, or security nature. Mitigating these issues might need the fortification of public trust in institutions, the enhancement of crisis preparedness strategies, and the promotion of greater social cohesion to bridge perceived divides between the citizenry and governmental entities.

Trust in institutions proves variability across distinct sectors. Communities command the highest degree of trust, with 39.1 percent of respondents expressing confidence in them, despite 27.6 percent harbouring scepticism. National authorities receive a more segmented evaluation, with 33.7 percent expressing trust and 32.8 percent expressing distrust. The media encounters a comparable issue, as 30.8 percent of respondents trust it, while 34.3 percent indicate distrust. These statistics underscore a pervasive concern of institutional scepticism, which could potentially affect public engagement and policy endorsement.

Conclusions

This study examined the interplay between civic participation, social resilience, and democratic resilience in Lithuania within the broader European context. The findings allow for direct responses to the three research questions outlined in the introduction.

The evidence confirms that civic participation – whether through community involvement, voluntary associations, or political activism – plays a crucial role in reinforcing democratic resilience. Survey

data reveal that higher civic engagement is associated with greater readiness to defend democratic values during crises, while the relationship with institutional trust is weak and context-dependent. However, participation remains uneven, with significant segments of the population disengaged or distrustful of political processes. This imbalance limits the capacity of civil society to act as a consistent counterweight to institutional weaknesses. Strengthening opportunities for inclusive participation, particularly among underrepresented groups, could expand the societal base of resilience.

Lithuania's performance on the EU/JRC Resilience Dashboard and related indices shows a mixed picture. Lithuania is above EU average in geopolitical, around the EU average in digital, and below the EU average in social-economic and green dimensions. However, it lags in green resilience and environmental sustainability indicators, which represent emerging dimensions of democratic legitimacy in EU governance frameworks. These divergences suggest that while Lithuania's democratic institutions are generally stable, their long-term resilience will increasingly depend on integrating environmental and climate considerations into democratic governance. The results underscore the importance of balancing immediate geopolitical imperatives with sustainable development commitments.

The combined evidence points to three key policy priorities: (1) expanding civic education and public awareness campaigns to increase citizens' capacity for critical engagement; (2) enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms in public institutions to build sustained trust; and (3) strategically investing in green transition policies to close resilience gaps in environmental governance. Each of these measures addresses both the attitudinal and structural components of democratic resilience, ensuring that civic capacity, institutional trust, and policy sustainability are mutually reinforcing.

Taken together, the findings reaffirm that democratic resilience is not a static attribute but an evolving capacity that depends on the interaction between active citizenship, adaptive institutions, and forward-looking policy agendas. For Lithuania, the challenge lies in using its relative strengths – such as geopolitical adaptability and digital readiness – while addressing areas where resilience is less developed, particularly environmental governance and inclusive participation. The Lithuanian case offers lessons for other EU member states facing similar pressures from hybrid threats, democratic backsliding, and global policy shifts: building resilience requires a dual focus on protecting democratic norms in the present and investing in the social and institutional foundations that will sustain them in the future.

Acknowledgment

This article is part of the research project „*Strengthening Resilience in Communities and Society through Citizen Science and Citizenship"(RECONECT)*, funded by the Research Council of Lithuania (LMT) under the Competitive Priority Research Programme "Strengthening Societal Resilience and Crisis Management in the Context of Contemporary Geopolitical Situation", grant No. SVIS2314.

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Vytautas Valentinavičius, Vaidas Morkevičius, Eglė Butkevičienė

DEMOKRATINIS ATSPARUMAS LIETUVOJE IR ES: PILIETINĖS VISUOMENĖS IR PILIEČIŲ DALYVAVIMO VAIDMENS ANALIZĖ

Anotacija. *Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamas pilietinės visuomenės, pilietinio aktyvumo ir demokratinio atsparumo ryšys Lietuvoje, lyginant su kitomis Europos Sąjungos (ES) šalimis. Mišrių metodų modelis apima nacionaliniu mastu reprezentatyvią viešąją apklausą (N = 1255; 2024 m. gegužė–liepa) ir ES atsparumo rodiklių suvestinės (duomenys iki 2022 m.) rodiklius. Siekdami pagrįsti išvadas, pateikiame ordinalinę asociacijos matricą (Kendall τ-b) kartu su kompaktišku logistiniu modeliu su vidutiniais ribiniais efektais. Pasirengimas aktyviai protestuoti yra teigiamai susijęs su pilietiniu aktyvumu (+4,9 procentinio punkto už kiekvieną žingsnį 0–3 skalėje) ir su piliečių ir vyriausybės konflikto suvokimu (+12,1 procentinio punkto) ir šiek tiek mažėja su amžiumi (−0,19 procentinio punkto per metus); ryšys su instituciniu pasitikėjimu yra nedidelis ir tik marginalus. ES palyginime Lietuva užima vietą virš ES vidurkio geopolitiniu aspektu, yra apie vidurkį skaitmeniniu aspektu ir žemiau vidurkio socialiniu-ekonominiu ir ekologiniu aspektais. Mes tei-*

giam, kad pilietinių įpročių ugdymas ir patikimų balsavimo kanalų užtikrinimas yra artimiausi (mikrolygio) demokratinio atsparumo svertai, o informacinių suvestinių nustatytų gebėjimų trūkumų šalinimas veikia mezo/makro lygiu. Tyrimas pateikia integruotą mikro–makro demokratinio atsparumo aprašymą geopolitiškai pažeidžiamoje ES valstybėje narėje ir paaiškina, kur politikos svertai gali būti veiksmingiausi.

Vytautas Valentinavičius, PhD, assistant professor, a member of Committee for Political Science, Sociology and Public Governance Study Programs and of research group "Civil Society and Sustainability" at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology.
E-mail: *vytautas.valentinavicius@ktu.lt*

Vaidas Morkevičius, PhD, full professor, a member of Committee for Political Science, Sociology and Public Governance Study Programs and of research group "Civil Society and Sustainability" at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology.
E-mail: *vaidas.morkevicius@ktu.lt*

Eglė Butkevičienė, PhD, full professor, Head of Committee for Political Science, Sociology and Public Governance Study Programs and a member of research group "Civil Society and Sustainability" at Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.
E-mail: *egle.butkeviciene@ktu.lt*

Vytautas Valentinavičius, politikos mokslų daktaras, asistentas, Kauno technologijos universiteto Socialinių, menų ir humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto Politikos mokslų, sociologijos ir viešojo valdymo studijų programų komiteto bei mokslinių tyrimų grupės „Pilietinė visuomenė ir tvarumas" narys.
El. paštas: *vytautas.valentinavicius@ktu.lt*

Vaidas Morkevičius, daktaras, profesorius, Kauno technologijos universiteto Socialinių, menų ir humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto Politikos mokslų, sociologijos ir viešojo valdymo studijų programų komiteto narys, mokslinių tyrimų grupės „Pilietinė visuomenė ir tvarumas" narys.
El. paštas: *vaidas.morkevicius@ktu.lt*

Eglė Butkevičienė, daktarė, profesorė, Kauno technologijos universiteto Socialinių, menų ir humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto Politologijos, sociologijos ir viešojo administravimo studijų programų komiteto pirmininkė bei mokslinių tyrimų grupės „Pilietinė visuomenė ir tvarumas" narė.
El. paštas: *egle.butkeviciene@ktu.lt*