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May 2026

Political spectrums in Latvia

Between post-Soviet legacies and democratic change



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Executive summary

As Latvia approaches parliamentary elections in October, public debate is increasingly being shaped by campaign messages, party conflicts and short-term political issues. However, these do not fully capture the deeper beliefs that structure voter choice. This report examines the foundations of political attitudes in Latvia, focusing on the question: **what underlying ideological worldviews organise political competition in society of Latvia?** It is beyond the scope of this research to examine the full logic of political cleavages in Latvia. Its more limited aim is to uncover the patterns that lie behind views on issues commonly linked to the ideological spectrum.

The analysis is based on a nationally representative survey of voters conducted in Latvia by Kantar in January 2026 (N = 1700). The survey collected three types of information: ideological self-identification; responses to 27 issue-based questions covering social, economic, and democratic-authoritarian attitudes; and an index of authoritarian predisposition. Going beyond descriptive statistics, the report uses advanced multivariate statistical methods to identify which attitudes independently structure political views and voter alignment (see Box 1).

The results show that political attitudes in Latvia do not fit neatly into classical liberal-conservative or left-right framework. Instead, they are structured by broader and historically grounded orientations related to order-freedom, change-preservation, and democracy-authoritarianism. This helps to explain why familiar ideological labels often capture only part of the political picture, and why voter attitudes in Latvia do not always align with the standard Western European model of political competition.

The broader conclusion is that politics in Latvia is shaped not only by current policy preferences, but also by longer-term historical legacies, generational change and competing visions of how society should be governed. In that sense, the report offers not just a snapshot of public opinion, but an extensive map of the value spectrums that shape Latvia's politics.

Methodology

Box 1

Survey sample: 1,700 respondents in a nationally representative voter computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) survey, January 2026.

27 survey questions measuring attitudes towards:

- social liberal-conservative,
- economic left-right,
- democratic-authoritarian issues.

2 self-identification questions:

- social liberal-conservative,
- economic left-right.

Authoritarian predisposition index (4 questions).

Statistical methods:

Ordinal logistic regression shows how people's attitudes (answers to survey questions) are linked to where they fall on a scale (for example, more liberal vs more conservative). The statistical significance of these associations was assessed using the Wald z-test and defined using standard p-value thresholds ($p < 0.05$), while accounting for multiple comparisons.

Linear regression is similar in purpose to ordinal logistic regression, but it is used when the outcome variable is continuous (for example, respondents' latent attitudes). Different regression models fitted to the same data were compared using the **Akaike information criterion (AIC)**, which balances how well a model fits the data with how complex it is.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) identifies underlying patterns in how attitudes vary together in a population.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) maps attitudes onto predefined theoretical dimensions (such as the liberal-conservative spectrum) and estimates how strongly each attitude relates to those dimensions.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to statistically assess whether the average values differed across subgroups (for example, voters from different age groups). The statistical significance of these differences was defined using standard p-value thresholds ($p < 0.05$), whereas their practical relevance was evaluated using an effect size measure (η^2).

Key findings

Three party clusters structure political competition

Party competition in Latvia is not structured only by specific policy issues, but by broader voter worldviews, which divide voters and parties into three clusters. Progressives (PRO) and New Unity (JV) form a reform-oriented cluster: their voters are more supportive of openness, democratic pluralism, European integration and liberal societal change. At the other end of political spectrum Latvia First (LPV) and Sovereign Power (SV) form an order-and-preservation cluster: their voters are more strongly oriented toward authoritarian and conservative values, stability, social control and resistance to change. Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), National Alliance (NA) and United List (AS) are close to LPV and SV, leaning more towards order, conservatism and preservation.

The main divide in politics is deeper than liberal versus conservative

The central political conflict in Latvia is not only about individual social issues such as same-sex marriage or gender roles. More fundamentally, it reflects different views about how society should be governed. On one side are preferences for openness, pluralism, democratic participation and European integration. On the other are preferences for protection, order, authoritarian leadership and preserving familiar arrangements. Social conservatism therefore does not appear as a separate moral dimension standing on its own. Instead, it is closely tied to a broader worldview that puts greater value on order, stability, social control and status quo.

Latvia has comparatively few Western European-style democratic conservatives

In many Western European democracies, conservatism often combines support for tradition with a strong commitment to democracy, pluralism and restraint in the use of power. In Latvia, this type of conservatism appears comparatively weak. Conservative attitudes are associated more often with hierarchy, stronger authority and tighter social control. This gives Latvia's conservative political space a more authoritarian, far-right character than is typical in much of Western Europe.

Latvia's political attitudes are still shaped by history

Public opinion in Latvia is not shaped only by current policy debates or material interests. It also reflects the long af-

ter-effects of Soviet rule and the difficult transition to a democracy and market economy after restoring independence in 1991. These experiences left a lasting imprint on how people think about authority, stability, democracy and change. Although this historical influence is gradually weakening, it continues to shape the structure of political attitudes.

Society leans predominantly toward the left on economic policy

In contrast to many Western political systems, the economic left-right dimension plays a comparatively limited role in structuring political attitudes in Latvia. Voters of all political parties to a relatively similar extent tend to support a substantial state role in the economy, including a large state service, redistribution towards less advantaged groups, and protection of workers' rights.

Generational change is gradually shifting the political centre of gravity

Younger voters are more likely to support democracy, openness, European integration and individual autonomy. Older voters, especially those socialised during the Soviet period, are more likely to prefer order, stability and the preservation of familiar social arrangements. Over time, this points to a gradual shift toward more liberal-democratic attitudes. But the shift is unlikely to be automatic or smooth because older generations remain politically important, and appeals to strong leadership, order and protection still mobilise large parts of the electorate.

History shapes contemporary trends

Latvia is part of a broader international trend in which support for authoritarian, illiberal and strong-man politics has grown over recent years. But in Latvia these tendencies are reinforced by a specific historical legacy. Soviet-era socialisation, the insecurities of the transition period and the weaker presence of democratic conservatism provide order-oriented politics with a stronger social foundation than in many Western European societies. This represents a structural risk.

Introduction

As Latvia approaches its parliamentary elections, it becomes especially important to understand what structures voter attitudes. To understand why voters are drawn to different parties – and what competing values organise politics in Latvia more broadly – it is necessary to look beyond day-to-day political messaging and examine the underlying ideological patterns within society.

To understand political attitudes in Latvia, it is not enough to rely on a single left–right scale. In the United States, political conflict has increasingly become structured along a single left–right dimension, with economic, social and value disagreements increasingly assimilated to that broader ideological divide.¹ By contrast, European politics is understood more commonly as multidimensional, with at least an economic left–right dimension and a distinct or socio-cultural dimension, often also linked to other questions, such as social values, European integration and authoritarianism preferences.² This report uses the latter, more nuanced approach.

One way to locate voters on the political spectrum is to ask them to identify themselves ideologically. This is useful because it captures how people understand and describe their political position, even if those labels are sometimes vague or inconsistently applied. Another approach is to examine responses to specific policy questions, which show where people stand on concrete issues commonly associated with social liberal–conservative, economic left–right divides and democratic–authoritarian preferences.

This report uses both approaches. **The first chapter examines ideological self-identification and establishes which political attitudes are associated with it. The second and third chapters go a step further by focusing on issue-based positions.** They are designed both to locate society across multiple ideological dimensions and to identify which underlying attitudes, beyond standard ideological categories, most strongly structure political views in Latvia.

To examine the political spectrum in Latvia, the study includes 27 issue-based questions: 11 measure positions on the social liberal–conservative spectrum, 11 those

on the economic left–right spectrum, and 5 test for democratic–authoritarian attitudes (see all survey questions in Attachment 1). These items draw both on established international surveys, local politically divisive issues and consultations with some of the leading political scientists in Latvia. As there was no clear undisputable prior evidence about which issues best structure the liberal–conservative and left–right dimensions in Latvia, those areas were measured using a broader set of items. The authoritarian dimension, by contrast, was measured with a smaller number of questions, as it is more clearly defined and theoretically established. In addition to direct questions about authoritarian attitudes, the study also measured a four-question child-rearing values index, a well-established approach in political psychology for capturing subconscious authoritarian predisposition.³ Altogether, these measurements make it possible to map the ideological landscape, identify the main cleavages within society, and assess how political parties align with public attitudes.

This analysis should also be read with an important limitation in mind. It examines the ideological structure of public attitudes, not the full structure of political competition in Latvia. It does not directly measure populism, nationalism, ethnic or language-based identity, trust in institutions, corruption or other factors that may also shape party choice and political competition. Nor does it claim that ideology alone explains politics in Latvia. Its aim is narrower: to identify the attitudinal patterns on issues traditionally associated with political spectrums. The findings therefore provide an important part of the picture, but not the whole. Politics in Latvia is also structured by geopolitical orientation, identity cleavages, leadership style and strategic mobilisation around issues extending beyond ideology as measured here.

1 Hare C. (2022) Constrained Citizens? Ideological Structure and Conflict Extension in the US Electorate, 1980–2016. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 1602–1621. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342100051X>

2 Le Corre Juratic M. (2025) Dimensions of polarisation, realignment and electoral participation in Europe: the mobilizing power of the cultural dimension. *European Journal of Political Research*, 64(3), 989–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12718>

3 Feldman S., Stenner K. (1997) Perceived threat and authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18(4), 741–770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00077>

Self-identification is only a start

Positioning voters along the social liberal–conservative and economic left–right dimensions is fundamental for understanding the structure of political competition in a society. These two axes capture the core value conflicts that underpin most political debates, ranging from cultural and identity issues to redistribution, markets and the role of the state.

Voter self-identification is used broadly in political science as it provides the most easy-to-grasp snapshot of how individuals understand their own place in the political landscape. While self-placement is not always a precise reflection of underlying attitudes, it is highly relevant for political behaviour, as voters tend to rely on these simplified identities when making electoral choices. Starting with self-identification therefore establishes a clear baseline of perceived ideological alignment.

Socially liberal or conservative?

Self-identification of voters on social issues on the liberal–conservative spectrum (see Box 2) shows that society is ideologically mixed, and divisions are roughly equally distributed. A combined **38% identify as liberal or rather liberal**, compared with **36% who lean conservative or rather conservative**, with an additional **15% placing themselves in the centre** and **11% unable to position themselves**. Tak-

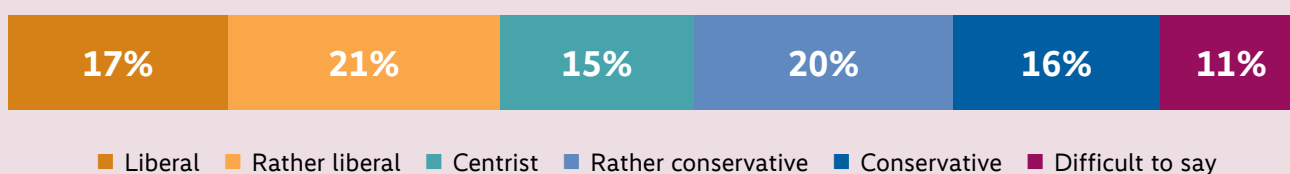
en at face value, these results suggest that society is broadly balanced between liberal and conservative camps.

This finding is best understood as a useful first snapshot of perceived ideology in society, and so it should be interpreted cautiously. It is not a precise map of the attitudes that structure the political spectrum. These categories capture how people describe themselves, not necessarily the full substance of their political beliefs.

It is important to note that different ways of asking self-identification questions are likely to yield slightly different results. To improve response quality, brief and accessible definitions of both the social liberal–conservative and economic left–right spectrums were provided to survey respondents, enabling them to position their views more accurately. The provision of definitions certainly shapes the answers to some extent. However, this was deemed necessary in response to findings from a similar survey conducted in 2012,⁴ in which roughly half of respondents were unable to place themselves on these ideological scales or selected the middle option (3 on a 1–5 scale). In survey research, this midpoint can reflect a genuinely neutral or ambivalent position, but it is also often used when respondents are uncertain or lack a clear

Box 2

“In social matters, which approach is closer to you – liberal or conservative?”



Short definitions provided in survey:

Conservative approach – society should be based on traditions and established values; change should be introduced cautiously.

Liberal approach – people should be free to live according to their own beliefs; society should be open to change and diversity.

⁴ POPULARES Latvija, SKDS. (2012) Pasaules uzskats: Pašnovērtējums un realitāte. Latvijas iedzīvotāju ideoloģiskais portrets. SKDS, pp. 8, 14. https://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/site/record/docs/2012/09/27/latvijas_iedzivotaju_ideologiskais_portrets.pdf

opinion. This central tendency bias can also arise if a respondent has difficulty understanding the question.⁵ By offering definitions as reference points, this survey managed to improve self-classification and produce more reliable measures of ideological orientation, resulting in fewer “don’t know” responses and less resort to the midpoint in answers.

What “I am conservative” means in Latvia?

Labels such as “liberal” and “conservative” are interpreted differently by different people. To interpret self-identification meaningfully, we must look beneath these labels and identify the underlying political attitudes that increase the likelihood of someone identifying as liberal or conservative in Latvia.

Respondents who identify as conservative (see Box 3) are more likely to believe that politics should be guided by traditional values; that order is more important than individual freedom; and that Latvia should withdraw its support for the Istanbul Convention and be more critical of European integration. Taken together, this worldview reflects a preference for security, predictability and social cohesion. In contrast, those

who identify as liberal tend to hold the opposite positions, emphasising individual freedom, openness to social change, diversity and European integration, indicating a preference for autonomy and adaptability in a changing world. This pattern also suggests that these orientations may be partly rooted in deeper predispositions toward authority and order, probably shaped by Latvia’s historical experience, particularly the enduring Soviet legacy with regard to attitudes towards control, stability and the role of the state.

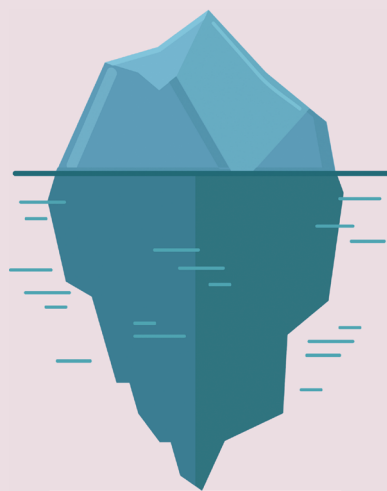
This is not to say that specific policy issues do not matter. Positions such as support for looser environmental regulation, opposition to assisted dying, and opposition to same-sex marriage are all meaningfully associated with liberal-conservative self-identification. However, the effects of issue-based positions are weaker than those of the underlying predispositions already mentioned.

It is also important to consider timing. The Istanbul Convention – one of the most salient political issues in autumn 2025 – also plays a role in self-identification. Furthermore, the survey was conducted in January 2026, approximately nine months before the elections. Issue salience is not fixed. Election campaigns can elevate and politicise specific

Box 3

“I am conservative.”

Key beliefs behind conservative social identity:



- **Traditional values** should guide politics OR 1.86
- **Order** is more important than individual freedom OR 1.38
- **Opposition to Istanbul Convention** OR 1.36
- Preference for **national decision-making** over EU OR 1.30
- Concern about increasing **social diversity** OR 1.25
- **Less strict environmental regulation** OR 1.19
- **Opposition to assisted dying** OR 1.17
- **Opposition to same-sex marriage** OR 1.17

Beliefs associated with self-identification were analysed using ordinal logistic regression. For each attitude, this analysis estimates an odds ratio (OR): **the odds of identifying as more conservative rather than more liberal.** For instance, an OR of 1.86 means that a statistically meaningful (1 standard deviation) difference in the particular attitude along the liberal-conservative spectrum increases the likelihood of identifying as more conservative by about 86%. These associations should be interpreted symmetrically: the same attitudes that increase the likelihood of identifying as more conservative, when held in the opposite direction, are associated with identifying as more liberal.

⁵ Sturgis P., Roberts C., Smith P. (2014) Middle Alternatives Revisited: How the neither/nor Response Acts as a Way of Saying ‘I Don’t Know’? *Sociological Methods & Research*, 43(1), 15-38.

topics. The prominence of the Istanbul Convention illustrates how rapidly an issue can become prominent. Had the survey been conducted a year ago, its impact would probably have been smaller.

However, self-identification on the liberal–conservative scale is not statistically significant when it comes to explaining party choice (all p-values exceed the Bonferroni corrected significance threshold in the Wald z-test). In other words, **how voters label themselves does not reliably predict which party they support**. People aren't well versed in the political spectrum. Additionally, parties can also have contradictory positions. For this reason, this analysis must move beyond self-identification and examine the specific political attitudes that differentiate voters. The next chapters focus therefore on issue-based positions to identify which questions create meaningful divides in society and structure electoral choice. By mapping these issue-level cleavages, the report aims to uncover the real drivers of political competition in Latvia, those that shape voter decisions more directly than abstract ideological labels.

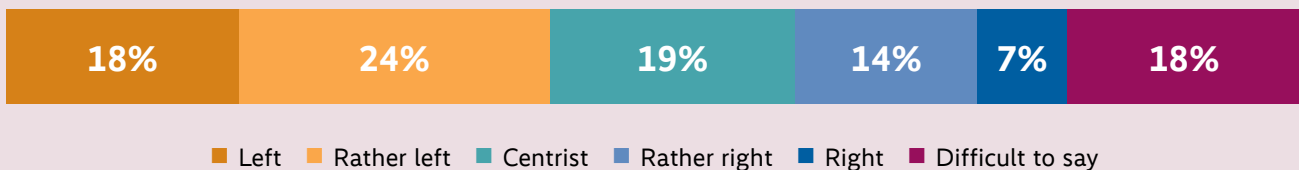
Positioning voters along the social liberal–conservative and economic left–right dimensions is fundamental for understanding the structure of political competition in a society. These two axes capture the core value conflicts that underpin most political debates, ranging from cultural and identity issues to redistribution, markets and the role of the state.

What “I am right-wing” means in Latvia?

Self-identification on economic issues (see Box 4) shows a clearer tilt towards the left, though the overall picture remains mixed. A combined **42% identify as left or rather left**, compared with **21% who place themselves on the right**, while **19% choose the centrist position** and a relatively high **18% are unable to position themselves**. In self-identification, voters in Latvia lean more toward redistribution and state involvement than toward right-wing market-oriented views. Left–right self-identification is also not a statistically significant predictor of party choice.

Box 4

“In economic matters, which approach is closer to you – left or right?”



Short definitions provided in survey:

Left-wing approach – supports a larger role for the state in the economy, broader state support for less protected groups, and higher taxes for the wealthy.

Right-wing approach – supports a smaller role for the state in the economy, less redistribution in favour of the poor, and lower taxes.



“I am right-wing.”

Key beliefs behind right-wing economic identity:

- Against progressive tax policy OR 1.47
- Cuts in funding for unsustainable theatres and museums OR 1.23
- Private sector should provide public services OR 1.22
- Against prioritisation of worker protection OR 1.19
- Privatisation of large state companies OR 1.18

Beliefs associated with self-identification were analysed using ordinal logistic regressions. The higher the odds ratio (OR), the more likely it is that holding that belief is associated with identifying as more on the right economically.

Identifying as economically right in Latvia is associated primarily with a coherent set of market-oriented beliefs. The strongest predictor (see below) is opposition to progressive taxation, indicating that preferences around redistribution are central to right-wing economic identity. This is followed by support for reducing state involvement in areas traditionally associated with public or cultural goods, as well as a broader preference for privatisation. Additionally, a lower emphasis on worker protection aligns with a more market-liberal orientation. Taken together, these results suggest that economic right-wing self-identification in Latvia is structured around a consistent preference for a smaller state, reduced redistribution and greater reliance on market mechanisms.

How to measure authoritarianism?

The measure used in this study is based on the **child-rearing values index**, a well-established approach used in political psychology to capture **authoritarian predispositions**. Rather than asking directly whether they like dicta-

tors, the method asks respondents to choose which qualities are more important for children to learn.

Stanley Feldman, instead of relying on direct or normatively loaded questions, in the 1990s introduced an indirect approach based on child-rearing values. The measure consists of four simple paired choices that appear to ask about desirable traits for children but are in fact designed to capture deeper value orientations – specifically, the extent to which individuals prioritise order, hierarchy and conformity over autonomy and independence.⁶

This approach has since become one of the most widely accepted tools for measuring the deeper psychological foundations of political behaviour, complementing traditional left–right and liberal–conservative measures. Its strength lies in its reliability and subtlety: as respondents are not explicitly asked about “authoritarianism”, this approach reduces social desirability bias and elicits more stable underlying preferences. As a result, it provides a robust way to identify people who are more inclined toward order, discipline and social conformity, as well as those who put greater value on individual freedom and self-direction.

For example, in the 2015 US Republican primary, this authoritarian predisposition was the strongest predictor of support for Trump, outperforming income, education and other standard ideological measures.⁷ In Finland this index showed that a predisposition to authoritarianism is linked primarily to culturally conservative attitudes rather than economic ideology. Furthermore, such a predisposition played a role in Finnish party support, suggesting that authoritarian predispositions are a broadly relevant driver of political orientation beyond the US.⁸

In society of Latvia, roughly half of eligible voters lean toward lower levels of authoritarianism: **54% fall into the low or somewhat low categories**, while **21% fall into somewhat high or high**, and **25% sit in the middle**. Ordinal logistic regression analysis shows that people in Latvia

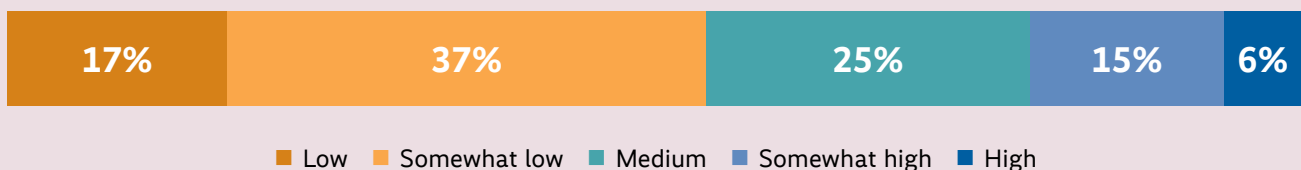
Which quality is more important for a child to have:

- *respect for elders or independence?*
- *obedience or self-reliance?*
- *being well-behaved or being considerate?*
- *good manners or curiosity?*

Survey respondents who selected the first option in each pair received one point on the authoritarian predisposition index. Each step on the scale reflects the number of authoritarian-oriented choices made (from 0 to 4). A low score indicates that none of the authoritarian options were chosen; a high score indicates that all were selected.

Box 5

Predisposition to authoritarianism



⁶ Feldman S., Stenner K. (1997) Perceived threat and authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18(4), 741-770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00077>

⁷ MacWilliams M.C. (2016) Who decides when the party doesn't? Authoritarian voters and the rise of Donald Trump. *Political Science & Politics*, 49(4), 716-721, p. 718. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516001463>

⁸ Helminen V., Wass H., Kantola A., Elovainio M. (2024) Nordic authoritarianism: child-rearing values and political behavior in a multiparty context. *Political Psychology*, 45, 91-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12915>

who score higher on authoritarian predisposition are more likely to support **strong, unconstrained leadership** (OR 1.26) and a **punitive justice system** (OR 1.22), which indicates that those with a higher authoritarian predisposition are more likely to favor harsh, decisive authority (see Box 5).

These people also tend to prioritise **order over individual freedom** (OR 1.17), consistent with the notion that authoritarian predisposition is fundamentally about valuing stability and control over personal autonomy. A **preference for homogeneity**, indicated by a belief that society has too many different opinions and lifestyles (OR 1.21), further reinforces this pattern, linking authoritarianism to discomfort with diversity and pluralism. However, authoritarian predisposition also relates to **opposition to the Istanbul Convention** (OR 1.18) and **preference for woman taking care of children and the household** (OR 1.17). These findings suggest that an authoritarian predisposition is not limited to political attitudes but reflects a broader preference for stability, hierarchy and reduced pluralism in both institutional and social life.

Between the Soviet legacy and change

What kind of stories do the data tell? To understand the beliefs that shape a society and influence voter decisions, it is not enough to look only at how people label themselves or how they answer individual survey questions. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) helps us to uncover deeper patterns beneath the surface. As a data-driven statistical method, it identifies which attitudes tend to go together without imposing assumptions in advance, offering insights into the underlying structure of population attitudes (see Figure 1). Applied to the 27 survey items, the EFA results show that a large share of response variance is organised by two consistent patterns, suggesting that voters' attitudes are not random, but structured around coherent underlying worldviews.

Two worldviews forming a spectrum of attitudes:

1. Freedom vs order
2. Change vs preserve

This indicates that political attitudes in Latvia do not always fit neatly into the familiar ideological boxes used in Western Europe, such as liberal vs conservative or left vs right. Instead, attitudes about the state, authority, markets, diversity and social change often cluster together in ways that reflect Latvia's own historical experience and political development. The EFA approach was therefore especially useful here. Rather than forcing the data into imported ideological categories, it shows how beliefs are actually organised in this society. The result is a more grounded picture of the value structure shaping political competition in Latvia, one that captures both the continuing weight of post-Soviet legacies and the pressures of social and generational change.

This section proceeds in three steps. First, it interprets the two worldviews identified by the EFA and outlines the underlying attitudes that define them. Second, it examines how these dimensions structure political competition in Latvia by showing how parties and voters are positioned within this attitudinal space. Third, it analyses how these patterns vary across demographic groups, with particular attention to generation and authoritarian predisposition. Throughout, the analysis is situated within a wider Central and Eastern European context to better understand the role of Soviet legacies and processes of social change.

Exploratory factor analysis identifies patterns in data like highlighters marking themes in a text

Figure 1



Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) shows which beliefs are “bundled together” in people’s responses, revealing the underlying structure of how political attitudes may be organised in people’s minds. It works by examining how responses to different survey questions move together: **if respondents who agree with one statement also tend to agree with several others, these items likely reflect a shared underlying belief.** By identifying these patterns, EFA reduces many variables (survey questions) into a smaller set of latent dimensions or “worldviews” (called “**factors**” in statistics) that reflect the natural organisation of attitudes in a population and need not align with strict liberal–conservative or left–right axes.

Worldview names (“freedom vs order”, “change vs preserve”) are assigned based on interpretation of the loadings rather than a direct output of EFA.

The worldviews identified by EFA are defined by **factor loadings**, which show how strongly each attitude is associated with the particular worldview. Although loadings in the report are presented as defining one end of a spectrum (such as order), they should be interpreted symmetrically: the same clusters of attitudes that define one end of a worldview imply an opposite pattern at the other end. In this report, we focus on attitudes with the highest loadings (at least 0.5), representing a substantive relationship between the attitude and the latent worldview. **The higher the factor loading, the higher the role of the specific issue in shaping the worldview.** A loading of 0.5 is typically considered indicative of moderate factor–item association, while a loading of 0.7 is treated as a strong association. However, as the present analysis allows for inter-factor correlations, loading values should not be interpreted as measures of variance explained.

Freedom vs order

Voters in Latvia are distributed along a fundamental spectrum of **how society should be organised**: freedom vs order (see Table 1). This underlying worldview explains 37% of all variation in responses across the survey. For political science value surveys, this represents a high level of explanatory power, indicating that a large share of how people think across different issues is shaped by a single, consistent orientation. The prominence of this factor suggests that it reflects a deep underlying structural outlook, capturing fundamental preferences about whether society should prioritise autonomy, pluralism and individual agency, or stability, hierarchy and control. It thus represents systematic beliefs about how society should function rather than issue-specific opinions.

At one end of the spectrum an **order-oriented worldview** (below) emphasises stability, authority and protection. This includes support for a stronger role for the state in regulating the economy and society, as well as preferences for social cohesion, traditional norms and authoritarian leadership. At the other end is a **freedom-oriented worldview**, embracing individual autonomy, limited state intervention

Attitudes of order orientation

Table 1

Attitude	Factor loading
Authoritarian attitudes:	
<i>Support for rule by strong leader</i>	0.87
<i>Concerns about increasing social diversity</i>	0.86
<i>Support for a punitive justice system</i>	0.77
<i>Preference for order over individual freedom</i>	0.75
Lib-con attitudes:	
<i>Priority for traditional values in state policy</i>	0.83
<i>Support for traditional gender roles</i>	0.70
<i>Restriction of non-European immigration</i>	0.66
<i>Opposition to same-sex marriage</i>	0.64
Economic attitudes:	
<i>Support for strict business regulation</i>	0.85
<i>Priority for worker protection</i>	0.83
<i>Support for state provision of public services</i>	0.82
<i>Support for strong trade unions</i>	0.82
<i>Support for state intervention in housing</i>	0.80
<i>Support for pension redistribution</i>	0.72
<i>Support for progressive taxation</i>	0.70

and openness to diversity, besides support for market-based solutions. It contrasts top-down control vs bottom-up autonomy and integrates economic, political and cultural attitudes in a single, coherent vision of how society should be organised.

Furthermore, attitudes often described in terms of the liberal-conservative dimension (such as views on gender roles, immigration and same-sex marriage) do not function as independent value dimensions in Latvia. These cultural attitudes are a part of a wider worldview, embedded within this broader freedom-order divide, in which conservatism reflects a deeper worldview centred on authority, stability, control, order and cohesion over individual freedom.

Change vs preserve

Voters in Latvia are also distributed along a second spectrum that reflects the question of **where society should be heading**: change versus preserve. This dimension explains 14% of the variation in data, indicating a weaker but still meaningful structure in public attitudes. This factor is a directional orientation. At its core, it reflects a divide between openness to change and a preference for holding course, shaping how voters think about Latvia's future (see Table 2).

At one end of the spectrum is a **preservation-oriented worldview** (below), which emphasises continuity, stability and protection of existing institutions and ways of life. It represents caution towards external influence, a preference for national control and resistance to social or economic change. At the other end is a **change-oriented worldview**, characterised by support for reform, adaptation and openness to external influences. This includes stronger support for European integration, liberal social norms, adaptation to climate change and willingness to adjust economic structures.

The existence of this dimension helps explain patterns of resistance to certain liberal European norms in Latvia,

Attitudes of a preserve orientation

Table 2

Attitude	Factor loading
The EU should not have more power	0.72
Opposition to Istanbul Convention	0.70
Opposition to privatisation of state companies	0.61
Opposition to same-sex marriage	0.60
Support for agricultural subsidies	0.57
Opposition to assisted dying	0.56
Opposition to environmental regulation	0.54
State should not borrow during hard times	0.51

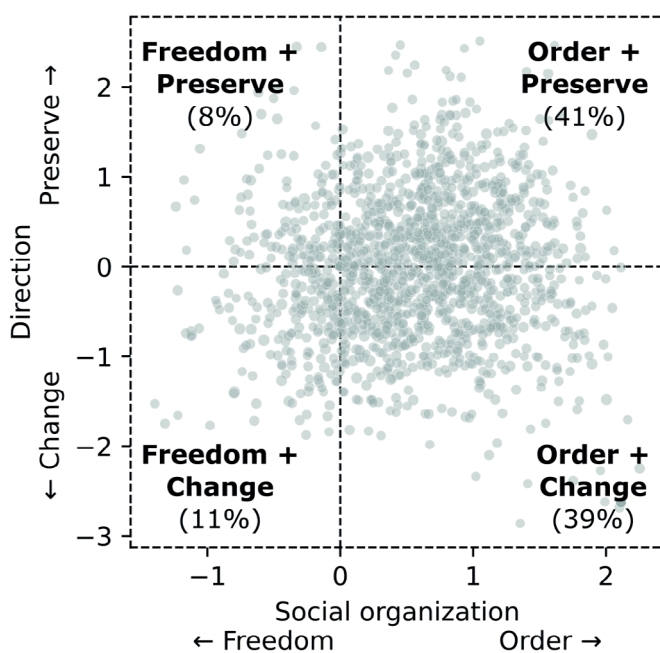
as well as more cautious attitudes toward the EU. Positions such as opposition to expanding EU decision-making powers, resistance to the Istanbul Convention or same-sex marriage, and cautious approaches to climate policy align on the preserve end of the spectrum. The underlying principle tying these positions together is less political ideology in the narrow sense and more about managing change and uncertainty. The preservation-oriented worldview also has a “Latvia knows better and should follow its own course” attitude underlying it.

To sum up, this dimension reflects a broader orientation towards stability and inertia versus adaptation and transformation. In this sense, caution towards liberal European norms is part of a wider preference for preserving existing social, economic and institutional arrangements rather than embracing externally driven or rapid change. This dimension captures a fundamental question shaping public opinion in Latvia: should society adapt, move forward and modernise, or protect and maintain the previously established course and norms?

Underlying worldviews

Both dimensions identified here can be represented on a two-dimensional map of underlying worldviews (Figure 2). On this map voters are divided along two intersecting dimensions: **how society should be organised and direction society should be heading**. This creates a structured and nuanced political landscape, in which different combinations of economic, cultural and geopolitical attitudes shape voter preferences. The percentage value in each quadrant shows the share of voters located there.

Map of voters' underlying worldviews



The horizontal **social organisation** axis represents the dominant divide between **freedom (left)** and **order (right)**, reflecting contrasting views on individual autonomy versus state-led protection and control. The vertical **direction** axis represents a secondary dimension between **change (bottom)** and **preserve (top)**, reflecting whether society should move toward reform and adaptation or prioritise status quo and stability. Together, these two factors form a four-quadrant structure that captures how voters combine views on governance and direction. Furthermore, each quadrant represents a distinct combination of both orientations.

The **bottom-left quadrant (Freedom + Change)** represents a **transformative liberal worldview**. People in this quadrant (11%) believe individuals should have more autonomy and that society should actively evolve. They are comfortable with diversity, experimentation and reform, and tend to support expanding rights, modernising institutions and adapting to new realities. In political terms, this is the most future-oriented and reform-driven space: not just “more freedom,” but freedom combined with a willingness to disrupt the status quo.

The **top-right quadrant (Order + Preserve)** represents a **traditionalist, status quo-oriented worldview**. People here (41%) prioritise hierarchy, paternalistic leaders, large state role in economy and social cohesion, and they prefer to maintain existing norms and structures. This is a status quo or even reactionary quadrant, not only resisting change, but preferring order and preservation, as well as authoritarian ideas, which suggests a move backwards away from liberal-democratic norms.

The **bottom-right quadrant (Order + Change)** captures a preference for **directed change through order**. People in this space (39%) want society to move forward and do not simply defend the status quo, but they are more likely to believe that change should be guided by strong institutions, clear rules and a greater role for authority rather than emerging through unstructured, bottom-up, individual level change. In context of Latvia, this likely also partly reflects the legacy of Soviet socialisation, where civil society and individual freedoms didn't exist and the state was understood not only as a source of control, but also as the main instrument through which large-scale transformation was imagined and delivered. As a result, this quadrant combines openness to change with a preference for structure, protection and top-down coordination.

The **top-left quadrant (Freedom + Preserve)** reflects a more **classical Western conservative position**. These individuals (8%) value autonomy, democracy and limited state interference, but are cautious about rapid change. They are more likely to support existing institutional arrangements if they already protect freedom, preferring stability over experimentation. This is not reactionary in a social sense, but rather protective of a system that is seen as already functioning well enough.

Taken together, the quadrants in the map of voters' underlying worldviews show that the dominant pattern in Latvia is not a split between liberal and conservative values in the usual Western European sense, but a strong tilt towards **order** as the preferred model of social organisation. Fully **80%** of respondents fall on the **order** side of the horizontal axis, while only **19%** fall on the **freedom** side. This suggests that, for most voters, questions of stability, control, protection and stronger structuring authority remain more central than autonomy, pluralism and bottom-up self-organisation.

At the same time, the vertical axis shows that society is **not mainly status quo-oriented**: **50%** of respondents are on the change side, compared with **49%** on the **preserve** side. In other words, a narrow majority want movement rather than continuity, but most of that demand for change is located in the **Order + Change** quadrant rather than the **Freedom + Change** one. This indicates that many voters appear to support change, but prefer it to be **guided, structured and controlled**, not driven by maximum individual freedom or open-ended liberal transformation.

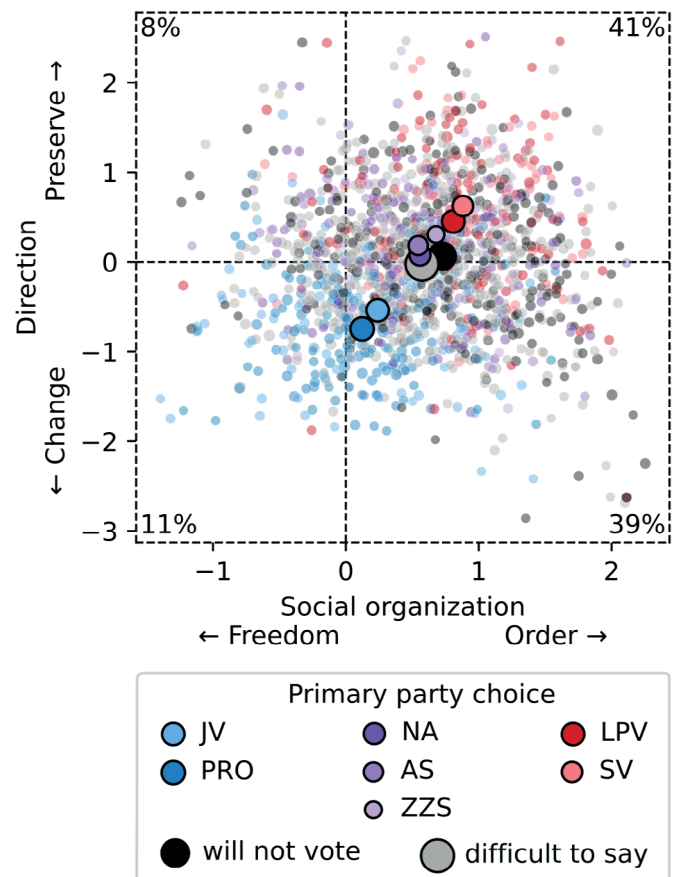
Three party clusters

EFA makes it possible to map the political landscape in Latvia by locating voters of different political parties on the map of voters' underlying worldviews. This report focuses on major parties likely to pass the 5% electoral threshold and for which the survey includes enough respondents to support statistically meaningful analysis. Party positions form a clear pattern along an axis that differentiates the Freedom + Change and Order + Preserve worldviews, indicating that while the two underlying dimensions are weakly correlated (correlation coefficient: 0.12), they are both relevant in structuring party competition in Latvia. Parties and their voters are not randomly dispersed, but cluster in distinct positions within the identified two-dimensional ideological space, which is different from the traditional liberal-conservative, left-right political spectrums.

After mapping voters and the political parties they support across both attitudinal dimensions on the map (Figure 3), it is possible to identify emerging patterns. Voters for the **Progressives (PRO)** and **New Unity (JV)**, on average, are located predominantly (85%) in the Change half of the map, distributed across both the Freedom (34%) and the Order (51%) quadrants. This reflects a reform-oriented worldview, but captures voters supportive of liberal individual autonomy, as well as voters located on the Order side of the map. In terms of these underlying worldviews, the electorates of both parties are very similar (effect size η^2 : 0.01-0.02) and clearly differentiated from those of other political forces (η^2 : 0.16-0.29).

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, electorates of the parties **Latvia First (LPV)** and **Sovereign Power (SV)** are, on average, positioned farthest into the top-right

Political party choice distribution



How to read the map of voters' underlying worldviews

Each point on the map represents a respondent's population-weighted position relative to a neutral voter (all answers 3 on a 1-5 scale), located at the centre (0,0). Moving to right or left/up or down indicates increased alignment with the underlying pattern of attitudes captured by either factor on each axis.

The scale of each axis reflects relative positions within the latent worldview. The maximum values represent the most extreme observed respondents in this population, rather than theoretical endpoints. The population prevalence of each worldview is reflected as a percentage in the corner of each quadrant. Where the percentages do not sum to 100, a small fraction of the population is located at zero on one or both axes.

In practical terms, people (points) near the centre tend to hold more mixed or weakly structured views, while those farther from it have more consistent and clearly aligned attitudes.

Positions of specific subgroups (e.g. parties, age groups) are estimated as the average population-weighted scores of the respective respondents (represented by differently coloured points) on the two latent dimensions. Each point's size reflects the share of voters it represents.

Order + Preserve quadrant (68%). Their voters predominantly exhibit stronger alignment with preferences for authority, social control and stability, combined with a desire to maintain existing norms and resist change. An additional 24% of their voters are in the Order + Change quadrant, and only 8% are in the Freedom half of the worldview map.

The voters of **National Alliance (NA), United List (AS) and the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS)** are grouped predominantly in the Order half of the map (81%), distributed mainly across the Preserve (46%) and Change (35%) quadrants, with ZZS extending the most into the Order + Preserve space. Thus, while ZZS, NA and AS occupy an intermediate position between the two poles, their voters are attitudinally closer to LPV and SV than to PRO and JV. Furthermore, the conservative parties are also close to those survey respondents who indicated that they **do not intend to vote** or find it **difficult to say whom they will vote for**. Both groups are also located predominantly in the Order half (roughly 83%) and are split roughly in half in the middle of Change and Preserve spectrum.

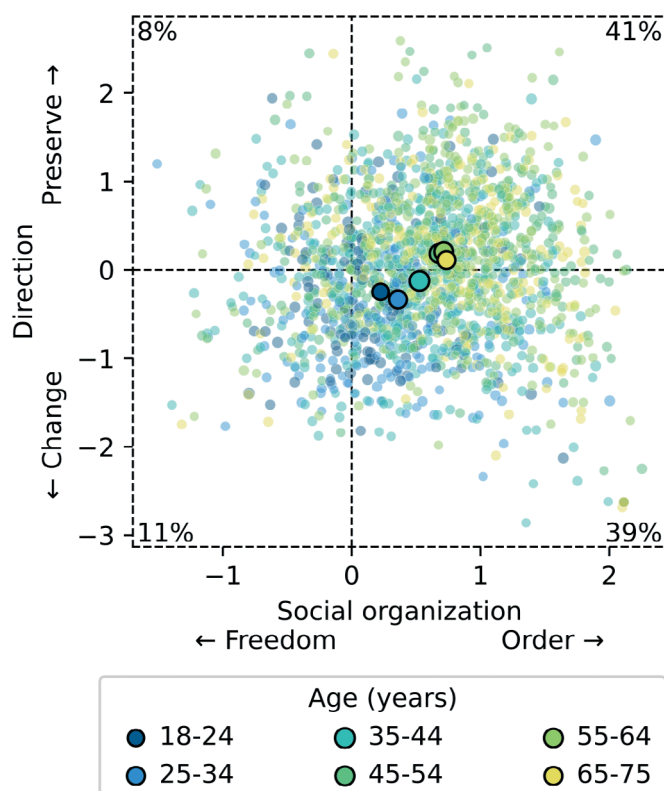
Party choice distinguishes voters along these two dimensions more strongly than any other variable in the analysis (social organisation factor: $\eta^2 = 0.15$; direction factor: $\eta^2 = 0.25$). Both effect sizes are large for political science surveys, showing that voters of different parties are not randomly distributed, but differ systematically in their attitudes. This suggests that in Latvia party competition is structured in terms of these two worldviews, and that these dimensions capture the fundamental divides that organise voter alignment and party positioning.

For ANOVA models, this study reports both **statistical significance (p-values)** and **effect size (η^2 - eta squared)**. While p-values indicate whether differences between groups are statistically detectable, they are influenced by sample size and may not capture how large or meaningful the differences are. To address this, we report on **effect sizes**, which capture the **practical importance** of results. In simple terms, effect size shows how much of the variation in the outcome variable (such as ideological position) is associated with differences between groups. A large effect means that groups (for example, party electorate or age group) are meaningfully separated in their political views, while a small effect means that groups are largely similar despite potential statistical differences. Effect size $\eta^2 = 0.26$ means that 26% of variance in the outcome variable is explained by group membership.

Effect size significance:

Small: ≥ 0.01 Medium: ≥ 0.06 Large: ≥ 0.14

Age group distribution



The Soviet legacy still divides Latvia

In addition to party choice, significant predictors of voter positions on the map of underlying worldviews are age and authoritarian predisposition. By contrast, other demographic and background factors (language of media consumption, income, region, language spoken at home, education and gender) play only a limited or no role in shaping attitudes.

Dividing voters by age group (see Figure 4) reveals a clear generational structure aligned with the two dimensions of freedom–order and change–preserve. People aged 45–75 are located predominantly in the Order half (75%), reflecting a greater preference for a strong leader and state, stability and hierarchy. A key commonality among these groups is that they were born and socialised in the Soviet Union, with formative experiences shaped by both that system and the economic uncertainty of the 1990s. This suggests a lasting imprint of Soviet-era socialisation, reinforcing preferences for order, protection and maintenance of familiar structures.

By contrast, those born closer to or after the restoration of independence are, on average, positioned more toward the change and freedom side of the spectrum. This trend begins with the 35–44 age group, born shortly before the collapse of the Soviet system and socialised in an independent Latvia. It becomes even stronger among the youngest generation (18–34), which is concentrated

particularly in the Freedom (30%) and Change (70%) halves of the map. These cohorts are more likely to support individual autonomy, openness and societal adaptation, which probably reflects lived experience in a democratic and European context. This suggests that generational experience is an important driver of political attitudes in Latvia.

Age is not only statistically significant but has the third biggest effect size in the Social Organisation factor ($\eta^2=0.07$) and the second biggest in the Direction factor ($\eta^2=0.06$), which indicates a moderate role in structuring attitudes.

There are two plausible explanations for this pattern. First, it may reflect an age effect: older respondents may be more likely to hold conservative attitudes and to prefer order and preservation over freedom and change.⁹ Second, it may reflect a socialisation effect: those who spent more of their lives under the Soviet system may be more oriented toward order and preservation, while those who grew up in an independent Latvia may be more oriented toward freedom and change.¹⁰

Assessing both hypotheses along the Direction dimension, significant (more than the first 10 years of life) exposure to the Soviet system (45+ age group compared with those below 35) provides a much better explanation of voter positions than age alone ($\Delta AIC = 19$). This suggests that differences on this axis reflect formative historical experiences rather than simply getting older. Along the Social Organisation dimension, however, the two models perform similarly ($\Delta AIC = 2$), indicating that age and Soviet-era exposure capture much of the same pattern. Overall, this suggests that age-related differences in voter worldviews are better understood as a legacy of Soviet socialisation than as an effect of age per se.

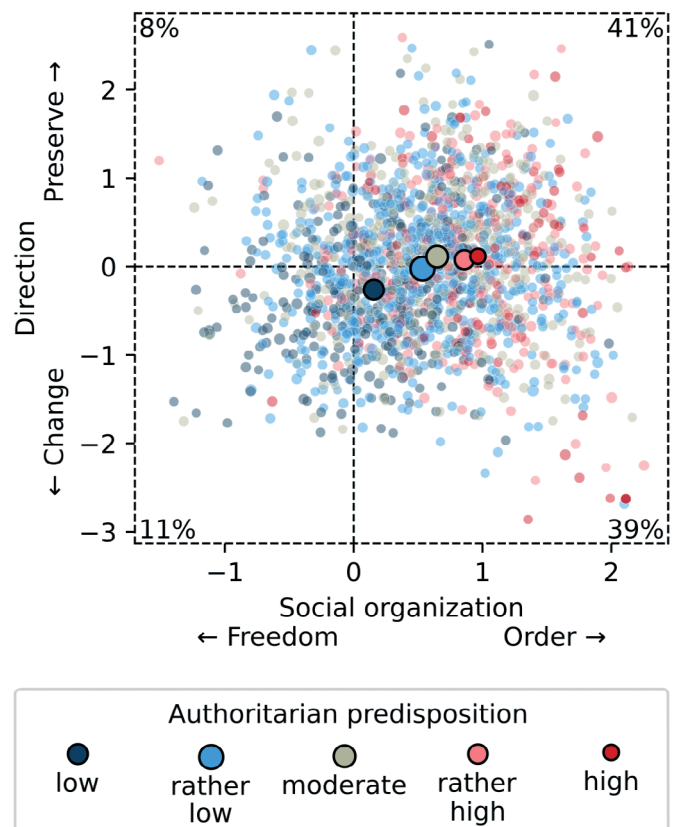
The Akaike information criterion (AIC) is a statistical estimator used to compare how well different regression models, including the weighted linear regression model used here, explain the same data. It takes into account both model fit and model simplicity, rewarding models that explain the data well without adding unnecessary complexity. When two models are compared on the same dataset, an AIC difference of 5 or more is usually treated as a meaningful advantage for the model with the lower AIC.

⁹ Geys B., Heggedal T.-R., Sørensen R.J. (2022) Age and vote choice: Is there a conservative shift among older voters? *Electoral Studies*, 78, 102485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2022.102485>

¹⁰ Mierina I. (2011) *Political participation and development of political attitudes in post-communist countries*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Latvia, pp. 43-44, 29-30, 157-158, 175-176.

Authoritarianism predisposition

Figure 5



Authoritarianism predisposition distribution

This Soviet legacy is further reinforced by overlaying the authoritarian predisposition index (see p. 9) onto the map of voters' underlying worldviews. The distribution of respondents across the attitudinal space shows that the main worldview in Latvia – captured by the freedom vs order dimension – is closely linked to authoritarian predisposition. Individuals with higher levels of authoritarianism are, on average, located more towards the order side, while those with lower levels, on average, cluster towards the freedom side. This relationship is strong, as the authoritarianism index shows the second largest effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.13$). This indicates that this dimension reflects not only policy preferences, but a deeper psychological orientation toward hierarchy, control and stability versus autonomy, pluralism and individual freedom. By contrast, this relationship is much weaker on the second dimension (change vs preserve, $\eta^2 = 0.02$), suggesting that attitudes about societal direction are shaped less by authoritarian predisposition and more by generational experience and openness to change.

Overlaying authoritarian predisposition onto the map of voters' underlying worldviews therefore demonstrates that the **core political divide in Latvia is not only ideological, but also psychological** (see Figure 5). Preferences associated with the order space – such as support for strong authority, traditional norms and stability – are rooted in a broader authoritarian orientation, while alignment with the freedom space reflects a more democratic disposition, emphasising autonomy, diversity and openness.

An electorate in transition

The EFA results suggest that the deepest divide in politics does not concern primarily the classic liberal–conservative spectrum, but two broader questions: how society should be organised, and whether it should preserve its current course or move towards change. The dominant freedom–order dimension shows that attitudes toward the state, authority, markets, diversity and social norms are closely connected rather than separate. In Latvia, these issues form part of a wider worldview about whether society should be built around autonomy and pluralism, or around stability, hierarchy and control. The second dimension – change versus preserve – adds a directional element, showing that political conflict is shaped not only by values, but also by whether voters want society to hold its course or adapt.

These worldviews are not abstract statistical constructs. They map clearly onto party competition, which helps to explain why party electorates cluster so distinctly in the ideological space. They also show that Latvia remains more strongly structured by attitudes towards order than by a simple liberal–conservative divide in the Western European sense. At the same time, society is not static. A narrow majority of voters lean towards change rather than preservation, but much of this demand for change is located not in the freedom-oriented part of the map, but in the order-oriented one. In other words, many voters appear to want change, but they want it to be directed, managed and contained.

This makes generational change especially important. Older cohorts, shaped by Soviet socialisation and the insecurity of the transition period, are more likely to prefer order and preservation. This is not a unique phenomenon. Citizens of other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe tend to display relatively higher critical attitudes towards democracy.¹¹ At the same time younger generations, socialised in an independent and European Latvia, are more open to freedom and change. This points to a gradual long-term shift in the structure of public attitudes. Nevertheless, the transition remains incomplete. Post-Soviet preferences for protection, hierarchy and state-led order still form a powerful part of Latvia's political

landscape. Latvia is therefore not simply moving from one settled model to another. It is living through an ongoing contest between inherited habits of order and an emerging preference for greater openness, autonomy and democratic change.

¹¹ Auerbach K., Petrova B. (2022) Authoritarian or Simply Disillusioned? Explaining Democratic Skepticism in Central and Eastern Europe. *Political Behavior*, 44, 1959-1983 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09807-0>

More than just liberal versus conservative

Exploratory factor analysis showed that political attitudes in Latvia are not organised primarily along the familiar liberal–conservative or left–right lines. Instead, they cluster into broader and more deeply rooted worldviews, combining views on how society should be organised with attitudes towards change. At the same time, self-identification revealed that commonly used ideological labels capture how people describe themselves, but not necessarily how their underlying political preferences are structured. Terms such as »liberal« and »conservative« are used inconsistently and do not reliably predict political behaviour or party choice. Different respondents understand political labels through different personal experiences, media framings and political references, and may attach to them cultural, economic or geopolitical meanings inconsistently.

To examine how respondents' attitudes are organised along more clearly defined theoretical dimensions, the analysis next uses confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Such analysis works by specifying the categories in advance and then examining how the survey items fit them. In practical terms, this involves grouping relevant questions into pre-defined dimensions – such as **social views**, **economic attitudes** and **authoritarian leanings** – and visualising the structure that emerges. This approach is useful because, unlike self-identification, it does not depend on how individuals personally interpret abstract ideological labels (see Figure 6).

This approach allows for a systematic comparison of how well observed structures of political attitudes in Latvia map onto each of the traditionally defined ideological dimensions. The results discussed on the following pages show that the liberal–conservative and democracy–authoritarianism dimensions play a meaningful role in structuring attitudes, whereas the economic left–right spectrum has comparatively limited explanatory power.

Ideological spectrum in Latvia

Using CFA results, voters in Latvia can be mapped onto two pre-defined ideological dimensions: social values (liberal–conservative) and political system preference (democratic–authoritarian). The map illustrates how voters' positions along these two dimensions are related to political party support and relevant demographic indicators.

The bottom-left quadrant (liberal + democratic) represents a distinctly pro-European, democracy-oriented

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Figure 6



CFA is like drawing boxes labelled "Theme A" and "Theme B", and then examining how the highlighted words fit into them.

While EFA is like highlighting a text and noticing that certain words naturally cluster into themes, CFA is a theory-driven method that lets the researcher specify in advance which items are expected to measure particular latent dimensions. The model is then used to derive respondents' population-weighted positions on these pre-defined theory-based dimensions (e.g. liberal–conservative), allowing researchers to visualise their distribution. Here, CFA is used purely descriptively rather than to formally assess model fit or test construct validity (see p. 11 for how to read factor loadings).

Dimensions Liberal–conservative, democratic–authoritarian are assigned based on the theory of what divides political attitudes.

worldview (24% of all voters). Voters in this space prioritise individual rights, equality and the inclusion of diverse identities, while also rejecting strong top-down control. They support protection of rights for same-sex couples and women. At the same time, they prefer gov-

ernance based on participation, openness and individual autonomy.

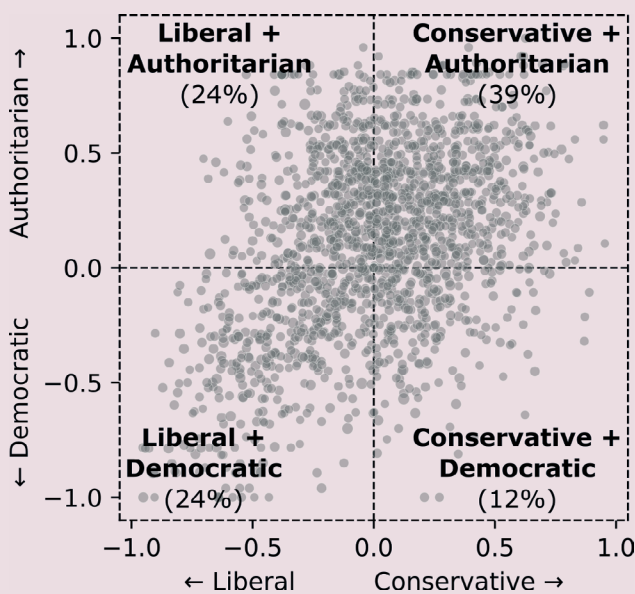
The top-right quadrant (conservative + authoritarian) represents an authoritarian traditionalist worldview centred on preserving existing norms through active enforcement and authority. These voters (39%) combine cultural traditionalism with a strong preference for order, hierarchy and clear boundaries. They are more likely to support strong leadership, punitive approaches to justice and limits on diversity and change. Social norms are both valued and should be actively maintained by the state.

The top-left quadrant (liberal + authoritarian) combines support for equality, inclusion and social change with

a preference for strong, directive governance. Voters here (24%) believe that freedom is important, but requires structure and guidance to function effectively. They are comfortable with authority, regulation and top-down coordination as tools to achieve fairness and manage complexity.

The bottom-right quadrant (conservative + democratic) reflects a more individualistic but culturally traditional position. Voters in this quadrant (12%) support maintaining established social norms – particularly around family and gender – but are less inclined towards strong state control or authoritarian governance. Their conservatism is rooted in a preference for continuity and recognisable social structures, but also personal autonomy. This corresponds to a conservative but non-authoritarian worldview.

Voter ideology map



Attitudes in conservative direction	Factor loading
Core attitudes:	
Opposition to same-sex marriage	1.20
Opposition to Istanbul Convention	1.19
Priority for traditional values in state policy	1.06
Supporting attitudes:	
EU should not have more power	0.79
Opposition to environmental regulation	0.78
Support for traditional gender roles	0.78
Opposition to medical marijuana	0.76
Opposition to assisted dying	0.74
Restriction of non-European immigration	0.73

Attitudes in conservative direction	Factor loading
Concern about increasing social diversity	0.87
Support for rule by strong leaders	0.83
Support for punitive justice system	0.75
Preference for order over individual freedom	0.67

The underlying distribution of attitudes suggests that liberal and conservative positions in Latvia are balanced fairly evenly. With regard to self-identification, 38% describe themselves as liberal, 36% as conservative and 15% as centrist (see p. 6). The CFA results point to a similar overall balance, with roughly half of respondents on the liberal side and half on the conservative side. The size of the ideological centre on the voter ideology map depends on where its boundaries are drawn, and there is no completely objective way to define that threshold.

Tables on this page display the attitudes that moderately (loadings above 0.5) and strongly (above 0.7) define the liberal-conservative and democratic-authoritarian dimensions of the voter ideology map. The social liberal-conservative dimension accounts for 18% of the data variance, while the democratic-authoritarian dimension explains 6% of it.

The top 3 attitudes indicating conservative views on the liberal-conservative spectrum (left) show exceptionally strong relationships with the underlying factor (loading > 1). In CFA models with correlated dimensions, standardised loadings can exceed 1 when items are very similar and closely linked to overlapping constructs. This is not a model problem as the residual variances remain positive, but a sign that these attitudes are aligned very tightly with the factor. However, it means that factor loading values for this spectrum should be read as indicators of relative strength, not exact proportions of explained variance.

Political party ideological alignment

When mapped onto the voter ideology map, voters are clearly differentiated by their positions on both the liberal-conservative and democratic-authoritarian spectrums. The results (Figure 7) reveal a clear clustering of voters into three broad party blocs along both axes, similar to the EFA. However, the theory-driven liberal-conservative and democratic-authoritarian dimensions explain less variance (18% and 6%, respectively) than the single freedom vs order dimension identified by the EFA. This is to be expected, as the freedom-order dimension combined questions from both ideological spectrums and also incorporates an economic dimension. Notably, the two ideological dimensions are moderately correlated (coefficient 0.49), which contributes to the shared variance captured by the EFA-derived worldview.

The first block of parties consists of **PRO** and **JV**, whose electorates are located predominantly on the liberal half of the map. In total, 76% of PRO voters are located in the liberal + democratic quadrant, with a further 17% in the liberal + authoritarian quadrant. JV voters are positioned closer to the centre, split almost equally along the democratic-authoritarian dimension (48% vs 51%).

Party choice strongly distinguishes voters along these two dimensions, more than any other variable in the analysis (liberal-conservative factor: $\eta^2 = 0.40$; democratic-authoritarian: $\eta^2 = 0.21$), indicating that parties reflect the core underlying divides shaping political competition in Latvia.

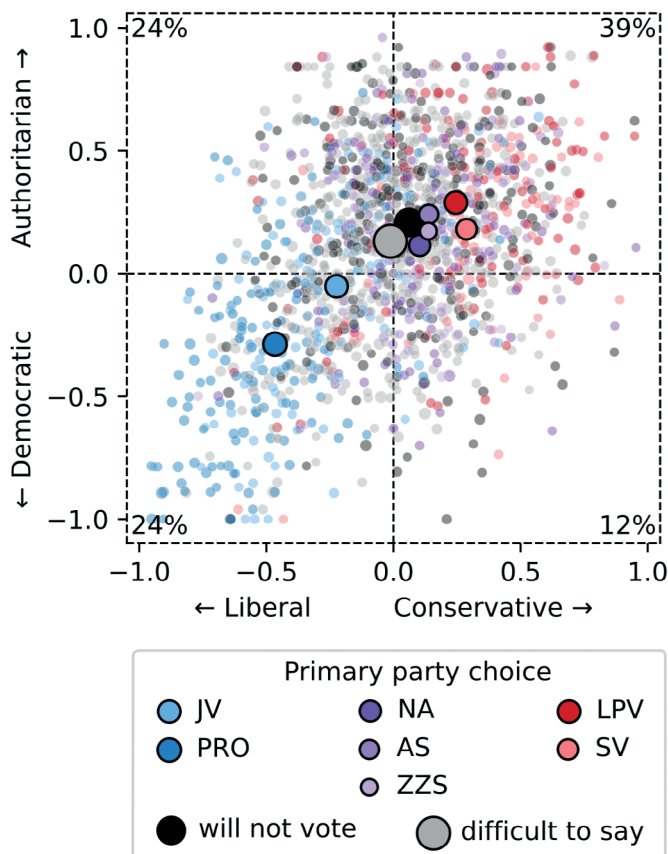
A second block is formed by the conservative parties – **NA**, **AS**, and **ZZS** – where 42–47% of voters fall into the conservative + authoritarian quadrant. The third block, composed of the populist parties **SV** and **LPV**, is also located primarily in the conservative + authoritarian quadrant (61–68% of voters). These parties' electorates are generally more conservative than the second block (79–82% vs 65–69% in the conservative half), while showing broadly simi-

How is the voter ideology map (CFA) different from the map of voters' underlying worldviews (EFA)?

In the CFA scatterplot, values are normalised to a [-1, 1] range to provide a meaningful reference frame. The endpoints represent theoretical extremes: a value of 1 corresponds to a respondent who consistently aligns with one pole of the dimension across all defining items, while -1 represents the opposite pattern. The midpoint (0) reflects a position between these two extremes (value 3 in answers to all survey questions on a 1–5 scale). This scaling allows for a more intuitive interpretation of positions along each dimension.

Political party choice

Figure 7



lar levels of authoritarian attitudes. These findings suggest that the political landscape in Latvia cannot be understood solely through the traditional liberal-conservative divide, confirming that authoritarian tendencies do play a major role in the differentiation of party electorates.

Also notable is the clustering of conservative and populist parties together in the conservative + authoritarian quadrant. Measured ideological differences between voters of LPV, SV and NA, ZZS, AS are significantly smaller (η^2 : 0.01–0.04) than between both of these blocks and JV (η^2 : 0.08–0.24) or PRO (η^2 : 0.26–0.48). However, this does not suggest that the parties and their voters are identical.

As a result, the map can be read as a spectrum, where movement from -1 to +1 reflects a gradual shift from one coherent set of attitudes to the other. Unlike in the EFA scatterplot, where the scale is relative and values depend on the distribution of factor scores, the CFA scaling provides fixed reference points that make distances and positions more directly interpretable within the model framework.

Each point on the map corresponds to an individual voter's position along these dimensions. The **larger dots** represent the average position of voters associated with each political party, illustrating where their electorates are centred within this ideological space.

It is important to note that this map does not capture all aspects differentiating the voters of these conservative and populist parties. A larger share of populist parties' voters is Russian-speaking (50% of all LPV voters and 77% of SV). Conservative party voters are predominantly Latvian-speaking – almost no Russian speakers consider voting for NA and AS, while 20% of ZZS voters are Russian-speaking.

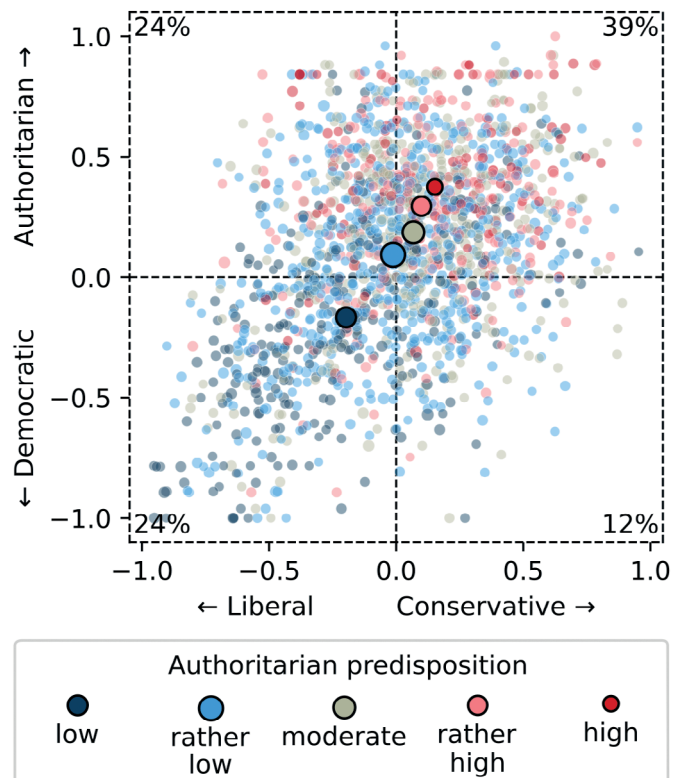
Furthermore, 60% of SV voters and 40% of LPV voters think that Ukraine or the West (USA, NATO, EU) are primarily responsible for the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. Voters of the conservative bloc view this question differently: almost no NA and AS voters, and only 16% of ZZS voters, agree that the West bears primary responsibility. These findings indicate that, while in terms of ideological values and attitudes, the two blocs appeal to a similar voter base, party choice is also closely related to ethnicity and geopolitical attitudes.

Undecided voters and those who do not intend to vote, on average, are close to the centre on the voter map composed of individuals from all four quadrants. However, those who do not intend to vote are slightly more prevalent on the authoritarian (10 percentage point difference) and conservative (8 percentage point difference) sides of the map. This suggests that political disengagement in Latvia is not confined to one ideological camp; rather non-voters lean somewhat more toward the authoritarian and conservative side of the spectrum.

Authoritarian leanings play a role in Latvia

Mainstream Western European conservatism has typically paired social traditionalism or caution towards rapid social change with acceptance of constitutional limits, pluralism and the rule of law. It operates within the framework of liberal democracy, even when advocating more traditional social values. This model differs from populist radical-right and illiberal parties, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), MAGA, Nigel Farage's Reform UK or Viktor Orbán's Fidesz, which tend to combine traditionalist or nationalist themes with stronger emphasis on sovereignty, authoritarian leadership and tighter social control, alongside more explicit criticism of liberal-democratic institutions.¹²

Far-right parties are most commonly defined by a combination of nativism and authoritarianism. In this framework, nativism means that the state is seen as belonging primarily to the native national group, while non-native elements are treated as threatening to the nation. Authoritarianism refers to a preference for a strictly ordered society in which authority, hierarchy and social norms are strongly en-



forced.¹³ Populist parties, by contrast, are typically defined in ideational terms: they portray politics as a conflict between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, arguing that political decisions should express the general “will of the people” rather than the preferences of established institutions or intermediary actors.¹⁴

In Latvia, the Democratic + Conservative quadrant (Figure 8), which corresponds to a Western European-type conservative electorate, is the least populated (12%). This may partly reflect political supply, as party offerings over the past three decades have shaped how voters interpret and organise their views. However, the survey data also suggests a deeper structural pattern. Rather than aligning with a Western European model, a substantial share of conservative voters in Latvia cluster in a more authority-oriented profile, in which traditional values are combined with preferences for hierarchy, enforcement and more authoritarian state-led control. When the democratic–authoritarian dimension is considered, conservatism in Latvia appears structurally closer not to mainstream Western European conservatism, but to the more authority-centred end of the conservative spectrum, associated in Western Europe with populist radical-right and illiberal movements.

¹² Bale T., Rovira Kaltwasser C. (2021) The Mainstream Right in Western Europe: Caught between the Silent Revolution and Silent Counter-Revolution. In: Bale T., Rovira Kaltwasser C. (eds) *Riding the Populist Wave: Europe's Mainstream Right in Crisis*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-37.

¹³ Mudde C. (2007) Constructing a conceptual framework. In: *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 11-31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>

¹⁴ Mudde C. (2004) The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39, 541-563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>

What further substantiates this point is that the stronger the subconscious authoritarianism predisposition, the closer towards the conservative and authoritarian end of spectrum the respondent is. Authoritarian predisposition (see p. 9) significantly relates not only to the democratic–authoritarian dimension ($\eta^2 = 0.15$), but also to the liberal–conservative dimension ($\eta^2 = 0.09$). These findings suggest that, in Latvia, both authoritarian and conservative attitudes in survey questions are connected to a subconscious authoritarian predisposition.

The broader implication is that conservatism is not a uniform ideological category across contexts. In Latvia, it often carries a stronger authoritarian component, which shapes both voter alignment and party competition. In a wider context of global democratic backsliding,¹⁵ this creates conditions in which order-oriented and authority-driven political narratives in Latvia may have greater potential to consolidate voters. However, it is likely to be more complex because **voters of conservative parties are dispersed across multiple quadrants**. There are voters of conservative parties with a strong preference for democracy and also for some of the liberal values already identified.

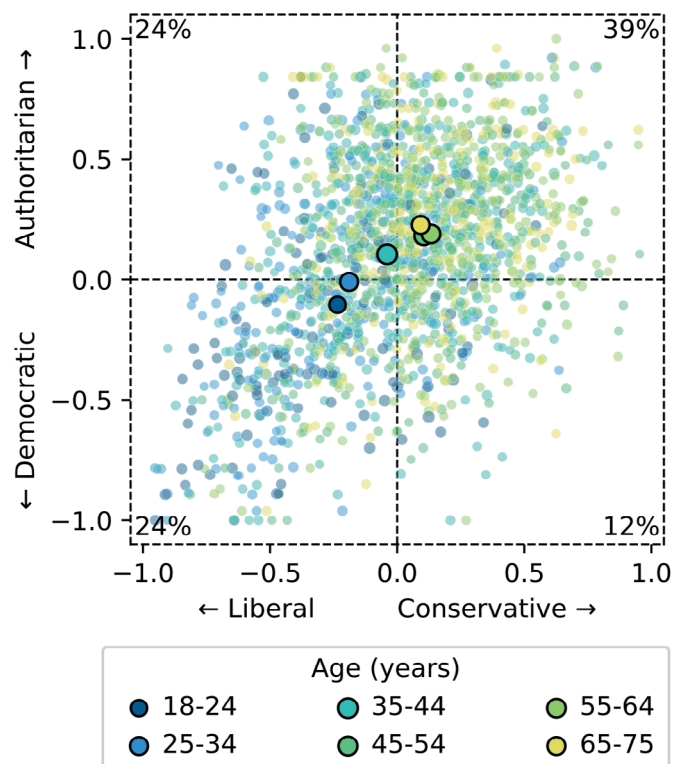
These results also have implications for political party classification in Latvia. NA has consistently been classified as far-right by political scientists in Latvia.¹⁶ PopuList is a peer-reviewed expert database that classifies parties across 31 European countries as populist, far left, and/or far right, and also records whether they are Eurosceptic. In its classification, both LPV and SV are listed as populist right-wing parties. This reflects their combination of anti-establishment politics, social conservatism and emphasis on traditional values.¹⁷

While this study does not directly measure populist attitudes or party rhetoric, the voter ideology map shows that, on average, SV and LPV voters are located furthest in the conservative-authoritarian direction, with NA voters also close to the same attitudinal space. While LPV and SV are categorised as populist right-wing parties and NA as far-right, AS and ZZS are not usually placed in those categories. However, their electorates overlap substantially with the same conservative-authoritarian profile, both being even further in the authoritarian direction than NA voters. This implies the need for a further in-depth reassessment of political party classification in Latvia.

Ongoing generational change

Age is the most important demographic factor explaining differences in data. The younger the respondent, the more likely they are to lean towards the liberal-democratic

Age is associated with the divide Figure 9



quadrant. At the same time, the older generations, which prefer stability, hierarchy and control, will remain an important force in the near term, resulting in an electorate structurally divided along generational lines (see Figure 9).

Age shows a clear and statistically significant relationship with political attitudes, with a large effect along the liberal–conservative ($\eta^2 = 0.14$) and a moderate effect along the democracy–authoritarian axis ($\eta^2 = 0.07$). Older age groups (45+) tend to cluster at higher levels of both authoritarian and conservative orientations, probably shaped by formative experiences under the Soviet system (see p. 15). Younger generations – socialised after the restoration of Latvia’s independence – are increasingly associated with democratic and liberal orientations.

Within this broader generational shift, an additional pattern emerged in self-identification questions among the youngest voters. Among women aged 18–24, only 8% identify as conservative, while 66% identify as liberal. By contrast, young men in the same age group are significantly more conservative: 45% describe themselves as conservative and only 30% as liberal. This pattern is specific only to the youngest female cohort. Among women aged 25–75, 33% identify as conservative and 39% as liberal. Among

15 Lindberg S. (2026) *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling the Democratic Era?* V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg.

16 Auers D. (2024) The (non) Europeanisation of Latvia’s Far Right. *Nationalities Papers*, 52(6), 1273-1291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.39>

17 PopuList (n.d.) *Latvia Country Report*. <https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Latvia.pdf>

men aged 25–75, 42% identify as conservative and 34% as liberal, a similar proportion to younger males.

This phenomenon is not unique to Latvia. Cross-national data from 20 developed countries showed a growing ideological divide between young men and women.¹⁸ While two decades ago there was little difference in how men and women aged 18–29 positioned themselves on the liberal–conservative spectrum, by 2020 a noticeable gap had emerged. Young men remain relatively balanced between liberal and conservative views, but young women are significantly more likely to identify as liberal. The data from Latvia therefore appear to reflect a broader generational pattern: young women are moving more clearly towards liberal self-identification, while young men remain more divided.

However, this gender gap is less pronounced when examining underlying attitudes rather than self-identification. CFA results show that the difference between genders in the 18–24 age group on the liberal–conservative spectrum is small ($\eta^2=0.04$), not statistically significant after correction for multiple comparisons ($p=0.02$, corrected significance threshold: $p<0.008$). This suggests that while self-identification reflects a visible and internationally observed trend, **underlying ideological attitudes among young voters in Latvia remain similar across genders**. Still, by examining only a single snapshot, the present study cannot comment on long-term societal trends, and the self-identification results alone suggest a need for further investigation and continued monitoring of this phenomenon.

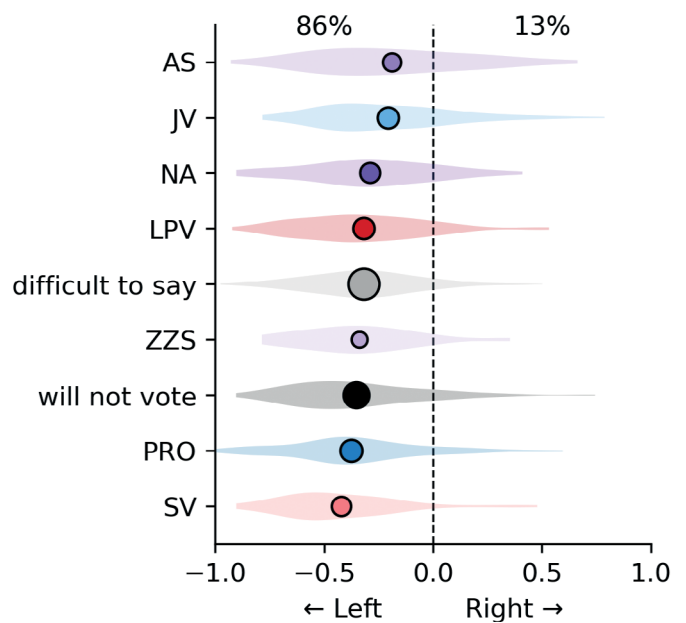
Economic dimension relatively insignificant

While the economic dimension in Latvia is structured around a clear divide between state-led protection (left) and market-led approach (right), **most voters (86%) lean towards an economically left position** (Figure 10). At its core, the left-leaning position emphasises the role of the state in protecting citizens from market risks and inequalities. This includes strong support for worker protection, trade unions, business regulation, progressive taxation and state provision of essential services, such as housing, transport and utilities. The underlying logic is that the state should actively shape economic outcomes to ensure fairness, security and social stability, even at the cost of reduced business flexibility or slower growth.

On the right, the opposing orientation favours market autonomy, competition and limited state intervention. It reflects a belief that economic outcomes are best driven by private initiative, efficiency and incentives, with less redistribution and regulation. Sector-specific protections – such as support for agriculture or opposition to privatisation –

Political party choice by economic orientation

Figure 10



are also weaker at this end of the spectrum, suggesting that the main divide is not individual industries, but the broader question of how much the state should intervene in the economy versus leaving outcomes to the market.

With most voters (86%) leaning towards the left, economic position only weakly differentiates party preference ($\eta^2 = 0.05$). For example, LPV, NA and PRO voters express similar levels of support for progressive taxation (around 73% in all groups). Overall, this suggests that economic issues play a relatively limited role in structuring political competition in Latvia, with broad voter consensus reducing their power to differentiate between parties.

Some attitudes about the economy still matter, but not in isolation. Their political significance becomes visible when they are combined with views on social issues and authority, as the EFA analysis showed. In practice, what distinguishes voters is not whether they support redistribution or the market, but how these economic preferences fit together with broader views about order, freedom and change. It is this combination of attitudes rather than economic views alone that shapes political alignment.

It is also worth noting that support for left-leaning economic policies is even stronger than voters' self-perceptions suggest. While self-identification showed a clear tilt to the left, with 42% placing themselves on the left and 21% on the right (see p. 8), CFA analysis of responses to specific economic questions indicate even more consistent support

¹⁸ The Economist (2024) Why the growing gulf between young men and women (13 March). <https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women>

for state intervention and redistribution. There is no fully objective way to distinguish between the economic right, centre and left, because any cut-off is ultimately arbitrary. However, regardless of how broadly the economic centre is defined, the share of voters who consistently support right-wing economic attitudes does not exceed 14%. In other words, voters in Latvia are, on average, even less economically right-leaning than they describe themselves to be ($p < 0.001$).

A number of factors may explain this unique pattern. First, there appears to be a broad societal consensus on a significant role for the state in the economy, particularly in ensuring social protection, public services and redistribution. This, similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, is probably linked to the durable legacy of the large state role in the economy and extensive state-provided social welfare throughout the Soviet period.¹⁹ When most voters share similar baseline expectations about the state's role, economic issues lose their capacity to divide the electorate into distinct camps and for parties to differentiate themselves in terms of their economic policies.

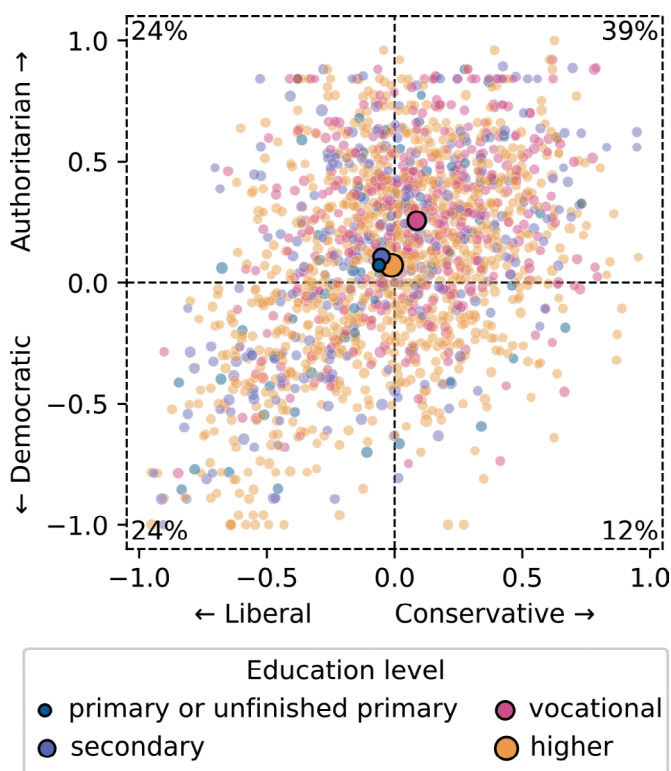
Second, parties themselves offer limited differentiation on economic policy. Many profess overlapping positions on key economic questions or avoid clearly articulated economic proposals altogether. Pre-election slogans, such as "more jobs" or "more investments" do not constitute an economic policy. As a result, voters are not presented with meaningful alternatives, which reduces the salience of economic issues as a basis for political choice.

Third, historically, electoral politics in Latvia has not been structured around economics. As Daunis Auers notes, party competition in Latvia has usually been shaped more by identity-based cleavages – particularly ethnic and language divisions – as well as by the oligarch versus anti-oligarch divide, rather than by stable socio-economic (left–right) distinctions.²⁰ The data from the present survey support this hypothesis, showing limited economic differentiation between party electorates. Other dimensions play a more decisive role in shaping political alignment. If we assume that the oligarch/anti-oligarch spectrum fundamentally reflects a democracy–authoritarianism axis, the current data shows a similar pattern, as hypothesised previously.

Unexpected variables play little or no role

Other demographic and background factors (language of media consumption, income, region, language spoken at home, education and gender) show little or no relation

Education does not change much **Figure 11**



to the ideological spectrum, similar to their lack of association with worldviews on social organisation and direction, as discussed previously. This sub-section examines two of these in more depth: education level and media consumption.

In many Western European countries, higher levels of education are often associated with more socially liberal attitudes²¹ and, in much of the literature, also with stronger democratic participation.²² However, this is not the case in Latvia, where education level is not strongly related to liberal or democratic attitudes ($\eta^2 < 0.04$). Respondents across all education levels are distributed similarly across the ideological spectrum, except those with a professional or a vocational education. Half of the latter group are in the conservative and authoritarian quadrant.

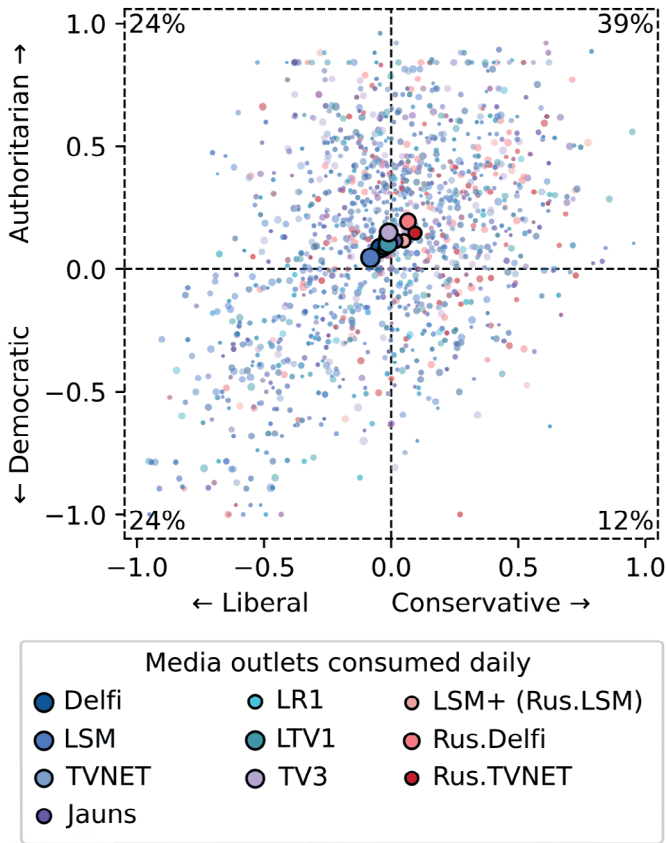
While it is beyond the scope of this study to explain the different attitudes of people with a vocational education, one potential explanation for the lack of difference between respondents with primary, secondary or higher education is again the Soviet legacy: a significant share of older respondents obtained their education during the Soviet

19 Pop-Eleches G., Tucker J.A. (2017) *Communism's Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes*. Princeton University Press, pp. 5-6, 19.

20 Auers D. (2013) Latvia. In Berglund S., Ekman J., Deegan-Krause K., Knutsen T. (eds) *Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, 3rd ed., Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 94, 105. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782545880.00011>

21 Scott R. (2025) Why Are Graduates More Socially Liberal? Estimating the Effect of Higher Education on Political Values Through Variation in University Experience. *Political Studies*, 73(2), 885-903.

22 Persson M. (2015) Education and Political Participation. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(3), 689-703. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000409>



A society in transition

To sum up, Latvia’s political landscape is not understood best through the classic liberal–conservative lens. CFA analysis of the survey data shows that political competition is also structured along the democratic–authoritarian axis. While liberal–conservative differences matter, they are combined with views about how society should be governed: through openness and bottom-up participation, or through hierarchy, control and strong, even authoritarian leadership.

At the same time, a key finding suggests that Latvia is undergoing a gradual but important generational shift. Younger voters are more likely to cluster in the liberal-democratic part of the map, while older voters are more often located toward the conservative-authoritarian end. This points to a longer term transformation in society’s value structure. However, this change is incomplete: authority-oriented conservatism remains a large and electorally significant force, while a Western European-style democratic conservatism remains comparatively weak. In practical terms, this means that the main struggle in politics is not over economic issues, but over the balance between openness and control, pluralism and hierarchy, democratic participation and the appeal of stronger top-down order.

or early post-Soviet period, when education systems emphasised conformity and hierarchy rather than independent thinking and individual autonomy. At the same time, structural limitations in the contemporary education system – including decades of underfunding, wasteful, overlapping spending and uneven quality – may also have limited its capacity to foster civic and critical competences and reduced education’s role as a transformative force shaping political values.

The CFA results also show a very weak relationship between media consumption and location on both spectrums ($\eta^2 < 0.02$). Audiences across both Latvian- and Russian-language media, as well as public and commercial media are distributed similarly across the democratic–authoritarian dimension (Figure 12). Consumers of Russian language media are slightly more conservative than those consuming Latvian language media, but this may be because Russian speakers tend to be slightly more conservative as a group. These results suggest that media consumption does not play a major role in shaping political worldviews in Latvia. These findings also challenge radical claims that specific media actors, such as the public broadcaster LSM, systematically shift audiences toward more liberal positions. The data indicates that viewers of all major Latvian language media outlets are, on average, located almost in the centre of the political spectrum.

Conclusion: the Soviet shadow over political views in Latvia

The results of the statistical analysis presented in this paper show that political competition in Latvia is structured less by a classic Western liberal-conservative, left-right divide than by a deeper contrast between **Post-Soviet Legacy** and **Democratic Change**. The EFA map of voters' underlying worldviews showed that parties and their voters are shaped by two political dimensions. One reflects a tension between freedom and order, while the other captures a divide between change and preservation. The CFA results are consistent with this pattern, showing that politics in Latvia is organised not only by a liberal-conservative divide, but also by a democratic-authoritarian one. These findings can be summed up on a single ideological spectrum (Figure 13) that helps explain both party competition and wider tensions concerning the direction of society.

Attitudes that in Western Europe are often analytically separate – such as a large state role in economy and society, a preference for top-down authority and order, caution towards openness and pluralism, and cultural conservatism – are in Latvia fused into a broader Post-Soviet Legacy worldview centred on preserving the status quo and state dependence. By contrast, support for freedom, openness, self-direction, bottom-up politics, democratic change

and a European orientation forms an opposing and equally coherent worldview oriented towards Democratic Change.

Three party clusters emerge in this spectrum. First, the electorates of **PRO** and **B** are concentrated on the change-oriented side, representing a more reformist and more freedom-oriented pole. Second, **LPV** and **B** form the clearest order-and-preservation cluster, with voters most strongly aligned with authority, stability and resistance to change. Third, **NA**, **AS** and **ZZS** occupy a position closer to the LPV–SV cluster than to the PRO–JV cluster. Their voters are also concentrated at the legacy preservation end of the spectrum. This distribution shows party clustering toward the right side of the ideological spectrum, as well as a gap in the centre that could be filled by a centrist party.

Post-Soviet legacy in a regional context

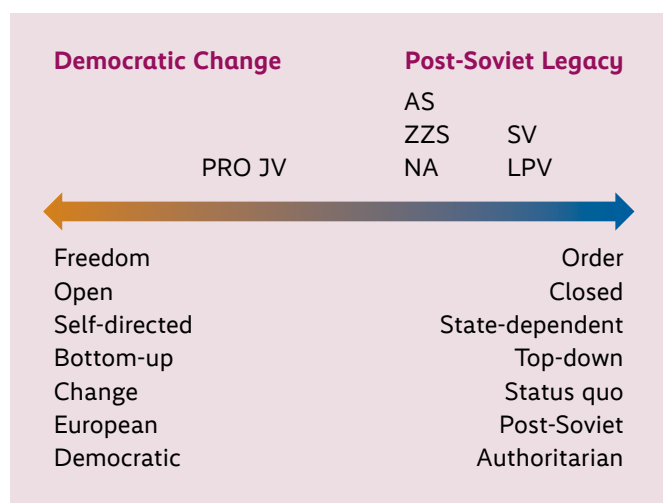
In Latvia, the classic liberal-conservative and left-right ideological spectrums do not fully capture how political attitudes are structured. These findings fit within a well-established strand of comparative political science showing that political competition in Europe cannot be reduced to a single left-right dimension.²³ Alongside economic redistribution, research increasingly points to a second axis linked to culture, authority, identity and openness to integration and change.²⁴ Furthermore, Latvia's unique history has probably left a mark on voters' political attitudes.

The post-Soviet legacy differentiates Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) from Western Europe and continues to affect contemporary politics. In post-communist democracies, electoral conflict has been shaped not only by standard socioeconomic divides, but also by the legacies of communist rule, the shocks of the post-1989 transition to democracy and a free market economy, state formation and the uneven consolidation of democratic institutions.

Comparative research on post-communist attitudes supports this interpretation. Pop-Eleches and Tucker argue that “communism's shadow is still ever present in the hearts and minds of post-communist citizens” and show that post-communist citizens are, on average, “less sup-

Ideological spectrum in Latvia

Figure 13



²³ Le Corre Juratic M. (2025) Dimensions of polarisation, realignment and electoral participation in Europe: The mobilizing power of the cultural dimension. *European Journal of Political Research*, 64, 989–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12718>

²⁴ Delespaul D.A. (2025) Common Two-Dimensional Structure? Comparing Demand-side Political Spaces of Eight European Democracies. *Government and Opposition*, 60(4), 1062–1088. doi:10.1017/gov.2025.10018

portive of democracy, less supportive of markets, and more supportive of state-provided social welfare” than citizens elsewhere in the world.²⁵ These differences are better explained by the experience of living through communism than simply by living in a transitioning post-communist country or becoming more conservative with age. This is consistent with the nature of the Soviet system, which did not merely govern people, but actively sought to shape citizens’ attitudes through schools, workplaces and public life.

Under state socialism, the state was responsible for employment and basic welfare provision. This established a strong expectation that it should protect citizens from economic risk. Although political and economic systems changed rapidly after 1989, underlying belief systems evolved more slowly. Support for state intervention therefore remained widespread, limiting the ability of parties to differentiate along classic Western European liberal-conservative or left-right economic divides. Rather than fully adopting a liberal-capitalist ideology, post-socialist societies adapted by integrating new ideas with older expectations.²⁶

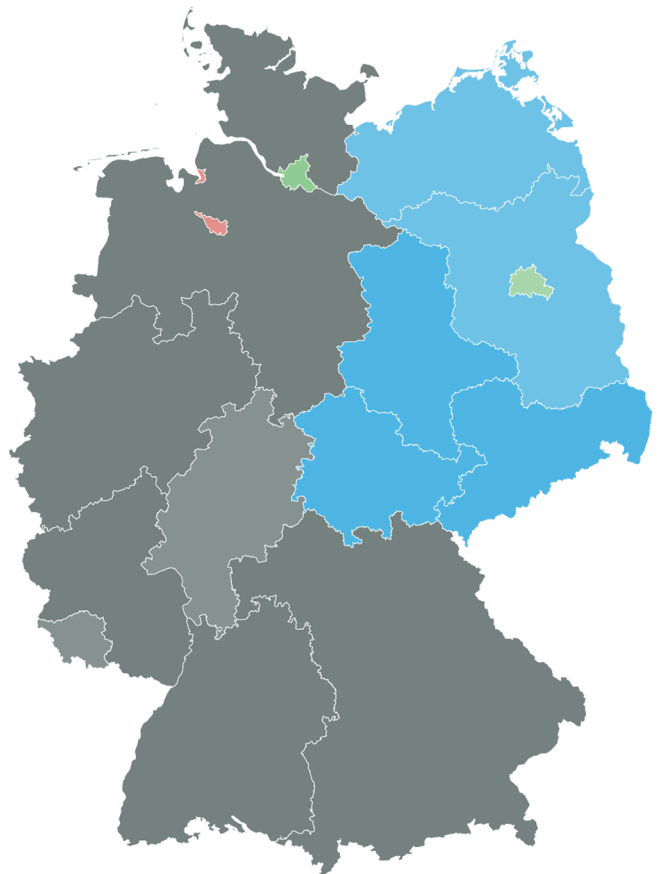
These expectations were not only inherited but also reinforced during the 1990s transition to market capitalism and democracy. The economic shocks of that period, marked by instability, unemployment and uncertainty, strengthened the demand for state protection. As a result, post-communist systems developed with significant institutional continuity, evolving into “entitlement states” built on inherited patterns providing safety nets. Some authors therefore argue that stronger order-oriented or more authoritarian attitudes do not necessarily indicate a rejection of democracy as an ideal, but may also reflect disappointment with how democracy functioned in practice during and after the transition.²⁷

The findings of this report on Latvia should be read not as an isolated case, but as part of this wider post-Soviet CEE pattern in which demands for protection, stability and authority remain politically salient. In this perspective, **Latvia’s order-oriented attitudes may reflect not only a preference for hierarchy and control, but also post-Soviet political experience and disillusionment with democratic institutions**, often judged through the lens of instability, weak representation and unmet expectations.

The case of Latvia also suggests that these patterns are not simply a matter of age. Two explanations were considered: that older voters are more conservative just because they have got older, or that the difference reflects formative exposure to the Soviet system. The results presented here support the second explanation: those exposed to the Soviet system and post-Soviet transition are more strongly driven by a Post-Soviet Legacy worldview, while

AfD in the 2024 EP election

Figure 14



younger generations are more oriented toward European democratic values. In other words, voter worldviews are better understood as shaped by Soviet-era socialisation than by age alone. This helps explain why preferences for state dependence, top-down coordination and social protection remain bundled with caution towards pluralism, openness and rapid change.

Figure 14 shows the German states in which the radical-right populist AfD (in blue) won in the 2024 European Parliament elections. It reveals a clear territorial divide: support for the AfD is concentrated in the territory of former communist East Germany, while former West Germany remains predominantly supportive of mainstream democratic parties. This is a clear visual illustration how in post-communist politics historically rooted legacies can shape voter attitudes, beliefs and party choice.

In the first decade or two after democratisation, parties linked to the communist past and parties emerging from the anti-communist opposition were often treated as clearly

²⁵ Pop-Eleches G., Tucker J.A. (2017) *Communism’s Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes*. Princeton University Press, pp. 1-3, 6-7.

²⁶ Ekiert G., Hanson S.E. (eds) (2003) *Capitalism and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the legacy of communist rule*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 214-217.

²⁷ Auerbach K., Petrova B. (2022) Authoritarian or Simply Disillusioned? Explaining Democratic Skepticism in Central and Eastern Europe. *Political Behavior*, 44, 1959-1983. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09807-0>

different political camps. Over time, this divide has changed into disagreement about democracy itself, separating parties and voters willing to tolerate democratic erosion, as with AfD in Germany, from those who unite in defence of liberal democracy.²⁸ In both cases, political competition in some CEE democracies is not only about ordinary policies, but also about the fundamental nature of the political system and the legitimacy of political actors.

As in other Central and Eastern European societies, these attitudinal legacies help explain why Latvia's ideological map does not align neatly with a standard Western European one. This does not mean that specific issues or party strategies are unimportant. But it does help explain why party competition in Latvia is often driven less by economic disagreement and more by competing visions of authority, openness and the desirable direction of social change.

Authoritarian predisposition and change

This report also draws on political psychology research on subconscious authoritarian predispositions, using child-rearing values to capture deeper preferences for conformity, order and autonomy. In Latvia, a more authoritarian predisposition is associated with conservative values, aversion to change and broader preferences for hierarchy, discipline, social control and reduced pluralism. These findings align with a wider body of research showing that authoritarian predispositions are activated most strongly in contexts of perceived threat, instability and cultural conflict.²⁹

In political psychology, authoritarian responses are understood less as abstract ideological commitments than as reactions to environments experienced as unstable, risky or difficult to control. Feldman and Stenner argue that authoritarian predispositions are rooted in a preference for social conformity over individual autonomy and that perceived threats can activate these predispositions more strongly.³⁰ From this perspective, economic uncertainty, rapid social change and exposure to risk can all increase demand for predictability, clear rules and stronger authority as means of restoring (a sense of) stability.

This helps explain why older voters may be more averse to change and to liberal European values. These dynamics do not necessarily operate in isolation but can be mutually reinforcing: a changing world generates insecurity; insecurity increases the need for protection; protection enhances the

value of order; and order makes stronger authority appear more legitimate. The result is a coherent attitudinal package in which support for state intervention, caution toward pluralism and openness to strong leadership reinforce one another. What may appear to be a set of separate policy preferences is therefore better understood as a broader orientation toward minimising risk and maintaining stability in an uncertain environment.

The prevalence of authoritarian leanings in these party electorates suggests a problem of political classification. Looking at their electorates, in a Western European framework, these do not look like classical conservative parties. Far-right parties are typically defined by a combination of authoritarianism – a preference for a strictly ordered society with strong authority, hierarchy and enforcement of social norms – and nativism, which views the state as belonging primarily to the native national group and treats perceived outsiders as threatening the nation.³¹

The voter ideology spectrum shows that SV and LPV voters are located furthest in the conservative-authoritarian direction, while NA, AS and ZZS occupy a nearby attitudinal space. In political science NA is typically classified as far right, while SV and LPV are classified as populist right-wing.³² The ideological spectrum indicates that average AS and ZZS voters lie close to the same broader ideological space, while neither party is seen as far-right. This suggests that the classification of parties in Latvia may need some reconsideration.

Seen through this lens, attacks on civil society organisations, independent media and women's rights in 2025 were not simply isolated disputes over individual issues. They are better understood as expressions of a broader conflict over the kind of society Latvia should be: one organised around pluralism, autonomy and checks on power, or one that places greater value on cohesion, hierarchy and control. For voters and political actors closer to the authoritarian end of this spectrum, such institutions may appear less as safeguards of democracy than as sources of disorder, external influence or unwanted change.

This matters because **Latvia is not insulated from the wider international trend of democratic backsliding and illiberal politics**. In many countries, insecurity, distrust and rapid social change have strengthened appeals centred on protection, strong leadership, national control and limits on pluralist institutions.³³ In Latvia, a substantial share of

28 Gessler T., Wunsch N. (2025) A new regime divide? Democratic backsliding, attitudes towards democracy and affective polarization. *European Journal of Political Research*, 64(4), 1593-1617. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12751>

29 Helminen V., Wass H., Kantola A., Elovainio M. (2024) *Nordic authoritarianism: Child-rearing values and political behavior in a multiparty context*. *Political Psychology*, 45, 91-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12915>

30 Feldman S., Stenner K. (1997) Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18, 741-770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00077>

31 Mudde C. (2007) Constructing a conceptual framework. In: *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 11-31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>

32 PopuList (n.d.) *Latvia Country Report*. <https://popu-list.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Latvia.pdf>

33 Lindberg S. (2026) *Democracy Report 2026: Unravelling the Democratic Era?* V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg.

the electorate already combines conservatism with preferences for hierarchy, protection and stronger state control. As a result, the political system may be more vulnerable to parties and politicians who portray democracy as weak, slow or incapable of providing security. This, in turn, creates more favourable conditions for illiberal and leader-centred politics that confer less value on pluralism and constraints on power. This echoes developments in Orbán's Hungary and Trump-style politics in the United States.

At the same time, society is not simply oriented towards preserving the status quo. More than half of voters are on the change side of the identified spectrum. But the nature of that change matters: it is more often imagined as guided, protective and controlled than as open-ended liberal transformation. In other words, many voters want society to move forward, but they prefer change that is managed by strong institutions and clear authority rather than driven by bottom-up social experimentation. This helps to explain why support for reform can coexist with caution with regard to pluralism and why demands for change do not automatically translate into more freedom-oriented politics.

Latvia is therefore best understood not as a society split simply between left and right, or between liberal and conservative camps in the Western European sense. The deeper divide is between a Post-Soviet Legacy worldview, centred on order, protection and top-down stability, and a Democratic Change worldview, centred on openness, self-direction and European democratic development. A majority of voters still support movement towards a more Western European model of society, but for many that change is imagined as guided and controlled rather than open-ended and bottom-up. This is what makes Latvia's political development both open to possibility and exposed to risk.

Attachment 1 Breakdown of survey questions

11 potential liberal-conservative social questions

■ Agree
 ■ Rather agree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Rather disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Difficult to say

Freedom of speech is not absolute – hate speech must be restricted



Doctors should be allowed to end a patient’s life in a scenario in which the patient has an incurable, painful, terminal illness and requests it



Taking care of children and the household is not a woman’s main role



Latvia should remain in the Istanbul Convention
(on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)



Latvia’s public broadcaster (LSM) should continue producing Russian-language content*



Marijuana use for medical purposes should be legalised in Latvia



Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in Latvia



The government should introduce stricter environmental protection regulations to reduce Latvia’s impact on climate change



The European Union should have greater decision-making powers, even if it reduces Latvia’s influence



Traditional values should not be a priority in Latvia’s state policy



Immigration to Latvia from non-European countries should not be strictly limited

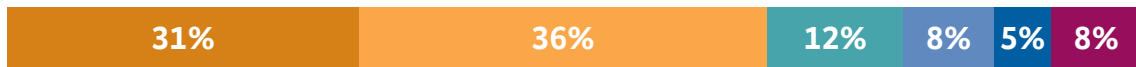


* This question is not strongly associated with any political spectrum identified in the study.

11 potential left-right economy questions

■ Agree
 ■ Rather agree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Rather disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Difficult to say

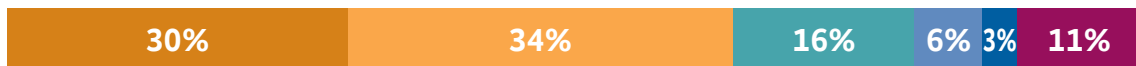
The state should intervene in the housing market (rent regulation or support for the construction of social housing) to improve housing affordability



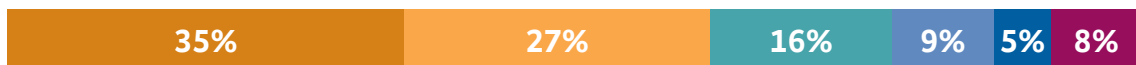
Wealthy people should pay higher (progressive) taxes to reduce inequality in society



Trade unions should have a strong role in defending workers' interests, even if it reduces company profits



The state should not reduce financial support for agriculture



Important public services, such as public transport and utilities, should be provided primarily by the state, not by private companies



Business should be strictly regulated to protect employees and consumers



Worker protection should be the state's priority, even if this slows business development



Large pensions should be reduced in order to increase smaller pensions



Large state-owned companies (such as AirBaltic and TeT) should not be privatised



Taxpayers should finance theatres and museums that cannot sustain themselves without state support



During periods of economic hardship, the state should borrow and increase public debt to support the economy



5 potential authoritarian–democratic questions

■ Agree
 ■ Rather agree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Rather disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Difficult to say

Today, society of Latvia has too many different opinions and lifestyles



Latvia needs a strong leader who makes decisions without discussion



The justice system should focus on punishing criminals rather than rehabilitating them



Order in society is more important than individual freedom



Decisions of the Constitutional Court should not be implemented if some MPs and members of the public disagree*



* This question is not strongly associated with any political spectrum identified in the study.

Attachment 2 Summary of EFA and CFA results

This table shows how questions are associated with different political spectrums identified in the statistical analysis.

Survey question	Freedom- Order	Change- Preserve	Lib- Con	Left- Right	Dem- Auth
Liberal-Conservative social items					
Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in Latvia	+	+	+++		
Latvia should remain in the Istanbul Convention (on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)		++	+++		
Traditional values should not be a priority in Latvia's state policy	++		+++		
The European Union should have greater decision-making powers, even if it reduces Latvia's influence		++	++		
The government should introduce stricter environmental protection regulations to reduce Latvia's impact on climate change		+	++		
Taking care of children and the household is not a woman's main role	++		++		
Marijuana use for medical purposes should be legalised in Latvia			++		
Doctors should be allowed to end a patient's life in a scenario in which the patient has an incurable, painful, terminal illness and requests it		+	++		
Immigration to Latvia from non-European countries shouldn't be strictly limited	+		++		
Freedom of speech is not absolute – hate speech must be restricted			+		
Latvia's public broadcaster (LSM) should continue producing Russian-language content					
Left-Right economic items					
Worker protection should be the state's priority, even if this slows business development	++			+++	
Trade unions should have a strong role in defending workers' interests, even if it reduces company profits				+++	
Business should be strictly regulated to protect employees and consumers	++			+++	
The state should intervene in the housing market (for example, through rent regulation or support for the construction of social housing) to improve housing affordability	++			+++	
Important public services, such as public transport and utilities, should be provided primarily by the state, not by private companies	++			++	
Wealthy people should pay higher (progressive) taxes to reduce inequality in society				++	
Large pensions should be reduced in order to increase smaller pensions	++			++	
The state should not reduce financial support for agriculture		+		+	
Large state-owned companies (such as AirBaltic and TeT) should not be privatised		+		+	
During periods of economic hardship, the state should borrow and increase public debt to support the economy		+			
Taxpayers should finance theatres and museums that cannot sustain themselves without state support	+				
Democratic-Authoritarian items					
Today, society of Latvia has too many different opinions and lifestyles	++				++
Latvia needs a strong leader who makes decisions without discussion	++				++
The justice system should focus on punishing criminals rather than rehabilitating them	++				++
Order in society is more important than individual freedom	++				+
Decisions of the Constitutional Court should not be implemented if some MPs and members of the public disagree					

+++ indicates most significant factor loadings greater than 1

++ indicates significant factor loadings greater than 0.7

+ indicates moderate factor loadings greater than 0.5

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Political spectrums in Latvia

Between post-Soviet legacies and democratic change

This study uncovers the deeper forces shaping politics in Latvia today. Going beyond familiar labels such as liberal and conservative, it shows how public attitudes are structured by a more fundamental struggle between freedom and order, change and preservation. Drawing on January 2026 survey data, the analysis reveals how Soviet-era legacies, generational change, authoritarian predispositions and competing visions of democracy continue to shape voter behaviour and party competition. At a time when democratic values are under pressure across Europe and beyond, this paper offers a clear and accessible map of Latvia's political landscape – and of the choices that may define its future.

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