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Belarusian National Identity in 2026

How Belarusians see their place in the world and how their communication networks are structured



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About the research

This is the sixth edition of our research, through which since 2020 we have been tracking what “being Belarusian” means to society. In previous reports, we examined the internal structure of Belarusian identity: exploring what distinguishes and unites segments of Belarusians oriented toward different national projects¹, and analyzing the role of politics, language, and cultural consumption.

This edition introduces two new lenses: how Belarusians see their place in the world and how different segments are connected through communication networks.

How the report is structured

The publication consists of five separate sections that can be read in any order. Each section begins with a summary highlighting the key findings and figures.

The first section describes the main identity segments, their views, and socio-demographic characteristics. The second shows how Belarusians position themselves on the map of nations, who they consider close and who they consider distant, and why. The third section analyzes the notion of Europeanness: what “being European” means to Belarusians

and why they confidently classify some nations as European while excluding others. The fourth section explores the social ties connecting people with different variants of Belarusian identity. The fifth shows what kinds of resources these ties provide access to.

What data we rely on

In March—April 2026, we surveyed 803 urban Belarusians aged 18–64 through an online questionnaire (CAWI)². The quota sample reflects the structure of the urban population by gender, age, city size, region, and education. In addition, we conducted eight in-depth interviews³ to better understand the ideas and motivations behind respondents’ survey answers.

These methods have limitations: the sample does not cover the rural population and is skewed toward active internet users. As a result, the responses obtained are likely somewhat more pro-European and pro-democratic than those of the country in general. At the same time, the share of pro-European responses may be underestimated, as some participants may be reluctant to express views that diverge from the position of the authoritarian authorities.

¹ To learn more about the theoretical framework of the study — our understanding of national projects, identity, and segments — see one of our previous reports: Bikanau P., Nesterovich K. [Belarusian Identity in 2023](#). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

² The raw survey data are available [here](#).

³ The interviews included two representatives from each of the four main segments, with an equal number of women and men; participants ranged in age from 31 to 50.

Key findings

Belarusians are a formed and distinct nation. Most urban residents (85%) feel they are part of the national community and take pride in belonging to it. People with different views share a common image of “their people” (“peaceful,” “hardworking”), a shared culture (Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas), and common symbols (the European bison, draniki). Although most (63%) do not use the Belarusian language regularly, it is considered to be a native language and is used occasionally.

Within a shared identity, **two national projects continue to compete: the Soviet and the National-Romantic.** These projects place different emphasis on the country’s history, the role of language, and the choice of symbols. The authorities tend to support the former, while civil society organizations promote the latter. Depending on the level of affinity for these projects, Belarusians can be divided into four main segments.

- The identity of **the Soviet**, the oldest segment, is tied to Belarus’s continuity with the BSSR, loyalty to official state symbols, and an emotional attachment to the state. At the same time, the Soviet value Belarusianness, unlike the small share of the Russified that identifies as Russian.
- **The Conscious**, a highly educated segment, are oriented toward pre-Soviet history and support the Belarusian language. They feel closer to the white-red-white flag and Pahlonia as a national emblem.
- **The Emerging**, the youngest segment, are in many ways close to the Conscious but do not want to abandon the Soviet legacy.
- **The Indifferent** are disengaged from both projects, reducing their sense of commonality with other Belarusians to politically neutral markers such as citizenship or place of birth.

Differences in views are also reflected in perceptions of Belarusians’ place among other nations. **At the regional level, Belarusian identity appears “borderland”:** the Soviet gravitate toward a Russian imperial community, while the Conscious lean toward a European one. Thus, 60% of the Soviet see Belarusians as belonging to a common space with Russians, compared to only 10% of the Conscious. Meanwhile, 78% of the Conscious consider Belarusians European, compared to 26% of the Soviets.

At the same time, most Belarusians view themselves as a European nation (67%) due to the country’s location and shared cultural and historical ties with Europe. However, for Belarusians, the core of Europeanness still lies far to the West: in Germany and France. These countries are seen (by roughly 90%) as embodying Europeanness because of their democracy, tolerance, and EU membership. Belarusians turn out to be somewhat peripheral due to the country’s political isolation. The exception is the Conscious, who see Belarusians as no less European than the nations of the core.

On the global scale, the “borderland” nature of Belarusians disappears. They place themselves within an East Slavic cluster of nations with a Western, European culture and Christian heritage — alongside Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and Lithuanians. The main supranational community for Belarusians is the Slavs. 78% of Belarusians identify with this group, including 90% of the Soviet and 84% of the Conscious.

Belarusian identity relies on horizontal communication networks. These form the foundation of solidarity and commonality: 91% can count on basic assistance from people they know.

The typical Belarusian is disconnected from representatives of both the state and civil society. While 62% know people in the former, these ties are weak, and only 41% have connections to the latter. Contrary to expectations, loyalty to the authorities does not translate into institutional privileges: the Soviet have fewer connections within the state apparatus than the Conscious.

The Conscious are the most mobile and resourceful segment. They are more likely to have access to a range of resources, from emigration assistance to neighborly support. Beyond ties with “ordinary people,” they are also more likely to have representatives of the authorities and people abroad within their networks. Contact with foreigners contributes to their openness and pro-European views.

Thus, Belarusians from different segments are united by strong grassroots ties and mutual support, as well as by a conviction of belonging to Western civilization on a global scale.

1. Four variants of Belarusianness

Belarusians with different views share a common culture: Kolas and Kupala, draniki, European bison, clean streets. They see their nation as formed and distinct, describing themselves in terms that closely echo the national anthem — as peaceful and hardworking. As a result, 85% of urban residents are proud to be Belarusian. Yet beneath this shared foundation, two projects of the Belarusian nation compete: the Soviet and the National-Romantic. Together, they shape four segments of Belarusianness: the Conscious, the Emerging, the Indifferent, and the Soviet. In addition, a small share of the Russified do not consider themselves Belarusian.

Belarusians are a nation with a formed identity: people with different views share common symbols, values, and self-image

Most Belarusians not only identify with their country but also take pride in their national belonging (85%⁴) and consider Belarusian culture unique (72%).

Belarusians across different segments share a common self-image as “peaceful” (45%) and “hardworking” (40%). These are the key character traits that, in Belarusians’ view, not only define them as a nation but also foster a sense of commonality. As the in-depth interviews show, peacefulness includes both being non-belligerent and being calm, non-confrontational in everyday life⁵. The opening line of the official anthem clearly resonates with Belarusians, as it reflects what they consider their core value.

Extensions of Belarusian peacefulness are kindness and hospitality — a willingness to help fellow Belarusians without expecting personal gain and an openness toward people of other nationalities.

As a rule, all Belarusians are kind of non-confrontational in terms of character, not belligerent, calmer. I mean, even if you look at the neighboring countries around, this character trait really stands out even against the background of the neighbors.

Male, 45, Conscious

The words of our anthem immediately come to mind. “We Belarusians are peaceful people, wholeheartedly devoted to our native land...” And for me, Belarusians — well, I was raised this way, and I consider myself like that too — basically, I consider Belarusians to be very

kind, peaceful, well-mannered, hospitable people, let’s say.

Female, 35, Emerging

Hard work and a commitment to tidiness are seen not merely as everyday habits, but as expressions of inner discipline and responsibility. For example, clean streets are viewed not as the achievement of the state, but as the result of people’s own efforts — their tidiness and respect for shared spaces.

We are very clean. I mean, our country is very clean. All the cities, all the villages — everything is very clean. To the point that you’re walking down the street, and you’re simply afraid to throw a piece of paper on the ground.

Female, 39, Indifferent

This commitment to tidiness is also reflected in moral values: Belarusians value honesty and decency in themselves and in others.

Belarusians with different political views are united by a shared space of national symbols and culture. This includes the European bison and draniki, classic writers Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, the music of Pesnyary, the Kommunarka confectionery factory, and BelAZ. Belarusians from different segments visit the same historical sites: Khatyn, the Brest Fortress, and Mir Castle.

Even without actively using the Belarusian language, Belarusians consider it to be their native one (63%). A range of other markers — from place of birth (62%) and citizenship (30%) to shared culture (42%) and love for the country (34%) — help people recognize “their own” and feel part of the community.

⁴ These and some other data and conclusions in this section are drawn from previous waves of our study.

⁵ Participants perceive this trait as positive, though not without a downside. In their view, peacefulness turns into excessive “tolerance”: slowness, obedience, and at times

disengagement from public processes. In other words, the value of peace is so great that it discourages fighting for it.

Competition between the Soviet and the National-Romantic projects gives rise to four variants of a shared Belarusian identity

Besides the shared features of national identity, there are also differences. Like many other nations, Belarusians hold different views on aspects of history, language, symbols, and relations with other peoples. These differences are structured around two competing national projects: the Soviet and the National-Romantic⁶. Depending on their degree of affinity with these projects, Belarusians can be divided into **four segments: the Conscious, the Emerging, the Indifferent, and the Soviet**. In addition, there are the Russified, who do not consider themselves Belarusian⁷.

Differences between the segments are organized around four substantive components⁸ — four dimensions of what it means to be Belarusian.

- The Russian-Soviet component: characterized by an orientation toward the Soviet past and the preservation of close political and cultural ties with Russia.
- The Belarusian component: grounded in the recognition of the fundamental value of the Belarusian language, national culture, and pre-Soviet history.
- The nationally indifferent component: indifference toward national issues as such and the conviction that national differences are secondary or excessive.
- The cosmopolitan component: openness to and interest in different cultures, along with a sense of commonality with people of different nationalities.

What all segments share is acceptance of manifestations of “Belarusianness” and cosmopolitanism, whereas manifestations of “Sovietness” and national indifference may contribute to increased polarization in society.

Five segments of national identity with distinct profiles coexist in Belarusian society

Table 1

Component strength on a scale from 0 to 100

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Cosmopolitan component	84	78	68	82	65
Belarusian component	81	58	47	63	44
Soviet component	33	49	59	70	59
Nationally indifferent component	22	30	49	33	55

Component strength is the standardized average level of agreement with the statements associated with each component. See the Appendix for the original response distributions.

The segments differ not only in the content of the identities but also in their views on the country's situation, foreign policy orientations, and socio-demographic profiles.

The Conscious (11%). Carriers of the national-romantic project, for whom the Belarusian language, pre-Soviet history, and independent culture are central values. This segment is more likely to hold pro-democratic views and to view Russian influence negatively. As national symbols, they prefer the white-red-white flag and Pahonia as a national emblem. The Conscious have the highest share of highly educated (59%)

professionals and self-employed people from Minsk (51%) with high income. Their strong national self-identification is organically combined with a European identity (85%) and cosmopolitanism.

The Emerging (13%). A younger segment combining elements of both competing national projects. They support the development of Belarusian culture and language, while not seeking to abandon the Soviet historical legacy. Representatives of this group are more likely to be Minsk residents (43%), to have higher levels of education (40% with

⁶ More on our understanding of national projects, identity, and segments can be found in the section on the theoretical framework in one of our previous reports: Bikanau P., Nesterovich K. [Belarusian National Identity in 2023](#). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023.

⁷ Segments were identified using hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method (distance measure — squared Euclidean distance) based on levels of agreement with 24 statements

(see Appendix). The Russified segment was distinguished separately — these are people who consider themselves Russian rather than Belarusian.

⁸ Components were identified using principal component analysis based on levels of agreement with 24 statements (KMO = 0.88, three components explain 44% of the variance). See the Appendix for the original response distributions.

higher education), and to display cultural engagement and pronounced cosmopolitanism.

The Indifferent (32%). A segment characterized by high levels of national indifference. Its members believe that national culture and language are secondary in the modern world and may create unnecessary barriers between people. They are more likely to identify with the least politically and culturally charged markers of identity, such as draniki or citizenship. Politically, they are more likely to hold neutral positions (56%). A typical representative of this segment is a worker (41%) with secondary education (78%).

The Soviets (38%). Supporters of the Soviet project of the Belarusian nation, for whom Soviet heritage and closeness with

Russia are key values. This is the oldest segment (half are aged 45+), demonstrating high loyalty to the current authorities (44%). They perceive Belarus as part of the broader project of a “three-fold Slavic nation” and align with state symbols, particularly the red-and-green flag. They are characterized by a strong emotional attachment to the state.

The Russified (5%). People who identify as Russian rather than Belarusian. In terms of interest in national issues, they are close to the Indifferent, but when interest in identity emerges, the Russified tend to align with the Soviets. For example, more often than others, they describe themselves as “Soviet people” (54%).

2. Belarusians among the nations of the world

Speaking of the world map, Belarusians confidently place themselves and other Slavs, including Russians, within the sphere of European culture and Christian heritage. It is Spanish-speaking nations, rather than Belarusians, that are more likely to be seen as a “borderland between East and West”. Yet at the regional level, this in-between position still emerges: some Belarusians gravitate toward a Russian-imperial community, while others lean toward a European one. Most (78%) transcend this divide through a shared Slavic identity. This is the main supranational community for Belarusians, the one that, thanks to its political neutrality, “bridges” different segments.

On the global map, Belarusians see themselves as part of an East Slavic cluster within European culture — and do not identify as a “borderland” between East and West

Belarusians’ perceptions of national similarities are structured around two main axes (Figure 1).

The first axis is the opposition between European and non-European nations. Belarusians place themselves among nations with a European culture and predominantly Christian heritage, a group that also includes Russians and Americans. This sense of belonging is confirmed by self-identification: 57% consider Belarusians a “Christian people” (Figure 2).

The second axis is the shared historical experience. Along this dimension, Belarusians are seen as most similar to neighboring nations (Poles and Lithuanians), former members of the Soviet bloc (Georgians and Kazakhs), as well as nations with which Belarus maintains ties today — political (China) or touristic (Turkey, visited by 21% of urban residents over the past ten years).

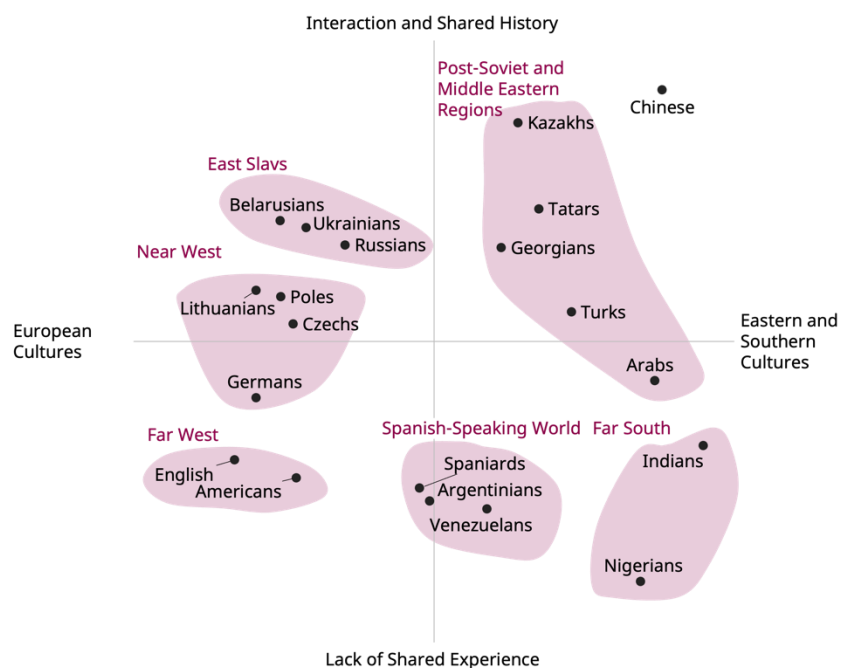
The combination of positions along these axes reveals how Belarusians perceive different nations around the world. The English and Americans feel culturally familiar to Belarusians yet are less often seen as “our own” due to limited shared experience. Chinese and Turks, by contrast, may seem culturally distant, but contact and political ties make them feel closer. The nations seen as most “exotic” by Belarusians, such as Indians and Nigerians, occupy the far corner of the map: they are both culturally unfamiliar and distant in terms of shared experience.

In Belarusians’ perception, nations are grouped into six clusters plus the Chinese that form a separate category. Belarusians themselves fall into the East Slavic cluster alongside Russians and Ukrainians: these nations are close both historically and in terms of present-day ties. This closeness is also confirmed by direct measurement: 78% of respondents consider Belarusians to be Slavs.

The entire East Slavic cluster — including Belarusians themselves — is located in the European part of the map. In other words, at the global level, Belarusians do not see

Perceptions of closeness of nations are shaped by their degree of Europeanness and the extent of shared experience with Belarusians

Figure 1



In your opinion, how much [...] and [...] are similar or not similar as nations? Scale from 1 (completely not similar) to 7 (almost the same). Each respondent assessed 24 random pairs of nations. On average $n \approx 100$ per pair. The map is built using multidimensional scaling (PROXSCAL), nation clusters are identified by hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward’s method, squared Euclidean distance). How to read the map: the closer nations are to each other, the more similar they are in the eyes of Belarusians.

themselves as a “borderland” between East and West. In their perception, this role is more characteristic of Spanish-speaking nations.

For Belarusians, Slavic identity is a politically neutral category that unites both Belarusians across different segments and neighboring nations with a shared history and language

At the supranational level, Slavic identity is more important than any other supranational community (Figure 2). It is more popular than such identities as “Christians,” “Europeans,” and “Soviet people”.

“Slavs” is a universal identification shared across all segments. A total of 90% of the Soviet and 84% of the Conscious identify themselves as such. 79% of the Soviet and 77% of the Conscious consider Belarusians to be Slavs. The figures are nearly identical across the other segments.

identity unites Belarusians across all segments. As the in-depth interviews suggest, this is because Slavic identity is perceived as a historical rather than a political category — one that predates contemporary divisions.

Being a Slav does not contradict being a European, and the two identities coexist successfully among Belarusians: 93% of those who consider themselves European also identify as Slavs.

[A Slav and a European] are completely different concepts. A Slav is more of a historical concept, while a European is more of a political and territorial concept. Nothing more, nothing less. Yes, these are absolutely different concepts and categories.

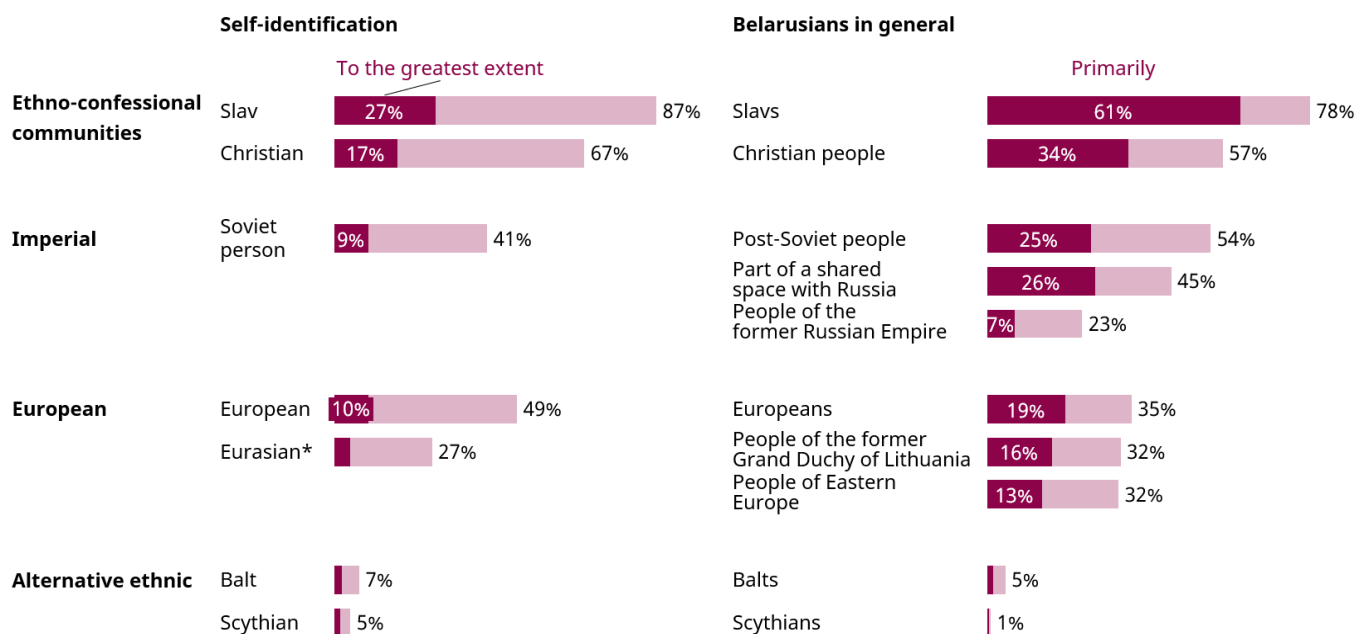
Female, 46, Conscious

Belarusians see “Slaviness” as an ancient foundation that shapes not only the present-day commonality of the Belarusian nation, but also its ties with neighboring countries.

Belarusians along value-based and geopolitical lines, Slavic

Figure 2

Both personally and collectively, Belarusians most often identify as Slavs



Who do you primarily identify as? Scale: do not identify / identify to a minimal degree / identify / identify to the greatest degree, the figure shows the share of people who selected “identify” and “identify to the greatest degree”. Who do you consider present-day Belarusians to be? And who else do you consider present-day Belarusians to be? Multiple choice (up to three options). Number of responses: n = 803. Grouping of categories based on principal component analysis with varimax rotation of responses to both questions (KMO = 0.67, four components explain 45% of the variance).

For Belarusians, shared origins and linguistic similarity that enable mutual understanding matter greatly, especially among East Slavs. For some Belarusians, the notion of “Slavs” narrows to the East Slavs alone: Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians, while Poles, Czechs, and Bulgarians, despite formally belonging to the same group, are excluded.

Slavs are more likely to understand each other better than, for example, a Slav would understand a Spaniard. After all, it’s easier for us to communicate with each other. (...) We speak the same language, it’s easier for us to talk to Russians or to those who speak Russian. That’s all.

Male, 43, Indifferent

Former Yugoslavia, if we take, say, Serbia, Montenegro... well, they are different, obviously, because they're more southern, the climate is milder, there are seas — there will be differences there. (...) And we may be a bit different from Poles, then with some countries where there is Orthodoxy — Serbia, for example — we'll probably be closer through some shared cultural codes, again, connected through religion. In this regard, we're closer to Russia as well, because for the most part our people share the same faith. (...) and through this come cultural things too, in terms of architecture.

Male, 45, Conscious

Ultimately, in Belarusians' eyes, Slavicness is a category that allows them to feel part of a larger whole without confronting today's conflicts and differences among neighboring peoples.

Belarusians' "borderland" character manifests itself not at the global but at the regional level — in the choice between a European and a Russian-imperial community

Belarusians differ little in terms of ethno-confessional markers and alternative ethnic identities. The divide runs instead between imperial and European identities (Figure 3). On one side are communities that are close to the Soviet, shaped by Belarus's place within the orbit of Russian influence. On the other side are categories closer to the Conscious, associated with moving beyond that orbit and the country's location.

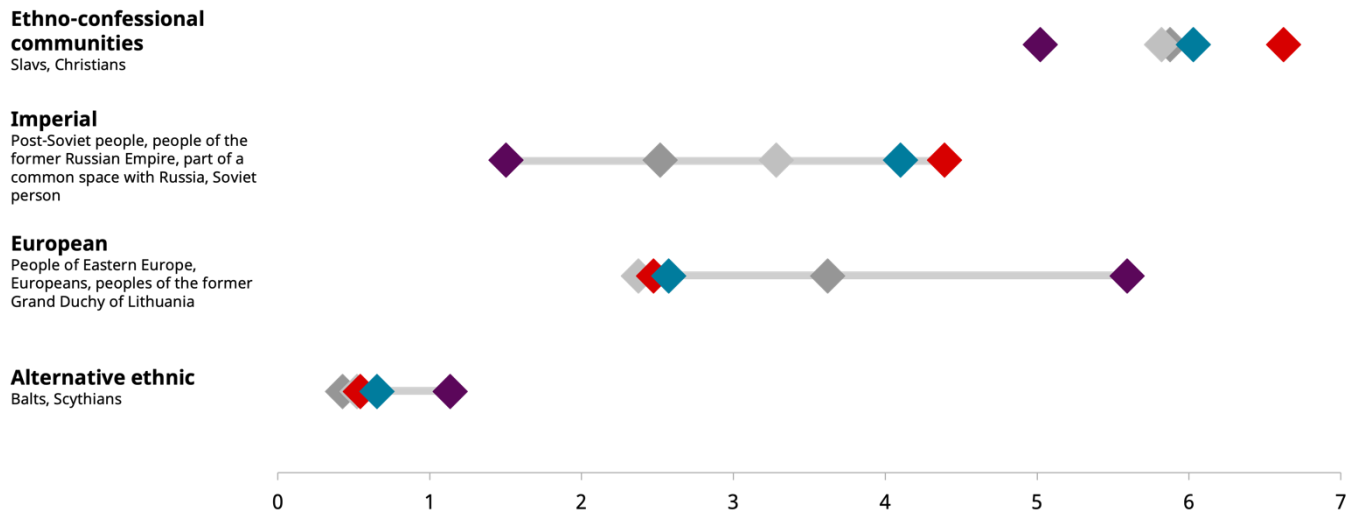
78% of the Conscious consider Belarusians to be European, compared to 26% among the Soviet. Similarly, 78% versus 31% see Belarusians as a nation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and 70% versus 28% as a nation of Eastern Europe. The pattern is mirrored in relation to Russia: only 10% of the Conscious, compared to 60% of the Soviets, see Belarusians as part of a shared cultural and historical space with Russia; 10% versus 32% view them as a people of the former Russian Empire; and 40% versus 61% as a post-Soviet people

The Conscious identify with European communities and reject imperial ones, while the Soviet and the Russified show the opposite pattern

Figure 3

Level of self-identification on a scale from 0 to 10

◆ Conscious ◆ Emerging ◆ Indifferent ◆ Soviet ◆ Russified



Who do you primarily identify as? Scale: do not identify / identify to a minimal degree / identify / identify to the greatest degree.

Who do you consider present-day Belarusians to be? And who else do you consider present-day Belarusians to be? Multiple choice (up to three options).

Number of responses, n = 803. The figure shows standardized mean values of responses for each category group.

In Belarusian society, imperial and European identities are distributed roughly equally — the society is divided. Yet at the global level, Belarusians place Europe, Russia, and themselves within the same cultural sphere (Figure 1). Thus, the Belarusian "borderland" character is not a conflict between East and West, but a conflict between two parts of the same pole.

Young people aged 18–30 do not conform to the stereotype of being a more pro-European group. They identify as European even less often than older respondents (41% vs. 52%) and describe Belarusians as a European nation at roughly the same rate (56% vs. 62%). The difference lies elsewhere: young people are less likely to favor an alliance exclusively with Russia (28% vs. 42%) and more likely to support ties with both the EU and

Russia simultaneously (38% vs. 22%). In other words, they are not more pro-European, but rather less polarized.

Belarusians view closer nations more positively, while distant ones are seen as “different” rather than “bad”

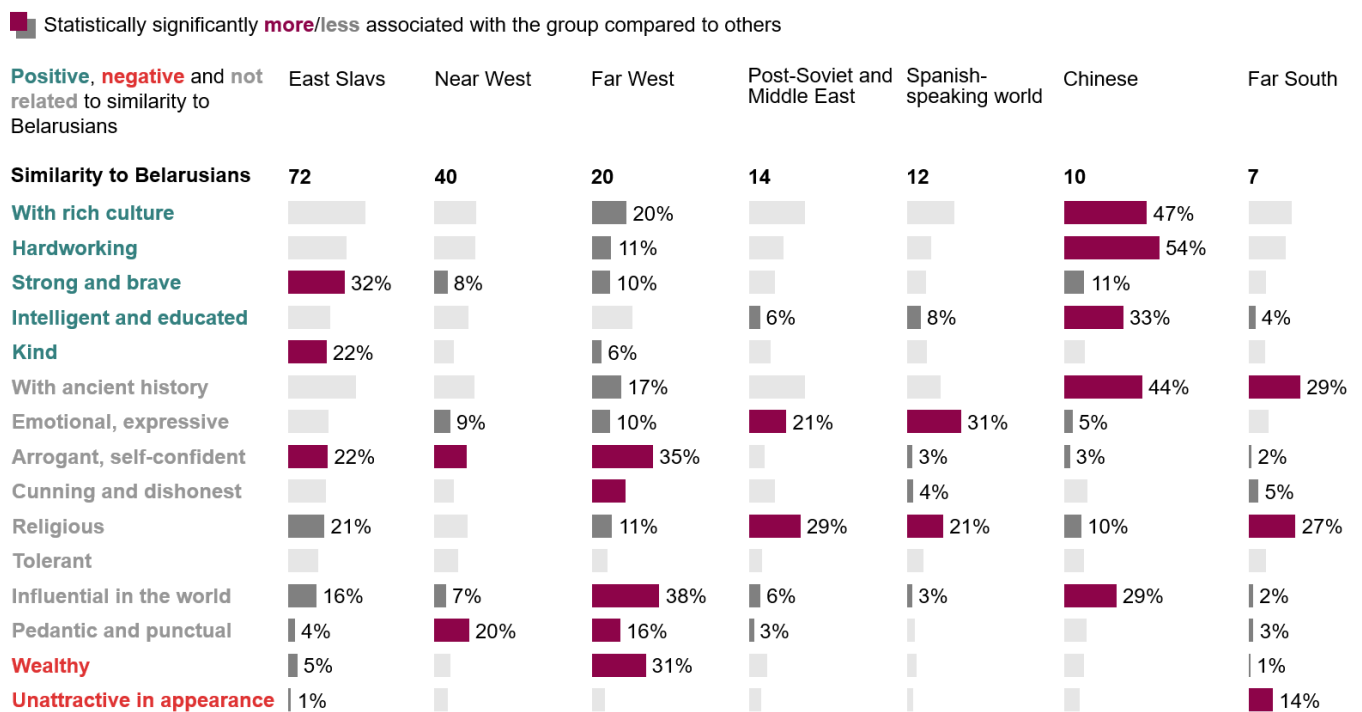
A classic in-group perception is at work here: the closer a nation feels, the more positive qualities are attributed to it — rich culture, hard work, strength, intelligence, and kindness. Belarusians’ perceptions of themselves are the most positive: 76% consider Belarusians hardworking, 70% kind, 55% tolerant and open-minded, and 48% intelligent and educated.

Belarusians do not necessarily perceive distant nations negatively. For example, the dissimilar peoples of the Global South are more often seen as “less attractive in appearance,” yet also as having a rich history. Nations of the Far West are more often perceived as wealthy and influential, though not especially hardworking and somewhat arrogant. Negative traits may also be attributed to closer nations: for instance, East Slavic nations and those of the Near West are more often seen as arrogant. The perception of the Chinese stands out. Belarusians see them as very different from themselves, while at the same time attributing to them a range of positive qualities, such as a rich culture, hard work, and intelligence.

The more often Belarusians perceive a nation as similar to themselves, the more likely they are to attribute positive qualities to it

Figure 4

% of Belarusians who consider a trait to be characteristic of nations within the cluster



Which of these traits, in your view, are most characteristic of [...] as a nation? Each respondent evaluated 10 randomly selected nations; on average, n = 400 per nation. The figure shows mean values across nations within each cluster. The connection of traits with closeness to Belarusians was estimated using linear regression. Color highlighting is based on the results of standardized residual analysis (p < .05).

Declarative friendliness toward other nations is a core feature of the “cosmopolitan” character of Belarusians

Most agree that all people are brothers and sisters (Figure 5). Belarusians also see themselves as citizens of the world (61%), and for them, being a “citizen of the world” is primarily associated with peacefulness and friendliness (“world” and “peace” are homonyms in Russian). Most participants in the in-depth interviews associated the term with “peaceful people” who oppose war and relate to other nations in a friendly and tolerant way. The Soviet and the Indifferent are especially likely to interpret the term in this way.

I would clearly define us here, one hundred percent, as a peaceful nation. By “мир” I mean peace, not the globe, and I specifically mean that we are good-natured, hospitable, peace-loving. We are for peace. I definitely don’t mean that we’re wandering all over the planet, but rather that we are peaceful people.

Female, 49, Soviet

These attitudes are directly correlated with Belarusians’ desire to interact with foreigners and have acquaintances from other countries (89%), their interest in global news (80%), and the belief that it is important to draw on knowledge and achievements from different cultures around the world (77%).

Cosmopolitan views are more common among those who have traveled abroad ($r_s = .25^{**9}$) and those who have acquaintances abroad ($r_s = .20^{**}$). English-speaking skills also matter: those who speak it show greater interest in other cultures, global news, and communication with foreigners.

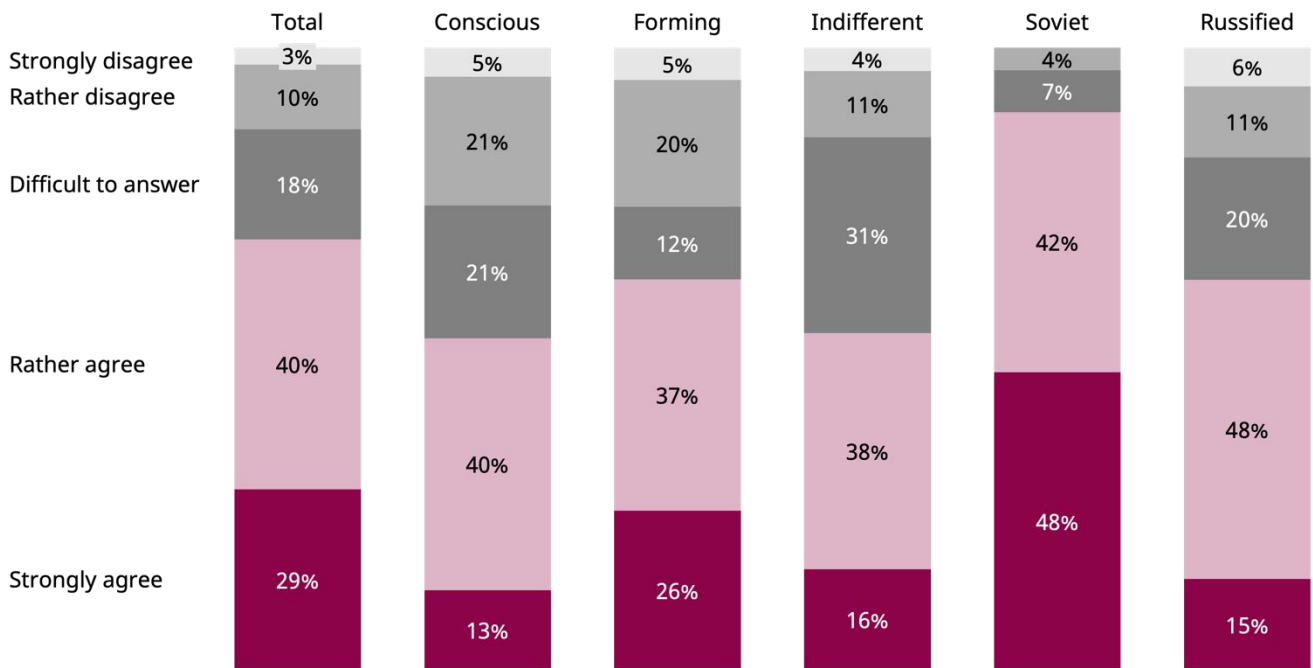
The prevalence of these cosmopolitan traits does not mean that Belarusians are abandoning their national identity. On the contrary, the Conscious, the Emerging, and the Soviet — segments with a strong interest in national culture — are also

the most cosmopolitan ones. This contrasts with the Indifferent, who show lower levels of interest in both national and global communities (Table 1). In this sense, the definition of cosmopolitanism used in this report may differ from those that imply a radical rejection of nationality.

Besides, Belarusians’ friendliness is often declarative: studies point, for example, to strong anti-immigrant attitudes¹⁰ and great social distance with Muslims and Jews¹¹.

Most Belarusians declare that “all people are brothers and sisters, regardless of nationality”

Figure 5



Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: *I believe that all people are brothers and sisters, regardless of nationality.* Number of responses, n = 803.

⁹ r_s — Spearman’s correlation coefficient. Levels of statistical significance: * — < .05, ** — < .01, *** — < .001

¹⁰ [Belarusians’ Views on War, Domestic and Foreign Policy](#) / Belarus Initiative, Chatham House, 2025.

¹¹ [Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues](#) / Pew Research Center, 2018.

3. Why Belarusians are (not) European

Most Belarusians (67%) consider themselves a European nation. This view is grounded in the belief that Belarus is located in the center of Europe, as well as in a shared culture and history. At the same time, for Belarusians, the “core” of Europeanness still lies further west: Germans and French are seen as more European because they are EU members and are perceived as more democratic, tolerant, and individualistic than Belarusians. The state’s political isolation also distances Belarusians from Europe. The exception is the Conscious, who see Belarusians as no less European than the nations of the “core”.

In the Belarusians’ eyes, the center of Europeanness lies far west of Europe’s geographic center

Although, according to official Belarusian sources, the geographic center of Europe is located in Polotsk, Belarus, Belarusians see Germany and France as the center of the European world. These are the nations that an overwhelming majority of Belarusians most readily identify as European, and the farther a nation lies from this core, the less European it appears to Belarusians (Figure 6).

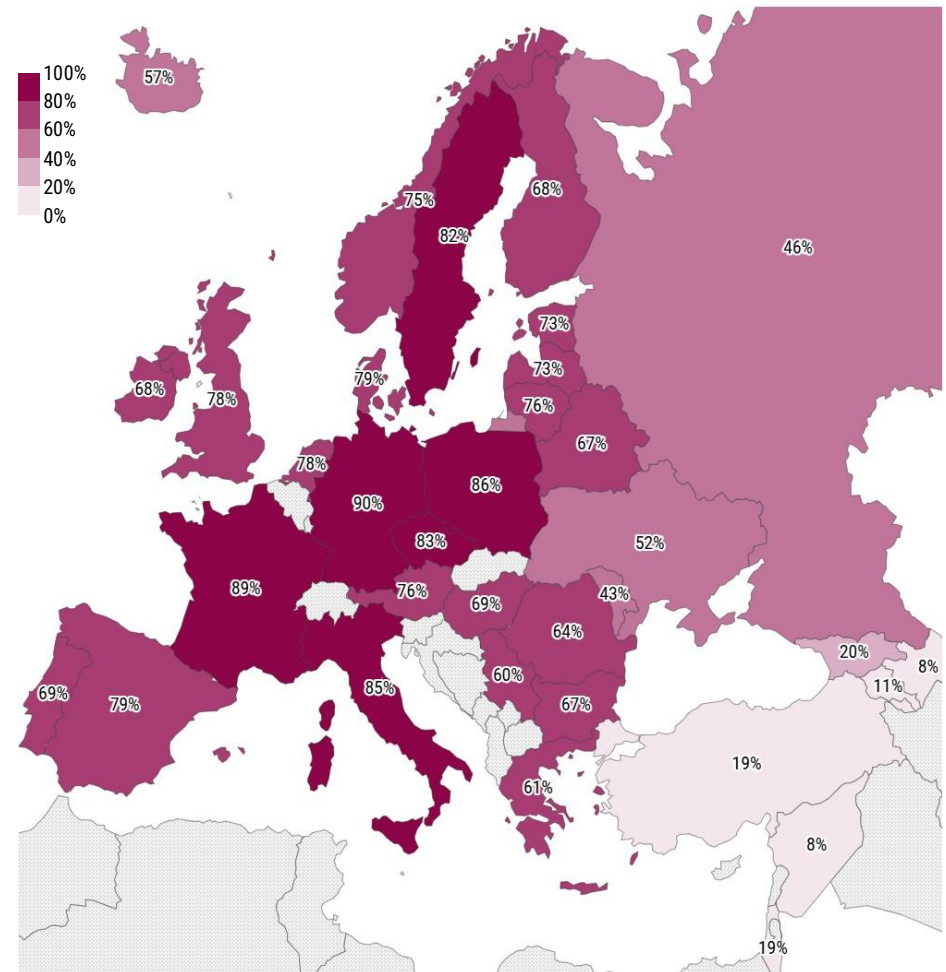
- Besides Germans and the French, the “unambiguously European” nations also include Poles, Czechs, Swedes, and Italians. More than 80% of Belarusians consider them European.
- The group of “predominantly European” nations consists mainly of countries located south or east of the core — Romanians, Finns, the Balkan peoples, the Baltic states, and Belarusians themselves.
- Belarusians assess the Europeanness of Ukrainians, Russians, and Moldovans inconsistently: around half of urban residents consider them European. They therefore fall into the category of “debatably European” nations.

Although the center of Europeanness is shifted in Belarusians’ perception, its outer boundary largely coincides with the geographic one. Fewer than 20% of Belarusians consider nations living beyond Europe’s geographic borders — such as Israelis and Syrians — to be European.

Belarusians’ perceived map of Europe differs considerably from a geographic one

Figure 6

% of Belarusian urban residents who consider a nation European



To what extent, in your view, are the following nations European? The figure shows the combined share selecting rather European and completely European. Each respondent saw 18 randomly selected nations from the list. Number of responses for each nation, n = 400.

The Conscious and the Soviet see this map in a different way. The Conscious have the least differentiated view: the boundary of Europeanness runs sharply along the border with Russia, with almost all countries to the west receiving ratings above 90%. Among the Soviet, the map is more blurred: they are less likely to consider Balkan nations, Romanians, the Baltic states, and even the British as European, but more likely to view Russians as European. The perceptions of the Indifferent are closer to those of the Soviet, while the Emerging are closer to the Conscious.

Belarusians are more likely to consider nations as “unambiguously” and “predominantly” European if they have traveled abroad or have relatives living abroad. Notably, it does not matter which country they traveled to or have relatives in — it may even be Russia.

Belarusians assess the degree of Europeanness of nations not only by geography: a developed culture, peacefulness, and democracy also matter

For Belarusians, being geographically in Europe is more of a necessary condition for considering a nation European. The degree of Europeanness is determined by other criteria. Belarusians are more likely to classify nations as European if, in their view, they possess a developed culture, behave

peacefully, and are committed to democracy and human rights (Figure 7). These are also the criteria by which Belarusians distinguish between “unambiguously”, “predominantly,” and “debatably” European nations.

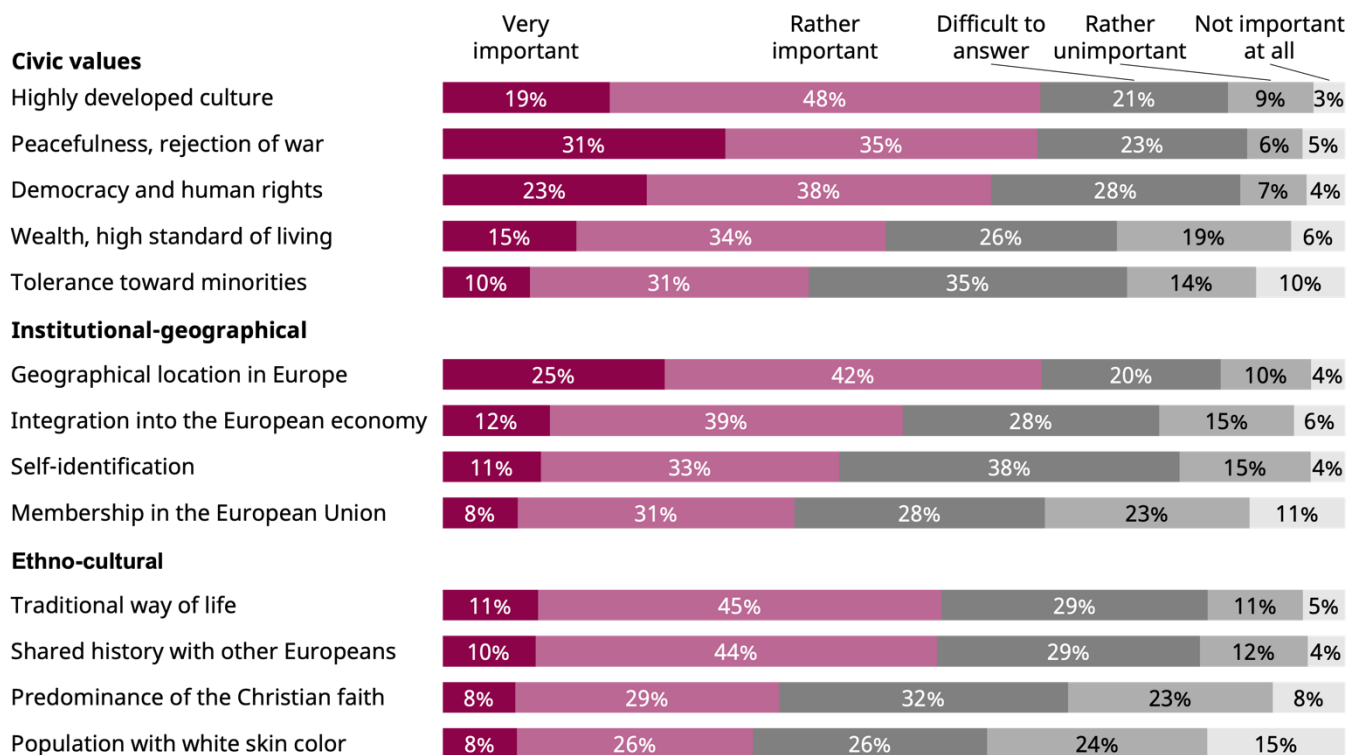
The Conscious stand out from the other segments: they are more likely to consider most criteria important — geography (89%), democracy (88%), and a developed culture (85%). At the same time, the ranking of importance among these criteria is nearly identical to that for Belarusians overall.

The greater importance the Conscious attach to all characteristics does not make their understanding of Europeanness less inclusive. On the contrary, while assigning greater weight to these criteria, the Conscious are also more likely to recognize most nations as European. In other words, they use these criteria not to determine who is more or less European, but to imbue European identity with diverse meanings.

Ethno-cultural criteria — especially Christianity and skin color — rank near the bottom for most segments. Among the Soviet, however, a traditional way of life (62%) and shared history (58%) rank among the top criteria. This segment also stands out in that their highest ranking criterion is not geography (61%) but peacefulness (71%) and a developed culture (70%).

Figure 7

The main criteria of Europeanness are geography, culture, peacefulness, and democracy



How important or unimportant is it for a nation to have a given characteristic in order for you personally to consider it European? Grouping of criteria based on principal component analysis with varimax rotation (KMO = 0.88, three components explain 52% of the variance). Number of responses, n = 803.

Belarusians are likely to consider countries west of Belarus as European based on their EU membership, economic integration, civic values, and individualism.

The more important any of the three groups of criteria is to Belarusians, the more likely they are to consider both “unambiguously European” nations (Germans, French, etc.) and “predominantly European” ones (Lithuanians, Romanians, etc.) to be European¹².

The Conscious, meanwhile, do not distinguish between “unambiguously European” and “predominantly European” nations — they attribute all of the above criteria to both groups to a similar degree. In the eyes of the Soviet, the latter group is less European because these nations are seen as embodying civic values to a lesser extent.

The in-depth interviews highlighted another important aspect: when Belarusians speak about their significant differences from Europeans, they tend to compare themselves with the countries shown in the darkest blue on the map — Germany, France, Sweden, Poland, and the Czech Republic. The central theme running through these comparisons in all the interviews is the balance between the individual and the collective, freedom of self-expression and restraint. It is precisely in comparison with the perception of these nations that Belarusians often conclude they differ substantially from Europeans. Yet this comparison is not necessarily in Europe’s favor. Belarusians note the greater inner freedom of people in these countries, but at the same time, perceive “true” Europeans as cold and calculating.

For them, everything is precise: they close exactly on time, and they don’t care if you’re late because you were standing in line, or because the system wasn’t working for you, or something else. They really don’t care. Everything is very clear with them. We don’t have that hundred-percent rigid line in how we work. I mean, we mix things up. (...) Even in these kinds of relations, if needed, if someone asks — we don’t have it so strict... we understand that... they may pay if they can, they may not pay. But if it needs to be done, especially if someone asks — of course, we’ll always come to help, to lend a hand.

Female, 49, Soviet

Belarusians perceive Portugal, Spain, Italy, and the Balkans as less European because people there are seen as warmer and more open. Another factor that prevents southern countries from being viewed as prototypically European is the relaxed attitude — and even a certain laziness — associated with

southerners, which distinguishes them from other Europeans and even from Belarusians themselves.

Everything from Macedonia onward — it’s already completely different architecture there, completely different culture, a completely different world. [...] I would end Europe at Germany. And beyond that, well, I don’t even know what to call it. That’s already the Mediterranean. They’re completely different. Even if you take Italians, Spanish people, Greeks, and Germans — these are completely different nations, absolutely. [...] I would even... I don’t know how they ended up in Europe at all.

Female, 49, Soviets

If, for example, we compare ourselves with the South, then we’re not similar in character: they’re all more hot-tempered, more open, more cheerful. [...] And we are like average Europeans. Maybe we don’t get enough sun either. Spanish people, Portuguese people, Italians... Southern France... There’s a carnival there; their character is a bit different.

Male, 45, Conscious

According to Belarusians’ perceptions, the Scandinavian countries live more separately and more closed off from the rest of Europe, focusing on their own local challenges. In this sense, they are seen as similar to Belarusians.

[Scandinavians] are Europeans just like we are, to be honest. Very much, you know, kind of branched off a little bit.

Female, 46, Conscious

Greater emotional restraint than among Southern Europeans also helps bring Scandinavians closer to Belarusians.

Belarusians are more likely to be seen as European by those who consider geography important, and less likely by those who place greater importance on EU and Schengen membership

Belarusians are considered European by a majority (around 60%) across all segments, rising to 92% among the Conscious.

Regression analysis shows that Belarusians are more likely to be considered European by those who view the geographic criterion¹³ and skin color¹⁴ as important. At the same time, the relationship between the importance attached to EU

¹² Average estimate of Europeanness of Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Romanians and Hungarians <- civic values (B = 0.14***), institutional-geographic (B = 0.34***), ethno-cultural (B = 0.09**). Average estimate of Europeanness of Germans, the French, Poles, Italians, Czechs and Swedes <- civic values (B = 0.19***), institutional-geographic (B = 0.33***), ethno-cultural (B = 0.14**).

B is a coefficient of linear regression: how many points the estimate of a nation’s Europeanness gains or loses when a criterion’s importance is raised by 1 point.

¹³ B = 0.18**

¹⁴ B = 0.11*

membership and recognition of Belarusians as Europeans is inverse¹⁵.

The importance of being in the geographic center of Europe for Belarusians' European identity is also confirmed by the in-depth interviews. The narrative of Belarus being situated at the center of Europe — actively promoted by state media for many years — has become so deeply rooted that many people do not question Belarus's belonging to Europe itself.

Well, of course, you can [call us Europeans]. We're probably, again, very fortunately positioned geopolitically and geographically. And yes, some might even say that we're kind of the center of Europe. And that's probably nice too.

Male, 50, Soviet

At the same time, historical ties to Europe are also important for Belarusians. From the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, castles, Catholic churches, and Baroque architecture have remained on the territory of Belarus, shaping the visual resemblance of Belarusian and European cities. Architecture serves as a reminder of a shared past and reinforces a sense of belonging to Europe. This is especially evident in Western Belarus.

Here in Belarus, pretty much everything, I don't know, at least up to Minsk for sure, is more in a European style. We have a central square or area, especially in Grodno... And then these towers, on the basis of which an Orthodox or a Catholic church was built. Lithuania, Latvia — they also follow this kind of principle. There was even a time when I was on the road a lot, traveled a lot, and I would sometimes get this feeling where I couldn't understand where I was. Whether I was in Tallinn, or in Kraków, or in Minsk. If you take these cities — Tallinn, Kraków, and Minsk — you can really find a lot of elements that are the same in the architecture.

Female, 49, Soviet

Western Belarus, probably yes after all, and also the buildings, you know, these historical ones that remained here in Brest. They still don't remove them. Whether it's signs or something else, some traces of that European era have probably remained. You can feel it, at least it's felt more than in Polesie or, say, the Vitebsk or Mogilev regions.

Female, 35, Emerging

An additional connecting element is a shared cultural and religious background: belonging to the Christian world and shared holidays are often cited as links to other Europeans. An important factor is that Catholicism historically had a broader

presence in Belarus than in Russia or Ukraine, which may further reinforce Belarusians' European identity.

For the most part, [echoes of a shared history with Europe are] architectural monuments, mostly castles and churches, including Catholic ones... We also have quite a lot of Catholic churches, even in the eastern regions. For example, in Mogilev, as far as I know, there is some... Here [in Minsk], for example, the building of the Bernardine order still stands to this day.

Male, 31, Emerging

At the same time, the sense of belonging to Europe remains incomplete. The in-depth interviews point to several interconnected reasons. At the level of everyday associations, "Europeans" are understood primarily as residents of Schengen countries — places Belarusians need visas to enter and that are difficult to access. This perception emerged even before 2020, but in the years since, Belarus's isolation has strengthened the sense of exclusion from Europe and of being different from Europeans.

[Europeans are] those you have to get a visa for, those you basically can't get to at all. Schengen countries, probably. Well, again, maybe this is, well, not impossible, just, well, not entirely right, probably not very educated of me. But somehow that's how it's been ingrained, again, since childhood, since youth, probably... Europeans are Schengen countries. (...) We somehow became a kind of special nationality, [not Europeans], when everyone started closing themselves off from us.

Female, 35, Emerging

As a result, Belarusians' Europeanness takes on a borderland form of identity: it is rooted in geography, history, and architecture, yet politically constrained, especially in light of developments over the past six years. In this context of isolation and limited direct interaction with Europeans, a sense of difference becomes reinforced. Now, Belarusians learn about Europeans mainly through the news and other people's stories, which contribute to an image of distant, emotionally reserved, and calculating people who seem very different from the familiar, open, and kind Belarusians they know well.

Russians are more likely to be seen as European by the Soviet, for whom a traditional way of life is important

The question of Europeanness of Russians is the most polarizing: 53% of the Soviet consider Russians European, compared to just 19% of the Conscious.

Regression analysis shows that Russians are most likely to be perceived as European by those for whom Europeanness means adherence to a traditional way of life¹⁶ — a

¹⁵ B = -0.23***

¹⁶ B = 0.22**

characteristic that tends to matter more to the Soviet. At the same time, people who consider EU membership an important criterion are less likely to view Russians as European¹⁷.

The in-depth interviews point to several explanations for why Russians are perceived as less European than Belarusians. The first relates to the scale and heterogeneity of Russia, where even ethnic Russians living across the country's vast territory have regional differences influenced by Turkic, Finno-Ugric, and other cultures, as well as by geographic conditions. A country stretching from Bryansk to Chukotka is perceived as too diverse to be wholly European. Belarus, by contrast, is viewed as a compact, homogeneous country located entirely within geographic Europe.

Russians, on the whole, probably shouldn't really be called Europeans even geographically. (...) Russians are also spread out across the whole territory of the Russian Federation, but they are more European. You could say, with some reservations, that on the whole, they are Europeans.

Male, 45, Conscious

Russians may be associated with arrogance, pushiness, and "imperia complex" — qualities that Belarusians perceive as alien, unacceptable, and generally inconsistent with Europeanness. Likely due to this, as well as Belarusians' "peacefulness," only 22% of Belarusians sympathize with Russia in the war against Ukraine, despite state propaganda.

No offense to all Russians, of course. May they forgive me, but they're a bit arrogant, arrogant, kind of rude, ill-mannered. Some sort of piggish behavior. You know that expression, like, "rednecks," right? ... I hear from many people... as if, well, [Belarusians are] a village, and they are Russia, this imperial power.

Female, 35, Emerging

Russians and Russian people, in principle, tend to have more of an imperial view of their identity. We, Belarusians, after all, see ourselves as a small people, kind of compact, living on our own territory, on our own land.

Male, 43, Indifferent

Belarusian restraint, tidiness, clean streets, and order are contrasted with Russian everyday life and behavior, which, in respondents' perceptions, are marked by greater disorder and lack of restraint. Belarusians see these characteristics as bringing them closer to Central and Western Europe and distinguishing them from Russians.

If Russians come, they behave differently from us in the sense that they are provocative. They behave quite

provocatively in other countries, some pick fights. [...] When people have money, they try in every possible way to show it and behave kind of boorishly.

Female, 46, Conscious

Major differences [between Belarusians and Russians] are neatness, patience, hard work. Oh, that really makes a huge difference. Discipline. And they're not like that at all, Russians are not like that whatsoever. (...) [In Belarus] nobody bothers anyone, everyone calmly goes home, nobody throws anything around. Nowhere are there overflowing trash bins with garbage thrown all over. They were walking around and were amazed.

Female, 49, Soviet

All of this helps explain why every segment is less likely to consider Russians European than Belarusian.

Almost all segments perceive Ukrainians as less European than Belarusians because they see them as more conflict-prone

Ukrainians are considered European by 79% of the Conscious, compared to 92% who view Belarusians as European within this segment. A similar gap exists among the Soviet (47% vs. 61%) and the Indifferent (47% vs. 65%). The exception is the Emerging, who consider Ukrainians European to roughly the same extent as Belarusians (57% vs. 56%).

The reasons for recognizing Ukrainians as European differ noticeably from those applied to Russians and Belarusians. Regression analysis shows that Ukrainians are more likely to be considered European by those who view national self-determination¹⁸ and tolerance toward minorities¹⁹ as important. This relationship is likely driven by the views of the Conscious and the Emerging, who are both more likely to consider these criteria important and more inclined to recognize Ukrainians as European.

During the in-depth interviews, participants spoke rather briefly about Ukraine and generally simply stated that Ukrainians do not resemble Europeans. At the same time, some noted that Ukrainians themselves aspire to be European and linked the ongoing war to this aspiration.

Statements made during the in-depth interviews on various topics, together with survey responses, allow for the reconstruction of the reasoning of those Belarusians who do not consider Ukrainians European. Ukrainians are perceived as more aggressive, warlike, and less tolerant people. For example, 14% consider Ukrainians kind, compared to 70% for Belarusians. Ukrainians are also more often seen as expressive and emotional than Belarusians (28% vs. 3%). These are precisely the qualities perceived as non-European: Europeans,

¹⁷ B = -0.23***

¹⁸ B = 0.17**

¹⁹ B = 0.17*

in participants' view, are more restrained, non-belligerent, and accepting.

An additional argument comes from the quick thinking and cunning attributed to Ukrainians. 30% of Belarusians describe

Ukrainians in these terms, which is associated with perceptions of their lesser Europeanness²⁰, as these traits are viewed within Belarusians' frame of reference as belonging more to an Eastern rather than a European civilization.

²⁰ B = -0,56**

4. Belarusians' communication networks

The Conscious possess the broadest and most diverse social ties: more than any other segment, they are connected to the global class, entrepreneurs, civil society, and international networks. They are also more likely to interact with people holding opposing political views.

The Soviet live in a dense yet horizontal social world: their networks are deeply embedded in mass occupations, while their cultural environment aligns with their own beliefs. At the same time, this segment — the most loyal to the authorities — has limited access to vertical channels of social mobility.

The Russified display the most elite profile: they have the best access to the state apparatus across all segments, with networks that extend from contacts with administrative resources to the global class.

The Indifferent and the Emerging are the segments with the most limited social networks. They are simultaneously distant from state structures, civil society institutions, and the global class.

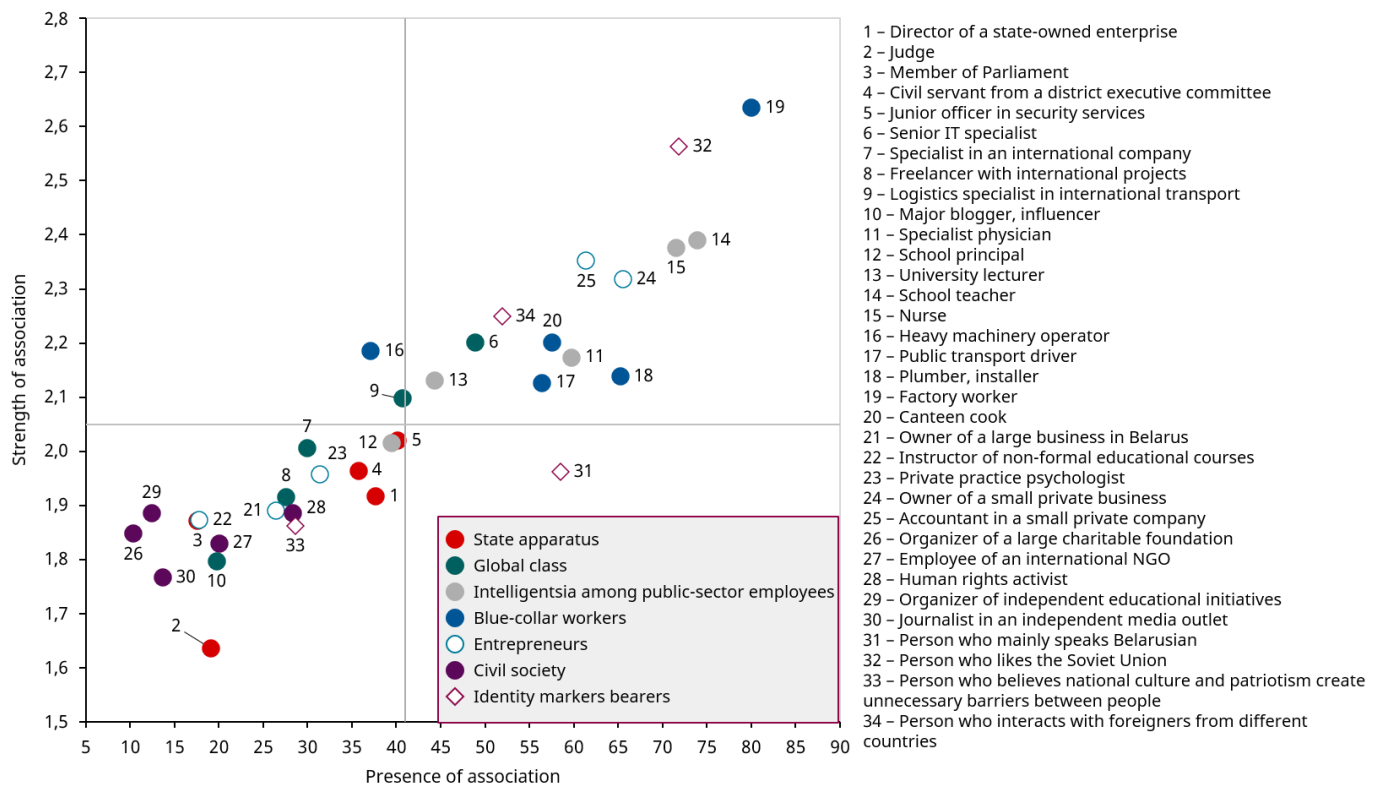
Belarusians are equally distant from the authorities and civil society

Most Belarusians lack upward ties within the social hierarchy (Figure 8). The most accessible social strata are blue-collar

workers and intelligentsia employed in public sector. Around 90% of respondents know people from these groups, and ties with them are the closest: teachers, doctors, and workers are widespread and form part of the immediate social environment of most families.

Figure 8

The least accessible professions belong to civil society and the state apparatus



In the next question, you will be shown the occupations of different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person in each occupation and how close you are to the closest person you know in that occupation. Number of responses, n = 803.

Presence of association — the percentage of respondents who reported knowing a person with a given occupation or viewpoint. Strength of association describes the closeness of the relationship with a person of that occupation or viewpoint (on a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates a very close relationship).

The state apparatus remains highly distant: 62% of respondents know someone working within it, yet even its most “people-facing” representatives — junior officers and local government officials — are characterized by relatively weak ties. Representatives of higher levels of government, such as judges and members of parliament, remain inaccessible to ordinary people.

At the same time, civil society representatives constitute the most closed social stratum. They are known to only 41% of urban residents, and associations with them are the weakest among all social groups. Even the few who do know representatives of civil society tend not to have close relationships with them, while civil society itself lacks a broad social base.

As a result, 8 of the 10 least accessible occupations belong to civil society and the state apparatus. This means that most Belarusians have neither leverage over the authorities through personal ties with representatives of the state apparatus nor support from civic structures through which citizens typically participate in public life.

Belarusians often know people who are fond of the USSR

The vast majority of the population knows such people. This suggests that nostalgia for the USSR is highly widespread in Belarusian society.

Speaking Belarusian, unlike the Sovietness, is more of a medium-reach culture with moderately strong ties. Slightly more than half of Belarusians know someone who speaks Belarusian in everyday life.

People who reject national culture are encountered relatively rarely. Only 29% of the population know such individuals. This may be due to both their smaller numbers and their lower social activity and lower likelihood of expressing such views in everyday life.

The strength of social ties varies significantly across segments of national identity: they demonstrate not only different degrees of integration into social networks, but also qualitatively distinct patterns of access to social classes (Table 2).

The strength of social capital varies significantly across segments of national identity

Table 2

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Overall social capital strength	31.1	22.9	22.7	27.0	27.6
Public-sector intelligentsia	7.6	5.6	5.5	7.3	7.4
Blue-collar workers	6.2	6.3	6.5	7.5	5.7
Entrepreneurs	5.9	4.1	4.0	3.4	5.1
Global class	5.9	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.8
State apparatus	3.2	2.6	2.4	3.2	3.7
Civil society	2.4	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.0

In the next question, you will be shown the occupations of different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person in each occupation and how close you are to the closest person you know in that occupation. Number of responses, n = 803. Strength indicates the overall volume of social capital, taking into account both the breadth and depth of ties. It reflects total access to a social stratum. Overall strength is measured on a scale from 0 to 120, where 120 indicates the strongest social capital with high access to all social strata. Component-specific strength is measured on a scale from 0 to 20 for each component, where 20 indicates maximum social capital.

The Conscious are the most socially mobile segment, with access to the global class and international contacts

They demonstrate the strongest overall social capital, particularly through ties to the global class, the intelligentsia, and entrepreneurs. By this measure, the Conscious significantly outperform all other segments.

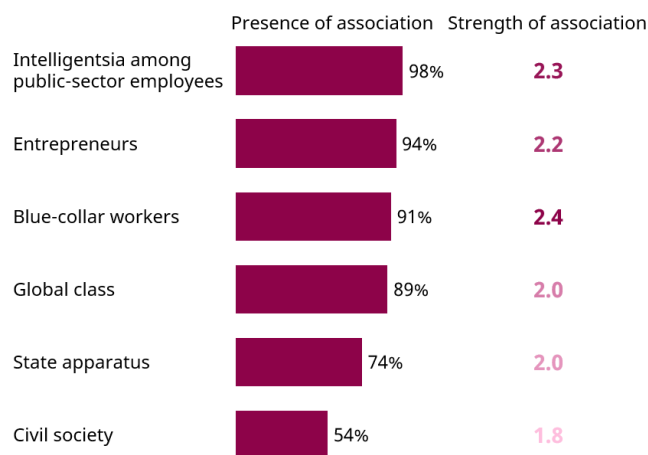
Their close connection to the global class likely explains why people who interact with foreigners make up part of their immediate social circle: 78% of the Conscious know such people. Moreover, these ties are exceptionally close: the strength of connection reaches 2.89, the highest figure across all segments and cultural groups. Such close ties may be explained by the fact that the Conscious include a higher share of people with connections to the Belarusian diaspora abroad.

Ties to civil society among the Conscious are nonetheless weaker than their other social connections

Although the Conscious interact with civil society more frequently and more closely than other segments, these ties remain relatively weak: among the Conscious, ties to the state apparatus (3.16) are even stronger than ties to civil society (2.36).

The Conscious know fewer representatives of civil society than of the state apparatus

Figure 9



Number of responses, n = 89. Presence of association — the percentage of respondents who reported knowing a person with a given occupation or viewpoint. Strength of association describes the closeness of the relationship with a person of that occupation or viewpoint (on a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 indicates a very close relationship).

This points to the structural weakness of civil society in Belarus. Even the segment most ideologically aligned with it has greater access to the state apparatus than to NGOs, human rights activists, and independent media.

A total of 83% of the Conscious know Belarusian-speaking people — the highest share among all segments. However, the strength of ties with Belarusian speakers is lower than that with those with international contacts. In other words, Belarusian-speaking communities form part of their familiar cultural environment, but such people do not necessarily belong to their closest social circle.

At the same time, the Conscious do not live in isolation from the “dominant” culture. As the chart above shows, 76% of them know people nostalgic for the Soviet Union — meaning that Soviet nostalgia surrounds them almost as closely as Belarusian-speaking communities. Moreover, the strength of ties with people nostalgic for the USSR (2.07) is only slightly weaker than with Belarusian speakers.

The world of the Soviet is one of horizontal ties: close-knit within their own social stratum, held together by shared cultural memory, yet disconnected from the state apparatus

They are the most deeply integrated into the mass social structures of the working class. Their ties with workers (7.51) and the intelligentsia (7.27) are the strongest among all segments. Their cultural environment is homogeneous and ideologically aligned: 78% know people nostalgic for the Soviet Union very closely (strength of association — 2.77).

The loyalty of the Soviet to the authorities does not translate into better access to the state apparatus. Contrary to expectations, the strength of their associations with the state apparatus is virtually the same as among the Conscious. This means that even the segment most loyal to the authorities does not enjoy privileged access to administrative resources.

The Russified hold the broadest access to the authorities

The Russified demonstrate the strongest access to the state apparatus (strength — 3.74). This segment has the closest ties with representatives of the state apparatus. Additionally, those Russified who are connected to the global class and civil society tend to have relatively close ties with them as well.

The Russified also display relatively high proximity to people who view national culture and patriotism as barriers between people. A total of 37% of the Russified know such individuals. Moreover, their relationships with these people are closer than in any other segment.

The Indifferent and the Emerging are the most distant from the state apparatus, civil society institutions, and the global class

Both segments exhibit the lowest levels of social capital across nearly all social strata, except blue-collar workers — they are the most distant from the state apparatus, civil society institutions, and the global class. The Indifferent are the least integrated into Belarusian-speaking environment (48%) and have few international contacts. The only cultural group to

which they are closely connected is people nostalgic for the USSR. The Emerging are somewhat more open, yet do not stand out on any indicator either. Lacking ties directed upward and outward, both segments risk reproducing their social position.

5. Identity and access to resources

The Conscious lead or rank among the leaders in four out of five resource groups: alternative information, transnational capital, bridge-building, and access to state power. Their social capital is broad, diverse, and well-connected to civic, informational, and transnational networks.

The Soviet are characterized by strong personal solidarization resources and considerable potential for neighborhood mutual aid and consolidation, accompanied by one of the lowest levels of access to power and weak transnational capital. This is a form of capital oriented toward horizontal mutual support, but one that is poorly convertible into institutional advantages.

The Emerging are unexpectedly well-endowed with mutual support resources through their social environment, likely due to the segment’s young age and mobility. Their resources are grounded in horizontal ties, while access to institutional and status-related resources remains weak.

Belarusians are widely endowed with mutual support resources, but administrative resources and alternative information remain accessible to a minority

Having ties to representatives of different social strata does not necessarily guarantee access to real resources. To assess the extent to which Belarusians’ social capital translates into

concrete forms of support, we asked respondents whether they had people in their social networks capable of providing different kinds of assistance — ranging from basic mutual aid to help in solving issues through state institutions or gaining access to resources abroad. This approach enables moving beyond describing the structure of social networks to assessing their practical value across different segments of Belarusian society.

Figure 10

Access to state power is the most limited type of resource for Belarusians



In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person you know who possesses that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The figure on the left presents results for aggregated groups of resources, while the figure on the right shows results for specific skills or resources. In both cases, the percentage of respondents who have at least one acquaintance possessing the given resource is reported.

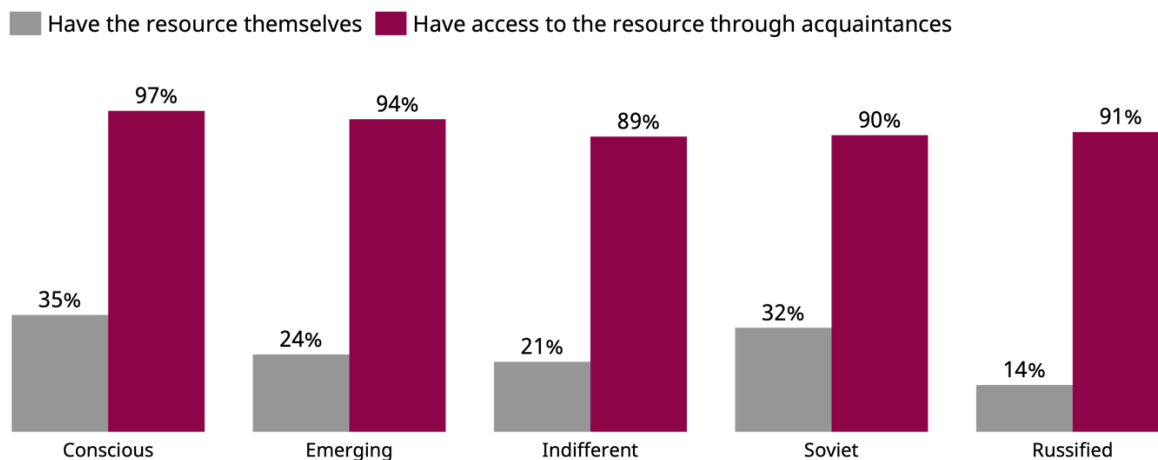
The Conscious and the Soviet have equally strong potential for everyday mutual support

Resources of basic solidarization constitute the most democratic group of resources in Belarus. One might expect differences between segments to be minimal. Yet precisely because this type of resource is typically realized through close relationships and one's immediate social environment, it is especially sensitive to the structure of a person's social milieu.

The Conscious and the Soviet are more likely than other segments to report being able to provide some form of support within the framework of basic solidarization (35% and 32%, respectively). At the same time, the Conscious are more likely than any other national segment to provide emotional support (27%). The closest to them are the Soviet and the Emerging, among whom 17% possess this resource.

Figure 11

The Soviet and the Conscious are more likely to possess resources of basic solidarization than other segments, though the latter have greater potential to access these resources through their social networks



In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person you know who possesses that resource. Number of responses, n = 803.

At the same time, the access of the Soviet to solidarization resources through social networks falls noticeably short of their personal potential (their score is comparable to that of the Indifferent). The Conscious, by contrast, lead by a wide margin: nearly all of them (97%) have broad access to such resources through their social environment. This is likely linked to the fact that involvement in the National-Romantic project strengthens horizontal solidarity, with people sharing this identity more densely embedded in networks of mutual support. The closest to them are the Emerging (94%). This younger segment may be more deeply integrated into horizontal networks due to its greater mobility.

The Soviet and the Conscious have similar high share of contacts capable of mobilizing neighbors for mutual assistance when needed (41% and 43%, respectively). This suggests that both segments, regardless of their beliefs, are sufficiently strong and internally cohesive to sustain

readiness for collective mobilization. However, the Soviet are a much larger group, making this segment the main reserve of grassroots solidarity in Belarusian society.

The Conscious are better able than others to circumvent the information blockade, but legal protection remains equally inaccessible to all

In a context of tight control over the media space, access to alternative information is perhaps the most sensitive category of resources. The Conscious are significantly more likely than other segments to possess this resource, both personally and through their social ties. At the same time, the difference is driven specifically by access to alternative sources of information and by the skills required to set up VPNs and other tools to obtain information from outside the country.

Table 3

Neighborhood mobilization and mutual aid are more often accessible to the Conscious and the Soviet

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Basic solidarization	97%	94%	89%	90%	91%
Help with repairing equipment, cars, or housing	90%	74%	75%	77%	74%
Emotional support	82%	80%	74%	77%	63%
Medical contacts (specialist / procedure)	67%	47%	47%	54%	64%
Providing temporary housing	64%	68%	60%	55%	58%
Loaning a large sum of money in an emergency	54%	54%	44%	43%	45%
Neighborhood mobilization and mutual aid	43%	29%	30%	41%	27%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person you know who possesses that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who know at least one person with the specified skills or resources, broken down by the theme group "Basic solidarization".

Nevertheless, access to legal assistance for protecting one's rights is available to the Conscious to the same extent as to other segments. This suggests that Belarus's legal field remains equally closed regardless of political orientation. The

nature of political repression in recent years has prevented even the most oppositional segment from developing a relevant network of legal support.

Table 4

Only the Conscious know how to use tools for circumventing the information blockade — and even among them, only around one-third do

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Information and legal protection	43%	17%	16%	14%	13%
VPNs, secure messengers	33%	13%	12%	11%	13%
Access to alternative information	27%	6%	5%	4%	3%
Legal advice and protection of rights	3%	4%	1%	2%	0%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person you know who possesses that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who possess the specified skills or resources, broken down by the theme group "Alternative information".

The Conscious have roughly the same number of acquaintances who can help resolve legal issues as other segments

Table 5

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Information and legal protection	81%	59%	66%	65%	56%
VPNs, secure messengers	62%	50%	51%	42%	38%
Legal advice and protection of rights	50%	43%	42%	49%	43%
Access to alternative information	35%	24%	21%	16%	22%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person possessing that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who know at least one person with the specified skills or resources, broken down by the thematic group "Alternative information".

Information about life abroad is accessible to many, while practical emigration assistance is a resource more available to the Conscious

Emigration after 2020 was uneven, affecting primarily certain social and identity groups. Unsurprisingly, the Conscious — whose networks were most affected by emigration — find themselves in a situation where this forced rupture has been transformed into a resource.

Around 80% of this segment have access to this group of resources in general. This is significantly higher than among

representatives of other groups (50–59%, depending on the segment). At the same time, 55% of the Conscious have a contact who can help with finding work or housing in emigration.

Among the other segments, the Emerging possess the highest level of transnational capital: 57% of the segment know people living abroad. However, connections with those who can provide practical assistance with emigration are considerably less common — only around one-third of the segment have such contacts.

Only one segment mostly has access to contacts who can assist with emigration

Table 6

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Transnational capital	83%	59%	50%	53%	52%
Information about life abroad (lives there)	77%	57%	46%	48%	48%
Help with finding work / housing in emigration	55%	28%	25%	20%	31%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person possessing that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who know at least one person with the specified skills or resources, broken down by the theme group "Transnational capital".

The Conscious are more likely to have access to people with opposing political views (one in two within the segment)

“Bridge-building” is a provisional term for a group of resources acquired through connections with dissimilar people — those separated by ideology, status, or cultural and linguistic boundaries.

The Conscious are the only segment for whom contact with political opponents is the norm rather than the exception. By comparison, such ties are relatively rare among the other segments, and least common among the Soviet (28%). However, the diversity of cross-political ties among the Conscious may reflect not so much a particular openness on their part but the fact that they constitute a relatively small segment.

Table 7

The Conscious are more likely to interact with people holding opposing views

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Bridge-building	81%	57%	49%	54%	50%
Contacts with people holding opposing political views	53%	35%	28%	28%	39%
Contacts within Belarusian-speaking environment	62%	37%	25%	32%	31%
Referrals for jobs in international companies	37%	18%	19%	23%	25%
Access to influential people and organizations	26%	14%	15%	17%	31%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person possessing that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who know at least one person with the specified skills or resources, broken down by the theme group “Bridge-building”.

Unsurprisingly, most of the Conscious have access to Belarusian-speaking environment. As noted in the previous section, 83% of the Conscious know Belarusian-speaking people. However, only 62% know someone whose social circle is predominantly Belarusian-speaking, rather than someone who simply speaks Belarusian themselves. This 20 p. p. gap may suggest that a substantial share of Belarusian speakers live in isolation: they use the language individually but are not embedded in a linguistic community (i.e., they lack friends, colleagues, or neighbors who also speak Belarusian). An alternative explanation is also possible: some of the Conscious may simply not know whether their acquaintances belong to Belarusian-speaking environments. Nevertheless, a similar gap appears across other segments, making the first interpretation more likely. Regardless of the reason, this pattern limits the potential for reproducing Belarusian-speaking practices on a mass scale.

Crossing status boundaries — that is, gaining access to influential people and job referrals at international companies — opens opportunities unavailable to most. The Russified have the greatest access to influential people (31%), which predictably correlates with their closer ties to the state apparatus. Access to job referrals at international companies is distributed relatively evenly, though it is noticeably less common among the Indifferent and the Emerging. This suggests that these segments are the most

cut off from the career pathways opened up by international companies.

Access to state power is determined not by loyalty to the authorities but by the breadth of one’s network and, possibly, professional contacts

Resources of power encompass different levels of interaction with the state — from everyday matters (expedited document processing and referrals for jobs in state-owned companies) to influence over government decisions and informal ties with law enforcement structures.

The Russified have the greatest access to power resources and — somewhat unexpectedly — so do the Conscious. Around half of the latter reported knowing at least one such person. At the same time, clear structural differences emerge between the segments. The Conscious have broad access to state power-related resources overall, but this access is concentrated in institutional channels (e.g., referrals, influence over decisions) rather than in law enforcement. This may be explained as follows.

- The Conscious are the segment with the broadest social network. A broad network itself increases the likelihood that it will include someone with access to state institutions.

- The Conscious may include a relatively high share of people whose work involves regular contact with the state, meaning that what we capture in the survey are professional rather than personal ties to state institutions.
- It is also possible that some of the Conscious built their networks through experiences of interacting with the state during and after the 2020 protests. As a result, people may have found themselves in situations where

→ they were compelled to seek connections to state institutions and law enforcement.

At the same time, it is important to understand that access to resources, as captured in the survey, does not necessarily imply a willingness to use them. A respondent may know someone capable of influencing a government decision or providing a relevant service, yet choose never to turn to them precisely for political reasons.

Table 8

The Soviet have the least access to resources of state power

	The Conscious	The Emerging	The Indifferent	The Soviet	The Russified
Access to state power	52%	42%	42%	40%	51%
Referrals for working in a government organization	42%	30%	29%	34%	40%
Expedited obtaining of certificates / documents	23%	18%	22%	19%	26%
Help with law enforcement authorities	19%	23%	27%	21%	29%
Influence on government decisions and resource allocation	16%	9%	11%	10%	16%

In the next question, you will be shown various skills and resources possessed by different people in Belarus. You will be asked to indicate whether you know at least one person who possesses each of these skills or resources and how close you are to the closest person possessing that resource. Number of responses, n = 803. The table shows the percentage of respondents who know at least one person with the specified skills or resources, broken down by the thematic group "Access to power".

Access to people with connections in law enforcement agencies is generally rare across all segments. The Russified stand out somewhat (29%), though the gap with the Indifferent is small, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the nature of this relationship. Taken together, the data allow for the cautious assumption that the Russified's closer ties to the state apparatus are after all

partly reflected in them having greater access to resources of state power.

The Soviet are the segment with the least access to administrative resources. This casts doubt on the assumption that ideological proximity to the regime translates into informal access to its institutions.

Appendix

Share of those who agreed (“rather” + “completely”) with the statements used to construct the national identity segments. Compared to previous waves, the wording of the statements was slightly modified.

		The Emerging	The Soviet	The Indifferent	The Conscious
Russian-Soviet	I feel equally positive about the achievements of Belarusians and Russians	100%	90%	39%	24%
	Some elements of the Soviet legacy should be preserved	93%	80%	20%	34%
	The proclamation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) in 1919 was a positive event	80%	54%	13%	30%
	The Belarusian language is sufficiently supported in public life	64%	44%	22%	9%
	The collapse of the Soviet Union had more negative than positive consequences	63%	55%	17%	10%
	If I had to choose where to emigrate, I would rather choose Russia than Western Europe	52%	45%	15%	0%
	The events in Donbas in 2014 were the result of domestic politics rather than external intervention	29%	26%	15%	14%
Belarusian	I feel bitterness and resentment when the rights of Belarusian-speaking people are violated	87%	58%	39%	94%
	Kasty Kalinouski was an outstanding historical figure who made a major positive contribution to the development of the Belarusians	87%	58%	39%	94%
	I am interested in contemporary Belarusian culture: music, literature, cinema, etc.	84%	45%	17%	66%
	I would like to see more Belarusian language in our everyday lives	69%	35%	24%	94%
	Events such as the Battle of Grunwald (1410) or the Battle of Orsha (1514) are part of our history and something to be proud of	65%	33%	18%	69%
	I would be willing to pay slightly higher taxes if the money went toward developing Belarusian national culture	54%	19%	8%	63%
	Many of our country’s problems are connected to the fact that we have forgotten our culture and language	40%	22%	9%	75%

		The Emerging	The Soviet	The Indifferent	The Conscious
Nationally indifferent	The existence of many languages in the modern world is an unnecessary barrier dividing people	26%	35%	30%	15%
	Preserving cultural heritage is not something that should be a priority in the modern world	19%	20%	25%	10%
	In my view, the existence of cultural differences causes too much harm and leads to conflict	15%	21%	15%	14%
	I do not think national culture and language are important in the modern world	11%	21%	27%	11%
	National culture and patriotism only create unnecessary barriers between people	8%	15%	17%	7%
Cosmopolitan	I am interested in learning about different cultures around the world	100%	91%	38%	99%
	It is interesting to communicate with foreigners and have acquaintances all over the world	99%	93%	61%	97%
	To be successful, one needs to know how to use materials, information, and knowledge from different cultures around the world	93%	80%	37%	90%
	I believe that all people are brothers and sisters, regardless of nationality	92%	76%	37%	54%
	I want to follow news about events from around the world	86%	86%	45%	94%

Number of responses, n = 803.

Belarusian national identity in 2026

This is the sixth edition of our research, through which since 2020 we have been tracking what “being Belarusian” means to society. In this study, we focus on two themes: how Belarusians see their place among other nations and the communication networks in which their identity is embedded. To explore these questions, we conducted a survey of 803 respondents and 8 in-depth interviews.

The data show that Belarusians remain a formed nation, united by a sense of pride, a shared self-image, a common culture, and recognizable symbols. At the same time, the Conscious, the Emerging, the Indifferent, and the Soviet place different emphasis on history and symbols. Some see us as part of Europe, others as part of the Russian space. Yet at the global level, Belarusians place themselves and other Slavs within the Western pole, organically bridging people with different views. Belarusians are also united by strong horizontal ties and mutual support, while remaining isolated from both the state and civil society.

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