



Belarusians' views on the political crisis

Results of a public opinion poll
conducted between 20 and 30 April 2021

Notes on methodology

Chatham House surveyed a total of 937 respondents between 20 and 30 April 2021. Our survey sample corresponds to the general structure of Belarus's urban population and is corrected and weighted by gender, age, size of respondents' town of residence and education level.

Previous waves of the survey did not correct for educational level, so in order to make previous data comparable, we recalculated our weightings for earlier waves. This means that in this report the data from previous waves will differ from the same data in previous reports by a few percentage points.

The poll was conducted using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method, which in practice means that it was limited to internet users. Although various sources claim that only 75–82 percent of the population in Belarus uses the web, internet users do remain more economically and socially active.

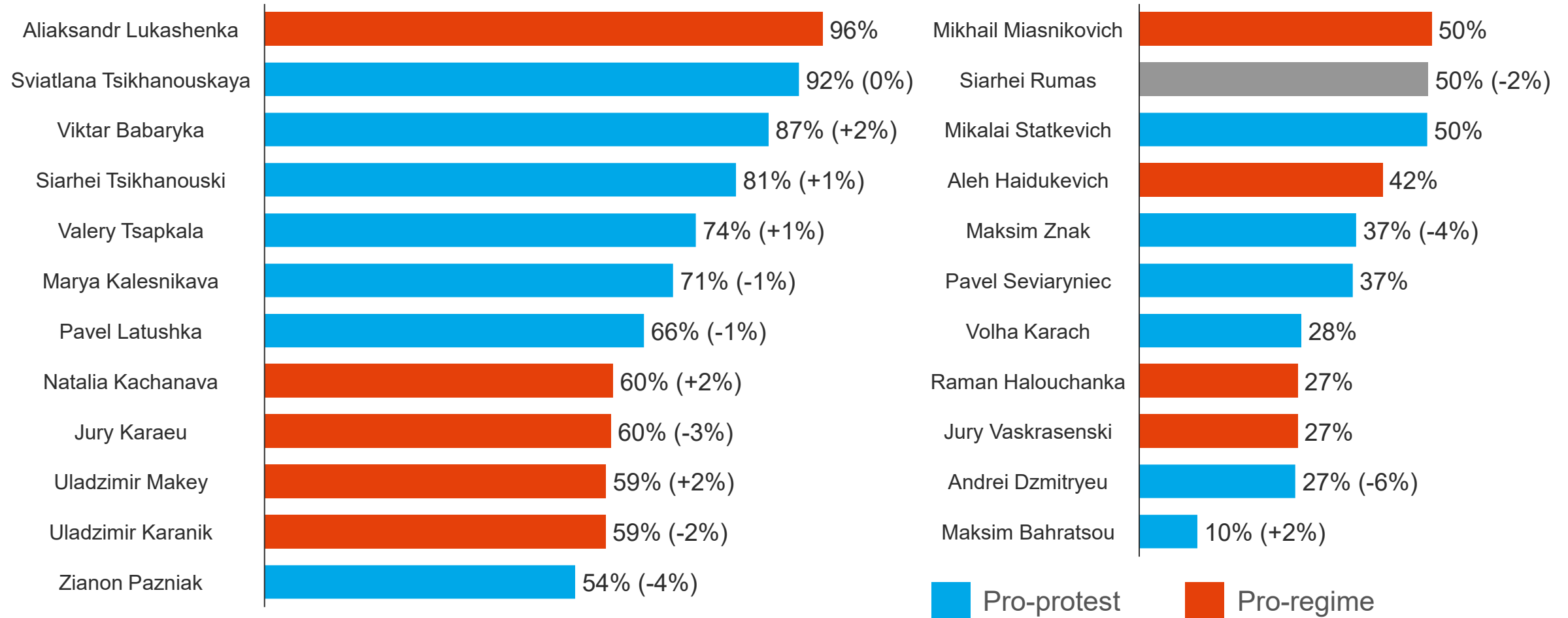
Therefore, despite the fact that our sample has been weighted to accurately reflect the make-up of Belarusian society, it is possible that support for Lukashenka and his policies may be slightly higher than this poll indicates, since Lukashenka's supporters tend to be less socially and economically active than his detractors.

We selected the CAWI method because the repressive nature of Belarusian legislation, as well as additional risks faced by researchers collaborating with us for this study, make face-to-face interviews impossible.

The statistical margin of error of our sample of 937 people (with a 95 percent confidence level) does not exceed 3.2%.

Electoral Preferences

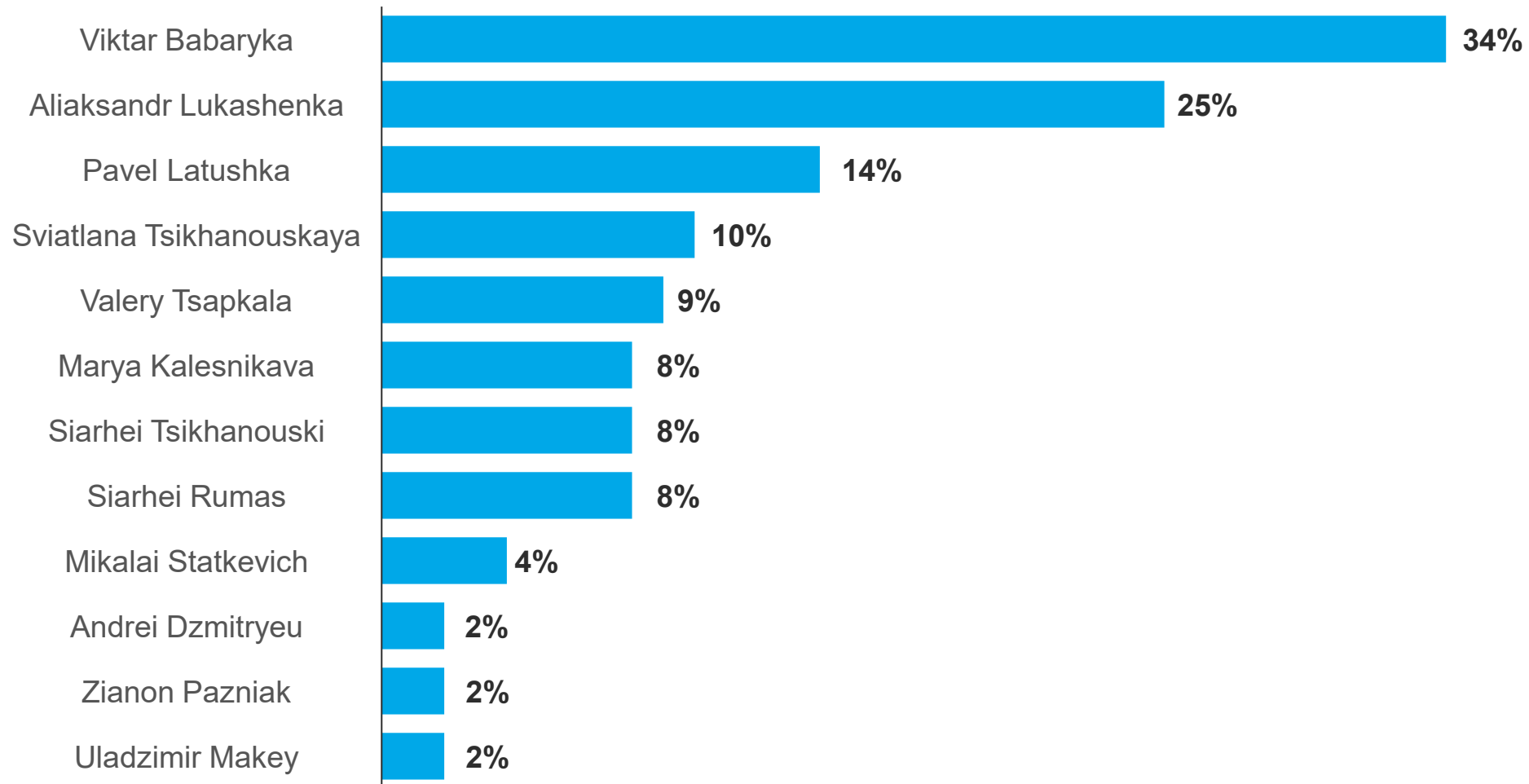
Which of these people do you know (you are familiar with who they are and what they do)?



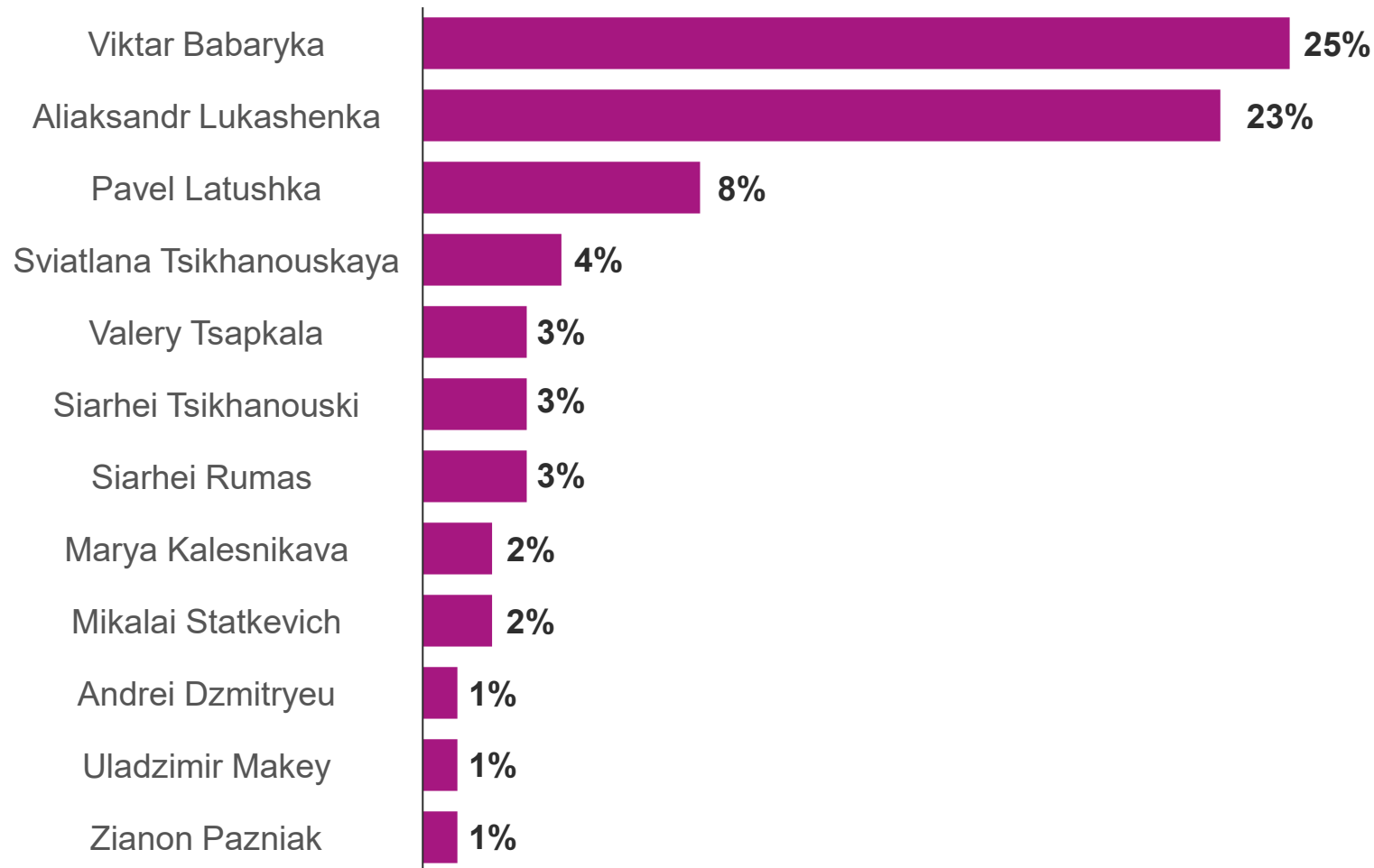
■ Pro-protest
 ■ Pro-regime

Changes since November 2020 in parentheses

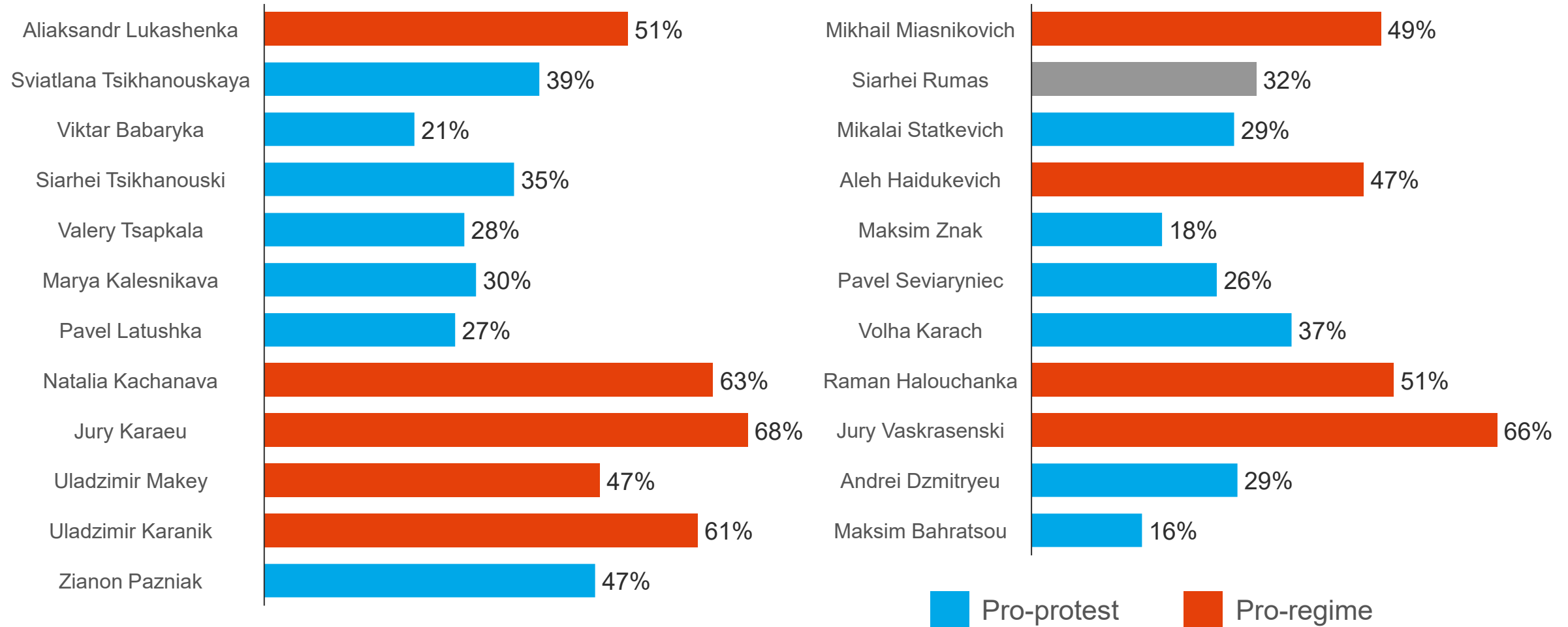
Which of the people on this list do you believe would make a good president of Belarus? Choose up to three answers.



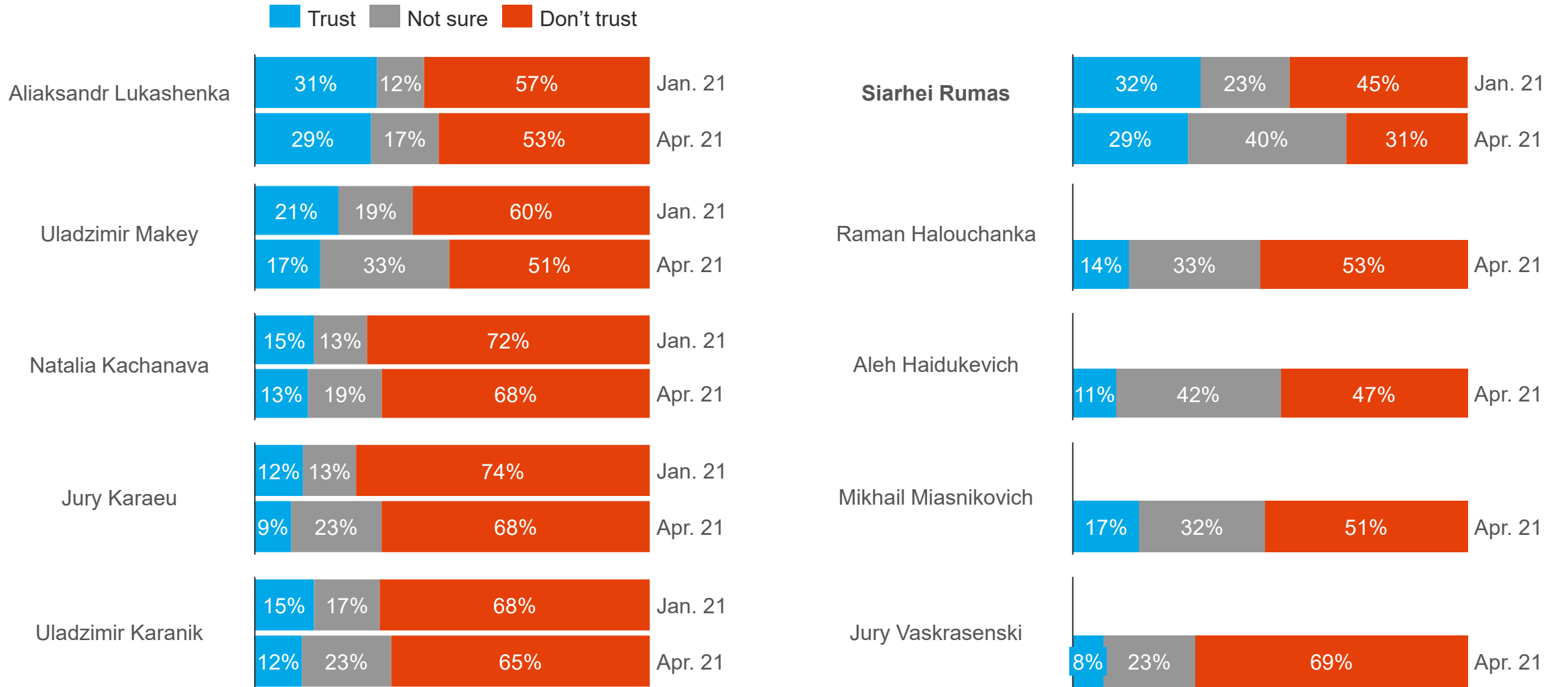
Which of these people do you believe would make the best president of Belarus? Choose one answer.



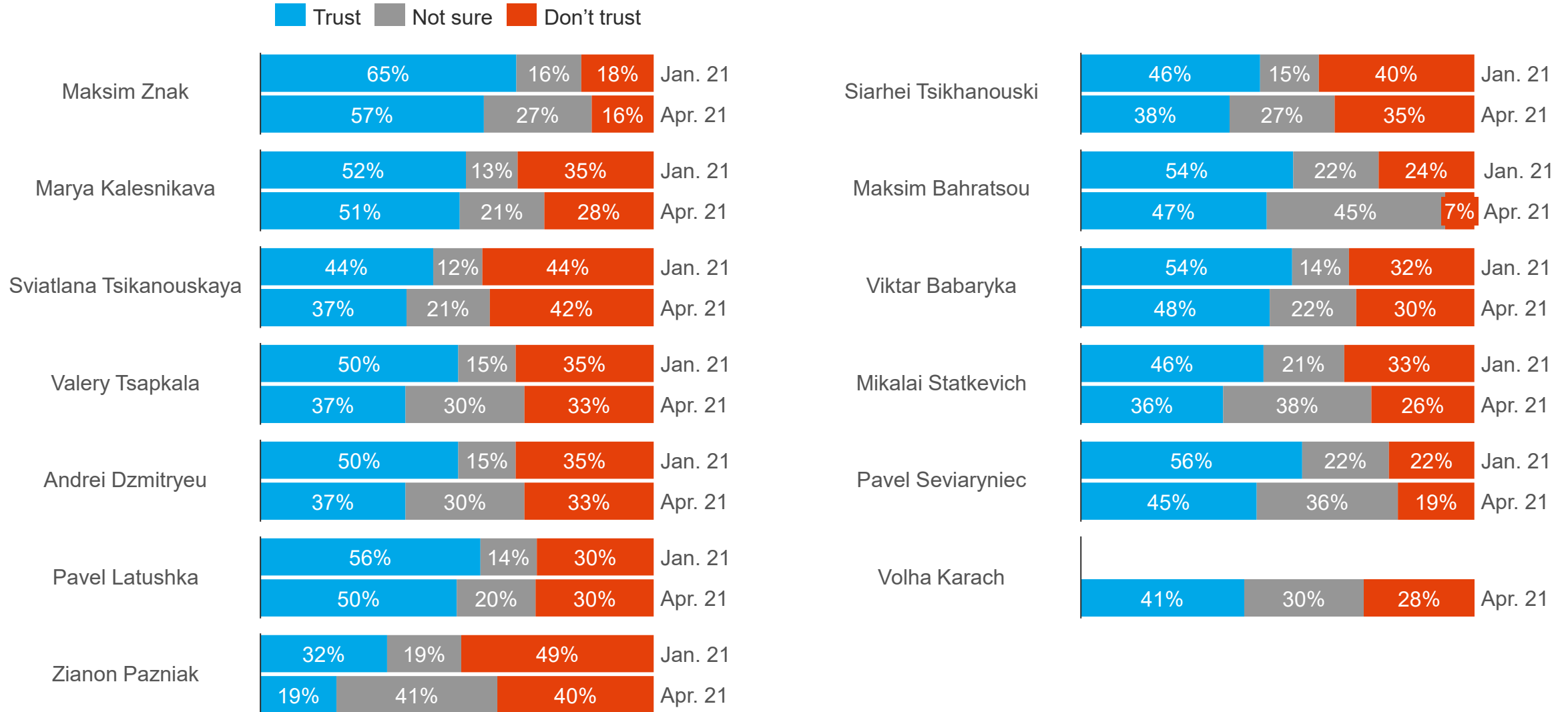
Which of the listed people would you never vote for in a presidential election? (based on the share of respondents who know of the person, sorted from best-known to least-known candidate)



Which of the people listed do you trust? (Pro-regime and Siarhei Rumas, based on the share of respondents who know the person)

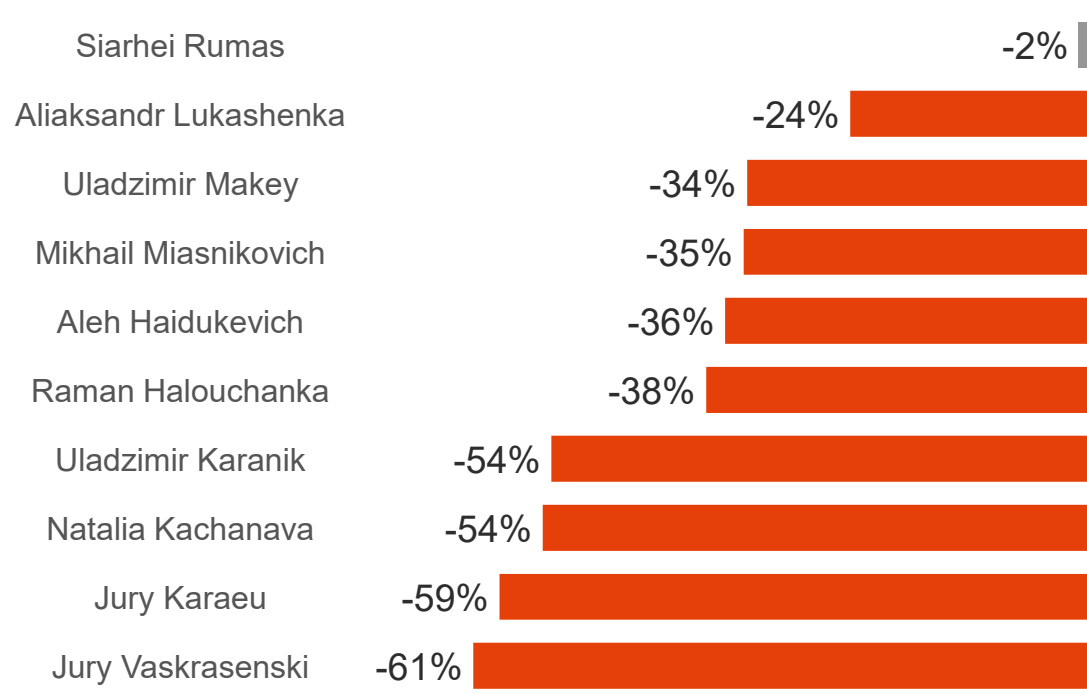


Do you trust these people? (Pro-protest, based on the share of respondents who know the person)

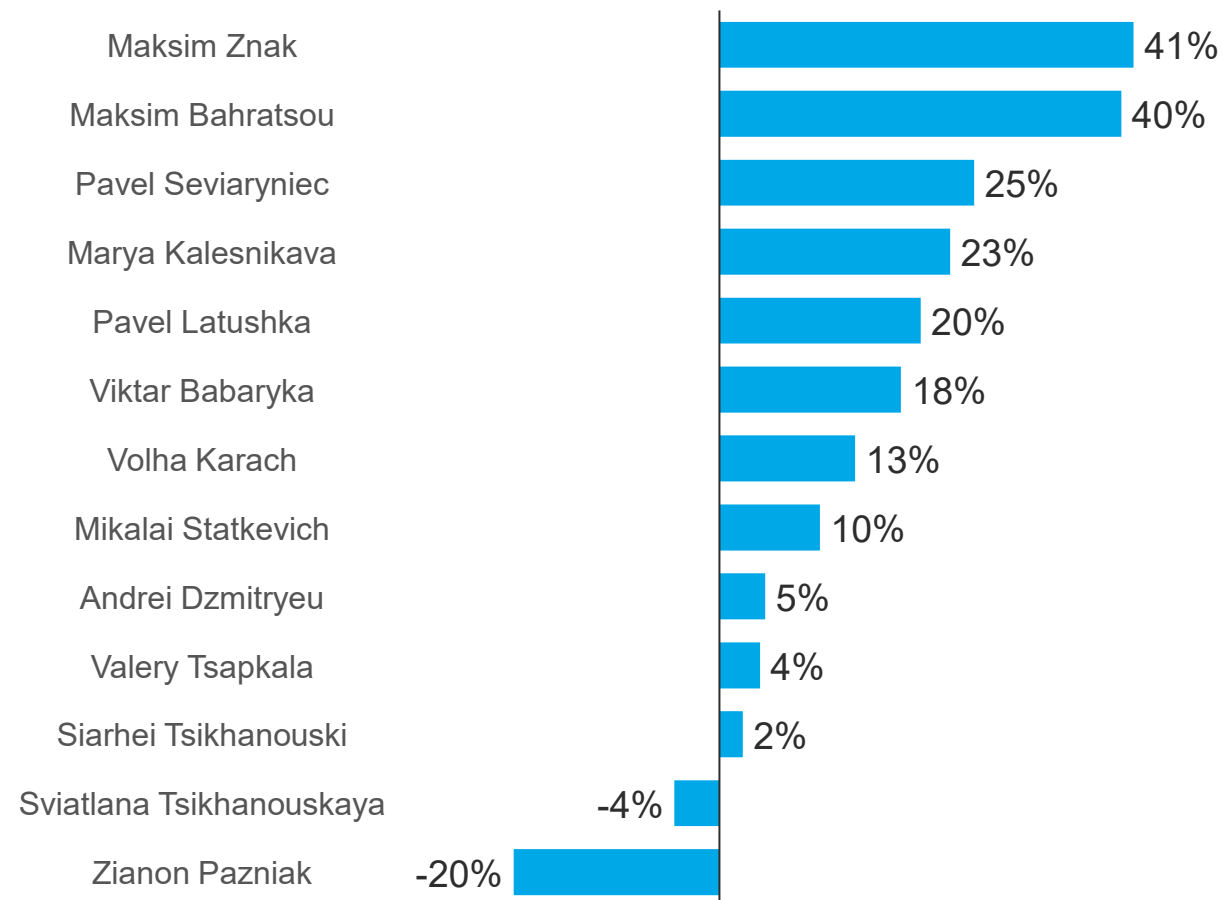


Trust index (difference between trust in and mistrust of politicians based on the share of respondents who know the person)

Pro-regime and Siarhei Rumas

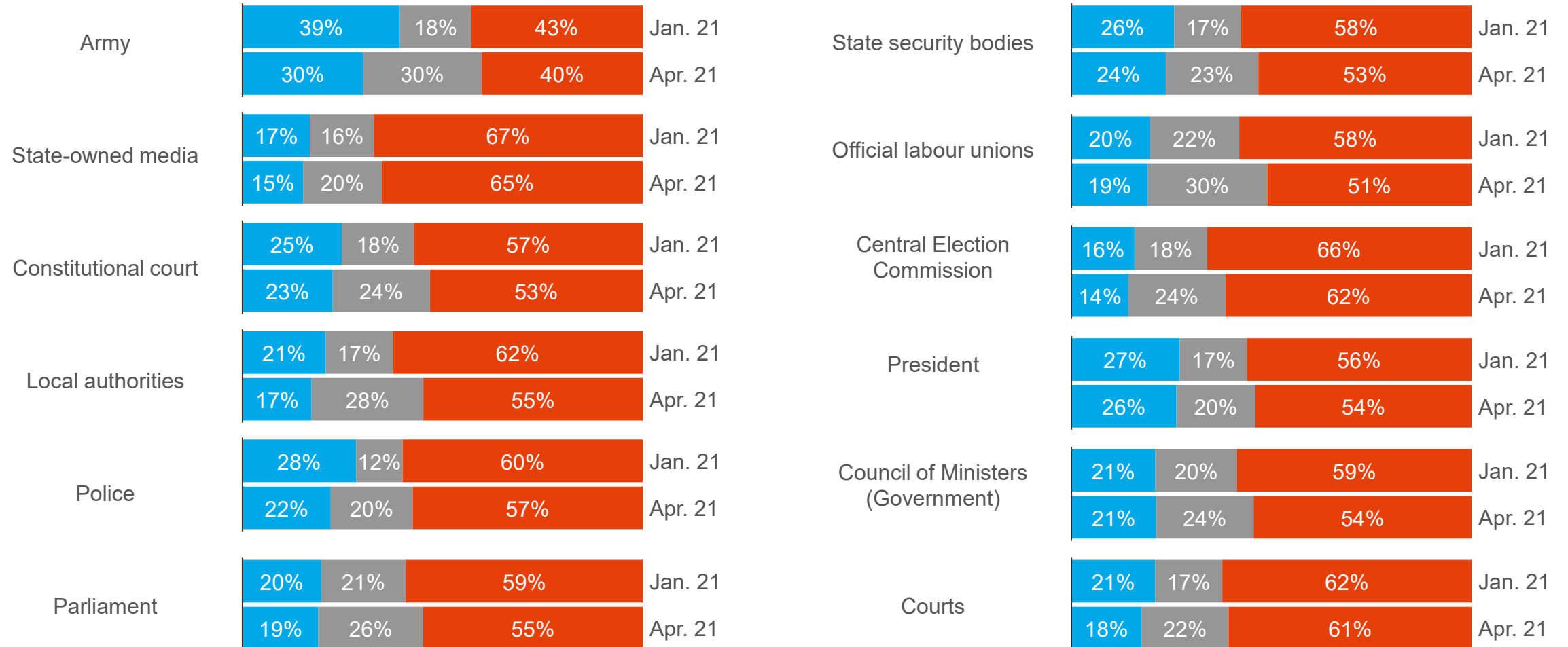


Pro-protest



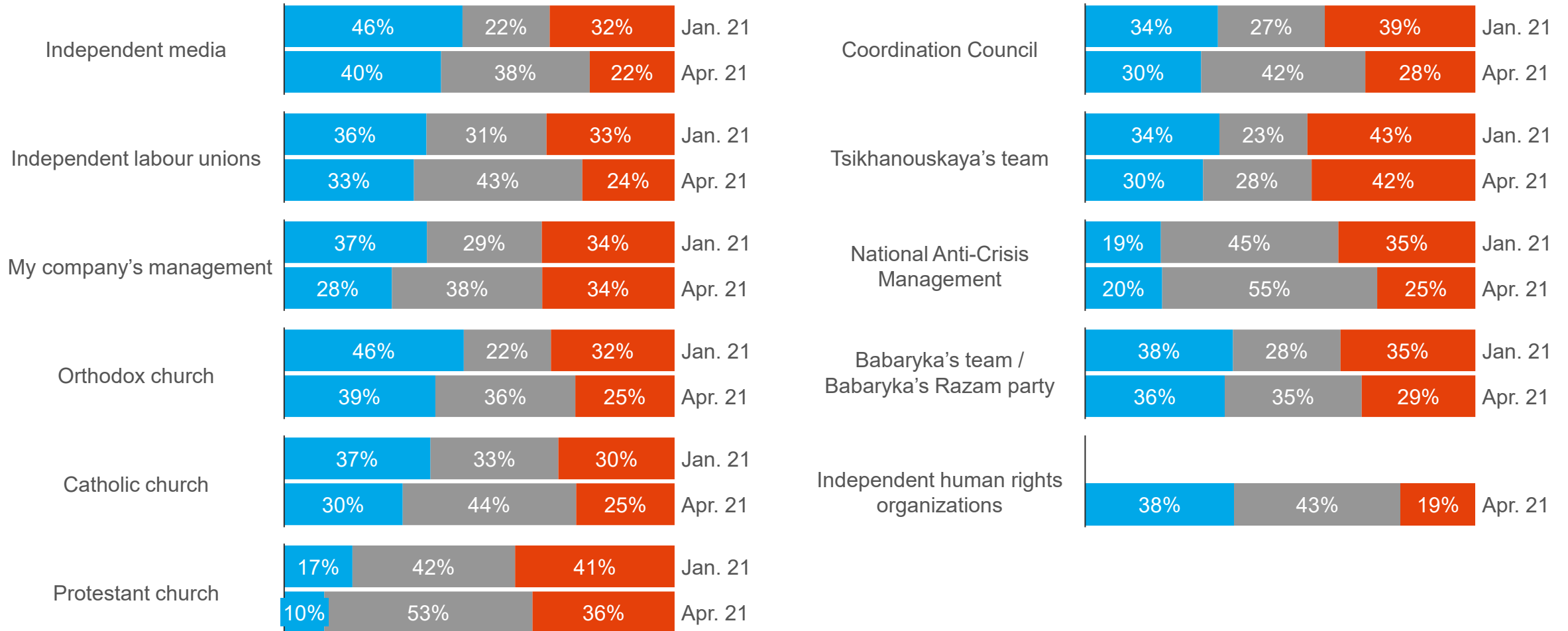
Do you trust these organizations? (regime institutions)

Trust Not sure Don't trust



Do you trust these organizations? (independent and pro-protest institutions)

Trust Not sure Don't trust



AWARENESS

- After Lukashenka, the most well-known political figures in Belarus are pro-protest: Tsikhanouskaya, Babaryka, Tsikhanouski, Kalesnikava, Tsapkala and Latushka.
- In general, people are far more familiar with the protest leaders than they are with state officials. Lukashenka's supporters know their functionaries less well than their opponents do, which explains the extremely low ratings and trust levels of officials.

RATINGS

- The ratings of protest leaders are much higher than those of state officials, while functionaries lead in negative ratings (“anti-rating”).
- Viktor Babaryka is the most popular presidential candidate among Belarusian urban citizens, with 25% finding him the most worthy and 34% thinking he would make a good president. His anti-rating is also relatively low, with only 21% of Belarusians saying that they would never vote for him.
- Lukashenka comes second to Babaryka with 23%, but he has only 25% support in general: his electorate is more consolidated, whereas those opposed to him could choose between politicians with similar views. At the same time, more than half of urban Belarusians say that they would never vote for him.

TRUST

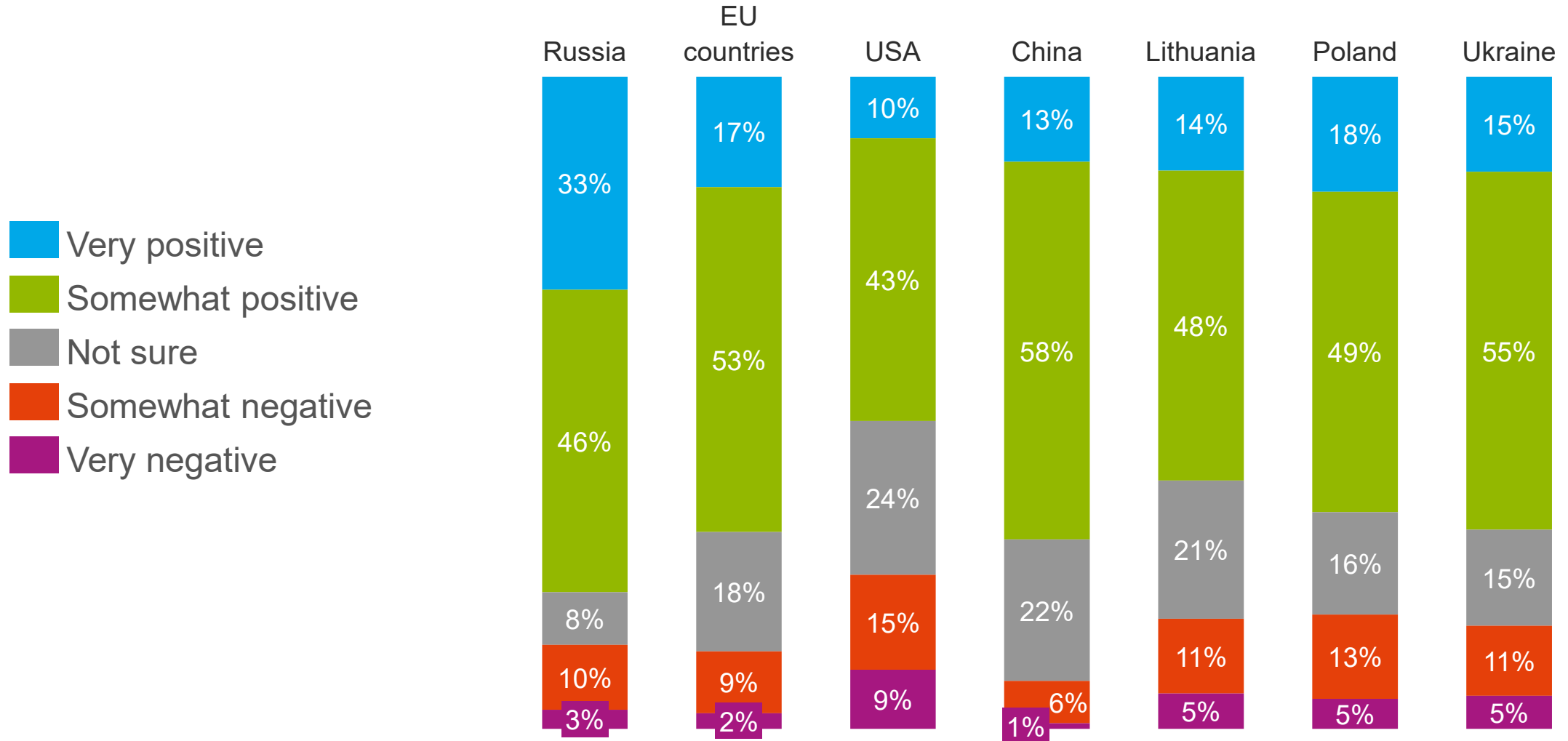
- As with the ratings, protest leaders are notably more trusted than officials. The exception is former prime minister Siarhei Rumas, who lives outside Belarus and whom many do not consider a part of the Lukashenka's regime.
- Znak and Bahratsou, who lead in the trust index with more than 40%, are poorly known by people who do not support the protest movement and this explains their high rankings. However, better-known opposition leaders such as Kalesnikava, Latushka and Babaryka are still highly trusted with 23%, 20% and 18% respectively.
- In general, attitudes towards both state and protest figures is changing, with growing numbers of people expressing uncertainty.
- State organizations and bodies are still mistrusted by more than half the population, while the army is slightly more popular than other bodies.
- Independent media, labour unions and human rights organizations are trusted far more than state ones.
- Babaryka's team remains the most trusted pro-protest body.

International relations

Which of the following statements about Lukashenka do you agree with?

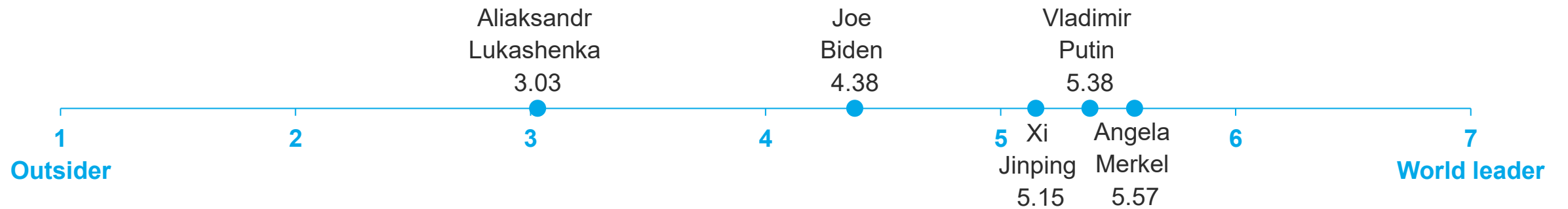


How do you feel about the following countries?

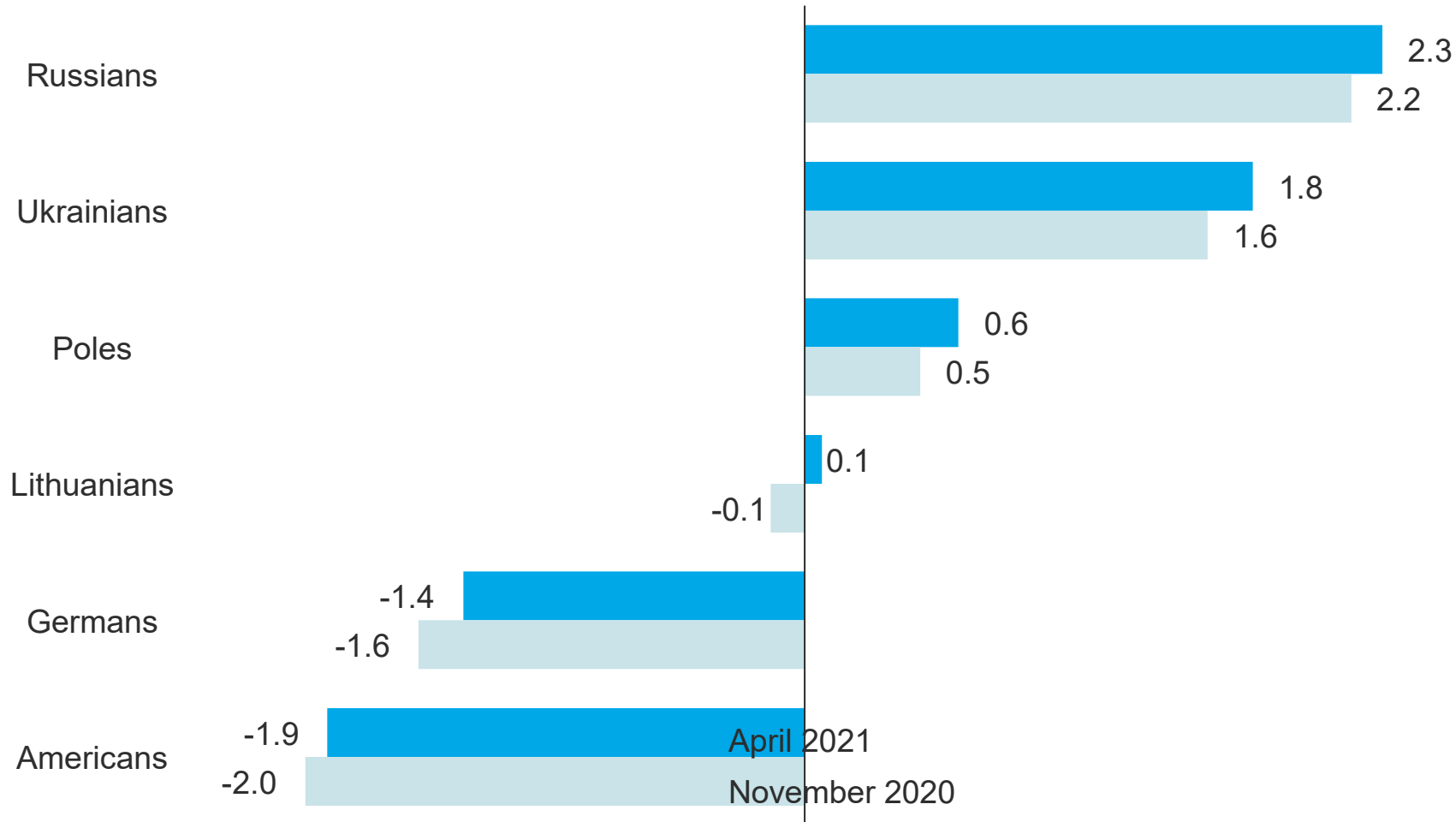


QUESTION 9

How would you evaluate the following politicians' positions on the world stage, where 1 is an outsider and 7 is a world leader?



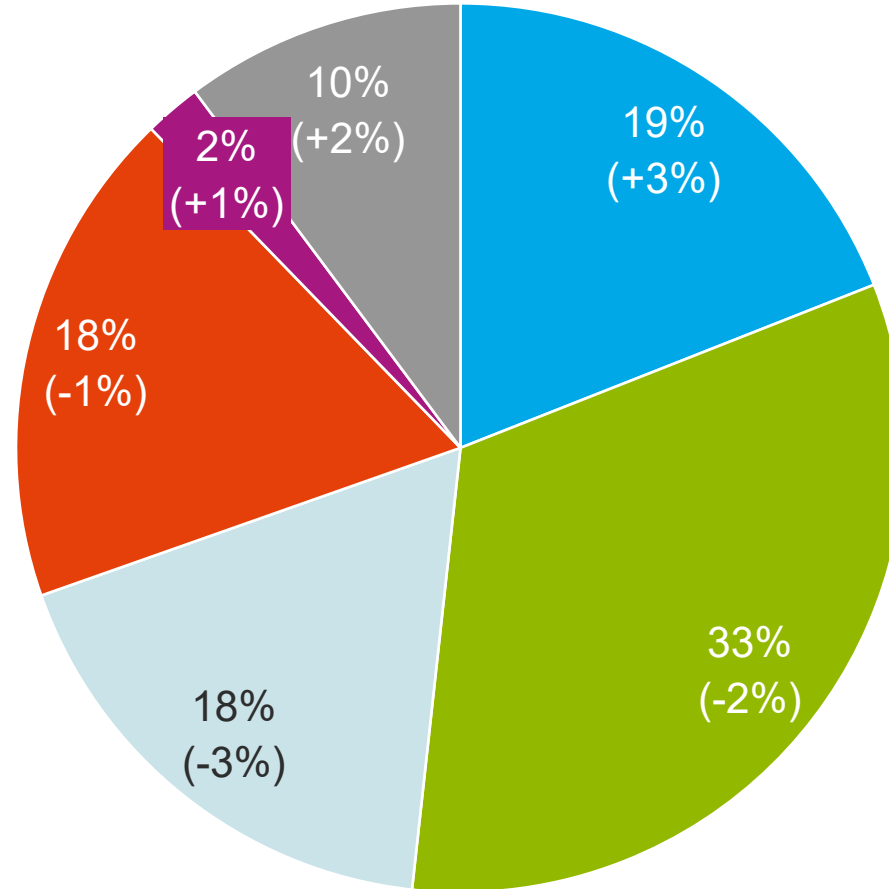
How do you assess the similarities between Belarusians and these nationalities in their mentality, character or culture, where -3 is very far apart and 3 is very close?



How do you assess current relations between Russia and Belarus?

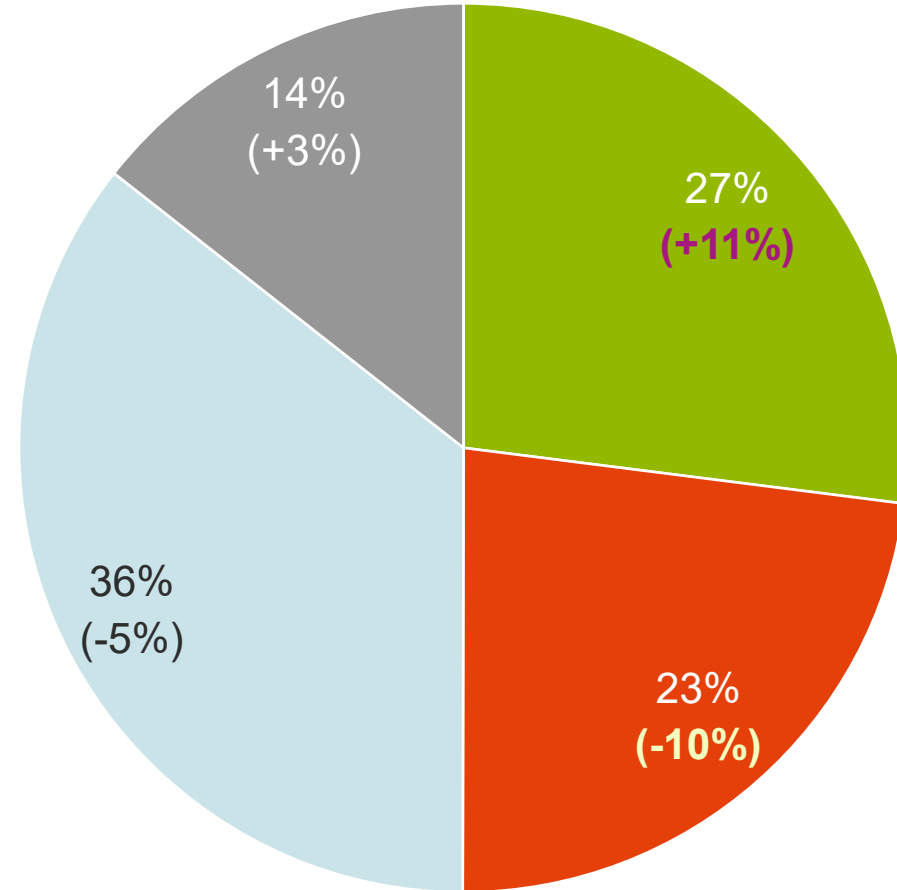
- Good and friendly
- Quite good, neighbourly
- Neutral
- Quite bad, tense
- Bad, hostile
- Not sure

Changes since November 2020 in parentheses



How have relations between Russia and Belarus changed over the last year?

- Improving
- Worsening
- No change
- Not sure

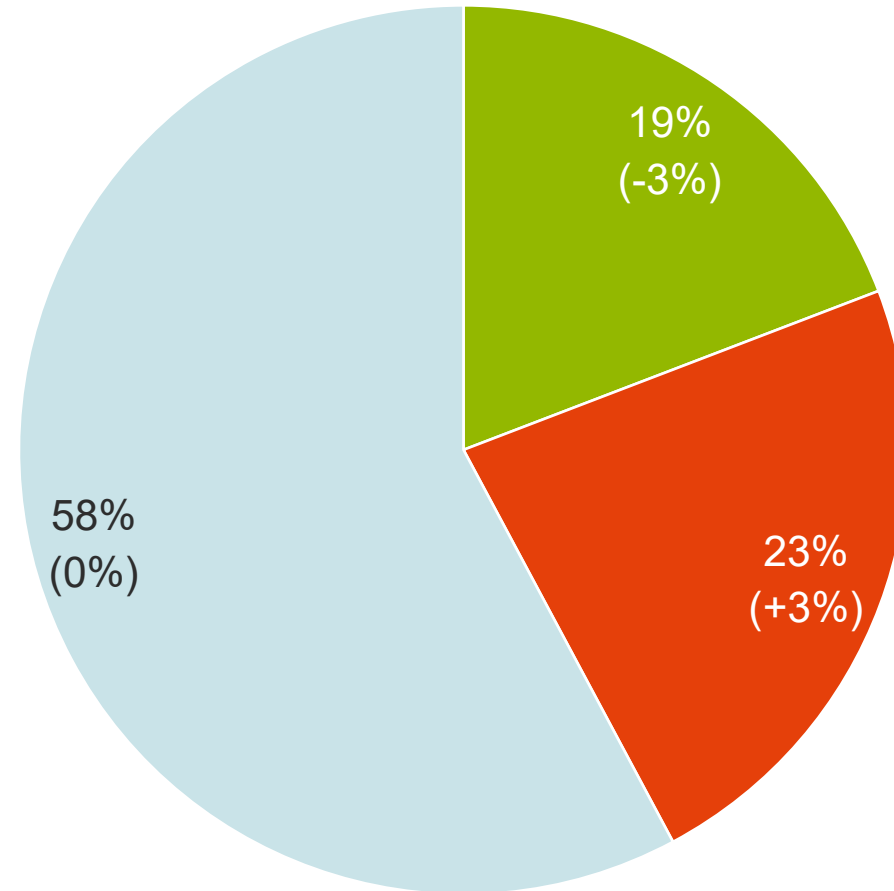


Change since November 2020 in parentheses

What position should Russia take regarding Belarus?

- Support the protest movement
- Support Lukashenka
- Refrain from interfering

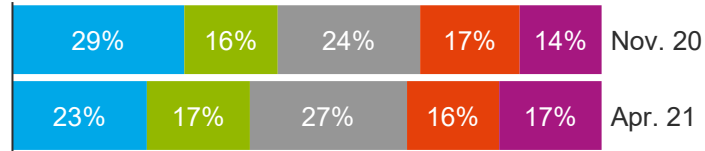
Change since November 2020 in parentheses



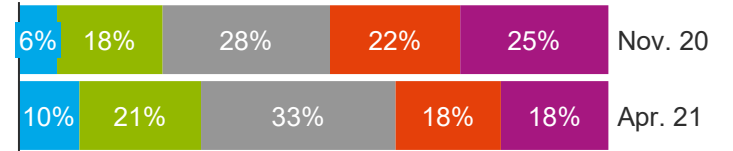
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Russia?

■ Totally agree
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Not sure
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Totally disagree

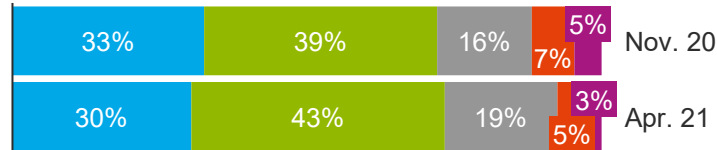
My opinion on the Russian government has changed since it supported Lukashenka in the political crisis



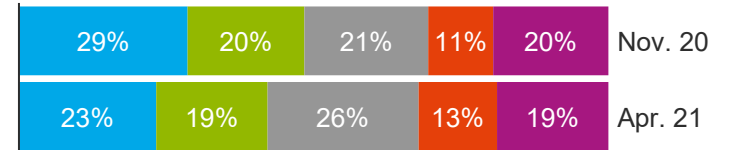
Russian government actions in solving the crisis are mostly focused on helping the Belarusian people



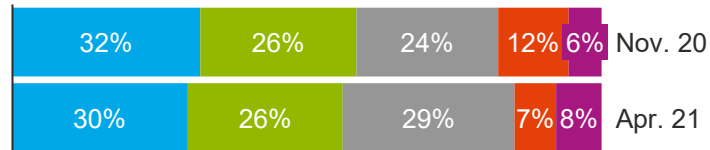
Russia is the only support Lukashenka has



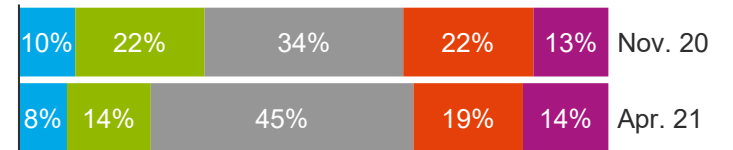
Russia should discuss the crisis not only with Lukashenka, but also with Tsikhanouskaya



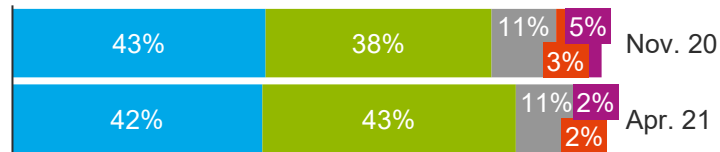
If Lukashenka left, I would not support a political force which decided to break off the relationship with Russia



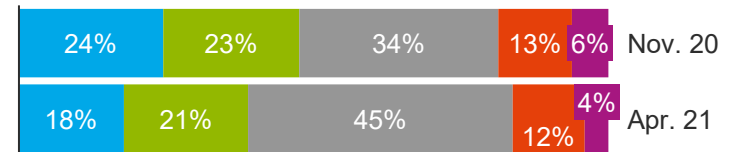
It would be acceptable if there were an openly pro-Russian party in the Belarusian parliament



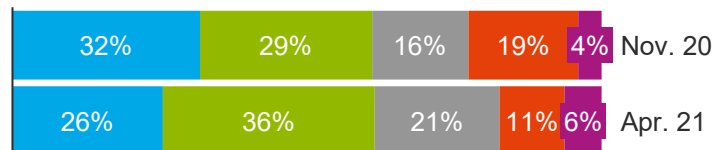
Free trade between Russia and Belarus is good for both countries



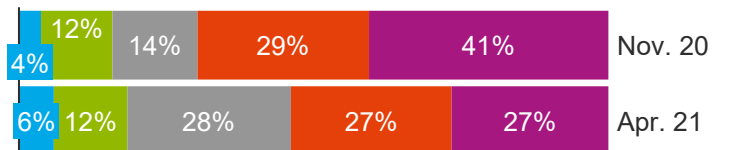
Russian media present the situation in Belarus absolutely incorrectly



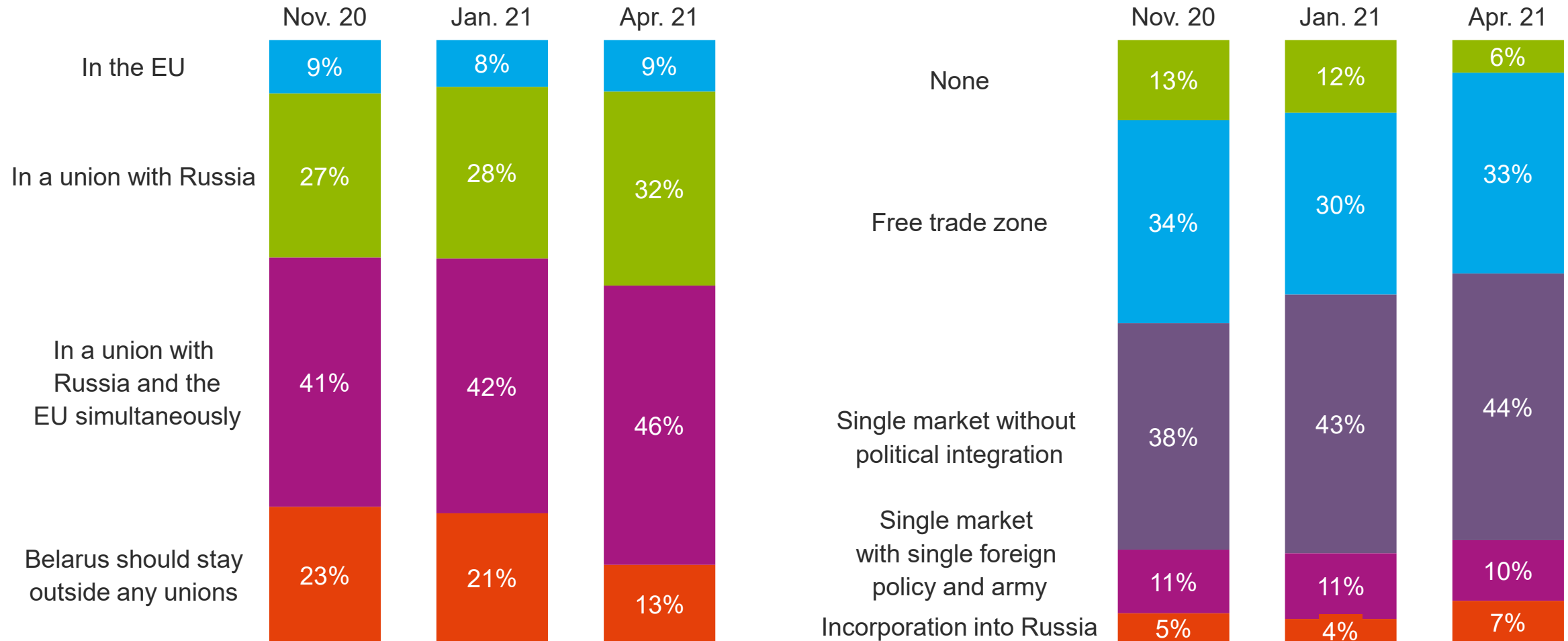
Russia and Belarus should not have any physical border



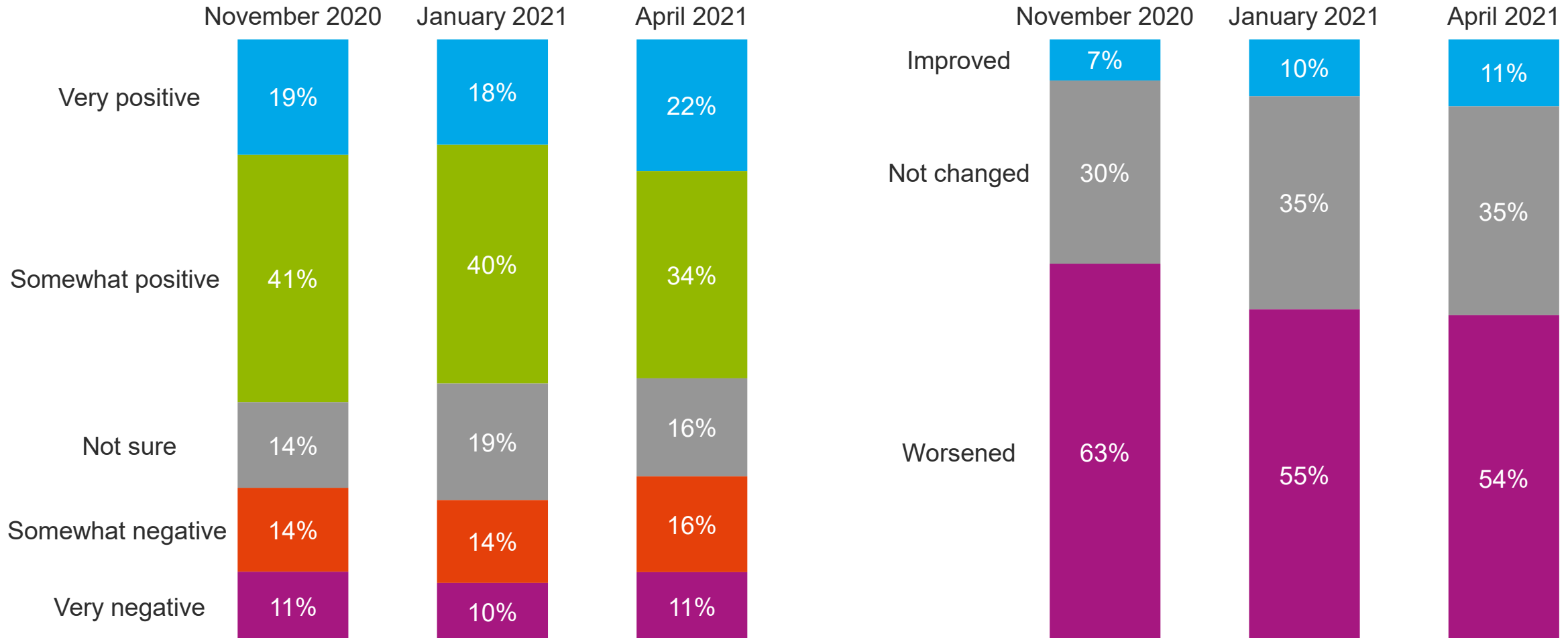
I think that the Belarusian protests are aimed against Russia



Which political union should Belarus be in? Which option of union with Russia seems the most appropriate in your view?

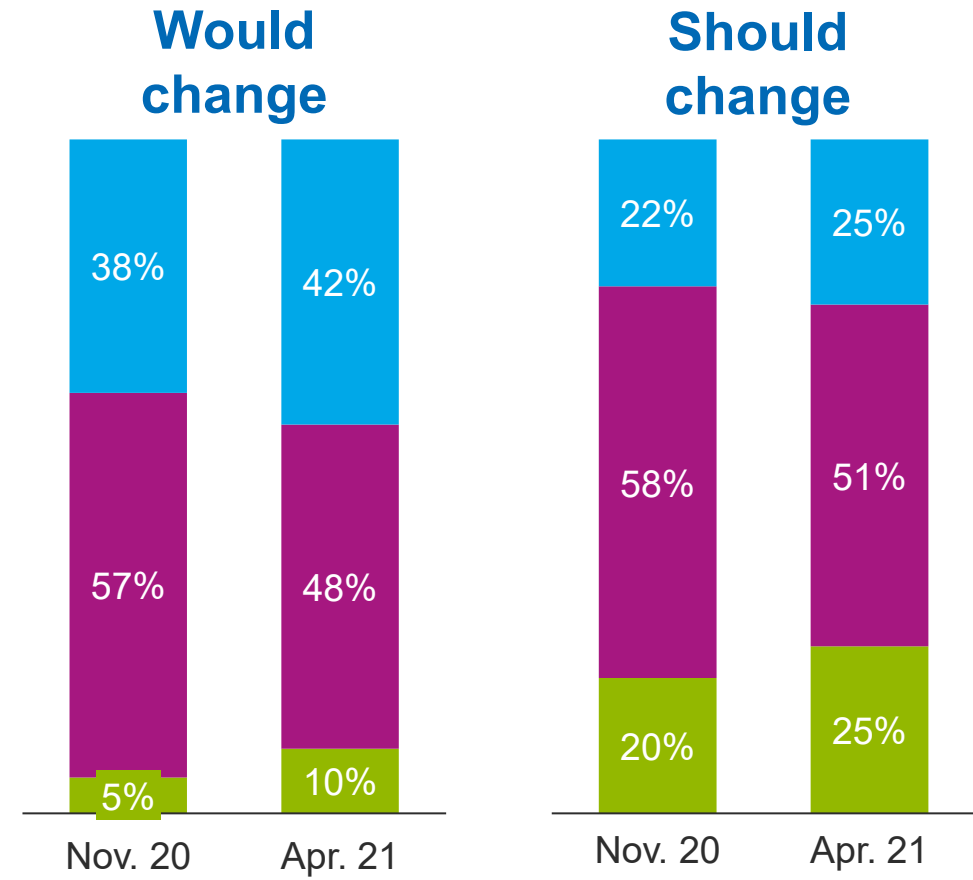


How do you feel about Vladimir Putin? Has your opinion changed in the last few months?

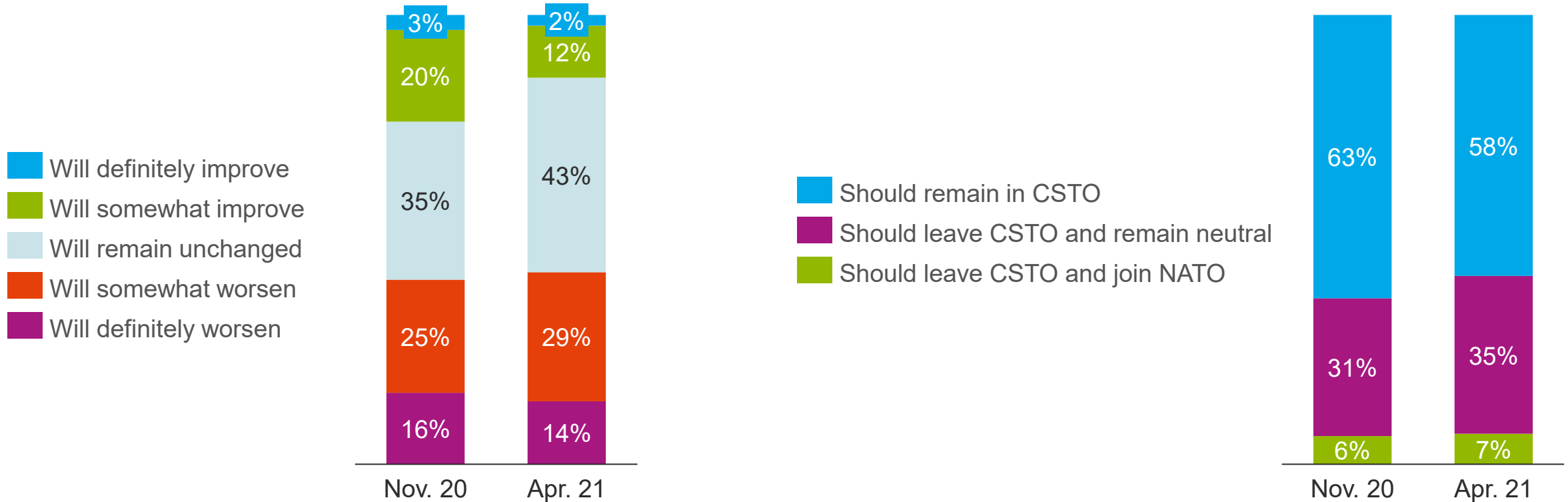


How would Belarusian foreign policy change if a pro-protest government came to power? How should it change?

- Oriented toward friendship and cooperation with Western states
- Oriented toward friendship and cooperation with both Western states and Russia
- Oriented toward friendship and cooperation with Russia



How will relations with Russia change if a pro-protest government comes to power? Should Belarus stay in the CSTO (ODKB), leave it and stay neutral, or leave it to join NATO?



What will happen if pro-protest forces come to power?



ATTITUDES TO FOREIGN STATES AND LEADERS

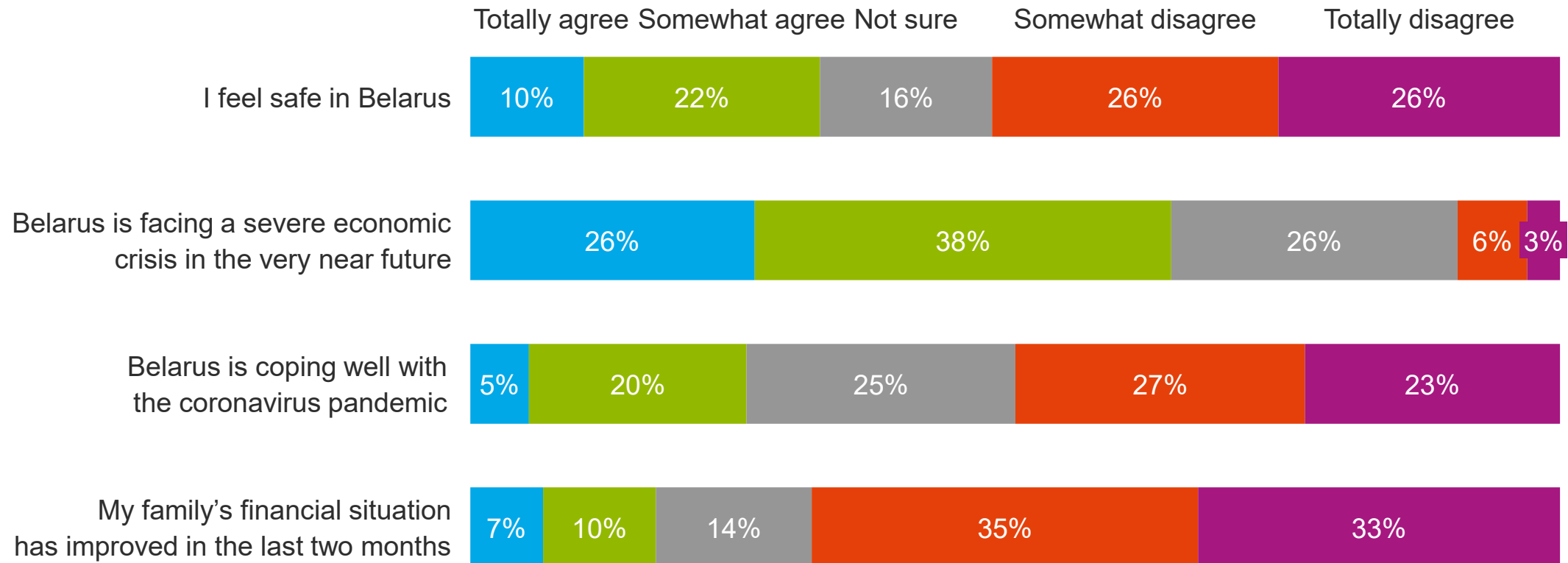
- Russia leads when it comes to positive attitudes: one in three Belarusians feel very positive about their neighbour and 79% feel positive in general.
- 71% Belarusians feel positive about China, which is the next highest indicator. At the same time, only 7% feel negative about China; the lowest indicator among all the states compared.
- Despite propaganda efforts, Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland and EU states are still perceived generally positively by more than 60% of Belarusians, with fewer than 20% feeling negative about them.
- The USA is a slight outlier: 24% of Belarusians perceive it negatively and only 53% positively. However, it also has the highest share of people who are uncertain – 24%.
- Among the leaders of Russia, Germany, the USA and China, Angela Merkel has the strongest reputation as a world leader, while Joe Biden has a lower score, which may be because he had not been in office long at the time of the survey and was still little known among Belarusians.
- Belarusians feel a strong affinity with Russians and with Ukrainians, although slightly less so. Among EU neighbours, more affinity is felt with Poles than Lithuanians.
- One in five Belarusians assesses relations with Russia as friendly and one in as neighborly, which combined amounts to about half the population assessing relations as good. 18% assess relations as neutral and 10% do not have a firm position, while the remaining 20% feel that relations are tense or even hostile.
- 23% think that relations have recently deteriorated, and 27% that they have improved.
- The position on Russian interference is consolidated enough: 58% think that Russia should remain neutral. The rest are almost equally divided between those who think Russia should support the protests (19%) and those who think Russia should support Lukashenka (23%).
- 40% have changed their attitude to the Russian government after it supported Lukashenka in the crisis and 73% are sure that Russia is his sole support – while only 31% believe that Russia's actions are focused on supporting the people of Belarus.
- Some propaganda claims have only marginal support: just 18% think that the protests are aimed against Russia and only 16% disagree that Russian media present the Belarusian crisis inaccurately.
- Attitudes to Vladimir Putin are more positive (56%) than negative (27%). However, attitudes towards the Russian president deteriorated in recent months for more than half of the Belarusian population.

FUTURE RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA AND THE WEST

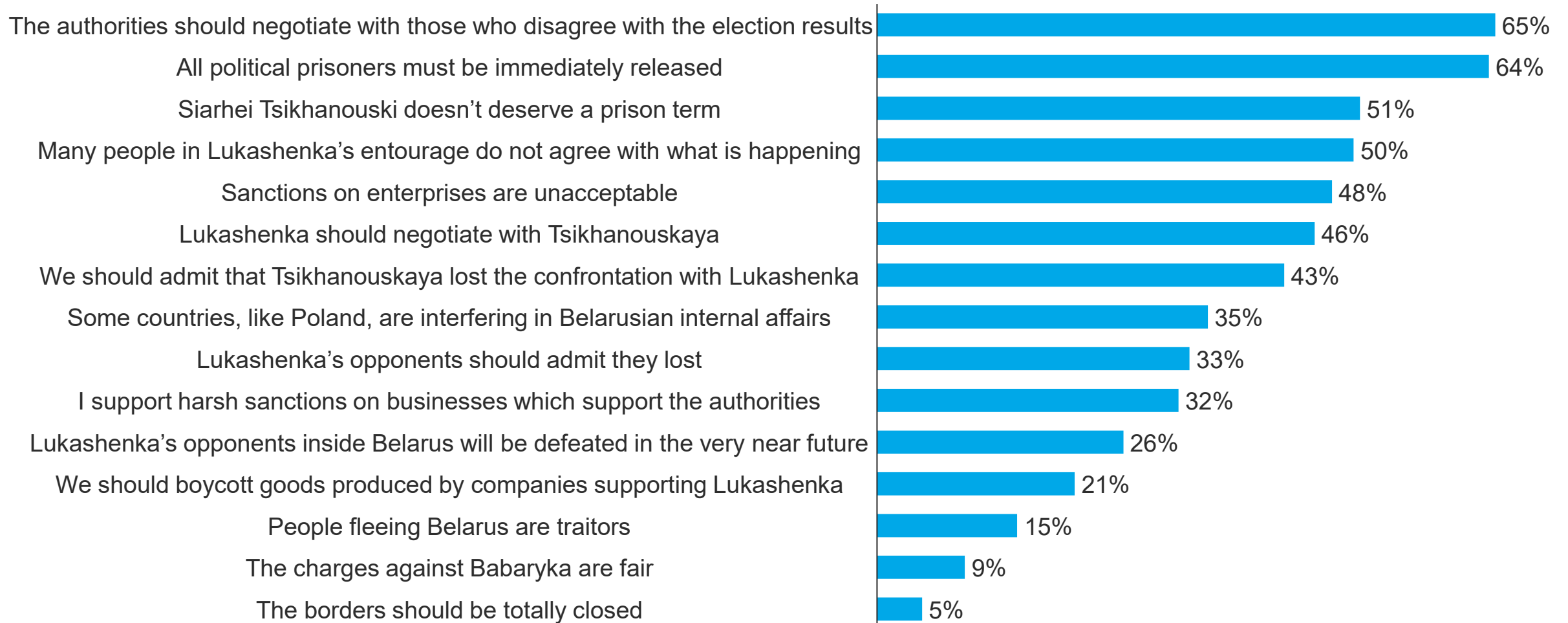
- The most popular option for co-operation with Russia is a single market (44%), followed by a free trade zone (33%). Other options have relatively low or marginal support. Most Belarusians (85%) consider free trade between the two countries to be a good thing, and 62% don't see any need for border controls.
- While 32% of Belarusians see a union with Russia as the most appropriate foreign policy, 46% would like to be in a union with both Russia and the EU simultaneously.
- Only 22% claim that it is acceptable to have a pro-Russian party in the parliament, but twice as many people do not have a clear position. Almost half the population think that Belarusian foreign policy in the event of a pro-protest government coming to power would be oriented toward friendship and cooperation with both Russia and the West, which correlates with how the majority thinks it should be. 42% expect that foreign policy would lean toward the EU in that situation, which is less acceptable: only 25% think it "should".
- Expectations were equal among those who foresee no change in relations with Russia and those who see them weakening after a change of power (both 43%); only 14% expect improvement.
- The proportion of respondents who think Belarus should remain in the CSTO is 58%, a slight decrease from November. 35% would like to see Belarus not belonging to any military bloc and a small share (7%) would prefer Belarus to join NATO.
- The most popular potential changes in foreign policy are: that Belarus should strive to enter the EU and conduct a pro-European policy; the withdrawal of Russian military facilities and assets; and establishing border controls with Russia and leaving the Union State.
- Radical changes, such as persecution for pro-Russian views, establishing a visa regime or depriving the Russian language of its official status, are less expected, but are still feared by about a quarter of the population.
- 21% fear that Belarus would lose its western territories and 18% its eastern territories.
- Almost half of the population considers Lukashenka to be the major obstacle for political stability and economic development and is sure he doesn't care about, and is a threat to, independence.

Public sentiment

To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?

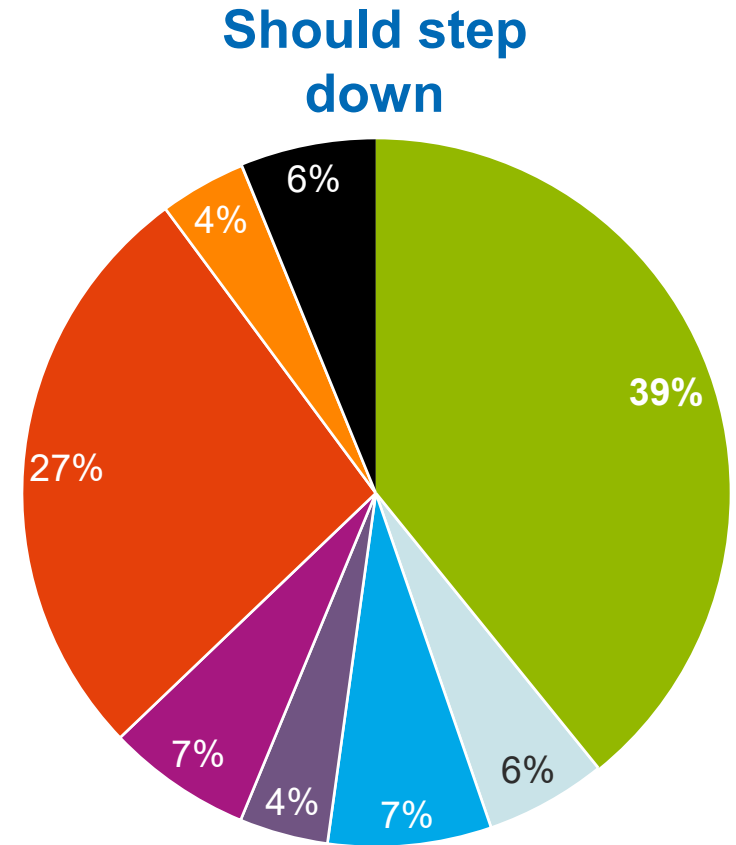
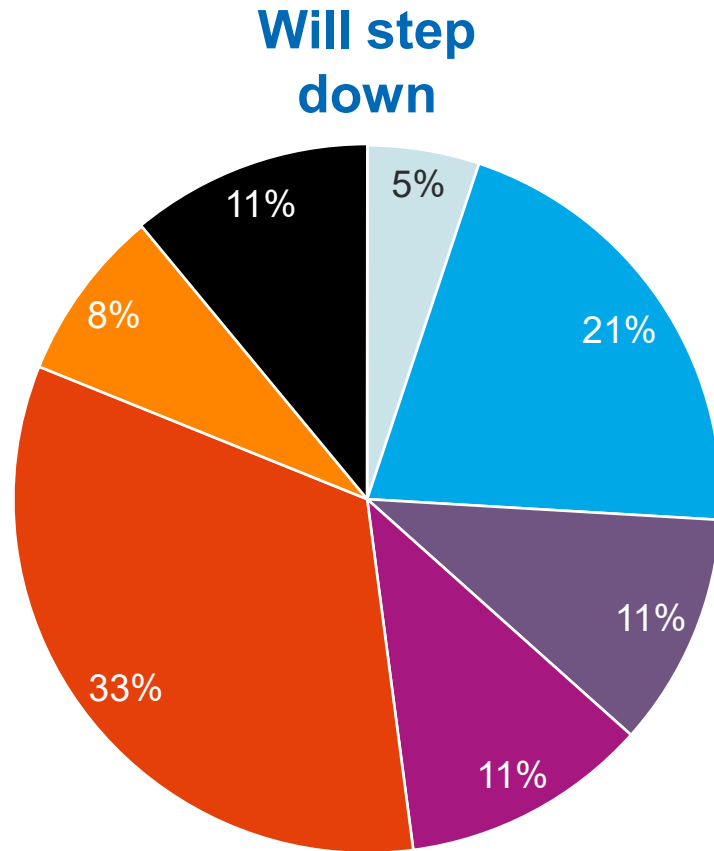


Which of these statements do you agree with?

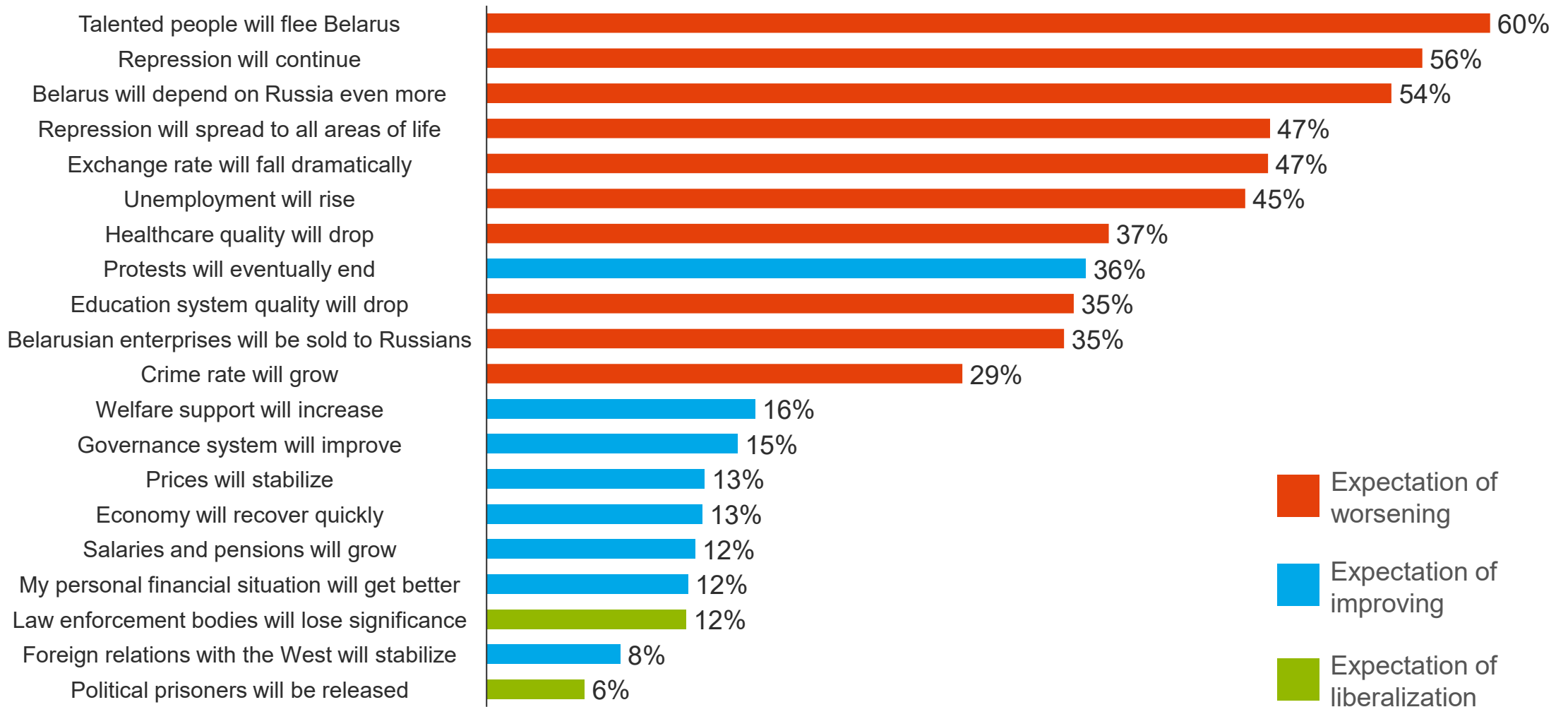


When will Lukashenka step down as president? When should he step down?

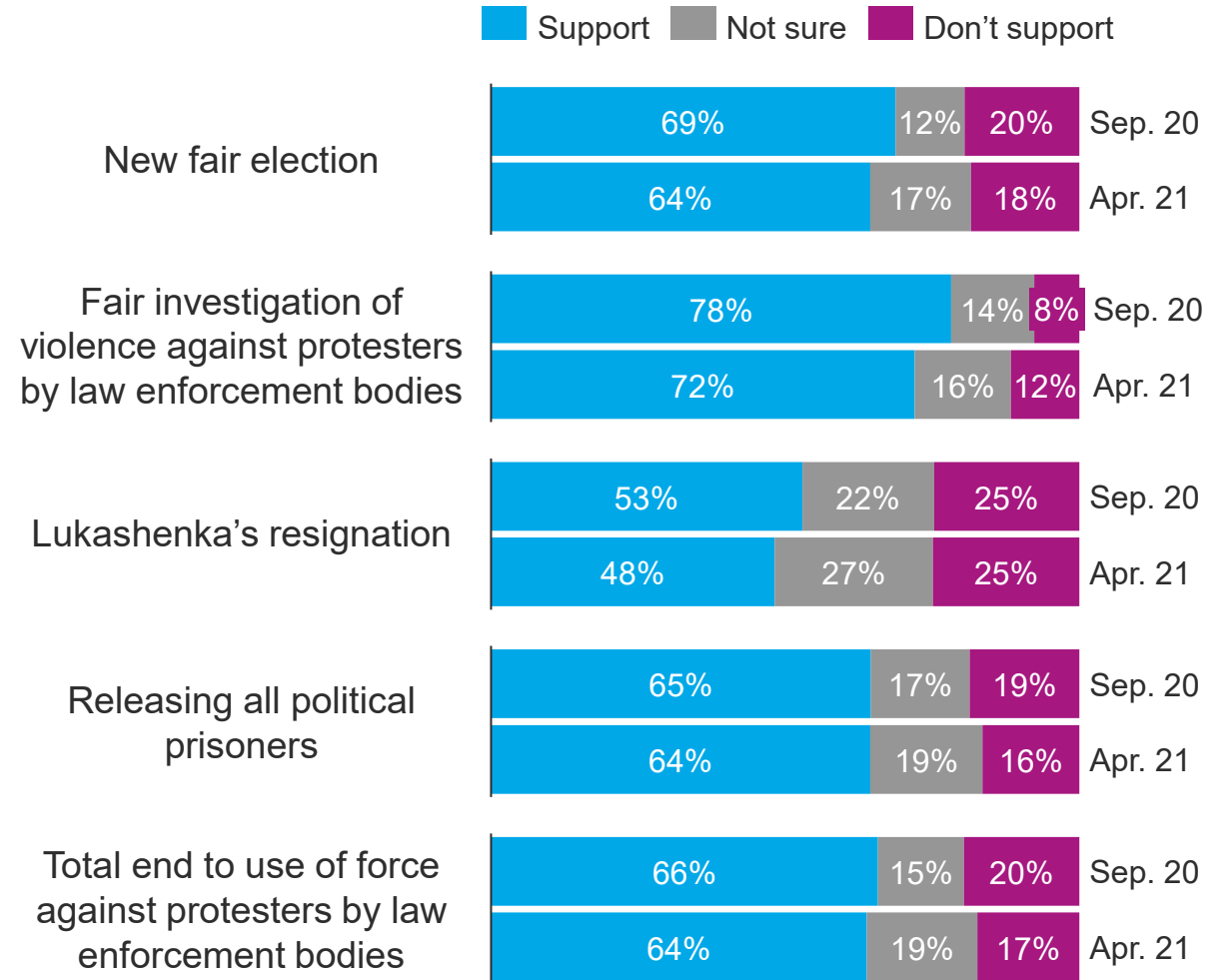
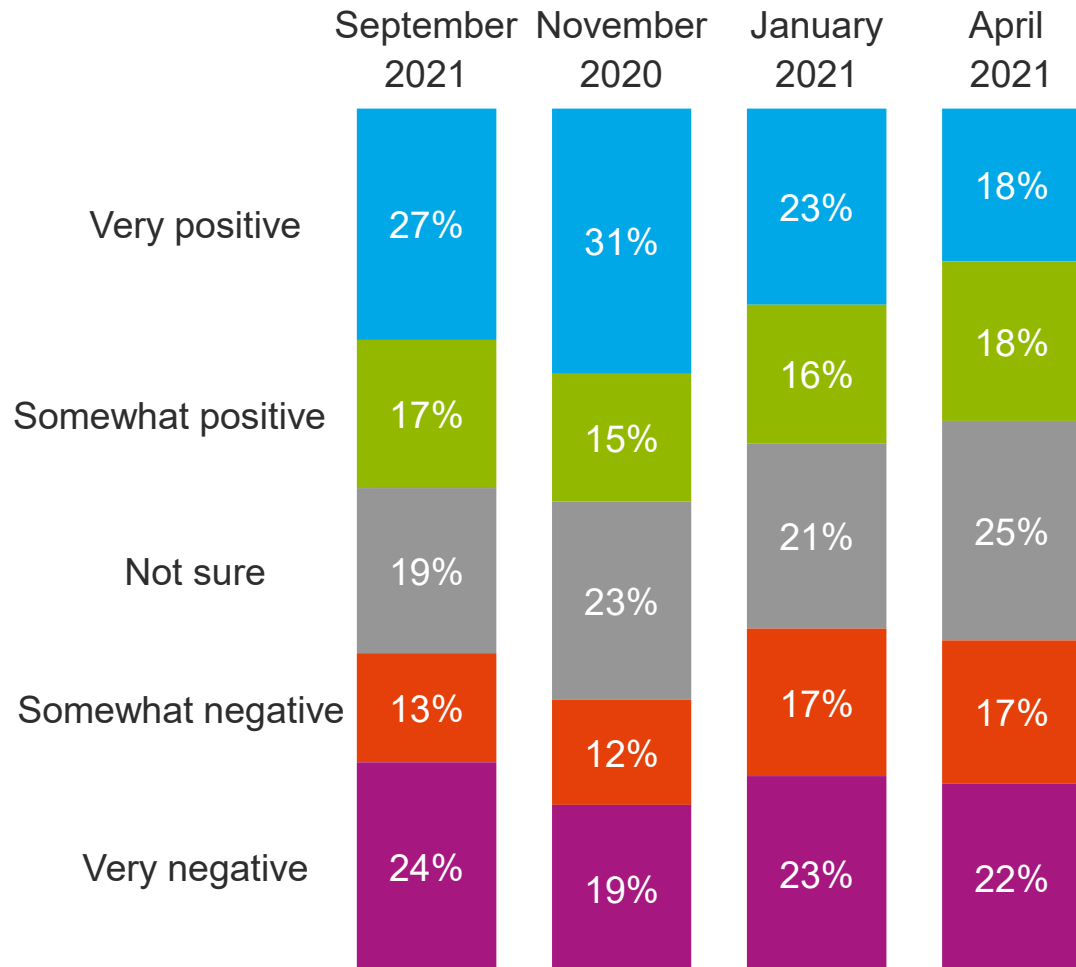
- Before June 2021
- Before the end of 2021
- In 2022
- In 2023-24
(before his term ends)
- In 2025
(when his term ends)
- In 2030
(after one more term)
- In 2035 or later
(at least two more terms)
- Immediately**



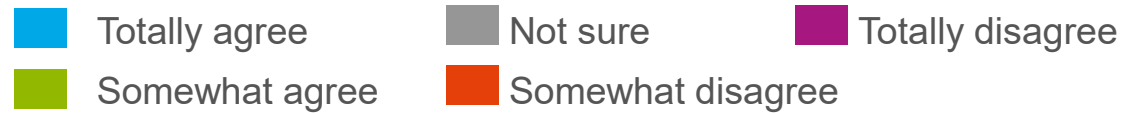
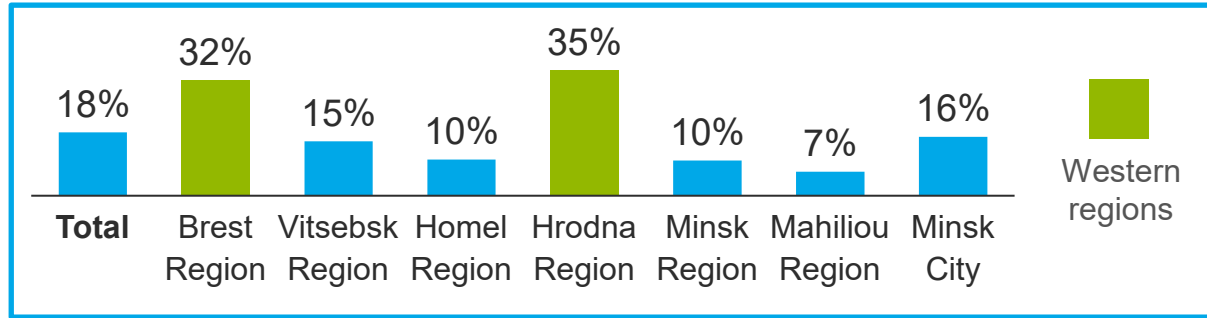
What will happen if Lukashenka doesn't leave?



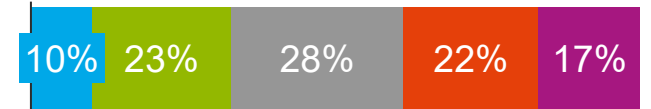
How do you feel about the Belarusian protests? Do you support the protesters' demands?



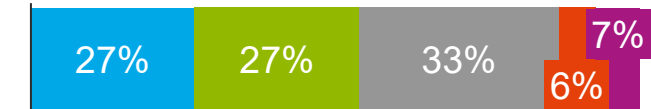
Do you know the date of September 17th? To what extent do you agree with these statements (based on the share of respondents who know the date, n=127)?



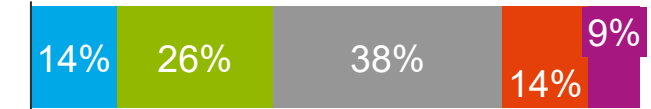
17.09.39 is a tragic date for Western Belarusians



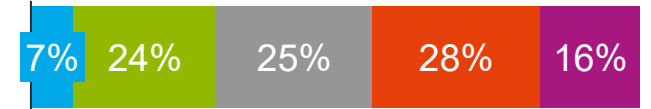
17.09.39 is the result of agreements between USSR and Nazi Germany



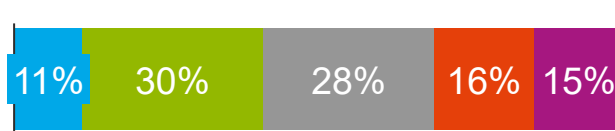
We need serious and detailed public discussion about 17.09.39



17.09.39 is a holiday



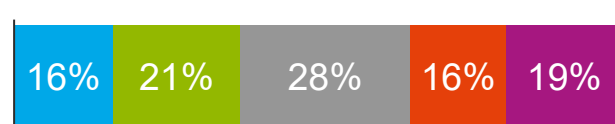
We should recognize 17.09.39 as liberation of Western Belarus from Polish occupation



17.09 is suitable for a "Belarusian unity day"



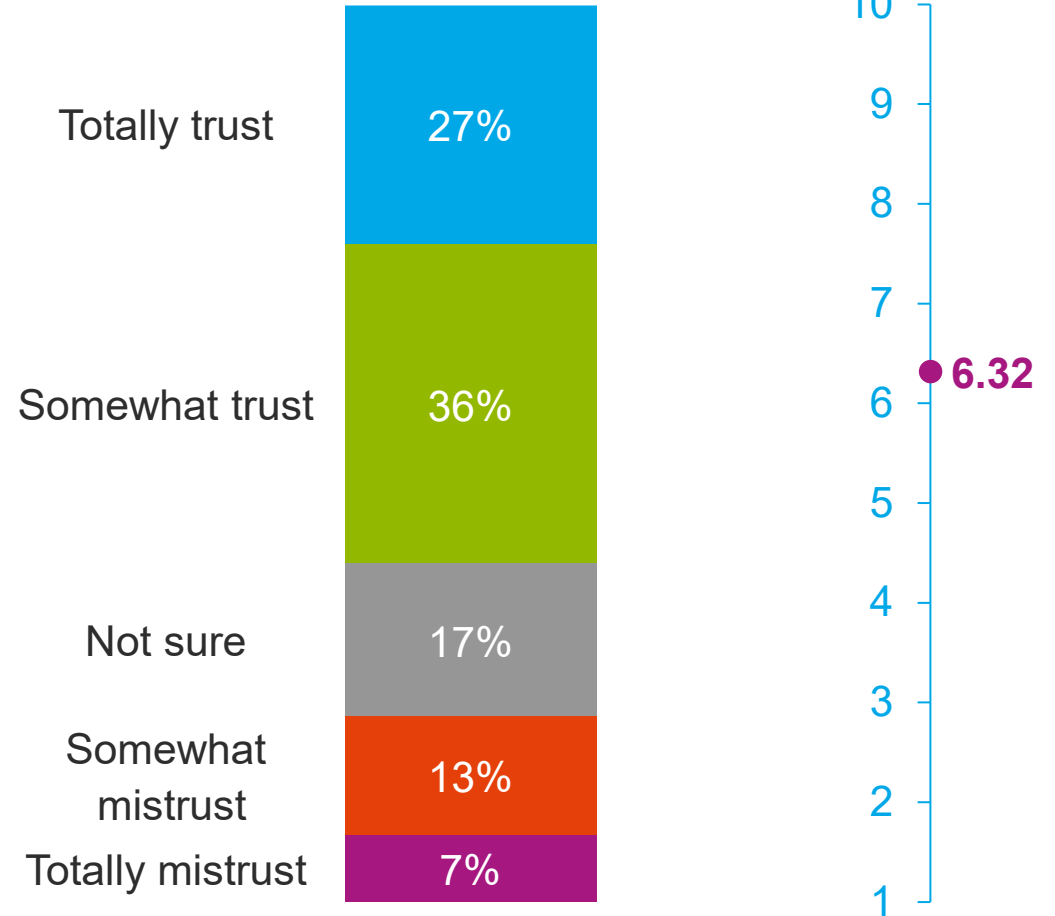
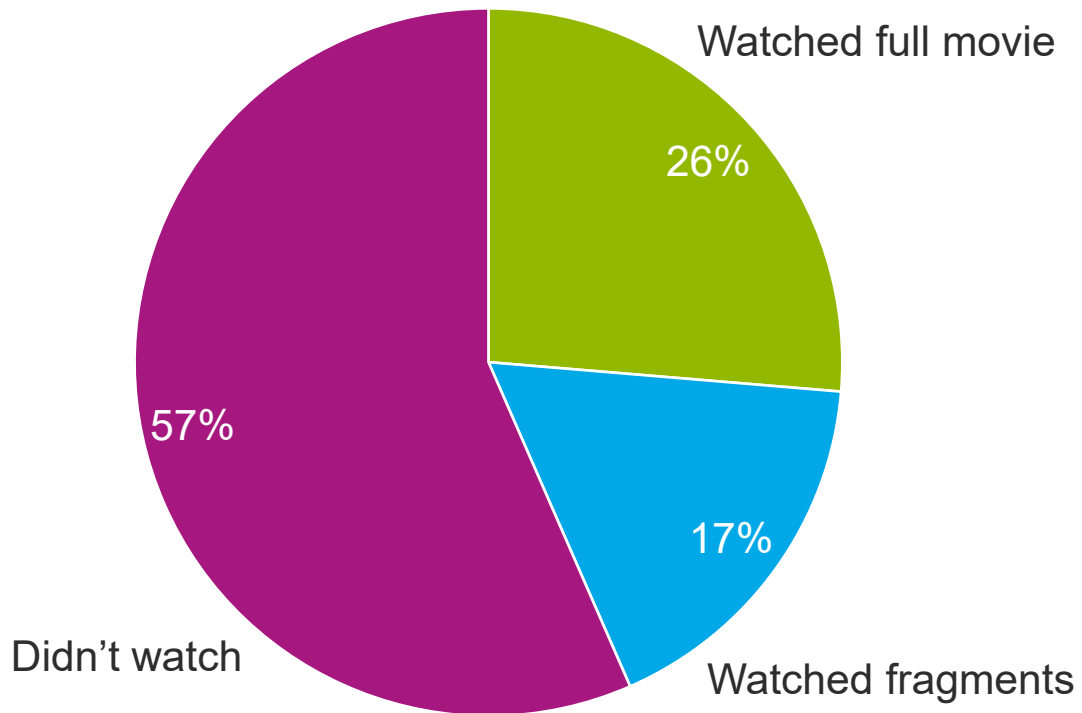
What happened on 17.09.39 was violent takeover of Western Belarus by USSR



Regardless of historical context it is right that territories that joined the BSSR on 17.09.39 became part of Belarus



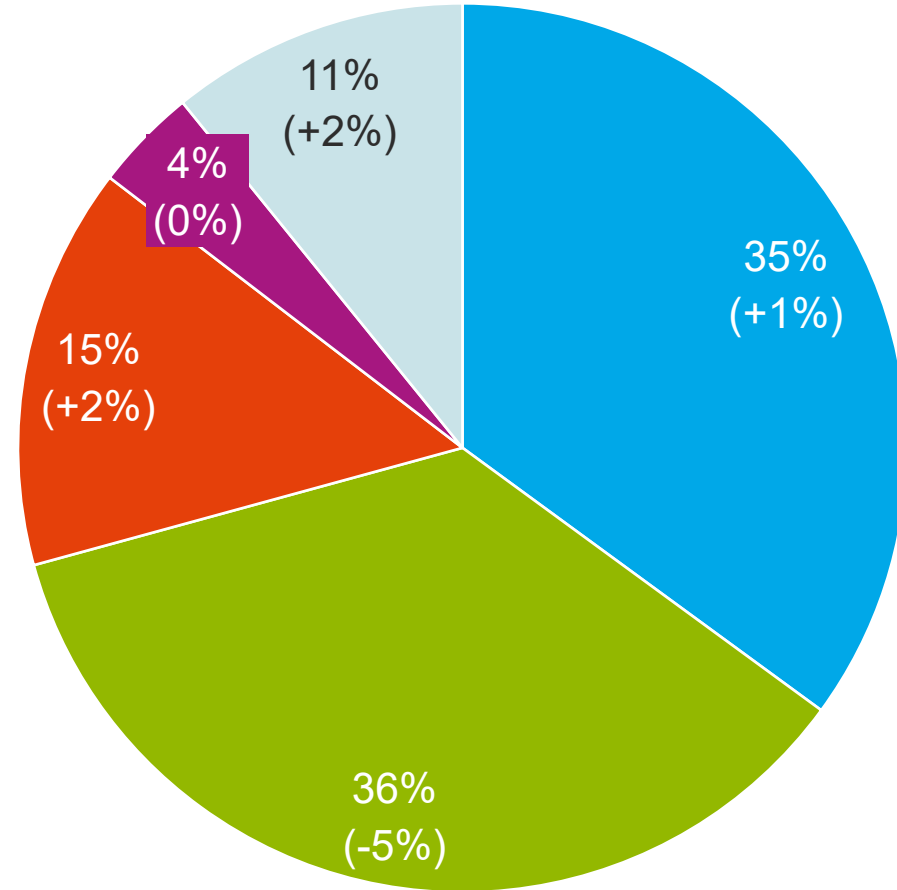
Have you watched NEXTA's movie "Lukashenka: Gold Mine"? Do you trust the information it presents? How would you rate the movie on a scale where 1 is "didn't like at all", and 10 is "absolutely loved it"?



Which of these statements about abortions do you agree with the most?

- Abortions should be allowed in all cases
- Abortions should be allowed in most cases
- Abortions should be banned in most cases
- Abortions should be totally banned
- Not sure/don't want to answer

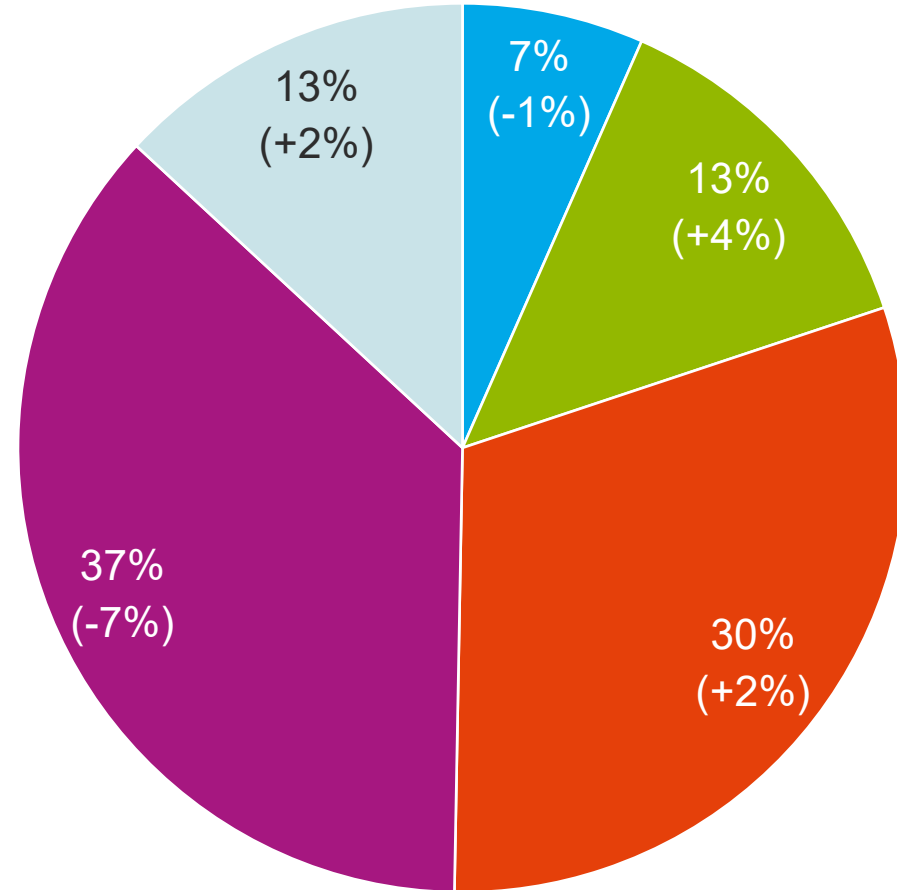
Change since November 2020 in parentheses



Some Belarusian media presented the opinion that Belarusian society is not ready to vote for women. Do you agree with this statement?

- Totally agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Totally disagree
- Not sure/don't want to answer

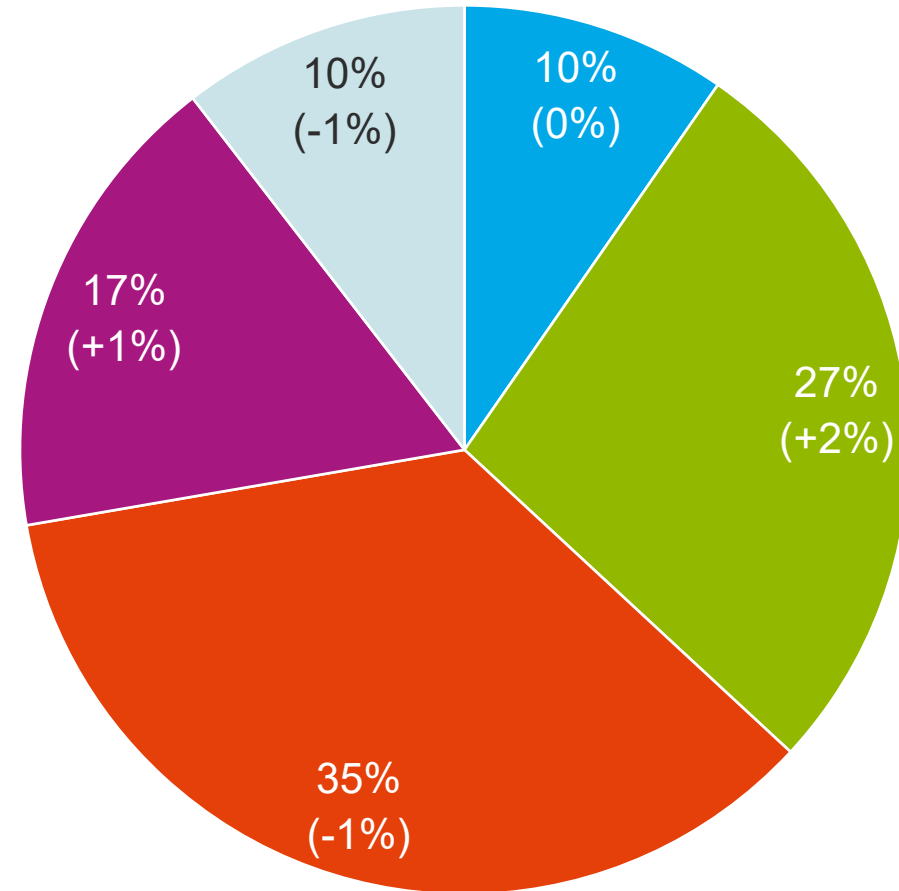
Changes since November 2020 in parentheses



Is wage inequality between women and men widespread in Belarus?

- Widespread
- Somewhat common
- Somewhat uncommon
- Very uncommon or non-existent
- Not sure/don't want to answer

Change since November 2020 in parentheses



GENERAL SENTIMENT

- The political crisis has led to a high level of uncertainty in Belarus: more than half of Belarusians do not feel safe in their own country.
- Two-thirds of Belarusians don't agree that their family's financial situation has improved lately. 62% expect a severe economic crisis in the very near future.
- Every second Belarusian thinks that Belarus has coped badly with the pandemic, while only a quarter think it is coping well.
- In general, most Belarusians have a consolidated opinion that the authorities should start negotiating with opponents and free all political prisoners.
- More than 90% of the population is convinced that the charges against Viktor Babaryka are unfair: even many Lukashenka supporters share this viewpoint.

THE FUTURE OF BELARUS AND LUKASHENKA

- More than half of Belarusians think that Lukashenka must leave immediately or before the end of 2021. 27% think that he should leave when his term ends in 2025. The opinion that Lukashenka should rule for another term beginning in 2025 is marginal – only 10% support this.
- Expectations are not so optimistic though: only 26% believe he will leave office this year. One in three think he will leave in 2025, a further 19% that he will stay on for further terms in office.
- If Lukashenka doesn't leave, people expect an increase in emigration and unemployment, the continuation of repression in all areas of life, falling exchange rates and increased dependency on Russia.
- Positive changes are expected by very few: from 12% to 16% believe that welfare support and wages will increase or that the economy will stabilize.
- The release of political prisoners seems impossible without Lukashenka's resignation for 94% of Belarusians, while the vast majority of the population believe that the law enforcement agencies will retain the political significance they gained recently.

PROTESTS

- The number of people feeling positive about the protests is slowly declining.
- Most people (72%) support a fair investigation into the use of force against protesters, with only 12% being against an investigation (a slight increase from 8% in September).
- Other demands, such as for a new fair election, the release of all political prisoners, and the cessation of the use of force, are supported by 64%, with 17-19% uncertain.
- The least popular protest demand is Lukashenka's resignation, which is supported by 48% and unsupported by 25%.

SEPTEMBER 17th, 1939

- The date of the Soviet invasion of Poland, which led to the annexation of eastern Poland and the reunion of Belarusian lands, has recently been promoted by the Belarusian authorities as a possible "Belarusian Unity Day" holiday. However, only 18% of Belarusians know the date. Residents in the western regions of Brest and Hrodna have better-than-average knowledge – 32% and 35% respectively.

- Those who know this historical event mostly agree that it was the date when reunion started and, regardless of the historical context, think it is right that western Belarus became part of the BSSR. People also agree that what happened was the result of agreements between the USSR and Nazi Germany.
- However, opinions on whether it was a violent takeover and whether it is a "tragic" date are highly mixed. Only 31% consider the date a holiday and 61% disagree or are not sure if it is suitable as the basis of a "Belarusian Unity Day".

OTHER INSIGHTS

- 26% of Belarusians watched the whole movie "Lukashenka: Gold Mine" by NEXTA, with a further 17% having seen at least excerpts. Just 20% distrust the information in the film, while 63% trust it.
- Opinion on abortions is still consolidated, with only 19% thinking they should be banned in most or all cases.
- The same applies to Lukashenka's infamous statement that society in Belarus is not ready to have a female president: only 20% agree with this opinion.
- 52% don't think there is a problem of wage inequality between men and women in Belarus, while 37% do see an issue.

The five most frequently asked questions

Are your critics right to say the polling is politicized?

Sufficient information on the methodology is included in each research report, and everyone is free to make their own value judgments. By reading our research methodology, a reader can assess any criticism leveled against the polling. We strive to be as objective as possible, which is why we provide information on the methods and timing of the study, on the sample, and on the wording of the questions and all response options.

Also, for transparency's sake, we publish the raw data (all respondents' answers) for each round of polling. Anyone can check our statistical calculations and carry out their own analysis based on these data.

What methods do you use in your research?

We interview about a thousand people every two months. The composition of our sample corresponds to the general structure of the urban population of Belarus by gender, age, education and size of the city of residence of the respondents. The statistical error in our research is 3%; our data can be wrong by that in either direction.

We conduct the survey via an online panel using the computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) method, which in practice means that it is limited only to internet users. Thanks to this, we are able to carry out these studies very quickly. Very importantly, survey participants feel more secure when they fill out the online survey themselves than they would if they were answering the questions over the phone.

Is a sample size of under a thousand people enough?

Yes, it is. There are several sampling models that are used for Belarus and which represent the entire population of the country with a specified error (“the sampling error”). The sizes of these samples range from about 600 to 2,500 people. For example, the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences [conducts research with a sample of 600 people](#).

The choice of model used to obtain a representative sample population is determined by the objectives of the study, the resources available, and time constraints. In conditions of political instability, the time factor is critical: the situation is changing rapidly and therefore surveys need to be conducted in a short timeframe or else there is a risk that information collected at the very beginning of the study becomes out-of-date.

For these reasons, a sample size of 1,000 people was chosen. This is sufficient for our research objectives.

Why are you using computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI)?

Sociologists constantly change their methods of collecting data. Initially, sociologists collected data live (face-to-face), later telephone interviewing became the dominant method, and now sociologists most frequently use online surveys.

This is not a significant methodological problem, since the number of internet users in Belarus is among the highest in the former republics of the USSR. According to a study by DataReportal, in 2020 [Belarus had 7.8 million internet](#) users, which is 83% of the total population. According to rough estimates, this is about 90-95% of the population over 15 years old.

CAWI is widely used both on its own and in combination with the traditional face-to-face and/or telephone surveys. Its main advantages are the speed of data collection and the relatively low cost, without any loss of data quality. For example, online polls are used by reputable social science services such as [Gallup](#) and [the Pew Research Center](#).

In addition to these features of CAWI methodology, we took into account the epidemiological situation in the country. Remote polling allowed us to "maintain social distancing" and minimize the risk of the spread of coronavirus.

Another important motivation is the restrictions on sociological research in Belarus. We cannot risk the freedom and wellbeing of our interviewees. Accordingly, the CAWI technique seems optimal.

Why doesn't your research include rural populations?

There are both organizational and methodological difficulties. Despite these we are working on solutions and planning to expand the study to this segment of the population. It is not yet possible to give exact dates, but rural populations will certainly be included in the sample in the future.

At the same time, our preliminary analysis of the situation showed that, due to the level of urbanization in the country and the specifics of the information and communication space, there are no critical differences between answers given by rural and urban residents. Undoubtedly, Belarusian villagers differ from the inhabitants of Minsk, but their worldview is similar to that of residents in small towns.

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