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IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD

# GLOBSEC Trends 2022

# Lithuania

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# Focus on Lithuania

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a shift in public opinion among Lithuanian population. While support for the West and its structures has always been robust in the country, the war has stiffened and broadened this resolve.

Lithuanians now express the greatest support for EU membership across all countries surveyed by GLOBSEC Trends. A resounding majority also believe that Russia poses a threat to Lithuania's security and values. Few, meanwhile, hold favourable views

of Vladimir Putin. In GLOBSEC Trends 2022, Lithuania, together with Czechia and Poland, turned out to be the three countries with the greatest awareness concerning foreign malign influence and the most resolute pro-Western attitudes.

this respect, the last two years have also witnessed an increase in satisfaction with democracy and the governance system in the country. This rise, however, is countered by growing distrust in the media and greater buy-in to some manipulative and polarising narratives such as the idea that "liberal democracy threatens our values and identity".

Political and state representatives have publicly shared this disdain for foreign malign influence and these views have likely contributed to the high levels of awareness among respondents in Lithuania about the problem. These findings hold for both Russia and China, with around 40% considering Beijing to be a threat to the country's security and/or values.

This report scrutinises key trends shaping society in Lithuania this year. It examines the socio-demographic groups driving the growth in support for the West and democracy and identifies where the above-mentioned distrust still resonates most.

Last but not least, despite not heading the regional charts in



# Lithuania on the West

Support for the West and its structures remains robust in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A spike in pro-Western attitudes, since 2021, has been measured across the population. That said, women, people with less formal education and rural residents are the key drivers, especially as it pertains to EU and NATO membership. The latter two groups had traditionally been among the more reluctant segments of society in espousing pro-Western sentiment.

While upward trends have been identified for both EU and NATO support, the EU has benefitted from slightly higher shifts among women and rural residents, while the level of educational attainment shifts are on par for both institutions.

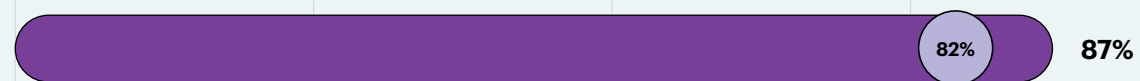
In 2021, support for EU membership was slightly weaker among women but now stands at the same level for both men and women at 87-88%. A similar dynamic is apparent among rural and urban populations, with the former exhibiting a greater uptick in support for membership over the past year. The key explanation for these changes should be seen in the war in Ukraine. Russia's belligerent attack has underlined the vulnerability of countries not entrenched in Western structures and heightened the realisation that Lithuania's membership in them is indispensable.

Both EU and NATO enjoy overwhelming support among those with university education. In 2022, people with less formal education, nevertheless, have largely equalised these numbers through a multiple percentage point jump in support.

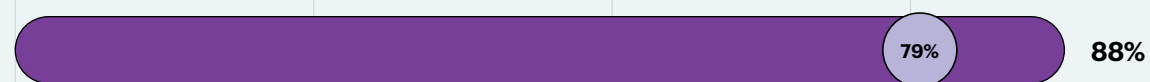
## Support for EU membership based on gender

2021 2022

### Male



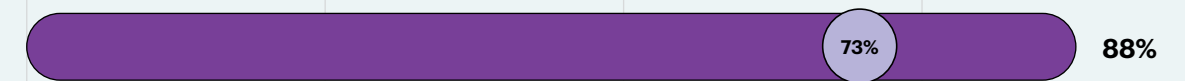
### Female



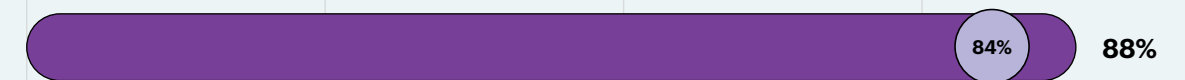
## Support for EU membership based on settlement

2021 2022

### Rural



### Urban



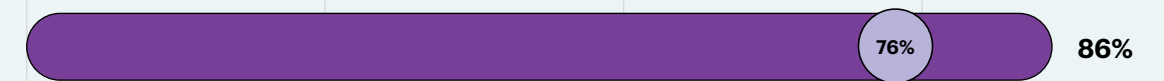
## Support for EU membership according to education

2021 2022

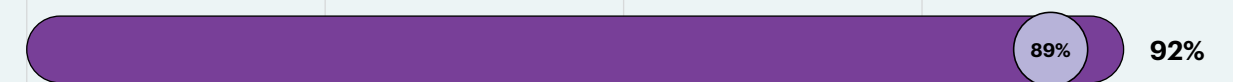
### Lower education



### Secondary with school leaving exam



### University



# Strategic partners

Greater support for the EU and NATO coincides with preferences for Western partners to serve as security guarantees and awareness concerning attempts by authoritarian actors to undermine the West and Central European societies. The US is now regarded as a key strategic partner for Lithuania by 61% – an increase from 53% in 2021. The UK, for its part, is identified a strategic partner by 26%, an uptick from 14% a year ago. On the other hand, Germany, like in most countries in the region, experienced a drop from 58% to 49%.

The declining perception of Germany as a strategic partner across most of the region should be seen as a reaction to German hesitancy and a lack of action vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine, especially in the first months of the war. The US and the UK, by contrast, reacted firmly and swiftly from the get-go, reassuring their role as key security guarantees and allies in the region.

The drop for Germany was largest among urban population, university educated respondents and people aged more than 55 years. The older respondents, interestingly, chose to rather shift their support to the UK than the US.

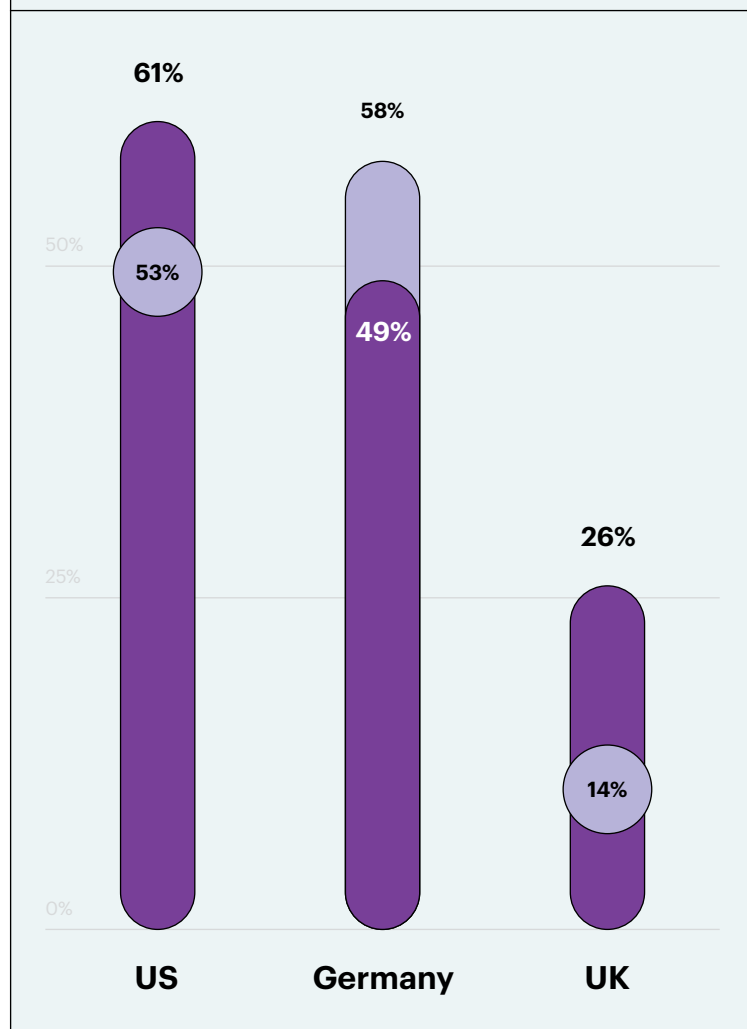
The shifts between different socio-demographic groups over the year for Germany and the UK caused alignment across most of the socio-demographic groups. In other words, there were no large differences in views between different groups as it concerns Germany and the UK in 2022.

The US, on the other hand, gained more trust among people aged 18-55 and those living in rural areas. Still though, younger and more educated respondents tend to favour the US more.

## Share of respondents choosing either the US, Germany or the UK as one of the two key strategic partners for their country (from a list of 6)\*

\*China, France, Germany, Russia, USA, UK were offered in random order

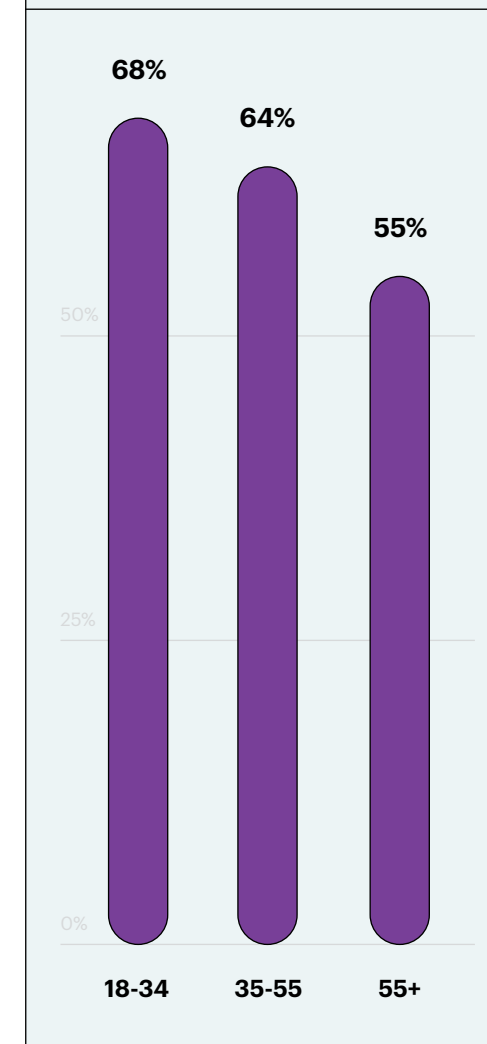
2021 2022



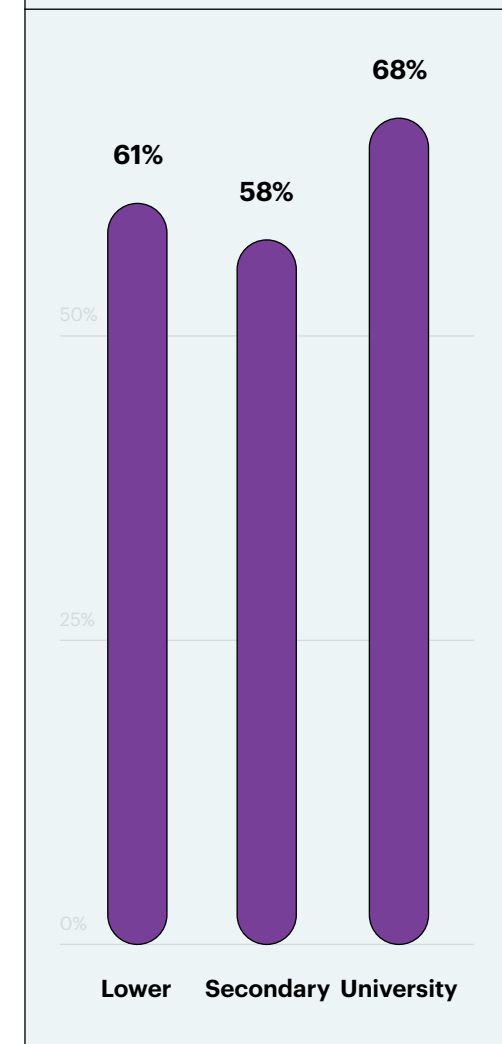
A shift towards the West among a broader segment of the rural population in Lithuania is also reflected in the fact that more rural respondents (87%) perceive Russia to be a security threat to Lithuania than urban residents (81%). This may be potentially explained by the larger presence of the Russian minority (5% of the population) in urban areas including Vilnius, Visaginas and Klaipėda – this subset could be more reluctant to label Russia a threat.

**A resounding 87% of rural residents perceive Russia to be a security threat to Lithuania compared to 81% of respondents living in urban areas.**

## Support for the US as a key strategic partner based on age



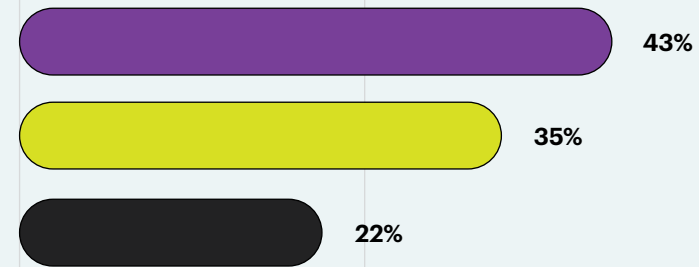
## Support for the US as a key strategic partner based on education



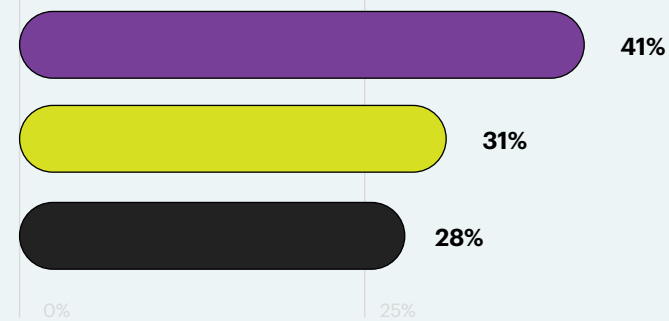
## Perception of China among all respondents

Yes No Do not know

### China as a security threat



### Chinese government as a threat to identity and values



## Awareness of China

Lithuanians indicate greater awareness about China compared to the average citizens across Central Europe - it is a country with the least respondents replying "No" to questions on whether China is a security threat to Lithuania and whether the Chinese government can be considered a threat to Lithuanian values and/or identity. This pattern is likely related to the openness of Lithuanian public officials towards criticising China, culminating in the opening of a Taiwanese representation office in Vilnius and subsequent economic and rhetorical reactions by China in response.<sup>1</sup> The episode was widely covered by the media in Lithuania and probably influenced public opinion and awareness about Beijing.

At the same time, the absolute majority did not respond "Yes" to either of the two questions as around 20% - 30% of respondents did not know how to respond. The higher level of uncertainty about China constitutes both a vulnerability and an opportunity for stakeholders to shift public perceptions in either direction.

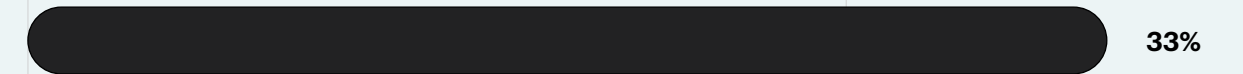
Regarding perceptions that China represents a security threat, uncertainty was largest among respondents with less education and younger people aged 18-34. But as it pertains to recognition of the Chinese government as a threat to values and the identity of Lithuanians, greater uncertainty was apparent among female and older respondents above 55 years old.

## Those who do not know whether the Chinese government should be considered a threat to Lithuania's values and identity

### Male



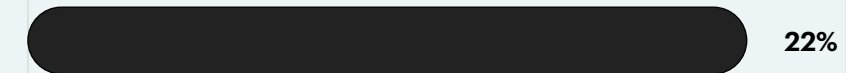
### Female



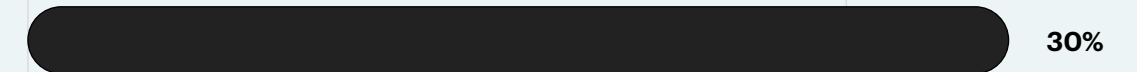
### 18-34 y.o.



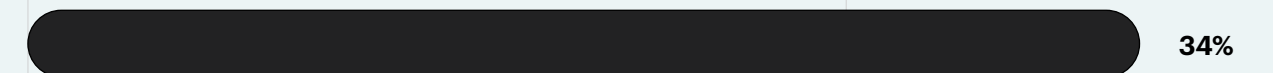
### 35-55 y.o.



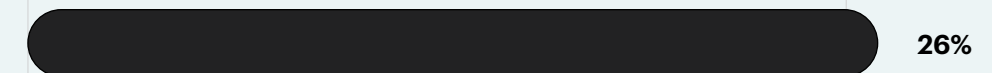
### 55+ y.o.



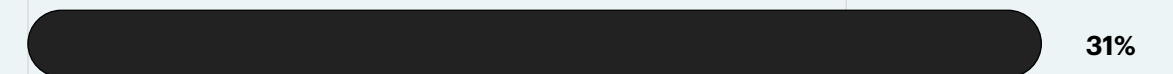
### Lower education



### Secondary education



### University education



# Democracy satisfaction

While trust in government has remained nearly static since 2020 and presidential trust has fluctuated (69% in 2020, 54% in 2021 and 63% in 2022), overall satisfaction with how democracy works in the country has increased since 2020.

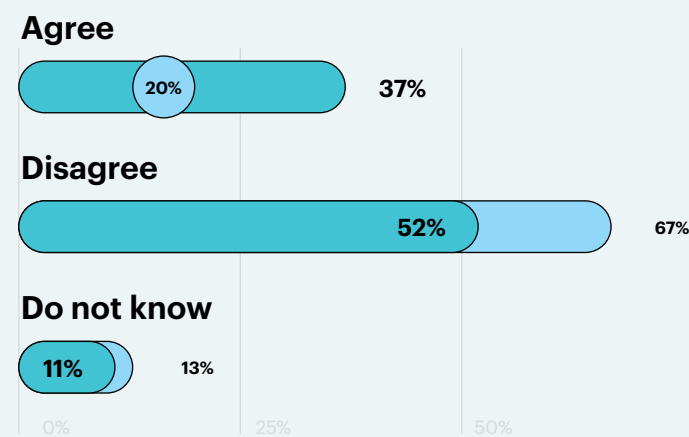
## These findings are based on three questions that address feelings of inclusion and satisfaction with the system:

- If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied with how democracy works in Lithuania?
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with:
  - The needs of people like you are well taken into account by the political system in Lithuania.
  - Who holds the power in the government does not matter, nothing will change.

All three questions measured some positive development in favour of satisfaction and feeling of inclusion. The shifts were more dynamic concerning the latter two questions as can be seen on the graph.

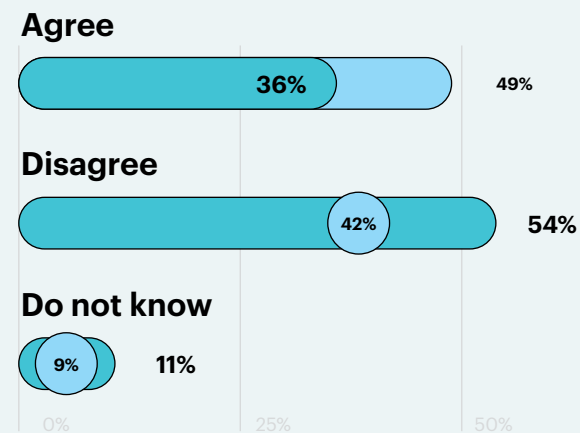
### The needs of people like you are broadly taken into account by the political system in Lithuania.

2020 2022



### It does not matter who holds government power – nothing will change regardless.

2020 2022



The largest increases in satisfaction occurred among women, university-educated respondents and people living in urban areas. Following Lithuania's legislative elections in late 2020, the government changed. These shifts, therefore, may have occurred among socio-demographic groups directly benefiting from government policies.

The youngest age group polled in the survey (18-34 years old), in general, tends to be more likely to respond "do not know" to questions about democracy, autocratic systems and satisfaction with domestic political situation. This pattern does not hold on questions concerning geopolitics though - here young people indicate greater decisiveness.

At the same time though, since government trust has not changed dramatically over the past two years, the shifts might also be explained by a growing sense of gratitude for Lithuania's democratic system and the security and prosperity it provides. This comes against the backdrop of appalling measures by the Belarussian regime and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both cases have underscored the brutality and oppressiveness of authoritarian systems.

## Media distrust

Greater satisfaction with the system, however, is still coupled with endemic distrust towards the media. Trust in the press decreased from 44% in 2020 to 37% in 2021 and remained constant this year at only 37%, whereas distrust increased from 43% to 51% since 2020..

Such distrust may be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which left some societal scars. The pandemic, and especially government restrictions of basic freedoms designed to limit the spread of the virus, elevated the popularity of many radical actors previously deemed fringe figures. These actors, exploiting societal frustrations from the restrictions, organised protests and managed to gain greater traction on social media. This presence possibly swayed some segments of society to express greater distrust in the so-called "mainstream" media.<sup>2</sup>

Distrust is highest among older people – 56% of those older than 55 distrust the media compared to 45% of people aged 18-34. At the same time, 12% do not know whether to trust or distrust the media in the country, a distinct pattern among younger respondents (17%).

**51% of respondents in Lithuania distrust the media.**

# Recommendations

## ① Support democratic participation among young people.

Young people showed greater reluctance to respond to questions concerning democracy in Lithuania and satisfaction with the system. Their indecisiveness might be related to a lack of information on the matter or a lack of inclusion. Support for activities that would foster democratic participation of young people might bridge the gap.

## ② Keep raising awareness about China.

While Lithuanians express among the strongest levels of awareness about Chinese influence in the region, a considerable part of society still does not have an opinion on whether China should be considered a security threat to the country – this is especially true of women, younger people and those with less education. These groups should be better targeted via media and other channels they tend to consume on a regular basis.

## ③ Maintain pro-Western momentum.

Overwhelming Lithuanian support for Western structures should be nurtured through sustained strategic communication and awareness raising campaigns from the state, civil society and the media. This backing must not be taken for granted, especially amid potentially looming economic crises.

## ④ Use threat awareness about Russia to communicate difficult messages.

At the same time, resounding support for Western structures and awareness concerning Russia as an aggressor can be seized to communicate difficult messages, including the need for energy cuts and explanations for rising inflation and poverty. The understanding that Russia is responsible for societal economic distress should be cemented among the public at this time when the public is most aware about the Kremlin.

## ⑤ Target media distrust.

While Lithuania scores high in media freedom indexes, distrust is still apparent among a majority of the population and 12% do not know whether to trust or distrust the media in the country. Bolstering trust in the media should be prioritised to ensure the public is not deceived by fringe sources propagating manipulative narratives.

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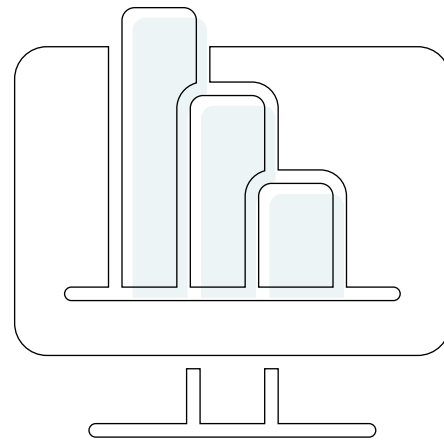
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## Methodology

The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2022 on a representative sample of the population in nine countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The surveys were conducted on a sample of 1000 respondents per country (9,000 respondents altogether) using stratified multistage random sampling in the form of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). In all countries, the profiles of the respondents were representative of the country according to gender, age, education, place of residence and size of settlement. For the purposes of graphical data visualisation, the results were rounded to full numbers. To improve the readers' experience, the responses in closed questions with a scale were generalised. For example, a question with options definitely agree/ rather agree/ rather disagree /definitely disagree was merged to agree / disagree. The opinion poll in Lithuania was conducted by Vilmorus and coordinated by FOCUS, s.r.o. agency and the comparative results were published in May 2022 as **GLOBSEC Trends 2022**. The results have been compared to polls conducted with the use of consistent methodology since 2020.

## References

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/china-condemns-opening-of-taiwan-office-in-lithuania-as-egregious-act>
- 2 <https://www.delfi.lt/en/politics/several-thousand-people-protest-in-vilnius-against-covid-19-restrictions.d?id=88156123>; <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1616501/vsd-warns-of-pro-kremlin-and-anti-vaxx-provocations-on-lithuania-s-independence-day>; <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1547928/trumpism-ss-uniforms-and-pandemic-populism-key-actors-behind-lithuania-s-august-riot-lrt-investigation-ii>





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