Exploring Interdependencies Between Identity and Resilience: Lessons from the War in Ukraine for the Baltic States

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between social identity and societal resilience, focusing on Ukraine and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) in the context of the ongoing malign external pressure and manipulation from Russia. By analysing Ukraine's resilience to Russian aggression and its implications for the Baltic States, the research underscores the role of identity as both a strength and vulnerability in national cohesion. Using a multi-method comparative case study approach, the study integrates social identity theory and societal resilience theory to explore how identity forms under external pressure and influences resilience. Data were collected through expert surveys, focus group discussions, and document analysis, culminating in a simplified comparative matrix to compare identity and resilience factors across the four countries. The findings highlight that Ukraine's collective solidarity, trust in institutions, and shared

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vision for the future fortified its resilience. Lessons from Ukraine emphasise the importance of inclusive identity frameworks, institutional trust, and proactive and whole-of-society resilience planning for the Baltic States to counter similar threats.

10.1   Introduction

The strategic manipulation of identity has become a formidable weapon in modern hybrid warfare, undermining societal cohesion and resilience. Russia's actions in Ukraine and its perceived broader sphere of influence illustrate this tactic vividly, particularly in the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Donbas. These events revealed an attempt to exploit minority groups to fracture national unity. Despite expectations that Ukraine's internal divisions, especially among its Russian-speaking population, would compromise its ability to resist, the nation demonstrated extraordinary resilience rooted in a strong sense of identity and unity.

For Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the parallels are striking. While their historical and sociopolitical contexts differ from Ukraine's, they share a history of Soviet occupation and contend with significant Russian-speaking minorities. These factors render the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) vulnerable to similar external pressures, underscoring the urgent need to understand the interdependencies between identity and societal resilience. Understanding the interdependencies between identity and resilience in this context is essential for developing strategies to counteract such threats.

This study adopts a comparative case study approach, analysing Ukraine as the primary case and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as comparative cases. Using a multidisciplinary framework grounded in social identity theory and societal resilience theory, the research investigates how identity forms under external pressure, influences resilience, and what lessons can be drawn for the Baltic States from Ukraine's experience. Through combined methodology, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers and strategists in the Baltic States, emphasising the importance of reinforcing societal resilience in the face of external manipulation.

10.2   Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study employs a multi-method comparative case study approach to examine the interplay between identity and societal resilience in Ukraine and the Baltic States. The methodology is structured into four stages: literature review, expert survey, document analysis, and comparative analysis. The process began with exploring existing literature aimed at identifying the primary constituents and key factors shaping identity on one hand and societal resilience on the other. In addition, the literature review sought to identify theoretical frameworks that facilitate an in-depth investigation of the interplay between identity and resilience at the national level

while also exploring the weaponisation of identity by the Russian Federation in the contexts of Ukraine and the Baltic States. This study standardises its conceptual approach by referring to national-level identity and resilience as "social identity" and "societal resilience", respectively.

The literature review identified key constituents and factors influencing identity and resilience, subsequently refined through a roundtable discussion at the Rīga Conference in October 2024. This iterative process ensured that expert feedback contextualised and validated the theoretical insights, enhancing the accuracy of selected constituents and factors. These refined constituents and factors were integrated into the survey design, enabling the investigation to capture the complex dynamics of identity and resilience across the case study countries.

Social identity is understood through two key dimensions: delineating national boundaries and the sense of attachment or belonging to a nation. Drawing on Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the study adopts the premise that social identity emerges from the tension between an inclusive civic identity, emphasising shared values and patriotism, and a more exclusionary ethnic identity rooted in ancestry, language, and cultural heritage. This dual perspective is complemented by Anthony D. Smith's (Smith, 1991) works on national identity, which emphasises the role of cultural, historical, and territorial factors in uniting individuals through shared myths, symbols, and traditions.

This study identifies four key constituents of social identity: sociodemographic structure, collective memory, common values, and shared determinations. Sociodemographic structure—shaped by age, ethnicity, and language—affects inclusivity and unity. Collective memory, a key constituent of social identity, functions as a unifying force by drawing on shared traumas and achievements to bolster cohesion and resilience. In contrast, shared values such as embracing democracy, freedom, and multiculturalism promote solidarity and inclusivity, while shared determinations—collective aspirations for a better future—motivate collective action. These constituents interact dynamically with external pressures, shaping identity and its capacity to influence resilience. The significant factors influencing social identity include age, ethnicity, language, income, freedom, democracy, multiculturalism, and European integration—all crucial in shaping identity amidst external pressures and internal dynamics.

Societal resilience is examined through Eshel and Kimhi's societal resilience theory (Eshel & Kimhi, 2016), which highlights its dynamic, multidimensional nature encompassing psychological, social, and structural components. Drawing on empirical studies such as Koubova and Kimhi's "Prediction of Individual, Community, and Societal Resilience" (Koubová & Kimhi, 2024), the study identifies four primary constituents of societal resilience: trust in government and political leaders, social unity (solidarity), willingness to contribute to the country (patriotism), and trust in public institutions. Trust in governance and public institutions fosters stability and reduces uncertainty, enabling coordinated responses during crises. Social unity facilitates collective action by promoting solidarity and morale, while patriotism motivates individuals to prioritise the collective well-being of their nation. Key psychological and social factors influencing societal resilience

complement these constituents, including hope, morale, sense of danger, perceived threats, well-being, distress, preparedness, and will to fight. Hope, identified as the strongest predictor of societal resilience, inspires optimism and collective action, while morale reinforces solidarity and shared purpose. Though potentially anxiety-inducing, perceptions of danger and threats act as catalysts for preparedness, encouraging proactive measures that mitigate risks. These factors demonstrate how societal resilience evolves dynamically in response to internal and external stressors.

The expert survey, conducted between November and December 2024, was built on these theoretical insights. It gathered data from 37 experts across Ukraine (10 participants), Estonia (6 participants), Latvia (9 participants), and Lithuania (12 participants). These experts, selected for their disciplinary expertise in political science, sociology, defence studies, media, education, civil society, and policy analysis, provided multidisciplinary perspectives. The survey was structured into four sections addressing key areas: the constituents of identity, the components of societal resilience, their interdependencies, and Russia's impact on societal resilience. Tailored timelines for Ukraine and the Baltic States reflected their distinct sociopolitical contexts, enabling the survey to capture the evolution of identity and resilience over time. Systematic analysis of the survey data revealed recurring patterns, variations, and interdependencies across the case study countries.

Document analysis provided additional depth by reviewing national policy documents, think tank reports, media coverage, and civil society perspectives. This phase contextualised the expert survey findings and illuminated how identity and resilience are framed and operationalised within each country's policy and public discourse. Most importantly, document analysis provided the study with insights into the role of external pressure in forming identity and resilience and the patterns of Russia's instrumentalisations of identity against the strength of the case study countries. The document analysis, combined with the reporting of the survey findings, culminated in the development of four country-specific reports, which outlined national strategies for mitigating vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience.

The final stage synthesised data from the expert survey and document analysis using a simplified comparative matrix. This matrix facilitated a comparative examination of the key constituents and factors influencing identity and societal resilience, their interdependencies, and the role of Russian influence. Integrating social identity theory and societal resilience theory provided a robust framework for examining these interdependencies. For instance, sociocultural structures that underpin social identity correlate with social unity, fostering resilience against external threats. Similarly, collective memory bolsters morale and optimism, which are critical for enduring crises, while common values enhance trust in public institutions, reducing distress, and fostering preparedness. Shared determinations, aligned with collective aspirations, reinforce societal resilience by inspiring proactive responses to challenges. These findings underscore a feedback loop wherein identity enhances resilience, and resilience, in turn, reinforces identity.

By combining theoretical insights from social identity theory and societal resilience theory with empirical findings, this methodology offers a comprehensive

framework for analysing the complex relationship between identity and societal resilience in Ukraine and the Baltic States. The iterative refinement of the theoretical framework through literature analysis and expert feedback ensures a contextually grounded and robust investigation, providing actionable insights into the dynamics of resilience and identity under external and internal stress conditions.

10.3   Country Reports and Analyses

This chapter provides an integrated secondary data analysis of the findings from the document review and data collected through the expert surveys. By synthesising insights from these two complementary sources, the chapter primarily examines social identity and societal resilience and their interplay in Ukraine and the Baltic States. It also studies Russia's instrumentalisation of identity as a tool to influence resilience. The document review offers a comprehensive understanding of the policy, academic, and civil society perspectives on identity and resilience. At the same time, the expert survey data provide nuanced insights into the lived experiences and professional judgments of individuals closely engaged with these topics. In contrast, analysis of data from opinion polls explicitly specifies the public sentiment and behavioural data collected through surveys. These sources illuminate the critical constituents and factors shaping identity and resilience, highlighting their interdependencies and practical implications for policy and strategy development.

10.3.1 Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Ukraine

Russia's war against Ukraine has underscored the critical importance of social and national identity as foundational to societal resilience and national security. External aggression, particularly Russia's full-scale invasion, has catalysed transformations in Ukraine's identity and resilience, emphasising shared values and collective determination (National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). This "war of identities" extends beyond physical conflict, encompassing cultural, historical, and civic dimensions. These dynamics shape the nation's resistance and chart its future trajectory as part of the European and global democratic community.

Russia's war against Ukraine has shown that the resistance to the aggressor largely depends on the identity of the population as a factor of national security. The concept of identity describes the challenges for national security and mobilisation potential, necessitating tools to counter external aggressors and adapt during long-term crises and post-war reconstruction (National Security Strategy of Ukraine, 2020).

Key Constituents and Factors of Ukraine's Social Identity
The evolution of Ukrainian social identity has been shaped by its historical struggles for independence and resistance to authoritarianism. Social identity was primarily tied to citizenship in the early years of independence, reflecting a legal and

geographic affiliation with the country. Over time, shared values, collective memory, and aspirations for a European future became defining components.

The Euromaidan protests symbolised a pivotal moment, reflecting the nation's fight for dignity and alignment with democratic and European ideals. These events marked a shift towards identifying with principles of freedom and inclusion rather than ethnic or cultural markers.

From 1991 to 2014, affiliation with citizenship was the main factor shaping Ukrainian identity. Shared determination and the desire for freedom became more significant during the war with Russia. Over the past decade, shared values, collective memory, and aspirations for European integration have played a more central role in identity formation. Inclusiveness has also become essential, reflecting efforts to integrate diverse communities and minorities while aligning with European standards.

Key Constituents and Factors of Ukraine's Societal Resilience

Ukraine's societal resilience has relied on several key elements, including patriotism, solidarity, and trust in institutions. Before the onset of full-scale conflict, resilience was characterised by hope for a better future and optimism about collective endeavours.

As the war progressed, the focus shifted towards solidarity, national unity, and trust in governance. Patriotism emerged as a cornerstone of resilience, reflecting a widespread willingness to contribute to the nation's survival. Solidarity emphasised collective effort and cohesion in response to external threats. Trust in state institutions and leadership also gained prominence, highlighting the importance of governance during crises.

From a regulatory perspective, the National Security Strategy of Ukraine (Human Development Strategy, 2021) emphasised resisting humanitarian aggression and using culture as a unifying force for identity. Developing a comprehensive national resilience system, including multilevel capabilities to respond to hybrid threats, has further solidified the nation's capacity to withstand crises.

The Human Development Strategy (Estonian Integration Monitoring, 2023) defines the relevance of forming Ukrainian civic identity based on social and state values, associated with "increasing the level of readiness of Ukrainian citizens, including youth, to fulfil their duty to protect the homeland, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine". The issue of identity formation focuses on the system of national and patriotic education.

The Interplay Between Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Ukraine

The dynamic relationship between social identity and societal resilience is a defining feature of Ukraine's response to external aggression. Most experts identified shared determination and solidarity as critical elements, bridging identity and resilience. These factors provided a sense of purpose and unity, amplifying societal cohesion and the capacity for future recovery.

Psychological dimensions, such as hope and morale, played significant roles. These factors fostered optimism and a belief in a brighter future, reinforcing

resilience while embedding themselves in the broader social identity framework. Freedom, democracy, and aspirations for European integration further strengthened the connection between identity and resilience, demonstrating how civic and national values contribute to collective strength.

Russia's Hostile Influence and Instrumentalisation of Identity in Ukraine

Russia has systematically targeted Ukraine's social identity as part of its hybrid warfare strategy. The most weaponised aspects were shared determination, collective memory, and language. By promoting divisive narratives, such as "denazification", Russia sought to delegitimise Ukrainian identity and impose its own cultural and historical narrative on occupied territories. The most striking example of weaponisation is Russia's policy of "denazification", which aimed at liquidating Ukrainian identity and replacing it with the concept of the "Russian world". These efforts highlight the need for Ukraine to fortify its identity and resilience against subversive strategies (Teperik, 2024).

While Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resilience, prolonged conflict poses significant challenges to sustaining morale and unity. The ongoing war risks diminishing faith in a brighter future, particularly as large numbers of Ukrainians remain displaced abroad. Post-war reconstruction will introduce new socioeconomic and demographic challenges, necessitating renewed efforts to build trust in institutions, integrate returning citizens, and address regional disparities.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has profoundly influenced the nation's social identity and societal resilience. Striving for freedom, patriotism, and solidarity have become defining pillars, reinforced by external aggression and internal determination. Despite the challenges of war, Ukraine's ability to adapt and strengthen its identity underscores the resilience of its people and institutions.

10.3.2 Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Estonia

Key Constituents and Factors of Estonia's Social Identity

Since regaining independence in 1991, Estonia's national identity has been shaped by its historical experiences, intercultural cohesion, and strong aspirations for integration with Western institutions. Collective memory, emphasising the shared historical narratives of Soviet occupation and the struggle to restore independence, has been a cornerstone of this identity. It serves as a critical lens through which current geopolitical dynamics are understood, fostering a collective vigilance against potential threats to sovereignty. This memory reinforces the societal cohesion of many Estonians by uniting them around a shared understanding of past struggles while also influencing policymaking, particularly in areas related to national security and integration. This consciousness has provided a unifying narrative that underscores the importance of freedom and sovereignty, forming the bedrock of Estonia's national cohesion. Additionally, shared determination—a collective vision for a democratic and secure future—has emerged as a defining element, reinforced by Estonia's alignment with EU and NATO values.

Ethnicity and language have been pivotal in defining Estonia's cultural and national identity. The interplay between these factors profoundly influences integration policies, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by the Russian-speaking minority. Efforts to balance the preservation of the Estonian language with the inclusivity of Russian speakers shape societal cohesion and aim to bridge divides that stem from historical, ethnolinguistic or sociopsychological differences. This complex dynamic directly impacts the effectiveness of policies aimed at fostering a unified national identity while also highlighting the importance of tailored strategies to promote mutual understanding and shared values across diverse communities (Vihalemm, 2008). The preservation of the Estonian language and culture has been crucial in differentiating the nation from its Soviet past, while the integration of the Russian-speaking minority remains a complicated issue. This group, constituting approximately 28% of the population, often navigates tensions related to language, citizenship, religion and sociopolitical participation. While significant strides have been made towards integration, gaps persist, particularly in civic and political engagement, where Russian speakers are underrepresented (Kalmus et al., 2020).

Common values such as democratic principles, digital literacy, and civic responsibility have gained prominence, especially during Estonia's integration with Western institutions. However, socio-economic and ethnolinguistic divides continue to challenge the inclusivity and dispersity of these shared values.

Key Constituents and Factors of Estonia's Societal Resilience

Among other important factors, Estonia's societal resilience is rooted in trust and collective effort. Trust in public institutions has been a foundational element, reflecting the critical role of effective governance in fostering societal stability. This trust has been bolstered by the country's commitment to transparency and democratic reforms. The willingness to contribute to the country, embodied in patriotism and voluntary services, provides a unifying force, particularly during significant crises or geopolitical tensions. Such patriotism has been instrumental in rallying collective efforts to navigate external and internal challenges (Teperik et al., 2022).

Morale and hope have played vital roles in maintaining societal optimism and belief in progress during Estonia's transition periods. Preparedness, emphasising readiness and awareness, has also been significant, particularly in light of external threats such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine in 2022. During such crises, the will to fight and a heightened perception of threats have underscored Estonian citizens' commitment to national defence and societal unity (Struberga, 2023).

The digital transformation of Estonia has further strengthened its resilience. Developing advanced e-government systems, cybersecurity measures, and digital literacy programmes has not only enhanced governance efficiency, but also has fostered civic engagement because it offers a compelling future vision [(Kažoka & Bērziņa, 2023)]. Digital innovation is now seen as a cornerstone of Estonia's resilience, ensuring inclusivity and empowering all social groups, including Russian-speaking minorities, to participate in national development. Notable exam-

ples include the e-residency programme, which simplifies bureaucratic processes and promotes economic participation, and the availability of multilingual digital services that bridge language barriers. Furthermore, initiatives like the national digital identity card have enabled seamless access to public services, fostering a greater sense of civic belonging among marginalised groups. These innovations enhance governance efficiency and contribute to societal cohesion by integrating diverse communities into Estonia's digital ecosystem (State Chancellery of Latvia, 2023).

Interplay Between Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Estonia

The dynamic interplay between Estonia's social identity and societal resilience has been a defining feature of its post-Soviet transformation. Shared determination and collective memory have reinforced societal resilience by providing a sense of purpose and continuity. These elements have strengthened trust in institutions and solidarity among citizens, enabling Estonia to navigate periods of uncertainty and external pressure effectively.

Conversely, societal resilience factors such as morale and hope have reinforced Estonia's social identity by emphasising optimism and the potential for collective progress. The will to fight, especially during geopolitical crises, has been closely tied to shared determination, illustrating how resilience can enhance national identity. Digital innovation, by fostering civic engagement and inclusivity, has further integrated social and resilience dimensions, contributing to a cohesive and forward-looking society (Ozoliņa et al., 2021).

Russia's Hostile Influence and Instrumentalisation of Identity in Estonia

Russia's efforts to destabilise Estonia have focused on exploiting vulnerabilities within its social identity and resilience. Historical narratives, particularly those related to the Soviet era, have been weaponised to challenge Estonia's collective memory and sow divisions. Methods employed by Russia include maintaining a vast network of influence agents and disseminating disinformation through media channels, amplifying grievances within the Russian-speaking minority, and promoting revisionist histories that undermine Estonia's independence narrative. These tactics are designed to erode trust in democratic institutions and foster polarisation, targeting both the majority population and marginalised groups to weaken societal cohesion. By amplifying ethnic and linguistic differences, Russia has sought to undermine social cohesion and erode trust in democratic decision-making.

Ethnicity and language have been key targets, reflecting their deep significance in Estonia's identity. Russian-speaking minorities have faced persistent disinformation campaigns aimed at polarising their geopolitical orientation and sociopolitical values (Struberga, 2024). These efforts have been accompanied by attempts to diminish confidence in Estonia's alignment with EU and NATO principles.

Digital resilience has played a critical role in countering these threats. Estonia's advanced digital infrastructure and its emphasis on fact-based, multilingual information dissemination have mitigated the impact of Russian propaganda. Investments

in Russian-language media, the promotion of inclusive narratives and support of intergroup bridging practices have further strengthened societal cohesion (Kaktiņš, 2023).

10.3.3 Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Latvia

Key Constituents and Factors of Latvia's Social Identity

Latvia's social identity is deeply rooted in its historical experiences, cultural heritage, and aspirations for sovereignty. The restoration of independence in 1989 marked a turning point, introducing a new framework for national identity while preserving a strong sense of historical continuity. Collective memory became a cornerstone as narratives of Soviet occupation and the struggle for freedom unified the Latvian-speaking population around shared experiences and values. These historical memories significantly influenced policies on integration, education, and national defence, reinforcing sovereignty and cultural preservation as fundamental pillars of Latvian identity.

Language emerged as a powerful marker of national identity, symbolising cultural cohesion and resistance to assimilation. Efforts to promote Latvian as the state language, alongside policies to naturalise non-citizens, highlighted the centrality of linguistic affiliation. However, these efforts also underscored the challenges of integrating the Russian-speaking minority, whose historical narratives often diverged from the Latvian majority. Some Russian speakers aligned with Latvian values and identity, while others maintained cultural and political ties to Russia, influenced by nostalgia for the Soviet era and Kremlin narratives (Praks, 2024).

During Latvia's integration into the EU and NATO, democratic values and freedoms assumed greater prominence. Shared determination and common goals united the nation around democratisation and alignment with Western institutions. However, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 brought a renewed emphasis on security, ethnicity, and national unity, further solidifying collective memory as a unifying force. Surveys reveal that most Latvian residents express (LSM, 2024) a sense of belonging and pride in their identity, although indicators of trust and acceptance remain lower among Russian-speaking populations (Dragiļeva, 2024).

Russia's war in Ukraine has emotionally charged relations between linguistic communities in Latvia, intensifying discussions on the role of social and national identity in resilience. Expert interviews emphasise the critical role of historical memory, patriotism, and democratisation as cornerstones of Latvia's identity, alongside cultural preservation and sovereignty. However, challenges persist in fostering a truly inclusive national identity, as tensions remain among younger generations, Russian speakers, and other marginalised groups (Ramonaite, 2015).

Key Constituents and Factors of Latvia's Societal Resilience

Latvia's societal resilience is characterised by a balance between optimism, preparedness, and collective unity. In the early years of independence, resilience

was driven by hope and morale, reflecting the population's confidence in shared activities and national rebuilding. Social unity and patriotism were pivotal, fostering solidarity and commitment to Latvia's development. However, trust in government and political institutions was limited, reflecting scepticism rooted in historical legacies.

Following the annexation of Crimea, societal resilience increasingly emphasised risk awareness and proactive measures. Preparedness and the will to fight became critical components, reflecting heightened perceptions of external threats. Opinion polls and expert surveys highlight (Ramonienė, 2013) that despite the persistently low levels of trust, encompassing interpersonal trust and trust in public administration institutions, particularly the government, the demonstrated willingness to cooperate during crisis situations underscores the critical role of collective action as a determinant of societal resilience (Lietuvos gyventojai, 2023).

Economic concerns, such as financial instability, further shaped perceptions of resilience. While national defence efforts provided some reassurance, public anxiety persisted, driven by fears of geopolitical instability and its economic impact. Hope and morale continue to serve as vital factors, closely linked to solidarity, shared determination, and patriotism, underscoring the importance of collective optimism in sustaining societal strength.

Public trust in local governance and law enforcement has proven more robust than in national institutions, reflecting the importance of targeted, community-based strategies in building resilience. At the same time, limited civic engagement among Russian-speaking communities highlights the need for more inclusive and participatory frameworks. Trust-building measures and a focus on strengthening interpersonal relationships remain critical for enhancing Latvia's societal resilience.

Interplay Between Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Latvia

The relationship between social identity and societal resilience in Latvia is deeply interconnected. Shared values and collective memory not only define national identity but also reinforce societal cohesion and readiness. Historical experiences of occupation and resistance underpin both social unity and the willingness to contribute to national resilience. These shared narratives inspire collective determination, strengthening Latvia's ability to confront challenges.

Cultural and linguistic dimensions of identity play a dual role. While language and ethnicity have been sources of division, they also act as unifying elements when aligned with inclusive national narratives. The EU and NATO integration bridged identity and resilience by embedding Latvia within democratic and security frameworks. This alignment not only reinforced a collective vision for the future but also enhanced trust in Latvia's strategic alliances.

The annexation of Crimea underscored the dynamic interplay between identity and resilience, with increased emphasis on security and shared determination. While divisions between ethnic and linguistic groups persist, surveys indicate opportunities to strengthen resilience by fostering inclusive policies and trust-building initiatives that align with Latvia's shared values and democratic aspirations.

Experts have noted that low levels of civic engagement and interpersonal trust in Latvia remain barriers to fully leveraging social identity in enhancing resilience. These challenges are particularly pronounced among younger generations and Russian-speaking minorities, who often experience feelings of alienation and disconnection from the state.

Russia's Hostile Influence and Instrumentalisation of Identity in Latvia

Russia has actively exploited Latvia's ethnic and linguistic divisions to undermine its social identity and resilience. Pro-Kremlin narratives have targeted the Russian-speaking minority, portraying Latvia as discriminatory and promoting the concept of the "Russian World". These efforts include historical revisionism, media manipulation, and disinformation campaigns aimed at fostering mistrust and polarisation (Bankauskaitė & Šlekys, 2023).

Historical revisionism reframes Soviet occupation as a period of prosperity and liberation, challenging Latvia's independence narrative. Media platforms amplify divisive content accompanied by the generally apolitical tendencies observed among Russian speakers, exacerbating tensions between ethnic Latvians and Russian speakers. Surveys reveal widespread distrust in public institutions and media among Russian-speaking populations (Seimas of Lithuania, 2022), reflecting the effectiveness of these tactics.

Despite these challenges, Russia's influence has waned in certain segments of the population, particularly following its invasion of Ukraine. The fragmentation of the Russian-speaking community reflects a weakening of Kremlin narratives, with many individuals distancing themselves from direct alignment with Russia. However, identity-based divisions persist, underscoring the need for inclusive strategies to counter external interference and strengthen national cohesion.

The Kremlin's tactics of spreading disinformation, fostering polarisation, and leveraging grievances related to citizenship policies remain significant threats. However, expert interviews and recent surveys indicate that younger generations of Russian speakers are increasingly integrating into European values and distancing themselves from the Kremlin's propaganda (National Cyber Security Centre, 2023).

10.3.4   Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Lithuania

Key Constituents and Factors of Lithuania's Social Identity

Lithuania's social identity has evolved across historical and geopolitical contexts, with each period marked by shifts in cultural, political, and aspirational factors. When evaluating the core constituents of Lithuania's social or national identity, experts unanimously highlighted collective memory as a key constituent in Lithuania's regaining of independence, joining NATO and the EU, and shaping the current geopolitical stance of Lithuanian society—strong support for Ukraine in its defence against Russia's full-scale invasion and the ongoing development of national defence capabilities. The other two constituents—common values and a shared determination (vision for the future)—were described as closely related

to and complementing collective memory. The sociodemographic structure of the society is not considered a significant factor.

Lithuania's determination for freedom was deeply rooted in its collective memory of the independent Republic of Lithuania (1918–1940), before the occupation by the Soviet/Russian regime. The nation's shared understanding of its historical experience, use of the Lithuanian language, and preservation of a resilient underground social fabric of society were crucial in shaping its current identity and culture (Civitas, 2023). Experts note that Western European-oriented thinking has a strong tradition in Lithuania and continues to influence how Lithuanian citizens envision the future of their state—as part of Western Europe and the democratic world.

Shared Determination, reflecting a collective vision for a sovereign and democratic future, reinforced Lithuania's aspirations for governance rooted in democratic principles. The integration of Lithuania into the EU and NATO marked a critical shift in identity formation. Common values, such as the embrace of democratic norms, societal cohesion, and alignment with Western geopolitical standards, became central to the national identity. During this period, the importance of Language as a unifying cultural element persisted, reflecting its role as a key factor in self-identification (Metinė Lietuvos politikos mokslų konferencija, 2024). Although ethnicity and multiculturalism were acknowledged, they were not considered decisive factors in shaping identity. Lithuania's predominantly homogeneous ethnic composition (Bankauskaite, 2020)—with Lithuanians comprising the vast majority—influences societal cohesion and trust.

Key Constituents and Factors of Lithuania's Societal Resilience

A combination of institutional trust, collective action, and psychological preparedness has underpinned Lithuania's societal resilience. Trust in public institutions emerged as the cornerstone of resilience, reflecting the critical role of stable and transparent governance in fostering societal confidence. High trust in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, police, and NATO, along with paramilitary organisations like the Riflemen Union, and the civil society organisations, reflects the population's confidence in their capacity to manage crises (Lithuanian State Security Department, 2024).

During the early years of independence, social unity (solidarity) and willingness to contribute to the country (patriotism) provided additional layers of resilience, emphasising the importance of collective effort and national pride. These factors closely correlate with preparedness (awareness and ability to take necessary actions) and will to fight, both of which have grown in importance due to initiatives implementing the whole-of-society approach. This means engaging not only government agencies such as the National Crisis Management Centre, State Security Department, and Lithuanian Armed Forces Strategic Communication Department (aligned with NATO PsyOps doctrine) but also civil society organisations, which play a crucial role in reinforcing the government's efforts (Government of Lithuania, n.d.). One of the initiatives is "Preparing Citizens for Civil Resistance" (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2022).

Digital transformation has further heightened Lithuania's awareness of the critical importance of resilience (National Cyber Security Centre, 2023). Investments in e-governance, information security, and media, digital and data literacy have strengthened the country's capacity to counter external threats, including disinformation campaigns. These innovations have empowered citizens, fostered civic engagement, and ensured both institutional and individual dimensions of resilience (Civitas, 2023).

Interplay Between Social Identity and Societal Resilience in Lithuania

Shared determination serves as a bridge between social identity and societal resilience domains, linking aspirations for sovereignty and democracy with the collective ability to withstand external pressures. This vision provides a unifying narrative that strengthens trust in institutions and fosters collective action.

Collective memory also plays a crucial role in this interplay, embedding historical consciousness into resilience strategies. Similarly, social unity and common values strengthen the connection between identity and resilience by promoting trust and inclusivity, particularly in response to external threats such as Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine but not limited to this.

Resilience factors such as hope (belief in a better future) and morale (optimism for the future) amplify national confidence and optimism (Struberga et al., 2024). Experts note that societal morale is high, with Lithuanians taking pride in their state and maintaining an optimistic outlook for the future, a sentiment especially true among the youth, despite geopolitical challenges. However, affective polarisation—an emotional divide among social groups based on their political party support—undermines social cohesion, solidarity, and preparedness (Metinė Lietuvos politikos mokslų konferencija, 2024). Efforts to counteract these divides, including inclusive governance and public policy initiatives, are critical.

Russia's Hostile Influence and Instrumentalisation of Identity in Lithuania

Russia's efforts to undermine Lithuania's social identity have focused on key components such as collective memory, shared determination, and ethnicity. By distorting historical narratives and promoting revisionist accounts of Soviet occupation (Bankauskaite, 2020), Russia seeks to erode Lithuania's collective understanding of its past. These tactics are aimed at weakening societal cohesion and creating divisions within the population.

Disinformation attacks against the Lithuanian population have intensified, aiming to spread fear of war, undermine support for Ukraine, and disrupt state institutions (Lithuanian State Security Department, 2024). Russian and Belarusian intelligence agencies are increasingly attempting to recruit Lithuanian citizens, both those travelling to Russia and Belarus and their immediate circles. Additionally, ideologies like Litvinism within the Belarusian diaspora are exacerbating divisions between communities, further weakening societal unity (Ibid).

Despite these challenges, Lithuania's resilience has been strengthened by strategic investments in information security, public awareness, and inclusive policies.

The State Progress Strategy "Lietuva 2050" (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, n.d.), adopted in 2023, defines Lithuania's long-term vision for development. It envisions the country as a mature democracy with a well-educated, skilled, resilient, and responsible society that is future-ready and collaborative. The strategy reflects a shared commitment to the future, aiming to position Lithuania as a resilient and influential global player—prepared to anticipate challenges, adapt, recover, and excel in an unpredictable world. Its successful implementation is expected to shape and strengthen the nation's social identity.

10.4   Comparative Analysis

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine, synthesising the findings from expert surveys and document reviews through a simplified comparative matrix (Table 10.1). Although the matrix largely relies on the analysis of the experts' perceptions, it provides grounds for facilitating a systematic examination of the key constituents and factors of identity and resilience across these four nations. By highlighting recurring themes, unique country-specific elements, and areas of overlap, the analysis identifies common challenges and opportunities, this comparative approach provides a nuanced understanding of the trends of how identity and resilience interact within different sociopolitical contexts.

10.4.1 Constituents of Identity

Across all four countries, language and collective memory emerge as foundational elements of social identity. In Estonia and Latvia, language symbolises cultural sovereignty and resistance to assimilation, serving as a unifying force while also highlighting the challenges of integrating Russian-speaking minorities. Lithuania's identity similarly centres on linguistic and historical cohesion, underscored by its collective memory of an independent Lithuanian state, anti-Soviet resistance, and aspirations for democratic governance and sovereignty. In Ukraine, language played a less divisive role post-2014, with identity shifting towards shared democratic values and a European orientation, catalysed by events such as the Euromaidan protests.

In the Ukrainian army as well as broader society, many people still speak Russian, and although there is increasing emphasis on the Ukrainian language and Orthodox Church, the key aspects of Ukraine's resilience today lie in survival and effective resistance to aggression. Language and religion, as components of identity, are not the primary drivers of resilience. This is a significant aspect for understanding the constituents of identity and offers valuable lessons for both Estonia and Latvia. The Russian-speaking community in Ukraine has always been more integrated into society (and is especially so now) compared to Latvia and

Table 10.1 Simplified comparative matrix, constituents and factors of identity and resilience, their interaction and weaponisation by Russia

Category	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Ukraine
Key constituents of identity	Language, collective memory, shared vision of democratic and digital leadership	Language, collective memory, shared vision for sovereignty and democracy	Language, shared determination of sovereignty, collective memory of an independent Lithuanian state and anti-Soviet resistance	Language, shared memory, aspirations for European integration and democracy
Factors influencing identity	Age, ethnicity, historical experiences, shared EU aspirations	Ethnicity, education, media influence, EU/NATO integration	Historical experiences, external threats, democratic aspirations	Ethnicity, regional differences, resistance to authoritarianism and foreign interference
Constituents of resilience	Trust in institutions, ethnic cohesion, digital inclusivity	Social cohesion, integration of minorities, trust in local governance	Trust in institutions, national solidarity, democratic values	Solidarity, patriotism, trust in institutions
Factors influencing resilience	Economic stability, digital transformation, community trust	Preparedness, economic stability, patriotism	Media literacy, economic development and socioeconomic well-being, national preparedness	National unity, support for democratic values, institutional trust
Interaction between identity and resilience	Identity fosters resilience against hybrid threats through collective vigilance and shared determination	Identity strengthens resilience by fostering national unity and readiness to counter threats	Identity reinforces resilience through shared values, shared determination and national pride	Identity mobilises resilience by fostering unity and collective determination against external aggression
Russia's instrumentalisation of identity	Targeting Russian-speaking minorities, disinformation campaigns, revisionist history narratives, bronze soldier controversy, cyberattacks, manipulation of Russian-language media	Promotion of Soviet nostalgia, targeting Russian-speaking minorities with divisive narratives, historical revisionism, pro-kremlin disinformation campaigns, cultural polarisation, instrumentalisation of conservative values	Narratives of state failure, attempts to delegitimise EU/NATO integration, ethnic divisions, disinformation campaigns targeting governance, propaganda using historical revisionism	Weaponisation of shared determination, historical memory, and linguistic divides, narratives of "denazification", promotion of "Russian world", manipulation of language and history

Source: prepared by the authors

Estonia, which in the end translated into the ability to unite and show remarkable resistance in the face of Russian aggression.

Shared determination, or the collective aspiration for democratic and sovereign futures, is another unifying thread. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania emphasise this vision in their integration into NATO and the EU, while Ukraine's wartime identity formation underscores solidarity, patriotism, and the quest for European integration.

While ethnicity plays a more pronounced role in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, shaping integration policies for Russian-speaking minorities, it also influences approaches to new Slavic-language-speaking immigrants from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. Ukraine demonstrates a significant shift towards a civic-based identity that prioritises shared values—such as sovereignty, democratic governance, and resistance to authoritarianism—over ethnic distinctions. This shift has played a crucial role in strengthening Ukraine's social cohesion and national resilience. A strong, unified civic identity enhances societal resilience and reinforces national security. This tendency towards civic identity is also observed among Baltic youth, where shared values, interests, professional aspirations, and activities serve as stronger unifying factors than ethnicity. This transformation has been accelerated by the internal displacement of millions of people since 2014, and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022. The large-scale dispersal of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across regions has redrawn the country's social and cultural landscape, creating new interpersonal networks and shared experiences that transcend traditional East–West divides. Rather than deepening regional fragmentation, this movement fostered greater mutual understanding and solidarity across previously more culturally distinct regions.

Importantly, this shift offers a compelling model of civic unity for countries like Estonia and Latvia, where identity-based resilience still tends to hinge more heavily on ethnic and linguistic distinctions. While Ukraine's experience underscores the potential for inclusive identity formation in times of crisis, it may encourage adaptability of Baltic societies towards less reliance on ethnolinguistic markers that may limit their capacity to build the kind of broad-based civic solidarity that Ukraine has demonstrated in the face of existential threats.

The Baltic states can draw valuable lessons from Ukraine's experience. Conflicting identities weaken the resilience of Baltic societies, and unless there are serious attempts to increase solidarity and mutually respectful reconciliation, the semi-artificially created conflict between different identities will remain a major challenge here. The development of a cohesive civic identity—rooted in solidarity and collective memory rather than fragmented along ethnic or linguistic lines— constitutes a fundamental strategy for strengthening societal resilience against external adversities. By prioritising common values and fostering mutual understanding among diverse identities, national cohesion can be sustained, thereby mitigating potential vulnerabilities.

10.4.2 Factors Influencing Identity

Key factors influencing identity in all four countries include historical experiences, particularly memories of Soviet occupation, and aspirations for alignment with Western institutions. In Estonia and Latvia, challenges persist in integrating Russian-speaking populations, with lingering divides shaped by divergent historical narratives. Lithuania, with a relatively homogeneous population, faces fewer ethnic divides but remains vigilant against external attempts to exploit historical grievances and inflict society's polarisation.

Ukraine's case is unique in the way external aggression has accelerated the unification of its identity. By framing the Russian invasion as a "war of identities", Ukraine has elevated solidarity and collective memory as defining features of its national identity, moving away from regional and linguistic divides that previously fragmented its population.

While each Baltic state displays a distinct approach to building national cohesion, all three are anchored in a collective memory shaped by Soviet occupation and the subsequent regaining of independence. This experience continues to serve as the foundational layer of national identity. This shared memory, combined with a common perception of external threats and a prevailing sense of geopolitical danger, strongly influences identity formation across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania today. However, the strategies they adopt differ in nuance. Estonia has made significant progress in developing digital governance and fostering a future-oriented national narrative, although challenges remain in fully integrating its Russian-speaking population. Latvia, by contrast, struggles with the absence of a unified vision for the country's development, which hinders broader cohesion. Lithuania faces a different challenge. Growing affective polarisation between political groups risks fracturing the emotional unity of society, even as it works to include new immigrants and refugees. Despite these differences, there are important lessons to be shared. Latvia could learn from Estonia's emphasis on innovation and civic participation to forge a more cohesive national direction. Lithuania's efforts to tackle societal polarisation offer insights into managing political divides that could benefit its neighbours. Promoting inclusive, civic-based identity frameworks that foreground shared democratic values over linguistic or ethnic divisions can be a unifying strategy across the region, especially in the face of evolving security threats. Ultimately, recognising the common roots of identity in the Baltic region while tailoring strategies to national contexts may be the most effective path forward.

10.4.3 Key Constituents of Resilience

The resilience of all four countries is anchored in trust in institutions, patriotism, and social cohesion. Estonia stands out for its emphasis on digital resilience, with advanced e-governance systems fostering inclusivity and trust even among marginalised groups like Russian-speaking minorities. Latvia's resilience highlights

localised trust, where interpersonal networks compensate for lower trust in national institutions. Lithuania emphasises the role of national solidarity, bolstered by high trust in its armed forces and voluntary military and civil society organisations.

Ukraine's resilience, amplified by its wartime context and pressing urgency of defending the homeland, is characterised by unprecedented levels of solidarity and institutional trust. Patriotism and the willingness to contribute to national defence are consistently rated as the most significant factors, reflecting the nation's ability to mobilise against external threats. However, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the consolidation of patriotism seen in Ukraine would produce similar results in the Baltic states. The experience of Ukraine is deeply shaped by its unique historical trajectory, ongoing war, and existential threat to national sovereignty. While Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania can and should actively work on strengthening patriotic sentiment, there is no guarantee that the same approaches or outcomes will hold in their different social, political, and economic contexts. Each of the Baltic states must therefore undertake a careful national analysis to identify which drivers of patriotic mobilisation resonate most deeply with their populations and are likely to generate cohesion and commitment in times of crisis. In doing so, it is essential to distinguish between honest and reflective patriotism, grounded in critical engagement, shared responsibility, and democratic values, and the kind of intrusive "social engineering" that promotes patriotism as blind conformity or absolute loyalty. The former builds resilience and trust, while the latter risks alienation and superficial unity. Tailored, context-sensitive strategies are needed to foster meaningful civic commitment in each country. This conversation is especially important for regional dialogue and cross-sectoral exchange among national actors who are well positioned to explore these issues further in a Baltic framework.

By addressing persistent vulnerabilities, such as linguistic divides in Estonia and Latvia or regional socioeconomic disparities in Lithuania and Latvia, and learning from Ukraine's adaptive strategies, the Baltic States can enhance their resilience against external threats and internal challenges. Maintaining hope and collective determination, as seen in Ukraine, is essential for navigating crises and fostering societal resilience, highlighting the importance of factors such as solidarity and morale.

10.4.4 Factors Influencing Resilience

In Estonia, economic stability, digital transformation, and community trust underpin resilience. Latvia's resilience is shaped by preparedness and risk awareness, heightened by geopolitical tensions post-Crimea annexation. Lithuania's resilience benefits from investments in social cohesion, strong communities, media, digital literacy, and national preparedness, reflecting its proactive approach to countering disinformation and external manipulation.

Ukraine's resilience has evolved under the strain of war, with external aggression driving the need for national unity, support for democratic values, and institutional reliability. However, the prolonged conflict poses challenges to sustaining morale

and inclusivity, particularly for displaced populations and regions experiencing economic hardship. One of the key lessons emerging from Ukraine's experience is that prolonged warfare presents a serious strategic problem, especially for smaller states. With limited strategic depth, constrained resources, and relatively small fighting forces, countries like those in the Baltic region cannot realistically adopt a strategy that relies on reclaiming occupied territories or preparing society for a drawn-out war of attrition. Ukraine's ongoing war reconfirms the difficulty and high cost of such an approach. For Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the more sustainable lesson lies in preparation during peacetime. Strengthening the societal foundations that can carry a nation through crisis—such as morale, hope, trust in institutions, and inclusive national narratives—is essential. Investing in these areas before conflict arises will be critical to ensuring societal endurance in the face of prolonged pressure. These preparations are not only about military readiness, but also about building the psychological and civic capacity of societies to remain united, resilient, and forward-looking if tested.

Strengthening institutional trust and leveraging digital tools could be the long-term solution to strengthening and maintaining societal resilience. Ukraine's success in rallying trust in governance during wartime underscores the importance of transparent and reliable institutions. Estonia's digital innovations, Lithuania's focus on self-defence across physical, digital, and informational domains, Latvia's emphasis on local governance and community engagement, collaboration between government and civil society, and Ukraine's wartime information campaigns demonstrate the power of technology in enhancing resilience and countering disinformation.

10.4.5 Interaction Between Identity and Resilience

The interplay between social identity and resilience is evident across all four countries. In Estonia, shared determination and collective memory strengthen resilience by fostering vigilance against hybrid threats. Latvia's historical narratives and linguistic policies serve as both unifying and polarising forces, depending on the inclusivity of governance frameworks. Lithuania demonstrates how shared values and democratic principles reinforce national pride and resilience, while Ukraine's identity mobilisation has directly fuelled its capacity to resist aggression.

Recurring themes include the role of collective memory in shaping resilience and the reinforcing feedback loop where identity and resilience mutually enhance each other. Estonia's digital innovations, Lithuania's media and digital literacy, and Ukraine's solidarity highlight distinct approaches to leveraging identity for resilience.

10.4.6 Russia's Weaponisation of Identity

Russia's hostile strategies exploit identity-based vulnerabilities in all four countries, targeting ethnic and linguistic divisions, historical grievances, and trust in

institutions. Estonia and Latvia face persistent disinformation campaigns aimed at polarising Russian-speaking minorities. Lithuania's relative homogeneity has not shielded it from propaganda challenging its EU and NATO affiliations. Ukraine endures the most aggressive attempts, with Russia weaponising language, historical narratives, and regional divides to undermine the state's cohesion and legitimacy.

The matrix includes several specific instances of Russia's identity-based influence tactics. In Estonia, playing with sensitive historical memories of the Russian-speaking populations, such as the Bronze Soldier controversy is a key example, while Latvia deals with information campaigns targeting older Russian speakers with narratives closely connected with conservative values, questioning language and resistance permission policies, as well as political party narratives. Lithuania faces propaganda campaigns targeting the credibility of the national governance. Ukraine is targeted by support for separatists and manipulation of historical narratives, all of which are designed to undermine national unity and foster divisions. Notably, disinformation is one of the most widespread manipulation tools across all four countries.

Estonia and Latvia prioritise ethnic cohesion and integration of minorities, while Lithuania's focus on democratic values and institutional trust underscores the importance of inclusive governance in fostering resilience. Ukraine's resilience is distinct, rooted in its historical struggle for independence and its shared vision for European integration, even as it faces ongoing hybrid warfare. The analysis highlights the critical role of economic stability, community trust, and morale in bolstering resilience, with identity consistently serving as a counterweight to external pressures such as Russia's weaponisation of cultural and historical narratives.

This comparative study underscores the necessity for tailored, context-sensitive strategies to enhance societal cohesion and resilience. While shared values and collective memory can be leveraged to foster unity, addressing unique vulnerabilities—such as social cleavages in Ukraine or media influence in Latvia—is essential for sustainable resilience. The findings emphasise that identity and resilience are deeply interlinked, forming a feedback loop where strong identity fortifies resilience, and resilience, in turn, preserves identity under external threats.

10.5   Conclusions and Recommendations

The formation of identity and resilience within societies is dynamic, shaped by evolving factors that redefine their interplay over time. This study underscores that identity cannot be reduced to socio-economic or value-based components alone but emerges as a complex amalgamation of both.

Identity formation is a continuous process, influenced by external and internal factors that shift across different historical periods. The expert survey highlights a strong correlation between social identity and societal resilience. Specifically, patriotism is closely linked with common values and shared determinations, reinforcing a collective vision for the future. Similarly, solidarity correlates with

sociodemographic structure and collective memory, emphasising the role of shared experiences in fostering cohesion.

However, resilience remains fragile under prolonged stress. The war of attrition in Ukraine demonstrates how sustained external pressures erode societal resilience and diminish hope, a crucial pillar of endurance. Maintaining faith in a better future is essential for sustaining resilience. Ukraine's experience also reveals a consistent pattern in Russia's hybrid tactics, which manipulate identity-related narratives—particularly within Russian-speaking communities—to undermine societal cohesion.

With over six million Ukrainians abroad, post-war reintegration will be a major challenge. Addressing socioeconomic and demographic shifts in the post-war period will be essential for sustaining resilience and national cohesion. Ukraine's future stability will depend on successfully managing these challenges while continuing its alignment with European democratic values.

The comparative analysis of Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania highlights shared themes of language, collective memory, and democratic aspirations while recognising unique historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts shaping their resilience strategies. Ukraine's experience illustrates the transformative power of identity mobilisation, offering critical lessons for the Baltic states in strengthening unity and resilience.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has significantly influenced social identity and resilience, shifting emphasis from sociolinguistic and regional factors to solidarity, faith in the future, and European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia's aggression has accelerated sociopolitical and value transformations, reinforcing freedom, patriotism, and solidarity as defining pillars of resilience. Trust in state institutions and a collective vision for the future have become central—an evolution not as evident before the war.

The interdependence of social identity and resilience has been a key strength in Ukraine's struggle, reinforced by values such as freedom, patriotism, and social unity. Russia's weaponisation of identity underscores the need for robust institutional and societal strategies to safeguard these elements.

10.5.1 Country-Specific Conclusions

Estonia

Estonia's progress in fostering a cohesive national identity and strengthening resilience highlights the balance between historical consciousness and forward-looking aspirations. While Estonia has made strides in civic-based identity and social integration, challenges remain, particularly in addressing socioeconomic inequalities and ethnolinguistic divides. Estonia's digital transformation serves as a model for resilience, but ensuring equitable opportunities across all social groups is critical. At the same time, Estonia's experience offers valuable lessons for Ukraine, especially in using digital infrastructure for building civic-based identity. Ukraine has increasingly invested in digital governance, public service delivery, and

cybersecurity, inspired in part by Estonia's success in these domains. As Ukraine continues to rebuild under wartime pressure, further emphasis on inclusive civic identity and digital innovation may help reinforce both state capacity and public trust. These areas are not only central to resilience but also serve as building blocks for long-term democratic consolidation.

Limited civic engagement among Russian-speaking minorities, language disparities, and economic inequalities in rural regions must be addressed through expanded Estonian language education, civic education programmes, and inclusive economic policies. Greater representation of all communities in governance will further enhance societal cohesion. By investing in trust-building, inclusive policies, and digital innovation, Estonia can reinforce its resilience against external and internal pressures.

Lessons from Ukraine emphasise the need to strengthen national solidarity, ensuring that no citizen, social group, or region is marginalised. In a complex sociopolitical and geopolitical landscape, Estonia must adopt a comprehensive approach to nation-building that fosters resilience across all layers of society.

Latvia

Latvia's national identity and resilience have been shaped by historical legacies, cultural dynamics, and geopolitical challenges. Since regaining independence in 1991, collective memory has unified the Latvian-speaking majority through shared experiences of Soviet occupation, democratisation, and European integration. Language remains a strong marker of national identity, yet integration of Russian-speaking communities presents challenges. Russia's efforts to exploit divisions highlight the importance of inclusive policies and trust-building initiatives.

While patriotism varies along linguistic lines, societal resilience is shaped by optimism, preparedness, and collective determination. Trust in local governance remains strong, but trust in national institutions lags, limiting broader societal cohesion. Economic disparities and low civic engagement among Russian-speaking communities further challenge resilience-building efforts.

Drawing from Ukraine's example, Latvia should expand civic education that promotes shared values and democratic principles while implementing inclusive policies to bridge ethnic and linguistic divides. Strengthening trust in national institutions will be crucial. By leveraging its integration into Western frameworks and investing in resilience-building strategies, Latvia can enhance its national stability amid evolving geopolitical uncertainties.

Lithuania

Lithuania's resilience is rooted in its ability to balance historical consciousness with forward-looking aspirations. The interplay between social identity and societal resilience has enabled Lithuania to navigate internal transformations while maintaining democratic principles and sovereignty. However, demographic shifts, migration patterns, and information warfare present new challenges.

Investments in trust-building, inclusive governance, education, and digital innovation will be critical in addressing emerging societal challenges. Lithuania's long-

term development strategy, Lietuva 2050, provides a roadmap for strengthening democracy, public trust, and national resilience. A continued focus on actionable strategies and policies will allow Lithuania to anticipate external shocks and maintain stability in an unpredictable geopolitical environment.

Ukraine's experience highlights the importance of proactive societal engagement in national resilience-building. Security awareness, socioeconomic stability and cohesion, trust in institutions, and collective memory are key components of national strength. By reinforcing these pillars, Lithuania can further solidify its position as a resilient, democratic nation aligned with European values.

10.6   Limitations and Future Research

This research offers a nuanced understanding of the complex interrelations between national identity and societal resilience, drawing on the specific experiences of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Because of the heavy reliance on expert surveys, the data collection method may constrain elite perceptions that could have affected the representativeness of the findings. Additionally, the document analysis was subject to potential source biases, which could influence the interpretation of historical narratives and policy contexts. The rapidly evolving geopolitical environment, especially in the context of hybrid threats, further underscores the necessity for periodic reassessment to ensure the findings remain pertinent.

To address these limitations, several future steps have been identified. First, expert interviews with 2–3 participants per country will be conducted as a data analysis method rather than data collection. These interviews aim to validate and refine the findings, focusing on recurring themes related to social identity and societal resilience, with a particular emphasis on predefined categories. This process will enable a deeper and more contextually grounded analysis at the national level.

Second, the research will culminate in a roundtable discussion held in Riga, Tartu, or online. This capstone event will facilitate international validation of the study's findings while fostering the development of targeted policy recommendations to enhance resilience in the Baltic States. The collaborative format will ensure that the study's conclusions are not only comprehensive but also practically actionable.

Another critical aspect of future research will involve refining the questionnaire design based on the insights and experiences gained during this research. Adjusting the questionnaire will allow for a more nuanced exploration of the identified themes and factors, ensuring that future surveys capture a broader range of perspectives and provide more robust data for analysis.

Finally, the integration of longitudinal approaches and larger datasets will enable an exploration of the evolving dynamics of identity and resilience over time. Employing quantitative methods, such as statistical modelling, alongside qualitative insights, will offer a more holistic understanding of these phenomena. Moreover, investigating the influence of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence

and social media, will be essential in understanding their dual potential to enhance or undermine societal cohesion and resilience. These refinements and extensions are vital to ensuring the continued relevance and impact of this research.

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Dmitri Teperik is the Co-founder and Director of the National Centre of Defence & Security Awareness (NCDSA) in Estonia. With over 15 years of professional experience, he has led international research projects, development programs, and professional trainings focused on resilience, cognitive security, and countering foreign disinformation. From 2016 to 2023, he directed the Resilient Ukraine program, strengthening national resilience in vulnerable communities. A co-founder of the Resilience League, he has trained experts to combat societal polarization and hostile influence. Holding an MSc from the University of Tartu, he has contributed to over 70 publications on strategic communication, disinformation, and civil security.