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The Consequences of Perceived (In)security and Possible Coping Strategies of Lithuanian People in the Context of External Military Threats

Abstract: In recent years, Lithuania's changing geopolitical environment because of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has increased the potential military threat that inevitably affects the subjective perception of security of the population. Based on the data from representative surveys and interviews conducted in 2014 and 2016, the article examines Lithuanians' subjective perception of external military threats in the new geopolitical context, the impact of this perception on their coping strategies and the factors that have an impact on the selection of these strategies. The article is based on Buzan's (1983, 1991, 2007) theoretical insights into subjective security and the sociological subjective security analysis approach of Inglehart and Norris (2012), applying it to the practically unexplored subjective response (strategies chosen by individuals) to the research into the field of military threat field. These two theoretical approaches allow the analysis of how a country's population comprehends threats to its security amid a changing geopolitical context and the examination of the impact of different groups and approaches in society when selecting coping strategies. The article argues that the perception of security changes over time, as following the events that created the feeling of insecurity in the first place, the feeling of security again starts to rise gradually. In addition, knowledge of not only the current geopolitical context but also the historical experience is important, as in societies that have undergone radical political transformations, attitudes towards the existing democratic and former Soviet regimes play a rather major part in determining subjective security. The subjective security of different social groups and their selected coping strategies also differ, as it is the most vulnerable social groups that feel least safe. The least vulnerable social groups are most inclined to defend their country, whereas more vulnerable groups choose to be passive or to look after themselves and their families first and foremost.

Keywords: subjective security; military threats; coping strategies.

"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1928, 571)

1 Introduction

Due to the changed geopolitical situation in Lithuania caused by the Russia–Ukraine conflict since 2014, it has become necessary to explain the changes in the Lithuanian people's perception of security in the face of external military threat as this field of study is still relatively undeveloped in the country. The

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data from but a few studies have been published before 2014, which, aside from other subjective security aspects, also encompass the aspect of external military threat. According to data from a study conducted in 1998, at the time, respondents were much more concerned over threats to the country's internal rather than external security – 95% of all respondents thought that there was no foreign country that posed a threat to Lithuania's external security; only 0.9% of respondents identified an external security problem (Janušauskienė and Novagrodskienė 2003, 282–283). Even though in a study conducted in 2012[1], a majority of the population (60.1%) still believed that Lithuania was not facing any military threats and only 18% of respondents thought that Russia still posed a threat, by 2014, another study[2] showed that 54.5% of the population was convinced that Lithuania's independence was indeed at stake. This kind of change in the public opinion reveals its reaction to the changed geopolitical context.

The aim of this article is to analyse the Lithuanian people's subjective perception of general and military threats, what influence this perception has on changing public opinion and their selected coping strategies, and what factors have the greatest impact on their choice of strategy. The article is based on Buzan's (1983, 1991, 2007) theoretical insights on subjective security and the sociological subjective security analysis approach of Inglehart and Norris (2012), adapting it to the practically unexamined subjective response (individuals' choice in coping strategies) to the research into the field of military threat. These two theoretical approaches allow us to analyse the population's perception of threats amid a changing geopolitical context and to study the influence of different social groups and attitudes when choosing coping strategies. This kind of approach to the research topic provides us with the missing information about the outcomes of people's perceptions – the impact on their changing values and behaviour.

The empirical basis of this article consists of representative survey data collected in 2014 and 2016. In the autumn of 2014, a pilot scientific study titled "Opinions of the Lithuanian people on Lithuania's defence and security" was conducted, during which (October 3–12) a representative (*N*=1004) national survey was held, carried out by the market and public opinion research centre "Vilmorus". During the course of this survey, six questions were given about the military threat posed by Russia, along with other related questions. The questions were aimed at clarifying how safe respondents felt in Lithuania, what their opinions were on Lithuania's capability to resist enemy aggression, what was needed in order to be able to resist enemy aggression, whether respondents would be prepared to directly provide financial support to the Lithuanian army, and whether they would personally be ready to defend Lithuania if war did break out. In 2016, the Lithuanian Social Research Centre and the Institute of Social Innovations, as part of the project "Subjective Security in a Volatile Geopolitical Context: Traits, Factors and Individual Strategies", financed by the Research Council of Lithuania, conducted a representative national survey (*N*=1004), carried out by the market and public opinion research company "Spinter research". Alongside the questions given in 2014, additional questions about the military threat from Russia were also asked: how did it affect people's lives, as well as their attitudes and behaviour strategies in the face of an actual invasion. The respondent selection method for both surveys was a multistage probability sampling, while the surveys were conducted as a quantitative interview in the respondents' homes.

The first part of the article presents the research framework of theoretical subjective security and the potential outcomes associated with this feeling. The second part analyses changes to Lithuanians' attitudes on security over the period 2014–2016 and the subjectively felt changes to their sense of security in the context of the events in Ukraine. We also tried to answer the following questions: what factors had an influence on the changes to one's sense of security, and what were the outcomes of this change in attitude in relation to Russia and its actions, as well as to Lithuania's Russians. How did a changed sense of security affect whether people agreed with the introduction of new defensive measures? The third part analyses

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1 Data from a representative survey of the Lithuanian population commissioned by the Delfi news portal ("Apklausa: realių grėsmių Lietuvai nėra, o jei bus – mus apgins NATO?" [Survey: Lithuania faces no real threats, but if they appear –will NATO defend us?], Delfi.lt).

2 Data from a representative survey of the Lithuanian population commissioned by the Delfi news portal ("Rusijos agresija prieš Ukrainą Lietuvos piliečiams atskleidė nemalonią tikrovę: priešas – už vartų" [Russia's aggression against Ukraine revealed an unpleasant reality to Lithuanian citizens: the enemy is just outside our gates], Delfi.lt).

another aspect of the outcomes of a changed sense of security – the Lithuanian people's selection of possible coping strategies and the factors that had an influence on this choice.

2 Theoretical framework on subjective security

For a long time, the concept of security had been usually associated with international and national security; however, by the end of the 20th century, attention had been drawn to analyses of security at the individual level. One of the main impulses driving researchers to rethink the concept of security was the book *People, States and Fear* by Barry Buzan, released in 1983 (McSweenen 1999, 52; Williams 2012, 4). In his book, alongside international and national security, Buzan (1983, 18) also mentions the concept of individual security, as people represent "the irreducible basic unit to which the concept of security can be applied". In the supplemented second (1991) and third (2007) editions of this book, Buzan uses a broad concept of security, which, in the general sense, refers to "freedom from threat" and expands the threat sectors: besides just military and political threat, he adds the economic, societal, and ecological sectors (Buzan 2007, 37–38). The author also distinguishes security at the individual level into objective and subjective (feeling safe) security; in addition, the subjective feeling of safety "has no necessary connections of actually being safe" (Buzan 2007, 50). This distinction is beneficial for avoiding the analysis of security as something that is objectively taken for granted and highlighting that "security is determined by actors and in this respect is subjective" (Buzan et al. 1998, 31). Nonetheless, the label "subjective" itself, as the authors note, is not quite adequate, as the "security issue is not something individuals decide alone": it is a socially constructed perception (ibid.).

Buzan has previously drawn attention to the fact that the perception of threats depends on the society and the period in time, as historical experience and its various resulting "fears easily cloud rational judgement, and lead to certain kinds of threat being given higher priority" (Buzan 2007, 122). Other authors note that different social groups can have different perceptions of security, so we can expect that "perceptions of insecurity will be stronger among those living through major wars or natural disasters, growing up in risky neighbourhoods and among the more vulnerable sectors of the population, such as the elderly, the poor, women and the less educated" (Inglehart and Norris 2012, 77–78). This kind of approach is more characteristic of a sociological analysis of subjective security, which highlights the influence of social inequality, gender, age, race, and class factors on the perception of subjective security (Stampnitzky and Mattson 2015).

The sociology of security should also pay attention to various "kinds of individual and collective responses to particular understandings of security" and "what consequences of such practices are shaping the nature of our social world" (Bajc 2013, 615). Buzan associates security with survival, claiming that "the bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence" (Buzan 1991, 432). Buzan is not the only researcher to link security with survival; for example, Roland Paris defines the "threats to security" concept as a certain type of threat to survival (Paris 2001, 98). This kind of association of security with survival is related to responses to the perceived threats to one's survival. Buzan himself mostly studies security at the international and national levels, so when he discusses responses to threats, he usually focusses on those support measures that the state puts into action in order to stop threats from eventuating (Buzan et al. 1998, 21). Based on this logic, at the individual level, the response to perceived threats would encompass individuals' actions and strategies taken in order to survive. In this regard, expanding on Buzan's theoretical provisions and his sociological approach, we could analyse not just the threats to their security that individuals see but also the types of coping strategies they create in the face of threats, as well as the factors that determine their selection of strategies.

Even though Buzan did not extend his research on security to the individual level, his insights did give a great stimulus to other studies on individual security. Due to this attention to security at the individual level, gradually, a human security theoretical paradigm is being formed (*United Nations Development Pro-*

gramme 1994; *Human Security Now* 2003; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy 2007; *Human Security Approaches and Challenges* 2008; Kerr 2013; Hampson 2013; Schnabel 2014). However, we must note that the foundations for this paradigm were formed in a period of relative calm in terms of geopolitical threats to Western countries, which is why an analysis of military threats remains on its fringes, even though, theoretically, precisely these threats cannot be denied (Paris 2001, 98).

Even though the human security theoretical paradigm focusses on the individual security level, in the words of Inglehart and Norris (2012, 72), "scholarly debate about these issues has been mainly theoretical and normative" and "little empirical work has sought to measure subjective perceptions of Human Security among ordinary people". The authors also stress the importance of subjective security research, as changes to subjective security can determine changes in values within society (Inglehart and Norris 2012; Diez-Nicolas 2015), political attitudes, and behaviour (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2016), including understanding of democracy and collective participation in the political process (Herman 2011).

In summary, we must admit that thus far, there have been very few studies of subjective security in the face of military threats and the selection of coping strategies not only in Lithuania but in other countries as well. Thus, the aim of this article is to contribute to the analysis of the perception of subjective security and its impact, so as to address this pressing knowledge deficit.

3 The attitudes of the Lithuanian people to military threats in the context of recent geopolitical events

The most general indicator of subjective security is the general feeling of security as indicated by respondents. According to data from the 2014 survey, 31.8% of survey participants felt safe or more safe than unsafe, 25.3% felt neither safe nor unsafe, while 34.5% felt unsafe or more unsafe than safe (Figure 1). Those respondents who indicated that they felt unsafe or more unsafe than safe were mostly women who were older (>50 years old), had a lower income, had a lower level of education (no higher education), and lived in smaller cities and rural areas. This strongly correlates with the provision given by Inglehart and Norris that it is the most vulnerable groups in society that feel the least safe.
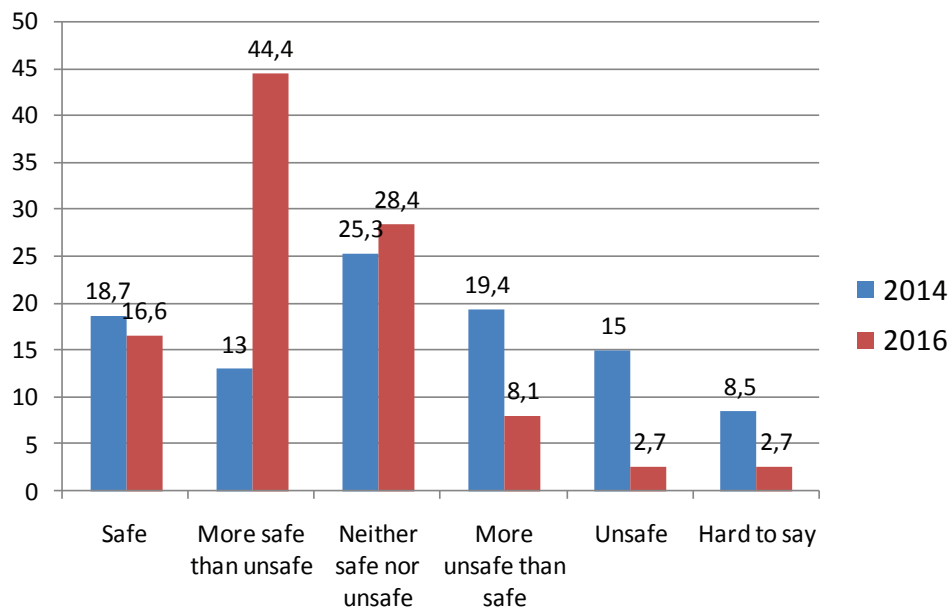

Figure 1: Changes to subjective security over the period 2014−2016 (%).

Two years after the events in Ukraine, in 2016, the general feeling of security among the Lithuanian people has increased – 61% of respondents felt safe and more safe than unsafe, while 10.8% felt more unsafe than safe and unsafe. In addition, unlike in 2014, the only statistically significant[3] socio-demographic characteristic determining the feeling of insecurity remained a poorer financial situation, i.e., respondents who had a smaller income felt more insecure than those who had a larger income (Janušauskienė et al. 2017, 105).

We can therefore presume that over time, following events that lead to a leap in subjective insecurity, the general feeling of safety does gradually return. In this way, when analysing the subjective feeling of security, we need to take into account not only the changing geopolitical context (Gečienė 2015), but also the distance in time since events that caused the feeling of insecurity, as the events in Ukraine are still continuing in 2016; however, the Lithuanian people no longer reacted so sensitively to them in terms of subjective security.

Nevertheless, when asked whether they started to feel less safe in Lithuania as a result of the events in Ukraine, almost half (49.5%) of the respondents to the survey conducted in 2016 said that they started to feel less safe, a quarter claimed that they felt neither more nor less safe, and a quarter did not feel less safe in Lithuania. Judging by socio-demographic characteristics, only nationality had a statistically significant impact on changes to the feeling of safety caused by the events in Ukraine: if 52.9% of Lithuanians felt less safe, then representatives of national minority groups were more reserved in their responses regarding a reduced feeling of safety: 36.4% and 23.7% of Poles and Russians, respectively, felt less safe. This connection echoes Buzan's insight that historical context has a major influence on subjective safety, as we can raise the presumption that Lithuanians' memories of the period of Russian occupation and the associated repressions are still alive. Meanwhile, some of the mentioned nationalities in the Lithuanian population have a different assessment of the occupation.

Indeed, further analysis reveals that changes to subjective security are statistically significantly related to respondents' attitudes towards the Soviet period and their assessments of democracy. Those who did not agree that life was better during the Soviet years and had a greater appreciation for democracy in Lithuania started to feel less safe over the events in Ukraine (Figure 2). This reveals the links between changes to the feeling of security in the face of military threats on the one hand and respondents' values (including their attitudes towards democracy) in Lithuania on the other.
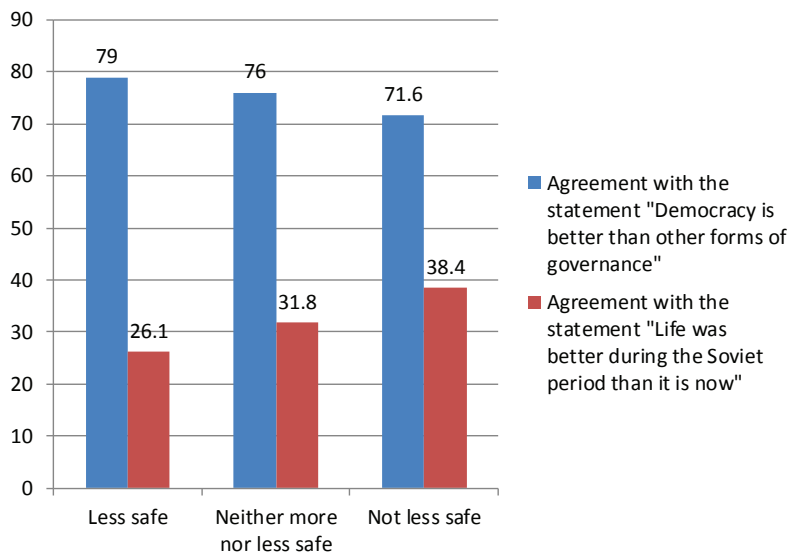

Figure 2: Impact of assessments of democracy and the Soviet period on changes to the feeling of safety following the events in Ukraine in 2016 (%).

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3 Here and further, only those correlations are given whose statistical significance is $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 1: Links between changes to the feeling of insecurity and views on the occupation of Crimea, the threat from Russia, and the risk of war in Lithuania (%).

Views	Less safe	Neither more nor less safe	Not less safe
Cannot justify the occupation of Crimea	81.1	61.2	55.3
Agree that Russia poses a great threat to Lithuania's security	67.7	26.8	14.2
Agree that there is a great risk that Russia will attack Lithuania and war will break out	54.7	29.2	22.1

Positive evaluation of the Soviet past and support for democracy are linked to the person's socioeconomic status. Respondents aged >45 years, less educated (with primary, secondary and professional education), less financially secure (who declared that they have not enough money for food and/or clothes) and from national minorities are more likely to disagree with the statement "Democracy is better than other forms of governance" and to agree with the statement "Life was better during the Soviet period than it is now". The survey showed that such differences are not statistically significant in case of agreement or disagreement with the statement on authoritarian rule – "It would be a good idea to abandon the Seimas [parliament] and the elections, but to have a strong leader who can deal with everything quickly". Therefore, it is more likely that positive evaluation of the Soviet past and weaker support for democracy is more related not with political preferences but with the reflection of their own current disadvantaged social position.

This finding can be supported by the results of other research on the evaluation of the Soviet past in Lithuania, which revealed the selective evaluation of different aspects of the Soviet regime: if evaluation of the political aspects is generally negative, some social stability and security aspects – such as the provision of work and housing, the minimum wage, and social guarantees – are evaluated quite positively, especially by older and more socially disadvantaged groups of society (Šutinienė, 2013, 193). It is possible to suppose, that, due to historical experience and selective nostalgia for social security during the late Soviet period, these older and more disadvantaged social groups feel less anxiety in the face of possible military threats from the Russian side.

The increase in feelings of insecurity following the events in Ukraine is also linked to the population's attitude towards the occupation of Crimea, the threat of Russia, the risk of war in Lithuania, and Lithuania's Russians. Those respondents who started to feel less safe in Lithuania are more negative concerning the Russians' incorporation of Crimea; more of them think that Russia does pose a threat to Lithuanian security and are more inclined to indicate a great and very great risk that Russia will attack Lithuania and war will break out (Table 1).

Even though a large majority (78.4%) of respondents claimed that their view towards Lithuania's Russians has not changed, nevertheless, 17.6% indicated that their view has turned negative. Among those who claimed that their feeling of insecurity increased, this percentage value is much greater (27%) than among those who said that their feeling of insecurity did not increase (5.3%). In this way, the increase in feelings of insecurity as a result of the events in Ukraine also led to greater intolerance towards this national minority in Lithuania.

Correspondingly, the increase in feelings of insecurity over the events in Ukraine affected the Lithuanian people's attitudes towards defence-strengthening measures. Previously, in 2014, our study revealed that in the face of such threats, Lithuanians started to positively view suggestions regarding greater funding for defence.[4] In the 2016 survey, there was a question regarding another defence-strengthening measure – what did respondents think of the reintroduction of a conscripted army. As answer, 57% of those who said that their feeling of safety after the events in Ukraine decreased had a positive opinion on the return to conscription, whereas, among those who said that their feeling of safety did not decrease, only

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4 Data from a representative survey of the Lithuanian population commissioned by the Delfi news portal ("Rusijos agresija prieš Ukrainą Lietuvos piliečiams atskleidė nemalonią tikrovę: priešas – už vartų" [Russia's aggression against Ukraine revealed an unpleasant reality to Lithuanian citizens: the enemy is just outside our gates], Delfi.lt).

47% approved of the reintroduction of conscription. This shows that the feeling of insecurity over military threats increases the population's approval of the introduction of new defence-strengthening measures. This adds to the insights of Stevens and Vaughan-Williams that changes to subjective (in)security have consequences on political views and behaviour.

4 Possible coping strategies of the Lithuanian people in the event of an attack from Russia

There was a question in the 2016 survey on what respondents would do were Russia to attack Lithuania or if there was a very realistic threat of attack. In such an event, a large majority (42.4%) of the Lithuanian people would choose to remain in Lithuania and would search for ways of protecting themselves and their families (Figure 3).

First of all, we searched for statistically significant correlations in order to work out what factors determined the selection of different strategies. The following factors were found to have an influence: socio-demographic factors (nationality, age, and financial situation) and personal views (attitudes towards the Soviet and demographic regimes, patriotism, and general satisfaction with one's life).

The second step taken in order to answer the question as to how these factors affected the selection of strategies in the case of Russian military aggression was a multinomial logistic regression analysis.[5] The dependent nominal category in this model is the choice of strategies with four categories: "passive" (corresponding to the answer "I would remain in Lithuania and not do anything"); "active, firstly caring for their family" (corresponding to the answer "I would remain in Lithuania but search for ways of protecting myself and my family"); "active, helping to defend their country" (corresponding to the combined answers "I would remain in Lithuania and contribute to the country's defence in other ways" and "I would remain in Lithuania and take up arms to defend the country"); and "potential emigrants" (corresponding to the answer "I would leave Lithuania"). A referential category was chosen for the "non-active" category, comparing the other three categories to it in order to ascertain how they differed from the "non-active" category of respondents.

The following factors determined in the binary data analysis were included in the model as independent variables: general satisfaction with one's life, attitudes towards the Soviet period and democracy, nationality, education, and gender. Even though there is a correlation between the selected strategies and
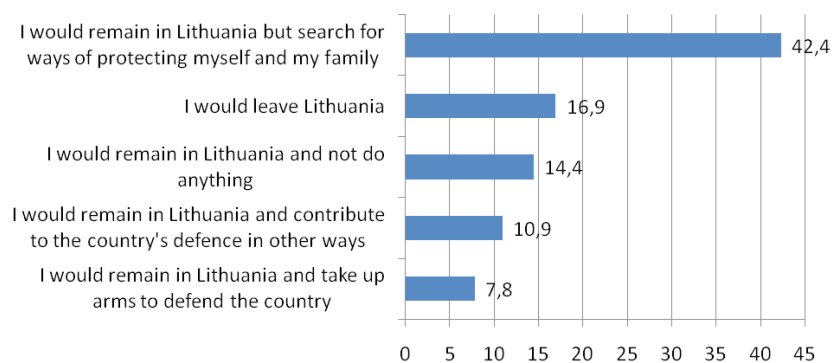

Figure 3: What would you do if Russia were to attack or if there was a very realistic threat of attack? (%).

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5 Multinomial logistic regression was chosen because it allows predicting a nominal dependent variable on the basis of continuous, ordinal or nominal independents, as well as to determine the percentage of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independents. Since the choice of strategies is a nominal variable, conventional multivariate analyses or binary logistic regression could not be applied.

Table 2: The results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis of strategies taken in the event of Russian military aggression ("passive" as a reference category).

Factors	Active, firstly caring for their family		Active, contributing to the country's defence		Emigrants	
	Exp(B)	Wald	Exp(B)	Wald	Exp(B)	Wald
Intercept		0.002		6.747		1.272
Life satisfaction	1.016	0.060	**1.212***	6.352	1.010	0.019
Evaluation of the Soviet period (ref.: Negative)						
Positive	**0.471***	6.496	**0.281***	13.323	**0.507***	4.092
Neutral	0.667	1.774	**0.376****	7.710	**0.490***	4.050
Evaluation of the Democracy (ref.: Negative)						
Positive	**2.268****	7.496	**2.812****	7.181	1.346	0.771
Nationality (ref.: Russian)						
Lithuanian	**3.615****	8.205	**16.576****	6.877	1.274	0.278
Polish	**3.245***	4.386	5.553	1.969	0.621	0.504
Education (ref.: Higher education)						
Less than secondary	**0.368***	5.268	**0.214****	8.828	**0.294***	6.005
Secondary	0.611	1.738	**0.243****	9.957	0.469	3.386
Professional	1.148	3.112	0.499	3.673	**0.320****	9.393
Sex (ref.: Female)						
Male	0.157	0.240	**2.094****	7.225	1.218	0.518
Valid *N*			729			
Model Chi-square			123.940***			
Nagelkerke's *R*-square			0.170			
% correct predictions			48.6			
Significance level			*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001			

respondents' financial situation and age, as the results of the logistic analysis show, the influence of these variables when the impact of the other variables is controlled becomes statistically insignificant, which is why these factors were removed from the model. A singularity phenomenon was observed in terms of the patriotism factor, i.e., an overly large correlation between the dependent and independent variables, suggesting that the greatest engagement (active in contributing to the country's defence) is one of the indicators of patriotism, which is why it was also not included in the model. The impact of each analysed factor remains statistically significant when the other factors in the model are controlled. The model's explanation power is rather large, as the Nagelkerke *R*-square value of 0.170 indicates. The results are given in Table 2.

In multinomial logistic regression, the impact of independent variables is commonly explained in terms of odds ratios. Exp(B), presented in the table of the results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis, refers to odds ratios. If Exp(B) is equal to 1.00, the independent variable has no effect. If Exp(B) is >1, then the independent variable increases the odds; if it is <1, the odds decrease. For example, the odds of making the choice "active, contributing to the country's defence" compared to "passive" are increased by a factor of 2.812 when the respondent positively evaluates democracy as against negatively, controlling for other variables in the model.

The model best explains the active groups, contribution to the defence of their country, as well as differences in relation to the passive group. It is more likely that respondents will choose to contribute to the defence of their country rather than remain passive if they are more satisfied with their life in present-day Lithuania, give a positive assessment of democracy, their nationality is Lithuanian rather than a national minority, and are male. And in contrast, the possibility of choosing this strategy decreases if the respon-

dents are positive or neutral in their assessment of the Soviet period and have less than a higher education.

The possibility of choosing the strategy of caring for one's family, compared to the passive respondents, is primarily increased by a positive assessment of democracy and being Lithuanian or Polish, compared to being Russian, and is decreased by a positive assessment of the Soviet period and having less than a secondary level of education. The possibility of selection of the emigration strategy, compared to the passive respondents, reduces when there is a positive or neutral assessment of the Soviet period and if the respondents have less than a higher education.

5 Conclusions

Comparison of the general subjective security since the events in Ukraine began and 2 years thereafter reveals the changes in this feeling: over time, following the events that led to the leap in subjective insecurity, the general feeling of security starts to grow again gradually; thus, distance from the traumatic events is very important in the conduct of this research. In addition, factors that have an influence on the general feeling of subjectivity change; if, in 2014, it was the most vulnerable social groups (women, elderly respondents with a lower income and less than a higher education, and those who live in smaller cities and rural areas) that felt the least safe, then in 2016, income was the only socio-demographic characteristic determining a different sense of security.

When we analysed the feeling of security due to external military threats, we noticed that this feeling of security can be directly determined not as much by the socio-demographic characteristics of social groups (except for nationality) as indirectly by the ratio between the present democratic and former Soviet regimes – those who gave a positive assessment of democracy and a negative assessment of the Soviet regime declared a reduced sense of security over events in Ukraine. This shows that when we are analysing changes to subjective security, it is important to take into account the importance of historical experience. In addition, the analysis revealed that the outcomes of changes to the feeling of security on people's attitudes and behaviour, as a decrease in the feeling of security, are linked to a worse attitude towards Russia and its actions, have an influence on the increase in intolerance towards the Russian ethnic minority group in Lithuania and a greater approval of the introduction of otherwise-unpopular defence measures (conscription).

When analysing people's possible coping strategies in the face of an actual threat of attack from Russia, several different strategy selection factors became evident. It is likely that those respondents who are men, Lithuanians, have a higher education, and are more satisfied with their lives at present gave a positive assessment of democracy and did not agree that life was better during the Soviet period, and these would be more likely to choose to take up arms or other measures to contribute to the country's defence than remain passive. Similar factors have an impact, albeit a smaller one, on choosing the strategies of protecting themselves and their families or emigration, even though in such cases, the factors of education, especially gender, are not so evident. This reveals that the least vulnerable social groups are the most likely to defend the country, while the more vulnerable social groups choose to remain passive or to care for themselves and their families.

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