

The Concept of Collaboration with 20th-Century Occupation Regimes in Lithuanian Public Opinion: Interpretations and Relevance

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Summary. Drawing on data from a nationally representative quantitative survey of the adult population, the article examines the prevailing concept of collaboration in public opinion and the relevance of collaboration-related issues for various groups in society. Both the general concept and the criteria for evaluating specific cases of ‘collaboration’ with the Soviet and Nazi regimes are discussed, along with assessments of the forms of (non-)memorialisation of collaboration. The dominant concept of collaboration prevailing in public opinion is relatively clear, and the boundaries of its core criteria (such as links to repression or the repressive apparatus, and work in political-administrative institutions that had real decision-making power) are strict and unambiguous. Greater ambiguity emerges when assessing specific cases of ‘collaboration’, work in lower-level positions with less power, spreading the ideologies of the occupation regimes, and so on. The article also examines the assessment of certain controversial cases of ‘collaboration’ in public discourse.

Keywords: collaboration, quantitative research, public opinion.

Kolaboravimo su XX a. okupaciniais režimais samprata Lietuvos visuomenės nuomonėje: interpretacijos ir aktualumas

Santrauka. Straipsnyje, remiantis suaugusių šalies gyventojų reprezentatyvaus kiekybinio tyrimo duomenimis, aptariama visuomenės nuomonėje vyraujanti kolaboravimo samprata ir kolaboravimo problemų aktualumas įvairioms visuomenės grupėms. Be to, aptariama tiek bendra samprata, tiek kai kurių konkrečių „kolaboravimo“ su sovietiniu ir nacistiniu režimu atvejų vertinimo kriterijai, taip pat kolaboravimo atminimo (ne)įamžinimo būdų vertinimai. Visuomenės nuomonėje vyraujanti bendra kolaboravimo samprata yra gana aiški ir pagrindinių jos kriterijų (tokių kaip sąsajos su represijomis ir represinėmis struktūromis bei darbas realią sprendimų galią turėjusiose politinėse-administracinėse institucijose) ribos yra griežtos ir vienareikšmės. Daugiau nevienareikšmiškumo yra vertinant konkrečius „kolaboravimo“ atvejus, darbą mažiau galios turėjusiose pozicijose, skleidžiant okupacinių režimų ideologijas ir kt. Straipsnyje aptariami ir kai kurių viešajame diskurse prieštaringai vertinamų „kolaboravimo“ atvejų vertinimai visuomenės nuomonėje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kolaboravimas, kiekybinis tyrimas, kolaboravimo interpretacijos visuomenės nuomonėje.

Questions of collaboration with occupation regimes have been discussed in most European countries since World War II, as part of broader efforts to reconsider relations with the totalitarian past and its memory. In Lithuania, these issues have been publicly debated since the very restoration of the country's independence in 1990, both in relation to collaboration with the Soviet regime and in reassessing questions of collaboration with the Nazi regime. Initially, these questions were inevitably raised by the 'return' of the memory of the victims of the Soviet regime, as well as by the practical challenges of state-building. Over time, questions of collaboration with both the Nazi and the Soviet regimes have been examined and addressed at various levels – academic, legal, and within public debate and commemorative practices – and their content and relevance have also evolved. Like in the other Baltic States, the discussion and perceived importance of these issues in Lithuania's public arena and memory culture were diminished during the first decades by the dominance of the narrative of heroic resistance and non-conformity under Soviet rule.¹ However, these issues were nonetheless examined in scholarly discourse, and numerous historical studies of collaboration with the occupation regimes were carried out. There were also recurrent and often highly conflictual public debates related to the opening of archives, historical research and legal decisions (questions of lustration were considered, and alongside historical studies, moral questions concerning Lithuanian involvement in the Holocaust, secret KGB agents, and similar issues began to be discussed). These debates intensified after Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014, and even more so following the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. The ontological insecurity triggered by these crises not only reinforced the significance of the heroic memory narrative of 'fighting and suffering', but also encouraged a rethinking of the memory of the occupation regimes, drawing attention to collaboration and the crimes associated with it.² In the past decade, discussions have mostly taken place in the context of specific events or decisions related to memory culture and policy. Liucija Vervečkienė, who studied the Lithuanian discourse on collaboration, identifies the dominant issues in the 2011–2021 period precisely as 'problems of (non-)memorialisation'.³ The debates concern both the concept of who should be considered collaborators, as well as the classification of specific historical figures or groups as collaborators and their (non-)memorialisation; questions about potential current collaboration with hostile states are also raised.

¹ Ieva Zake, 'The Exempt Nation: Memory of Collaboration in Contemporary Latvia', in: *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth and James Mark, London: Anthem Press, 2017, pp. 59–80; Felix Krawatzek, 'Remembering a Contentious Past: Resistance and Collaboration in the Former Soviet Union', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 2022, No. 36(1), pp. 298–327; Nerija Putinaite, *Nenutrūkusi styga: prisitaikymas ir pasipriešinimas sovietų Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Aidai, 2007, p. 228–292.

² Dovilė Budrytė, 'Memory politics and the study of crises in International Relations: insights from Ukraine and Lithuania', 2021, p. 22, <<https://rdcu.be/cTfA>>.

³ Liucija Vervečkienė, 'Ji buvo politinė kolaborantė': kolaboravimo sampratos Lietuvoje po 1990-ųjų, lecture delivered at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 3 September 2025.

Both the debates themselves and the reactions of various social groups and institutions to specific memory policy decisions (for example, discussions concerning certain initiatives to erect or remove monuments, or the refusal or delay by some local government authorities to implement the law of the Republic of Lithuania that entered into force on 1 May 2023 and requires the removal of objects representing totalitarian or authoritarian regimes and their ideologies from public spaces) reveal the considerable multivalence, diversity and ambiguity of interpretations of the concept of collaboration within society, as well as the fact that these interpretations are often contradictory and conflicting. Questions of collaboration in Lithuania have been examined most extensively in scholarly research, but these interpretations and findings do not always influence the discussions taking place in society or the decisions made by actors in the field of memory culture and policy. In these discussions, and to some extent in commemorative practices, reliance is placed on spontaneously formed criteria of 'collaboration', shaped not so much by academic research as by various narratives and discourses of memory culture and other forms of collective memory.

Although this concept is used more precisely and with greater nuance in scholarly research, these studies also reveal the complexity and multivalence of the phenomenon of collaboration as well as the concept that defines it. In Lithuania, this concept and manifestations of collaboration with occupation regimes – whether described through this term or through others such as 'betrayal', 'conformism' and similar notions – have primarily been examined by interpreting and evaluating the actions and attitudes of individuals and various structures within totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, especially during the Soviet period.⁴ These studies reveal the multidimensionality of the concept (encompassing political, moral and legal dimensions⁵), the diversity and variability of interpretations, and the extent to which its application depends on the country as well as on specific contexts and nuances. Various aspects of collaboration with occupation regimes have also been revealed in numerous historical studies examining the actions and attitudes of different institutions, structures and groups, as well as individual historical figures, intellectuals and others during World War II, the Stalinist period and the late Soviet era (notable examples include the work of L. Truska, A. Anušauskas, A. Bubnys, A. Eidintas, A. Rukšėnas, M. Pocius, J. Starkauskas, K. Burinskaitė, V. Ivanauskas and V. Klumbys, among others). Intergenerational research has also been conducted on the

⁴ Nerija Putnaitė, *Nenutrūkusi styga: prisitaikymas ir pasipriešinimas sovietų Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Aidai, 2007; Valdemaras Klumbys, *Stovėję po medžiu? Lietuvių inteligentijos elgesio strategijos sovietmečiu*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2021; Vilius Ivanauskas, „Ne už tokią Lietuvą dėjome parašą: istorijos politika posovietinėse Lietuvos kultūrininkų trajektorijose“, *Darbai ir dienos*, 2014, p. 209–227; *Tarp estetikos ir politikos: lietuvių literatūra sovietmečiu*, ed. by Dalia Satkauskytė, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2015; Kęstutis K. Girnius, „Pasipriešinimas, prisitaikymas, kolaboravimas“, *Naujasis Židinys–Aidai*, 1996, Nr. 5, p. 268–279.

⁵ Vytautas Tininis, „Kolaboravimo sąvoka Lietuvos istorijos kontekste“, *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2001, Nr. 1(9), p. 71.

family memory of collaboration during the Soviet period.⁶ In scholarly research, the concept of collaboration is defined more clearly and precisely than in public discourse, and considerable debate concerns its definitions and their application when assessing the actions of various individuals, groups and institutions in specific historical contexts and situations. Yet here, too, a variety of interpretations persists, and scholars note both the problematic nature of defining the concept and the insufficiency of existing definitions for characterising the attitudes and actions of particular individuals or groups in concrete historical circumstances.⁷

The multivalence and contextual nature of the concept of collaboration are also noted in studies conducted in other countries. Scholars note the impossibility of establishing universal definitions of collaboration, betrayal and similar phenomena, as well as their dependence on specific historical contexts – the historical period, the political regime, power relations, politics of memory, and so on. In different contexts, the same action may be considered a betrayal, a conformity, a way of survival, or even a morally justifiable choice. According to Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko, ‘far from being an archetypal transhistorical scheme transposable in different historical circumstances, betrayal is rather a flexible construction underpinned by thinking about (im)possible strategies of [loyalty] boundary transgression’, and ‘the social relevance, significance, and moral evaluation of betrayal vary according to the symbolic orders and historical contexts [...] Treason comprises many “shades of grey” and is often a matter of perspective.’⁸ This concept is thus understood as dynamic, multidimensional and contextual.

In the context of the multivalence, ambiguity and diversity of interpretations of the concept of collaboration visible in public debates and memory practices in Lithuania – and the often conflictual clashes between them – it is also important to know the quantitative aspects of the popularity of these interpretations in society: which interpretations of collaboration with the Soviet and Nazi regimes are relevant to and prevalent among the general public and specific social groups, and which are only significant to small segments; to what extent the conflictual interpretations visible in public debates are reflected in public opinion; whether polarising, categorical interpretations or ‘grey zone’ interpretations predominate; which memory policy decisions concerning ‘collaboration’ are

⁶ Liucija Vervečkienė, „Gal jie tikrai buvo kolaborantai ir juos puolė?“ Kolaboravimo (ne)prisiminimai ir šeimos kartų atminties darbas“, *Tautosakos darbai*, 2025, p. 13–31.

⁷ Kęstutis K. Girmius, *op. cit.*; Kęstutis K. Girmius, „Išdavystė“, *Naujasis Židinys-Aidai*, 2018, Nr. 5, p. 36–42; Vytautas Tininis, *op. cit.*; p. 71–78; Valdemaras Klumbys, *op. cit.*, p. 71–86; Algis Kasperavičius, „Kolaboravimas: chronologinės ribos“, *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2001, Nr. 1(9), p. 85–88.

⁸ Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko, ‘Introduction: “Formulas of Betrayal” – Traitors, Collaborators and Deserters in Contemporary European Politics of Memory’, in: *Traitors, Collaborators and Deserters in Contemporary European Politics of Memory: Formulas of Betrayal*, ed. by Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 2, 10.

supported or opposed by society; and so like. In this article, these questions are examined on the basis of data from quantitative research – a representative public opinion survey. The findings should be regarded as an exploratory overview that reveals only certain generalised quantitative aspects of the popular concept of collaboration. They do not, however, capture many of the nuances involved in applying and interpreting the concept in specific contexts – this would require more detailed, in-depth quantitative and qualitative research.

The aim of the study was to identify the following aspects: (1) the relevance in society of questions of collaboration with occupation regimes; (2) the content of the concept of collaboration prevailing in public opinion (the criteria of definition) and its differences across the main socio-demographic groups; (3) differences in the assessment of collaboration across the three periods of occupation – the Stalinist period (1940–1941 and 1944–1952), the Nazi occupation (1941–1944) and the post-Stalinist period (1953–1988); (4) the ‘strictness’ of the boundaries of the concept of collaboration – the balance between unambiguous ‘black-and-white’ assessments and more nuanced ‘grey zone’ interpretations; (5) certain contextual nuances of the concept – assessments of circumstances and criteria that may be seen as ‘justifying’ collaboration; and (6) assessments of certain forms of (non-) memorialisation of collaboration.

Research methodology

Despite the already noted diversity of interpretations of the concept of collaboration in specific contexts, the concept also has a common core – the connotation of betrayal and cooperation with the enemy that emerged during World War II in reference to the collaboration of French Marshal Philippe Pétain with Nazi Germany, and which after the war came to be applied to other countries that had experienced occupation.⁹ Alongside this common core, both theoretical and empirical studies of the phenomenon of collaboration also highlight more specific criteria describing its content, which are used to analyse and evaluate particular cases of collaboration. In reviewing numerous scholarly conceptualisations of collaboration, Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko identify several groups of criteria used by researchers to define the phenomenon of collaboration. These include the relationship between voluntariness and coercion, distinguishing between voluntary from forced collaboration (for example, in cases involving threats to life, violence and so on); also taken into account are the intentionality of the individual or collective actor (whether the actions were undertaken consciously), as well as their agency – their position within power relations and the presence or absence of alternative choices. Motivations for collaboration are also assessed, distinguishing between ideological support for the occupation regime, motives of material gain or career advancement, ‘neutral’ oppor-

⁹ Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth and James Mark, ‘Introduction: Collaboration, Cooperation and Political Participation in the Communist Regimes’, in: *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth and James Mark, London: Anthem Press, 2017, p. 9.

tunistic adaptation for everyday survival, 'tactical' cooperation aimed at reducing harm or protecting the community, and the so-called 'horizontal collaboration', meaning intimate or other social relationships, and so forth.¹⁰ A distinction is also made between collective collaboration (by certain institutions, structures or groups) and individual collaboration.¹¹ It is likewise noted that the definition and identification of collaboration is made even more complicated by questions of the degree of collaboration – the large 'grey zone' between collaboration and resistance, which is particularly relevant in the context of Central and Eastern Europe.¹² Given the considerable duration of the Soviet occupation, Lithuanian researchers regard this issue as one of the most significant as well, debating the temporal boundaries of applying the concept of collaboration to different periods of the Soviet era, as well as the notions that describe the 'grey zone', such as adaptation, conformism and similar concepts.¹³

In the survey, our aim was not to examine respondents' attitudes towards a specific definition of collaboration formulated by scholars, but rather – the aforementioned concept of 'collaboration' that is reflected in public opinion and that emerged spontaneously under the influence of both historiography and scholarly interpretations, as well as various memory discourses and narratives. The specific empirical indicators of the concept's content examined in the survey consisted of a list of actions that, in the Lithuanian context, may be attributed to collaboration. This list was compiled on the basis of both theoretical and historical literature and the interpretations visible in recent public debates in the Lithuanian public arena. The list covers a broad spectrum of actions that, in Lithuanian historical contexts, may be attributed to collaboration, from participation in repression or genocide to 'everyday adaptation'. Yet, as noted, identifying collaboration in specific cases involves numerous concrete historical circumstances and nuances, which make not only universal definitions, but even more detailed general definitions for specific countries and specific periods extremely difficult to formulate. In this survey, we therefore examined a generalised, partly simplified concept that does not encompass many specific nuances. A certain degree of simplification is already implied by the very use of the term 'collaboration', to the exclusion of other terms ('betrayal', 'conformism', 'crime', and so forth) which, although used less frequently, also appear in public and especially academic discourse to describe specific nuances of the phenomenon of collaboration. Nevertheless, in public debates, the term 'collaboration' is most commonly used to denote the general content of negatively viewed cooperation with occupation regimes. For this

¹⁰ Eleonora Narvselius, Gelinada Grinchenko, 'Introduction...', pp. 8–14.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹² Martin Dean, 'Where Did All the Collaborators Go?', *Slavic Review*, 2005, No. 64 (4), pp. 791–798.

¹³ Kęstutis K. Girnius, *Pasipriešinimas, prisitaikymas...*; Valdemaras Klumbys, *Stovėję po medžiu?..*; Nerija Putnaitė, *Nenutrūkusi styga...*

reason, the survey was limited to this term alone, and the survey data reflect the popular interpretations associated with it.

In constructing the empirical indicators, we tried to encompass all the main aspects of the concept of collaboration discussed both in theoretical works and in concrete empirical studies conducted in Lithuania and abroad – particularly in Central and Eastern Europe – and especially those aspects that, in one way or another, also appear in public discourse, adapting them to Lithuanian contexts. We also drew on scholarly definitions that reflect the historically formed common core of the concept – betrayal and cooperation with the enemy – such as the definition adapted to the Lithuanian context by Kęstutis K. Girnius, according to which collaboration is ‘a certain relationship between a citizen of an occupied country and the occupying power, manifested in assisting it to consolidate its rule and suppress its opponents, or at least to neutralise them. Alongside others, the following actions are to be regarded as collaboration: (a) actively participating in, or holding responsible positions within, the structures of the occupier’s government and organisations; (b) betraying or denouncing individuals to the state security organs; and (c) publicly justifying the crimes of the authorities.’¹⁴ Yet, as noted, both in research and in public discourse, this term is interpreted in different ways, with the same actions and attitudes being described in some studies as collaboration, and in others as adaptation, conformism or similar notions. For this reason, studies of these phenomena described in other terms have also been taken into account.¹⁵ Beyond the general theoretical ‘frameworks’, efforts were made in the formulation of specific survey indicators to also reflect the key criteria identified in foreign studies of collaboration, especially those conducted in Central and Eastern Europe,¹⁶ and adapted to Lithuania’s historical contexts. The empirical indicators also relied on Lithuanian historiography examining the activities and attitudes of institutions, groups and historical figures under occupation regimes.¹⁷ In developing the methodological design, the consultations of the historian Valdemaras Klumbys, a specialist in the study of the attitudes of the Lithuanian intelligentsia during the Soviet period, were of particular significance.

¹⁴ Kęstutis K. Girnius, *Pasipriešinimas, prisitaikymas...*, p. 269.

¹⁵ Kęstutis K. Girnius, *op. cit.*; Valdemaras Klumbys, *Stovėję po medžiu?...; Nerija Putinaitė, Nenutrūkusi styga...*

¹⁶ Eleonora Narvselius and Gelinada Grinchenko eds., *Traitors, Collaborators and Deserters in Contemporary European Politics of Memory: Formulas of Betrayal*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Péter Apór, Sándor Horváth and James Mark eds., *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe*, London: Anthem Press, 2017.

¹⁷ Arvydas Anušauskas [et al.], *Lietuva 1940–1990: okupuotos Lietuvos istorija*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2007; Arūnas Bubnys, *Holokaustas Lietuvoje 1941–1944 m.*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2011; A. Bubnys, *Lietuvių policijos batalionai 1941–1945 m.*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2017; Kristina Burinskaitė, *LSSR KGB ideologija, politika ir veikla 1954–1990 m.*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2015.

In constructing the empirical research indicators, the set of interpretations circulating in the public sphere debates were also one of the key sources. As already noted, public opinion reflects an implicit understanding that has become particularly pronounced over the past decade amid conflicts concerning the (non-)memorialisation of the past. We therefore examined the debates surrounding the specific cases of (non-)memorialisation and memory policy decisions that generated the greatest public resonance in recent years.¹⁸ Our aim was to capture the most popular and recurrent criteria used in these discussions to describe ‘collaboration’.

In addition to the list of actions that, in the Lithuanian context, are understood as constituting collaboration and reflect the concept of collaboration, we also examined other indicators that are pertinent in the public sphere discussions and serve to refine this concept or reveal some of the nuances of its application in specific cases – such as criteria that ‘justify’ collaboration, as well as assessments of the ‘collaboration’ of certain individuals whose actions have generated, or continue to generate, the most extensive public discussion. Also relevant in the Lithuanian historical context are the differences in how collaboration is evaluated across the successive periods of the three occupations. Respondents were likewise asked about the forms of memorialisation – or non-memorialisation – of collaboration that are discussed in the public sphere, often with considerable emotion.

The data discussed here are from a survey¹⁹ carried out on 18–28 April 2025 that is statistically representative of the opinions of the adult population of Lithuania (aged 18 to 75). The sample reflects the proportions of this population by age, gender, education, marital status, income, place of residence and type of occupation.

The relevance of questions of collaboration in society

Although other terms are also used in public debates to describe actions associated with collaboration (betrayal, conformism, etc.), the concept of collaboration itself – understood as cooperation with an enemy – appears to remain highly salient in Lithuanian society and carries strongly negative connotations. One indication of this is the data from a representative population survey conducted in 2006, which included an open-ended question about the most shameful events or phenomena in Lithuanian history. Accord-

¹⁸ A comprehensive discourse analysis was not undertaken; we only examined the debates related to specific (non-)memorialisation decisions – such as the installation or removal of monuments and other memorials, or the decisions of the ‘desovietisation’ commission – that generated the greatest public resonance in recent years. The material published on these issues on *LRT.lt*, *Delfi.lt* and *15min.lt* was analysed.

¹⁹ The survey was conducted by the market and public opinion research company Spinter Tyrimai on 18–28 April 2025. A total of 1,019 respondents were interviewed in a statistically representative survey of the country’s adult population. The sample reflects the proportions of this population by age, gender, education, marital status, income, place of residence and type of occupation. The statistical margin of error is 3.1 percent. The sampling method was quota-based, and the survey was carried out using a mixed-mode approach. For more detailed information on the survey methods used by Spinter Tyrimai, see: <<https://spinter.lt/metodai/kiemybiniai-metodai/>>.

ing to the responses, collaboration with various occupying powers ranked first, while a specific form of collaboration – participation in the Holocaust – ranked second.²⁰

The data from the 2025 survey indicate that issues of collaboration with both 20th-century occupation regimes are regarded as relevant by the vast majority of society (see Fig. 1). Issues of collaboration during both periods of Soviet rule are regarded as the most relevant: in 2025, slightly more than half of respondents considered them to be relevant or very relevant, while only 22–27 percent of the population regarded issues of collaboration across all three periods examined as not relevant.

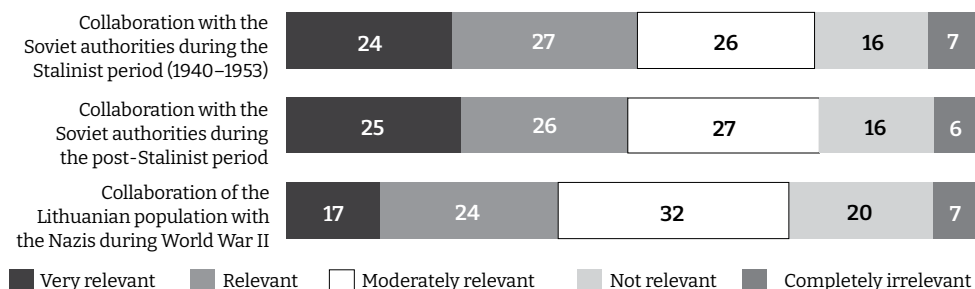


Figure 1. Assessment of the relevance of questions of collaboration (%). Question: *In your opinion, to what extent are issues of collaboration currently relevant to Lithuanian society?*

Questions concerning collaboration during the Nazi occupation are regarded as somewhat less relevant: 41 percent of respondents consider them relevant or very relevant, and a larger share than in the case of collaboration with the Soviet regime regard them as moderately relevant. The greater relevance attributed to collaboration during both periods of Soviet occupation, compared to collaboration with the Nazi regime, is likely linked not only to the shorter temporal distance separating this occupation from the present, but also to the sense of insecurity arising from the geopolitical situation, which has effectively re-activated the memory of the Soviet occupation – both the narrative of ‘fighting and suffering’ and the memory of ‘collaboration’ with the occupation authorities.²¹ This is supported by the fact that the relevance of collaboration in both Soviet-era periods – one during Stalinism and the other after – was assessed in almost identical terms.

²⁰ Responses to the open-ended question (with no predefined answer options) ‘What should Lithuanians (citizens of Lithuania) be most ashamed of from their past?’ In their answers, respondents most frequently used the term ‘collaboration’ and occasionally ‘betrayal’, at times referring to specific periods (mostly in the 20th century) and at times to ‘all occupations’. Source: Irena Šutinienė, „Socialinė atmintis ir lietuvių tautinė tapatybė“, in: *Lietuviškojo identiteto trajektorijos*, ed. by Vytis Čiubrinskas and Jolanta Kuznecovienė, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2008, p. 131.

²¹ Dovilė Budrytė, ‘Memory politics and the study of crises in International Relations: insights from Ukraine and Lithuania’, 2021, p. 22, <<https://rdcu.be/cTfA>>.

Criteria defining the concept of collaboration in public opinion

In the concept of collaboration prevailing in public opinion in 2025, several common groups of criteria defining it can be identified that are applied across all of the occupation periods examined (see Figs. 2–4).



Figure 2. Assessment of people who collaborated with the occupation authorities during the Stalinist period. Question: *Which people who cooperated with the occupation authorities during the Stalinist period should be regarded as collaborators?*

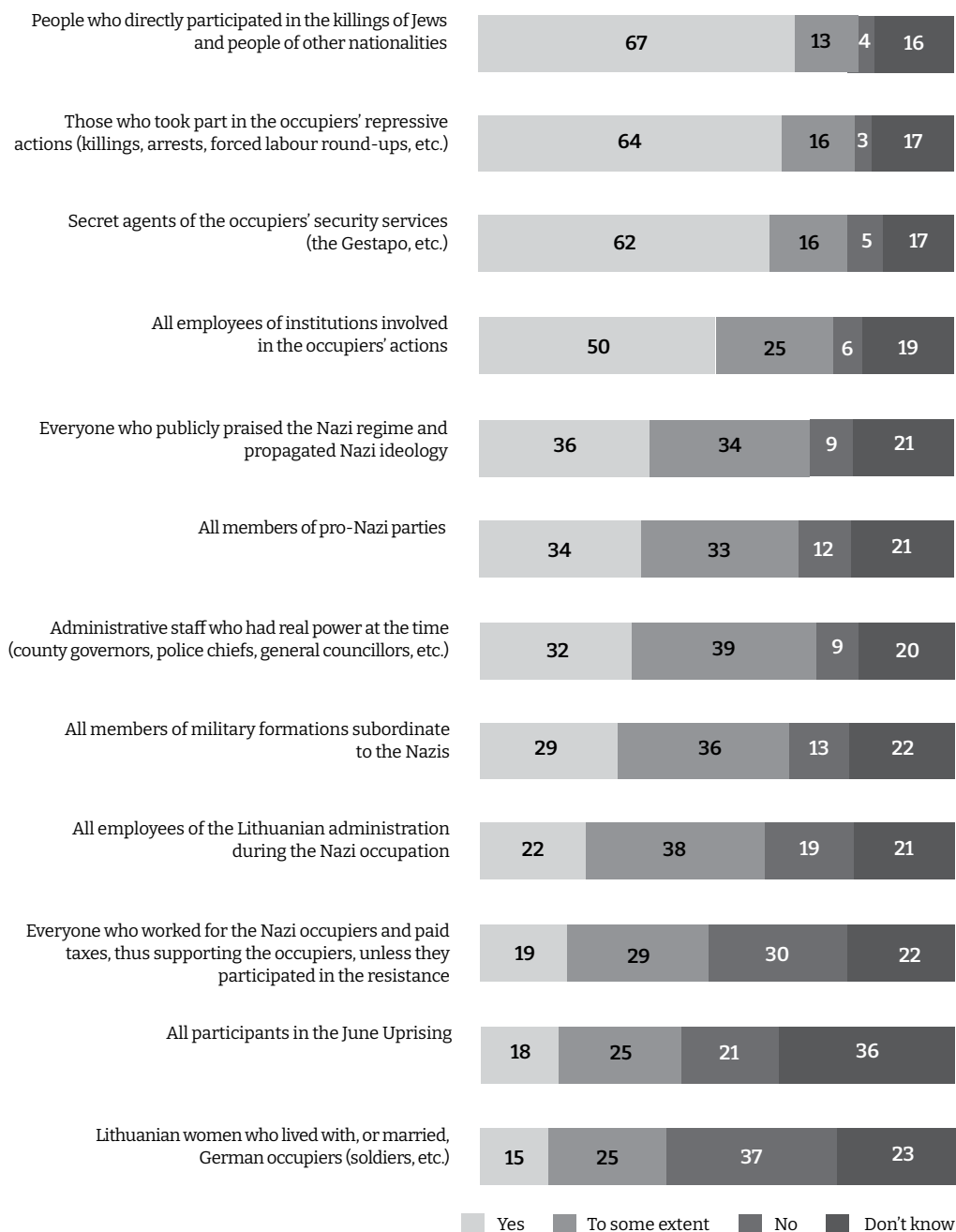


Figure 3. Assessment of people who cooperated with the occupation authorities during the Nazi occupation. Question: *Which people who cooperated with the occupation authorities during the Nazi occupation (1941–1944) should be regarded as collaborators?*



Figure 4. Assessment of people who cooperated with the occupation authorities during the post-Stalinist period. Question: *Which people who cooperated with the Soviet occupation authorities during the post-Stalinist period (1953–1988, when there were no mass repressions) should be regarded as collaborators?*

The first group of criteria defining collaboration consists of *direct and indirect links to repressions or killings*, such as taking part in them, or belonging to and assisting the structures that carried them out (secret agents, people involved in arrests or in establishing and guarding ghettos, etc.). These criteria defining collaboration are the most important for an absolute majority of respondents and are applied almost equally across all three occupation periods: 61–68 percent regard people directly involved in repressions in any of the periods as collaborators unconditionally, and a further 13–18 percent regard them as collaborators to some extent. Some 60–66 percent of respondents regard active secret agents of the occupiers' security services (MGB-NKVD-KGB or the Gestapo) who provided information as collaborators unconditionally, with a further 16–26 percent regard them as collaborators to some extent. A large proportion of respondents also regard all employees of the repressive apparatus as collaborators (43–51 percent, with a further 25–32 percent regarding them as such to some extent), as well as all secret agents. When collaboration is directly linked to genocide or repressions, indirect administrative involvement through work in the relevant structures is considered almost equally important.

A clear pattern is visible here: in all three periods, secret agents are judged more harshly than regular employees of the repressive apparatus, even though it was precisely the latter who organised and carried out the repressions, while the role of agents was generally auxiliary. Although in Lithuania, as in other post-communist countries, all security structures are judged severely – as an unquestionable 'embodiment of evil'²² – because of their direct association with repressions, secret agents are nevertheless evaluated more harshly than other employees of the repressive apparatus. When assessing agents in public opinion, the degree of collaboration is also an important criterion, with more people considering those who collaborated actively to be collaborators. Such assessments may be linked to the generally negative image of agents that prevails in Lithuania. As Liucija Vervečkienė observes, 'hypothetical affiliation with, or assistance to, the former KGB, whether proven or merely assumed, is a more general label used today when referring to individuals or groups perceived as anti-state or unpatriotic'.²³ The assessment of secret agents may also be influenced by moral considerations, as betraying people within one's own social environment may be judged more harshly on moral grounds. Secret agents of various coercive structures are judged more harshly in other post-communist countries as well. For instance, in Hungary, from as early as 1989, the secret agents of the security services have been judged more harshly than the police who had directly supported the regime since

²² Florin Abraham, 'To collaborate and to Punish: Democracy and Transitional Justice in Romania', in: *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by P. Apor, S. Horváth, J. Mark, London, 2017, p. 139.

²³ Liucija Vervečkienė, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

1957.²⁴ In this case, the opening of archives and historical research became 'an instrument for unmasking alleged wrongdoers, treating them as among the most despicable collaborators'.²⁵ One of the most important reasons for such evaluations, alongside other factors, is considered by researchers to be moral judgement, whereby the 'betrayal of one's own' is assessed more harshly. Peter Apor and Sándor Horváth illustrate this by quoting a Hungarian MP: 'the policemen wore a police uniform, but the "brick" [the synonym for secret agent] didn't wear a 'brick''.²⁶ In Romania, secret agents of the security services were also assessed more harshly, with the public only showing greater leniency towards agents who had confessed.²⁷

In Lithuania, the more unfavourable evaluation of secret agents compared with other 'collaborators' may be largely linked to moral judgement, since not only Soviet-era but also Nazi-era secret agents are regarded as collaborators by more people than the employees of the repressive apparatus of those periods. The harsher assessment of Soviet-era secret agents may be partly related to the uncertainty created by missing documents, which makes the process of identifying KGB agents difficult or even impossible.²⁸ This reinforces feelings of ambiguity and suspicion. The issue is further brought to the fore by the repeated demands of various political forces to disclose the names of agents who confessed and whom the state has committed to keeping classified (even though they constitute only a small share of all agents who operated during the Soviet period). However, a considerable proportion of respondents also regard all regular employees of the repressive apparatus as collaborators, which demonstrates the severity of the criterion concerning links to repressions.

The second most important group of criteria concerns *employment or participation in party-administrative structures or the corresponding parties*. People differentiate this criterion according to the position of the institution or individual within power relations – that is, the degree of decision-making power held. Across all three occupation periods, those who held positions with real decision-making power in the highest government

²⁴ Péter Apor and Sándor Horváth, 'Closing the Past – Opening the Future: Victims and Perpetrators of the Communist Regime in Hungary', in: *Secret Agents and the Memory of Everyday Collaboration in Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by P. Apor, S. Horváth, J. Mark, London, 2017, p. 107.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

²⁷ Florin Abraham, 'To collaborate', pp. 141–143.

²⁸ A large share of agents' personal files were destroyed or removed to Russia at the end of the Soviet period. According to data from the Lithuanian Special Archives, 33,760 LSSR KGB agent files and 2,477 operational files were destroyed during 1989 and the first three months of 1990, while approximately 5,000 personal files of the same agency and 169 operational files were transferred to the USSR KGB Omsk Oblast Archives. In 1990, a substantial part of the information about these files was also destroyed – 73 registration journals of KGB agents' personal and operational files, as well as lists of 15,000 destroyed KGB agent files. See Kristina Burinskaitė, *Slaptieji KGB bendrininkai*, Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2022, p. 23–24.

institutions – the *nomenklatura* (bureaucratic elite) during the Soviet period and the county governors, police chiefs and general councillors during the Nazi occupation – are more frequently regarded as collaborators, with 34–45 percent of respondents classifying them as collaborators unconditionally, and a further 33 percent – to some extent. By contrast, fewer people regard other employees of these institutions or officials at the local level as collaborators. Slightly more than half of the population classify all members of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) in both Soviet periods as collaborators, either unconditionally or to some extent, while an even larger share do so in the case of members of pro-Nazi parties during the Nazi occupation (34 percent unconditionally, with a further 33 percent to some extent). The assessment of the participants in the controversial June Uprising²⁹ stands out for the high proportion of respondents who have no opinion: 36 percent. Meanwhile, 43 percent of respondents regard its participants as collaborators at least to some extent, and 21 percent do not regard them as collaborators.

In the first two groups of criteria, consideration is also given to the individual's personal involvement and level of activity. Personal involvement in certain actions (including the activities of secret agents) is regarded as a more important indicator of collaboration than collaboration mediated through institutions – that is, participation in the repressive or party apparatus. However, the differences between them are not large (8–10 percent), and the collective responsibility of all members of repressive or other power-holding structures is also considered important.

The third most important group of criteria is related to *participation in the creation and dissemination of the ideologies of the occupation regimes*. Some 56–57 percent of the population regard everyone who created and propagated the occupier's ideology during both Soviet periods (writers, journalists, teachers, lecturers and others) as collaborators, either unconditionally or to some extent. Those who propagated Nazi ideology are assessed even more harshly, with 36 percent of the population regarding them as collaborators unconditionally, and 34 percent – to some extent.

The fourth group of criteria is more often referred to by researchers not in terms of collaboration, but of *everyday conformism* – the opportunistic, routine adaptation undertaken in order to survive. The smallest proportion of respondents classify such attitudes as collaboration. Only 14 percent agree that, in both Soviet periods, *everyone who followed the authorities' orders, with the exception of those involved in the resistance*, collaborated; a further 25 percent regard such behaviour as collaboration to some extent. For the Nazi

²⁹ Aimed at restoring Lithuania's independence, the June Uprising took place on 22–28 June 1941, following Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR. The uprising was unsuccessful, and it is assessed controversially due to manifestations of anti-Semitism in its documents and the that time or later connections of some of its participants to Nazi crimes.

occupation period, the figures are slightly higher: 19 percent and 29 percent respectively. A similar pattern is seen in assessments of 'horizontal collaboration':³⁰ 14 percent of respondents believe that, across all periods, *'everyone who lived with the occupiers, including spouses'*, collaborated, with an additional 25 percent agreeing that they collaborated to some extent.

Comparing assessments of collaboration across different occupation periods, it can be seen that, according to all criteria, respondents evaluate collaboration in the two Soviet periods in virtually identical terms, even though historical research assesses the nature of the regime's activities in these periods differently. Collaboration during the Nazi occupation, although regarded as somewhat less relevant to contemporary society, is evaluated in much the same way and, in some respects, even more harshly than collaboration during the Soviet period. This is likely linked to the Holocaust – the largest mass killing in Lithuania's history. Given the involvement of some Lithuanians in this crime, the more severe assessment of collaboration with the Nazi regime also indicates that society acknowledges the collaboration of 'its own', including their links to the crimes.

We can see that there is a high degree of consensus in society regarding the main criteria for assessing collaboration. This is reflected both in the very small share of respondents who disagree with the key criteria (4–10 percent) and in the predominance of unconditional assessments compared with the relatively small proportion of assessments 'to some extent'. The overall concept of collaboration in contemporary society is therefore fairly clear, and there is broad agreement on its core criteria: links with repression are indisputable, and participation in the highest political and administrative structures of the occupation regimes – especially in positions with decision-making power – is also of major importance. Differences between the two Soviet periods do not affect the general criteria used to evaluate collaboration under Soviet rule.

However, there are also less stringent criteria in public opinion that fewer people endorse unequivocally. The response option 'to some extent' made it possible to distinguish how strictly the criteria are applied – between clear-cut 'black-and-white' assessments and more ambiguous 'grey zone' evaluations. As noted above, people most often apply unequivocal criteria to individuals and repressive structures that were directly or indirectly associated with Stalinist repression or the Holocaust, and, to a large extent, to those who held real decision-making power in the highest government institutions and to active secret agents of the repressive apparatus. Thus, the boundaries of the first two groups of criteria of the general concept of collaboration prevailing in public opinion appear fairly strict and are seldom questioned. As the power of an institution or the position held within it decreased in the governing structures of the time, assessments become less cate-

³⁰ Narvselius and Grinchenko, 'Introduction', p. 11.

gorical and more ambiguous, giving rise to considerable debate about how these criteria should be applied in specific cases. Assessments by those who consider all members of lower-level institutions or parties to be collaborators are less strict – the ‘grey zone’ is larger, and ‘to some extent’ responses predominate. When ordinary membership in the LCP or participation in local-level party and administrative structures during the Soviet period are viewed as collaboration, the ‘grey area’ is roughly twice the size of the categorical assessments; analogous participation in Nazi structures is evaluated in a similar way, albeit somewhat more strictly. Ideological collaboration – participation in the creation and dissemination of the occupiers’ ideology – is likewise assessed in a lenient and ambiguous manner. In the fourth group of ‘everyday conformism’ attitudes, which most of society does not regard as collaboration, ‘grey-zone’ assessments also predominate.

Thus, when evaluating the criteria that define collaboration, people draw fairly categorical and strict boundaries around the core criteria, on which the absolute majority of society agrees. These include links to repression, as well as participation in the highest political and administrative structures of the occupation regimes that held decision-making power. More reservations are applied to those who were involved in structures and positions with less power, as well as to those who disseminated the occupiers’ ideology. The strictness of public assessments is shaped by criteria such as the position within the regime’s power relations – the degree of decision-making authority held – and, to some extent, personal or institutional (collective) involvement and the level of active participation. The nature of the activity is also important, with political and administrative cooperation being judged more harshly than ideological cooperation. Even more reservations emerge when evaluating the ‘grey-area’ attitudes between resistance and collaboration – namely, ‘everyday conformism’. Next, we will discuss other criteria that are seen in public opinion as ‘softening’ the boundaries of the concept of collaboration.

Criteria that ‘soften’ assessments of collaboration

As already noted, the nuances and multivalence of the concept of collaboration become apparent when examining specific cases in specific contexts, and the application of clear-cut definitions to particular situations is often uncertain, conditional and nuanced.³¹ A study of family memory conducted in Lithuania likewise reveals a significant gap between the clearly understood, strict categories defining collaboration at the structural (collective) level and their ambiguity and indeterminacy in specific cases.³² The boundaries can be questioned in two ways – either by challenging the very notion of the boundaries, or by accepting them but disputing the attribution of specific cases to a particular group.³³

³¹ L. Vervečkienė, *Gal jie tikrai buvo...*, p. 25–26; Narvselius and Grinchenko, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8–12.

³² Liucija Vervečkienė, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³³ Narvselius and Grinchenko, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Based on the main criteria, the general boundaries of the concept in Lithuanian public opinion are fairly strict. However, the attribution of particular cases or individuals to 'collaboration' can, at times, give rise to considerable debate in the public sphere.

In this survey we also examined several criteria that 'soften' general assessments of collaboration in specific cases, asking respondents to evaluate various circumstances that might 'justify' collaboration (see Fig. 5).

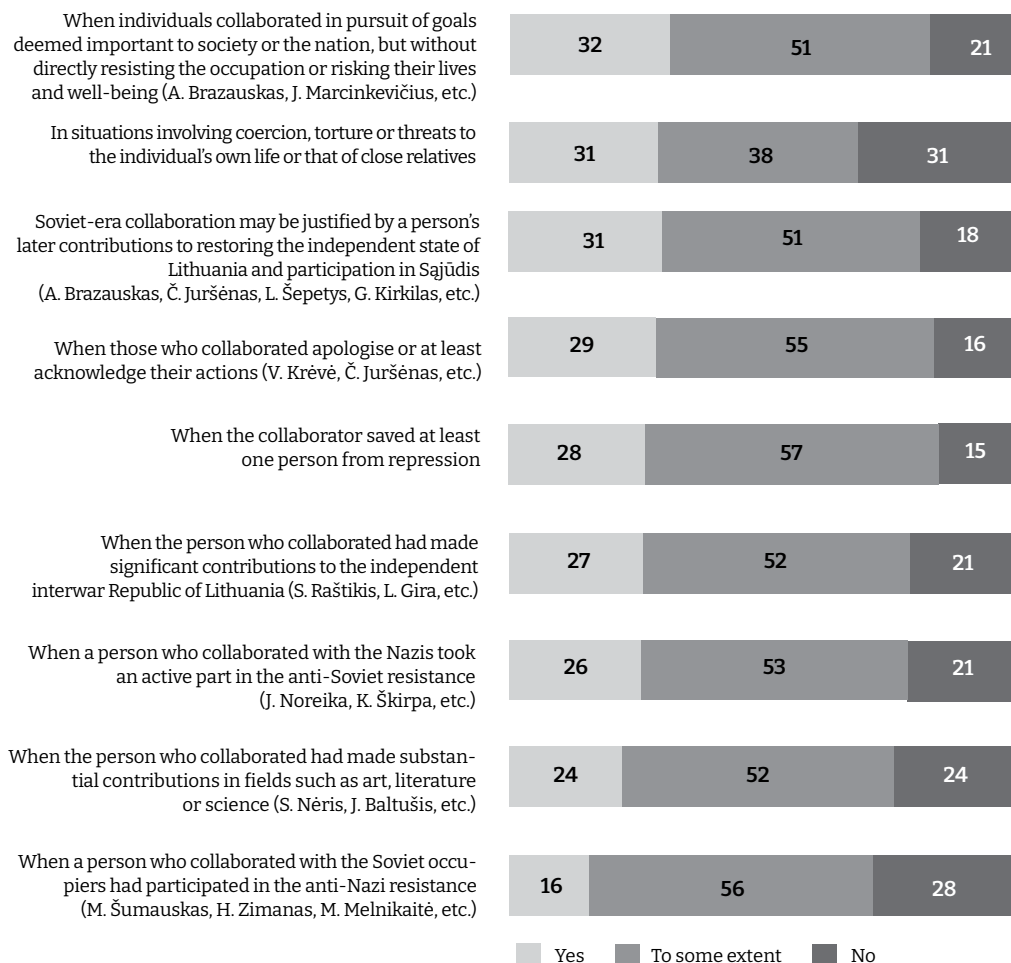


Figure 5. Attitudes towards circumstances that 'justify' collaboration. Question: *In which cases can collaboration be justified or assessed more leniently?*

There are certain cases where it is more common for respondents to feel that collaboration may be justified: when individuals collaborated in pursuit of goals deemed important to society or the nation, but without directly resisting the occupation or risking their lives and

well-being (32 percent); in situations involving coercion, torture or threats to the individual's own life or that of close relatives (31 percent); and, in the case of collaboration during the Soviet period, in view of later contributions to restoring the independent state of Lithuania and participation in Sąjūdis (also 31 percent).

The data show that very few respondents regard any of the listed circumstances as fully exculpatory; among those who consider collaboration justifiable, most are inclined to justify it only to some extent. These assessments reveal the influence of communicative memory – the memory transmitted through informal communication between generations living today. People are most inclined to 'justify' the opportunistic attitudes common among cultural and other elites in the late Soviet period, when individuals collaborated in pursuit of goals deemed important to society or the nation, but without directly resisting the occupation. The influence of this memory is also evident in the fact that, among the criteria seen as 'justifying' collaboration, later contributions to restoring the independent state of Lithuania and participation in Sąjūdis carry greater weight than their contributions to the interwar Republic of Lithuania. A person's stance towards their past cooperation is also important (acknowledging one's collaboration and expressing repentance), as is 'dual loyalty' – contributions to one's own community while collaborating (saving people from repression and so on). The participation in the anti-Soviet resistance of people who collaborated with the Nazis is considered a slightly more important extenuating circumstance than participation in the anti-Nazi resistance by people who collaborated with the Soviet occupiers. Fewer respondents regard contributions to culture as justifying collaboration than contributions to independence or participation in anti-Soviet resistance, suggesting that political activities carry greater weight in assessments of collaboration.

Even more nuances in the application of the concept of collaboration prevailing in public opinion are revealed by assessments of the 'collaboration' of specific individuals whose actions have been, or continue to be, debated in the public sphere. These assessments reflect both the general criteria of the concept outlined earlier and several of the 'justifying' criteria (see Fig. 6).

Unlike in the descriptions of the general criteria for collaboration, collaboration during the two periods of the Soviet regime – the Stalinist and the post-Stalinist – is assessed differently in specific cases. Among the listed figures, the largest share of respondents regard individuals from the Stalinist period as collaborators: First Secretary of the Communist Party Antanas Sniečkus, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, writers and poets of the time who engaged in collaboration – Kostas Kubilinskas, who was also an NKVD agent, and Petras Cvirka, a writer who held positions of power within the political structures of the time. The poet Salomėja Nėris, who propagated communist ideology but had limited involvement in political activity, is regarded as a collaborator by slightly fewer respondents – 15 percent, with a further 36 percent considering her a collaborator 'to some ex-

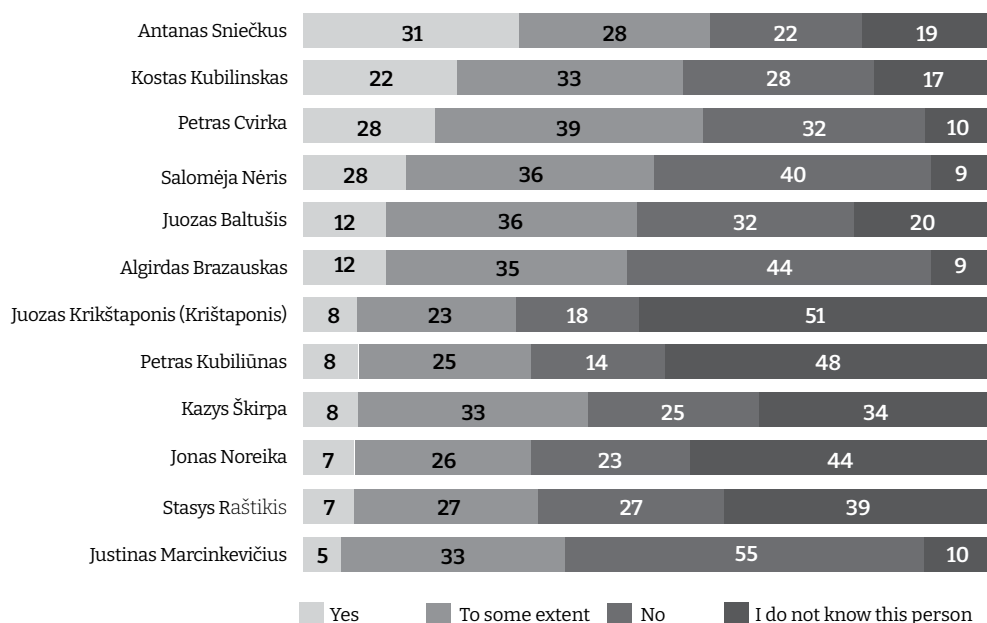


Figure 6. Trends in the classification of Lithuanian historical figures as collaborators. Question: *In your opinion, should these individuals be regarded as collaborators?*

tent'; the assessment of the Soviet-era writer Juozas Baltušis is similar. Even fewer people consider Algirdas Brazauskas – the secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania during the late Soviet period who also played an active role in Lithuanian politics after the restoration of independence – to be a collaborator. The smallest share of respondents view the late-Soviet poet Justinas Marcinkevičius, who also took an active part in the restoration of independence, as a collaborator (5 percent, with a further 33 percent judging him to have collaborated 'to some extent').

It is noteworthy that a substantial share of the public (35–51 percent) are not familiar with some of the figures whose collaboration and commemoration have prompted rather contentious and emotionally charged debates in the public sphere. These are people associated with the Nazi period and the first Soviet occupation (1940–1941): 51 percent of respondents said that they did not know of Juozas Krikštonis (Krištonis);³⁴ 48 percent

³⁴ Juozas Krikštonis (Krištonis) collaborated with the Nazi regime during the German occupation. In October 1941, he was commander of the 2nd Company of the TDA Battalion in the mass killing of prisoners from the Rudzyensk ghetto and of inmates of Stalag No 352, the Minsk prisoner-of-war camp. At the end of the war and in the postwar period, he took an active part in the armed anti-Soviet resistance, serving as commander of the Vytis Military District partisans. He was killed in 1945. See Mindaugas Pocius, „Juozas Krištonis (Krikštonis) – dalyvavimo Holokauste ir istorinio atminimo problema“, *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2022, Nr. 1(51), p. 7–36.

did not know of Petras Kubiliūnas;³⁵ 44 percent did not know of Jonas Noreika;³⁶ 39 percent did not know of Stasys Raštikis;³⁷ and 34 percent did not know of Kazys Škirpa.³⁸ An equally small share of the public – 7–8 percent – regard these individuals as collaborators unconditionally, while between 23 and 33 percent consider them to have collaborated to some extent. This would indicate that some of the public debates surrounding particular figures are of little relevance to the wider public. There is also no significant polarisation in public opinion regarding their assessment: among those who are familiar with these figures, the majority – roughly 60 percent – classify them as collaborators at least to some extent. At the same time, the biographies of most of these individuals reflect the contradictory loyalties (or lack thereof) resulting from the history of Lithuanian occupations during successive periods of occupation, the combinations of collaboration and resistance or multiple loyalties and other problematizing unambiguous assessment options. Therefore, different criteria and memory narratives sometimes collide even in the evaluation of a single individual's collaboration – the heroic narratives of post-war armed anti-Soviet resistance, as well as the narratives of anti-Nazi resistance, of cooperation with the occupying power, and of victims of repression. The collision of these different assessments gives rise to a range of evaluative outcomes. For example, anti-Soviet resistance, imprisonment or death – although they do not negate the fact of collaboration – may soften the assessment criteria for some people on a symbolic scale. The assessments of certain figures show that even the strictest criteria – links to repressions – are, in specific cases, applied with reservations. For example, a share of those familiar with Juozas Krištaponis (Krištaponis), who took part in mass killings, do not regard him as a collaborator (37 percent). In these respondents' views, his involvement in anti-Soviet activity, his imprisonment and his death 'for Lithuania' appear to symbolically offset his links to the crimes.

³⁵ General Petras Kubiliūnas was the head of the institution of General Councillors established by the Nazis from 1941 to 1944. In 1944, he fled to Germany, where he was abducted by agents of the Soviet counterintelligence services and taken to Moscow. He was executed in Moscow in 1946.

³⁶ Jonas Noreika worked within the Nazi administrative structures at the beginning of the occupation in 1941. As county governor, he signed orders establishing the Jewish ghetto and authorising the confiscation of property. In 1943, he was imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp for involvement in anti-Nazi activities. After the war, he returned to Vilnius, where he took an active part in the anti-Soviet underground. He was eventually arrested by the Soviet authorities and executed in 1947.

³⁷ Former Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces General Stasys Raštikis opposed the proposal to resist the Soviet Army by force in 1940. After the USSR occupied Lithuania that same year, he was appointed deputy chair of the Ministry of National Defence Liquidation Commission. When he was dismissed, he fled to Germany.

³⁸ Colonel Kazys Škirpa was a Lithuanian military officer and diplomat who contributed to the creation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. While in Germany, he organised the 1941 June Uprising, which was aimed at restoring the Lithuanian state in the first days of the German-Soviet War. When Germany did not agree to their demands, the uprising collapsed just a few days later. Some of the documents Škirpa had distributed in connection to the uprising contained anti-Semitic statements.

Thus, when concrete individuals are assessed, both the criteria for identifying collaboration and the criteria that may be seen as ‘justifying’ it are applied in a more individualised manner. Unlike abstract assessments of actions deemed to constitute collaboration, specific figures from the late Soviet period tend to be judged somewhat more favourably than collaborators from the Stalinist period. Literary activity during the Stalinist period, when accompanied by limited political engagement (as in the case of Salomėja Nėris), is regarded as a lesser degree of collaboration than literary activity combined with active political participation (as in the case of Petras Cvirka). In this context, contributions to contemporary Lithuania carry more weight than contributions to the interwar republic. A substantial share of the public are unfamiliar with some of the controversial figures from the Nazi and interwar periods whose collaboration and memorialisation have generated contentious debate in public discourse; hence, these discussions are only relevant to a small segment of society.

Assessments of certain forms of (non-)memorialisation of collaboration

As previously mentioned, many of the public debates on issues of collaboration over the past decade have centred less on the historical evaluation of particular individuals or events, on which specialists (though not always the general public) largely agree, and more on their public memorialisation or, conversely, the removal of memorials. These debates are usually linked to specific memory policy decisions, events or figures. Some of the evaluations of these forms of (non-)memorialisation were also examined in our survey (see Fig. 7).

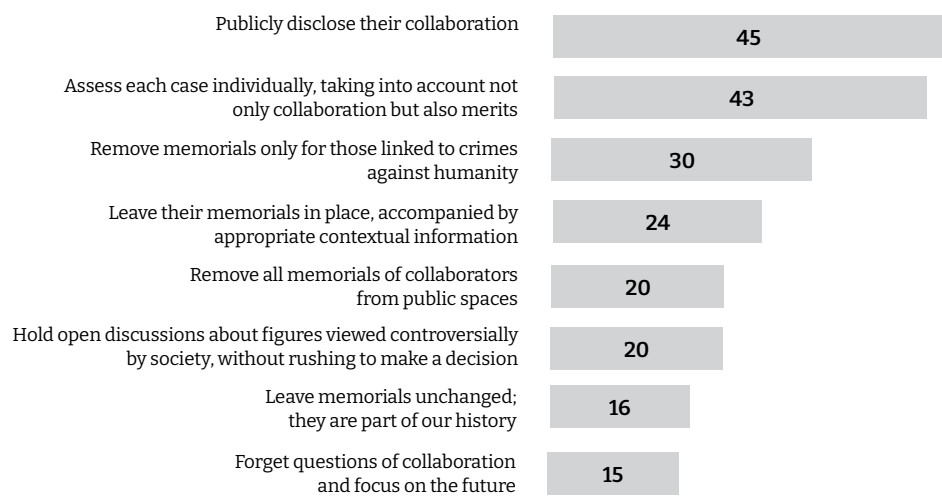


Figure 7. Attitudes about the forms of (non-)memorialisation of collaborators. Question: *In your opinion, how should the memory of people who collaborated with the occupation regimes be handled today? (select no more than the three top options)*

In responding to the question about the forms of (non-)memorialisation of collaborators in contemporary society, the largest share of respondents – 45 percent – supported publicly acknowledging their collaboration, while 43 percent favoured an individualised assessment that also takes account of their merits. In the absence of consensus, 20 percent of respondents supported public discussions without rushing to make a decision. A further 20 percent of respondents supported categorical measures – removing all memorials of collaborators from public spaces – while 16 percent suggested leaving existing memorials unchanged. Thus, most people advocate more moderate and individualised approaches to memory policy decisions.

Socio-demographic factors and their influence

Socio-demographic factors only differentiate assessments in a limited number of respects. Variables such as respondents' income, level of education and age have almost no impact on evaluations of collaboration. The strongest influence is that of *gender*: men are more likely than women to regard questions of collaboration in all periods as relevant, and men also tend to assess collaboration more categorically. Collaboration in both Soviet periods is considered relevant or very relevant by 59 percent of men and 43 percent of women, while for the Nazi occupation period, the corresponding figures are 45 percent of men and 38 percent of women. Men also express higher levels of agreement than women with all the criteria used to define collaboration, more frequently classifying all the groups and individuals mentioned in the survey as collaborators, and supporting more categorical memory policy measures (such as removing all memorials of occupation regimes). Women, by contrast, are more likely than men to favour more moderate assessments and to support individualised evaluations of collaboration and decisions on (non-)memorialisation, as well as the view that, where society is divided on matters of (non-)memorialisation, there should be public discussions without rushing to make a decision.

Residents of the major cities are somewhat more likely than those living elsewhere to regard employees of the Soviet repressive apparatus and active secret agents as collaborators, as well employees of the highest Soviet government institutions and local-level officials who had real decision-making power. They are also more inclined to classify individuals who propagated Nazi ideology as collaborators.

People with higher levels of education are somewhat more likely to regard employees of the highest government institutions in both Soviet periods who held real decision-making power, as well as all secret KGB agents during the post-Stalinist era, as collaborators. They also attribute 'everyday conformism' to collaboration more often than respondents with lower levels of education, considering *everyone who followed the orders of the Soviet authorities, with the exception of those involved in the resistance*, as collaborators. In addition, people with higher levels of education view questions of collaboration during the Nazi period as somewhat more relevant.

Income levels only have a statistically significant effect on attitudes towards individuals who created and propagated Soviet ideology in the late Soviet period – people with higher incomes are more likely than others to regard them as collaborators.

The influence of *age* on the attitudes towards collaboration studied is also negligible. Younger residents are more likely to consider employees of the highest government institutions of the post-Stalinist period and individuals who spread Nazi ideology as collaborators. Older respondents (aged 56 and over) are more likely than younger people to view contributions to interwar Lithuania and participation in the anti-Soviet resistance as circumstances that 'justify' collaboration.

The comparatively limited influence of socio-demographic factors on attitudes towards collaboration confirms that, on the one hand, there is broad societal agreement on many of the criteria for the concept of collaboration, both general and specific, that prevail in public opinion. On the other hand, the concrete interpretations of this multidimensional and complex concept have many nuances and aspects whose differences appear to be linked less to socio-demographic characteristics than to other forms of societal division.

Conclusions

Questions concerning collaboration with the occupying powers during the Soviet and Nazi occupations are quite pertinent in present-day Lithuania – slightly more than half of the country's adult population consider them relevant or very relevant, and a further quarter regard them as moderately relevant. Thus, issues of collaboration in society are important and, unlike in the first decades of independence, are not overshadowed by a narrative of resistance and nonconformity.

Public opinion reveals a fairly clear overarching understanding of 'collaboration' with these regimes, and there is broad societal agreement on its core criteria. For most people, the key factors in defining collaboration are involvement in the repressive actions and structures of the occupation regimes, and work in political-administrative institutions and positions that held real decision-making power. In public opinion, the boundaries of these criteria are relatively strict and unambiguous. There is more reservation and ambiguity when assessing work carried out in positions or structures with less power, or the dissemination of the ideologies of occupation regimes; however, only a small share of the population (10–25 percent) disagree with these collaboration criteria altogether. The absolute majority of respondents do not associate the opportunistic adaptation or 'everyday conformism' with collaboration.

Public opinion indicates that the strictness of the assessment is also shaped by criteria such as the position within the regime's power relations – the degree of decision-making authority held – and, to some extent, personal or institutional involvement and the level

of active participation. The nature of the activity is important as well, with political and administrative cooperation being judged more harshly than ideological cooperation. The more severe assessment of collaboration with the Nazi regime compared to collaboration with the Soviet authorities, as well as the harsher evaluation of specific Stalin-era collaborators relative to figures from the late Soviet period, indicates that society acknowledges the collaboration of 'its own', including their links to the crimes.

The study also revealed other criteria that 'soften' the boundaries of the concept of collaboration. People are most inclined to 'justify' the familiar opportunistic attitudes of the late Soviet period – when individuals collaborated in pursuit of goals deemed important to society or the nation, but without directly resisting the occupation. Later or earlier merits to the country also serve as important 'justifying' criteria: the contributions of collaborators to the restored state, with participation in Sąjūdis carrying slightly more weight than contributions to the interwar Republic of Lithuania. An individual's acknowledgement of their collaboration and expressions of remorse are important as well. Participation in the anti-Soviet resistance of people who collaborated with the Nazis is considered a slightly more important extenuating circumstance than participation in the anti-Nazi resistance by people who collaborated with the Soviet occupiers.

Assessments of concrete individuals are more nuanced and individualised, yet there is no marked polarisation of opinion here either. Compared with the general criteria, there are more differences in how collaboration in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods is evaluated, and later contributions to Lithuania after the restoration of independence have a considerable 'justifying' effect. Literary activity during the Stalinist period is judged as more 'justifiable' than participation in political life. A substantial share of the public are unfamiliar with some of the controversial figures from the Nazi and interwar periods whose 'collaboration' has generated many emotionally charged debates in the public arena; hence, these discussions are only relevant to a part of society.

Socio-demographic factors have comparatively limited influence on assessments of collaboration. The clearest influence is that of gender: compared to women, men find these questions more relevant and are harsher in their assessments of all forms of collaboration. Education and place of residence only affect certain individual dimensions, while age differences have little impact. The concept of collaboration is complex and has many nuances and aspects whose differences appear to be linked less to socio-demographic characteristics than to other forms of societal division.

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