



**THE EFFECT OF DISINFORMATION
AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES ON
DEMOCRATIC
PROCESSES
IN NORTH
MACEDONIA
IN 2025**

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**The Effect of Disinformation and Foreign Influences on Democratic Processes
in North Macedonia in 2025**

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INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the creation and dissemination of disinformation are recognized as a significant societal and institutional challenge that affects not only the media space, but also the functioning of democratic processes, the trust in institutions and particularly the security situation.

Although the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022 continues to influence the presence of geopolitical and pro-Russian narratives, other lines of disinformation have additionally intensified in the Macedonian media context – from anti-EU and anti-NATO messages to manipulative content related to electoral processes, health topics and new technologies, including artificial intelligence. The economic vulnerability of the media and the increased presence of content from regional propaganda sources create an environment in which such narratives are reproduced more easily, affecting the quality of information and efforts to build societal resilience to manipulative information.

The research “The Effect of Disinformation and Foreign Influences on Democratic Processes in North Macedonia in 2025” aims to determine the level of exposure to and influence of disinformation on citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia by combining analyses of the characteristics of disinformation flows with a public opinion survey conducted on a nationally representative sample. The applied methodology enables comparison with the results of previous research of the same type, including complementary surveys conducted in [2022](#) and [2023](#), providing insights into trends as a basis for setting priorities, conveyed in the form of recommendations toward a whole-of-society approach that seeks solutions to the structural causes of susceptibility to disinformation.

The research design is based on the conviction that only through systematic, empirically grounded observation can a realistic picture of disinformation trends and their impact be obtained. This approach is necessary for demystifying widespread disinformation and populist narratives – especially those that encourage apathy and impose the thesis that “everyone is the same,” thereby reducing motivation to participate in democratic processes. The goal of the research is to provide a factual basis for a more informed public debate and greater societal resilience.

The Metamorphosis Foundation conducted this research as part of broader efforts to expose the influence of foreign propaganda in the Republic of North Macedonia and to strengthen societal resilience to harmful anti-democratic influences. Synergies were achieved with the project “Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub” ([antidisinfo.net](#)), supported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as with activities for countering disinformation and developing media literacy, including previous projects supported by IFEX, IRI, TechSoup and the European Union.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This research shows that citizens continue to obtain information through traditional and digital media, with domestic TV stations (89%) and social media platforms (80%) being the most commonly used sources of information. The most senior citizens show a strong orientation toward television, while the youngest rely primarily on digital media.

Although the media landscape is changing, significant trust in traditional media remains. Domestic TV stations are trusted by 48% of citizens, while social media platforms are trusted by 26%. Although a higher percentage of citizens obtain information from social media platforms, online news portals are perceived as a more trustworthy source of information (34% of citizens trust domestic online news portals, 33% trust online news portals from the region, and 36% trust online news portals outside the region). Radio remains one of the most trusted channels (52%), but it is used for information by only a small percentage of citizens.

At the same time, as many as 85% of citizens obtain information through personal contacts, which enables the rapid circulation of unverified information.

Two thirds of surveyed citizens (65%) are aware of the seriousness of disinformation, but the number of those who believe they can recognize fake news is declining – in 2025 as many as 40% are not sure that they can identify it. This indicates the need for greater media literacy education and the development of critical thinking.

Although 40% of citizens believe that the level of disinformation is such that measures are needed to reduce it, this represents a decline compared with 2023 when that percentage was 46%. At the same time, the number of citizens who do not see a need for special measures is increasing (32% in 2025, compared with 28% in 2023), which may be explained by strengthened fact-checking efforts and greater media accountability.

Trust in the state's ability to deal with disinformation is also increasing. While in 2023 the dominant opinion was that the state lacked the capacity to deal with disinformation (39% believed the state lacked capacity, compared with 27% who believed it had), in 2025 39% believe the state has the capacity, compared with 32% who believe it does not. Nevertheless, citizens still expect a consistent and transparent state policy in countering disinformation – 67% believe that disinformation should be sanctioned by law.

Despite numerous activities aimed at increasing media literacy and debunking disinformation in the media, citizens remain highly susceptible to disinformation and conspiracy theories. 65% of citizens believe in the existence of a "secret group that controls world events" (71% in 2022), 37% believe in the "chemtrails" conspiracy theory which purports that "the white trails from airplanes in the sky are evidence that we are being sprayed with poisons" (39% in 2023), while a high 66% believe that COVID-19 was created intentionally – a percentage identical to that recorded in 2022.

The most concerning trend is the decline in belief in the existence of climate change (from 52% in 2022 to 41% in 2025), indicating growing climate skepticism and the need for systemic communication of scientifically grounded information.

The only positive trend is the decrease in belief in anti-vaccination narratives. In 2023, 39% of citizens believed that diseases can be overcome without vaccination, while in 2025 that percentage declined to 33%.

Susceptibility to pro-Russian disinformation narratives remains almost unchanged. The most illustrative example is the claim that “there are American biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine” – a narrative that has circulated for years in regional media and social networks and is believed by 39% of citizens, both in 2023 and in 2025.

Although the majority of citizens do not justify Russia’s military actions in Ukraine (43% in 2023 and 44% in 2025), support for introducing sanctions against Russia has decreased (in 2023, 42% were against introducing sanctions, while in 2025 that percentage increased to 45%). At the same time, support for Ukraine is moderately increasing (in 2023, 34% believed that the country should support Ukrainian sovereignty and independence, while in 2025 that percentage increased to 39%).

However, citizens’ awareness of the presence of pro-Russian influences in the country is growing. In 2023, 17% of citizens believed that there were sources and entities in the country that promote Russian interests; in 2025 this percentage increased to 29%.

The research records a significant change in citizens’ geopolitical attitudes. In 2023, 35% of citizens favored alliance with Russia, compared with 26% favoring alliance with the United States and the European Union. In 2025, 43% of citizens support orientation toward the United States and the European Union, while only 22% support alliance with Russia.

Citizens’ perceptions of the dispute with Bulgaria and the constitutional amendments have hardly changed over the last two years. In 2023, 50% of citizens opposed amending the Constitution due to European integration, while in 2025 that percentage increased to 52%. Differences between ethnic communities are very pronounced – only 17% of citizens of Macedonian ethnic background would support constitutional amendments, compared with 54% of citizens of Albanian ethnic background.

Citizens are not highly susceptible to disinformation narratives that attempt to undermine support for European integration by promoting the idea of institutional instability of the European Union. 25% believe that the EU will collapse soon, while 43% trust in its stability.

The most significant change is recorded in citizens’ perception of their security in the context of global military polarization. In 2023, only 31% of citizens felt more protected after the country joined NATO, while 36% did not share that view. In 2025, the percentage of those who feel more protected increased to 46%, while only 23% do not share that view.

The research in 2025 also reveals skepticism toward the European integration processes, stemming from a combination of political, economic and cultural perceptions. For a vast majority of citizens, the accession process is too slow (82%), and the belief that the EU sets unfair conditions (69%) and uses double standards (68%) also dominates, reinforcing the impression that the country is being kept on the margins of the accession process.

Economic fears are equally strong. Two thirds of respondents (67%) expect that entering the Union will bring an increase in costs and prices, and 63% fear that membership could further encourage emigration.

A significant share of citizens (59%) believe that the EU promotes liberal, leftist and LGBTQ+ values that are contrary to tradition, and an additional 40% of citizens believe that EU membership can endanger state and national sovereignty.

As a result, a dilemma emerges regarding the state's strategic direction itself: 33% of citizens believe that there are better alternatives than joining the EU, while 41% disagree with this, indicating increased skepticism but also the absence of a clear, convincing narrative for any alternative path.

Nevertheless, the European perspective has not been lost. A larger share of citizens (36%) still believe that EU membership would have a positive impact on governance and the fight against corruption – one of the most painful points in the domestic context. This shows that, despite disappointment, part of the public still sees the EU as a potential source of institutional reforms and greater accountability.

Perceptions of friendly and hostile countries remain deeply linked to citizens' ethnic affiliation. Serbia is perceived as the greatest friend of North Macedonia (40%), especially among citizens of Macedonian ethnic background (55%), while citizens of Albanian ethnic background see Albania (30%) and the United States (29%) as the greatest friends.

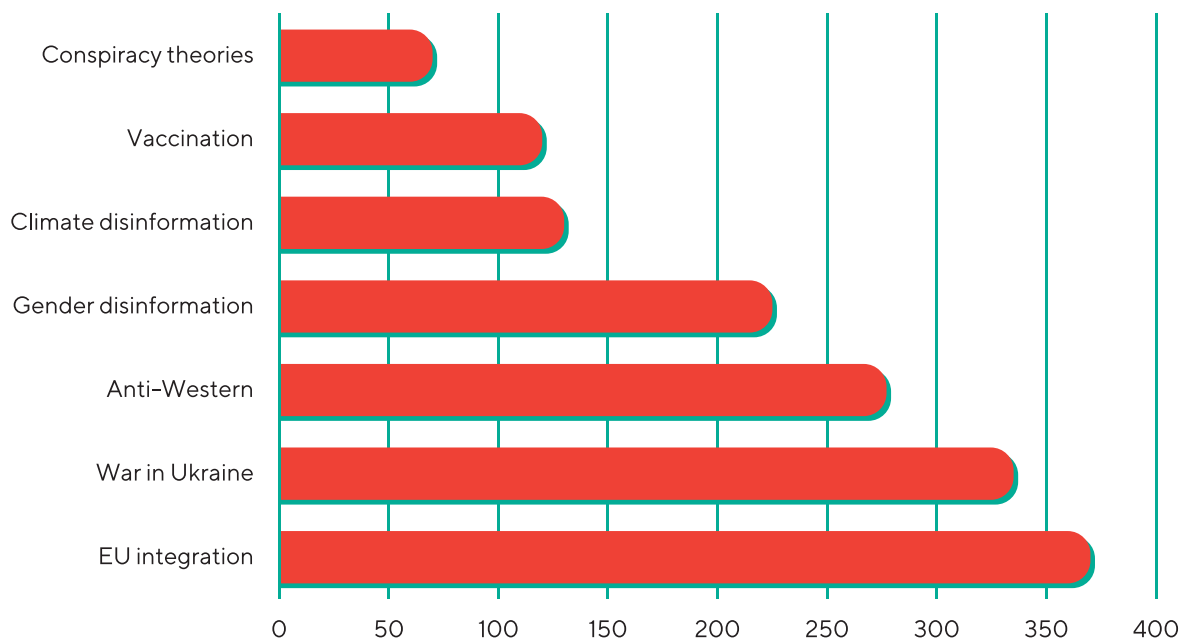
The greatest enemy of the state, according to citizens' perceptions, is Bulgaria (a high 45% share this opinion), followed by Greece (15%). Regarding this perception there are no significant differences with respect to citizens' ethnic affiliation. More significant are the differences in perceptions of Russia and Serbia, which, according to the perception of a larger share of citizens of Albanian ethnic background, are hostile countries of the state.

OVERVIEW OF DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE MEDIA

Disinformation poses a significant challenge to public trust and democratic processes in North Macedonia. Disinformation in North Macedonia has a significant impact on public trust and democratic processes. In the period January 2024 – October 2025, the information environment was exposed to intensive disinformation campaigns, especially related to tragic events, political crises, elections and the EU integration process. These campaigns aimed to provoke strong emotional reactions, encourage distrust in institutions and revive old anti-Western sentiments. Foreign and domestic actors used these events as flashpoints for creating narratives that portray democracy as ineffective and Western countries as manipulative and selfish. In a highly polarised environment, citizens often do not know which credible sources they should rely on for information, which further increases the public's vulnerability to disinformation.т, што дополнително ја зголемува ранливоста на јавноста кон дезинформации.

In order to obtain a clearer picture of citizens' exposure to disinformation content and to observe changes in public attitudes, an overview of the most prevalent disinformation topics in the Macedonian information environment in the period January 2024 – October 2025 was conducted. The overview is based on quarterly media monitoring reports from the project "Western Balkans AntiDisinformation Hub", with a focus on North Macedonia (see Bibliography).

Number of articles for each disinformation topic, period January 2024 – October 2025



1. EU INTEGRATION / ANTI-EUROPEAN NARRATIVES

Disinformation related to EU integration is used to create doubt and dissatisfaction with the European integration process in North Macedonia. EU membership is portrayed as a loss of national and cultural identity, while the blockade by Bulgaria is used as evidence of the alleged hypocrisy and double standards of the Union. Dissatisfaction with the change of the country's name is incorporated into these narratives, presenting it as an attack on the identity of Macedonian citizens. At the same time, ethnic Albanians in the country are portrayed as individuals who allegedly do not care about national identity and are focused only on rapid accession to the EU, which creates additional polarisation in society. Malign actors promote narratives claiming that the EU forces countries in the region to abandon Russia and other geopolitical partners, portraying the Union as a controlling bureaucracy with no genuine interest in citizens.

Most common narratives:

- "The EU does not truly want North Macedonia to become part of the Union"
- "The EU is blackmailing and deceiving North Macedonia"
- "It would be better for North Macedonia to join BRICS instead of the EU"
- "It would be better for North Macedonia to partner with Russia rather than the EU"
- "EU membership means losing national identity"

2. THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The war in Ukraine continues to be a major focus of disinformation narratives. In many such narratives, Ukraine is portrayed as a weak, corrupt and incapable state. Russian and pro-Russian media often frame the confrontation as a war between NATO and Russia or as a conflict in which the European Union is aggressively interfering. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is frequently targeted with disinformation about alleged corruption and personal wealth, which undermines trust in the Ukrainian government and attempts to justify Russian aggression. These narratives aim to relativise the suffering caused by the war and portray Ukraine as a victim of Western interests rather than of Russian military aggression.

Most common narratives:

- "The war in Ukraine is a war between NATO and Russia."
- "Russia is conducting a 'special operation', not a war."
- "Ukraine recruits children to fight at the front."
- "Organ trafficking is taking place in Ukraine."
- "Ukraine sells donated military aid on the black market."
- "Zelenskyy purchased a casino or property through suspicious transactions."

3. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES

Anti-Western narratives are deeply intertwined with cultural and geopolitical divisions in the region. In disinformation narratives circulating in the information environment, the United States and NATO are frequently framed as manipulative actors that undermine the sovereignty of Balkan countries and prolong the war in Ukraine for their own economic or geopolitical interests. These narratives portray Western institutions as hypocritical, while presenting alternative geopolitical actors as more authentic partners for the region. Political developments in the United States also contribute to polarisation in these narratives: U.S. President Donald Trump is sometimes portrayed as representing a 'better' West that would stabilise global politics, while in other narratives his role is used to highlight alleged instability of Western democracy.

Most common narratives:

- "NATO is a terrorist organization."
- "The West interferes in domestic political affairs."
- "NATO is financing the war in Ukraine."
- "There is no freedom of speech in the West."
- "Media freedom in Western countries is fictitious and imposed."

4. GENDER DISINFORMATION

Disinformation in this area relies on hate speech and moral panic to attack gender equality and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. European values are portrayed as dangerous and undermining traditional family values, which further polarizes the public and reinforces anti-Western narratives. These narratives originate from Russian sources and their proxies in the region, and also from actors close to political groups in the United States who promote far-right values. They often involve manipulation involving children, presenting them as victims of alleged transgender influence in order to intensify fear and resistance toward inclusion policies.

Most common narratives:

- "European countries are 'sick' because they support LGBTQ+ values."
- "The LGBTQ+ community is a threat to the traditional way of life."
- "The EU together with the LGBTQ+ community promotes pedophilia."
- "The 'gender agenda' aims to make children transgender."

5. CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

Climate disinformation narratives often portray environmental protection measures as harmful to the economy, unnecessary, or as part of global conspiracies by elites who allegedly want to control resources and the population. These contents deny the scientific reality of climate change, minimise the danger of extreme weather conditions, and promote scepticism toward renewable energy sources. The aim is to undermine scientific knowledge, create distrust toward

the institutions working on climate policies, and devalue efforts to transition to green energy, presenting them as an unnecessary cost or a threat to national economic development.

Most common narratives:

- “Climate policies are part of global conspiracies.”
- “Environmental protection measures endanger the economy.”
- “Climate change is exaggerated or a hoax.”

6. ANTI-VACCINE NARRATIVES

Anti-vaccine narratives focus on fear and disinformation about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. The aim is to reduce immunisation and undermine public health, which has a direct negative impact on the population’s collective immunity. These narratives are often linked to COVID-19 vaccines, portraying them as a hoax, thereby encouraging distrust toward health experts and medical professionals and calling into question trust in medical doctors and the health system.

Most common narratives:

- “Vaccines are experimental and unsafe.”
- “Vaccines cause cancer, infertility or autism.”
- “Vaccines are an agenda to depopulate the population.”
- “Vaccines do not protect and are poisonous.”

7. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Conspiracy theories foster uncertainty, fear, and deep distrust toward institutions by promoting the idea that powerful actors secretly control global events through alleged “secret plans.” Such narratives are designed to demotivate the public: they create a sense of apathy that discourages civic participation, promote the perception that nothing can be changed, and portray institutions as powerless. As a result, trust in democratic processes is eroded, participation in public life declines, and more radical, anti-democratic attitudes gain ground—making the public more vulnerable to manipulation and political abuse.

Most common narratives:

- “Chemtrails” – the alleged ‘spraying’ of the population from aircraft
- “The 5G conspiracy” – claims that 5G networks are harmful or used for covert control
- “A ‘new world order’ will emerge after the pandemic”
- “NATO and the West promote or control satanism”
- “Vaccines contain microchips used to monitor or control people”

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

To support advocacy efforts and encourage appropriate changes in media policies, a public opinion survey was conducted in October 2025 examining the attitudes and perceptions of the population in North Macedonia regarding disinformation in the media, interest in policy change, and the influence of foreign and domestic sources of disinformation in the context of NATO and EU integration, as well as citizens' susceptibility to various forms of malign foreign influence.

In order to better understand the effects of disinformation narratives over the past year and assess their impact on changes in citizens' attitudes toward the issues addressed in this study, a comparative analysis was also conducted using the results of public opinion surveys carried out in 2022 and 2023. This analysis also helped evaluate the positive effects of fact-checking activities in the media and contributed to the development of recommendations for measures that relevant state institutions should take in order to proactively deter malign foreign influence operations in the country.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

DISSEMINATION OF DISINFORMATION

For news and developments in the country and around the world, citizens primarily rely on domestic TV stations (89%) and social media (80%).

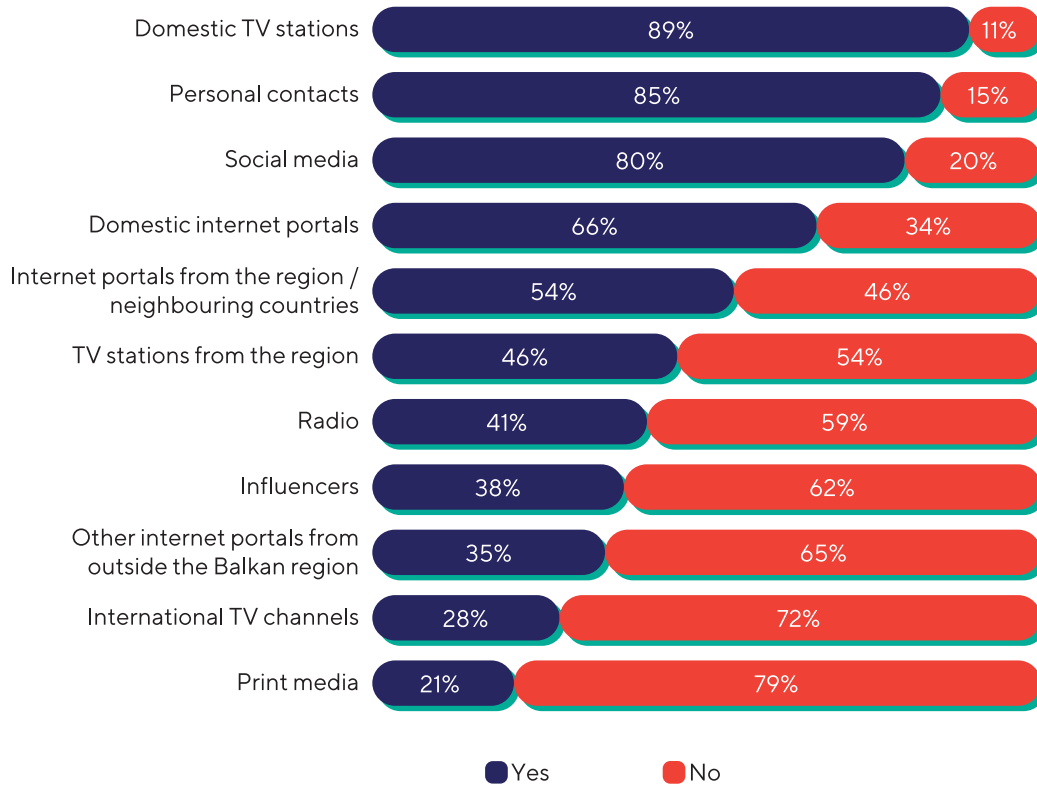
Domestic TV stations are the dominant source of information for the oldest population group (97% of citizens aged 60+ rely on domestic TV stations, while 50% rely on social media). In contrast, social media are the dominant source of information for the youngest audience (93% of citizens aged 18–29 rely on social media, while 71% rely on domestic TV stations). Other age groups rely on both media sources almost equally. Specifically, 93% of citizens aged 50–59 rely on domestic TV stations, while 85% rely on social media; 89% of those aged 40–49 rely on domestic TV stations and 95% on social media; while among citizens aged 30–39, 92% rely on domestic TV stations and the same share (92%) rely on social media.

Among digital media sources, in addition to social networks, citizens also rely heavily on online news portals: 66% obtain information from domestic online portals, 54% from portals in the region, and a smaller share (35%) from portals outside the region. In addition, 38% of citizens report obtaining information from posts by influencers.

In contrast to domestic TV stations, all other traditional media are used to a significantly lesser extent. Regional TV stations are used by 46% of citizens, while international TV stations are used by 28%. Radio is used by 41% of citizens, while printed media are used by only 21%.

The survey also shows that an extremely large share of citizens (85%) receive information about events in the country and the world through personal contacts and communication.

Do you obtain information about events in the country and the world from the following information channels?



Citizens generally have limited trust in the information they receive from different information channels. Trust in traditional media (TV stations, radio, and printed media) is higher than trust in digital media.

Although citizens obtain information about developments in the country and the world almost equally from domestic TV stations and social media, they express nearly twice as much trust in TV stations (48% of citizens completely or somewhat trust domestic TV stations) compared to social media (only 26% completely or somewhat trust social media).

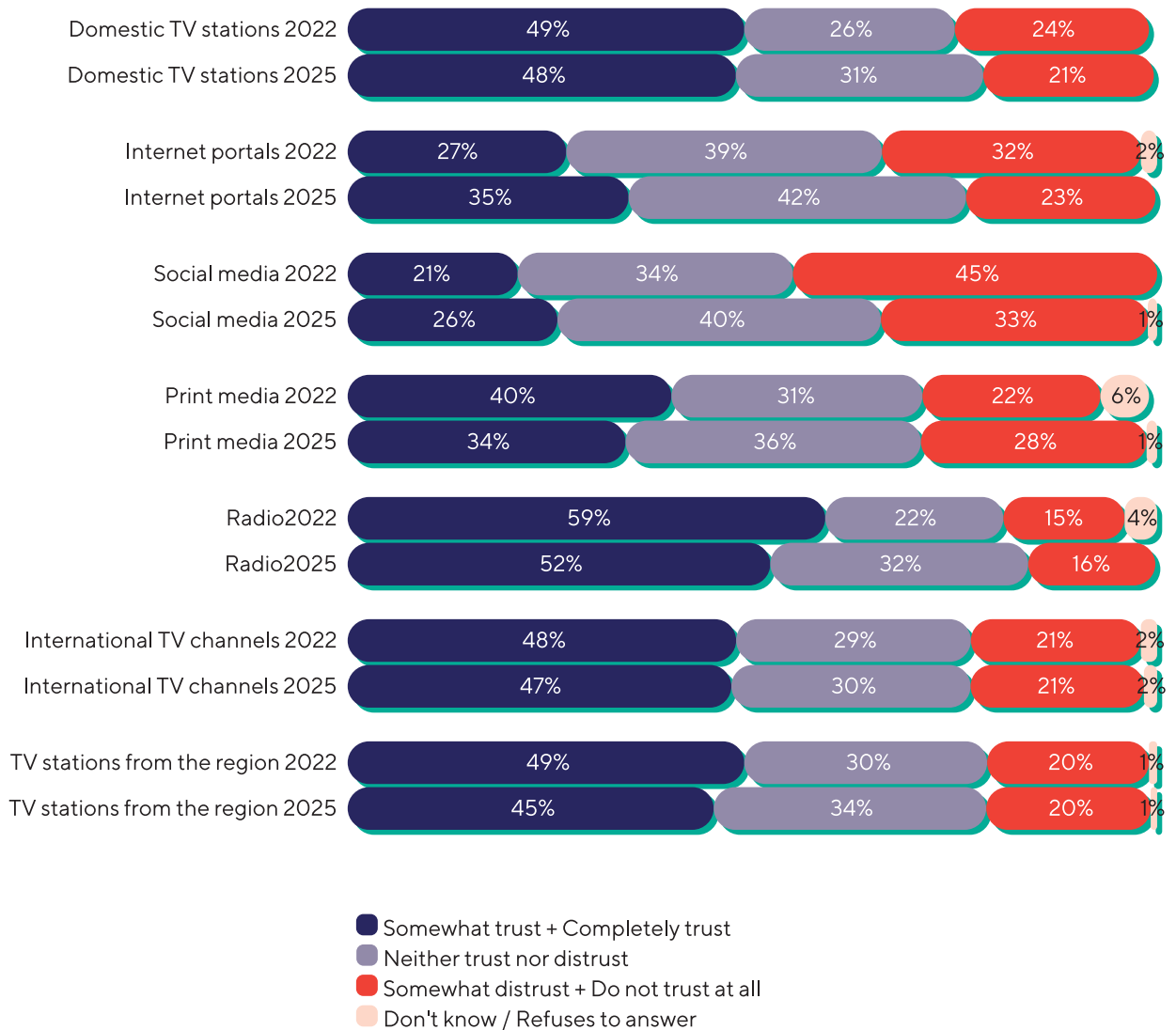
Trust in TV stations from the region is expressed by 45% of citizens, while 47% trust international TV stations. Printed media are trusted by 34% of citizens, while radio enjoys the highest level of trust among traditional media, with 52% of citizens expressing complete or partial trust.

Comparative analysis of the results from successive surveys shows a trend of increasing trust in digital media. Trust in online news portals increased from 27% in 2022 to 35% in 2025. Likewise, trust in social media increased from 21% in 2022 to 26% in 2025.

Trust in traditional media, however, shows stagnation or a slight declining trend. In 2022, the survey recorded that 49% of respondents trusted domestic TV stations, while in 2025 that share was 48%. Trust in international TV stations was 48% in 2022 and 47% in 2025. Trust in regional TV stations shows a larger decline—from 49% in 2022 to 45% in 2025.

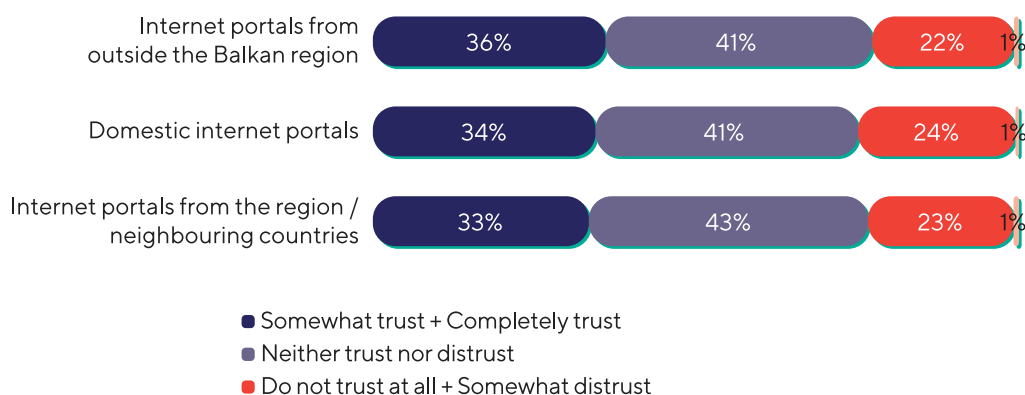
The survey also shows a decline in trust in radio (59% in 2022 and 52% in 2025) and in printed media (40% in 2022 and 34% in 2025).

To what extent do you trust the following information media or channels?



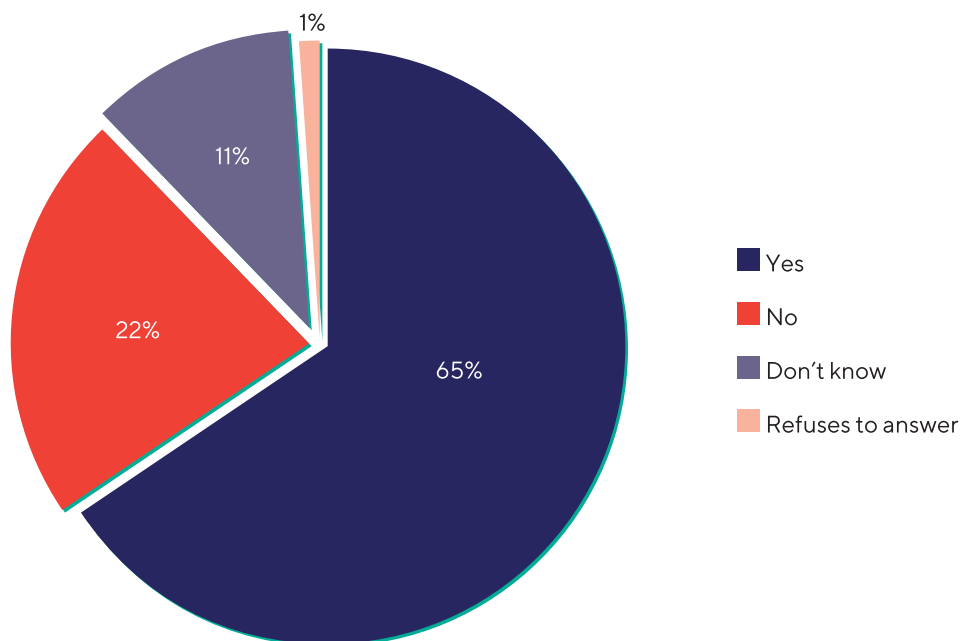
When it comes to digital media, although a significantly larger share of citizens obtain information from social media compared to internet portals, internet portals are nevertheless perceived as a more trustworthy source of information. Specifically, 26% of citizens express trust in social media, compared with 34% who trust domestic internet portals, 33% who trust internet portals from the region, and 36% who trust internet portals outside the region.

To what extent do you trust internet portals?



Two thirds of citizens (65%) are aware that disinformation represents a serious problem in our country.

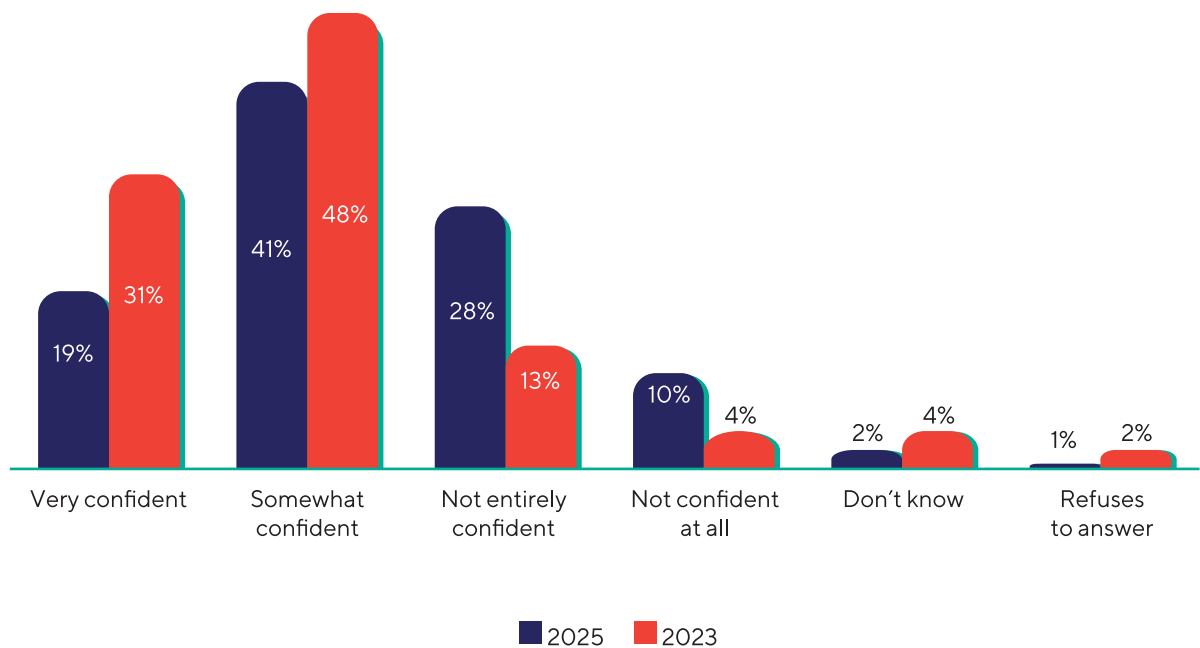
Do you think that disinformation, or fake news, represents a serious problem in our country?



Almost two thirds of citizens believe that they are capable of recognizing fake news or disinformation in the media from which they obtain information. Specifically, 19% of citizens are very confident, while 41% are somewhat confident that they can recognize disinformation in the media. Nevertheless, 28% of citizens are not entirely confident, and 10% are not confident at all that they can recognize fake news or disinformation in the media from which they obtain information.

This finding clearly indicates the need for greater media education and the development of critical thinking. This is particularly important given that, compared with the survey conducted in 2023, the share of citizens who believe they can recognize disinformation in the media has declined. While in 2023, 13% of citizens were not entirely confident and 4% were not confident at all that they were able to recognize fake news or disinformation in the media from which they obtain information, in 2025 those percentages have more than doubled..

To what extent are you confident in your ability to recognize fake news or disinformation in the media from which you obtain information?



INTEREST IN POLICY CHANGES

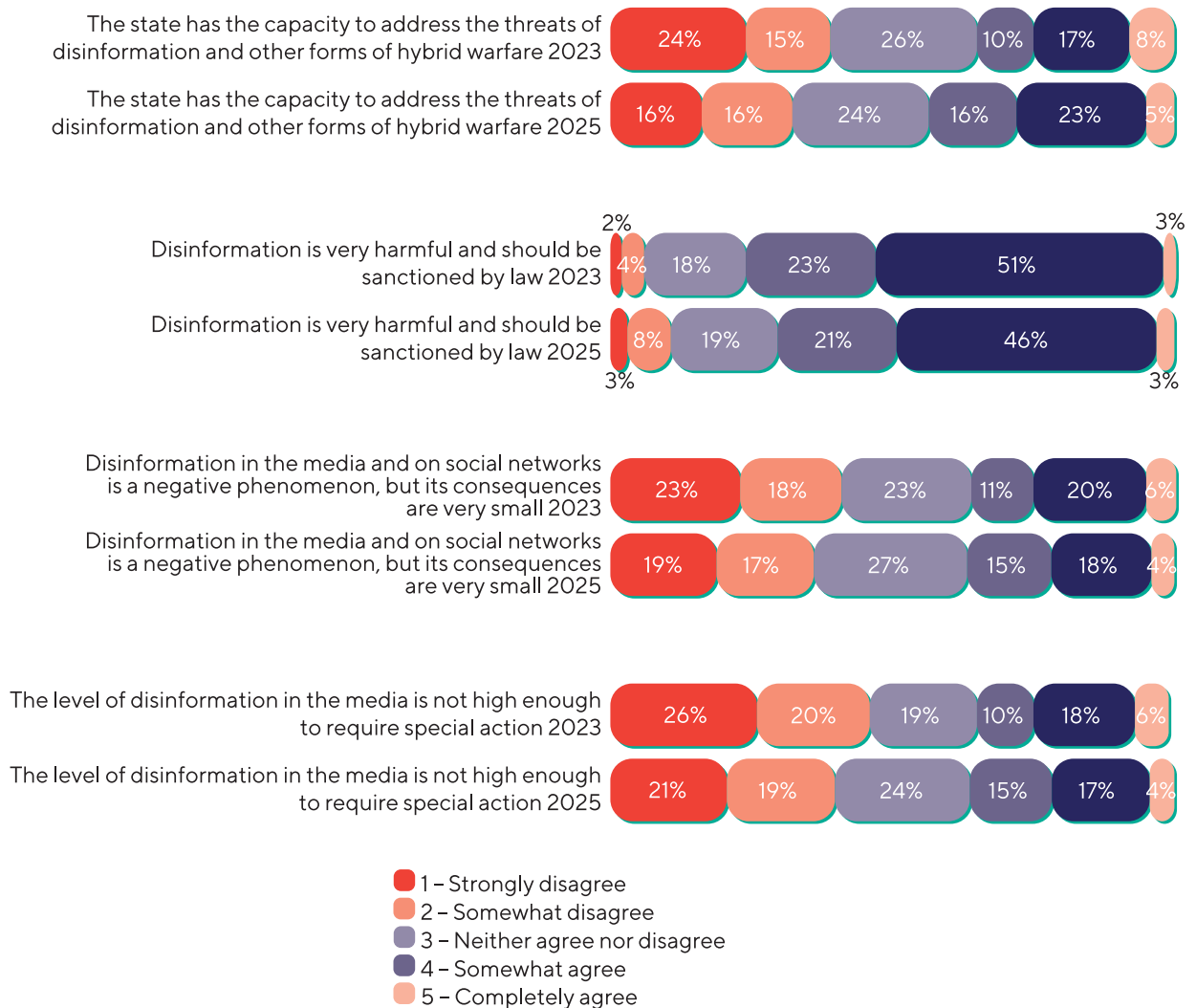
The findings indicate a gradual but significant shift in how citizens perceive disinformation in the media. While 40% of citizens believe that the level of disinformation in the media is high enough to require measures to reduce it, this represents a decline compared with 2023, when 46% of respondents held that view. At the same time, the share of citizens who do not see a need for special measures is increasing—32% in 2025 compared with 28% in 2023. This change may indicate a lower perceived intensity of disinformation, potentially reflecting stronger fact-checking efforts, regulatory actions, and greater media accountability over the past two years. It is also notable that almost a third of citizens (28%) have no formed opinion on this issue, suggesting that the topic remains complex and that part of the public is still hesitant or does not feel sufficiently informed to respond.

The 2025 survey shows that 36% of citizens believe that disinformation in the media and on social media platforms is a negative phenomenon and that its consequences are not minor, compared with 33% who believe that disinformation in the media and on social media platforms is present but that its consequences are very small. This suggests a shift in perception compared with 2023, when a higher share of citizens were aware of the consequences of disinformation (41%), compared with a smaller share who believed the consequences were minor (31%). These findings indicate that citizens remain aware of the harm caused by disinformation, but that their assessment of the seriousness of its consequences has weakened slightly. This shift may signal improvements in the information environment, but also a risk of reduced vigilance among the public. To maintain resilience to disinformation, clear and continuous communication about disinformation risks is needed.

Comparing the 2023 and 2025 data shows a significant change in citizens' trust in the state's ability to address threats from disinformation and other forms of special warfare (hybrid threats). While in 2023, 39% of citizens believed the state lacked capacity to deal with these threats, compared with 27% who believed capacity existed, in 2025 the picture shifts in the opposite direction. Now 39% believe the state has the capacity to address disinformation and hybrid threats, while 32% believe it does not. This shift in perception may reflect greater visibility of institutional efforts over the past two years, as well as the presence of media literacy programmes or activities aimed at debunking disinformation narratives in the media space.

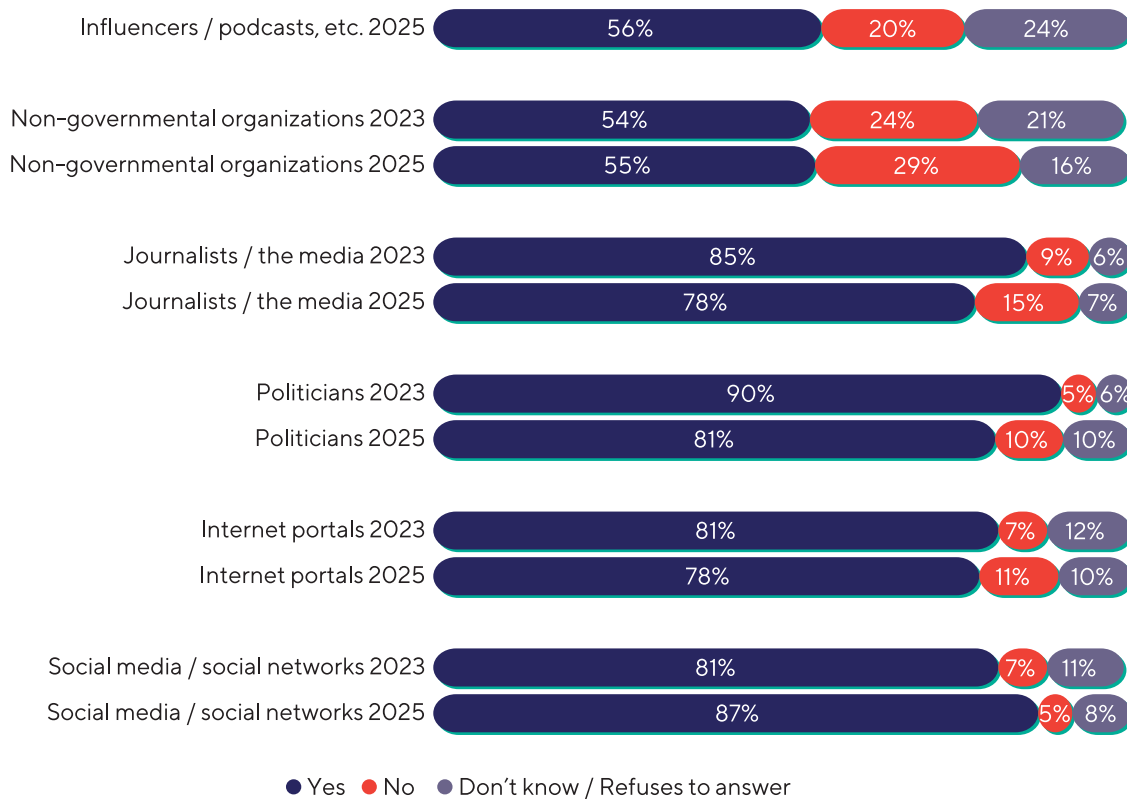
The data show that a critically large share of citizens believe that disinformation should be sanctioned by law. In the 2023 survey, 75% of citizens, and in 2025, 67% of citizens, agreed with the statement that disinformation is highly harmful and should be sanctioned by law. Strong support for legal sanctions indicates that, despite increased trust in institutions, citizens expect a consistent, transparent, and proactive state policy for countering disinformation and special influence operations.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Citizens reckon that disinformation is disseminated primarily through social media platforms and online news portals. As many as 87% of citizens believe that disinformation spreads through social media platforms, while 78% cite online news portals. Comparative results with the 2023 survey show a notable increase in perceptions of social media as channels through which disinformation spreads—from 81% in 2023 to 87% in 2025. By contrast, the trend for online news portals is declining: in 2023, 81% believed disinformation spread through online news portals, while in 2025 that share fell to 78%.

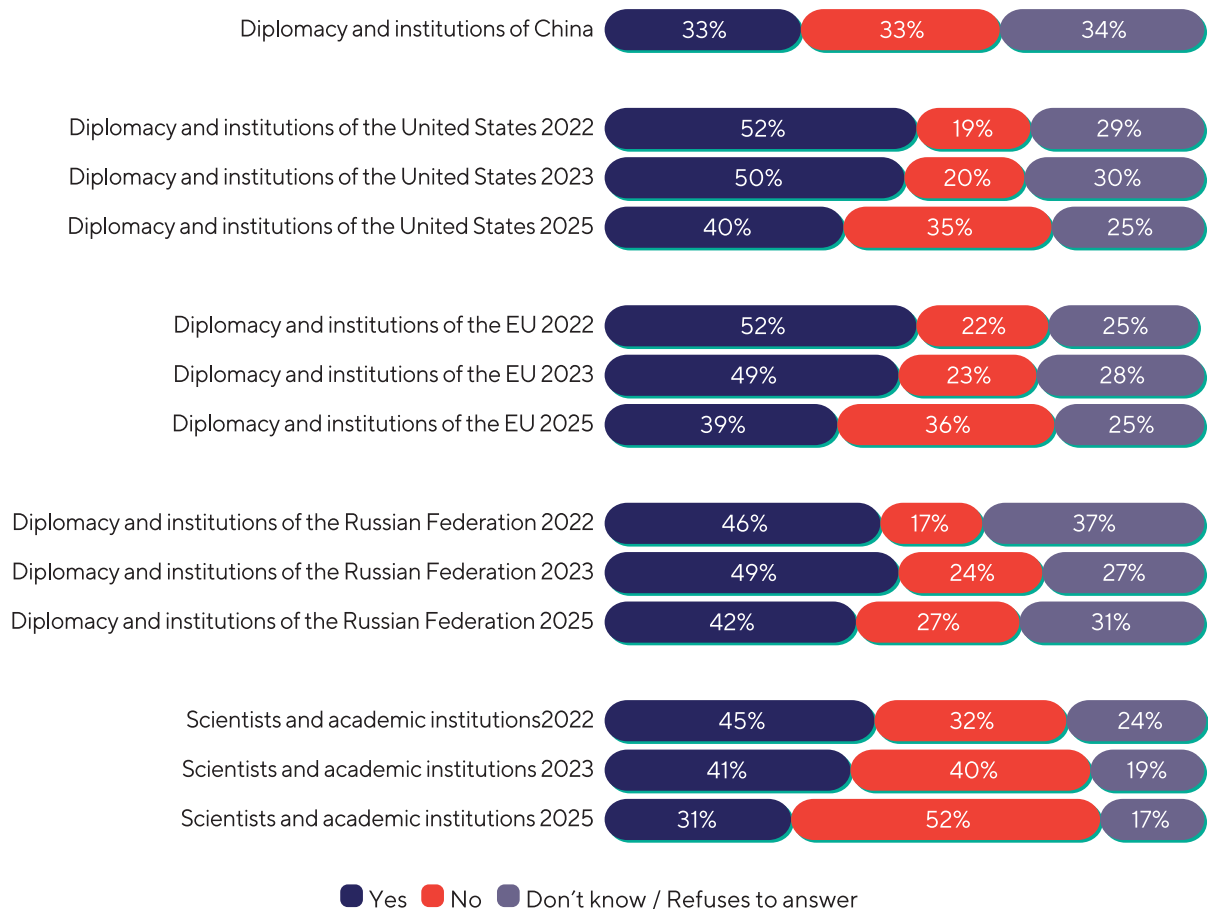
Which of the following actors disseminate disinformation in the country?



According to respondents, disinformation is disseminated to the greatest extent by politicians (90% in 2023 and 81% in 2025 share this view), and also by journalists, i.e., the media (85% in 2023 and 78% in 2025). Non-governmental organizations are viewed as a source of disinformation by 55% (54% in 2023), and influencers are viewed as a source of disinformation by 56% of citizens.

Although comparative analysis of the 2022, 2023, and 2025 data shows a declining trend, a substantial share of citizens still believe that disinformation in the country is also disseminated through various diplomatic services. In 2022, 52% believed disinformation was disseminated through U.S. diplomacy and institutions; in 2025 this fell to 40%. Similarly, 52% believed in 2022 that disinformation was disseminated through EU diplomacy and institutions, while in 2025 this share was 39%. The diplomacy and institutions of the Russian Federation were seen as disseminating disinformation by 46% in 2022, and by 42% in 2025. Overall, the comparative analysis shows a shift in perception: whereas in 2022 citizens tended to believe that disinformation was disseminated more by the U.S. and the EU than by the Russian Federation, in 2025 the perception is the opposite.

Which of the following actors disseminate disinformation in the country?



In 2025, citizens' perceptions regarding China were also measured: 35% believe that China's diplomacy and institutions disseminate disinformation in the country, while the same share do not agree with this claim.

Comparative analysis shows a notable shift in perceptions of scientists and academic institutions between 2022 and 2025. In 2022, a high 45% believed that scientists and academic institutions in the country disseminated disinformation, while in 2025 only 31% shared that view, compared with 52% who disagreed.

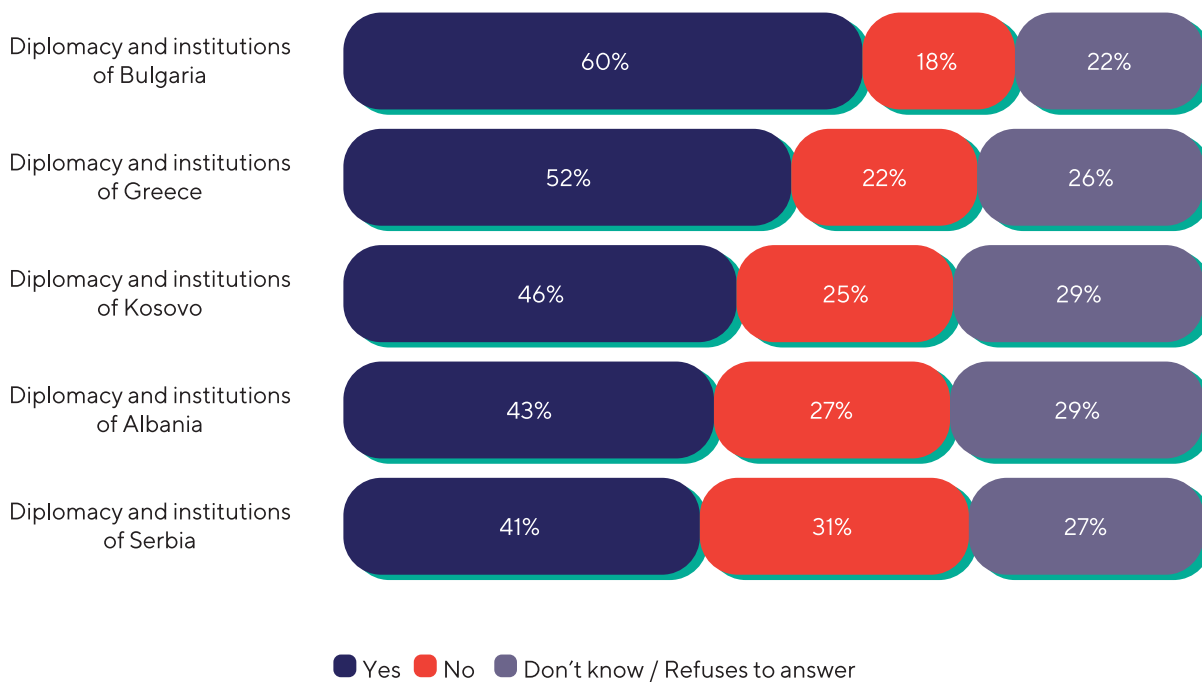
The 2025 survey also measured citizens' views regarding neighboring countries. According to citizens, the diplomacy and institutions of neighboring countries disseminate disinformation in the country to a greater extent than the diplomacy and institutions of major geopolitical powers. As many as 60% believe that Bulgaria's diplomacy and institutions disseminate disinformation in the country, and 52% believe that Greece's diplomacy and institutions do so. Regarding these two neighboring countries, there are no significant differences between citizens of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic background.

Attitudes toward Kosovo, Albania and Serbia vary significantly along ethnic lines, and the overall picture is shaped primarily by differing perceptions among citizens of Albanian and Macedonian

ethnic background. Kosovo’s diplomacy and institutions are seen as disseminating disinformation by 46% of citizens, and Albania’s by 43%. These high shares largely reflect perceptions among citizens of Macedonian ethnic background. Among Macedonians, 51% believe Kosovo disseminates disinformation, compared with 22% who disagree; similarly, 48% believe Albania disseminates disinformation, while 25% believe the opposite. By contrast, perceptions among citizens of Albanian ethnic background are more balanced: 31% believe Kosovo disseminates disinformation, while 35% disagree; regarding Albania, 30% believe it disseminates disinformation, compared with 37% who reject the claim.

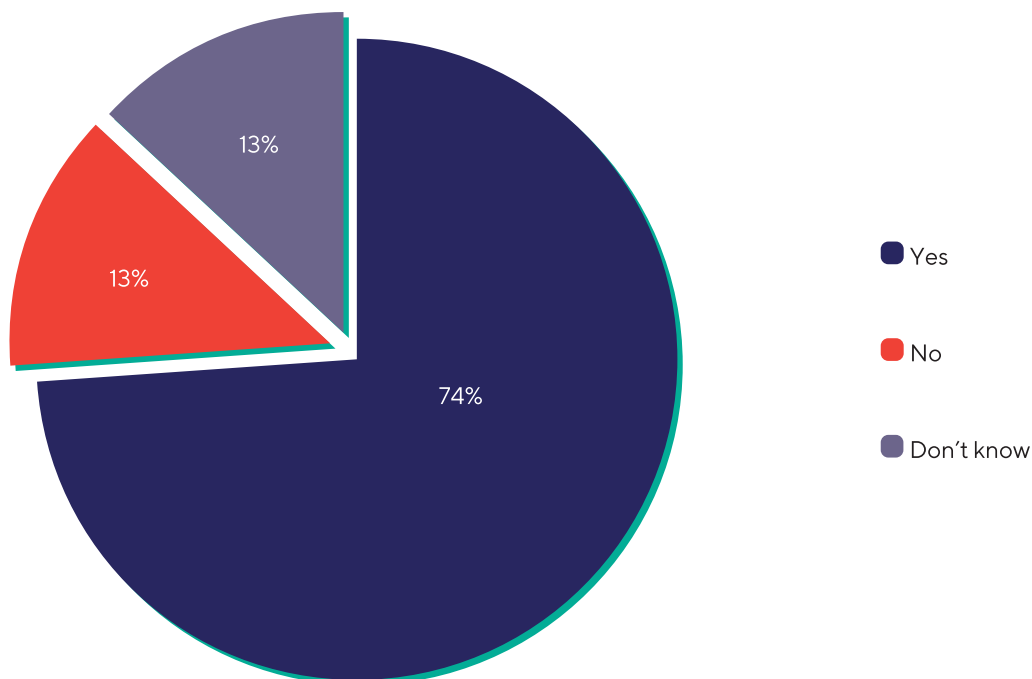
Regarding Serbia, 41% of citizens believe that its diplomacy and institutions disseminate disinformation in North Macedonia. This finding is largely driven by the views of citizens of Albanian ethnic background, among whom 53% believe Serbia is a source of disinformation, while only 18% hold the opposite view. Among Macedonians, perceptions are more evenly split: 37% believe Serbia disseminates disinformation, while a nearly identical share—38%—disagree.

Which of the following actors disseminate disinformation in the country?



Three quarters of surveyed citizens (74%) believe that the Government should take measures to address disinformation in the media.

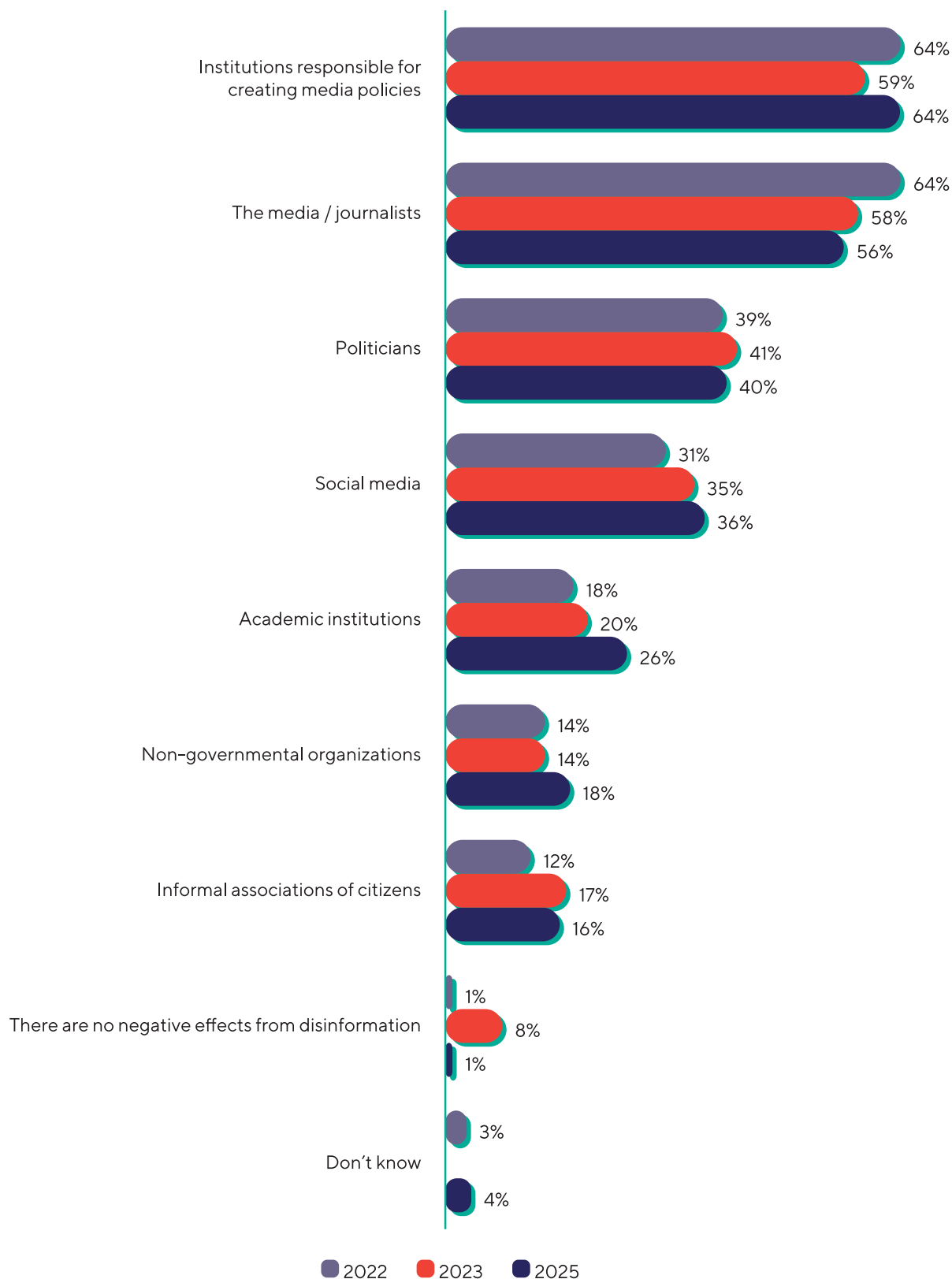
In your opinion, should the Government take measures to address disinformation in the media?



Comparative analysis of the 2022, 2023 and 2025 surveys confirms which actors, according to citizens, should play a role in reducing the negative effects of disinformation in the media. Citizens believe that the leading role should be played by institutions responsible for creating media policies (64% in 2022, 59% in 2023, and 64% in 2025). Citizens also expect the media, i.e., journalists, to play a leading role, but this expectation declines over the measured period (64% in 2022, 58% in 2023, and 56% in 2025).

Between 2022 and 2025, a change is also observed in citizens' attitudes toward the role of other actors. In 2022, 39% believed that politicians should play a role in reducing the effects of disinformation in the media, while in 2025 this share is 40%. In 2022, 31% expected responsibility from social media platforms, while in 2025 this increased to 36%. The largest increase in expectations is recorded for academic institutions: 18% in 2022 believed they should play a role in reducing disinformation, rising to 26% in 2025. Civil society organizations were cited by 14% in 2022 and by 18% in 2025, while informal citizen associations were cited by 12% in 2022, compared with 16% in 2025.

Which of the following stakeholders, in your opinion, should play a leading role in reducing the negative effects of disinformation in the media?

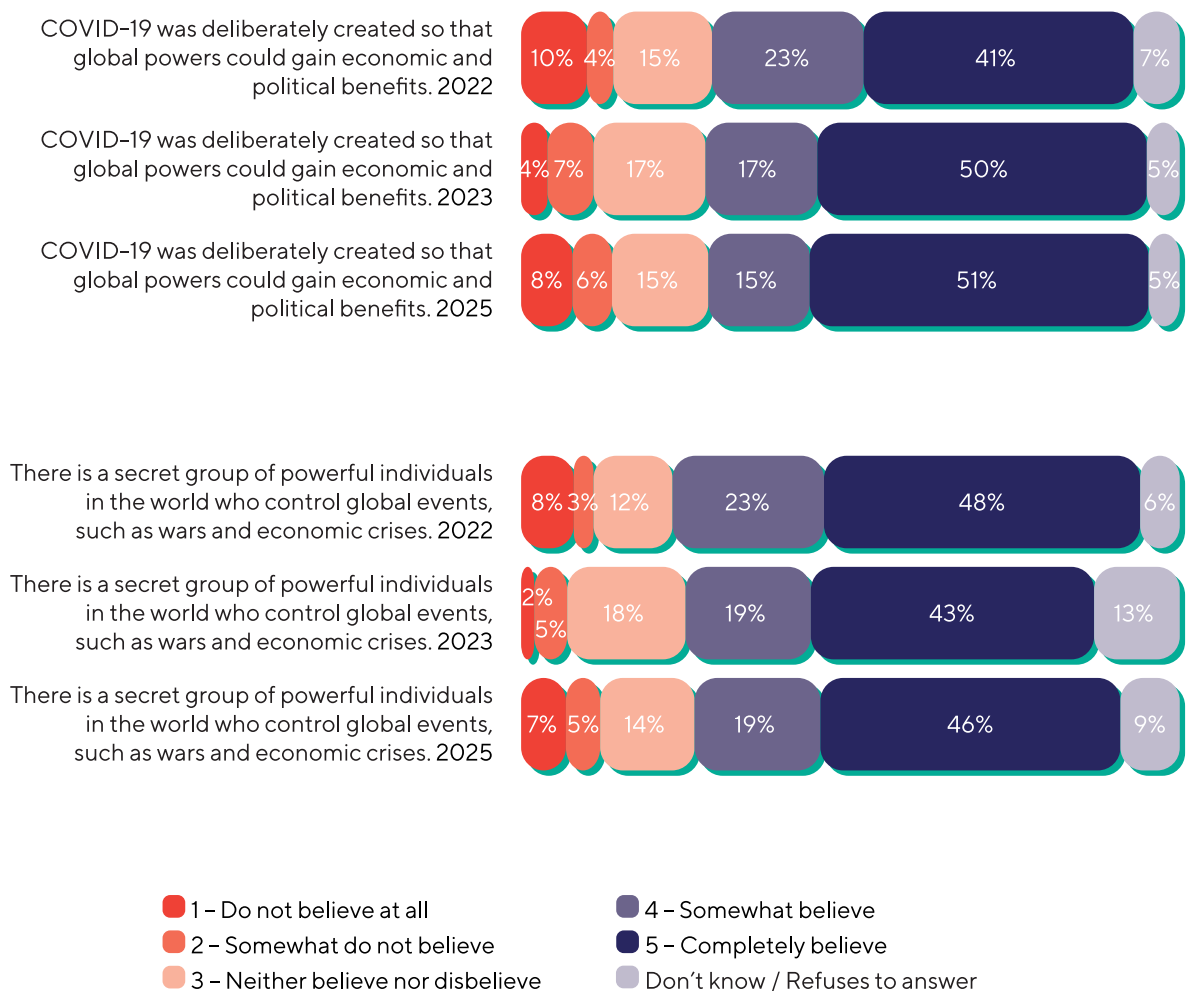


INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC SOURCES OF DISINFORMATION

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The survey shows that citizens remain, to a large extent, susceptible to disinformation and conspiracy theories. Comparative analysis of the data from 2022, 2023 and 2025 highlights the need for continued efforts to expose disinformation in the media, as well as to raise public awareness and media literacy in order to achieve visible changes in public attitudes.

To what extent do you believe each of the following statements?

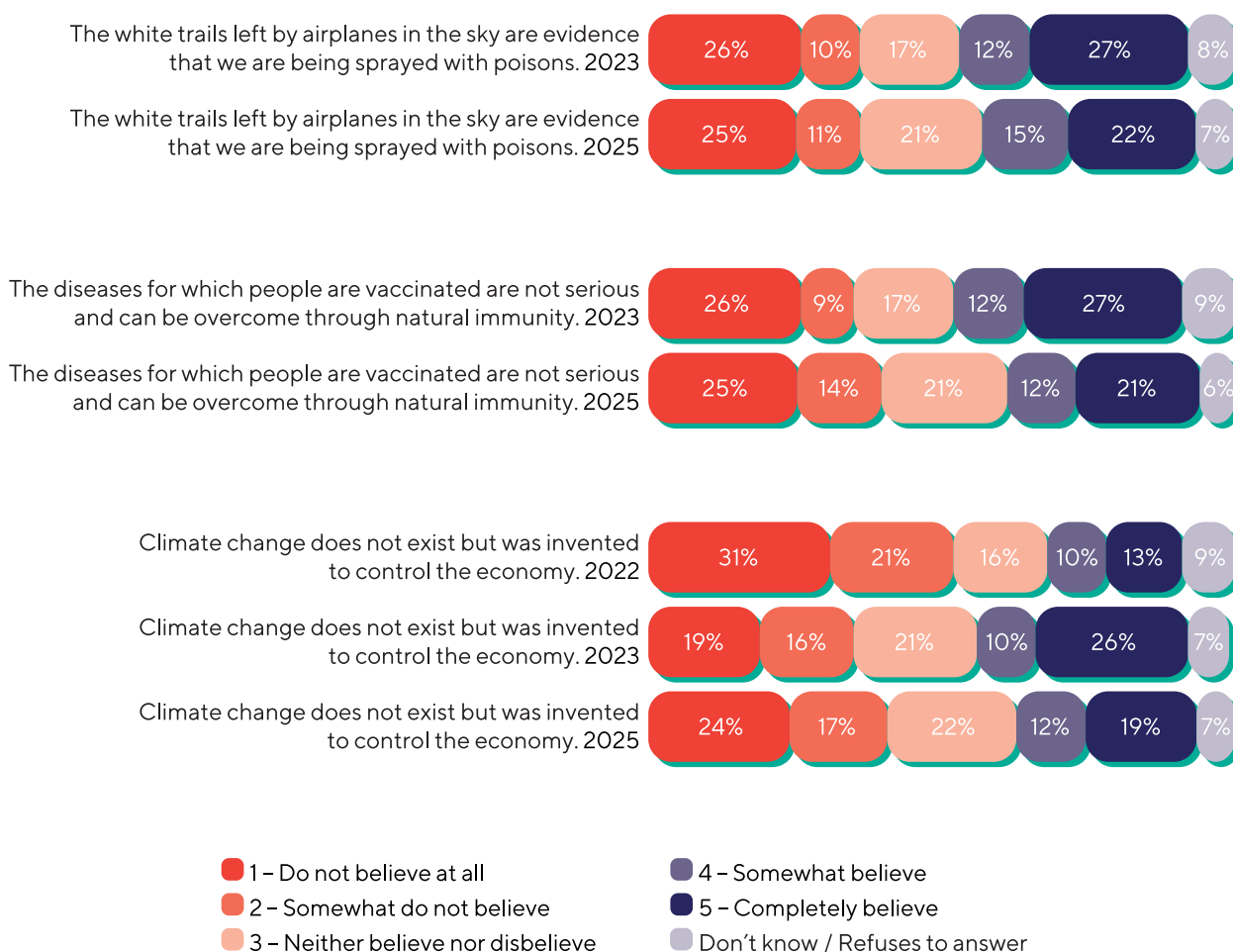


The 2025 survey shows that 65% of citizens believe that there is a secret group of powerful individuals who control global events such as wars and economic crises. Although the analysis shows a decrease in this share (from 71% in 2022 to 65% in 2025), the fact remains that roughly two thirds of citizens believe in this claim.

A large share of citizens also believe that COVID-19 was deliberately created so that global powers could gain economic and political benefits. In 2025, 66% of citizens shared this belief, the same proportion as in 2022.

Regarding information related to climate change, the surveys show a particularly negative trend, namely an increase in the share of citizens who believe that climate change does not exist but was invented in order to control the economy. In 2022, only 24% of citizens believed that climate change does not exist and was invented to control the economy; in 2025 this share increased to 31%. This trend is further confirmed by the fact that in 2022 as many as 52% of citizens held the view that climate change genuinely exists, while in 2025 this percentage fell to 41%.

To what extent do you believe each of the following statements?



Fewer citizens (37% in 2025, compared to 39% in 2023) believe in the chemtrails conspiracy theory, or claim that white trails left by airplanes in the sky are evidence that people are being sprayed with poisons. Surveys show that the share of citizens who do not believe this narrative is smaller than the share who believe it (36% in both 2025 and 2023 say they do not believe this claim).

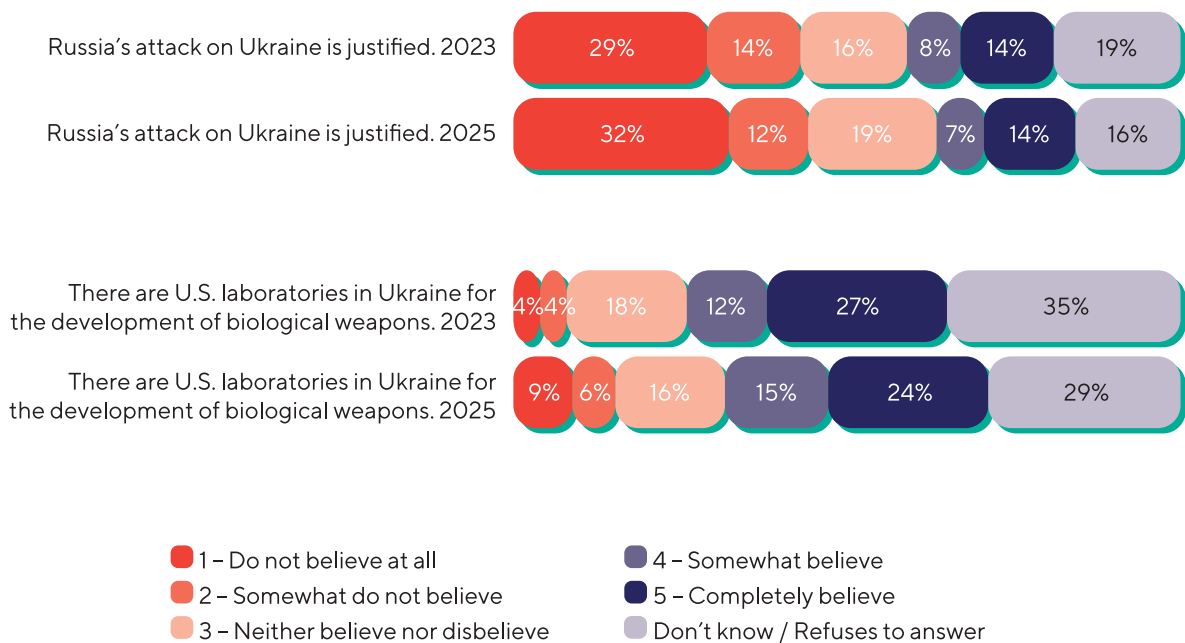
Between 2022 and 2025, a positive trend is observed in the decline of citizens who believe the anti-vaccine narrative that diseases for which vaccination exists are not serious and can be overcome through natural immunity. While in 2023, 39% of citizens believed this narrative compared with 35% who did not, in 2025 the share believing it declined to 33%, while 39% rejected this narrative.

INFLUENCE OF PRO-RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

The results of the 2025 survey show that citizens’ attitudes toward pro-Russian disinformation narratives remain almost unchanged compared with 2023. A notable example is the claim that U.S. biological weapons laboratories exist in Ukraine—a narrative that has circulated for years in regional media and on social networks. In both surveys, in 2023 and 2025, the same 39% of citizens believe this claim, with no change. A slight shift can be seen among those who reject this narrative: while only 8% stated in 2023 that they did not believe the claim, this share increased to 15% in 2025. This increase suggests a modest strengthening of critical awareness. However, the most striking finding is that more than half of citizens—53% in both 2023 and 2025—have not formed any opinion on this issue, indicating a high level of uncertainty or lack of information among the public regarding geopolitical narratives and a potential vulnerability to disinformation campaigns.

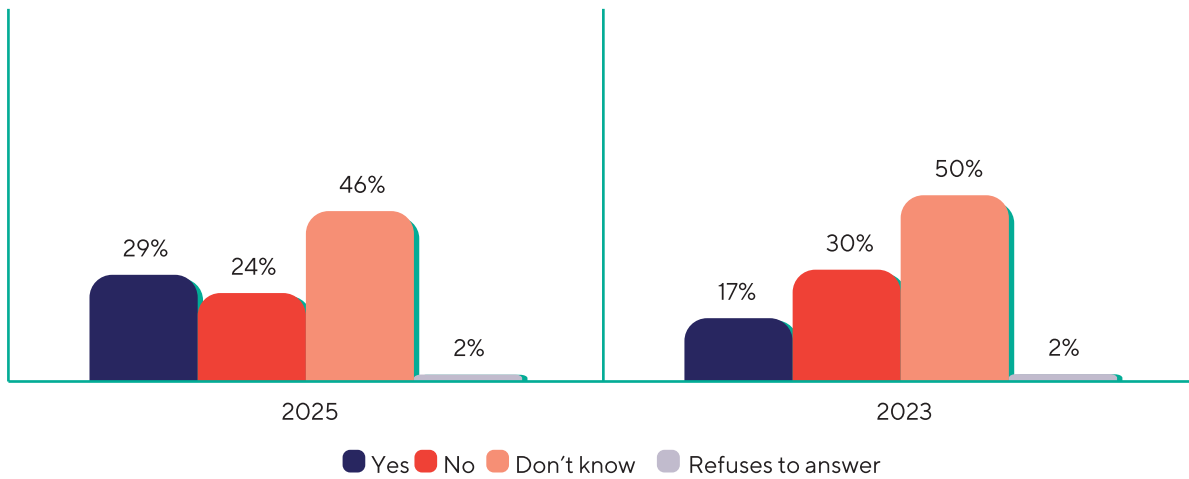
Although a larger share of citizens (43% in 2023 and 44% in 2025) do not justify Russia’s attack on Ukraine, a considerable proportion (22% in 2023 and 21% in 2025) believe that the Russian attack on Ukraine is justified. No significant differences are observed between citizens of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic background in this regard.

To what extent do you believe each of the following statements?



The survey nevertheless indicates increased awareness among citizens of the presence of pro-Russian influence in the country. While in 2023 only 17% of citizens believed that there were sources or entities in the country promoting Russian interests, in 2025 this share increased to 29%.

To the best of your knowledge, are there sources or entities in the country that promote Russian interests and positions?



Anti-European, i.e., pro-Russian narratives continue to shape public opinion in the country to a considerable extent. The survey shows that these narratives have a significantly stronger influence among citizens of Macedonian ethnic background than among citizens of Albanian ethnic background.

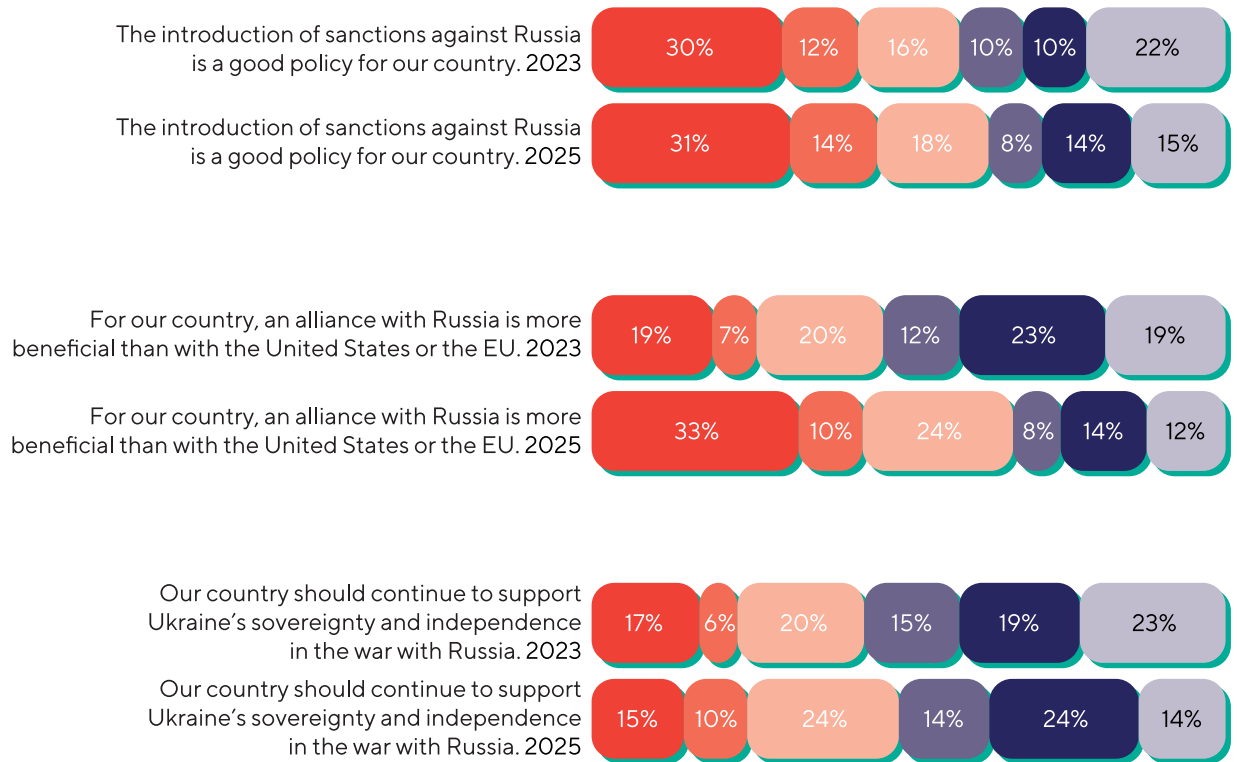
In 2023, 42% of citizens believed that imposing sanctions on Russia in the context of the war in Ukraine was not a good policy for the country. In 2025 this share increased slightly: 45% of citizens stated that sanctions against Russia are not a good policy for the country, compared with 22% who held the opposite view. These views differ significantly between citizens of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic background. While 56% of Macedonian respondents believe that sanctions against Russia are not a good policy (and 12% believe they are), 44% of citizens of Albanian ethnic background consider sanctions against Russia to be a good policy.

The survey also shows a positive shift in attitudes regarding the war in Ukraine. In 2023, 34% believed that the country should continue to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence in the war with Russia, compared with 23% who held the opposite view. In 2025 a stronger polarization on this issue is observed, with greater support for Ukraine: 39% believe that the country should continue to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence, compared with 25% who oppose such a position.

The most significant positive shift concerns citizens’ views on the geopolitical orientation of the country amid increasing polarization on the global political stage. While in 2023 the dominant view was that the country should orient itself toward the sphere of Russian influence, in 2025 a complete reversal in attitudes is recorded toward closer alignment with the United States and the European Union. In 2023, 35% of citizens believed that alliance with Russia would be more beneficial for the country than alliance with the United States and the EU, compared with 26% who favored alliance with the United States and the EU. In 2025, however, attitudes shifted

dramatically: 43% stated that alliance with the United States and the EU would be more beneficial, while 22% favored alliance with Russia.

To what extent do you believe each of the following statements?



- 1 – Do not believe at all
- 2 – Somewhat do not believe
- 3 – Neither believe nor disbelieve
- 4 – Somewhat believe
- 5 – Completely believe
- Don't know / Refuses to answer

GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONS OF NORTH MACEDONIA

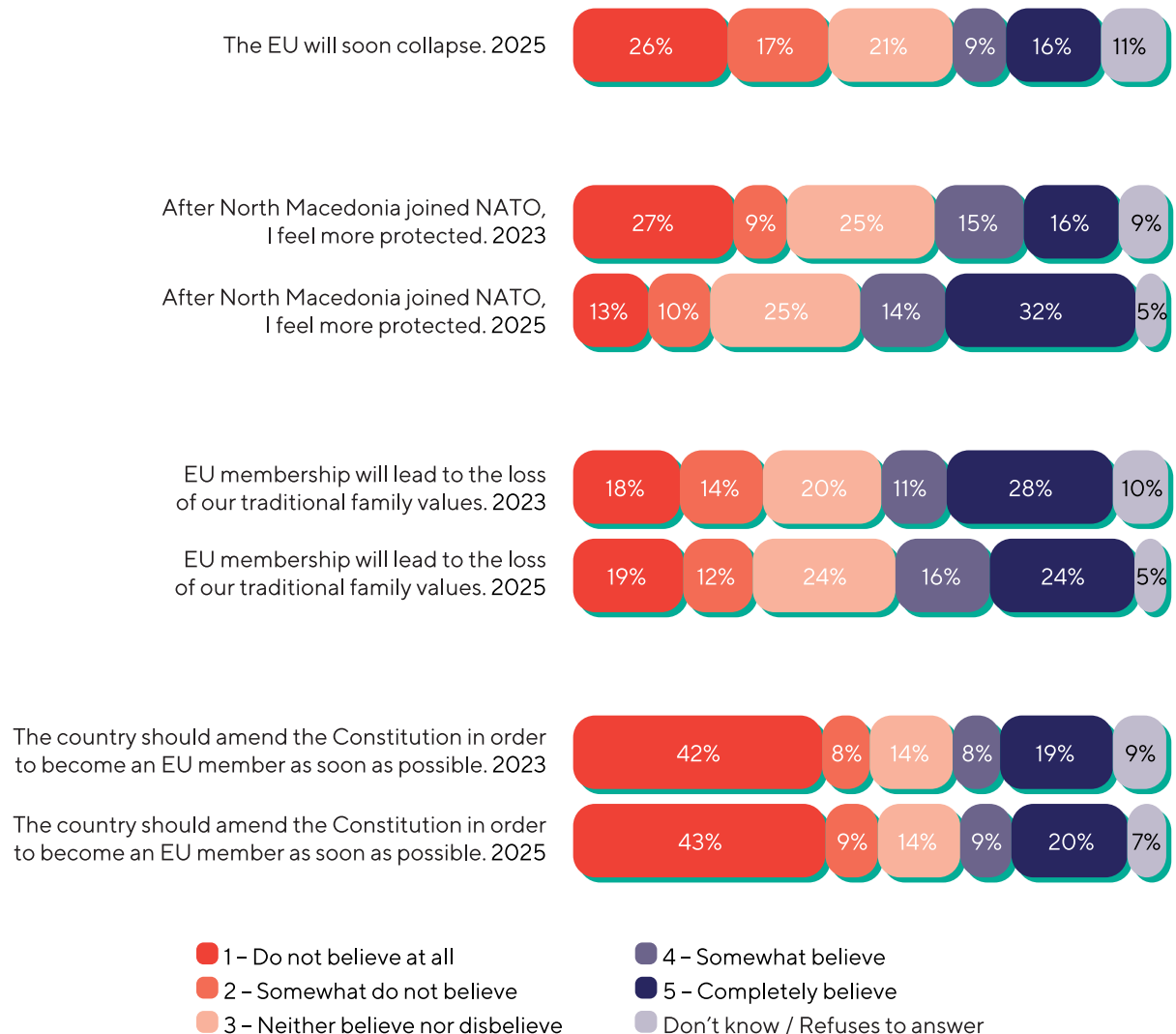
The political pressure on the country regarding the resolution of the dispute with Bulgaria, as a precondition for continuing the EU integration process, has not led to any change in citizens' attitudes on several key issues. The 2023 survey showed that as many as 50% of citizens did not agree with the idea of amending the Constitution in order to join the EU (42% strongly disagreeing and 8% somewhat disagreeing). In 2025 these attitudes were reaffirmed, with an even stronger resistance to this idea. In 2025, 52% of citizens disagreed with the idea of constitutional amendments (43% strongly disagreeing and 9% somewhat disagreeing). There is an enormous difference in attitudes between the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities. While only 17% of citizens of Macedonian ethnic background agree with amending the Constitution (10% fully and 7% somewhat), 54% of citizens of Albanian ethnic background support such a change (40% fully and 14% somewhat). However, comparison with the 2023 data shows a gradual convergence of attitudes: whereas in 2023 as many as 68% of Albanians supported constitutional amendments, in 2025 this share declined to 54%.

Additionally, citizens hold divided opinions regarding the potential impact of EU membership on social values. In 2025, 40% of citizens (39% in 2023) believe that EU membership would lead to the loss of traditional family values, while 31% in 2025 (32% in 2023) disagree with this view. According to the survey data, citizens of Macedonian ethnic background are considerably more concerned than those of Albanian ethnic background about the influence of the EU on traditional family values. While 45% of Macedonian respondents believe EU membership would lead to the loss of such values (26% think the opposite), among Albanian respondents this share is significantly lower (30%), while 38% do not fear the loss of traditional values.

The 2025 survey also addressed disinformation narratives aimed at weakening citizens' support for the European integration process by promoting the idea of institutional instability within the European Union. The results show that Macedonian citizens are not highly susceptible to such narratives. Specifically, 25% of citizens believe that the EU will soon collapse, compared with 43% who believe in the institutional stability of the EU.

The largest shift in attitudes has been observed in relation to security issues connected with the growing military polarization of the global political scene in recent years. While in 2023 only 31% of citizens stated that they felt safer after the country joined NATO (compared with 36% who disagreed), in 2025 as many as 46% reported feeling safer as a result of NATO membership (compared with 23% who disagreed). This perception is more pronounced among citizens of Albanian ethnic background (60% state they feel safer) than among those of Macedonian ethnic background (38% report feeling safer after the country joined NATO).

To what extent do you agree that:



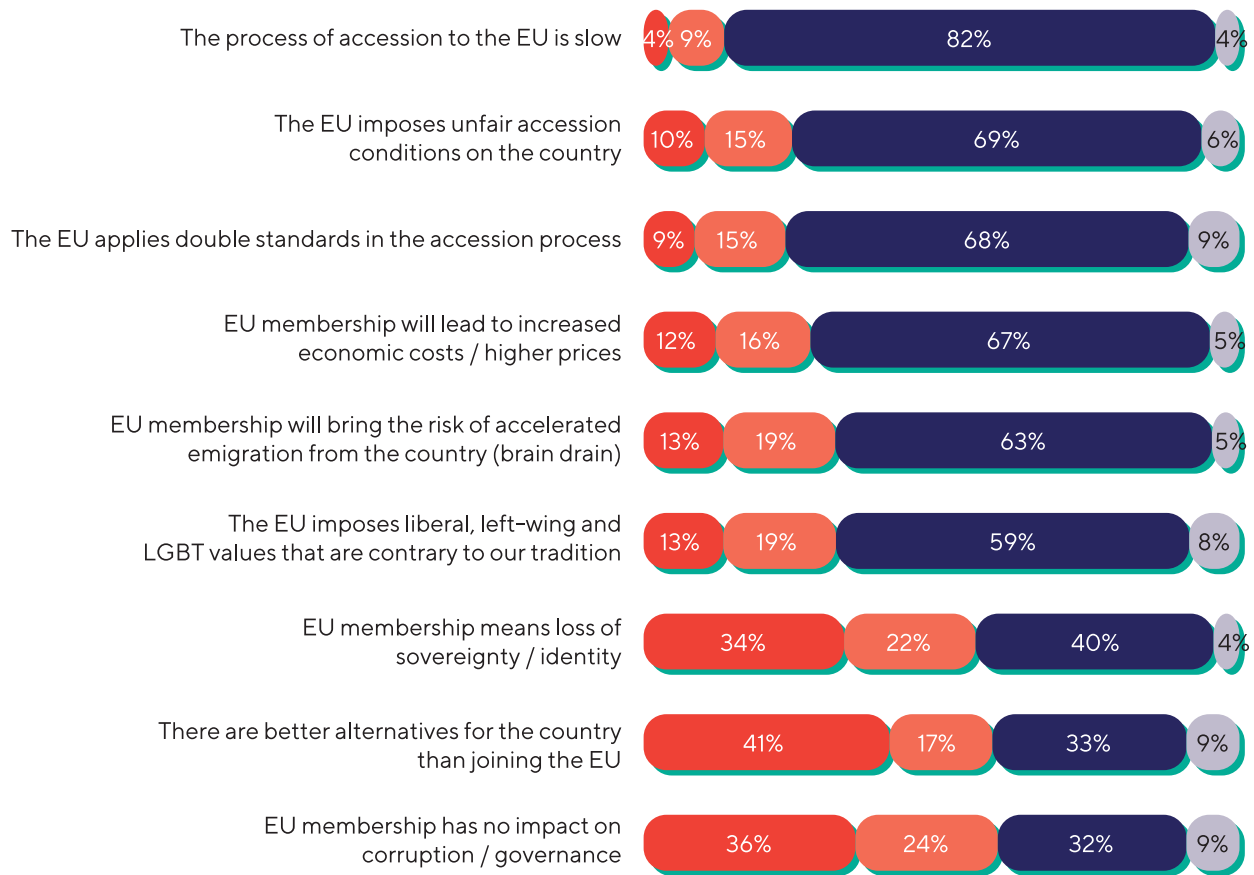
The 2025 survey also reveals a degree of skepticism toward the EU integration process, stemming from a combination of political, economic and cultural perceptions. For an overwhelming majority of citizens, the accession process is perceived as excessively slow (82%), reflecting the feeling that the country has been standing still for a long time without visible progress or a clear timeline. At the same time, there is a widespread belief that the EU sets unfair conditions (69%) and applies double standards (68%), reinforcing the perception that the country is being kept on the margins of the accession process.

Economic concerns are equally strong. Two thirds of respondents (67%) expect that accession to the Union will lead to increased costs and prices, while 63% fear that membership could further accelerate emigration. These views point to deep economic vulnerability and the perception that European integration may increase rather than reduce economic insecurity.

In the socio-cultural domain, a significant share of citizens (59%) believe that the EU promotes liberal, left-leaning and LGBTQ values that are contrary to tradition. This further reinforces the perception of external pressure on cultural norms and values.

These perceptions are accompanied by the feeling that membership could threaten state and national sovereignty: 40% of citizens share this view, compared with 34% who disagree. At the same time, a dilemma also emerges regarding the country's strategic direction: 33% of citizens believe that there are better alternatives than EU membership, while 41% disagree, indicating increased skepticism but also the absence of a clear and convincing narrative about an alternative path.

To what extent do you agree that:

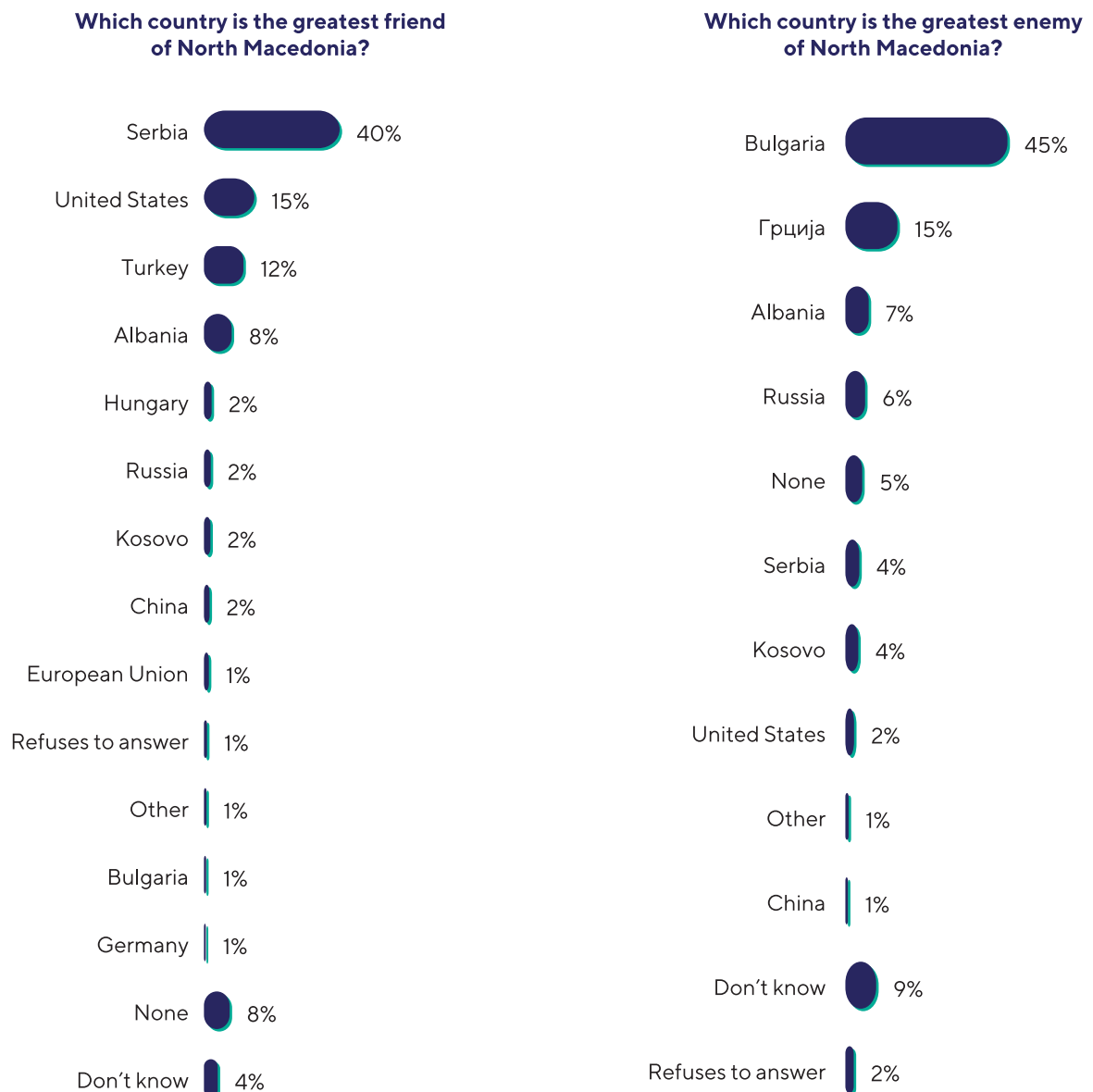


- Strongly disagree + Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Completely agree + Partially agree
- Don't know / Refuses to answer

Nevertheless, the European perspective has not been completely lost. A larger share of citizens (36%) still believe that EU membership would have a positive impact on governance and the fight against corruption—one of the most pressing issues in the domestic context. This indicates that despite disappointment, part of the public still sees the EU as a potential source of institutional reforms and greater accountability.

In summary, the results reveal a public that is simultaneously skeptical, fatigued and divided, but not entirely resigned to the idea of European integration. Fears of injustice, economic insecurity and cultural threat dominate public perceptions, yet expectations persist that the EU could bring better governance and a stronger fight against corruption—making integration a complex but still relevant goal in the eyes of citizens.

The survey findings also indicate that perceptions of friendly and hostile states remain closely linked to ethnic identity, political narratives and citizens' historical experience.



Serbia stands out as the country most frequently perceived as the greatest friend of North Macedonia—40% of respondents share this view. However, a closer look reveals that this positive perception is concentrated among citizens of Macedonian ethnic background (55% identify Serbia as the country's greatest friend) and among members of other ethnic communities (36%), but not among citizens of Albanian ethnic background, of whom only 8% consider Serbia to be the country's greatest friend. Among Albanian respondents, Albania (30%) and the United States (29%) are perceived as the country's greatest friends.

When it comes to hostile states, citizens show little division: 45% of respondents consider Bulgaria to be the country's greatest adversary (54% of Macedonians, 23% of Albanians and 47% of respondents from other ethnic communities), while Greece occupies the second position, with 15% of respondents perceiving it as the greatest adversary (16% of Macedonians, 12% of Albanians and 15% of respondents from other ethnic communities).

More pronounced differences appear in perceptions of Russia and Serbia. Seventeen percent of ethnic Albanians consider Russia to be the country's greatest adversary (compared with 1% of ethnic Macedonians), while 13% of Albanians consider Serbia to be the greatest adversary (compared with 0% of Macedonians)..

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations arise from the research process and the analysis of the data. They are based on a comprehensive whole-of-society approach, which implies coordinated, institutionalized and long-term action by all relevant stakeholders: state institutions, the media, the education system, civil society organizations, the academic community, the private sector and digital platforms. The recommendations focus on the finding that disinformation and foreign antidemocratic influences represent a structural and long-term risk for democratic processes, public trust and social cohesion.

1. Strengthening a systemic and coordinated whole-of-society approach

- A systemic approach is required to build a culture of critical thinking and social dialogue at all levels, starting with a proactive role of state institutions in the development of public policies, improving the quality of media coverage of key societal issues, and strengthening media and digital literacy through the education system, educational programs in the media, and reforms in the interaction between institutions and stakeholders from all sectors and at all levels.
- It is necessary to establish or upgrade a national strategic framework document for addressing disinformation and foreign information manipulation, based on empirical findings from regular research, ensuring a clear distribution of roles and creating a permanent infrastructure for resilience.
- The low level of trust in institutions, as well as in the media as a pillar of democracy, combined with citizens' awareness of the harmful effects of disinformation and their demand for solutions, makes it a priority to develop a national strategy for strengthening resilience to the harmful influence of disinformation through an inclusive process that takes into account previous experiences in overcoming polarization.

2. Alignment of the legislative framework and strengthening institutional capacity

- The national legal framework should be urgently aligned with European legislation, particularly the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), while also strengthening the capacities of regulatory bodies and institutions responsible for transparent public communication.

3. Protection of electoral integrity and democratic processes

- It is necessary to develop specific strategies to protect electoral integrity through cooperation among electoral bodies, regulators, the media and civil society, with a focus on digital platforms and electoral disinformation.

4. Strengthening media integrity and professional standards

- Media organizations should establish internal mechanisms for fact-checking, management of sensitive content and strengthening self-regulation in order to increase public trust.
- Media outlets should commit to transmitting verified content from fact-checking services or other media outlets, as well as from civil society organizations that regularly expose disinformation and disinformation narratives within their work.

5. Media literacy and digital literacy as a long-term public policy

- Media and digital literacy should be treated as a long-term priority, integrated into formal education and public campaigns, with targeted approaches for different social groups.
- Civil society organizations should continue creating and accumulating knowledge related to the problem of disinformation, particularly initiatives aimed at raising public awareness about the harmful effects of disinformation and the methods for building resilience against it. These initiatives should cover different target groups in their communities identified as most vulnerable to the negative influence of disinformation, especially youth and older populations.

6. Addressing foreign anti-democratic information influence

Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) should be addressed systematically through strategic communication and coordination among institutions, media and civil society organizations.

- It is necessary to raise the level of public debate on the geopolitical context, the flow of disinformation, its sources and the interests it promotes, particularly anti-democratic tendencies linked to influences from foreign authoritarian regimes. State institutions, the academic and educational community, the media and civil society have the responsibility to proactively inform citizens through positive public narratives based on facts and to encourage broad public debate.
- The research findings indicate that there is still a high susceptibility to conspiracy theories and other alternative narratives, resulting from structural factors and the continuous pressure and dissemination of disinformation through parts of the media, and especially through social networks. These conditions should be addressed through concrete programs based on cooperation among all social actors, rather than through pathologization or practices of politicization, rejection or ignoring..

7. Demonetization of disinformation and engagement of the private sector

It is necessary to involve the private sector and advertisers in efforts to demonetize disinformation sources, in order to reduce the financial flows used by actors that promote anti-democratic disinformation. At the same time, support should be increased for strengthening media integrity through economic models that reward professional and ethical media practices, as well as through greater transparency in the financing and distribution of online content.

- State and public institutions, private companies and civil society organizations should upgrade their ethical codes to incorporate the fight against disinformation as a core value on which further development of appropriate working procedures and criteria should be based, including in processes related to the procurement of media services.
- State institutions from both the legislative and executive branches should take a proactive role in strengthening the financial capacities of professional media, as well as in creating a favorable environment for financial investment in the media industry. Improving the condition of the media sector should be treated as a strategic objective.

Sustainable resilience to disinformation and foreign influence can be built only through a coordinated, inclusive and long-term approach, based on empirical evidence and aligned with European democratic standards.

ANNEX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN THE MEDIA

This report provides an overview of the results of the monitoring process of domestic online media in North Macedonia from January 2024 to October 2025. The aim of this monitoring was to identify and analyze disinformation trends related to malign foreign influence in the country and to understand the main messages these narratives aim to convey. To achieve this objective, the Metamorphosis team analyzed various media outlets and social media posts suspected of containing disinformation related to foreign influence in the country. The selection of articles was based on the availability of verifiable facts that could be checked using professional journalistic methods, including articles with a high level of circulation on social media. The analysis of these articles covered several key aspects, including the disinformation message they intended to convey, the themes and narratives they referred to, their level of impact, the sources of origin, the distribution of the media outlets, and their potential to provoke violence or radicalization.

METHODOLOGY OF THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

A quantitative research methodology was used to conduct the survey. Data collection was carried out through a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). A dual-frame methodology (landline and mobile numbers) was used for sample generation. The ratio of interviews conducted via landline and mobile phones was 30/70.

For the purposes of the research, a multi-stage stratified representative sample was designed with probability proportional to the estimated population size. According to the demographic structure of the population, North Macedonia is divided into eight regions: Skopje, Polog, Pelagonia, Vardar, Northeastern, Southeastern, Southwestern and Eastern region, as well as urban and rural communities. The number of respondents was proportional to the total population in each region.

Within the landline sample, interviews were conducted with the adult who had the most recent birthday and who was employed, aged 18 or older and present at home during the call. If this person was absent, the interview was conducted with any other available adult household member. In the mobile sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone; interviewers confirmed that the respondent was 18 years or older, employed and able to participate in the survey by answering the questionnaire.

The representative sample consisted of 1,100 respondents aged 18+, with a margin of error of 2.95% at a confidence level of 95%.

Fieldwork was conducted between 6 and 17 October 2025.

SAMPLE STRUCTURE

| Region | N | % |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| Vardar | 88 | 8.0% |
| Eastern | 99 | 9.0% |
| Southwestern | 88 | 8.0% |
| Southeastern | 110 | 10.0% |
| Pelagonia | 132 | 12.0% |
| Polog | 143 | 13.0% |
| Northeastern | 88 | 8.0% |
| Skopje | 352 | 32.0% |
| Area type | N | % |
| Urban | 686 | 62.4% |
| Rural | 414 | 37.6% |
| Ethnicity | N | % |
| Macedonian | 697 | 63.4% |
| Albanian | 286 | 26.0% |
| Other | 117 | 10.6% |
| Sex | N | % |
| Male | 540 | 49.1% |
| Female | 560 | 50.9% |
| Age | N | % |
| 18-29 | 209 | 19.0% |
| 30-39 | 185 | 16.8% |
| 40-49 | 195 | 17.7% |
| 50-59 | 199 | 18.1% |
| 60+ | 312 | 28.4% |
| Вкупно | 1100 | 100.0% |

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