



Civic Empowerment Index: 2007

The civic maturity and independence of society are the main factors which determine not only the quality of democracy but also the overall wealth of a country. The studies of the state of Lithuanian civil society that have been conducted until now show that there are serious problems in the development of civil – independent – society in Lithuania. When strengthening society as a political community, it is important to constantly assess its state and development trends as well as to draw the attention of society itself to these factors. Seeking to achieve this objective, the Civil Society Institute and the public opinion research centre TNS Gallup make an effort to determine and publish the Civic Empowerment Index on an annual basis. Our hopes are that this index will be helpful in the activities of non-governmental organisations and civic communities, political parties concerned with the strong and independent Lithuanian society, and people responsible for drafting educational programmes.

Survey results

The survey data show that 40% of the Lithuanian population do not participate in any civic activity. The majority of the Lithuanian citizens have participated in charity campaigns: during the past year, about half of the population (45%) donated money or various items to charity, or supported persons or public organisations in any other way. One third of the population (31%) participated in voluntary works to clean the surrounding areas, slightly less than one fifth of people (17%) participated in community activities, and one tenth (11%) notified state institutions of law violations. Less than 1 out of 10 citizens participate in other activities: activities of public organisations and movements, participation in public and civic campaigns, signing of petitions, boycotts against products from some country or company, meetings with journalists or writing and speaking in the media, application to law enforcement institutions to protect a public or collective interest, participation in lobbies and demonstrations, sending of information of the civic nature or proclamations by electronic mail, participation in strike campaigns, contacting politicians, and participation in a political party's activity. In summary, it can be stated that civic activeness is mostly oriented towards local communities and social solidarity and manifests itself in the forms of passive participation.

Younger citizens who have higher educational attainment, are employed or still studying, live in major cities and receive higher income tend to participate in civic activities more often. The overall civic participation index (average – 27.4) shows a low level of civic activeness of the Lithuanian population.

The indicators of the potential of the population's participation in civic activities show that even if there is quite a high potential of the citizens' participation in solving problems of local concern (74% of the respondents would participate in resolving these problems), one third of the population (35%) would never engage in any activity and would remain aloof if the whole society faced a serious economic problem, and even half of the country's population (51%) would remain aloof if the whole society faced a political problem. Only 4 out of 10 residents are determined to participate in elections to the Seimas. The determination to engage in civic activities mostly depends on the citizens' education background: individuals who have higher educational attainment tend to have this attitude more often. The overall index of participation in civic activities (average – 39.7) shows lower than the average potential of the Lithuanian citizens' participation in civic activities.



In the opinion of the Lithuanian population, the greatest influence in adopting decisions that have an effect on the life of the whole society or particular groups in society is exercised by members of the Seimas (average assessment of their influence in the 10-point scale – 8.3), officials (7.7), the President (7.3), and businesspersons (7.0). Individuals tend to evaluate the influence of the media and local government institutions (municipal councils, sub-district heads) more pessimistically: the average assessments stand at 6.7, 6.6 and 6.1 respectively. In the opinion of the respondents, ordinary citizens of the country have the least political influence (2.9). The majority (57%) of the Lithuanian population feel they have no influence on decisions that are significant for the general public. The conception of civic influence depends on age: the older the citizens, the more pessimistic their assessments of ordinary people's possibilities to influence important decisions. The overall index of civic empowerment conception (average – 43.1) shows that the majority of the country's population believe that ordinary citizens do not have any significant influence in adopting important decisions.

In the opinion of more than half of the Lithuanian population, people who initiate or actively participate in civic campaigns can lose their jobs (62% are of this opinion), can be considered weird by other people (53%), can be publicly attacked and slandered (59%), suspected that they act for selfish purposes (62%), or receive life threats (63%). The index of civic activity risk assessment (average – 25.2) shows that there is a fear in society that people can suffer damage as a result of their participation in civic activities.

After the survey data had been summarised, the single Civic Empowerment Index of the Lithuanian society was developed from the four indicators discussed above, namely the index of potential civic activeness, the index of actual civic activeness, the index of conception of civil society's influence, and the index of civic activity risk assessment. The average of the Civic Empowerment Index of Lithuania's population is 33.9 out of 100 points. This shows a very low level of civic empowerment in Lithuanian society. Younger and middle-aged individuals who have higher educational attainment levels, are employed or still studying, reside in major cities and receive higher income have more civic empowerment and those persons who have lower educational attainment levels, the retired, the unemployed, senior citizens, those who receive lower income, and rural residents have less civic empowerment.

Key conclusions:

- The civic activeness of the Lithuanian citizens is mostly oriented towards local communities and social solidarity and manifests itself in the forms of passive participation.
- Political problems seem to be least significant for the Lithuanian citizens. The highest level of potential participation is possible in case of local problems.
- The majority of the Lithuanian population feel they have no influence on decisions that are of concern to the general public. According to the understanding of people, political power has clearly shifted towards the side of politicians and officials.
- There is a feeling of insecurity as a result of civic activeness in our society. The majority of the country's population envisage both political and social risks related to the participation in public activities. These attitudes reduce civic activeness.
- Younger individuals residing in cities, who have higher educational attainment levels and higher income feel they have more civic empowerment.