

Place names as signs of Latgola (Itg) / Latgale (lvs) regional identity

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Overview

A decorative graphic in the top right corner consisting of several 3D cubes and rectangular prisms in shades of light blue, grey, and white, arranged in a cluster.

- *Latgola / Latgale* region and Latgalian written language.
- An insight into the recent history of bilingual signage (Latvian Standard and Latgalian or Livonian) in Latvia.
- Public attitudes towards bilingual (Latvian and Latgalian) road signs (survey conducted April 22 - May 5, 2024).
- Summing up / Q&A.

Historical Latvian Lands



Latgalian written (standard) language (LTG)

- Historical form of the Latvian language (State Language Law, 1999).
- 8.8% (about 165,000) of Latvia's inhabitants speak Latgalian; in Latgale, it's 35.5% (2011).
- In the 1920s and early '30s, LTG was taught in Latgale schools, and there were inscriptions and reports in public spaces, as the standardization of written Latgalian was underway.
- During Kārlis Ulmanis' authoritarian regime (1934-1940), the use of LTG in public spaces, schools, and administration was restricted and gradually eradicated. Restrictions continued during the Soviet occupation period (Leikuma, Andronovs 2023)
- Currently, including LTG in school programs and its use in media and public signs indicates the value that the state assigns to it and promotes its prestige within society. (Nau 2024)



➤ Place Names Database

Nosaukums	Nosaukuma ID	<u>Nosaukums oficiāls</u>	Nosaukums ievadīts	Nosaukuma forma	Fonētiskā rakstība	Lietošanas biežums	Lietošanas vide	Nosaukuma izcelsmes valoda
Liuža	4986	Jā	22.02.1999					
Lyuža	196788	<u>Nē</u>	20.04.2018					<u>latgaliešu</u>

- Phonetic and morphological **variability** in different sub-dialects: *Rāzekne*, *Rēzekne*, *Riezekne*; *Leivuoni*, *Leivuons*, (MuLaR, 2024)
- **Standardization** (Latgalian written language sub-commission of the Latvian Language Expert Commission): *Rēzekne* (lvs, ltg); *Līvāni* (lvs), *Leivuons* (ltg).

Bilingual (multilingual) signage

The reasons for implementing bilingual signage are varied and include:

- cultural aspiration;
- cultural protection;
- improved safety;
- assistance for temporary visitors;
- multilingual communication being the norm or default. (O'Donnell&Trotter, 2021:12)

The effective implementation of bilingual signage:

- robust stakeholder engagement an iterative design process,
- the development of relevant legislation,
- pragmatic budgeting,
- targeted communication, education and engagement to successfully transition the public;
- ongoing monitoring to determine the effects of any new sign designs. (O'Donnell&Trotter, 2021:8)

An insight into recent history

[LRT, 23.03.2016.](#) Kārsavas novads nepiekāpjas Valodas centram – ielu norādes arī turpmāk būs latgaliski. *[Kārsava Municipality does not yield to the Language Center – street signs will continue to be in Latgalian.]*

[ReTV, 20.07.2021.](#) Liepiņa, S. Neļauj izvietot ceļa zīmes lībiešu valodā. *[It is prohibited to place road signs in the Livonian]*

LTG

LV



The latest initiatives

- ***The Historical Latvian Lands Law (2021):*** “the State and the respective local governments shall ensure the preservation and sustainable development of the Latgalian identity and cultural and historical environment (..) by restoring and using the place names in the Latgalian language in the environment, including in road signs, location and street names” (section 4.8).
- In 2023, € 106,000 was allocated from the state budget for the priority measure submitted by the Ministry of Transport for ensuring road signs in Livonian and Latgalian written languages (LVC, 2023).
- At the end of 2023, bilingual road signs for settlements of Kurzeme and Latgale regions began to be installed along state roads.



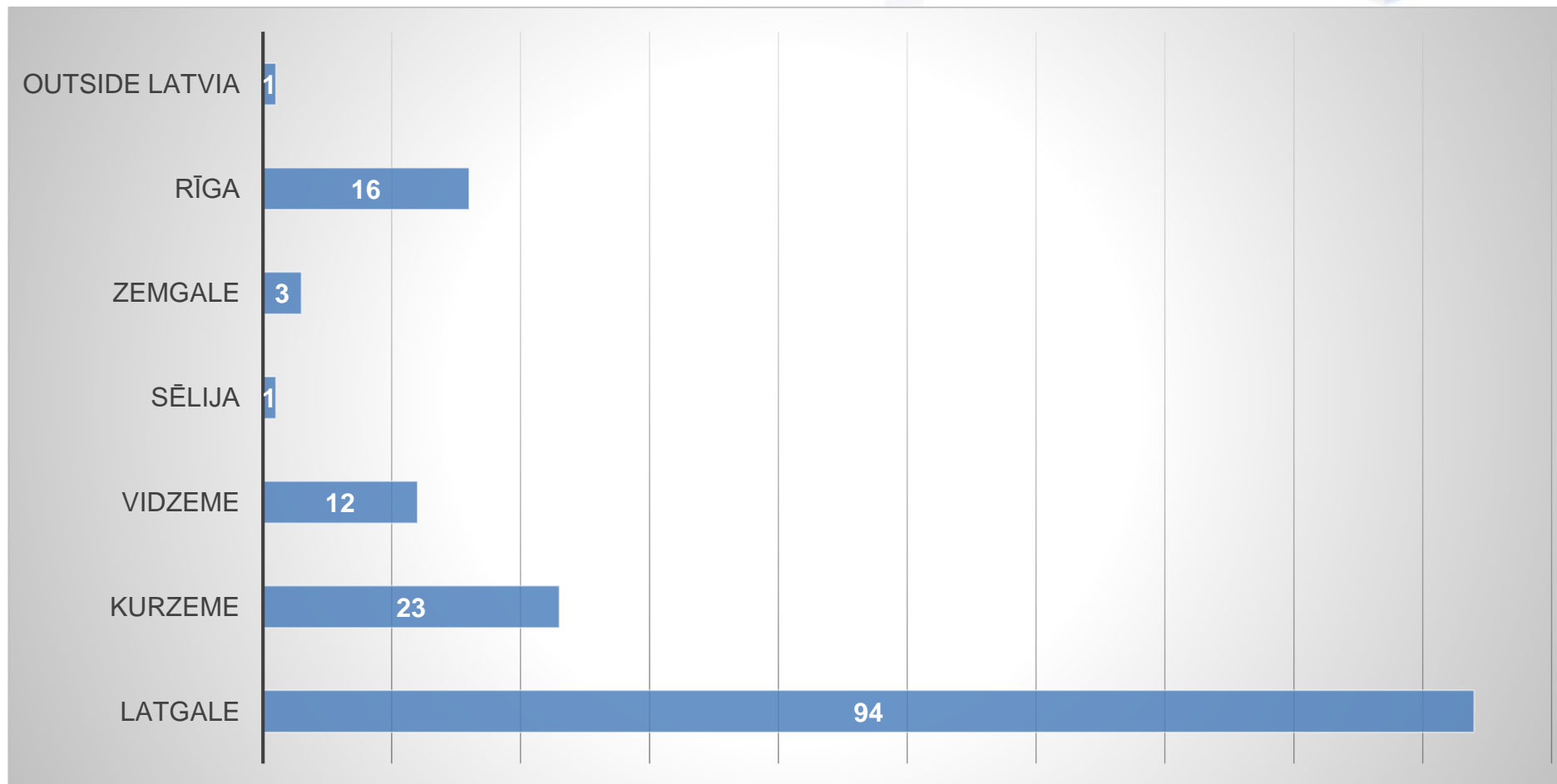
30.11.2023, LRT

Survey (April 22 - May 5, 2024)

Public attitudes towards bilingual road signs

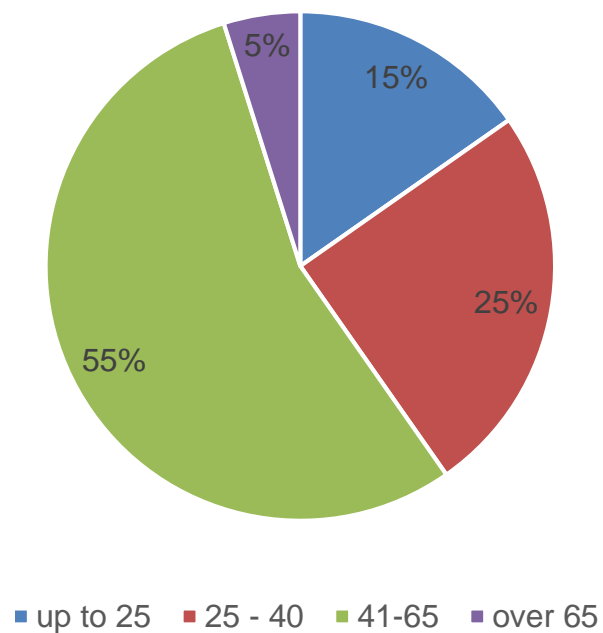
- Objective: to assess public attitudes towards the initiative in Latgale to install road signs that indicate place names in parallel with both Standard Latvian and Latgalian written languages.
- The study includes close-ended questions about the respondent's profile, close-ended questions and rating scales regarding bilingual road signs in Latgale, as well as close and open-ended questions about the functionality of the Latgalian in the linguistic landscape of Latgale .
- <https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/>

Place of residence (144 responses)

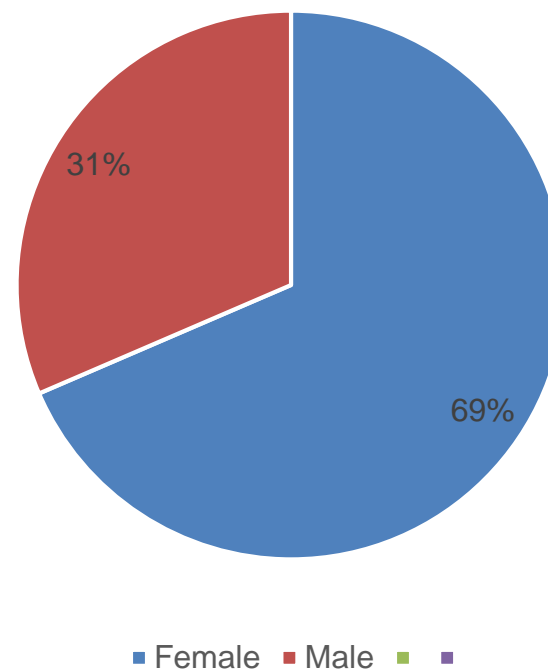


Age, gender (144 responses)

Age

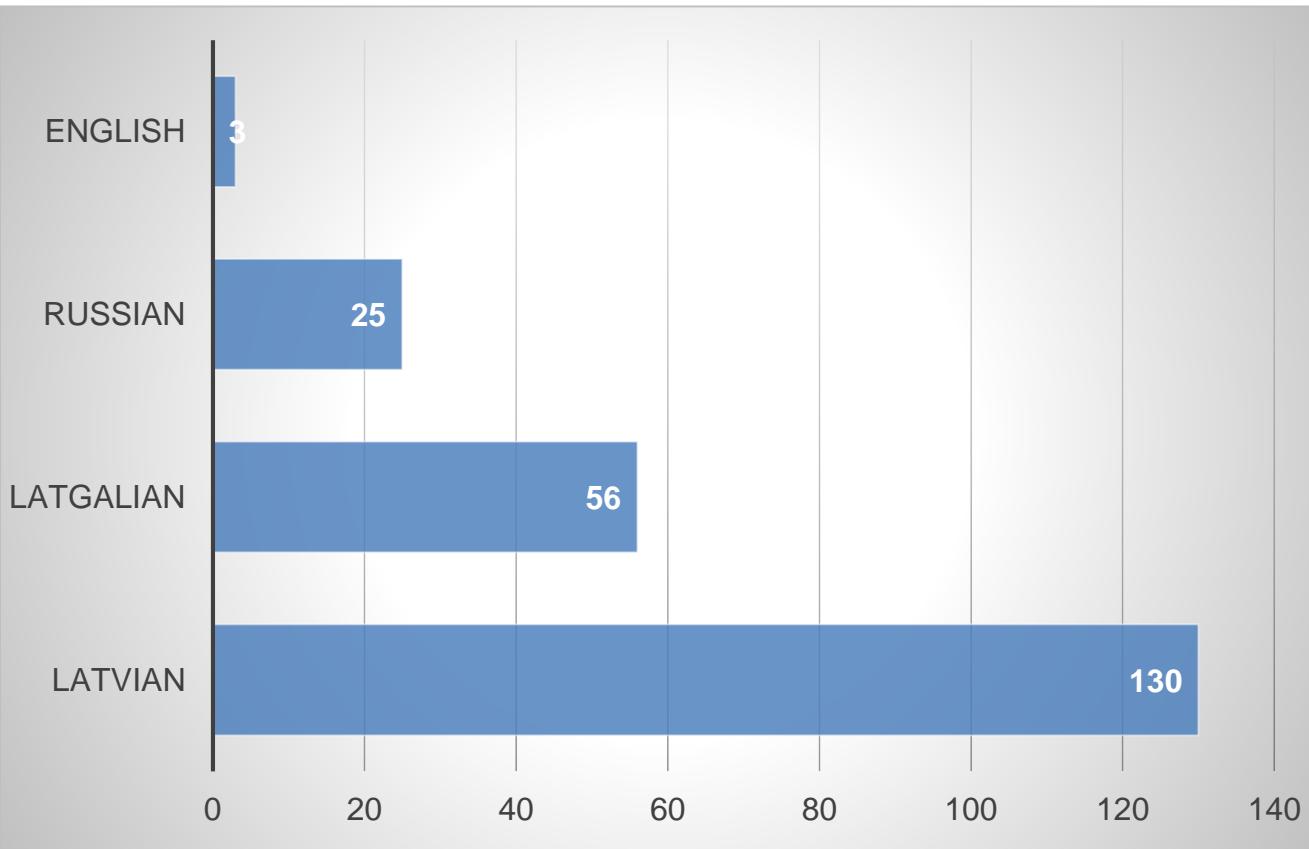


Gender

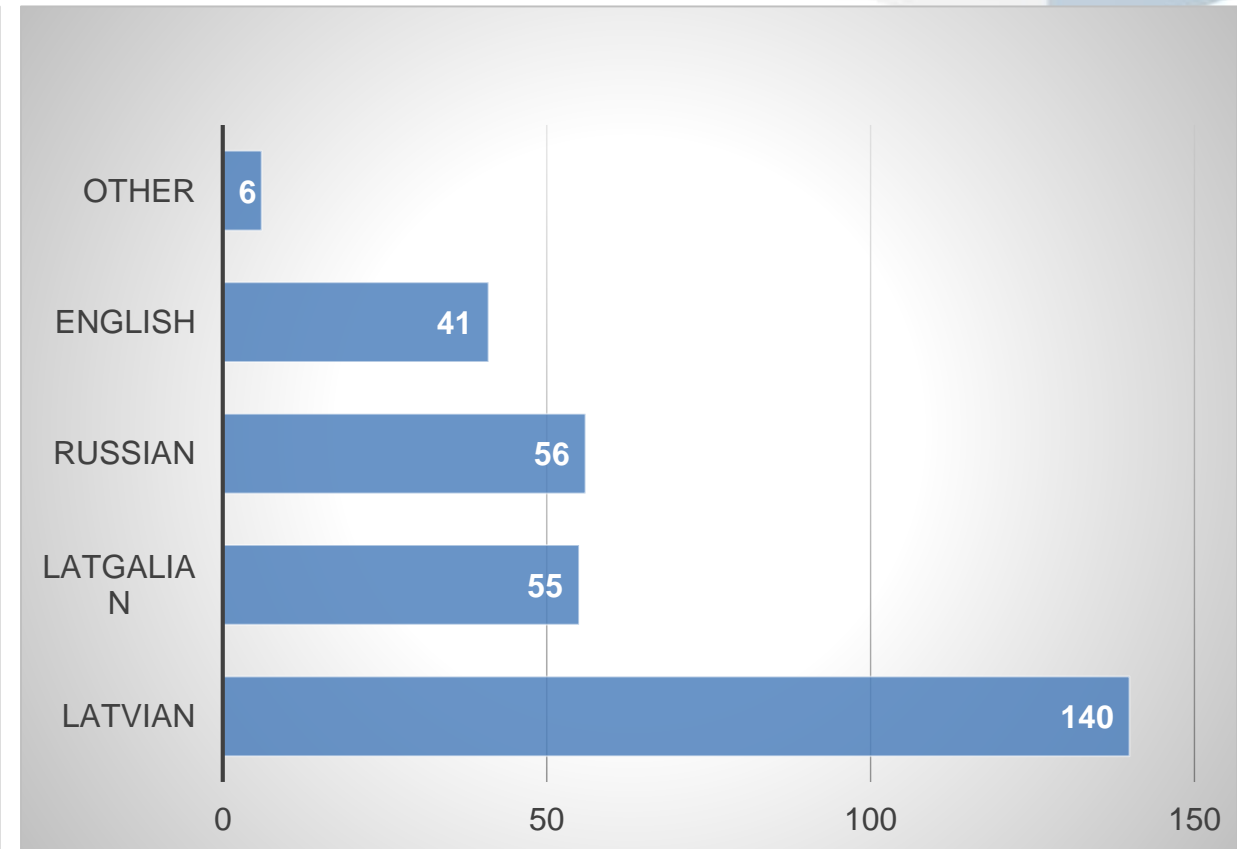


Language use (144 responses)

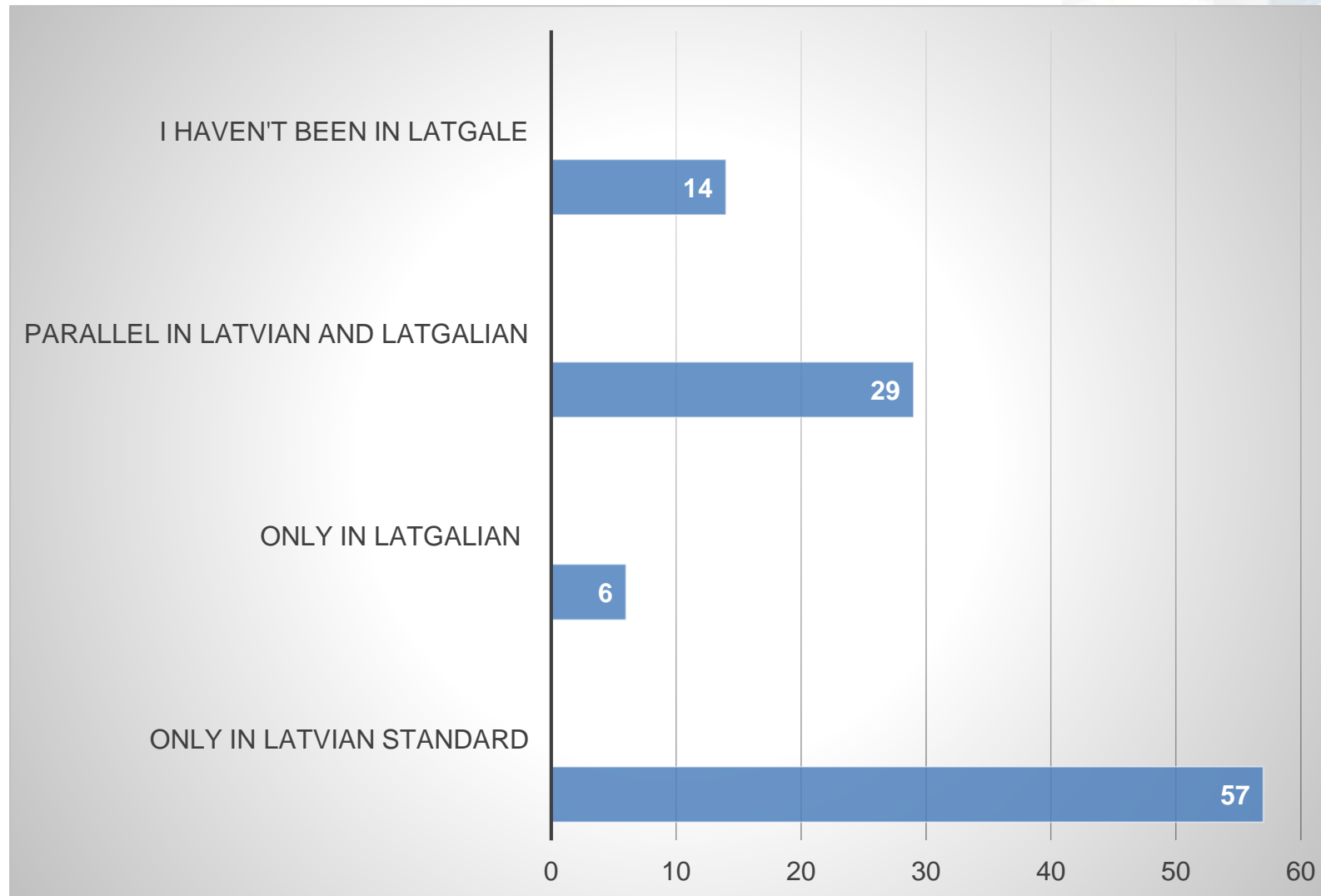
Languages used in family



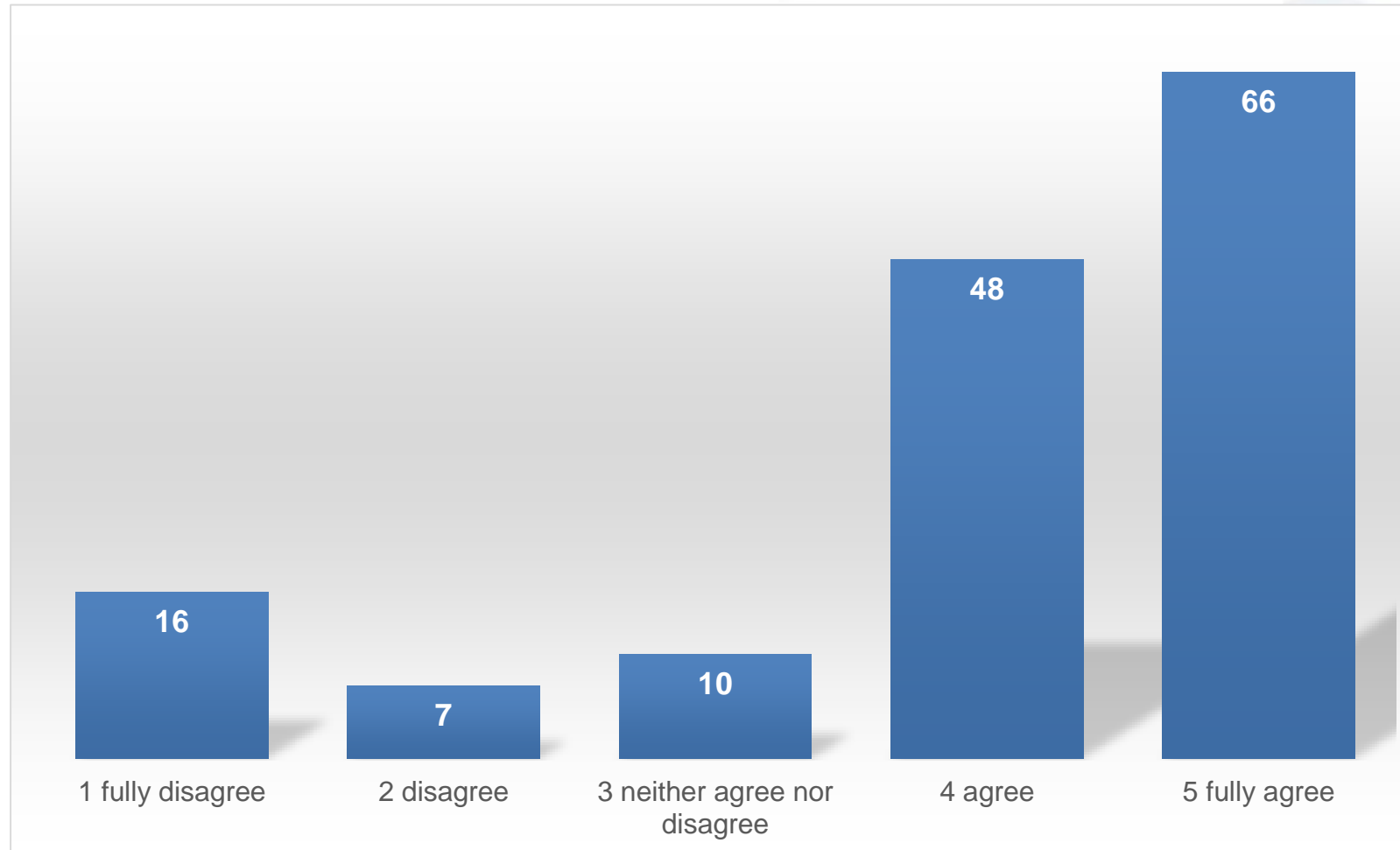
Languages used outside the family



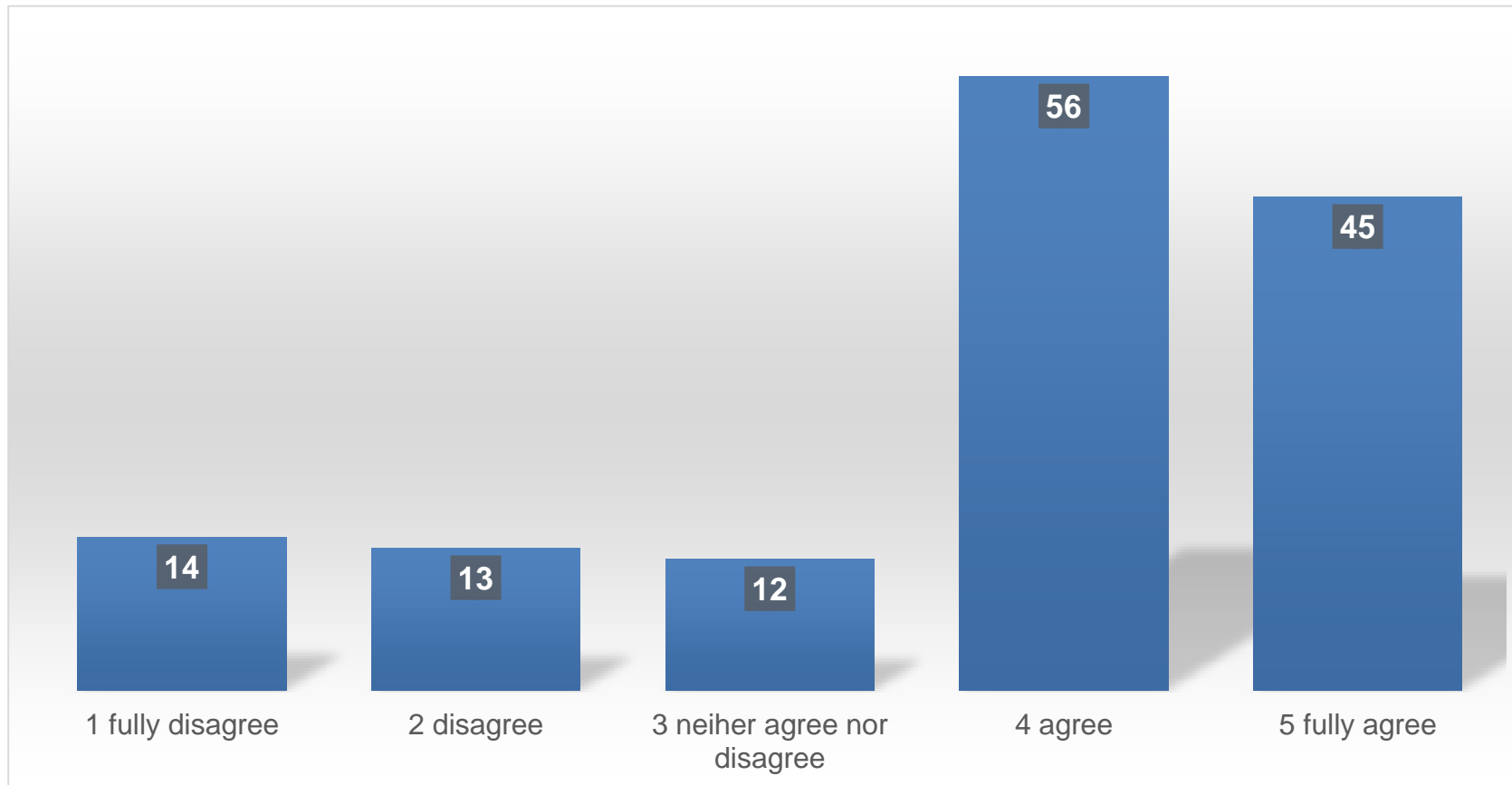
What language(s) have you noticed in road signs indicating the settlement names in Latgale? (144 responses)



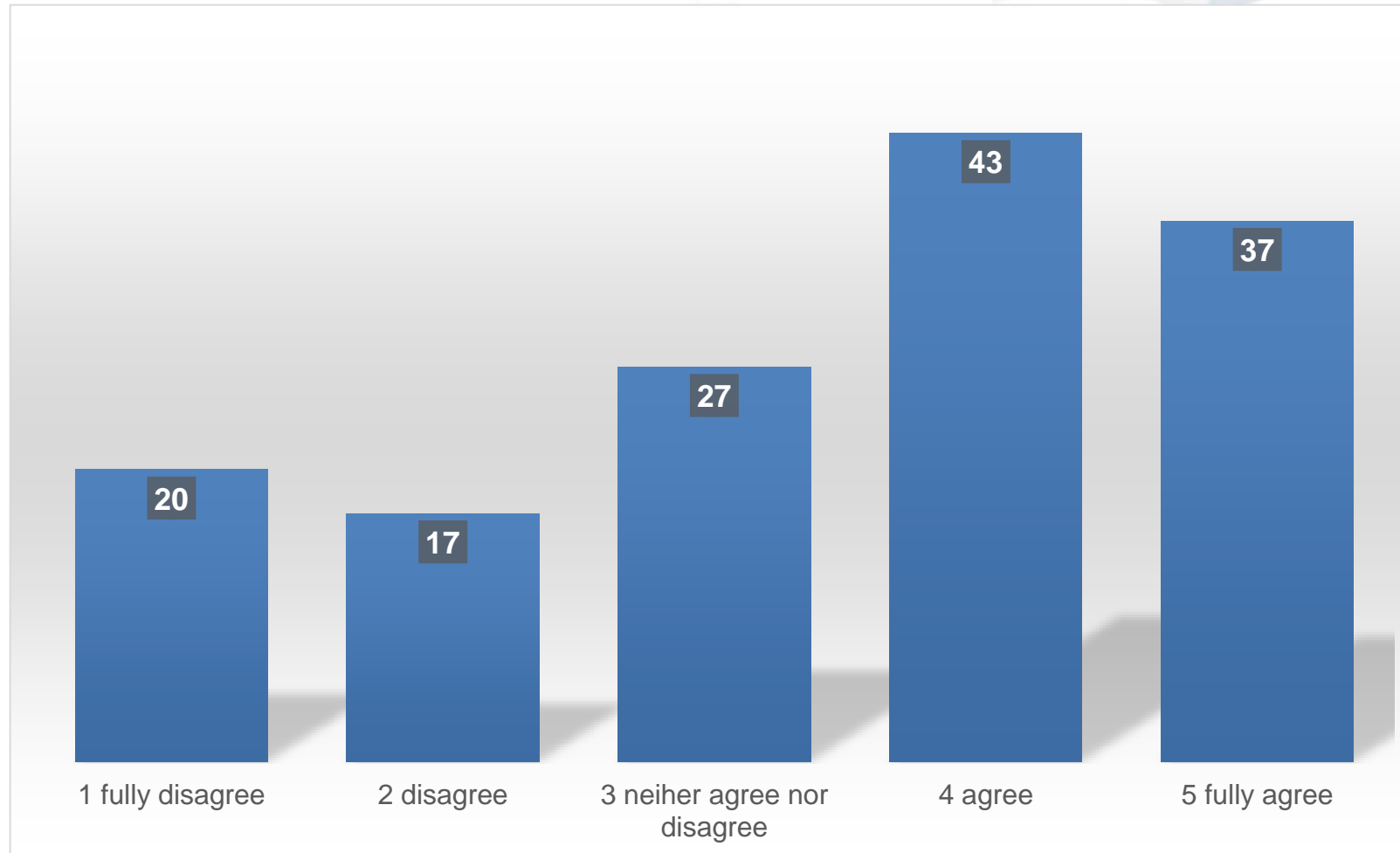
On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the following statements:
The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and
Latgalian written language is **an affirmation of regional identity**



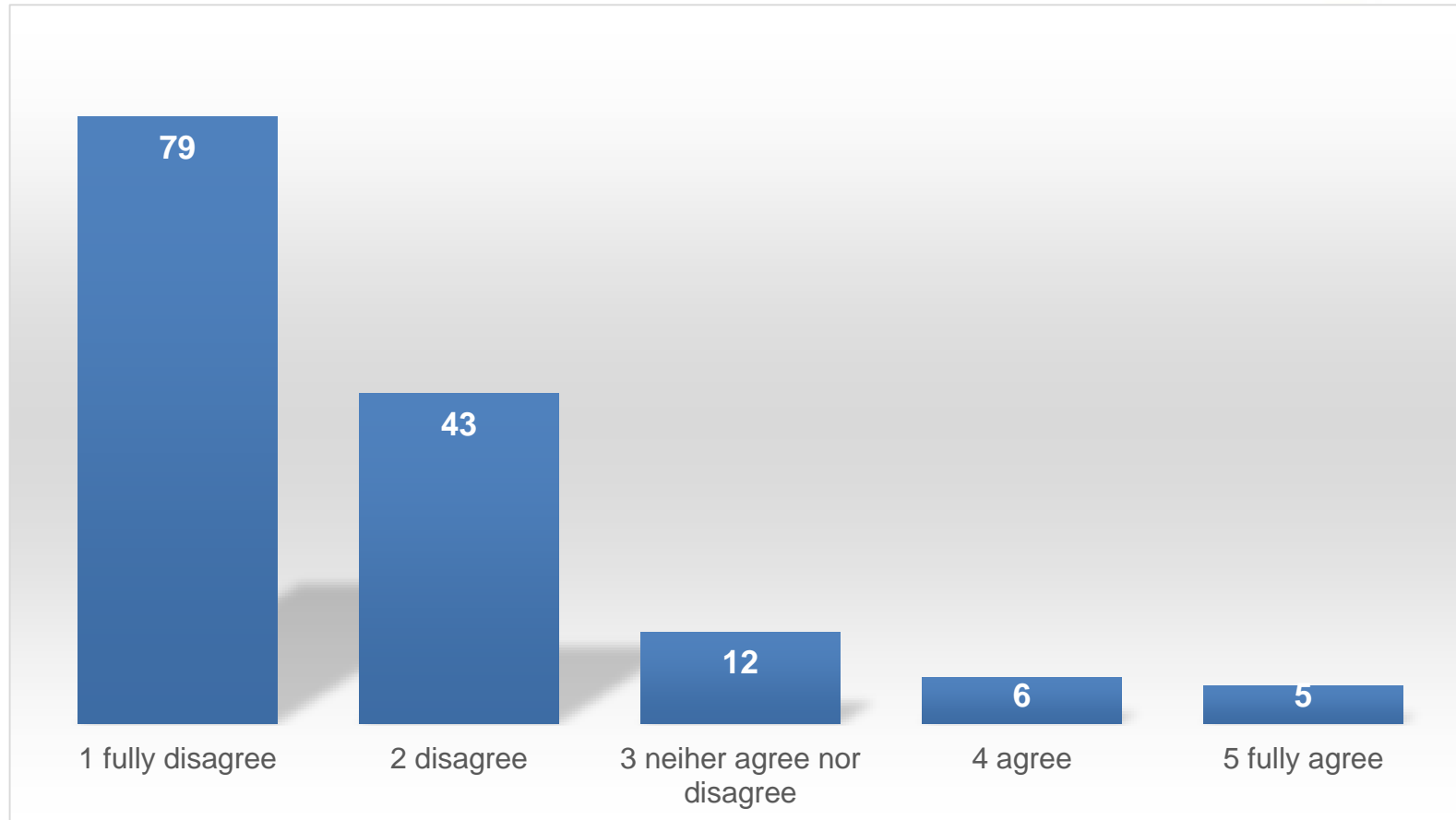
The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and
Latgalian written language is
expansion of the functionality of the Latgalian



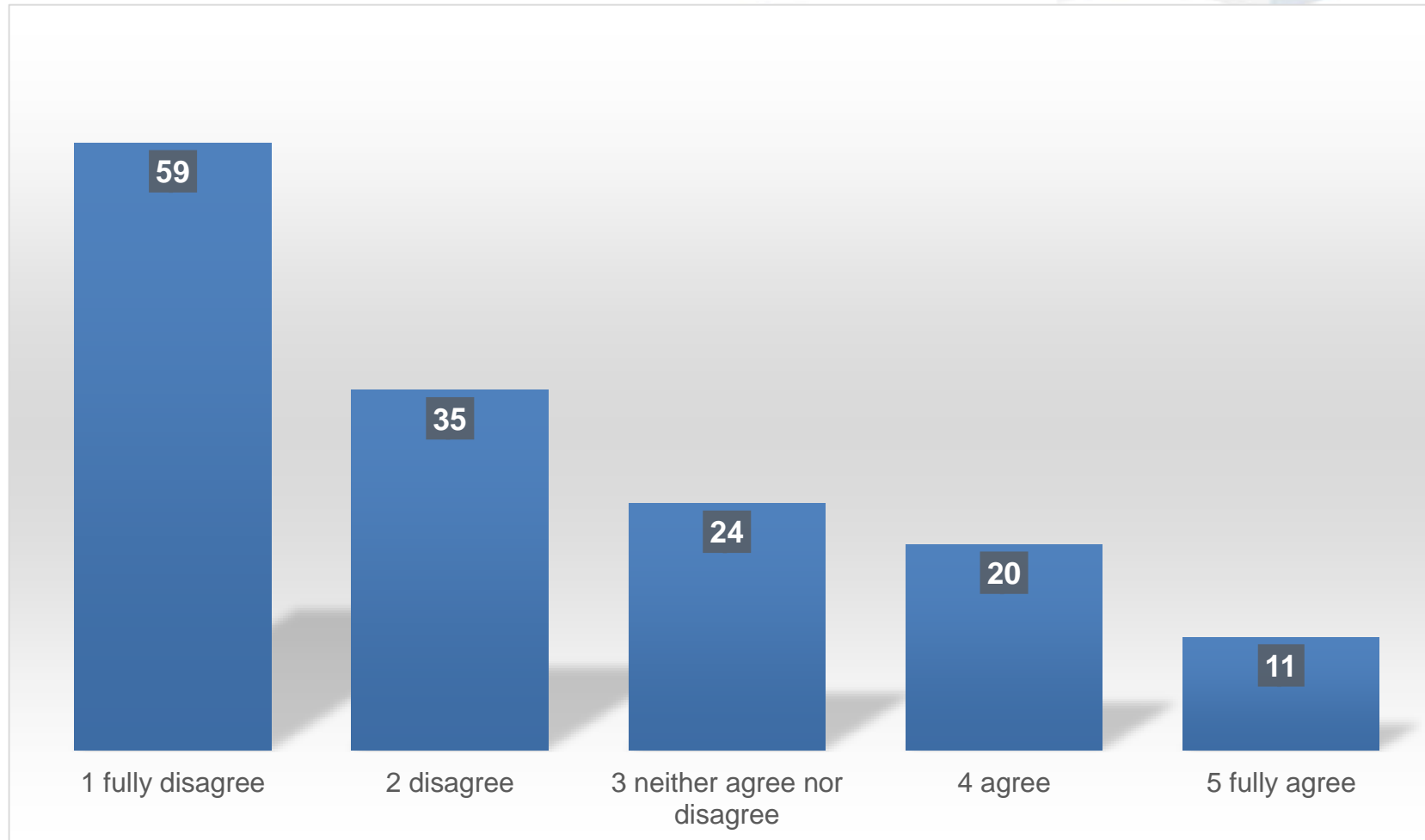
The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and Latgalian written language is **factor that promotes tourism**



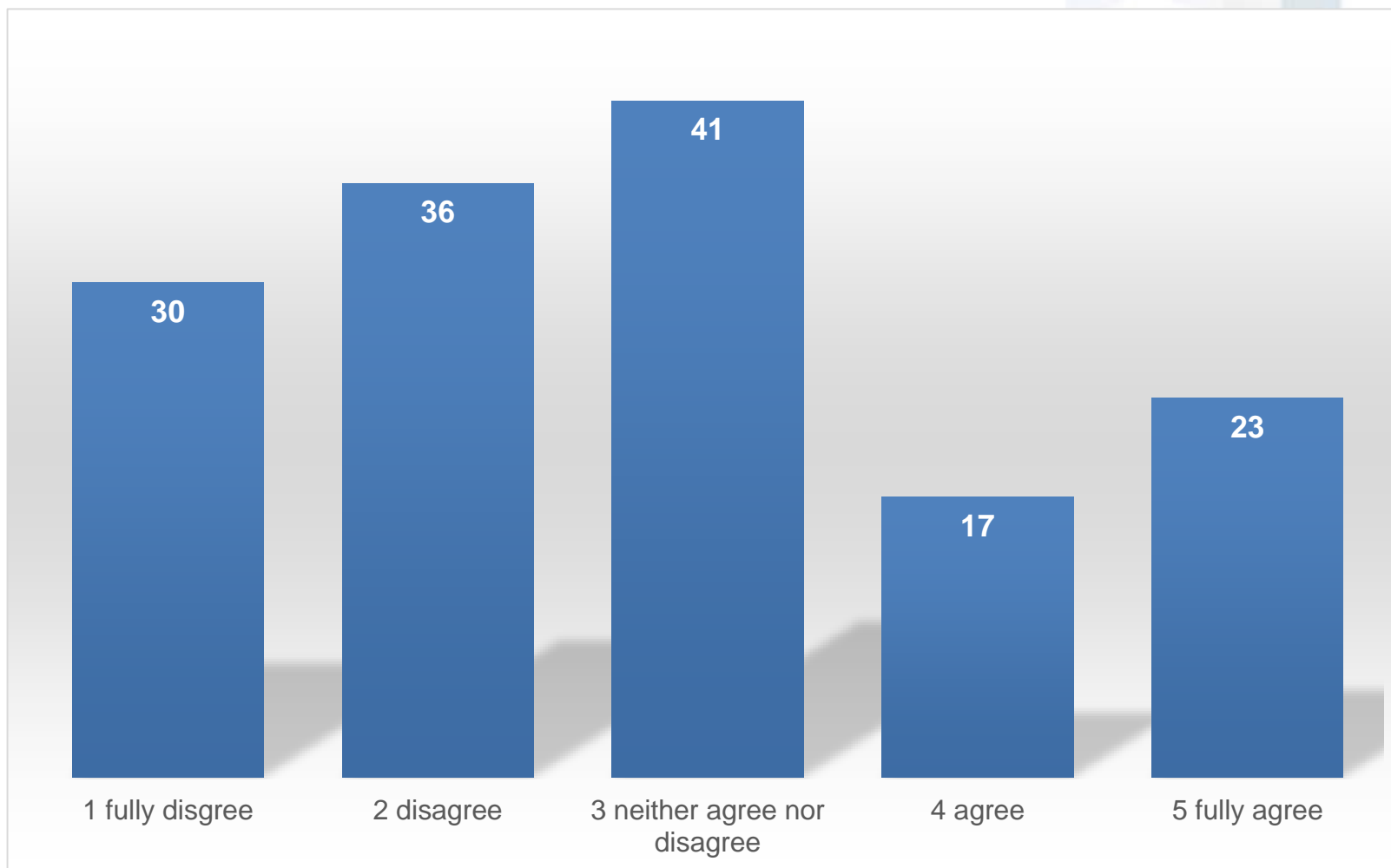
The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and Latgalian written language is **endangerment of Latvian as the state language**



The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and Latgalian written language is **pretext for dividing society**



The installation of bilingual road signs in both Latvian and
Latgalian written language is an **unnecessary waste of resources**



Which municipalities, communities, or individuals have been the most active in implementing the Latgalian written language in public signage? (91 responses)

Kārsava / Kuorsova, 2014



Cibla / Cybla, 2021



2021

Ludza, 2018

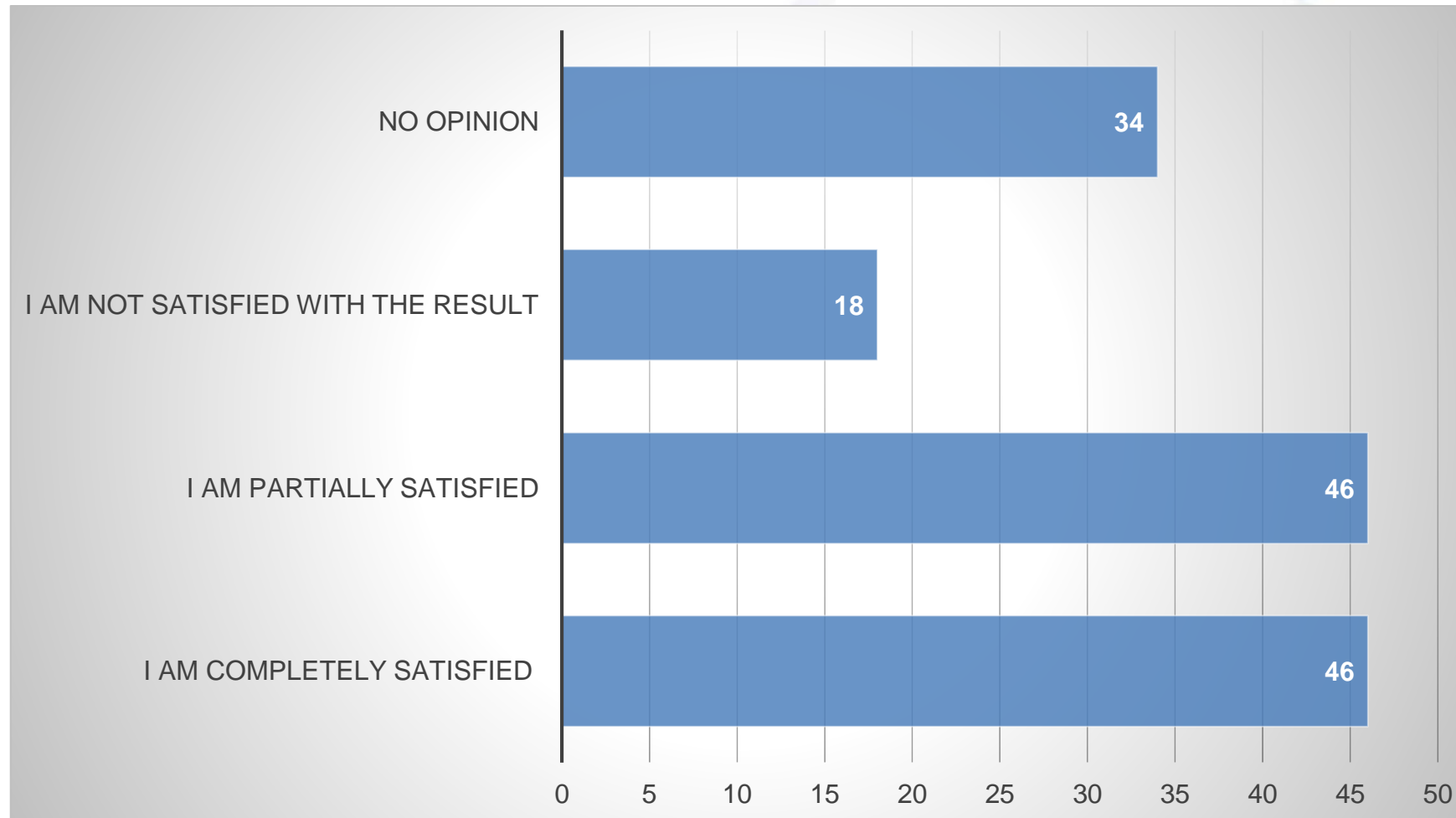


Nautrēni / Nautrāni, 2020

2022

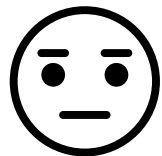


How do you assess the results of the bilingual road sign installations in **Latgale**? (144 responses)





- *Tourists would find it interesting because each region has its own charm. (Rīga, M, 41-65)*
- *It is an essential step in strengthening local identity. (Latgale, F, 41-65)*
- *It's interesting to learn about the spelling of the place's name. (Latgale, F, 41-65)*
- *I like these signs. (Latgale, F, up to 25)*



- *In my opinion, a foreigner cannot really read that these are two different names of one place, not one long name. I would like to see a visual difference. (Vidzeme, F, 25-40)*
- *For other signs where there is a long word, only 1 letter changes. Then the remaking of those signs seems wasteful. Or the names seem incorrectly written in Latgalian (in Rēzekne district they would pronounce it slightly differently than it is written on the signs). (Latgale, F, 25-40)*



- *Firstly, the roads should be repaired, then one can think about such luxuries as changing road signs. Secondly, I am not a good driver and in my opinion such signs will only create problems for drivers navigating the road. (Latgale, M, 25-40)*
- *I don't like that now everywhere they are pushing Latgalian as something special. It annoys me. (Latgale, M, 41-65)*
- *In Latvia there is one state language and it should also be used for informing the public, including about places. (Latgale, M, 41-65)*
- *Completely unnecessary waste of resources and incitement of people's anger. (Vidzeme, F. 41-65)*

In your opinion, what are the reasons why people have defaced or otherwise damaged inscriptions in Latgalian written language in public spaces? (101 responses)



Photo by Andris Slišāns (facebook.com),
23.10.2023

- *Disliked Latgalian written language in public space; the opinion that this writing is incorrect; simply for teenage entertainment. (Kurzeme, F, 41-65)*
- *A section of Russian society is being provoked with inscriptions in Latgalian. (Latgale, F, 41-65)*
- *Lack of awareness. (Latgale, M, up to 25)*

Your comments and suggestions on the use of the Latgalian written language in the linguistic landscape (83 responses)

- *The Latgalian language could be more widely used in various inscriptions, advertisements, and signboards. (Latgale, M, 41-65)*
- *Only for preserving family traditions and identity. The most important thing is to strengthen the positions of the Latvian language in Latgale, where the national proportion is not 92% (Latvians), for example, as in the region of Northern Kurzeme. (Kurzeme, F, 41-64)*
- *In every village, they speak differently, in their own dialect. Only for tourists. There's no need to impose artificially. (Latgale, F, 41-64)*

Conclusions



- At the state level, there is a noticeable change in attitude towards the functionality of the Latgalian written language in the linguistic landscape of Latvia (legislation, funding).
- Municipalities and individuals face several challenges, such as transcribing place names in Latgalian written language, taking into account phonetic and morphological variants functioning in different sub-dialects, as well as the public's ambiguous attitude towards the use of Latgalian place name variants in public spaces.
- There is a need for broader public awareness and education, both about the historical, cultural context and linguistic processes.

References

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Thank you!

Questions, comments?

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