

**PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY OF LITHUANIAN COHORTS:
DYNAMICS OR STABILITY?**

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INTRODUCTION

- Lithuania is an example of the post-communist society undergoing significant political, economic and social transformations from the state-run planned economy in the one-party controlled political system and forced incorporation into the Soviet state to the market economy based on democratic membership in the European Union.
- Significant system transformation brings some important theoretical and empirical questions concerning the shift and development of the social values, perception and attitudes of social inequality.

INTRODUCTION

- In order to examine the situation with the perception of Lithuanian society of the social inequality issues, we used the results of EUREQUAL project conducted in 2007 and the data from the survey conducted in Lithuania in 1993.
- The same block of questions dealing with the perception of the democracy and market economy as the factors related to the changing levels of the social conflict, acceptability of the extent of the social distance between various social groups, protection of the vulnerable groups in the society and institutional responsibility for the minimizing social inequality from two surveys were used for the analysis.
- Our main goal was to compare the perceptions of the phenomena in 1993 and in 2007 and to find out, whether these perceptions have changed over time – if yes, how, or they remained stable, and to examine whether perceptions and attitudes of different age cohorts towards social inequality have changed.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the beginning of 20th century Lithuania has experienced periods of very different socio-economic conditions.

After a short period of re-established independence (1918-1940), Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union. For 50 years, till 1990, Lithuanian society de facto lived under the totalitarian regime controlled by the Communist party. During this period, forced “sovietization” of Lithuanian people was under way: socialist social norms, values and laws were introduced, history re-written.

March 11, 1990 Lithuania declared the re-establishment of the independence. The first 5 years of independence were the years of high expectations and dramatic changes in economic and social spheres. Dramatic change from the state-controlled to the market economy required to introduce serious economic and social reforms. The results were painful to the big share of the population – loss of savings, scandals related to the privatization, falling/declining standard of living and etc.

The next period was marked by the banking crisis in 1995-1996 and economic crisis in Russia in 1998, which had a great negative impact on the Lithuanian economy.

Since 2001, Lithuanian economy started to grow, level of unemployment decreased. At the same time, level of emigration increased, with achieving its peak after Lithuania joined the EU in 2004.

COHORTS

With social, political and economic context described above in mind, four cohorts were defined with the respect to their different conditions of main socialization periods

	1993 Age at the time of Survey	2007	
1932-47	46-61	60-75	The eldest cohort: main socialization happened during the war and difficult post-war period. Entered the period of change with minimizing level of social activity. Many had relatives deported or in emigration, group split in the values of anti-communist and nostalgic pro-socialist. Pensioners in independent Lithuania
1948-63	30-45	44-59	Medium cohort: main socialization happened during somewhat more relaxed period. Entered the period of change with high expectations and active efforts to change the society and own life.
1964-75	18-29	31-43	Younger cohort: main socialization happened during the economic decline and the end of USSR and during “perestroika”. Entered period of change with very high expectations and level of entrepreneurship. “Engines” of the systemic change from planned to market economy
1976-89	-	18-30	“New youth” cohort: main socialization happened during the period of systemic change.

TYPES OF ATTITUDES/PERCEPTIONS

Normative Institutional

What the responsibility of the social (government) institutions should be in reducing social inequality

Normative Interpersonal

What the interpersonal relationships should be in the society (communication, trust, benefit)

Situational Institutional

The government institutions work in minimizing social inequality evaluation

Situational Systemic

Evaluation of the democratic and economy processes in the context of the social inequality conflict

INDICATORS OF ATTITUDES/PERCEPTIONS MEASUREMENT

Normative Institutional

- Provide jobs for everyone who wants one.
- Provide health care for the sick.
- Provide a decent standard of living for the old
- Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed.
- Provide decent housing for those who can't afford it.

Normative Interpersonal

- It is human nature to cooperate with other people
- Most people can be trusted.
- If someone is in serious trouble, no one else cares about it
- If you are not always on your guard other people will take advantage of you.
- A person cooperates with other people only when he or she sees it is in his or her own interest

Situational Institutional

- The government acts for the benefit of the majority of the society.
- Pensions and relief are large enough to allow old and disabled people to get by.
- There is freedom of organisation and speech
- Economic differences are not too big

Situational Systemic

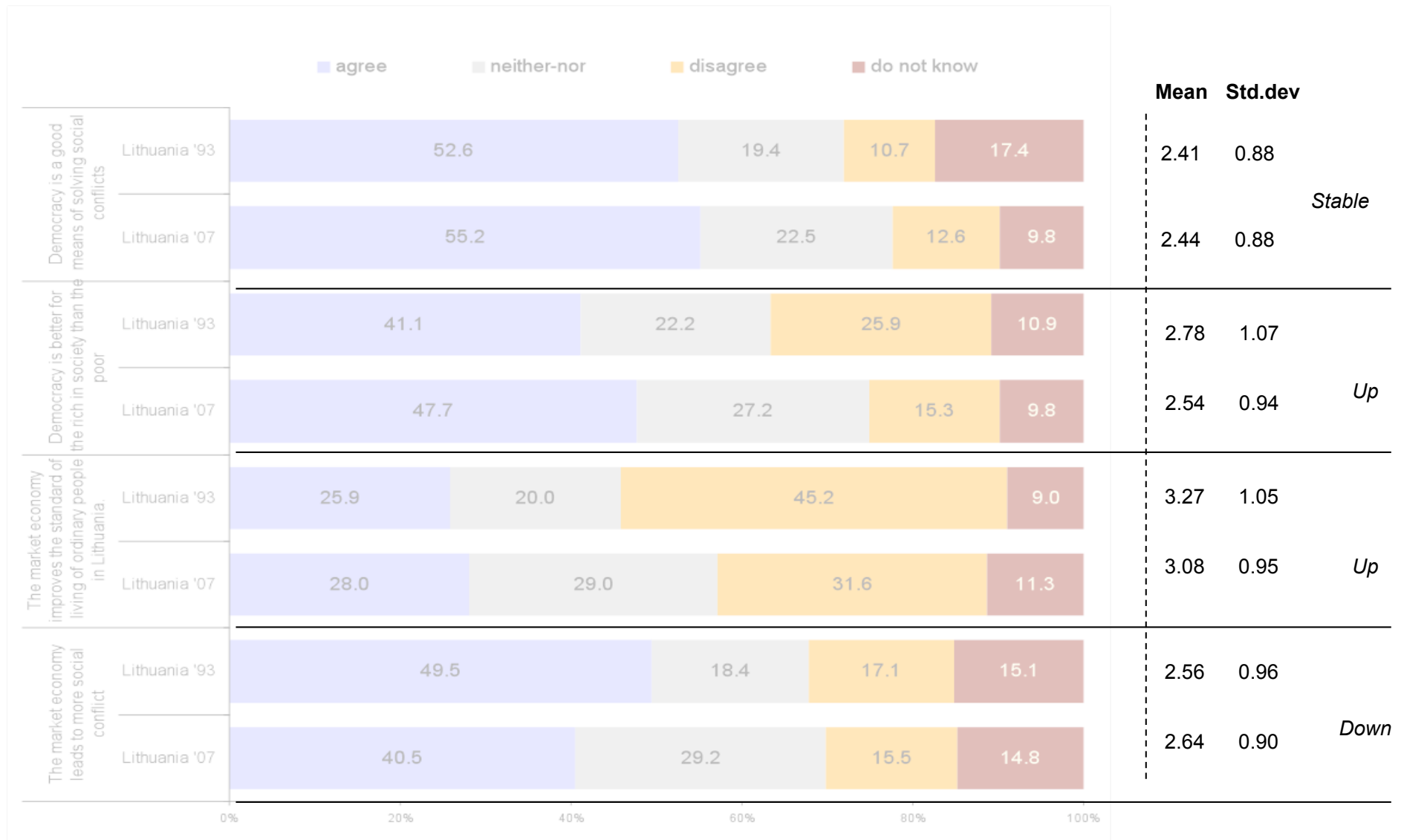
- Democracy is a good mean of solving social conflicts
- Democracy is better for the rich in society than the poor
- The market economy improves the standard of living of ordinary people in Lithuania.
- The market economy leads to more social conflict.

HYPOTHESES

- In our analysis, we tested the following hypotheses:
- situational attitudes have experienced the significant impact of the system transformation and has changed in the last decade. Situational institutional attitudes are less prone to the contextual influence than situational systemic attitudes;
- normative attitudes are less flexible and more rigid, thus they experienced less contextual influence and have not changed significantly over the last decade;
- different cohorts in the Lithuanian society experience similar impact of the social change thus their normative and situational attitudes change in the same direction – normative attitudes of each cohort remain relatively stable over time, while situational attitudes change in the same direction in each cohort.

SURVEY RESULTS AND THE DISCUSSION

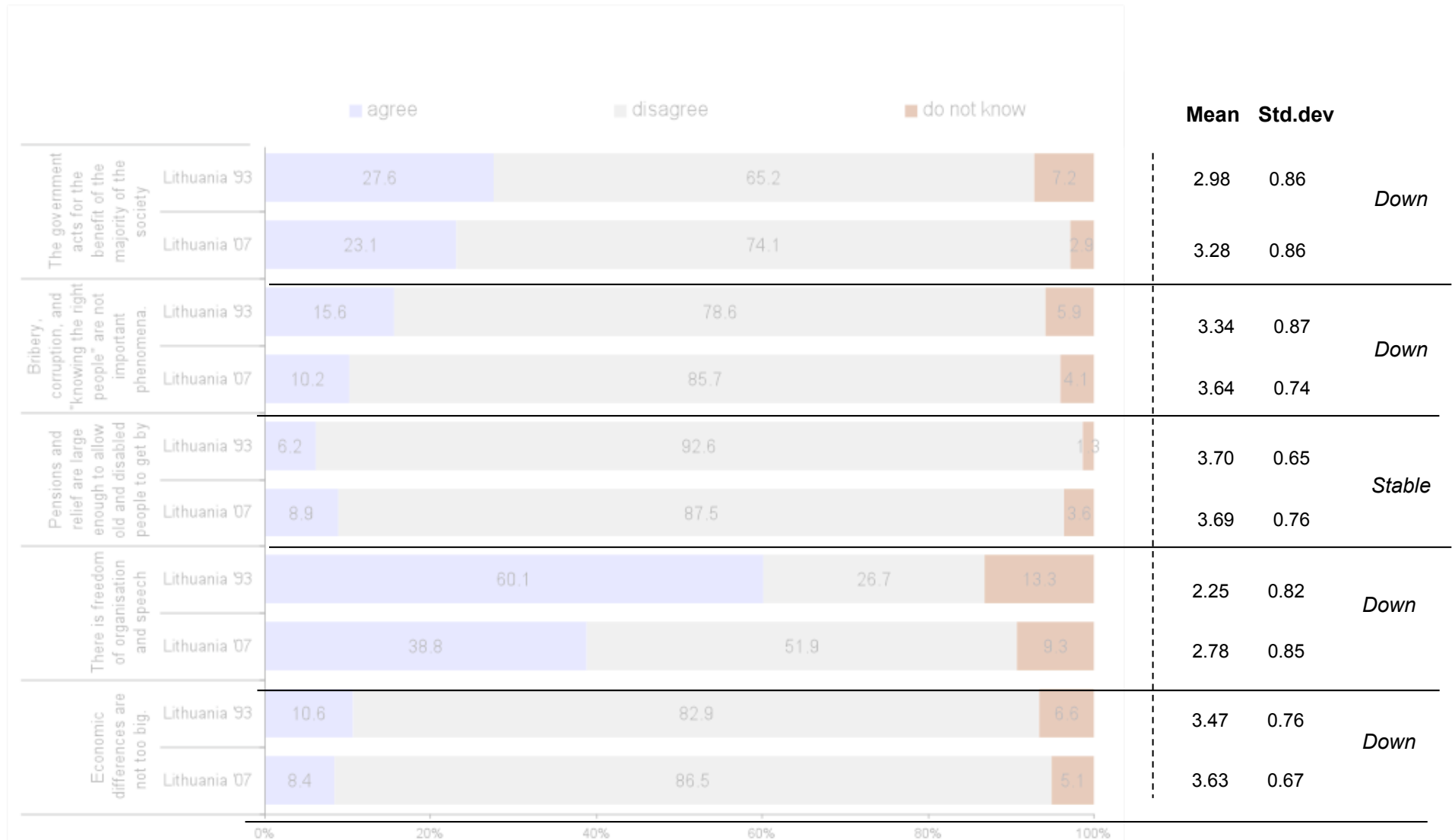
DYNAMICS OF THE SITUATIONAL SYSTEMIC PERCEPTIONS



Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree.

Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

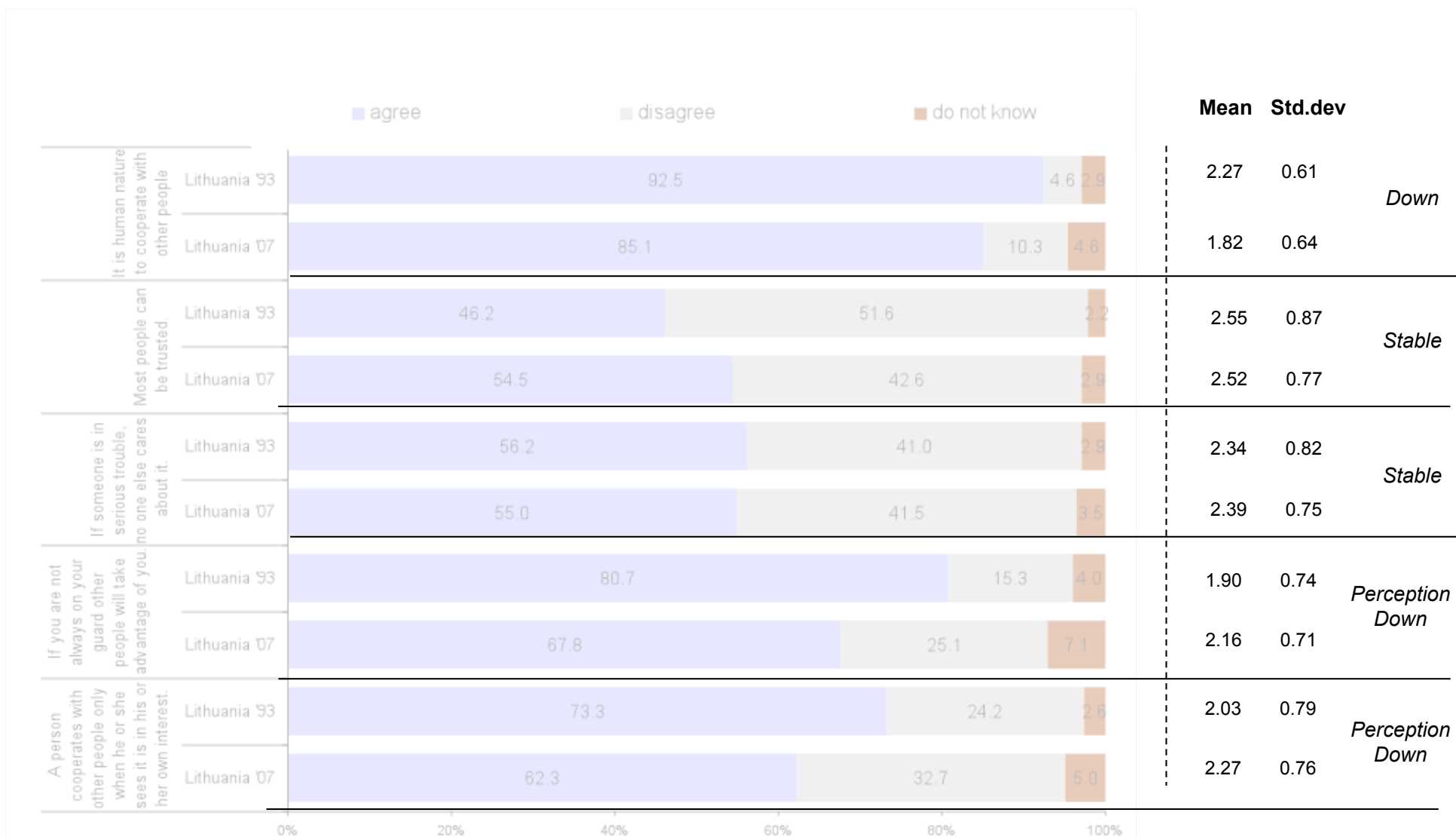
DYNAMICS OF THE SITUATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTIONS



Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-Somewhat agree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4-disagree.

Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

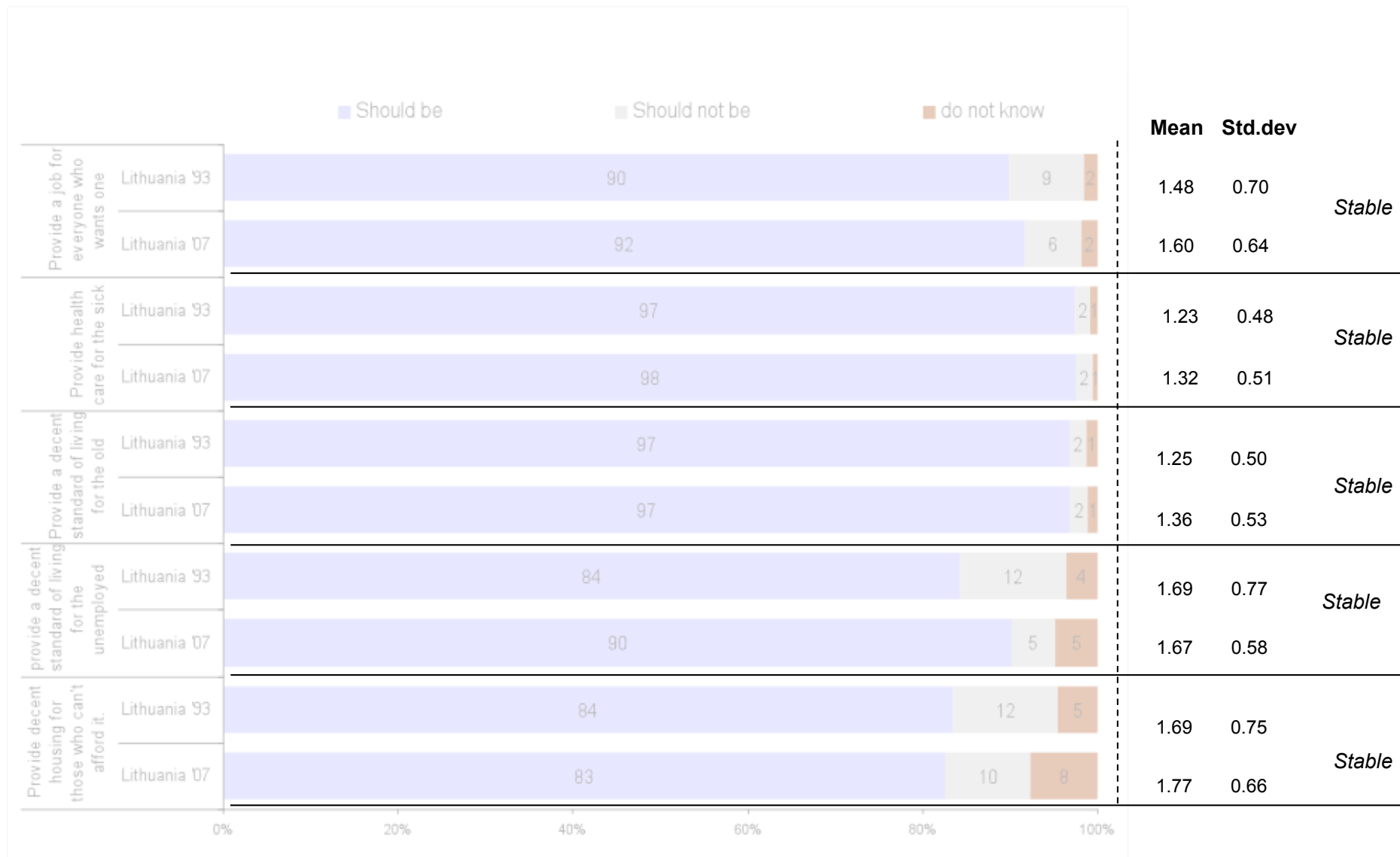
DYNAMICS OF THE NORMATIVE INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTIONS



Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-Somewhat agree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4-disagree.

Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

DYNAMICS OF THE NORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTIONS

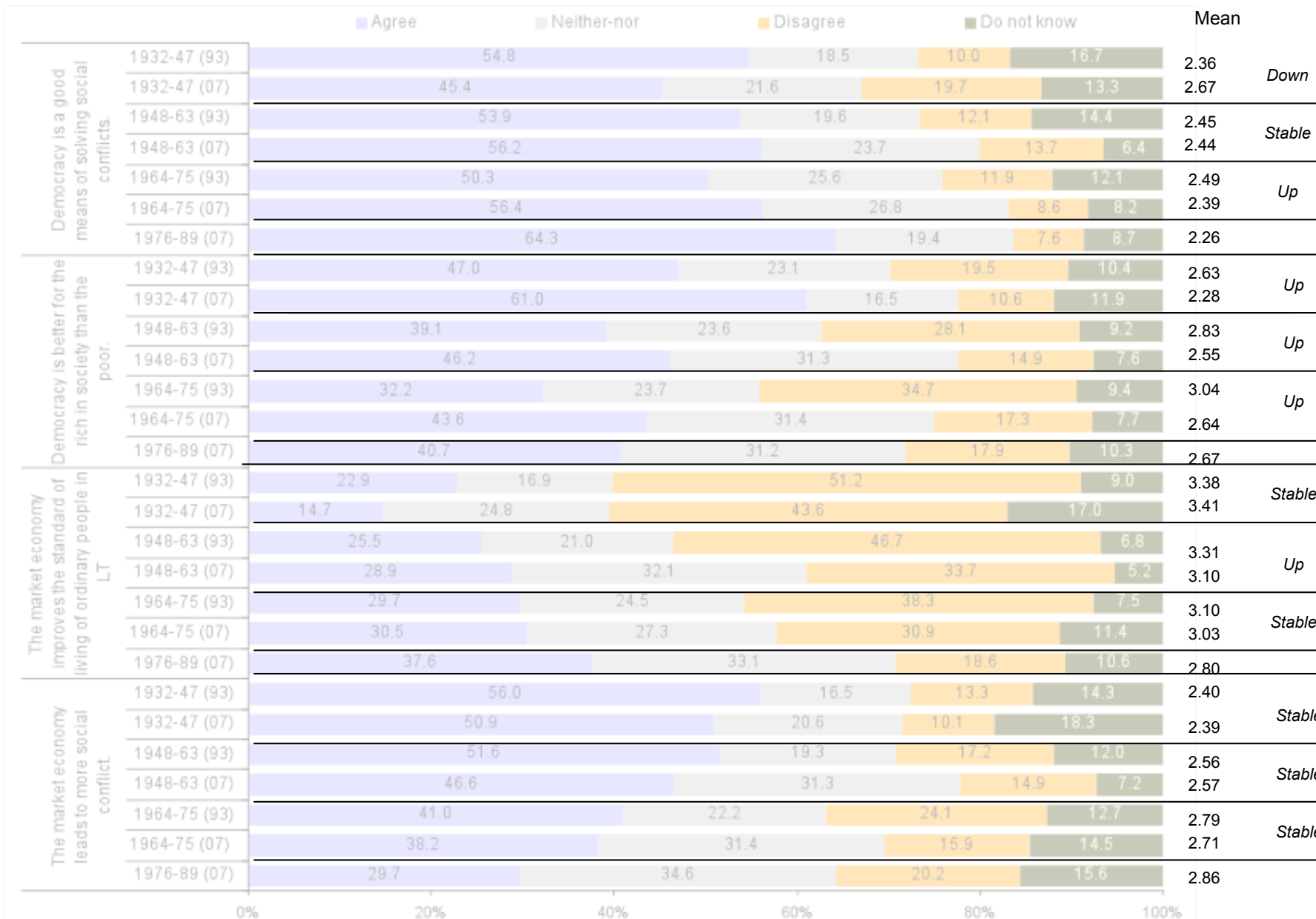


Respondents were asked to comment the responsibilities of the Government in scale: 1-Definitely should be , 2-Probably should be , 3-Probably should not be , 4- Definitely should not be .

Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed).

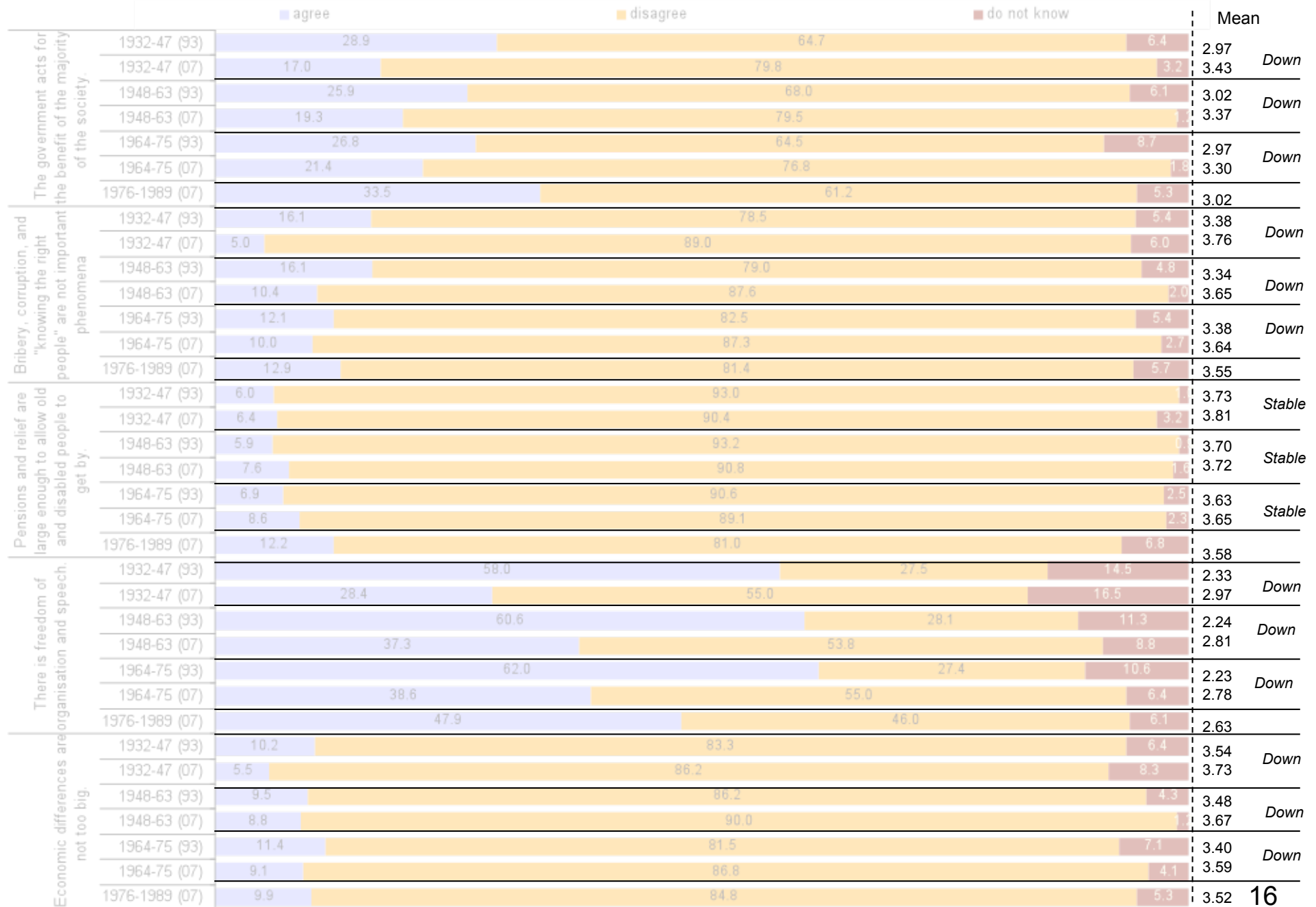
SPECIFICS OF COHORTS

DYNAMICS OF SITUATIONAL SYSTEMIC PERCEPTIONS IN COHORTS



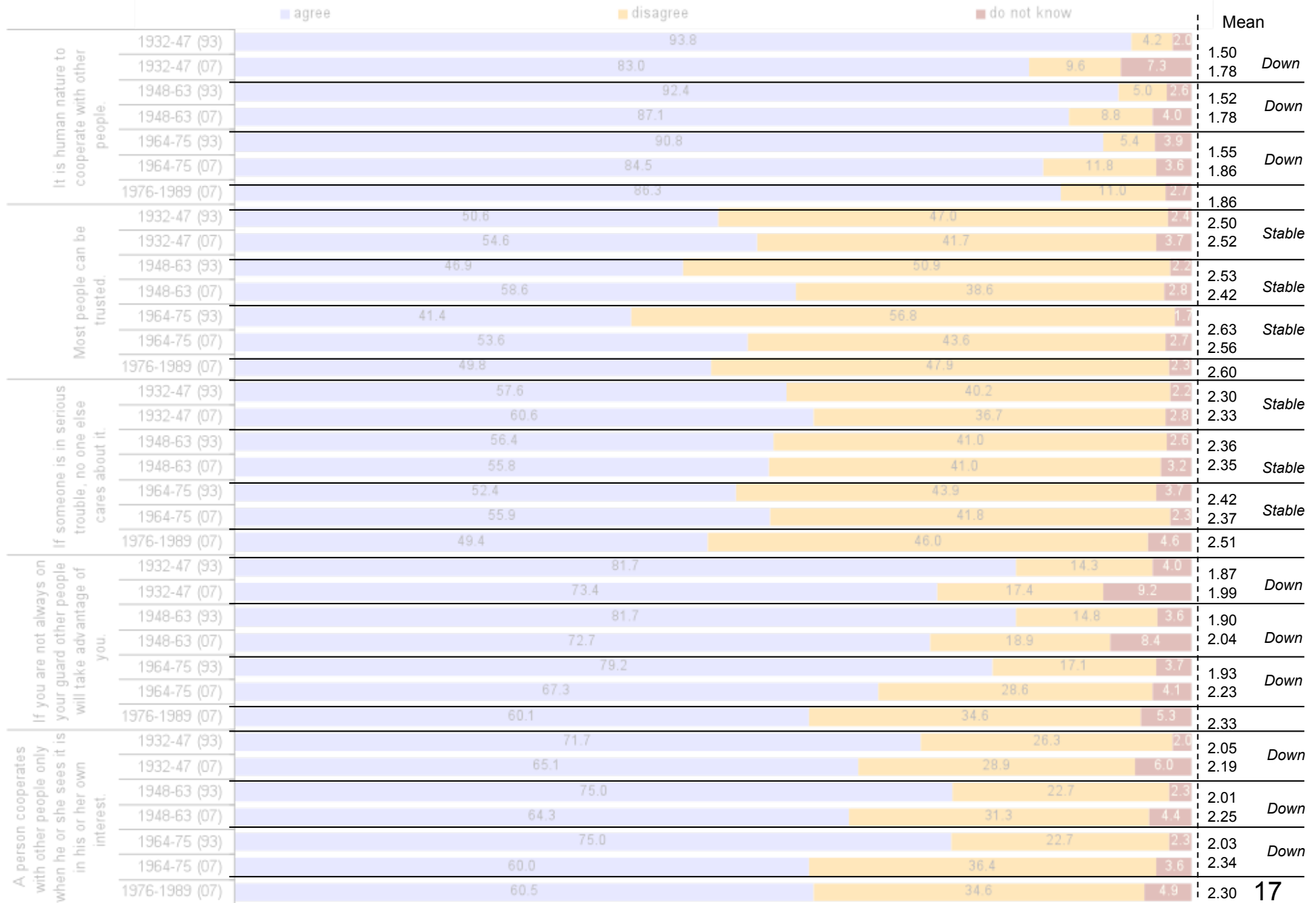
Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree. Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

DYNAMICS OF THE SITUATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTIONS IN COHORTS



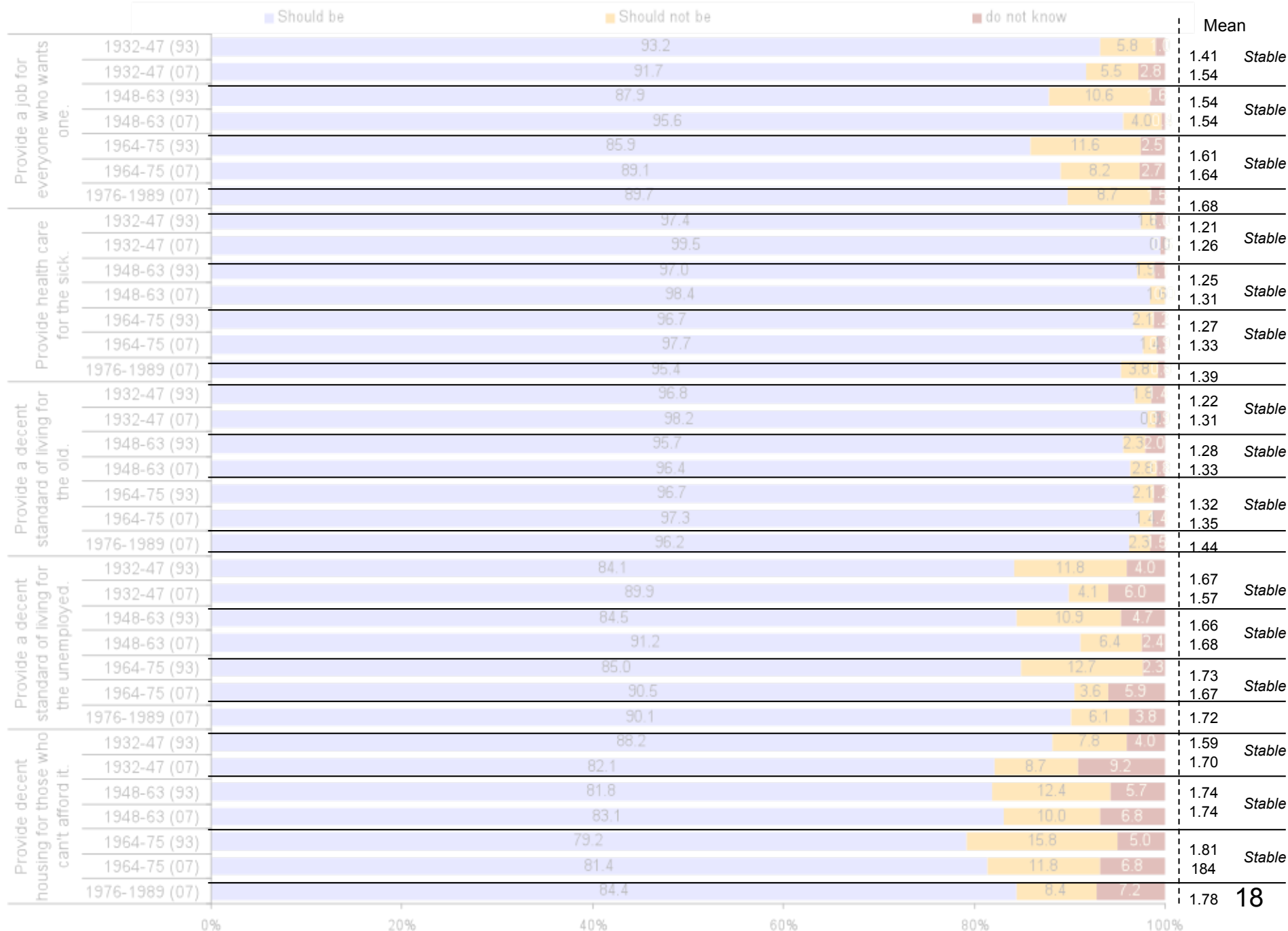
Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-Somewhat agree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4- disagree. Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

DYNAMICS OF NORMATIVE INTERPERSONAL ATTITUDES IN COHORTS



Respondents were asked to express their agreement with the statements in scale: 1-Strongly agree, 2-Somewhat agree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4-disagree. Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed)

DYNAMICS OF THE NORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL ATTITUDES IN COHORTS



Respondents were asked to comment the responsibilities of the Government in scale: 1-Definitely should be, 2-Probably should be, 3-Probably should not be, 4-Definitely should not be. Means were compared using a standard t-test for two independent samples. Significance of the differences was considered at the 0.05-level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus we can conclude, that :

- Lithuanian society expresses strong and stable attitudes towards diminishing social inequality.
- These normative attitudes have not changed over the last decade. Main responsibility for the social protection is expected from the governmental institutions.
- The normative attitudes in the sphere of personal relations are also rather stable and in the last decade became more tolerant.
- At the same time, the performance of the governmental institutions with regard to the diminishing social inequality is perceived in a more negative way than a decade ago.

CONCLUSIONS

Thinking about the future, we can conclude, that it is important for the national and the EU governing borders to take into consideration the strength and sustainability of the normative perceptions in favour of diminishing social inequality and the worsening situational perceptions of the social reality. Such significant contrast of the dynamics of normative and situational attitudes on the large part of the society leads to the explicit widening of the mental and social gap between the masses and government institutions and can cause wide-spread vertical conflicts.

Such widening gap is dangerous in the period of economic crisis in particular. In the context of Lithuania, the anti-crisis means, which Government has introduced in the beginning of 2009, seems to be not very effective in reducing social inequality as level of unemployment is increasing dramatically, businesses closing down and real incomes going down. The need of social dialogue and bringing social attitudes (especially the confidence in the institutional capacities) closer to the expectations of the population become crucial as never before.