

The Attitudes of the General Public toward the Administrative Reform 2013–2016

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Turu-uuringute AS carried out opinion polls of the Estonian adult population (aged 15 or older) with regard to the administrative reform six times from May 2013 to October 2016. The opinion polls were conducted as regular omnibus surveys, in the course of which 1,000 people from across Estonia are interviewed in their homes. Survey sample areas are selected on the basis of the country's administrative division and the population density of each region. Within these areas, households and respondents are selected according to specific rules. Omnibus surveys are conducted as face-to-face interviews. Their results can be used to make generalisations about the entire population in the relevant age group, and the maximum permissible statistical error is $\pm 3\text{--}4\%$.

The attitudes of the Estonian population towards the administrative reform over the years 2013–2016

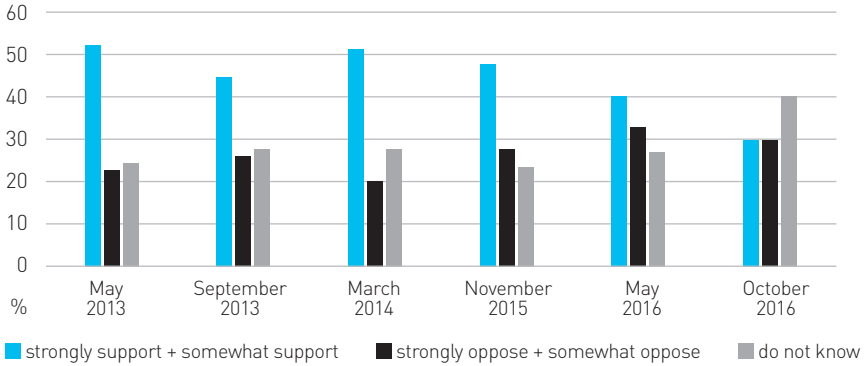


Figure 1.

The question of the respondent’s attitude toward the planned administrative reform was introduced by a short explanation. Its wording did not change much over the years. In 2013, the text read as follows:

‘According to the plan for the proposed administrative reform, small municipalities will merge with local commuting centres. These centres will drive the development of business, education and services in an entire region and will be connected to other settlements by means of high-quality roads and transport links. In the future, all local issues that people have to deal with on a daily basis, be it the creation of jobs or the maintenance of streets, will be the responsibility of one local authority. Local public services (preschools, primary schools and basic schools, social services, assistance for the elderly etc.) will continue to be provided to people close to their homes. What is your attitude towards such a plan for the administrative reform?’

Another sentence was added in 2015: ‘In order to ensure the development of municipalities, they must have sufficient population.’

Results

The results of the surveys conducted 2013–2014 were somewhat mixed, but the respondents supporting the reform always considerably outnumbered those opposing it.

By October 2016, there were an equal number of supporters and opponents – 30 % of the population in each case – and the proportion of respondents with no opinion had grown significantly (reaching 40 %). In earlier surveys this figure had been lower than 30 % and in 2013 even 25 % (see Figure 1).

Although the respondents' attitudes changed frequently within socio-demographic groups, the percentage of the supporters of the reform was always larger among younger respondents with tertiary education and higher income levels, particularly among entrepreneurs.

Support for the planned administrative reform (n = 1,000)

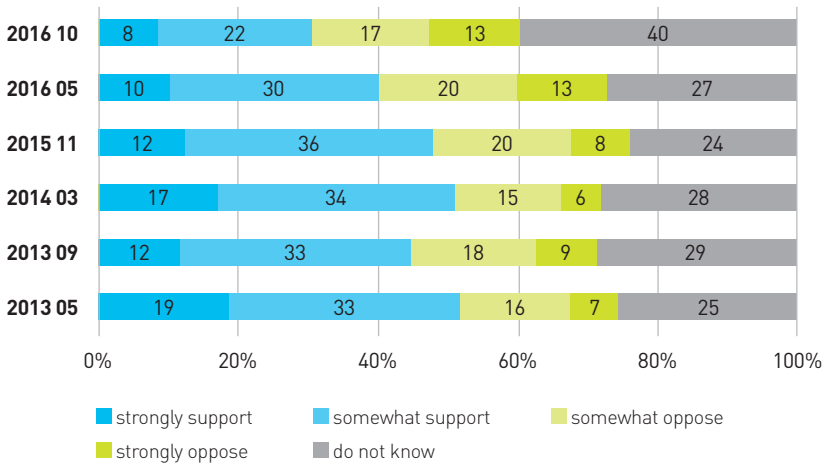


Figure 2.

Attitudes of the rural population towards the planned administrative reform between 2013 and 2016

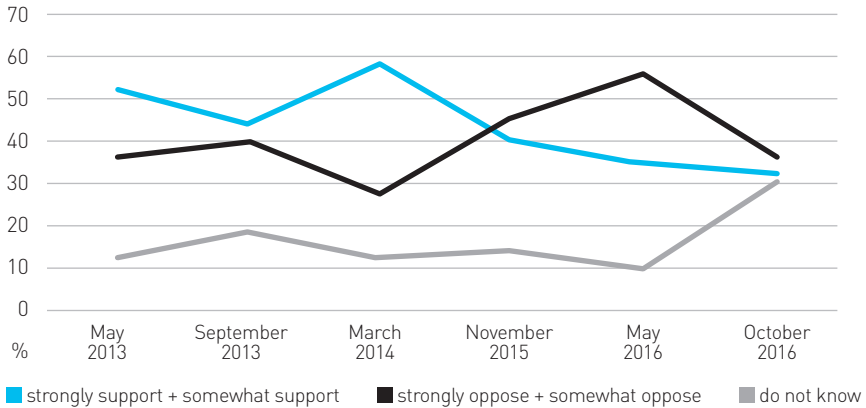


Figure 3.

Conversely, the share of opponents was always above average among people of retirement age, underprivileged people and rural populations, particularly in western Estonia. People living in villages and small towns became significantly more sceptical in 2015, when the sentence about the size requirement of municipalities was added to the questionnaire (see Figure 3).

A large part of the Russian-speaking population had no opinion.