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## Democratization against the Odds: Prospects for Political Transformation in Belarus during the Democratic Recession

Piotr Rudkouski (independent researcher) and Piotr Lichacz (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

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### Abstract

This paper examines the global downturn in democracy, juxtaposing widespread backsliding with scholarship challenging the severity of this decline. While international indices show sustained erosion in democratic norms, some argue that these trends are modest and disproportionately reflect younger, poorer democracies still consolidating their institutions. Simultaneously, shifting public attitudes and elite critiques are undermining traditional faith in democratic governance. Applying Seva Gunitzky's framework, the study situates Belarus's 2020 pro-democracy mobilization within a global environment that offered neither hegemonic shocks nor regional contagion. Instead, domestic factors—changing values and openness to meritocratic leadership—propelled democratic aspirations despite the limited external support. The Belarusian case suggests that democratization can still emerge internally, albeit more slowly and uncertainly. Ultimately, the struggle underscores the importance of gradual, ethically mindful experimentation and careful timing in the pursuit of stable democracy.

### A Bad Time for Democracy

As of early 2024, multiple global assessments indicate a persistent downturn in democratic governance. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) reports that 2023 marked the eighth consecutive year of democratic backsliding, with nearly 47% of countries experiencing declines in key democratic indicators over the past five years (Politico, 2024). Similarly, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute's 2024 report stresses that autocratization remains a dominant trend worldwide (V-Dem Institute, 2024). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) also observes a downward trajectory, noting that its Democracy Index has reached the lowest levels since its inception in 2006 (Europe Elects, 2024).

Against this backdrop of discouraging indicators, some scholars caution that the perception of a severe democratic recession may be overstated. As early as 2009, when warnings about democratic backsliding first emerged, Levitsky and Way argued that initial post-Cold War optimism had inflated expectations. When these expectations failed to materialize, observers swung towards excessive pessimism (Levitsky & Way, 2009).

More recently, political scientist Daniel Treisman (2023) contended that the decline in the global share of democracies since 2000 has been modest and not catastrophic. He attributed much of the observed backsliding to younger, poorer countries that transitioned during the "Third Wave" (1974–2005) and thus had less experience with democratic institutions to begin with. Similarly, a study by Little and Meng (2024) used objective indicators—such as incumbent performance in elec-

tions—to find limited evidence of a global decline, suggesting that expert-coded measures may be skewed by subjective coder biases or subtle, less visible forms of undemocratic behavior.

The relative absence of major democratic contagion events since the Arab Spring (2010–2011) further complicates the picture. Despite significant protests in countries such as Ukraine (2013–2014), Venezuela (2017, 2024), Armenia (2018), Belarus (2020–2021), Kyrgyzstan (2020), Russia (2020–2021), Cuba (2021), Kazakhstan (2022), Sri Lanka (2022), and Iran (2022), these movements have not led to widespread democratization. In some instances, the state of democracy has even deteriorated (see Financial Times 2024, Karmanau, 2024).

Tunisia, once heralded as the Arab Spring's lone success story, now exemplifies the fragility of democratic gains. President Qais Saied's suspension of parliament, dismissal of the prime minister, and elimination of parliamentary immunity in July 2021 marked a troubling return to authoritarian practices (SGI Network, 2018). Tunisia's constitutional referendum of July 2022 expanded presidential powers at the expense of parliament, prompting low voter turnout and allegations of democratic erosion (Bremmer, 2024). In October 2024, President Saied's second-term victory—garnered with over 90% of the vote amid widespread repression of dissent—reinforced fears that Tunisia had abandoned its democratic aspirations and slipped back into authoritarianism (Amara, 2024).

In some cases, the public appears to accept or even support these shifts away from democracy. According to the Bertelsmann Foundation, trust in the govern-

ment has increased in countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Turkey despite the clear erosion of democratic standards (SGI Network, 2018). This phenomenon suggests that de-democratization does not always provoke popular resistance. In contrast, it may sometimes coincide with rising confidence in the state, indicating that citizens in certain contexts prioritize economic stability, security, or cultural values over liberal democratic norms.

Adding another layer of complexity, certain intellectual elites have begun openly questioning the virtues of democracy and proposing alternative models of governance. Hoppe (2001) argued that democracy incentivizes shortsighted resource exploitation, while Peter Thiel (2009) questioned the compatibility of freedom and democracy. Curtis Yarvin (writing as Mencius Moldbug) praised market-oriented authoritarian models, citing Deng Xiaoping's China and Singapore as examples of competent governance (Tait, 2019). In 2016, Jason Brennan went further in *Against Democracy*, advocating epistocracy—rule by the knowledgeable—on the grounds that voters' ignorance and irrationality often produce suboptimal policy outcomes (Brennan, 2016).

In sum, while major democratic indices and reports confirm a sustained decline in global democracy, some scholars maintain that this downturn is less drastic than public discourse suggests. Furthermore, the absence of recent democratic waves, the growing public tolerance of autocratic tendencies in some states, and a chorus of intellectual critiques are collectively undermining the global momentum for democracy.

For a country such as Belarus, which is seeking pathways toward democratization, these global patterns and debates make the task more daunting. The prevailing international climate offers fewer positive examples, less external support, and a more contested understanding of democracy's worth—all factors that can hamper the prospects for democratic change.

### Belarus's Struggle for Democracy without External Incentives

The trajectory of democratic development rarely unfolds in isolation. Global shifts in power, prevailing international norms, and regional trends can all set the tone for a country's democratic aspirations. The political scientist Seva Gunitsky has made significant contributions to understanding how such international contexts shape democratization processes.

In his historical analysis, Gunitsky (2018a) identified 13 waves of democratization between 1772 and 2011. Based on this extensive research, three distinct international contexts emerge:

1. Periods of global upheaval: When global hegemony declines and new powers ascend, democratization often occurs most rapidly. Such pivotal moments

occurred after the World Wars and the end of the Cold War.

2. Regional contagion without global change: At times, there are no major shifts in global hegemony, yet democratic transitions spread regionally through a domino effect. Instances include the "Spring of Nations" in 1848–1849 and the abovementioned "Arab Spring" in 2010–2011. In these cases, democratic changes still occur but more slowly.
3. No external incentives: When neither significant global transformations nor regional contagion is present, societies must confront authoritarianism with minimal external support. Under these circumstances, democratic transitions tend to be slower and more internally driven, but potentially more stable in the long run.

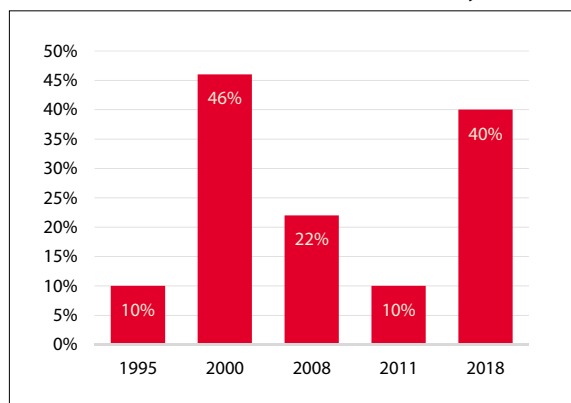
Belarus's pro-democracy mobilization in 2020 fits squarely into this third scenario. Internationally, the period was characterized by democratic backsliding rather than advancement (cf. Human Rights Watch, 2024). Nevertheless, the V-Dem assessments indicate that the scale of pro-democracy mobilization in Belarus in 2020 was unprecedented in the past half-century, not only for the country but also globally (V-Dem Institute, 2024). This surge in engagement occurred despite a lack of external catalytic events—i.e., no global hegemonic changes and no regional "contagion" akin to the Arab Spring. Instead, shifts in societal values drove Belarusians to demand greater political agency, respect for private property, tolerance for income inequality, and a weakening of paternalistic expectations (BISS, 2020).

However, Belarusian public opinion revealed this was more complex. While pro-democracy mobilization soared, the World Values Survey recorded an increase in support for strong, centralized authority. From 2011 to 2018, the share of Belarusians favoring a governance system with a strong leader rose from 47% to 51%, and support for "rule by experts" increased from 57% to 65%. Moreover, the percentage endorsing military rule increased from 8% to 24% (World Values Survey, 2020).

Crucially, support for a "strong leader" did not necessarily translate into backing for the incumbent authoritarian regime under Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Figure 1 overleaf illustrates the changing levels of support for expert governance over time, suggesting that this preference may stem from a desire for professionalism, competence, and effective administration rather than from a preference for autocracy itself.

The rising interest in meritocratic governance helps explain the rapid political ascent of Viktor Babaryka, a banker who announced his presidential bid in May 2020. Although he was soon imprisoned (since June 18, 2020), Babaryka remained a top contender in political rankings. Online research by Chatham House (2021)

**Figure 1: Prevalence\* of Support for “Expert Rule” in Belarus (World Values Survey—WVS)**



\* These percentage points were obtained by subtracting the combined percentage of “rather bad” and “very bad” responses from the combined percentage of “very good” and “rather good” responses for the question on expert rule. Source: own calculation on the basis of WVS/EVS data.

suggested that, for many in Belarus’s emerging middle class, Babaryka represented an archetype of competent leadership—someone who could combine democratic principles with technocratic efficiency. He stood as a symbol of a new management culture that, in the absence of strong external democratic role models, suggested that good governance might be achieved through rational expertise rather than pure ideological appeal.

The Belarusian case exemplifies the struggle for democracy when external incentives are minimal. Unlike historical moments shaped by hegemonic shifts or regional contagion, the 2020 mobilization in Belarus occurred in a global environment that did little to encourage democratic reforms. Nevertheless, Belarusians achieved an unprecedented level of pro-democracy activism, motivated largely by internal value changes rather than external pressures. Moreover, the public’s openness to strong leaders and expert rule underscores the complexity of democratic aspirations when societies must navigate these transitions on their own.

This nuanced interplay of democratic yearning, meritocratic admiration, and cautious openness to “strong”

authority highlights the challenges of securing stable democracy in a context devoid of global or regional catalysts. While the absence of external incentives may slow democratization, it can also lay a firmer foundation for a more resilient form of democratic governance in the long run.

### Concluding Remarks: the Importance of Trial and Error

Several global indices—such as IDEA, V-Dem, and the EIU—highlight a worrying trend of democratic decline, with nearly half of the world’s countries showing drops in key democratic measures. Although some experts warn against exaggerating the seriousness of this pattern, the absence of a recent wave of democratization and the public’s growing acceptance of autocratic governance in several countries suggest that democracy no longer commands the broad appeal it once enjoyed. Additionally, intellectual criticisms of democracy—including concerns about voter ignorance and support for technocratic governance—further weaken confidence in democratic systems.

The situation in Belarus exemplifies the challenges of pursuing democratization in such an unfavorable global environment. Without major international events or regional influences, efforts for political change in Belarus have been almost entirely homegrown. While Belarusians have displayed remarkable pro-democracy activism, their widespread support for strong or expert-led governance reflects the complex and, at times, contradictory nature of these demands. This reflects a broader trend in some societies, where people prioritize effective governance over traditional liberal-democratic principles.

Despite these challenges, the case of Belarus shows that grassroots movements, fueled by shifting values and a desire for accountable leadership, can still inspire meaningful democratic aspirations. Whether these efforts will ultimately lead to a lasting democratic transition may depend on the ability of Belarusians to sustain and build on their internally driven momentum.

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*Please see overleaf for references*

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## Lukashenka's Tightrope: Trying to Distance from the Kremlin?

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*\* The article was written before the presidential elections in Belarus took place on 26 January, 2025.*

### Abstract

This article analyses the development of the Lukashenka regime in Belarus since the 2020 presidential election and the state-wide protests that followed. Having burned bridges with Western states in its response to the protests, the Lukashenka regime has relied on support from Russia to maintain its power. This overreliance on Russian support has been a problem since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the one hand, Lukashenka has called for talks and unity among the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian 'brothers.' On the other hand, since 2020 Lukashenka, who is aware that most Belarusians are averse to the war, has tried to maintain as much neutrality as possible in the narrow space that is afforded him. Lukashenka has adapted by shoring up his position in developing a party-of-power that would supersede the Parliament with the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, and through indirect involvement in Russia's war. With the 2025 presidential elections set for January 2025, Lukashenka has put out tentative feelers to Western states, likely in an attempt to widen the narrow space left to him by relying on Russia.

### Introduction

The 2020 protests, and the resulting tightrope that Lukashenka is currently walking, can be attributed to several causes. Belarusian society had changed in the run-up to the 2020 elections, which missed the regime. Three recessions in 2008, 2014, and 2016, combined with a growing private sector showed that the Belarusian economic model of state control and paternalism was obsolete. Belarusians increasingly wanted less state involvement in their day-to-day lives.

To counteract fears that Russia would annex eastern Belarus like it did with Crimea, the authorities promoted soft-Belarusianisation, or a regime-controlled promotion of Belarusian identity. Originally, bottom-up, soft Belarusianisation gave space for existing civil society groups to operate under the guise of promoting Belarusian identity and supporting society through their activities, thereby highlighting the ineffectiveness of the state. For an autocracy concerned with control, the strengthening of independent civil society groups was a threat.

With the social parasite law in 2015, students, single parents, pensioners, and the unemployed were fined for being "social parasites." This led to state-wide protests in 2017, which, while they were short-lived, alienated many from the regime. These protests further increased the role of civil society groups. Belarusian civil society groups which existed throughout the 2010s were different from the political opposition, concerned with the less politicised topics of the environment, housing and protecting people with disabilities. The social parasite protests strengthened civil society groups which already existed and knew how to operate in organising people.

A final factor was the authorities' poor handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lukashenka even demanded that Belarus hold a Victory Day parade in central Minsk at the height of the pandemic. The regime's failure to cope with COVID-19 resulted in growing dissatisfaction just as the elections happened.

The direct cause of the protests was the Belarusian authorities stealing the election. Lukashenka received 81% of the vote to his nearest challenger, Svitlana Tsikhanouskaya, with just an improbable 10% of the vote. Mass protests against electoral fraud led Belarusian authorities to request Russian support, which came through official channels in the form of sending media agents after Belarusian state-media journalists walked out, and through informal channels by allegedly, having security service personnel work with their Belarusian counterparts in counterprotest practices.

Since 2020, Lukashenka has walked a tightrope of keeping in line with Russia while trying to maintain a semblance of independence. This position has become more difficult to maintain since Russia's war on Ukraine in February 2022. However, the Belarusian regime has shown adaptability and may be looking to distance itself from Russia in the run-up to its 2025 presidential election.

### Adaptability in a Narrow Space

Having relied on Russian support against protesters in 2020, Lukashenka had little space to adapt. Previously, Lukashenka balanced Russia and other alternatives. With Lukashenka wary of overreliance on Russia he balanced by seeking economic ties with China, Cuba, Venezuela, Iraq, Syria, Zimbabwe. Western states largely

shunned Belarusian overtures. Increasingly in the 2010s the Belarusian economy became Hi-Tec, becoming a world leader in computer outsourcing and with Chinese support developing the Great Stone business park – as a window on Europe. Lukashenka had tried to balance overreliance on Russia with alternatives. However, the 2020 protests pushed Lukashenka closer to Russia with security needs trumping economic linkages.

Accordingly, after 2020, this balancing act came to a halt as Lukashenka's space for manoeuvring narrowed due to his reliance on Russia to stay in power. Having burnt bridges with the West, Lukashenka allowed immigrants from Afghanistan and the Middle East access to Belarus and its border with Western states. Belarusian border guards pushed immigrants across the border. Creating an immigration crisis was a less than subtle way for Lukashenka to start dialogues with Western states. The creation of a migrant crisis to weaken Europe was a signal to Putin that Lukashenka remained a key Russian ally.

Lukashenka also showed a piratical turn by rerouting a Ryanair flight originally destined for Vilnius to Minsk to arrest activist Raman Protasevich in May. After the attempt to flood Europe with migrants, this episode only further divided Belarus from Western states. It isolated Belarus and increased its dependence on Russia. This situation became even more problematic after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Lukashenka has had to balance his reliance on Russia without directly getting involved in the war. However, Belarus is increasingly tied to Russia with a "common defence space," Russian nuclear weapons supposedly based in Belarus and further economic integration have all been agreed on since Russia launched the full-scale war on Ukraine in February 2022.

On the one hand, Lukashenka depends on Russia for his continued rule. To show that he remains a key Russian ally, Russian forces were allowed to invade Ukraine from Belarusian territory. Russia has stationed nuclear weapons in Belarus and fired missiles and bombed Ukrainian cities and military positions from Belarus. Lukashenka's support in defusing Prigozhin's March on Moscow in June 2023 was to show that he was a key ally to Putin. Similarly, Lukashenka claimed that he needed Russian support; otherwise, Western states would replace him with a pro-Western leader in Belarus. This posture maintains close links between Belarus and Russia.

On the other hand, Lukashenka has tried to maintain a neutral status in the limited space afforded him. Knowing that most Belarusians do not want direct involvement in the war and that that Belarusians may not fight for him, Lukashenka has tried to remain as neutral as much as he can. Although Belarus's neutral status is negligible, Lukashenka tried to use this status in the first weeks of the war to offer Belarus as a place

to negotiate a solution to the war, thus trying to make him integral to solving the conflict.

After the 2020 protests, there seemed to be little leeway for authorities to adapt and develop new practices to maintain their power. Rather, it appeared likely that the regime would be reliant on repression and Russia support. However, in the past, Lukashenka adeptly found solutions to what seemed to be difficult situations. There is a cottage industry devoted to predicting the fall of the Belarusian regime. However, the regime is now in its 31<sup>st</sup> year and shows no clear signs of collapse.

Given the narrow space that he has, Lukashenka has adapted and managed to shore up his power. While Lukashenka's 2020 electoral result was fraudulent, he does remain popular among a quarter of Belarusians (see Summer and Y, 2021). With the Belarusian opposition either jailed or exiled, there is little that the regime needs to worry about domestically. However, Russia remains the greatest threat to the stability of Lukashenka's rule.

Belarus changed the constitution via a referendum in February 2022 to bring back a two-term limit. The constitutional referendum did not meet basic international standards for conducting democratic and fair elections and was held in an atmosphere of fear and repression. Ostensibly, this was concession to the Russian authorities that Lukashenka's tenure would one day end. Although Lukashenka has been a Russian ally, he has remained far too independent for the liking of many in the Russian regime. It appeared that the ending of term limits was a compromise that allowed Lukashenka to stay in power but would give the Russian authorities the chance to install a less independent-minded Belarusian president in the future.

However, the changes, which were approved in a 2022 referendum, granted any president immunity and a guaranteed seat in Parliament's Upper House for life. Lukashenka would remain president until 2035, when he will be 79. In contrast, Putin will be 82 in 2035, and the world is likely to be very different by then. The constitutional referendum gave more power to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly.

This organisation, which was created in 1996, consists of 1,200 delegates and has been useful for providing regime legitimacy through television sessions showing Belarusians that they were represented by people similar to them. The 2022 referendum gave the body new powers on legislation and appointed Lukashenka as the Head of the Assembly. The 2022 constitutional referendum gave the head of the Assembly more power than the presidency did. However, with Lukashenka in both positions, this means little until 2035.

The largely ceremonial Parliament has also been changed to consolidate Lukashenka's power. Originally, Belaya Rus was founded in 2007 as a public association,

but in 2023, it became a political party, winning 51 out of 110 seats in the 2024 parliamentary elections. The 2024 elections returned a controlled parliament with the three other parties all regime controlled. For the first time, however, the number of independents was less than the number of members of a political party. Lukashenka was unwilling to allow independents—who take their independence too literally—to be the main force in parliament. By creating a party of power for the first time, Lukashenka showed that he was consolidating power even further.

### Widening the Narrow Space?

Having managed to maintain his dominance of the system against pressure from Russia, Lukashenka has created space for himself to develop the domestic political system to ensure the longevity of his power. The 2025 presidential election will occur on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, and Lukashenka announced that he will be on the ballot. It is certain that Lukashenka will win the election, and the official score will be 80% or above. A law passed in January 2024 requires that any presidential candidate must have permanently lived in Belarus for the past twenty years. This change makes it impossible for any opposition leader in exile – like Tsikhanouskaya – to stand in the elections.

By adapting the system from a difficult starting position after 2020, Lukashenka has given himself space from Russia domestically. This has allowed him to begin pushing for space in the international scene. Lukashenka has called for peace between Russia and Ukraine. Since announcing that he will run in the next presidential election, Lukashenka has put out tentative feelers to Western states. It remains plausible that Lukashenka will try to sell the narrative that he remained neutral in the war despite being under great Russian pressure.

Whether Western states believe such a narrative remains to be seen, but Lukashenka is likely betting that his Western neighbours will not want instability in Belarus and will support him in moving away from Russia and allow him to stay in power in Belarus, fearing that a Lukashenka-less Belarus will finally succumb to Russian dominance. This may seem unlikely and fantastical, but having given himself increased space, it is likely that Lukashenka will try this plot line.

Of course, the unknown factor is what happens in Ukraine. Although increasingly unlikely, a Russian defeat in Ukraine would have ramifications for Lukashenka. A defeated Russia will likely mean the fall of Lukashenka. It is unlikely that without Russian support, Belarusian authorities would survive. While Belarus has not officially joined the war, it has hardly been neutral, and it is unlikely that Ukraine, Poland, or Lithuania would accept Lukashenka remaining in power. We would expect pressure to be exerted on Lukashenka to accept at the very least a power-sharing deal. A Russian victory in

Ukraine with a regime change in Kyiv—or the fall of the Zelenskyy's government—due to negotiations beneficial to Russia, will result in the Kremlin looking to establish a controlled regime in Belarus as well. Thus, Lukashenka remains in a difficult position, with all scenarios regarding Ukraine plausibly leading to losing power.

This is why, having managed to make space for himself, Lukashenka is making tentative moves to open dialogues with Western states. Russia is likely to still be under sanctions regardless of what happens in Ukraine, and its overheating economy means that there will be less money to support Belarus. A Russian victory is likely to concern Lukashenka, and he will look to obtain assurances from the Russian authorities that his position will be safe. Currently, Lukashenka has made tentative moves to Western states, proclaiming the need for peace and stability. The release of more than 200 political prisoners since summer 2024 was a signal to the West that Lukashenka wanted to improve relations. Given that Russia's economy is overheating and will stagnate when the war ends (due to the militarisation of the economy), Lukashenka is aware that Russia will provide less financial support for Belarus and thus is looking to improve relations with the West in hopes of obtaining loans. Lukashenka is likely betting on Western states not wanting further regional instability, thus supporting him to stay in power. However, relations with the West are bad, and the token release of prisoners when there are still over 1,000 in Belarusian jails will only go so far. From being in a difficult position after 2020, Lukashenka has adeptly walked the tightrope and made space for himself to manoeuvre, although the future is still uncertain.

### Conclusion

What appeared to be the end of adaptive authoritarianism in Belarus after the 2020 protests due to over-reliance on Russia may have in fact been a hiatus. The situation has changed since the events in 2020, with the Belarusian authorities adeptly adjusting to the current circumstances. This has allowed Lukashenka to distance himself from the Kremlin by not fully getting involved in the war and trying to rebuild relations with the West. It remains to be seen how far this change will go. Lukashenka has managed to ensure that he will remain in power until 2035 and potentially longer from the new powers given to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly and immunity for life. However, much depends on how the situation in Ukraine plays out. Russia's defeat will put pressure on Lukashenka and lessen his chances of remaining in power. Similarly, a Russian victory will also adversely affect his chances of survival.

*Please see overleaf for references and information about the author.*



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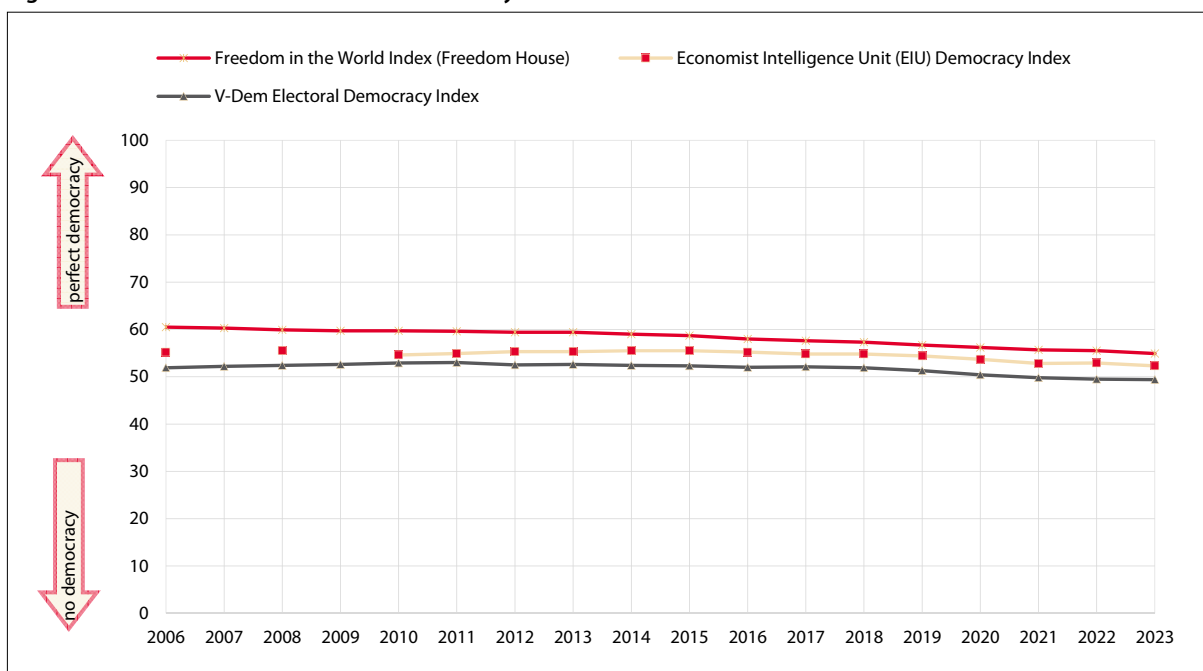
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DOCUMENTATION

## Democracy and Perception of Political System in Belarus

Figure 1: Belarus in International Democracy Indexes\*



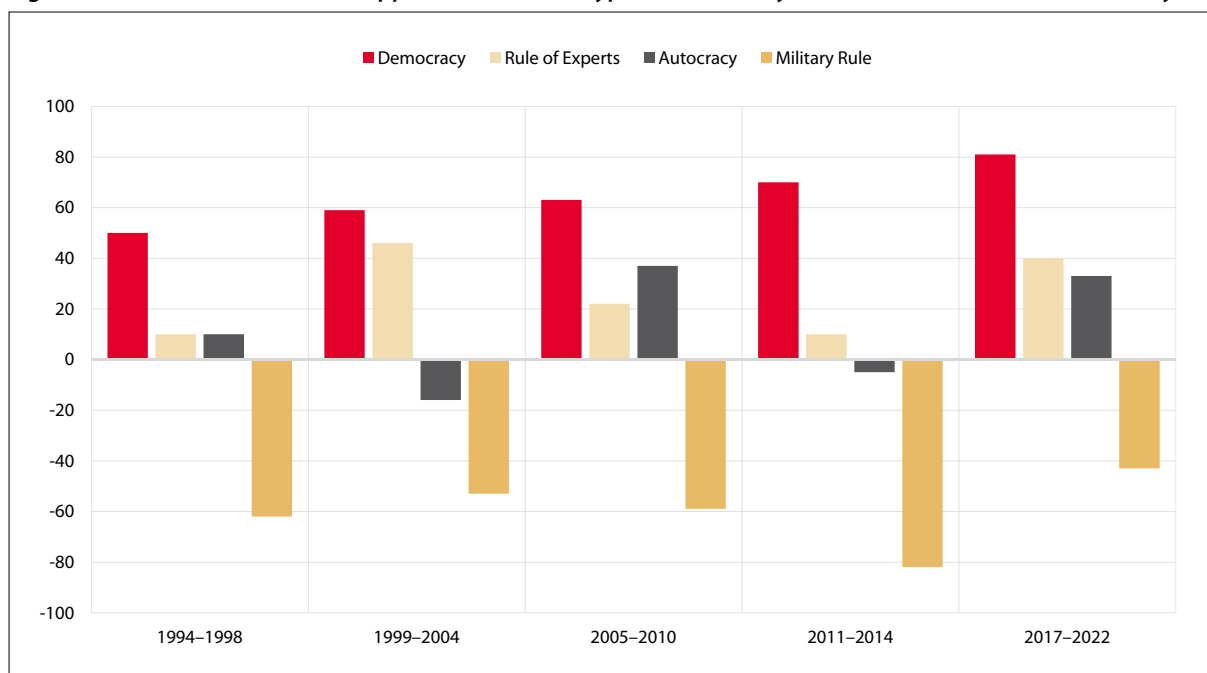
	Freedom in the World Index (Freedom House)	Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index	V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index
2006	60.5	55.2	51.9
2007	60.3	-	52.2
2008	59.9	55.5	52.4
2009	59.7	-	52.6
2010	59.7	54.6	52.9
2011	59.6	54.9	53.0
2012	59.4	55.3	52.5
2013	59.4	55.3	52.6
2014	59.0	55.5	52.4
2015	58.7	55.5	52.3
2016	58.0	55.2	52.0
2017	57.6	54.8	52.1
2018	57.3	54.8	51.9
2019	56.7	54.4	51.3
2020	56.2	53.7	50.4
2021	55.7	52.8	49.8
2022	55.5	52.9	49.5
2023	54.9	52.3	49.4

\* Each index is standardised on a 0–100 scale, where 100 indicates a perfect democracy.

\*\* Europe Elects mistakenly used the year of publication of an index as the year of review. For example, an index published by the EIU in 2007 reflects the state of democracy in 2006. However, Europe Elects attributed this data to the state of democracy in 2007.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit; Freedom House; V-Dem Institute via Europe Elects with corrections\*\*; [https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/?utm\\_source=uiu-website&utm\\_medium=blog&utm\\_campaign=democracy-index-2023](https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023/?utm_source=uiu-website&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2023); <https://v-dem.net/>; <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2024/mounting-damage-flawed-elections-and-armed-conflict>

**Figure 2: The Prevalence\* of Support for Particular Types of Political System in Belarus (World Values Survey)**



	Democracy	Rule of Experts	Autocracy	Military Rule
1994-1998	50	10	10	-62
1999-2004	59	46	-16	-53
2005-2010	63	22	37	-59
2011-2014	70	10	-5	-82
2017-2022	81	40	33	-43

\* Rating = sum of ('very good' + 'rather good') minus sum of ('rather bad' + 'very bad'). Options 'Don't know' and 'No answer' not considered.

Original wording:

**Democracy:** Having a democratic political system.

**Rule of experts:** Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country.

**Autocracy:** Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.

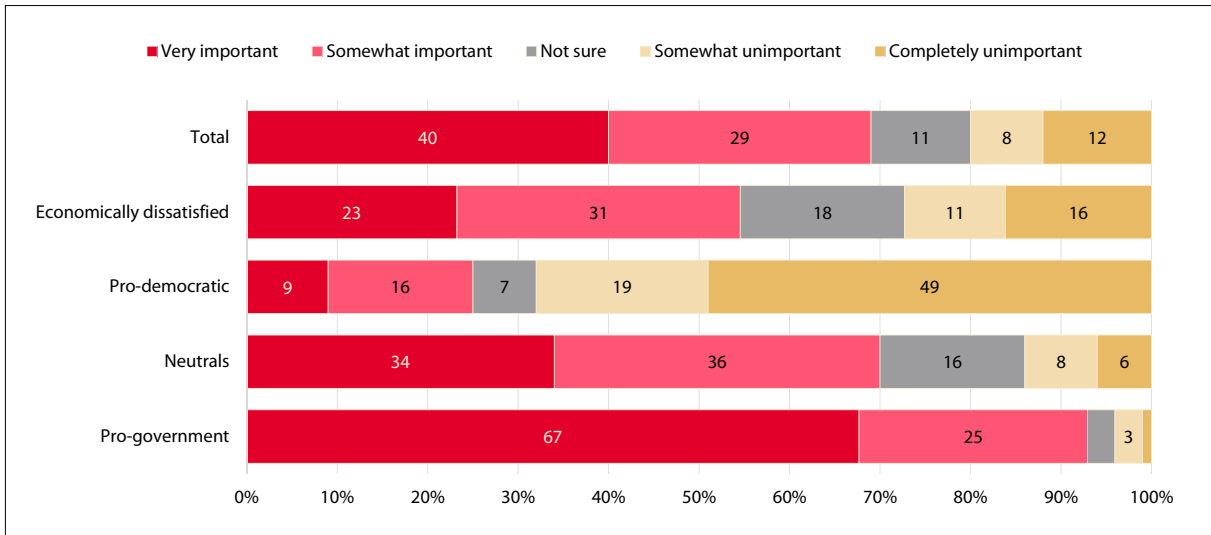
**Military rule:** Having the army rule.

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 3-7

OPINION POLL

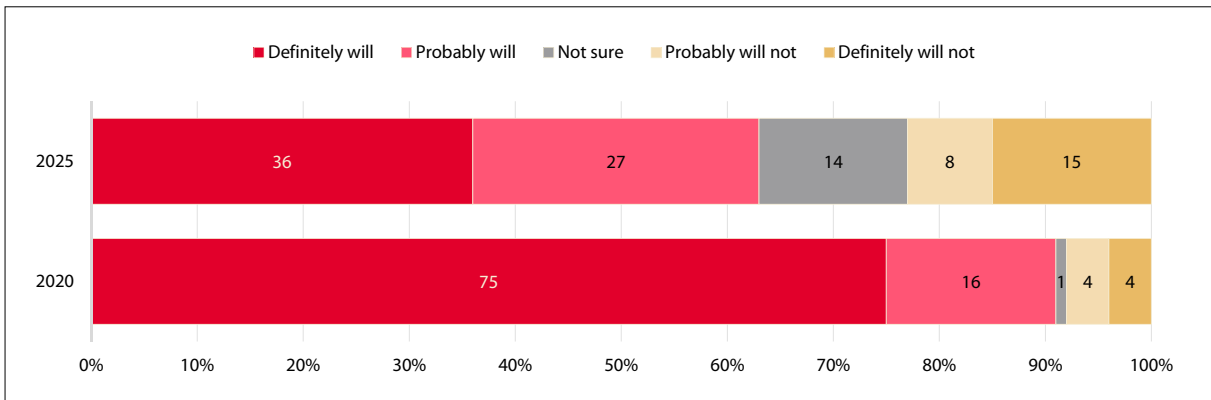
## Perceptions of the Electoral Campaign and the Situation in Belarus (December 2024–January 2025)

**Figure 1: How Important or Unimportant Do You Consider the Upcoming Presidential Election for the Country? (%)**



Source: *Perceptions of the electoral campaign and the situation in Belarus. Results of a public opinion study conducted between 9 December 2024 and 15 January 2025; Chatham House; p. 7–8: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFKicAVCWVGX2GmkBk2HdAaNi2Xf6QoX/view>*

**Figure 2: Personal Intention to Vote in 2020 and 2025\***  
**Will You Participate in the Upcoming Presidential Election in August 2020? (%)**  
**Will You Vote in the Upcoming Presidential Election in January 2025? (%)**

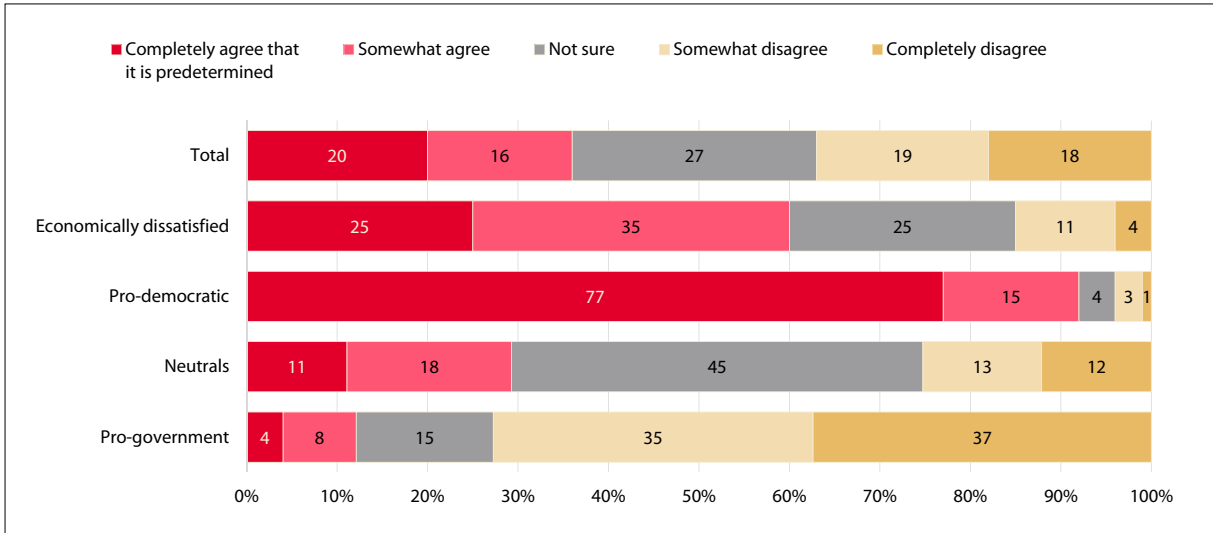


\* A direct comparison of exact figures between the years is not possible due to the lack of sample reweighting in the 2020 closed study based on the results of a phone survey. However, the significant difference in the share of those intending to vote cannot be explained solely by methodological differences.

Source: *Perceptions of the electoral campaign and the situation in Belarus. Results of a public opinion study conducted between 9 December 2024 and 15 January 2025; Chatham House; p. 12: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFKicAVCWVGX2GmkBk2HdAaNi2Xf6QoX/view>*

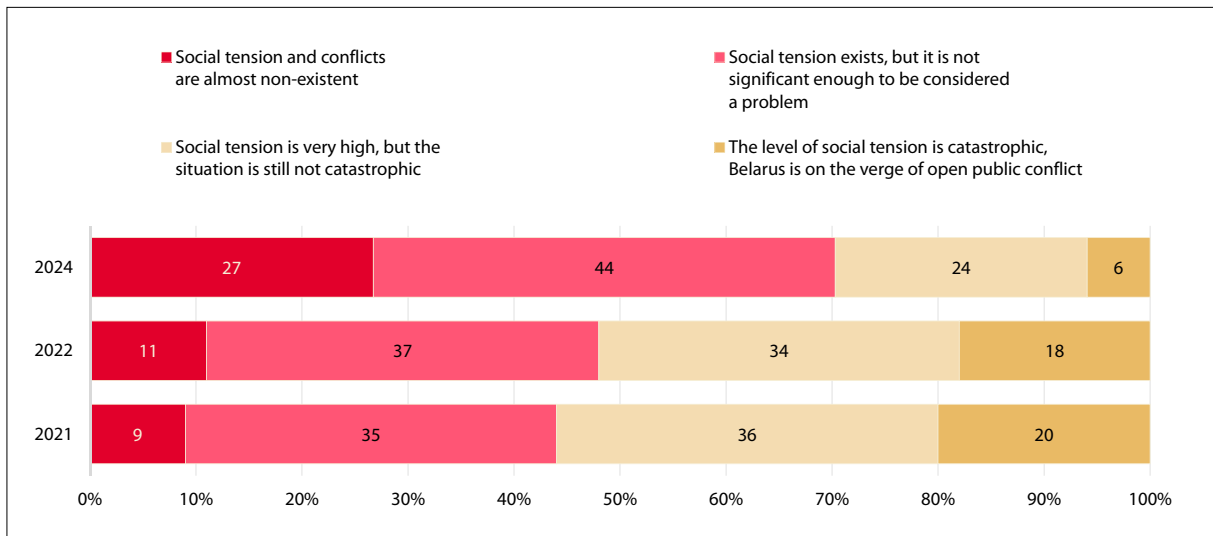


**Figure 3: To What Extent Do You Agree or Disagree with the Statement: ‘The Result of the 2025 Presidential Election in Belarus is Predetermined, and Voters’ Influence is Minimal’? (%)**



Source: *Perceptions of the electoral campaign and the situation in Belarus. Results of a public opinion study conducted between 9 December 2024 and 15 January 2025*; Chatham House; p. 17: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFKicAVCWGX2GmkBk2HdAaNi2Xf6QoX/view>

**Figure 4: Which of the Following Statements about Social Tension in Belarus Do You Most Agree with? (%)**



Source: *Perceptions of the electoral campaign and the situation in Belarus. Results of a public opinion study conducted between 9 December 2024 and 15 January 2025*; Chatham House; p. 32: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KFKicAVCWGX2GmkBk2HdAaNi2Xf6QoX/view>

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