



Why the Election in Belarus Cannot Be Recognized **(Analytical Report)**

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Introduction

The so-called presidential “election” in Belarus, with early voting starting on January 21 and the main voting day on January 26, 2025, cannot be considered free or fair and should not qualify as an election. There are no alternative candidates, independent observers, or transparent vote counting. This is a pre-planned self-reappointment of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to legitimize his dictatorial rule. The democratic forces of Belarus call on the international community to refuse to recognize this fake campaign, continue pressure and isolation of the Lukashenka regime, and support Belarus’ democratic forces led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in their demands for free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners, the cessation of repression, and Belarus’ withdrawal from Russia’s criminal war against Ukraine.

The presidential “election” in Belarus is taking place amidst state terror. The authorities systematically eliminate opportunities for civic participation. In an environment where independent media have been destroyed, civil associations paralyzed, and opposition parties dissolved, the electoral process has been turned into a farce, falling far short of democratic election standards.

The legal framework of the electoral process in Belarus not only fails to uphold democratic principles but is actively used to reinforce the authoritarian regime. Laws restrict the participation of independent candidates, impose strict eligibility criteria, and criminalize actions aimed at independent election monitoring, including alternative vote counting and photographing ballots.

Electoral commissions in Belarus are entirely controlled by the authorities, with the lists of commission members effectively classified as they are no longer published. These lists are formed well before the official announcement of elections and are approved after their members are checked for loyalty to the regime. A key role in manipulations is played by the so-called “troikas” (chairperson, deputy chairperson, and secretary of the commission), who are responsible for falsifying the voting results. These individuals are selected from trusted participants of previous fraud campaigns.

The use of token opposition has become a primary tool for imitating democratic elections. In the 2025 election, there are no representatives of the real opposition among the candidates.

The so-called “sparring partners” of the current pseudo-president act as mere extras, posing no threat to the regime. Their role is to dilute the protest electorate and create a window-dressing of political competition, but their participation serves only to legitimize Aliaksandr Lukashenka's power.

Thus, the 2025 “election” lacks genuine transparency and democracy, and voters are deprived of any real choice, rendering the process a fiction designed to maintain the authoritarian regime.

Electoral Legislation as a Tool for Consolidating Authoritarian Power

The electoral legislation in Belarus has become a tool for consolidating authoritarian power. In recent years, the authorities have repeatedly amended the laws to prevent democratic leaders from participating in political life and create conditions that are highly favorable for maintaining the authoritarian regime.

One of the most recent changes involves restrictions on eligibility for public office. The legislation now requires presidential candidates to meet strict criteria, including an age threshold of 40, a continuous 20-year residency in the country, and the absence of current or previous foreign citizenship or residency permits. These measures effectively exclude those forced into exile by repression from participating in elections.

Another notable change is the criminalization of alternative vote counting, photographing ballots, and calls to boycott the election. These provisions enable the authorities to suppress any criticism and deprive voters of the means to document fraud. During previous elections, photographing ballots was one of the primary methods of proving widespread electoral fraud. Now, such actions are prohibited, eliminating one of the few tools citizens had to ensure oversight.

The procedure for collecting signatures in support of candidates presents additional challenges. The law permits signature collection only in designated locations, limiting independent candidates' access to a broad electorate. Meanwhile, at workplaces and state institutions, signatures for pro-government candidates are often gathered under pressure from management. This grossly violates the principles of fair competition, as independent candidates face obstacles while pro-government candidates enjoy full administrative support. However, in the current sham election, independent candidates were not even allowed to begin collecting signatures for their nomination, as demonstrated by the case of opposition politician Yury Hubarevich, the leader of the dissolved public movement “For Freedom.”

The use of administrative resources is also evident in early and at-home voting procedures. These remain opaque: ballots cast early or at home are stored in conditions that do not prevent unauthorized access. This creates significant opportunities for manipulation and undermines trust in the election results.

Another serious issue is posed by the authorities' decision to cancel voting outside the country.

This measure has deprived approximately 2 million Belarusians¹ living abroad of the opportunity to participate in the pseudo-election. This decision further undermines the legitimacy of the electoral process by excluding a significant portion of society from democratic participation.

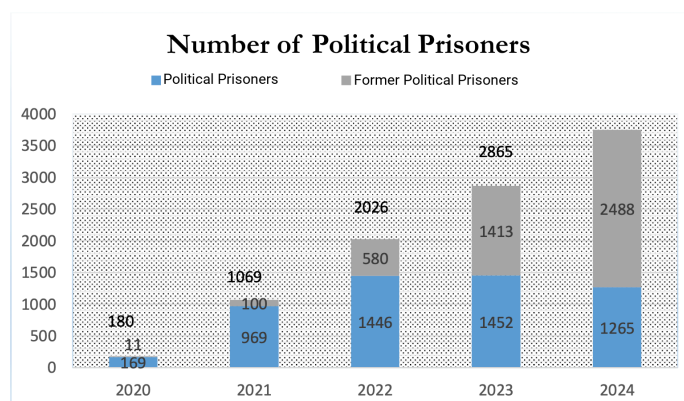
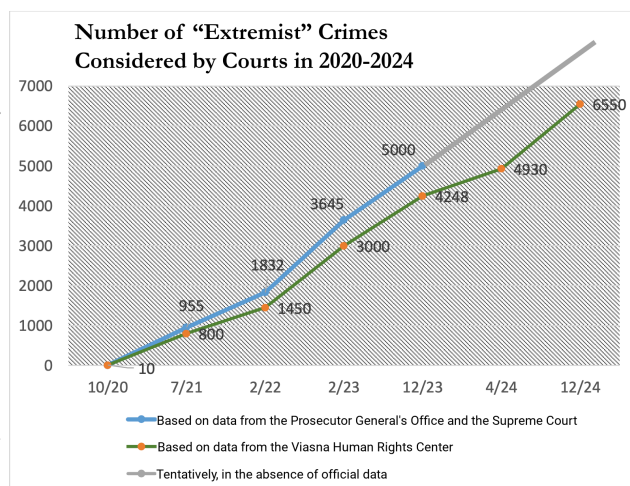
The situation during the 2025 sham election was worsened by the abrupt announcement of the “election” six months ahead of the expected date. The entire electoral process was compressed into just 95 days, denying candidates equal opportunities to prepare. This haste demonstrates how legislation is tailored to meet the regime's political goals rather than voters’ interests.

Together, these measures illustrate that the legal framework for the electoral process in Belarus not only fails to uphold democratic principles but is actively used to entrench authoritarian rule. It obstructs equality among participants, excludes a significant portion of voters from the process, and facilitates systemic manipulation.

“Elections” Under State Terror

The current presidential “election” in Belarus is being held amidst widespread repression that affects all aspects of public and political life². Since the protests of 2020, the country has faced state terror, with authorities using harsh measures to suppress any form of civic activity. This atmosphere of repression makes it impossible to conduct an election that meets democratic standards.

One of the main tools for intimidating citizens is the systematic persecution of democratic politicians, activists, and

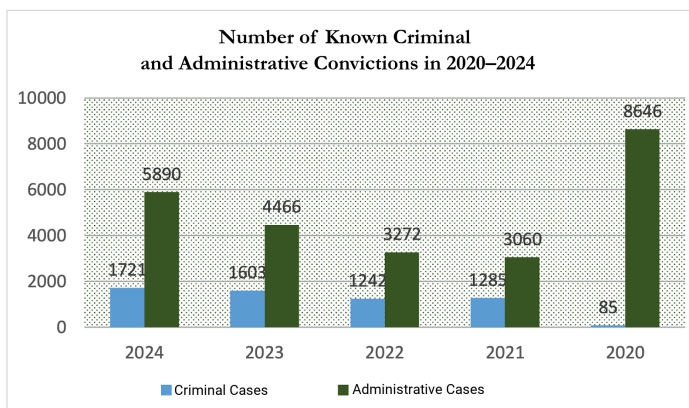


independent candidates. Political activists face arrests, interrogations, searches, and physical violence. As of the end of 2024, there were 1,265 political prisoners, including women, journalists, political leaders, and human rights defenders. Some of them were held incommunicado (completely isolated from the outside world), and four political prisoners died in prison over the past year.

¹ According to UN data, in 2020, 1,483,626 Belarusians lived outside Belarus. Source: <https://mfa.gov.by/mulateral/diaspora/>. After 2020, approximately 500,000 more people were forced to emigrate. Source: <https://www.dw.com/ru/skolko-grazdan-rb-emigrirovali-posle-2020-goda-poslednie-dannye/a-70423532> How many voters are outside Belarus cannot be precisely determined due to lack of information.

² Graphics and data are from the analytical review “Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2024”, Viasna Human Rights Center <https://spring96.org/ru/news/117167>

Citizens who dare to engage in political or civic activities are also targeted. On average, courts in Belarus have been issuing seven politically motivated criminal sentences every working day. Authorities actively use intimidation tactics, such as “preventive conversations” with protesters, members of initiative groups, or observers from previous elections.



Thus, “elections” in Belarus are conducted under conditions that eliminate equality and freedom and pose direct threats to the safety of election participants.

“Elections” Under Suppression of Freedom of Speech and Association

The current “election” in Belarus is taking place under severe suppression of freedom of speech, the right to association, and the destruction of democratic opposition parties, depriving citizens of opportunities to participate in political life or access unbiased information. Recent years have seen systematic efforts to eliminate any independent institutions that could challenge the regime.

Belarus is the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists, ranking 167th out of 180 in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, 45 journalists and media workers were imprisoned as of late 2024. Additionally, according to the Viasna Human Rights Center, 19 bloggers were behind bars, and 35 media outlets were labeled extremist organizations. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus noted, these figures represent more than 4% of the world’s imprisoned journalists³.

The situation regarding the right to association is equally dire. Since 2021, at least 1,180 nonprofit organizations have been forcibly liquidated, and another 693 have opted for voluntary liquidation under government pressure. These include key human rights initiatives like the Viasna Human Rights Center and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which played crucial roles in protecting human rights and monitoring elections.

Political parties have also been targeted. Following the introduction of re-registration requirements, only 4 of the previously 16 registered parties remain, all of which are fully loyal to the authorities. These four remaining parties now play a decorative role, creating an illusion of political competition while failing to represent public interests or serve as an alternative to the regime.

In an environment where independent media have been destroyed, civic associations paralyzed, and democratic parties eliminated, “elections” in Belarus have turned into a controlled process devoid of real choice or transparency. This suppression of freedom of

³ Situation of human rights in Belarus. Report by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus Anaïs Marin. A/HRC/56/65, paragraph 57
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/072/84/pdf/g2407284.pdf>

speech and association forms the foundation of the authoritarian regime, enabling it to retain power and stifle any dissent.

Formation of Electoral Commissions to Manipulate “Elections”

The formation of electoral commissions in Belarus is a strictly controlled process, fully subordinated to the authorities’ interests and designed to legitimize the predetermined outcomes of sham elections. According to BelPol⁴, the lists of electoral commission members were compiled as early as September 2024, long before the official announcement of the presidential election date. These lists were approved following loyalty checks conducted by the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Such prearranged organization demonstrates that electoral commissions are deliberately staffed with individuals entirely loyal to the regime.

The process of forming these commissions is opaque and lacks competition. Meetings to approve commission memberships were held behind closed doors, and the lists of commission members were not published, making public oversight of the process impossible. While citizens were formally allowed to participate, there was minimal public outreach about this opportunity. Most potential participants were either intimidated or deprived of any genuine means to apply. Those who previously attempted to engage faced repression.

A key element of this system of electoral fraud is the so-called “troikas” – a term that has been in use since the 2020 election and is widely referenced in conversations and official correspondence among state institution employees. A “troika” consists of the commission chairperson, their deputy, and the secretary. These three officials play a central role in election rigging as they oversee the transmission of vote count data. The regime appointed individuals to these positions who had been tested in similar manipulations during the elections and referendums of 2020, 2022, and 2024. Official documents often state: “Serves as a chairperson of a precinct electoral commission in all electoral campaigns,” underscoring the systematic approach to forming such groups.

In addition to orchestrating vote-rigging, the chairpersons, deputies, and secretaries also exert pressure on other commission members. Electoral commissions are often formed from members of the same workplace, and their chairs are typically heads of these enterprises or organizations. These organizations also send so-called independent observers to commissions to imitate the electoral process. While formally these employees are delegated by different organizations, such as pro-regime political parties and government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), their careers, financial stability, and even continued employment contracts are directly tied to the chairperson. This hierarchical structure creates an atmosphere of fear, forcing individuals to comply with orders, including participating in election fraud.

The tools employed by the “troikas” include organizing nontransparent vote counts, manipulating early and at-home voting processes, and transmitting falsified data to higher authorities. These actions render the electoral process in Belarus entirely controlled, with the announced results dictated by the authorities rather than determined by voter choice.

⁴ Report “On Readiness of the Electoral Fraud System in the 2025 Presidential Election in Belarus”
<https://belpol.pro/en/bezvybory-2025-dodlad-belpol/>

Thus, electoral commissions in Belarus are not independent bodies meant to ensure democratic elections. Instead, they are fully controlled by the regime and serve as instruments for manipulation and fraud, undermining trust in the electoral process and turning elections into a mere facade.

False Choice: The Use of Token Opposition to Simulate Democracy

Elections in Belarus have ceased to serve as a mechanism of democratic expression, turning instead into a controlled spectacle where the central role is played by the incumbent pseudo-president, while other candidates act as extras. The use of so-called token opposition, or “sparring partners,” has become a key tool for creating the window-dressing of democratic elections.

In the 2025 “election”, the Central Election Commission registered five candidates, including Aliaksandr Lukashenka, as well as Aleh Haidukevich, Aliaksandr Khizhnyak, and Siarhei Syrankou, who represent pro-government parties, and Hanna Kanapatskaya. Their participation in the “election” is entirely controlled by government bodies, from the collection of signatures to campaigning. These candidates present no real competition, and their rhetoric often supports Lukashenka's policies or lacks meaningful criticism of the regime. For example, Communist Party leader Siarhei Syrankou openly admits he is not striving for victory, publicly stating that he supports Aliaksandr Lukashenka and predicts that Lukashenka will receive the most votes.

These token candidates serve several purposes. First, they fill the ballot, creating an illusion of choice for voters. Second, their participation helps dilute the protest vote. If even one genuine opposition candidate were registered, protest voters could rally around them. In the absence of an alternative on the ballot, voters are left to choose between the familiar Lukashenka and insignificant figures.

Another critical role of token candidates is their involvement in official propaganda. During televised appearances and debates, rather than presenting their platforms, they reinforce Lukashenka’s position. Their statements either echo pro-regime rhetoric or appear intentionally weak to highlight the pseudo-president’s image in a favorable light.

Thus, the system of token candidates serves to strengthen authoritarian control, depriving voters of a genuine choice. This not only undermines trust in elections but also fosters a sense of hopelessness, where citizens understand their votes have no impact on the campaign’s outcome. In effect, such “elections” become a tool for legitimizing power while ignoring the will of the people.