

# BELARUS POLICY ALERT



## Understanding the Belarusian Presidential Elections\*2025

*The expert monitoring mission for the Belarusian presidential elections\*<sup>1</sup> 2025 is carried out by the Human Rights Center "Viasna" and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. The mission is aimed at evaluating the elections\* from the viewpoint of the Belarusian electoral legislation and international standards of free and democratic elections, as well as informing the Belarusian public and international community about the progress of the elections.*

*The seventh presidential elections in Belarus's independent history are scheduled for January 26, 2025. These elections\* occur against a backdrop of widespread political repression, systematic violations of fundamental democratic principles, and the institutionalized erosion of human rights. Below, we explain critical factors that define this process and affect its legitimacy.*

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1 The term "elections\*" in relation to the 2025 presidential campaign is used with an asterisk to emphasize the conventionality of this term, since any free and fair election campaign presupposes all conditions under which rights and freedoms are fully realized, including freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful assemblies and associations, the right to participate in the governance of one's state, freedom from discrimination, which are currently practically absent in Belarus.

## Repressive Environment

The political climate in Belarus is currently shaped by systemic repressions and an atmosphere of fear. The repression intensified significantly following the [contested 2020 presidential elections](#), where well-substantiated allegations of electoral fraud prompted mass peaceful protests. In response, the authorities launched a brutal crackdown on dissent, which continues to these days. Almost [1,300 political prisoners](#) are held in detention, subjected to harsh conditions often amounting to [torture](#). Civic activists, journalists, politicians and ordinary citizens face continuous persecution. Many opposition candidates from the 2020 election campaign, including [Viktar Babaryka](#) and [Siarhei Tsikhanouski](#), as well as members of candidates' teams including [Maksim Znak](#) and [Maria Kalesnikava](#) remain in prison sentenced to long sentence terms. These actions of the authorities have not only purged any political opposition but also instilled a climate of fear that suppresses civic and political engagement.

Civil society organizations, which played an important role in fostering political awareness and civic engagement, have been systemically [dismantled](#). Nearly all independent media have been [expelled or silenced](#), hindering the public's access to unbiased information. The regime [misuses anti-extremist laws to criminalize dissent](#), labeling individuals and groups who oppose government narratives as threats to national security. This pervasive environment of fear not only stifles dissent but also dissuades ordinary citizens from participating in political processes, effectively paralyzing civil discourse.

## Lack of Genuine Political Competition

The regime manipulates electoral mechanisms to maintain its grip on power. Initially, seven initiative groups were allowed to nominate candidates. They all are directly affiliated with or tacitly approved by the regime. Altogether, five candidates are [registered](#): apart from the incumbent Aliaksandr Lukashenka (often spelled Alexander Lukashenko), these are leaders of 3 (out of 4 registered political parties remaining in Belarus) and an "independent" candidate, the only woman in the election, who participated in 2020 elections:

- Aleh Haidukevich (chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus),
- Aliaksandr Khizhniak (chairman of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice),
- Siarhei Syrankou (first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus),
- Hanna Kanapatskaya (individual entrepreneur),
- Aliaksandr Lukashenka (incumbent).

None of these candidates came forward as a clear alternative to A. Lukashenka (the [slogan](#) of S. Syrankou is "not in place of, but together with"). Rather, they function as decoration to reinforce the

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illusion of democratic pluralism. Genuine opposition figures have been systematically excluded through legal (i.e. changed legislation prohibiting persons who ever had any foreign residence permits from running for office), administrative (i.e. application to register an initiative group from abroad wasn't accepted), and coercive measures, leaving no room for authentic political competition.

## State-Controlled Electoral Commissions

As noted in our reports (1,2), the entire mechanism responsible for administering the elections is controlled and orchestrated by the executive branch. Although electoral commissions formally appear to include representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, citizens, and labor collectives, this composition is just a veneer of pluralism. In reality, the nomination to the electoral commissions process is heavily manipulated; citizens are intimidated and prevented from exercising their right to independently propose commission members. Instead, under the **guidance** of the executive committees (territorial executive bodies) lists are compiled by GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations), pro-government political parties and budget-dependent institutions and enterprises - institutions that mimic civil society, masking the executive's absolute control over the process.

A typical model is so-called "occupational principle" of forming election commissions. For example, in a school on paper precinct election commission members represent trade unions, CSOs, political parties, citizens, and labor collectives. However, in practice, these members are the school's own teachers, said to represent different entities, and their immediate superiors are in charge of these election commissions.

## Manipulation of Electoral Processes

The procedural aspects of the elections are emblematic of a system designed to suppress fair competition. The nomination of candidates, collection of signatures, and other stages of the electoral process are conducted under opaque and administratively managed conditions. For instance, the verification of voter signatures is expedited in a manner that raises substantial doubts about its accuracy. Early and mobile voting procedures, characterized by a lack of transparency and accountability, exacerbate concerns about electoral manipulation. These systemic deficiencies highlight the regime's reliance on administrative control rather than genuine public support.

## Legal and Structural Barriers

Amendments to the Belarusian Constitution adopted at the **contested** referendum in 2022 and ensuing changes to the Electoral Code have introduced **further restrictions** on political participation. Candidates must now be at least 40 years old and have resided in Belarus for at least 20 years. Additionally, individuals who ever had foreign residency permits or similar documents are barred from

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candidacy. The opportunity to vote is effectively denied to citizens living abroad, both: those who cannot return to the country for fear of arbitrary persecution on political grounds, and those who just see it impractical to go to Belarus for voting. No polling stations will be opened outside Belarus. Such legal barriers reflect a deliberate strategy to consolidate power while undermining the principles of inclusivity and fairness.

## Lack of Independent Monitoring

The absence of independent domestic observers and the government's selective invitation of politically biased international observers further contribute to public distrust. [OSCE/ODIHR](#) (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) mission will not observe these elections\* due to the lack of a timely invitation. Independent oversight of the electoral process has been systematically eradicated. The "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign has [documented](#) the absence of domestic observers, a direct consequence of the regime's crackdown on civil society organizations. This exclusion of independent monitors ensures that the electoral process remains a tool of authoritarian control, devoid of accountability or transparency.

## Conclusion

**The 2025 Belarusian presidential elections\* so far are marked by pervasive state control, a lack of genuine political competition and civic participation, as well as systemic repression of civil and political rights. These conditions render the elections\* neither free and fair, nor transparent. They do not correspond to basic international electoral standards nor to Belarusian electoral legislation.**

**The "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign continues to document violations and advocate for electoral integrity, democratic values and human rights.**

## About the author:



**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS  
FOR FREE  
ELECTIONS**

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