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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Belarus

Not Free

8

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 2 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 6 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

11 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Belarus is an authoritarian state in which elections are openly rigged and civil liberties are severely restricted. In 2020, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who maintains a firm grip over the military and security forces, cracked down on a massive prodemocracy protest movement, that was sparked by his reelection in a fraudulent presidential poll. Since then, security forces have violently assaulted and arbitrarily detained journalists and ordinary citizens who challenge the regime, whether by means of protesting, reporting on events, or posting opinions online. The judiciary and other institutions lack independence and provide no check on Lukashenka's power.

Key Developments in 2021

- Between July and October, the Belarusian authorities ordered the dissolution of more than 270 independent nonprofit organizations and public associations, including the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and the Belarusian PEN Center. Throughout the year, security forces raided the offices and homes of human rights activists who remained in the country.
- In May, Belarusian authorities forced a Ryanair flight traveling from Athens to Vilnius to make an emergency landing in Minsk in order to arrest exiled blogger and opposition activist Raman Pratasevich. In response, the European Union (EU) banned Belarusian airlines from entering its airspace and from accessing its airports. As of November, Pratasevich was under house arrest in an unknown location in Belarus and had likely been subjected to torture.
- By November, approximately 4,000 migrants and refugees were camped in Belarus near the Polish border. The Lukashenka regime deliberately facilitated the passage of migrants—most of them from Iraq—through Belarus to the borders of the EU to divide the bloc and force them to end sanctions they imposed on the country. Both the Polish and Belarusian authorities used tear gas and water cannon against the migrants, who were left in freezing temperatures without adequate shelter, supplies, and assistance. At least 12 people died in the cold.
- The government forcefully cracked down on independent media during the year. Over 110 journalists were detained throughout the year, 32 of whom remained in prison at the end of the year. Authorities blocked access to over 100 news and media sites, including the largest and most popular internet portal in Belarus, Tut.by.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

The president is elected for five-year terms, and there are no term limits. President Lukashenka was first elected in 1994, in the country's only democratic election. The 2020 campaign period was heavily controlled by authorities, who permitted only 15 of 55 applicants to register as candidates. The government arrested two major candidates,

Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Viktor Babaryka, and forced another candidate, Valery Tsepkalo, to flee the country before voting day. Scores of activists were similarly arrested or fled the country. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Veronika Tsepkalo, who led the largest opposition rallies in the country since the fall of the Soviet Union, both became popular candidates after their husbands were arrested and forced to flee. They experienced severe pressure from authorities and eventually went into exile after the August election. Authorities failed to send an invitation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on time, and the elections took place without an independent monitoring mission.

The government claimed that Lukashenka won the poll with 80 percent of the vote, though this was widely denounced as fraudulent. A parallel and independent vote count using the mobile phone application Golos, with data from just under 23 percent of polling stations, revealed that Tsikhanouskaya likely received 13 times more votes than were reported. Protests after the announcement of the results were met with disproportionate police force, including the use of live ammunition and mass, arbitrary detentions, among other abuses. Documentation by human rights organizations showed that by the end of the year, 33,000 people had been detained and fined, 169 people were being held as political prisoners, and the government had opened more than 900 criminal cases, all related to the election period. In 2021, the number of political prisoners continued to increase, reaching nearly 1,000 people by the end of the year.

In September 2020, amid ongoing massive protests and growing calls for a repeat election, Lukashenka inaugurated himself in a secret, unannounced ceremony.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

Legislative elections in Belarus are tightly restricted. The 110 members of the Chamber of Representatives, the lower house of the National Assembly, are elected by popular vote to four-year terms from single-mandate constituencies. The upper chamber, the Council of the Republic, consists of 64 members serving four-year terms: regional councils elect 56 and the president appoints 8.

A parliamentary election was held in November 2019, nearly a year ahead of schedule. Candidates loyal to President Lukashenka won every seat in the lower house, while independent candidates won none. OSCE election monitors reported an overall lack of transparency, restrictions on observation of the vote count, and indications of ballot box stuffing.

A3 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 0 / 4
election management bodies?**

The legal framework for elections fails to meet democratic standards, and authorities have dismissed OSCE recommendations to improve it. Electoral commission members of all levels are politically aligned with and dependent on the government, and independent observers have no access to ballot-counting processes. Out of the 1,989 members of local electoral commissions formed for the presidential election, authorities allowed only two representatives of independent political parties to register, dismissing thousands of other independent applications.

In December 2021, President Lukashenka published a draft of a new constitution that would further cement his grip on power. The new constitution would reintroduce a two-term limit for five-year terms to the office of president. These limits would take effect once a newly elected president assumed office and would not apply to Lukashenka's current term. He would thus be able to be reelected as president until 2035, despite feigning a capitulation to international pressure to enact democratic constitutional changes. Among other changes, the new constitution also introduces a new governing body, the All-Belarus People's Assembly, to operate in parallel with the parliament and extends parliamentary terms to five years. Discussions for the amendments lacked transparency and any opportunity for public debate. A referendum is scheduled for February 2022.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political 0 / 4
groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these
competing parties or groupings?**

Involvement in political activism can result in a loss of employment, expulsion from educational institutions, smear campaigns in the media, fines, and the confiscation of property. Political parties face formidable challenges when seeking official registration. Political initiatives are actively persecuted and can lead to criminal charges for the leaders. Authorities harass and threaten political opponents, public figures, and political dissidents through state media.

In August 2020, Maryia Kalesnikava, who campaigned with Tsikhanouskaya and Babaryka, announced the creation of a new political party called “Together.” In September, Kalesnikava was kidnapped and later incarcerated, effectively ending the initiative. That same month, Tsikhanouskaya and other activists, including the winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature, Sviatlana Aleksiyevich, formed the Coordination Council, a civil society group that sought a peaceful resolution to the postelection violence and a rerun of the presidential poll. The government responded to the group's creation by arresting and prosecuting several of its leaders, claiming that they were

attempting to seize power illegally and that they were a national security threat. In September 2021, Kalesnikava and Maxim Znak, another member of the Coordination Council, were sentenced to 11 years and 10 years in prison, respectively, for conspiracy to seize power, among other dubious charges.

In 2021, prominent political opponents to Lukashenka’s regime continued to face politically motivated criminal charges and lengthy prison sentences. Viktor Babaryka was sentenced to 14 years in prison, and Siarhei Tsikhanouski for 18 years. Other activists prosecuted alongside Siarhei Tsikhanouski, such as Mikola Statkevich, Ihar Losik and others, also received lengthy prison terms.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 0 / elections? 4

There is effectively no opportunity for independent candidates to gain power through elections, and Belarus has never experienced a democratic transfer of power. During the 2020 presidential election, vast numbers of Belarusians responded enthusiastically to the participation of opposition candidates. This interest manifested itself at the early stages of campaign and, despite the regime’s attempts to eliminate challengers, developed into a broad civil resistance movement. However, Lukashenka’s regime has proven unyielding to the popular demand for political change.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 0 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 4

Private citizens and political candidates are limited in their opportunities to express their views and make political choices. Meaningful participation in politics is generally not possible. The police and military used severe, sometimes fatal violence, and arrested and detained over 33,000 people to crack down on the peaceful prodemocracy protests that took place between August and November 2020, ensuring that Lukashenka would maintain his power.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 1 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4

No registered party represents the specific interests of ethnic, religious, or other minority groups. Between July and October 2021, the Belarusian authorities dissolved more than 270 nonprofit advocacy groups, charity organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), some of which represented the interests of LGBT+ people and people living with disabilities.

Women formally enjoy equal political rights and make up 40 percent of the legislators elected in November 2019. However, women are underrepresented in leadership positions. Women’s advocacy groups have diverging positions on promoting the political rights of women, with some such groups taking the position that there is no need for gender equality initiatives in Belarus. There has been some visible activism by women’s groups seeking to raise awareness of gender-based violence, but the government has largely refrained from addressing their concerns.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies 0 / of the government? 4

Though Lukashenka claimed victory in the 2020 presidential elections, the legitimacy of his office is disputed both domestically and internationally. The constitution vests power in the president, stating that presidential decrees have higher legal force than legislation. Lukashenka considers himself the head of all branches of government, including the parliament, which always supports his policies and rarely initiates legislation on its own.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

The state controls at least 70 percent of the economy, and graft is encouraged by a lack of transparency and accountability in government. There are no independent bodies to investigate corruption cases, and graft trials are typically closed. Presidential clemency has been issued occasionally to free convicted corrupt officials, some of whom Lukashenka has returned to positions of authority.

Powerful oligarchs enjoy the protection of the government and adjustment of regulations and government policies in their favor, so long as they channel money in a quid pro quo back to Lukashenka by other means. Spurious bribery and tax evasion charges have been used against Lukashenka’s political opponents; for example, in 2021, Viktor Babaryka was sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment on corruption charges after he announced his intentions to register as a presidential candidate.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4

The government largely fails to adhere to legal requirements providing for access to information. In recent years, authorities have moved to make some basic information about government operations available online. However, the COVID-19 pandemic further revealed the government’s inability to provide transparent information to the public. President Lukashenka frequently provided conflicting and misleading information and guidance about the dangers of

the coronavirus, ways to reduce its spread, and the importance of mass vaccination. Evidence from the United Nations (UN) suggested that the government's reported COVID-19 case numbers and mortality rate were vastly inaccurate.

Similarly, the regime has deliberately kept silent about important matters, such as talks with Russia about economic and other issues.

From August through November 2021, Lukashenka intentionally withheld and obscured information about the increased numbers of economic migrants and asylum seekers that were being allowed into the country. Journalists and human rights groups were for months prevented access to the migrant camps in Belarus near the Polish border.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 0 / 4

The government exercises unrestricted control over mainstream media. The 2008 media law secures a state monopoly over information about political, social, and economic affairs. Libel is both a civil and criminal offense, and the criminal code contains provisions protecting the "honor and dignity" of high-ranking officials.

The government owns the only internet service provider and controls the internet through legal and technical means. From August 9 to 12, 2020, during the height of the mass prodemocracy protests, the government shut down the internet in almost the entire country, limiting the ability of reporters to provide accurate information to the public. Internet disruptions were registered during protest rallies throughout 2020.

The official definition of mass media includes websites and blogs, placing them under the Information Ministry's supervision. Most independent journalists operate under the assumption that they are under surveillance by the Committee for State Security (KGB). Reporters are subject to fines, detention, intimidation, and criminal prosecution for their work. The regime has used antiextremism legislation and investigations into alleged financial crimes to curtail media activity. In May 2021, the government amended legislation on "mass media," "mass events," and "criminal liability," all of which tightened restrictions for independent media and significantly increased the already disproportionate criminal penalties for legitimate journalistic activities.

The government forcefully cracked down on independent media in 2021. Security forces raided offices and homes of independent journalists, arrested journalists and staff members of news outlets, and seized servers and equipment. Over 110 journalists were detained during the year, 32 of whom remained in prison at the end of December. Two journalists, Daria Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreyeva who were detained after a live broadcast of a political protest in 2020, were sentenced to two years in prison in February 2021. Authorities blocked access to over 100 news and media sites, including the largest and most popular internet portal in Belarus, Tut.by. At least 10 print media outlets were forced to stop publishing.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 1 / 4

Despite constitutional guarantees of religious equality, government decrees and registration requirements maintain restrict religious activity. Legal amendments in 2002 provided for government censorship of religious publications and barred foreigners from leading religious groups. The amendments also placed strict limitations on religious groups active in Belarus for less than 20 years. In 2003, the government signed a concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which is controlled by the Russian Orthodox Church, giving it a privileged position.

After the 2020 elections, Lukashenka attempted to weaken the Catholic Church's influence, which had denounced state violence against peaceful prodemocracy protesters. In December, the government denied Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, a Belarusian citizen and Archbishop of Minsk-Mahileu, reentry to the country. Though he was allowed to return to Belarus later that month after negotiations with the Vatican and intense international pressure, he resigned in January 2021.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 0 / 4

Academic freedom remains subject to intense state ideological pressures, and academic personnel face harassment and dismissal if they use a liberal curriculum or are suspected of disloyalty. Students and professors who join opposition protests face threat of dismissal and revocation of degrees.

The government pressures young people to join the state-sponsored pro-Lukashenka group Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRSU). The government has announced plans to tighten control over private schools and kindergartens, which noticed significant rise in demand after the 2020 election; many public school teachers were linked to the falsification of voting results.

Student activity at universities rose sharply in 2020, as many were involved in the August 2020 prodemocracy protests. Authorities responded with unprovoked brutality and repression, as plainclothes security forces attacked peaceful student protests within and outside of university campuses. Lukashenka replaced at least eight deans at

different universities. Between August 2020 and May 2021, at least 153 students were arbitrarily expelled from universities, many of whom fled to neighboring countries. Throughout 2021, student activists were arrested and given several-year prison sentences for actions that allegedly “violated social order” or created “an extremist entity,” among other spurious charges.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of 0 / surveillance or retribution? 4

The use of wiretapping and other surveillance by state security agencies limits the right to free private discussion. Private citizens often avoid discussing sensitive issues over the phone or via internet communication platforms, for fear that state security agents are monitoring conversations.

During and after the 2020 election period and prodemocracy protests, authorities threatened, harassed, and arrested protesters, presidential candidates, professionals in the cultural sphere, academics, theater troupes, athletes, medical professionals, public figures, private individuals, and others who spoke out against Lukashenka and the postelection violence.

Police routinely coerce, threaten, and torture detained individuals, forcing them to open their mobile devices in search of photos, videos, and correspondence that confirmed their participation in the prodemocracy protests. Authorities also monitored social media activity of people who were arrested in order to find evidence of their participation in the protests and potentially increase the criminal charges they would face. The private company Synesis, which was sanctioned by the EU, reportedly helped authorities identify and arrest demonstrators after the 2020 elections by providing video surveillance technology with facial recognition.

Voicing criticism of public officials and security forces on social media platforms, including sharing posts from other users or media sites that have been labeled “extremist,” can lead to criminal charges. In 2021, security forces violently detained and arrested hundreds of people who had posted allegedly critical or insulting comments about state officials on social media. Defamation charges were used to prosecute such speech, with ordinary internet users being sentenced to more than a year in jail. Local authorities routinely surveil and monitor individuals who display publicly or privately any symbols of the opposition, including coded phrases or colors.

In May 2021, Belarusian authorities forced a Ryanair flight traveling from Athens to Vilnius to make an emergency landing in Minsk in order to arrest exiled blogger and opposition activist Raman Pratasevich. Domestic rights groups and international organizations and governments condemned Lukashenka’s actions and responded with new sanctions. The EU banned Belarusian airlines from entering its airspace and from accessing its airports. As of November, Pratasevich was under house arrest in an unknown location and had likely been subjected to torture.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because authorities took extraordinary measures to punish critical expression on social media, including the forced landing of an international flight to detain opposition activist Raman Pratasevich and arresting people for their critical comments posted online.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

The government severely restricts freedom of assembly. Protests require permission from local authorities, who often arbitrarily deny it. The May 2021 amendment to the law on mass events imposes strict authorization requirements and impedes organizers’ ability to raise funds for protests.

In the summer of 2020, unprecedented prodemocracy protests, demonstrations, and campaign rallies for Tsikhanouskaya occurred across the country—in the form of street chains, marches, and block parties with concerts and performances—assembling hundreds of thousands of people. Police and military forces only partially succeeded in blocking people from congregating before voting day on August 9. But in the weeks that followed, the government deployed military equipment and armed riot police, who attacked and arrested people brutally and indiscriminately, at times opening fire with live ammunition, killing several. More than 33,000 people were arrested and later tried, jailed, or fined. Numerous instances of cruel treatment, beatings, and torture of protesters were recorded, with total impunity for the security forces involved.

The Lukashenka regime amended the criminal code and increased the administrative fines and detention period (between 15 and 30 days) for participating in an unauthorized mass event. Administrative detention has been instrumentalized by the government against participants in the prodemocracy movement that began in 2020.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human 0 / rights– and governance-related work? 4

Freedom of association is severely restricted. Registration of groups remains selective, and regulations ban foreign assistance to entities and individuals deemed to promote foreign meddling in internal affairs. Prior to the 2020 prodemocracy movement, few human rights groups managed to operate due to resource shortages and pressure from

the authorities, and staff and supporters risk prosecution and fines for their activism. Though the rise of the prodemocracy movement brought with it increased citizen activism, since August 2020 activists have been arrested by the thousands, and many more have fled the country.

Between July and October 2021, the Belarusian authorities ordered the dissolution of more than 270 independent NGOs and public associations, including prominent organizations like the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and the Belarusian PEN Center. Throughout the year, security forces raided the offices and homes of human rights activists who remained in the country. For example, the director of and a lawyer from the Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were detained due to a dubious fraud investigation. The organization ceased all activities and was in the process of dissolution.

Participation in unregistered or dissolved organizations was decriminalized in 2018. However, the criminal code was amended in 2021 to provide for exorbitant fines for participants in such organizations, further complicating the ability of human rights watchdogs to record civil liberties infringements.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because authorities embarked on a wide-ranging crackdown against NGOs, marked by ongoing arrests and prosecutions of civil society activists and the closure of hundreds of independent organizations.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 0 / 4

Independent labor unions face harassment, and their leaders are frequently fired and prosecuted for engaging in peaceful protests. No independent unions have been registered since 1999, when Lukashenka issued a decree setting extremely restrictive registration requirements.

Independent unions were prominent in the prodemocracy movement in the summer of 2020, striking to protest the fraudulent presidential election and police violence toward peaceful demonstrators. The state increasingly targeted and pressured workers to prevent them from going on strike. Union leaders and rank-and-file members were arrested, fined, dismissed from their posts, sent to psychiatric institutions, and forced into exile.

In September 2021, security forces arrested at least 11 people, accusing them of being involved in an independent labor movement. The arrested workers face criminal charges of treason and conspiracy to seize power, with a maximum punishment of 15 years in prison.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

Courts are entirely subservient to President Lukashenka, who appoints Supreme Court justices with the approval of the rubber-stamp parliament.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

The right to a fair trial is not respected and often flatly dismissed in cases with political overtones. In a departure from international norms, the power to extend pretrial detention lies with a prosecutor rather than a judge. The absence of independent oversight allows police to routinely violate legal procedures. The government regularly attacks attorneys, who often are the only connection between imprisoned activists and their families and society.

During and after the presidential campaign of 2020 and throughout 2021, arbitrary arrests, police brutality and torture, and the denial of due process rights continued with impunity. Lawyers were often denied the right to meet with their defendants. Many lawyers defending political prisoners (arrested during the prodemocracy protests) were disbarred or arrested.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Law enforcement agencies have broad powers to employ physical force against suspects, who have little opportunity for recourse if they are abused. Human rights groups continue to document instances of beatings, torture, and intimidation during detention. During and after the presidential election period in 2020 and throughout 2021, detained peaceful prodemocracy protesters experienced cruel and dehumanizing treatment during their arrests, while being transported to detention centers and when incarcerated.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 0 / 4

Authorities have sought to increase the dominance of the Russian language. Official Usage of Belarusian remains rare. The UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognizes Belarusian as “vulnerable.” Since Lukashenka became president, the share of first graders who study in Belarusian fell from 40 to under 10 percent in 2019.

Women are prohibited from entering 181 different occupations, and societal norms in much of the country hold that women should be mothers or housewives. However, Tsikhanouskaya’s mass support in the prodemocracy movement has become a slight counter to long-standing gender roles.

LGBT+ people face widespread societal discrimination, and law enforcement authorities are reluctant to investigate and prosecute attacks against them.

Beginning in August 2021, Belarusian authorities began to allow an increased number of migrants and refugees to enter the country. The Lukashenka regime deliberately facilitated the passage of migrants—most of them from Iraq—through Belarus to the borders of the EU so as to divide the bloc and attempt to force an end to EU sanctions imposed on the country. Reports suggest that authorities have urged, and in some cases forced economic migrants to attempt to illegally enter the EU, providing them equipment to breach fences or preventing them from returning to Belarusian cities. By November, approximately 4,000 people were camped near the Polish border, and there were allegedly between 10,000 and 20,000 migrants throughout Belarus. Both the Polish and Belarusian authorities used tear gas and water cannon against the migrants, who were left in freezing temperatures without adequate shelter, supplies, and assistance. At least 12 people died in the cold. Lukashenka barred human rights groups and journalists from accessing the camps until November, when they were given limited access. By the end of the year, approximately 2,000 asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants were stranded in Belarus. Over 1,000 people chose to return home voluntarily. Repatriation efforts were still ongoing.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because asylum seekers and migrants traveling through Belarus faced mistreatment by authorities, with some reportedly forced across the western border and prevented from returning.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, 1 / employment, or education? 4

Opposition activists are occasionally detained at the border for lengthy searches. Passports are used as a primary identity document in Belarus, and authorities are known to harass people living in a different location than indicated by domestic stamps in their passport.

On numerous occasions, authorities forced the expulsion of politically active Belarusians in 2020 and 2021. Prominent prodemocracy figure Tsikhanouskaya, Archbishop of the Belarusian Catholic Church Kondrusiewicz, and other public figures were forced to leave the country. In December 2020, authorities prohibited Belarusians from leaving the country at land border crossings, except with Russia, ostensibly to prevent the spread of COVID-19; the policy was likely enforced to prevent political dissidents from fleeing. In May 2021, the EU banned Belarusian airlines from traveling over its airspace and accessing its airports. This has limited travel options for Belarusian citizens and significantly increased the cost of leaving the country. Further restrictions on air travel were imposed in response to the border crisis instigated by the Belarusian authorities.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 1 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

Though limits on economic freedom have eased in recent years, state interference still affects the economy and profitable business owners are never secure from arbitrary government pressure and harassment. Many businesspeople that became involved in the postelection prodemocracy efforts, often to support victims of human rights abuses or to incentivize policemen to resign from law enforcement, were criminally prosecuted on groundless claims. Other businesses and their owners who supported candidates other than Lukashenka have been arrested under false pretense. Multiple businesses relocated their employees to neighboring countries fearing that they would be harassed or prosecuted by the state.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 2 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Belarus, and police register about 150,000 incidents per year. In 2018, Lukashenka blocked a draft law on the prevention of domestic violence jointly developed by the law enforcement agencies and civil society representatives. He called attitudes against the corporal punishment of children “nonsense from the West” and insisted that “good” punishment of children could be useful to them. Threats of losing custody of children are often used to intimidate and harass political activists.

The constitution explicitly bans same-sex marriage. The Belarusian government led an effort in 2016 to block LGBT+ rights from being part of a UN international initiative focused on urban areas. In December 2021, authorities released a draft of a new constitution, subject to a national referendum set for February 2022, which includes a definition of marriage as a union solely between a man and a woman. This would create further obstacles for same-sex partners to have legal recognition.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Mandatory unpaid national workdays, postgraduate employment allocation, compulsory labor for inmates in state rehabilitation facilities, and restrictions on leaving employment in certain industries have led labor activists to conclude that all Belarusian citizens experience forced labor at some stage of their life. Many women become victims of the international sex trade.

In 2018, based on a presidential decree, the government effectively revived a plan to tax the unemployed by mandating full payment for housing and utility services starting in 2019. An attempt to impose the tax in 2017 was met with mass protests that were brutally suppressed.

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