



Belarus — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/26/1797 Start Part of Other Country [of Russia, Autocratic Monarchy]: In 1797, the Belarusian territories which had been annexed by the Russian Empire during the rule of Catherine II were incorporated into the Belarusian Governorate. As Belarus was closely connected to the Commonwealth of Poland-Lituania, it was affected by the third partitioning of Poland following Austrian, Prussian and Russian parley on 10/24/1795 to dissolve Polish-Lituanian Commonwealth, with the three conquering powers signing a treaty to divide the region on 02/26/1797.¹ During the 1840s, Nicholas I initiated a Russification campaign that banned the use of the Belarusian language in public schools, suppressed Belarusian publications, and attempted to force individuals who had converted to Catholicism during the Polish rule to revert to the Orthodox faith.²

11/07/1917 Continuation Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date the Russian Soviet Republic (RSFSR) was proclaimed.³

02/21/1918 End Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]: On this date, Minsk was taken over by the Germans in the context of the First World War.⁴ On 03/03/1918 the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. As per the conditions of this brief agreement, Russia relinquished a portion of what is now Belarus, as well as Ukrainian and Baltic territories, to Germany.⁵ While negotiating the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Belarus declared its independence on 03/25/1918, under German occupation, establishing the Belarusian People's Republic.⁶ On 12/03/1918, the German troops withdrew from Minsk.⁷

12/10/1918 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, Minsk was taken over by the Soviet troops. The Rada (Council) of the People's Republic of Belarus went into exile, initially relocating to Kaunas, and subsequently moving to Berlin before ultimately settling in Prague.⁸

01/01/1919 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Russia, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was proclaimed belonging to the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic.⁹ Under Soviet administration women in Belarus were granted universal suffrage on 02/04/1919.¹⁰

02/17/1919 End Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]/Start No Central Authority: On this date, the BSSR was dismantled, and a period of power struggle began in Belarus. A portion of the territory was amalgamated with the Lithuanian SSR to create the Lithuanian–Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (LBSSR), commonly referred to as Litbel, with its capital in Vilnius. The Belarusian Democratic Republic, was a state proclaimed by the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in its Second Constituent Charter on 03/09/1918 during World War I. The Council proclaimed the Belarusian Democratic Republic independent in its Third Constituent Charter on 03/25/1918 during the occupation of by the Imperial German Army. During this time, as the Belarus National Republic clashed with Litbel, external powers were preparing to reclaim territories they considered their own: Polish forces were advancing from the West, while Russian forces were approaching from the East. When Polish forces captured Vilnius on 04/17/1919, the capital of the Soviet puppet state Litbel was relocated to Minsk. However, on 07/17/1919, Lenin disbanded Litbel due to the mounting pressure from advancing Polish forces in the West.¹¹ Multiple entities simultaneously claimed

authority over Belarusian territory: the Belarusian Democratic Republic, Litbel (Lithuanian-Byelorussian SSR), advancing Polish forces from the west, and Russian forces from the east. The rapid relocation of Litbel's capital from Vilnius to Minsk after Polish capture (April 1919), followed by Lenin's dissolution of Litbel itself in July 1919 due to Polish pressure, demonstrates that no single authority exercised effective control over the territory. While Litbel was nominally a Soviet puppet state, the fact that it was disbanded within months due to external military pressure indicates it lacked stable, consolidated authority. This represents a power vacuum with contested sovereignty rather than effective Russian/Soviet control.

08/08/1919 End Part of Other Country [of Lithuanian-Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Poland, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, Polish troops captured Minsk. Józef Piłsudski, the leader of Poland, had a vision of creating an Intermarium federation in Central and Eastern Europe to act as a buffer against both Germany in the west and Russia in the east. In pursuit of this goal, Poland initiated a Kiev offensive into Ukraine in 1920. However, this move triggered a counter-offensive by the Red Army of the Soviet Union, which advanced deep into Polish territory, coming perilously close to Warsaw. Additionally, the Soviet Red Army recaptured Minsk on 07/11/1920.¹²

07/31/1920 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Poland, Electoral Democracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: On 07/11/1920, Minsk was captured by the Red Army. On 07/31, the new Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared.¹³ The following year, with the Treaty of Riga signed on 03/18/1921 and stating the end of the Polish-Soviet War, Belarus was partitioned between Poland and Russia.¹⁴

03/18/1921 End Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy and Poland, Electoral Democracy]: With the Treaty of Riga and the following partition of Belarus, the country was controlled by two powers. We code this regime change event as a negotiated transition. Western Belarus was given to the Second Polish Republic. During this time, Belarusians were subject to the government's effort of Polonization. Their language, teachings and cultural practices were discriminated against.¹⁵ Eastern Belarus fell under the administration of the RSFSR. In 1922, the SSRB was one of the founding members of the Soviet Union and became known under BSSR.¹⁶ The communist regime was introduced through the dissolution of non-communist institutions and a centrally planned economy subordinated to Moscow's directives. Belarus geographic position between Russia and Poland gave it a strategic and ideological role. Soviet authorities emphasized the fraternal unity of the Belarusian and Russian peoples while discouraging distinct nationalism. Belarus' exposure to Western influence, particularly through the shared border with Poland and Polish cultural presence, provoked strict Soviet surveillance and campaigns against bourgeois nationalism. Local communist ideology was framed as a defensive bulwark against Western imperialism, which shaped Belarus' strong loyalty to the Soviet center. The BSSR was tightly controlled by the Communist Party of Byelorussia, whose First Secretary served as the de facto leader but remained subordinate to the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee in Moscow. Leadership experienced high turnover during Stalin's purges. The Great Purge had devastating effects in Belarus between 03/03/1937 and 05/22/1938, including a mass execution of writers, artist and statespeople by Soviet Union authorities on 10/29/1937. After the Nazi occupation during World War II, new waves of repression targeted individuals suspected of collaboration or nationalist sympathies. Open resistance to Soviet rule was limited and heavily suppressed. During and after World War II, some nationalist underground movements emerged, largely among former anti-Nazi partisan groups who resisted Soviet reoccupation, but they were rapidly neutralized by the NKVD. Belarus differed from many other republics in its deep integration into Soviet economic and administrative structures. Its developed industry, proximity to Moscow, and relative ethnic homogeneity made it one of the USSR's most loyal and economically stable republics. The BSSR's identity came to define itself as a model socialist republic, by being industrially advanced, politically stable, and ideologically reliable.

09/17/1939 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy and Poland, Electoral Autocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, soviet troops invaded Poland and consequently, Western Belarus became part of the BSSR. Although not the whole of Belarus

experienced a regime change, we code a foreign intervention for Western Belarus, which was occupied.

06/28/1941 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: On 06/22/1941, the Axis powers invaded the Soviet Union. On 06/28/1941, Minsk was captured by German troops and all present-day Belarus was captured within the end of August. The German occupation was marked by violence and death. Altogether, during World War II, Belarus suffered the loss of a quarter of its population before the war, including virtually its entire intellectual elite.¹⁷

07/28/1944 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, the Operation Bagration reached Brest, marking the liberation of all occupied Belarussian territory and the end of the Operation Bagration in Belarus. On 07/03/1944 Minsk had been recaptured by the Red Army.¹⁸ Despite Belarus being affiliated to the Soviet Union later, we code this regime change event as a liberation by foreign forces. With the end of the Second World War and the victory of the Allies, the BSSR became part of the USSR again.¹⁹ LIED and V-Dem only starts to provide data for Belarus since 1991.

08/25/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date the Belarussian parliament, still dominated by the Communist party (302 from 328 seats), declared independence from the USSR. The Supreme Soviet was elected prior to independence in an election that excluded the major opposition parties (Zaprudnik/Helen 1995, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 43). The small opposition faction called the Belarussian Popular Front (BNF) was allowed to compete and managed to secure 26 seats. However, opposition was very limited and faced significant institutional restrictions. In December, Belarus, along with Russia and Ukraine, participated in the Alma Ata Declaration, leading to the complete dissolution of the USSR. Following an extended struggle, the still-prevalent former communist party consented to a new constitution and multiparty elections in 1994 (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 15). As classified by FH for the regime period in 1992, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. In 1993 the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were somewhat present in 1991 and present from 1992-1994. Whereas LIED codes them as absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also robust. Since the elections in 1990 were not multiparty elections and the opposition in the parliament formed only after the election the regime is classified as a one-party autocracy. It is a borderline case between a communist ideocracy and a one-party autocracy. According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were present in this period. However, because meaningful opposition was not possible and elections continued to be dominated by the Communist Party, we still code this period as a one-party autocracy.

07/10/1994 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date there was a presidential election (second round)²⁰, which was not won by the government candidate, but Alexander Lukashenka²¹ (Korosteleva 1998:35-45, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 43).²² Nonetheless, the process of becoming more authoritarian commenced shortly after Lukashenka's election on 07/21/1994. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. His election marks the only ever competitive election according to LIED. One of his initial actions involved delaying parliamentary elections, allowing those who had been elected to the Supreme Soviet in 1990 to remain in office. The harassment of the opposition began only days after his election (Silitski 2003: 44-46, Marshall/Gurr/Jaggers 2010, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 43-44). This assessment is founded on the notable limitations imposed on electoral politics, as well as attempts to circumvent both the legislature and the constitutional court by issuing executive decrees (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 72). Having previously ranked the elections of Belarus as somewhat free and fair since 1990, the V-Dem EF&FI

dropped to scoring the elections as neither free nor fair since 2000. Their CEI similarly scores the elections as not clean. As classified by FH for 1995, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. From 1996 onwards, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. LIED classifies political freedoms as absent since independence. According to V-Dem's PCLI political freedoms were somewhat present in 1995 and 1996, ambiguous from 1997 to 2001 and not really present from 2002 to 2015. V-Dem's PCLI codes a period of ambiguous presence of political freedoms from 2016 to 2019 and as absent since 2020. In 1995, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. Since 1996, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For 1995, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1996, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. During the rest of the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. In the 2008 parliamentary election, the government won all seats, maintaining its political control. Despite domestic and international calls for reform, Lukashenka remained defiant. He secured another presidential term in 2010, which was marred by allegations of vote rigging by the opposition and international observers. He was reelected again in 2015 with accusations of irregularities. The 2019 parliamentary elections resulted in the opposition failing to win any seats, allowing Lukashenka's government to continue its hold on power. His reelection in 2020 was once again marred by irregularities and repression of the opposition. Following the sham election, the largest mass protests against the regime since its inception in 1994 erupted, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets. The regime responded with violent crackdowns, prosecuting and sentencing countless opposition leaders to decades in prison.²³ A referendum held on 02/27/2022 allows the president to rule until 2035 and guarantees him impunity even after leaving office.²⁴ This authoritarian continuity was reaffirmed in the January 2025 presidential election. Conducted without independent observation, the election saw Lukashenka declared the winner of a seventh term with 87.48% of the vote.²⁵ The result was widely rejected by the EU and Western nations as a sham.²⁶

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Fedor 1995, Korosteleva 1998, Ó Beacháin 2011, Sahm 2010, Silitski 2003, Steinsdorff 2010, Way 2005)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Partition_of_Poland

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus#Russian_Empire

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus/History#ref33454>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus#Russian_Empire

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Soviet_Republic_of_Byelorussia

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage;
https://data.ipu.org/node/16/elections/historical-data-on-women?chamber_id=13335

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus

- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus#
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Riga
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Belorussia
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byelorussian_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus#
- ¹⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_World_War_II_\(1944\)#July](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_World_War_II_(1944)#July)
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus#
- ²⁰ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Belarus_2004?lang=en
- ²¹ Also transliterated as Lukashenko (Russian version of the name).
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Lukashenko
- ²³ <https://specials.dekoder.org/freiheit-protest/belarus/>
- ²⁴ <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/belarus-referendum-101.html>
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Belarusian_presidential_election
- ²⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/26/world/europe/belarus-lukashenko-re-election.html>

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