



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR FREE ELECTIONS

Elections*2024. Final analytical report on the results of monitoring the elections of deputies on a single voting day on February 25, 2024

*The expert elections*¹2024 observation mission was organized by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Viasna Human Rights Center as part of the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign. The mission collects and analyzes information about the election campaign based on open sources and messages from voters from Belarus.*

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¹ The term "elections*" in relation to the 2024 election campaign is used with an asterisk by the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign to emphasize the perfunctory nature of this term, since any free and fair election campaign presupposes, first of all, conditions where rights and freedoms are fully realized, including freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, freedom from discrimination, which is currently practically absent in Belarus.

CONCLUSIONS

A single voting day was introduced in Belarus based on the results of constitutional amendments in the 2022 referendum. The elections of deputies of the House of Representatives of the 8th convocation and local Councils of Deputies of the 29th convocation were scheduled for February 25, 2024 by Decree No. 367 of November 20, 2023.

The expert mission for independent monitoring of the elections of deputies on a single voting day on February 25, 2024, within the framework of the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign, uniting the Viasna Human Rights Center and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, aims to assess the electoral process from the point of view of Belarusian legislation and international standards of free and democratic elections, inform the Belarusian public and the international community on the preparation and conduct of the elections*, as well as on the results of the observation.

The 2024 elections* in Belarus were conducted in conditions of incessant repression; in the virtual absence of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association; in a climate of total fear and political purge. Repressions against any manifestations of what is perceived by the authorities as political activity continue; independent media and hundreds of civil society organizations, including all human rights organizations, have been liquidated. After re-registration, 4 political parties out of 16 remained in the country, all opposition parties were liquidated, and their members cannot carry out party activities under threat of criminal prosecution under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which was returned to criminal law in early 2022.

After the post-election crisis of 2020 and the constitutional changes of 2022, there have been significant changes in the legal regulation of elections. These changes are aimed at reducing the role of parliament, narrowing the circle of participants in electoral processes, limiting the electoral rights of citizens and increasing the control of the authorities over the electoral process.

Based on the monitoring of all stages of the election process conducted by the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign, we conclude that the elections* for deputies to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the 8th convocation and local Councils of Deputies of the 29th convocation did not meet international standards for democratic and free elections. The elections were accompanied by numerous violations of the electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus. All stages of the electoral process were not just administratively controlled by the authorities, but were organized by them to retain power and simulate popular support and consensus in society. The non-transparent formation of election commissions, the approval of candidate lists and "elected" individuals by the power vertical, campaigning that imitated political activity, and the continued practice of forcing voters to participate in early voting are all evidence of the lack of transparency in the electoral process. In addition, an atmosphere of intimidation was created by bans on photographing and taking ballots out of polling stations, rhetoric about "extremist conspiracies" and police

officers stationed at polling stations, an opaque tabulation process that did not include the publication of data from individual polling stations, and the complete absence of independent observers. The results of the 2024 elections* do not reflect the true will of Belarusian citizens.

Election Commissions

- The authorities consolidated their absolute control over all stages of the 2024 elections* through the formation of Territorial Election Commissions (TECs), District Election Commissions (DECs), and Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) which is an important mechanism of a democratic election process;

- A total of 5,411 PECs were formed (374 fewer than in the previous elections to the House of Representatives and 459 fewer than in the previous elections to the local councils). They had a total of 57,233 members. The reduction in the number of PECs and their membership at a time of increased workload (single voting day for parliamentary and local elections*) may reflect the authorities' confidence in the administrative control of all processes, as well as the low level of political activity among voters and the low actual voter turnout (in the context of population emigration), and the desire of the authorities to include only loyal people as members of the commissions;

- The nomination stage for election commissions was marred by pressure from law enforcement agencies, including searches and checks on individuals who had been active in previous election campaigns. This only intensified the atmosphere of fear and served as a warning to potential campaigners about the adverse consequences of participating in commission activities.

- The majority of DEC (74.3%) nominees and a significant proportion of TEC (47.1%) member candidates were nominated by pro-government public associations. Only 2.83% of TEC nominees and 16.3% of DEC nominees were nominated by political parties. The share of political party representatives in TECs and DECs remains insignificant (2%). In PECs, the share of political party representatives was lower than that of representatives of public associations (9% and 15.6%, respectively). Representatives of 4 political parties held 4,763 (8.3%) PEC seats, while representatives of public associations held 27,880 (48.7%) seats;

- The five largest public associations in Belarus, including Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), “Belaya Rus” [remains as a public association and also formed an eponymous party in March 2023], the Women's Union, the Association of Veterans, and the Peace Foundation, along with the trade unions that are part of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, are the main administrative resources used for the executive roles in conducting elections. Except for the Peace Foundation, these associations have a legislatively established special relationship with the state since 2023; the admission rate of their nominated representatives to commissions is 98.7% at TECs and 99% at DECs;

- Administrative control over the formation of commissions and predetermination of decisions to approve their membership is confirmed by the ratio of nominated and selected members which figured up to 98.4%;

- A gender imbalance persists in commissions of all levels, with women comprising 81.7% of TECs and DEC's and 74.7% of PECs, while men make up only 18.3% and 25.3%, respectively;

Nomination and Registration of Candidates

- The nomination and registration of candidates occurred without any political campaign. Political parties did not organize any information campaigns, and voters were not encouraged to sign up for candidates in the public realm. The authorities do not consider the complete cleansing of the public sphere to be a sufficient guarantee against the expression of different political opinions. They have reduced the number of places authorized for collecting signatures to prevent people from gathering in popular and convenient places under the pretext of collecting signatures. The picketing for the signature collection was rather a formality. In some cities, it was not visible at all. Reports and circumstances linked to signature collection indicate a high degree of administrative control and active use of administrative resources. This was not aimed at increasing voter engagement, but at simulating political activity and simplifying the work of electoral associations;

- Amid a general atmosphere of fear, including the repression of voters who signed for the nomination of alternative candidates in the 2020 presidential election, nomination activity through the collection of voter signatures decreased almost three times compared to the last elections for the House of Representatives, and one and a half times for local councils;

- Almost all initiative groups were registered: only two applications for registration were refused at the House of Representatives election* level. One of them was from D. Kuchuk, the leader of the liquidated Green Party and the only independent candidate, according to available information. At the local council election* level, 8 applications were withdrawn, 19 were denied registration, and 1 registration was revoked;

- The number of candidates nominated to run for local councils (18,999 people) decreased significantly compared to the last campaign. The number of candidates nominated by citizens through signature collection decreased by 15.7%, while the number of candidates nominated by political parties increased by 19.5% compared to the 2018 elections (due to the establishment of the "Belaya Rus" Party in 2023);

- A total of 18,802 candidates were registered for local council elections*, and the rejection rate remained low at 0.65%, continuing the trend of past election cycles. At the settlement level, there was an average of one registered candidate per seat and 1.2 candidates per district at the village level. This suggests that local elections effectively looked like a one-candidate race, indicating a lack of political initiative and a high degree of administrative control through pre-agreed lists of nominated candidates. Additionally, the atmosphere of fear may have contributed to this phenomenon;

- There were 265 candidates registered for the House of Representatives elections*. The nomination processes were predetermined, as indicated by the lowest recorded rejection rate of 8.4%. It seemed like the authorities aimed to have two candidates on the ballot in each district to ensure formal competitiveness;

- The analysis of the registered candidate lists reveals a completely 'nomenclature' character. The majority of candidates hold senior positions, and there are almost no working-class candidates. Unlike previous election cycles, all candidates can be considered pro-government, and there was no political conflict among them;

- The percentage of women running for the House of Representatives increased from 27% in 2019 to 34.7%. Similarly, the corresponding share of women running in local council elections increased from 49.1% in 2018 to 53.7%;

- The transformation of the "Belaya Rus" public association into a party in 2023 has led to a sharp increase in party representation. 42.3% of candidates for the House of Representatives and 27.6% of candidates for local councils are members of this party. However, it is clear that this partisanship is imitative, as evidenced by the significant number of districts where party members compete with each other;

- The rate of incumbent local councilors running for office again decreased to 39%. In the current cycle, 20 House of Representatives deputies and 31 incumbent local councilors were registered as candidates, which is significantly lower than the previous cycle's numbers (32 House of Representatives deputies and 66 local councilors in 2019).

Campaigning

- The campaign stage appeared as an administratively controlled simulation of the political struggle among almost exclusively pro-government candidates. The authorities struggled to accomplish the difficult task of creating an image of public interest in the elections* while prohibiting any public initiative. The authorities considered street events a potential threat and implemented measures to make public gatherings with the participation of candidates unnoticeable. Compared to previous election campaigns, the number of locations available for such events was reduced. Pre-election pickets were few in number and decorated with state symbols. It was difficult to determine which candidate they promoted;

- Most candidates mainly campaigned through programmatic talk in the assembly halls of public institutions and enterprises, often during working hours or lunch breaks. Administrative measures were taken to ensure voter participation in such meetings. The media coverage of these meetings created the impression of significant interest in the candidates, their programs, and their responses to voter questions. The administrative control over the campaigning processes is evident in the peculiar practice of 'saving' organizational efforts. Joint speeches of several candidates registered in one constituency were common, which is nonsensical in a competitive election campaign;

- The election programs of candidates and the coverage of the campaign period in state media attested to an authoritarian political system with limited space for political diversity or critical debate. Candidates' programs echoed the themes and values espoused by authorities, indicating a significant limitation of political dialogue and the absence of true competition of ideas. It was challenging to locate election programs online. Additionally, some election programs were not published in print media;

- Candidates were provided with airtime on state television, and TV debates were formally organized. However, due to current legal restrictions, each candidate was limited to approximately 3 minutes of communication with their opponent, which restricted the

possibility of a comprehensive exchange of views. Some of the speeches contained essential elements of inciting hatred, prohibited by Article 47 of the Electoral Code, and manipulating information;

- The artificiality of the campaign period is most evident in the coverage of this stage in the state media. The overall density of information did not reflect a competitive political struggle of alternative visions of the country's future, but rather represented general words about the importance of elections and the voters' duty to participate in them (with a continued emphasis on early voting);

- The Central Election Commission (CEC), executive committees, and social institutions actively engaged in educational and awareness-raising activities about the elections aiming to substitute for an active political process of electoral competition. During the campaign period, special attention was given to the "patriotic education of young people" through various "dialog platforms" and "open discussions" in specialized secondary and higher education institutions, as well as through coverage in social media and mass media. At the same time, attendees of such information events were often dependent on the speakers, and their presence could be effectively mandatory;

- Many registered candidates did not exercise their right to open special campaigning accounts: out of 265 candidates running for the House of Representatives, only 160 utilized the option to open such accounts. That is, across the country, 105 House candidates "campaign" without having the funds to do so. This attests to the imitative nature of electoral competition.

Voting and Its Results

- The authorities view voter turnout as evidence of general legitimacy, in the tradition of authoritarian states. Elections became plebiscitary procedures in which going to the polling station is seen as evidence of trust in the state. The authorities therefore make special efforts to organize a high voter turnout (using administrative leverage) and create an image of mass voter activity (awareness-raising events accompanying the elections and their media coverage actively created a 'festive atmosphere' that was supposed to fill the space of the absent political struggle);

- Early voting was of an administrative, mobilizing, compulsory, and accountable nature, as in previous election campaigns. Although the Electoral Code defines early voting as an extraordinary measure to be used when a voter is unable to vote on the main day, authorities encouraged and facilitated early voting. The official turnout for early voting was a record 41.7%, which is more than half (56.43%) of all those who voted. This represents an increase from 35.8% in 2019, 31.3% in 2016, and 25.9% in 2012.

- The 2024 elections* were held under the excessive presence of law enforcement agencies. Police officers were present at all polling stations, and video surveillance was installed. Panic buttons were also provided for commission members. However, the polling stations were equipped with open booths, which allowed for monitoring of activities inside.

- Despite the highest early voting turnout in the history of the House of Representatives, the final official turnout for the 2024 campaign was the lowest of the previous five-year period of election campaigns, even lower than the 2018 local council election campaign (73.09% vs 77.23%);

- The preliminary results of the nationwide vote were announced by the CEC six hours after the polls closed, confirming the election of all local councils as competent bodies; the list of names of deputies to the House of Representatives was announced 6 hours and 30 minutes after the polls closed;

- The counting of votes remains opaque, polling station data is not published, and no data is provided to the CEC in machine-readable form;

- Based on CEC data on special campaigning accounts, 29% of candidates provisionally elected as House of Representatives deputies did not open such accounts. Thus, they conducted "successful" election campaigns with no funds allocated specifically for this purpose by established procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To international organizations and foreign states

Continue to exert diplomatic pressure on the Belarusian authorities to ensure they comply with their international commitments to hold free and fair elections, as well as uphold the rule of law and human rights.

Support efforts to enhance the capacity of Belarusian civil society organizations that provide independent monitoring of electoral processes in Belarus and promote among Belarusian citizens the standards of democratic elections, civic participation, and the right to govern their country.

To Belarusian authorities

There appears to be a lack of political will to hold fair and free elections. On the contrary, representative democratic institutions are often used to mask the retention of power.

However, we urge all Belarusian state bodies to fully comply with both international human rights obligations and domestic legislation. Political rights, such as freedom of expression, association, assembly, and citizens' electoral rights, require special protection. Legitimate elections cannot take place in a situation of systemic political repression unleashed by the power apparatus itself. Law enforcement agencies, courts, and the penitentiary system, which should be tools for protecting rights, become tools for persecuting dissidents (or persons perceived by the authorities as ones).

Throughout the 16 years of observing elections, the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign has compiled a list of recommendations to improve election legislation and administrative practices. All of these recommendations remain valid. The most significant ones are listed below.

Genuine elections

- To ensure the neutrality of state administration of elections, it is important to avoid the use of "administrative leverage" and "administrative control". This can be achieved by ensuring a transparent process for the formation of election commissions, providing guarantees for independent observation at all stages of the electoral process, and encouraging broad participation of civil society actors, particularly political parties, in political processes;

- To ensure that the will of the citizens is truly taken into account in the formation of public authorities, guaranteed by following the procedures and their transparency, in particular voting and counting procedures;
- To ensure that election data is widely publicized, including in a machine-readable format;
- To ensure the criminal and administrative prosecution of individuals who violate electoral legislation.

Free elections

- To ensure that voters can freely determine their will without any interference from the state, such as administrative support for specific candidates, voter intimidation, or pressure. At the same time, it is important to guarantee freedom of expression, association, and assembly to enable genuine political campaigning;
- To ensure that voters can freely express their will, including the right to decide whether to participate in the election;
- To ensure that candidates have the freedom to decide for themselves whether to run and how to campaign, within the bounds of the law, and using all legal forms and methods of campaigning.

Universal suffrage

- To ensure that all adult citizens of Belarus, including those with dual citizenship or foreign documents granting political, religious, or national benefits, have the right to elect and be elected, even if they have an unexpunged or unspent conviction or a court verdict that has entered into legal force;
- To comply with international standards, disenfranchisement should only take place based on court ruling that declares a person incapacitated or on a conviction for a serious crime;
- To ensure that Belarusian citizens who have left the country for various reasons, including fears of arbitrary persecution in connection with the realization of their rights and freedoms, can vote.

Equal suffrage

- To ensure that the state remains neutral by guaranteeing equal conditions for all candidates throughout the electoral process, including unbiased media coverage.

Secret suffrage

- To maintain the secrecy of will expression throughout all stages, including the voting process (when filling and submitting ballots), and to refrain from disclosing lists of voters who have cast their votes;
- To refrain from using 'closed' polling stations, where administratively bound groups of people such as hospital patients, detention facilities inmates, and dormitory residents vote, as the results of the vote may have negative consequences for the entire group.

THE SITUATION ON THE EVE OF THE ELECTIONS

The elections*2024 began against the background of a deep social and political crisis lasting almost 4 years, which began in 2020 due to increased repression against civil society

during the election campaign² and falsification of the results of the 2020 presidential elections.³ The announcement of the official results of the 2020 elections, which did not reflect the genuine will of the citizens,⁴ was followed by massive spontaneous peaceful protests, responding to which the authorities ordered violent dispersals of protests, mass detentions, and torture of protesters.⁵ The investigative authorities began to initiate criminal cases against participants in peaceful protests on charges of group actions grossly violating public order or mass riots.⁶

Politically motivated criminal prosecution, which was practiced every now and then throughout the authoritarian period, intensified during the 2020 presidential elections, remained at a repressive level to the 2024 election* day, and will continue in the foreseeable future. The initiation of criminal cases for political reasons is the main method of suppression of any activity disapproved by the authorities: compared to the end of 2020, the number of known criminal cases for political reasons has increased five-fold. At the end of 2020, the Viasna Human Rights Center knew of 650 people who had been prosecuted in connection with their social and political activities, 1,380 at the end of 2021, 33,800 at the end of 2022, and 5,200 on November 20, 2023.⁷ According to the authorities, at the end of 2020, more than 900 criminal cases were initiated for participating in protests;⁸ and more than 5,000 at the end of 2021. Cases related to "extremist and protest activity" then accounted for 5.5% of all criminal cases, while "less than 3% of crimes in this category were committed with the actual use of violence."⁹ There were 11,000 cases¹⁰ in July 2022 and 16,000 cases¹¹ in November 2023. At the time of the announcement of the 2024 election*, 1,444 people deprived of their liberty in connection with the initiation of a criminal case were recognized as political prisoners.¹²

Administrative and criminal proceedings do not meet the standard of fair judicial procedure, and the execution of punishment in politically motivated cases is carried out with the use of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Not only do the authorities fail to protect against torture, but they systematically utilize it themselves. Essentially, any

² A more detailed analysis is provided in the Preliminary analytical report on the results of the observation: <https://elections2020.spring96.org/en/news/98942>

³ The explanation of the discrepancy between the announced results of the presidential elections and the real expression of the will of citizens can be found in the Final analytical report on the results of observation of the presidential elections of the Republic of Belarus in 2020: <https://elections2020.spring96.org/ru/news/100922>

⁴ Final report on 2020 presidential election observation, p. 3: <https://elections2020.spring96.org/en/news/100928>

⁵ During the first three days of the post-election protests, more than 6,000 people were detained, during August 2020 – more than 7,500, and during 2020 – more than 31,000 people. In August 2021, the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus reported that in the second half of 2020, it received about 5,000 complaints of alleged ill-treatment, and all of them were rejected. See *Viasna*, Human rights situation in Belarus in 2020: <https://spring96.org/en/news/101223>

⁶ *Amnesty Eurasia*, The Belarusian authorities have opened massive criminal cases against hundreds of peaceful demonstrators: <https://eurasia.amnesty.org/2020/11/03/massovye-ugolovnye-dela-protiv-soten-mirnyh-demonstrantovv-belarusi/>

⁷ *Viasna*, List of convicts in political criminal cases [updated]: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/table-convicted>

⁸ *Viasna*, Human rights situation In Belarus. November 2020: <https://spring96.org/en/news/100777>

⁹ *Viasna*, Human rights situation in Belarus. Analytical review: <https://spring96.org/en/news/106329>

¹⁰ Telegram channel of the Investigative Committee of Belarus: <https://t.me/skgovby/7971>

¹¹ Official website of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Belarus:

<https://www.prokuraturov.gov.by/ru/media/novosti/mezhdunarodnoe-sotrudnichestvo/generalnyy-prokuror-shos/>

¹² *Viasna*, The List Of Political Prisoners [updated]: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>

interaction between a representative of the government and a person who is an opponent of the government or is considered as such does not take place within the framework of the law, respect for human rights, and humane treatment, but in conditions of violence, humiliation, and suffering. At least 8 deaths are known to have occurred as a result of unjustified or disproportionate use of force, torture, and inhumane conditions of detention: Aliaksandr Taraikouski, Aliaksandr Vikhor, Henadz Shutau, Raman Bandarenka, and Vitold Ashurak,¹³ Ales Pushkin,¹⁴ Mikalai Klimovich,¹⁵ and Ihar Lednik.¹⁶

Freedom of speech in Belarus is absent not only at the level of an individual, but also in the Belarusian media. Since 2020, media and journalists have faced several widespread methods of pressure: criminal prosecution (15 criminal cases are known in 2020,¹⁷ 60 criminal cases in 2021,¹⁸ 17 criminal cases in 2022¹⁹), obstruction of media activities by law enforcement agencies, the application of legislation on countering extremism to limit the influence of independent media, and administrative measures of restricting access to information. A wide range of independent information is prohibited: from social and political issues to culture and Belarusian-language content. Violation of prohibitions entails persecution in various forms: ill-treatment and torture, fines, confiscation of property, administrative arrest and criminal prosecution, compulsory psychiatric treatment, and threats of deprivation of citizenship.²⁰

One of the most important forms of participation in the life of the state and society is civil society organizations, and the state is obliged to ensure conditions for their proper functioning. However, after the 2020 crisis, the authorities took a number of actions to purge civil society. As of the end of October 2023, according to monitoring conducted by Lawtrend, 1,457 non-profit organizations have been dissolved or are in the process of dissolution (931 are in the process of forced dissolution and 526 are in the process of self-dissolution).²¹

The combination of restrictive legislation, politics of intimidation, and repressive practices is used as a powerful tool to force people to leave the country.²² According to various

¹³ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/52/68, paragraph 12: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F52%2F68&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

¹⁴ *Viasna*, Political prisoner and artist Ales Pushkin died: <https://spring96.org/en/news/112176>

¹⁵ *Viasna*, Political prisoner Mikalai Klimovich died in the colony: <https://spring96.org/en/news/111635>

¹⁶ *Viasna*, Political prisoner Ihar Lednik died: <https://spring96.org/en/news/114453>

¹⁷ *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, Mass media in Belarus in 2020:

<https://baj.media/sites/default/files/analytcs/files/2021/media-monitoring-2020-ru.pdf>

¹⁸ *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, Mass media in Belarus in 2021: <https://baj.media/ru/analytcs/smi-v-belarusiv-2021-godu-0>

¹⁹ *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, Mass media in Belarus in 2022: <https://baj.media/ru/analytcs/smi-v-belarusiv-2022-godu-0>

²⁰ *Viasna*, Restriction of Freedom of Expression under the Pretext of Combating Extremism and Terrorism: https://spring96.org/files/book/en/freedom_of_expression.pdf

²¹ *Lawtrend*, Monitoring NGOs in Belarus undergoing forced liquidation and have chosen to self-liquidate: <https://www.lawtrend.org/freedom-of-association/situatsiya-so-svobodnoj-assotsiatsii-i-organizatsiyami-grazhdanskogo-obshchestva-respubliki-belarus-obzor-za-oktyabr-2023-g>

²² Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, A/77/195: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/432/95/PDF/N2243295.pdf?OpenElement>

estimates, from 200 to 500 thousand people were forced to leave Belarus after August 9, 2020²³ and now, as a result of new legislative changes, they are deprived of the opportunity to exercise their voting rights.

After the 2020 presidential elections, the authorities already have experience in conducting a nationwide election campaign — a referendum amending the Constitution, held on February 27, 2022, amid systemic and massive violations of human rights, a legal crisis, growing authoritarianism, and the tension in the region due to the war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The preparation and holding of the referendum did not meet the basic international standards for conducting free and fair electoral campaigns and were accompanied by numerous violations. The voting was not transparent, there were no independent observers, and the result could not be recognized as a real expression of the will of citizens.²⁴

By the time the 2024 elections* were announced, the authorities had created an atmosphere of total fear, supported by administrative arbitrariness. All three years after the 2020 presidential elections, the regime systematically purged the social and political space, leaving no opportunities for healthy political discussion and real political struggle in the election campaign. Due to ongoing political repression, any initiative to participate in the 2024 election campaign that is not sanctioned by the vertical of power entailed a high risk of politically motivated criminal prosecution. Existing remedies are still ineffective; there are no guarantees of judicial independence and predictability in law enforcement practice. The human rights situation in Belarus is critical, in such conditions it is impossible to talk about the 2024 elections* as free, fair, and democratic.

OBSERVATION CONDITIONS

The authorities' creation of an atmosphere of fear²⁵ and the suppression of civil society resulted in the 2024 elections* lacking the opportunity for comprehensive independent observation of all aspects of the electoral process. In December 2023, authorities began intimidating citizens who acted as observers during the 2020 presidential election. They conducted searches and arrests,²⁶ accompanied by threats, and forced them to record “repentant videos”.²⁷ The state-run media published videos accusing human rights defenders of misusing personal data of observers and falsifying data of election* monitoring results, specifically mentioning the “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” campaign and Viasna Human

²³ Belarusians in exile: an overlooked issue addressed by the Parliamentary Assembly:

<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/8955/belarusians-in-exile-an-overlooked-issue-addressed-by-the-parliamentary-assembly>

²⁴ Referendum 2022: Analytical report of the expert mission on the evaluation of the constitutional referendum, p. 4: <https://referendum2022.spring96.org/en/news/106966>

²⁵ See the campaign's report "Situation before the 2024 elections*":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113507>

²⁶ It is important to note that, based on the information available to us, all of them were released after 'preventive' interviews.

²⁷ See <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113571>

Rights Center.²⁸ These actions aimed to discredit independent observation in the eyes of the Belarusian and international public.

OSCE/ODIHR international observers were not invited to observe the elections*.²⁹ No observers were sent by the “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” campaign or representatives of democratic forces due to security concerns.³⁰ Only politically biased³¹ local and international observers were permitted to observe.

Almost half of all local observers were nominated by pro-government parties and public associations. The main entities that sent local observers were public associations, “citizens who submitted an application”, and political parties. “Belaya Rus” was the leading political party in this respect. Other public associations included pro-government trade unions and the BRSM.³² None of the political parties provided information on their website or social media regarding the opportunity to participate in the observation campaign. The observation results from political parties and public associations that sent observers were not published. The political parties either concisely announced the official voting results³³ or made general statements that the 2024 elections* were held without any violations.³⁴

Flagshtok media reported that some BRSM observers, who were expected to be youth representatives, included citizens over 50 years old.³⁵ This suggests that the nominations were

²⁸ *All-National TV*, "How extremists wanted to use Belarusians in elections? It's something else," February 15, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXuIn4vY6WQ>

²⁹ OSCE, «Deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus of utmost concern as crackdown continues, human rights office ODIHR says», 21 Feb. 2024, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/563046>

³⁰ See campaign statement: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113394>

³¹ *Politically biased election observation – a threat to the integrity of the international institution*, EPDE. https://www.epde.org/en/documents/details/politically-biased-election-observation-a-threat-to-the-integrity-of-international-institutions.html?file=files/EPDE/RESSOURCES/2019/2019%20Publications/EPDE_Biased%20observation%20threat%20integrity_EN.pdf

³² CEC, Information on Observers Accredited by Election Commissions, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat14-15.pdf>

³³ Statement of the Belarusian Party "Belaya Rus": <https://partiya.by/page44209719.html>

³⁴ Statement of the Communist Party of Belarus: <http://www.comparty.by/news/zayavlenie-centralnogo-komiteta-kpb-1>

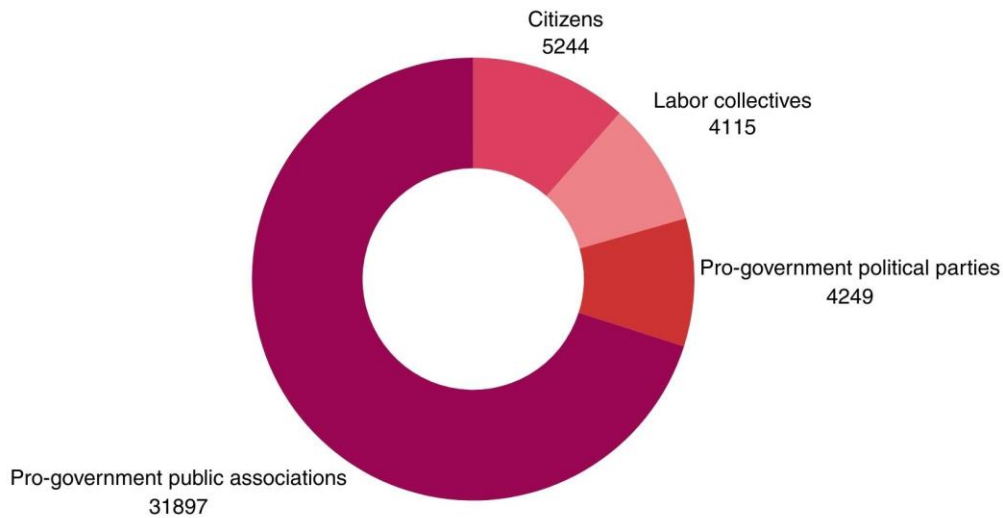
Statement of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus: <https://ldpb.by/ru/informatsiya/zayavlenie-vysshego-soveta-i-tsentralnogo-komiteta-liberalno-demokraticheskoy-partii-belarusi/>

Statements of the Republican Party of Labour and Justice: <https://rpts.by/ru/news/itogi-vyborov-v-parlament> and <https://rpts.by/ru/news/itogi-vyborov-v-mestnye-sovety-deputatov>

³⁵ *Flagshtok*, "Observers at the February 25 election. Who are these people?" February 23, 2024,

<https://d1j52mw0aso44.cloudfront.net/by/vybyary-2020/nabljudateli-na-vyborah-25-fevralja-kto-eti-ljudi.html>

WHO NOMINATED THE OBSERVERS



According to the publication *Flagshtok*, among the observers from the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, who can be expected to be youth representatives, were citizens over 50 years old, which indicates the formal nature of such nominations.

merely formal. According to the publication, the typical observer was a pre-retirement-age woman who worked as a teacher and was nominated by a pro-government public organization.

The CEC created a Public Election Observation Center as a platform to inform citizens about the 2024 election* observation and to interact with observers.³⁶ This center brought together all local observers. The Center's *Observation in Operation* Telegram channel³⁷ did not reflect the results of the observation. Instead, it focused on the authorities' general agenda regarding patriotic education and treating elections as a festivity.³⁸ This platform does not provide a public report on the results of the observation. After the elections, the Telegram channel changed its name to 'People's Control'. Its description was updated to include an institutional affiliation with the Trade Unions Federation of Belarus, and the channel's aim was declared to be civil control over the observance of labor rights.³⁹ Thus, it can be argued that civil society's imitation of independent observation was achieved through the organizational and technical means of pro-government trade unions.

³⁶ *BT*, "Public Election Observation Center hotline is set up," February 20, 2024, https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/rabotaet_goryachaya_liniya_tsentra_obschestvennogo_nablyudeniya_za_vyborami_8_017_215_21_83/

³⁷ Telegram channel: <https://t.me/vedetsyanablyudenie>

³⁸ *Observation in Operation*, "Elections are always a party!", February 23, 2024, <https://t.me/vedetsyanablyudenie/38>

³⁹ *People's Control*, "The election is over. But we keep watching and monitoring!", March 13, 2024, <https://t.me/vedetsyanablyudenie/77>

The CEC sessions were attended by only four individuals, which was a record low. One observer was sent from each of the following: the Communist Party of Belarus, “Belaya Rus”, BRSM, and the Belarusian Professional Union of Workers of Education and Science.⁴⁰

Regarding the international observers, CEC Chair Ihar Karpenka stated that although international organizations were going to be present at the elections, the elections were held for the country’s citizens, not for the approval of international observers. “Specifically, I am talking about the CIS observation mission. Traditionally, we invite the heads of election bodies from CIS countries, as well as representatives from CSTO and SCO.”⁴¹ Additionally, the head of the CEC noted that the role of international observers is to verify that the electoral process complies solely with national legislation.⁴² A total of 294 people were registered as international observers, 80% were CIS observers.⁴³

⁴⁰ CEC, “Information on observers sent to the meetings of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus during the 2024 elections of deputies on the Single Voting Day,”

<https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/cec-nabl.pdf>

⁴¹ *Sputnik Belarus*, “EU observers will work at elections in Belarus, CEC head promises,” February 17, 2024.

<https://sputnik.by/20240217/glava-tsik-belarus-provodit-vybory-ne-dlya-mezhdunarodnykh-organizatsiy-1083724709.html>

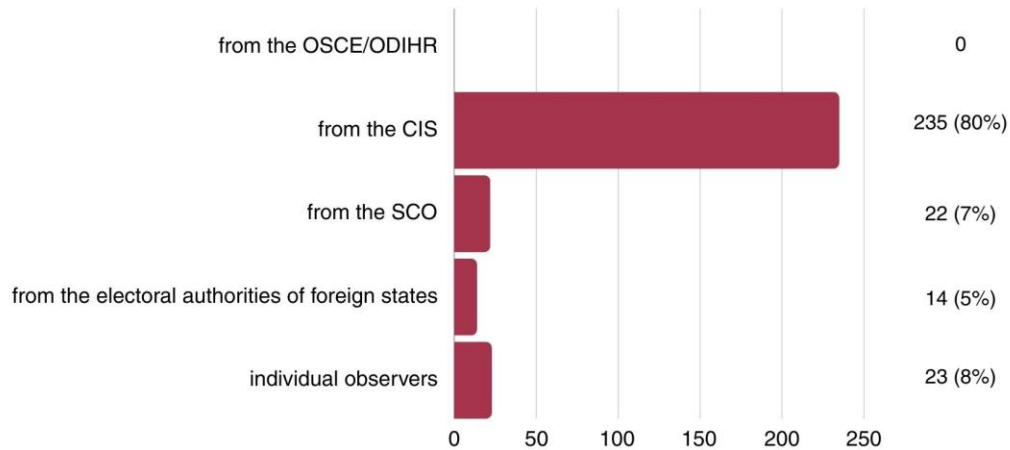
⁴² CEC, “The CEC of Belarus will accredit all international observers who come to Belarus for the election of deputies on the single day of voting, according to the current legislation. This includes missions, parliamentary structures, and individual experts from various countries, including EU countries,” January 11, 2024,

<https://rec.gov.by/ru/from-telegram-ru/view/vse-mezhdunarodnye-nabljudateli-kotorye-priedut-v-belarus-na-vybory-deputatov-v-edinyj-den-golosovaniya-1402-2024/>

⁴³ CEC, “Information on foreign (international) observers accredited by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus during the elections of deputies on the Single Voting Day,” February 25, 2024,

<https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/i-nab.pdf>

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS



We found one of these observers from Germany, Gunnar Lindemann, in the Database of Politically Biased International Observers of the European Platform for Democratic Elections.

The observer missions from CIS⁴⁴ and SCO⁴⁵ released their observation results in the form of statements five days after the main voting day, while the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly mission⁴⁶ presented their findings in the form of a conclusion on the main voting day. These publications do not disclose the methodology or manner of execution of the conducted observation. They are declarative in nature and uniformly claim the absence of violations of electoral legislation.

⁴⁴ CIS, "Statement from the Commonwealth of Independent States Observer Mission on the Preparation and Conduct of the Eighth Convocation Elections for Deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus," March 1, 2024, https://cis.minsk.by/news/27056/zajavlenie_missii_nabljudatelej_ot_sng_po_rezultatam_nabljudenija_za_podgotovkoj_i_provedenijem_vyborov_deputatov_palaty_predstavitelej_nacionalnogo_sobranija_respubliki_bielarus_v_osmogo_sozyva

⁴⁵ SCO, "Statement from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Observer Mission on the Results of Observing the Preparation and Conduct of Elections for the Eighth Convocation of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly and the Twenty-Ninth Convocation of Local Councils of Deputies in the Republic of Belarus," March 1, 2024, <https://rus.sectSCO.org/20240301/1286301.html>

⁴⁶ CSTO, "Findings of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly International Observation Team for the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Belarus," February 25, 2024, <https://paodkb.org/uploads/document/file/205/Zaklucheniye20240225.pdf>

On February 24th, the Ministry of Culture and the CEC hosted a concert for international observers.⁴⁷

After accrediting international observers, the CEC published comments allegedly made by European observers. They noted the “high level of election organization”⁴⁸, ensuring “freedom of choice”⁴⁹ and “compliance with international standards.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the pro-government media quoted⁵¹ Gunnar Lindemann, an international observer from Germany. However, it’s worth noting that Lindemann is listed⁵² in the Database of Politically Biased International Observers by the European Platform for Democratic Elections.⁵³

Thus, the observation conditions for the 2024 election* were highly restricted and regulated. There was no opportunity for independent and opposition observers to participate in a safe environment. Only politically biased domestic and international observers were permitted to observe. Their observation results did not reflect the true course of the electoral process.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The amended Electoral Code regulated the preparation and conduct of elections*. This was preceded by a legislative deterioration of conditions for the activities of independent public associations, including political parties, and the media. Excessive restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly continued.⁵⁴ A year before the Single Voting Day, a new requirement was introduced that political parties had to re-register. This resulted in only four out of the original sixteen parties remaining registered and authorized to nominate candidates for deputy. All opposition parties were liquidated. These measures, together with changes in the Electoral Code, have narrowed the range of subjects who can participate in the electoral campaign in different roles.⁵⁵

After the 2022 constitutional referendum, the central authorities’ configuration changed. This election campaign is a preparation for the formation of a new supreme

⁴⁷ *BelTA*, “Important, intimate, familial. A director discusses the concept of a concert featuring masters of arts and talented youth at the Bolshoi,” February 24, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/culture/view/vazhnoe-sokrovennoe-semejnoe-rezhisser-o-kontseptsii-kontserta-masterov-iskusstv-i-talantlivoj-617463-2024/>

⁴⁸ *CEC* (@cikbelarus), “Polish and French observers praised the organization of the elections in Belarus,” February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2253>

⁴⁹ *CEC* (@cikbelarus), “We have not witnessed the restrictions on voting reported by Western media, an independent observer from Italy notes,” February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2250>

⁵⁰ *CEC* (@cikbelarus), “German observer: Voting in Belarus meets democratic standards,” February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2223>

⁵¹ *BelTA*, “German observer: Voting in Belarus meets democratic standards”, February 25, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/nabljudatel-iz-germanii-golosovanie-v-belarusi-sootvetstvet-demokraticeskim-standartam-617608-2024/>.

⁵² *EPDE*, Database of politically biased election observers, Result: Gunnar Norbert Lindemann, <https://www.fakeobservers.org/biased-observation-database/details/lindemann-gunnar-norbert.html>

⁵³ *EPDE*, Database of politically biased election observers, <https://www.fakeobservers.org/politically-biased-election-observers.html>

⁵⁴ The first report “Situation before the 2024 elections*” describes relevant developments, pp. 2-3: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113507>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

representative body, the All-Belarusian People's Assembly.⁵⁶ The 2024 election* combined two campaigns: one for the deputies of the House of Representatives of the 8th convocation and another for the deputies of local Councils of Deputies of the 29th convocation. Both campaigns took place on a Single Voting Day, the last Sunday of February, as per changes in the electoral legislation.

The key changes to the election laws include:

- extending voting rights to citizens in pre-trial detention;
- formalization of the restriction on exercising suffrage outside the Republic of Belarus.

This change automatically deprives a significant number of citizens who left the country after 2020 due to the risk of politically motivated persecution of the opportunity to participate in elections*;

- significant narrowing of the group of people who have the right to be elected. Citizens who hold citizenship in another country, possess a foreign residence permit or have any foreign document that "grants them benefits or advantages" are now prohibited from running for office. Individuals who have an effective court conviction cannot run for the position of House of Representatives deputy. Candidates for local council deputies must be citizens without a criminal record, whether unexpunged or outstanding⁵⁷;

- further restriction of financing expenses for the preparation and carrying out of election campaigns. Financial aid cannot be received from foreign states, organizations, or citizens, as well as from organizations receiving foreign gratuitous aid, including transfers from Belarusian citizens who stay outside the country for over 183 days a year;

- the revised EC does not give citizens a practical way to know the membership of election commissions, which undermines confidence in the electoral process;

- the right to be a domestic observer is limited to those who have the right to vote;
- the ban on photographing ballots has been reintroduced.

Positive changes, such as implementing early voting without breaks, including citizens in voter lists before election day, and formalizing the obligation of election commissions to ensure favorable conditions for citizens with disabilities, are unable to significantly improve the overall situation. The changes made to electoral legislation do not take into account recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR,⁵⁸ domestic and international observers.⁵⁹ This effective undermining of the universality of elections* as early as at the regulatory stage worsens the situation.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ The All-Belarusian People's Assembly includes both House of Representatives deputies and representatives of local councils at various levels. This is in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 248-Z "On the All-Belarusian People's Assembly", Articles 6, 7, 10:

<https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12300248&p1=1>

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁸ OSCE/ODIHR recommendations are available in the Electoral Recommendations Database

<https://paragraph25.odihr.pl/search?dayOfElection=2019-11-17T00%3A00%3A00.000Z&numberOfTheRecommendationInTheFinalReport=1&numberOfTheRecommendationInTheFinalReport=55&projectBeneficiary=Belarus&typeOfElection=Parliamentary&yearOfElection=2019&yearOfElection=2019>

⁵⁹ <https://referendum2022.spring96.org/ru/news/107870>

⁶⁰ See the campaign's report "Situation before the 2024 elections*":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113507>

The systemic problems repeatedly noted by observers remained unaddressed:

- The election commissions should be formed in a way that ensures their independence and impartiality. All candidates should be able to nominate members. Additionally, the problem caused by the lack of clear criteria for the election of commission members should be addressed. The current setting enables the reproduction of hierarchical relationships in the commissions imported from institutions that send representatives to commissions;
- Excessively broad restrictions on exercising the right to be elected;
- Lack of legal and administrative measures to prevent abuse of office, pressure on public officials, and support from state-owned enterprises or state-subsidized associations during the electoral campaign;
- Lack of transparency in the candidate registration process; minor inaccuracies in documentation may result in automatic denial of registration. De-registration is not an exceptional measure that is only applied in cases of serious violations of the law by a court decision;
- Lack of independent, impartial, and professional verification of campaign finance reports based on fair and objective criteria;
- Lack of adequate safeguards against abuse during early voting and mobile voting;
- Lack of measures to ensure a controlled and transparent vote-counting process, including unimpeded access of observers to the process, announcement, and demonstration of the mark on each ballot paper during the vote count, open drafting of final protocols, and provision of a copy of the latter to observers.

The current regulation does not comply with international standards established by the Convention on Standards for Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States,⁶¹ despite statements made by representatives of the electoral administration and the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly.⁶²

ELECTION COMMISSIONS

The authorities consolidated their absolute control over all stages of the 2024 elections* through the formation of Territorial Election Commissions, District Election Commissions, and Precinct Election Commissions.

The authorities' complete disinterest in citizens' real participation in electoral processes is evident in the almost complete lack of information available to a wide range of voters about the formation stages of election commissions and the associated rights and opportunities.

The authorities restricted the range of entities eligible to nominate representatives to the commissions. This was due to ongoing repressions that drastically reduced the number of

⁶¹ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/karpenko-k-vyboram-budut-obrazovany-1394-okruzhnye-i-territorialnye-izbiratelnye-komissii-601553-2023/>, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/mezhdunarodnye-nabljudateli-ot-mpa-sng-vysoko-otsenili-organizatsiju-vyborov-v-belarusi-617414-2024/>, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/kosachev-vse-usloviya-dlja-raboty-mezhdunarodnyh-nabljudatelej-na-vyborah-v-belarusi-obespecheny-617380-2024/>

⁶² The defects of the national regulation that contradict the Convention mentioned, as described in the Analytical Report on the results of the observation of the 2019 elections to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, are still relevant, https://spring96.org/files/misc/2019_elections_analytical_report_en.pdf

public associations. Only 4 out of 16 political parties were able to finalize the re-registration procedure, all of which are loyal to the regime. As a result, all established election commissions lacked representatives from opposition parties and independent public associations.

The percentage of political party representatives in TECs, DEC, and PEC is still insignificant. They account for only 2.9%, 15.6%, and 8.3%, respectively, compared to the much higher percentage of representatives from public associations, which account for 44.5%, 57.8%, and 48.7%, respectively.

The five largest public associations in Belarus, including BRSM, “Belaya Rus”, Belarusian Women’s Union, Association of Veterans, and the Peace Foundation, along with the trade unions that are part of the Belarus Trade Union Federation, are the main administrative leverage for conducting elections. Except for the Peace Foundation, these associations have a legislatively established special relationship with the state since 2023; the admission rate of their nominated representatives to commissions is 98.7% at TECs, 99% at DEC, and 98.4% at PEC. The high admission rates of pro-government candidates to election commissions attest to administrative control over commission formation and predetermined decisions to approve their membership.

The reduction in the number and membership of PECs, while maintaining the high workload associated with the introduction of a single voting day for elections to the House of Representatives and local councils, may indicate confidence in the administrative controllability of all processes and low political engagement and turnout of the population, as well as the authorities’ desire to include only loyal individuals in the commissions.

The revised legislation permits the non-disclosure of PEC members’ names, making it challenging to evaluate the PEC’s membership, specifically the extent to which the ‘occupational principle’ of forming election commissions is maintained when commission members represent the same labor collective, and their immediate supervisors head these election commissions.

NOMINATION AND REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES

The nomination and registration of candidates took place without any political campaign. Political parties did not organize any information campaigns, and voters were not encouraged to sign up for candidates in public spaces.

After re-registration, only four pro-government parties remain in the legal field, while civil society organizations and independent media have been liquidated en masse. The authorities do not believe that completely cleansing the public realm of dissidents is enough to prevent the expression of diverse political opinions. The number of authorized signature collection sites has been reduced during the current election campaign. Collecting signatures in busy and convenient places was difficult. However, some privileged candidates have successfully ignored the prohibition.

Nomination of candidates through signature collection does not require formal links to state or political structures. However, this method is perceived as insecure because holding any alternative position would almost certainly lead to political persecution. The authorities continue to actively use this tactic against dissenters. Due to the atmosphere of fear created by the authorities, independent candidates refrained from running, even by collecting signatures.

There was only one known unsuccessful attempt to register as a candidate for the House of Representatives by the leader of the liquidated Green Party. Nomination activity by collecting voters' signatures decreased almost threefold compared to the previous elections for the House of Representatives and one and a half times for local Councils of Deputies.

Almost all initiative groups were registered: only two applications for registration were refused at the House of Representatives election* level. One of them was for Dzmitry Kuchuk, the only independent candidate, the leader of the liquidated Green Party, according to available information.⁶³ At the local council election* level, 8 applications were withdrawn, 19 were denied registration, and 1 registration was revoked.

The picketing for the signature collection was not active and was merely formal. In some cities, it was not visible at all. Reports and circumstances linked to signature collection indicate a high degree of administrative control and active use of administrative leverage. This was not aimed at attracting a mass of voters, but at simulating political activity and simplifying the work of initiative groups.

Due to the absence of independent observers overseeing the work of election commissions, it was challenging to evaluate the signature collection process. The media coverage was minimal. In general, most election commissions' verification of voters' signatures and data about candidates, including questionnaires, income, and property declarations, was non-transparent and publicly undisclosed.

A total of 298 candidates were nominated for the House of Representatives, which is significantly lower than the previous election campaign's figure of 703.

The percentage of women candidates increased by 6.9%, from 25.7% (181) in 2019 to 32.6% (97) in 2024.

On January 16, 2024, Ihar Karpenka, the CEC chairman, announced that 92 women had submitted their applications to register as candidates. All of them were granted registration.⁶⁴ 18,996 candidates were nominated for local Councils of Deputies elections.⁶⁵ However, the figures were later adjusted.⁶⁶

The number of candidates nominated to run for local councils (18,999 people) decreased significantly compared to the last campaign. The number of candidates nominated by citizens through signature collection decreased by 15.7%, while the number of candidates nominated by political parties increased by 19.5% compared to the 2018 elections.

⁶³ On February 16, 2024 Kuchuk was detained near the Russian embassy. He had brought flowers to commemorate the day of A. Navalny's death. He was sentenced to 30 days of detention and was supposed to be released on March 17th. However, as of March 22nd, his family has not received any information about his whereabouts: <https://pozirk.online/ru/news/74379/>

⁶⁴ *BelTA*, "298 candidates for the House of Representatives have been nominated in the country, Karpenka says," January 16, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/karpenko-v-strane-vydvynuto-298-kandidatov-v-deputaty-palaty-predstavitelej-610081-2024/>

⁶⁵ *BelTA*, "18,996 people have been nominated as candidates for local Councils of Deputies, Karpenka says," January 16, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/karpenko-v-kandidaty-v-mestnye-sovety-deputatov-vydvynuty-18-996-chelovek-610110-2024/>

⁶⁶ CEC, "Ihar Karpenka informs international observers about the registration of candidates for deputy," February 24, 2024, <https://rec.gov.by/ru/from-telegram-ru/view/igor-karpenko-rasskazal-mezhdunarodnym-nabljudateljam-o-registratsii-kandidatov-v-deputaty-1547-2024>

Nomination activity has significantly decreased. In 2019, 424 candidates were nominated, including by opposition parties. However, in the current campaign, the absence of independent candidates was noticeable.

There were 265 candidates registered for the House of Representatives elections*. The nomination processes were predetermined, as indicated by the lowest recorded rejection rate of 8.4%. It seemed like the authorities aimed to have two candidates on the ballot in each district to ensure formal competitiveness. Eight applications to run for office were withdrawn, and 25 candidates were denied registration as candidates for deputies.

A total of 18,802 candidates were registered for local council elections*, and the rejection rate remained low at 0.65%, continuing the trend of past election cycles. The average number of registered candidates at the settlement level was one candidate per seat and 1.2 candidates per district at the rural level, making the election virtually clear-choice. This suggests a lack of political initiative, which may be due to a climate of fear and a high degree of administrative control, including pre-agreed lists of nominated candidates. 78 declarations of consent to run for office were withdrawn, and 119 candidates were denied registration.

The analysis of the registered candidate lists reveals a completely ‘nomenclature’ character. The majority of candidates hold managerial positions, and there are almost no working-class candidates. Unlike previous election cycles, all candidates can be considered pro-government, and there was no political conflict among them.

The percentage of women running for the House of Representatives increased from 27% in 2019 to 34.7%. Similarly, the corresponding share of women running in local council elections increased from 49.1% in 2018 to 53.7%.

The creation of the “Belaya Rus” party in 2023 has led to a sharp increase in party representation. 42.3% of candidates for the House of Representatives and 27.6% of candidates for local councils are members of this party. However, this partisanship is imitative, as evidenced by the significant number of districts where party members compete with each other.

The rate of incumbent local councilors running for office again decreased to 39%. In the current cycle, 20 House of Representatives deputies and 31 incumbent local councilors were registered as candidates, which is significantly lower than the previous cycle’s numbers (32 House of Representatives deputies and 66 local councilors in 2019).

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

The campaigning period was characterized by an imitation of political competition between pro-government candidates, clearly controlled by the authorities. Candidates had only 24 days to campaign, which is a critically short time. During this period, they are supposed to present their programs to voters and canvass them. However, the short period allocated for campaigning aligns with the fresh election-related authorities’ policy of emphasizing the importance of voting rather than discussing the elections*, candidates, and their programs.

Candidates in these elections* hardly used campaign pickets, despite the simplified procedure for their conduct. The authorities considered street events a potential threat and banned them in the busiest parts of cities. If held, these events were practically unnoticeable. The pre-election pickets held around the country were few in number and decorated with state paraphernalia. It was difficult to determine which candidate they supported.

Most candidates mainly campaigned through programmatic talks in the assembly halls of public institutions and companies, often during working hours or lunch breaks. Administrators ensured voter participation in these meetings, which resembled ‘ideological lectures.’ The purpose was solely to create the appearance of public interest in candidates, their programs, and their responses to voters’ questions.

The election programs of candidates and the coverage of the campaign period in state media attested to an authoritarian political system with limited space for political diversity or critical debate. Candidates’ programs echoed the themes and values espoused by authorities, indicating a significant limitation of political dialogue and the absence of true competition of ideas. Publishing programs in print media⁶⁷ only limits voters’ exposure to them, hindering their ability to get an insight into the candidates’ platforms. It was challenging to locate election programs online. Additionally, some election programs were not even published in print media. The Hrodna Oblast Council of Deputies example demonstrates that, except for one district, the program was only published by the "winning candidate" in all other districts. This provides further evidence of an administratively controlled process.⁶⁸

State media covered the campaign stage, but failed to present the differences between candidates, limiting voters' ability to make informed decisions. The coverage focused on the importance of voting, without providing enough information about the candidates. Offering airtime to candidates on state television and formal televised debates created an illusion of a democratic electoral process. However, in practice, the 3 minutes of airtime provided at debates was insufficient for candidates to adequately present their programs, discuss differences in approaches, and convincingly argue their positions.

EARLY VOTING

Under the law, early voting lasted for five days from February 20th to February 24th, 2024. Official turnout for early voting was a record⁶⁹ 41.71%.⁷⁰ Previous House of Representatives elections demonstrate the trend of increasing reported turnout in early voting with every election cycle:

⁶⁷ Candidates could publish the program for free in print media only, as stated in Part 2 of Article 46 of the Electoral Code.

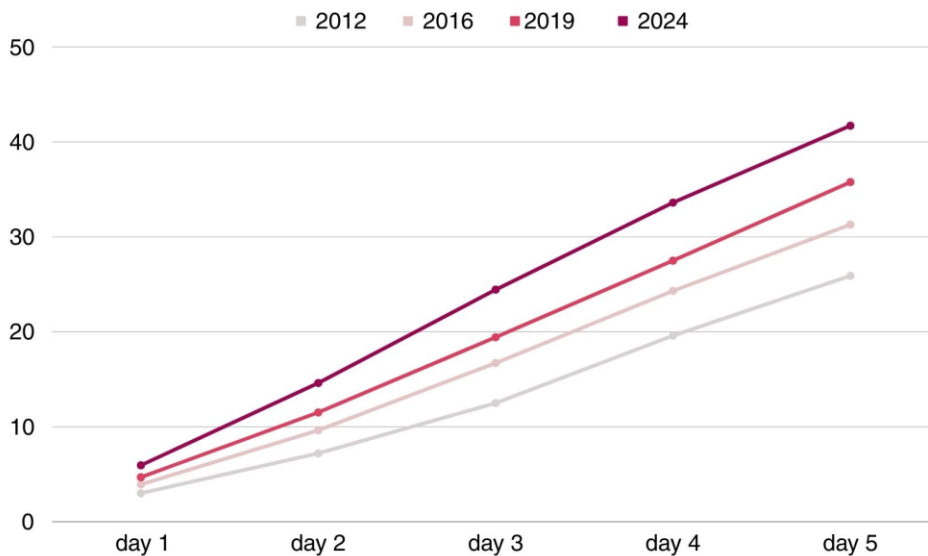
⁶⁸ Review the published programs (https://grodno-region.by/ru/programmy_kandidatov-ru) and the list of Deputies in the Local Councils of the 29th Convocation (<https://grodno-region.by/ru/oblast-sov-ru/>).

⁶⁹ The figures provided relate to election campaigns. During the 2022 referendum, the voter turnout was just over 42.93%. See Referendum 2022: Analytical report of the expert mission on the evaluation of the constitutional referendum, <https://referendum2022.spring96.org/en/news/106966>

⁷⁰ CEC, Information on Early Voting 20-24 February 2024: <https://www.rec.gov.by/ru/news-ru/view/dosrochnoe-golosovanie-1494/>

Election to the House of Representatives	2024	2019	2016	2012
Day 1 of early voting	5.94%	4.69%	3.92%	3.00%
Day 2 of early voting	14.61%	11.51%	9.63%	7.20%
Day 3 of early voting	24.44%	19.43%	16.71%	12.50%
Day 4 of early voting	33.61%	27.50%	24.31%	19.60%
Day 5 of early voting	41.71%	35.77%	31.29%	25.90%

INCREASE OF THE % OF OFFICIAL TURNOUT AT EARLY VOTING



The CEC meeting on March 1, 2024⁷¹ formalized the election results, which showed that 56.43% of voters cast early ballots.

Early voting was coercive, reportable, and driven by administrative mobilization, as in previous election campaigns. The EC defines early voting as an extraordinary measure to be used when voters are unable to vote on the main day. However, the authorities have traditionally taken a radically different approach.

The authorities' systemic actions indicate that early voting aimed to achieve and demonstrate high voter turnout, as it has in the past. The early voting stage is one of the most problematic stages of the electoral process in Belarus. It creates ample opportunities for the use

⁷¹ CEC, "Central Commission Meeting," March 1, 2024. <https://www.rec.gov.by/ru/news-ru/view/zasedanie-tsentralnoj-komissii-1613/>

of administrative leverage, artificial increase of turnout, and falsifications committed by members of commissions.

The desire to boost turnout, rig the vote, and ensure full control over the voting process was clearly expressed. This was done through the active promotion of early voting. The authorities actively campaigned for early voting before and during the early voting days (February 20 to 24). They organized pickets,⁷² entertaining mass events,⁷³ and ideological meetings with students.⁷⁴ They also held 'single awareness-raising days' for labor collectives⁷⁵ and posted extensively on social media⁷⁶ and in local pro-government media.⁷⁷

Practical steps were taken from 20 to 24 February to organize mass participation in voting. This included mobilizing pensioners,⁷⁸ athletes,⁷⁹ public servants, and employees of state-funded organizations and enterprises. Students and parents of schoolchildren were particularly instrumentalized in the educational institutions. High school students were stationed at the entrance of the building where the polling stations were located. They were offering to guide voters to the polling station. State-funded organization heads reported to higher officials on high turnout during early voting.⁸⁰ School directors had an early voting 'schedule' for their subordinates and reported to the education department.

To encourage early voting participation, authorities have traditionally used both incentives and threats against voters. For instance, students were promised a day off from school if they voted early instead of attending classes. They were also warned of academic consequences if they refused to vote early.⁸¹ Election commissioners gave stationery and constitution books as gifts to first-time and early-voting youth. Some other voters also received gifts.⁸² Some factories, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities have reportedly threatened workers with employment contract non-renewal if they did not vote early. Those residing in dormitories, both students and workers, were warned that they may not be allocated a bed or room in the upcoming year. Dormitory duty officers reportedly visited the rooms with a list of residents who did not participate in early voting. Mass voting by prisoners sentenced to restriction of freedom in open-type correction facilities is also a known occurrence.

A resident of Homiel' Oblast⁸³ was reported for taking a photo of a ballot paper on the last day of early voting, which is considered an administrative offense. The EC, as amended on

⁷² "Pickets in 'support of the elections' took place in various provinces of Minsk Oblast":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114448>

⁷³ "Every effort has been thrown at promoting early voting": <https://spring96.org/ru/news/114518>

⁷⁴ "Across the Mahilioŭ Oblast, students are 'strongly advised' to vote early":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114513>

⁷⁵ "The week leading up to the vote in Viciebsk Oblast": <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114512>

⁷⁶ "The first day of early voting in Hrodna Oblast": <https://spring96.org/ru/news/114465>

⁷⁷ "Almost all local nomenclature representatives in Rahačoŭ voted early":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114540>

⁷⁸ "A 'walking tour' of polling stations": <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114535>

⁷⁹ "Team up to vote, and no pictures of ballots": <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114494>

⁸⁰ "Homiel' Oblast leads two days into early voting ": <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114493>

⁸¹ "Across the Mahilioŭ Oblast, students are 'strongly advised' to vote early":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114513>

⁸² "Calendars, constitution books, and... tea are used to attract people to polling stations in Brest Oblast":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114539>

⁸³ Single Voting Day: timeline of events and prosecutions: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114549>

4 March 2023, prohibits photographing ballots.⁸⁴ This innovation appears to be the state's response to the revelation of fraudulent results in the 2020 presidential election. Voters took photos of their ballots and submitted them to the *Golos* platform for counting.⁸⁵ However, prosecutions for photographing ballots started long before the implementation of this restriction. Arrest was reported for photographing a ballot paper was recorded during the 2022 referendum. Although there was no ban on photographing the ballot in the EC, a voter was arbitrarily detained and prosecuted under Article 24.23 of the Administrative Offenses Code of Belarus for allegedly conducting 'single-person picketing' by putting two ticks in the ballot.⁸⁶

ELECTION DAY VOTING (INCLUDING MOBILE VOTING) AND VOTE TABULATION

Turnout

The authorities view voter turnout as evidence of general legitimacy, in the tradition of authoritarian states. Elections often become plebiscitary procedures. Going to the polling station is seen as evidence of trust in the state. The authorities therefore make special efforts to organize a high voter turnout and create an image of mass voter activity. This is achieved through administrative coercion, as described above. Turnout figures are only consistently announced by CEC on election day. However, without independent observers, it is impossible to assess the accuracy of the reported figures.

Time on Election Day, February 25, 2024	Official turnout
9:00	43.64%
12:00	50.97%
14:00	59.17%
16:00	65.40%
18:00	70.29%
20:00	73.09%

Many voters who came to the polling station at the end of the voting day reported that there were very few signatures on the registration sheets. This is suspicious, as the declared turnout was 73%. On average, at least 10 of the 15 lines on the sheet should be filled in.

⁸⁴ Art. 52 of EC prohibits taking the issued ballot outside the polling place and taking photos or videos of the completed ballot.

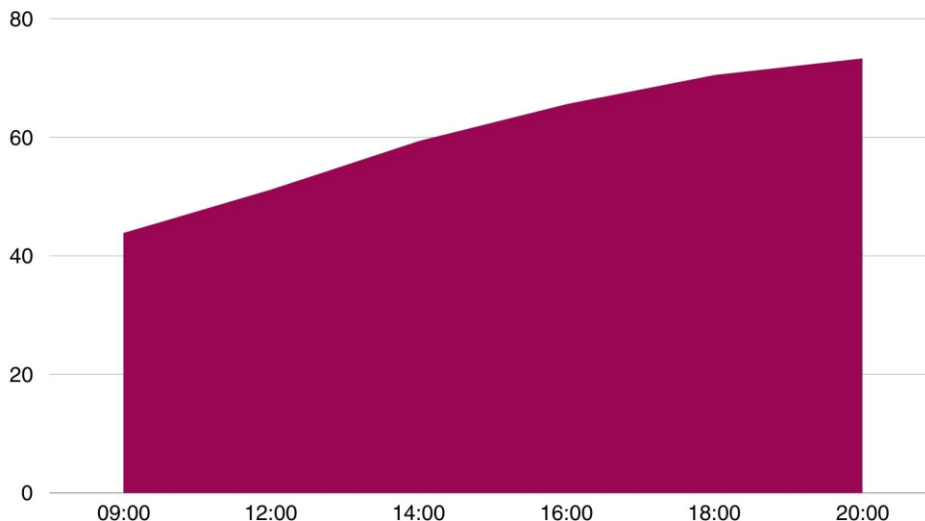
⁸⁵ The *Golos* platform: <https://belarus2020.org/home>

⁸⁶ Referendum 2022: Analytical report of the expert mission on the evaluation of the constitutional referendum, <https://referendum2022.spring96.org/en/news/106966>

Although early voting turnout in 2024 was the highest of any House of Representatives cadence, the final official turnout is the lowest of the previous five-year campaigns, even lower than the 2018 local councils election campaign.

	2024	2022 (referendum)	2020 (presidential elections)	2019 (House of Representatives elections)	2018 (local elections)
turnout	73.09%	78.63%	84.30%	77.40%	77.23%

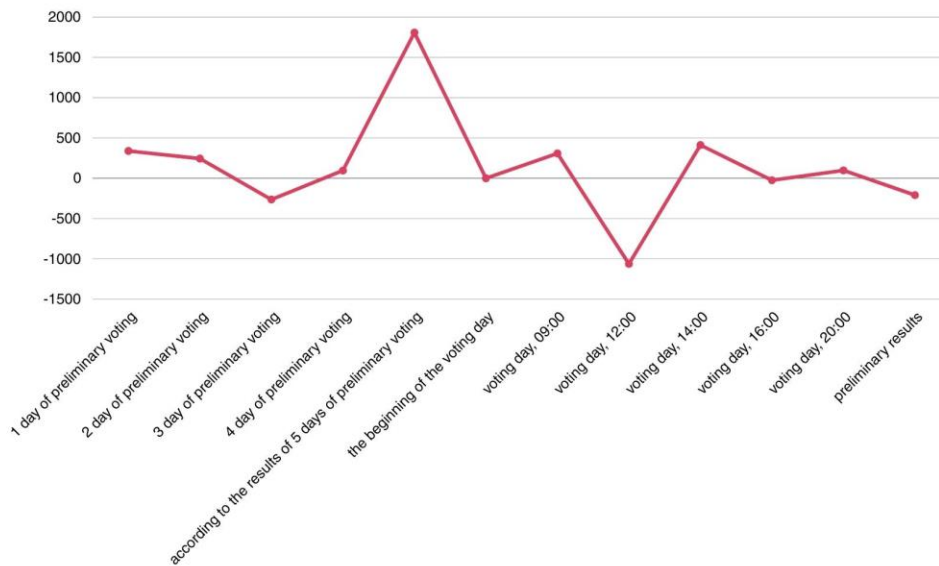
% OF THE OFFICIAL TURNOUT ON THE SINGLE VOTING DAY



The CEC also reported on the change in the total number of voters. Article 21 of the EC requires that voter lists be prepared 15 days before election day (two days in case of temporary housing locations such as hospitals), but also allows for changes to the total number of voters, including on election day (for voters not included in the voter list but registered within the polling station’s precinct). At the same time, the disorderly nature of significant changes in this list suggests either carelessness in compiling lists based on the database of citizens’ place of registration or manipulation:

	Total number of voters	Difference with previous value
Initial figure announced by CEC	6,913,965	
Day 1 of early voting	6,913,626	339
Day 2 of early voting	6,913,382	244
Day 3 of early voting	6,913,646	-264
Day 4 of early voting	6,913,550	96
Total in five days of early voting	6,911,742	1,808
Start of voting day	6,911,742	0
9:00	6,911,434	308
12:00	6,912,497	-1.063
14:00	6,912,085	412
16:00	6,912,110	-25
20:00	6,912,115	-5
Preliminary results	6,912,221	-106

THE DYNAMICS OF THE NUMBER OF VOTERS COMPARED TO THE ONE ORIGINALLY ANNOUNCED BY CEC



Voting conditions

The repressive environment,⁸⁷ along with the ongoing harassment⁸⁸ and coerced public apologies⁸⁹ of protesters who objected to the official results of the 2020 elections, as well as the public initiation of criminal proceedings for allegedly ‘attempting to disrupt’ the 2022 referendum,⁹⁰ were intended to demonstrate to society that expressing any criticism or dissent during the 2024 elections* was unacceptable.

The 2024 elections* were held with an increased presence of law enforcement agencies, in the continuation of that logic. Aliaksandr Kupchenia, the head of the Public Security Police Directorate for Law Enforcement and Crime Prevention, held a press conference⁹¹ dedicated to ensuring security during the elections. He discussed special police officer training for responding to electoral process violations and the formation of ‘voluntary vigilantes’ for the elections* from BRSM members and police veterans. STV, a state-financed TV channel, released a video demonstrating how police officers were going to detain protesters or voters who attempted to take pictures of their ballots at polling stations.⁹²

The changes made to the electoral legislation have resulted in the state not establishing polling stations abroad. This has deprived a significant part of the politically active population, including those who left the country due to the risk of arbitrary persecution, as well as people for whom traveling to Belarus for various reasons may be burdensome, of the opportunity to exercise their voting rights. The state allocated only one polling station in Minsk for "citizens who permanently reside abroad." The CEC reported that only 6 people had voted there by 5 pm on February 25.⁹³ There was no opportunity to participate in elections* for citizens who did not have permanent residence abroad and feared persecution.

Police officers were present at all polling stations,⁹⁴ and video surveillance was installed. Panic buttons were also provided for commission members.⁹⁵ However, the polling stations were equipped with open booths, which allowed for monitoring of activities inside. In 2020, the practice of prohibiting taking pictures in voting booths was introduced as an anti-epidemic

⁸⁷ See the campaign's report "Situation before the 2024 elections*":

<https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/113507>

⁸⁸ Since the start of the 2020 election campaign, Viasna HRC has registered over 4,500 convictions and at least 5,736 individuals (including those suspected, charged, or convicted) in politically motivated criminal cases. See <https://spring96.org/en/news/114277>

⁸⁹ *Mediazona Belarus*, "A channel linked to law enforcement officials releases a video of a female protester kissing a red and green flag" February 7, 2024, <https://strangling-rods-355181.appspot.com/news/2024/02/07/kiss>

⁹⁰ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/114498>

⁹¹ Video of the press conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFkePOy2gq0>

⁹² STV, "The Interior Ministry is preparing for potential disruptions during the elections. Will 2020 happen again?", February 18, 2024, <https://ctv.by/kak-obespechat-bezopasnost-na-vyborah>

⁹³ *BelTA*, "CEC reported on the number of Belarusians living abroad who participated in the elections," February 25, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/skolko-prozhivajuschih-za-rubezhom-belorusov-prinjali-uchastie-v-vyborah-rasskazali-v-tsik-617665-2024/>

⁹⁴ CEC (@cikbelarus), "Friendly and helpful. Internal Affairs officers are on duty at all polling stations to protect public order," Telegram, February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2233>

⁹⁵ CEC (@cikbelarus), "Since February 19, police have been protecting all polling stations, Karpenka says", Telegram, February 24, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2182>

measure. However, it has now become an accepted measure to increase scrutiny of voter behavior, particularly attempts to photograph the ballot.

However, the 2024 elections* were preceded by extensive activity from the CEC, executive committees, and public institutions, such as educational and awareness-raising events on 'Patriotic Education of Youth'. The workers at educational institutions that housed polling stations organized concerts and other entertainment⁹⁶ to create a festive atmosphere⁹⁷ around the elections, despite the absence of political competition.⁹⁸ Still, these events aimed to shape an ideologically correct stance and encourage people to vote, rather than provide substantive explanations of the powers of the authorities being formed at various levels. The state media covered the elections* in a similar fashion. In the months leading up to the election, experts observed manipulative rhetoric and disinformation in state media aimed at discrediting political opponents of the authorities, democratic elections in the West, independent international observers, etc. It is important to note that the lack of direct access to independent media within the country creates an imbalance in the coverage of key societal issues, leaving no opportunity to respond to accusations or express alternatives to pro-state positions.⁹⁹

Concerning the accessibility of buildings and premises where polling stations were located for people with reduced mobility, it has been reported that not all polling stations met the required standards for special equipment such as ramps, lowered thresholds, and doorways with a width of at least 0.9 m. Additionally, not all precinct commissions were provided with personnel who could assist individuals in accessing the polling station.

Irregularities were reported in closed polling stations. A patient at Rahačou Central District Hospital reported that voters were threatened with discharge from the hospital and other problems if they did not vote at a closed polling station.¹⁰⁰

In general, the voting conditions for the 2024 elections* were designed to maximize control over the voting process, suppress dissent, and ensure the appearance of legitimacy and public support. However, these conditions severely limited the fundamental democratic principles and rights of citizens.

⁹⁶ See, for example, <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114518>

⁹⁷ CEC (@cikbelarus), "Elections are not only an important political event. For Belarusians, it's a holiday," Telegram, February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/cikbelarus/2211>

⁹⁸ See the findings of the Analytical report on the results of monitoring the election campaigning: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/114587>

⁹⁹ Examples of blatant disinformation by the CEC head:

https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/60561.html?_gl=1*fnloej*_ga*MTAwNzQwNzk5Ny4xNjc5OTI0MDQy*_ga_B8LJ3JQEWY*MTcwNzY1MzQ1MC4zMy4xLjE3MDczOTM0NjAuNTAuMC4w,

<https://rec.gov.by/ru/from-telegram-ru/view/vse-mezhdunarodnye-nabljudateli-kotorye-priedut-v-belarus-na-vybory-deputatov-v-edinyj-den-golosovaniya-1402-2024/>; see also

https://factcheck.by/news/by_youtube_elections_jan-feb2024/,

https://factcheck.by/news/belarusian_cso_disinformation_dec2023/,

https://factcheck.by/news/belarusian_cso_disinformation_jan2024/

¹⁰⁰ *Flagshtok - Homelshchyna* (@Flagshtok), "In Rahačou, the hospital administration required patients under treatment to vote. Those who refused were threatened with discharge from the hospital and other consequences," February 25, 2024, <https://t.me/Flagshtok/11507>

Announcement of voting results

Twenty-four hours after the polling stations closed, only the names of the elected House of Representatives candidates were known. It was confirmed that all 1,284 local Councils of Deputies had been successfully formed, with fewer councils elected in 2024 than in previous campaigns.¹⁰¹

After 25 days from Election* Day, "Election Results Information" is finally made available. The CEC changed the format for presenting results compared to previous campaigns:

- The 'Election Results Information' for the House of Representatives elections* does not provide data on the number of votes each candidate received, categorized by constituency.¹⁰² Similarly, data for local councils does not include a breakdown by oblast, nor does it provide information on the total number of voters, including those who received ballots and participated in voting in different formats. There is also no general information on those who voted early, at their location, or on election day at polling stations, which was previously published.¹⁰³

- The "information on election results" for both the House of Representatives and local councils is incomplete. It does not include data on the number of votes cast against all candidates or the number of spoiled ballots.¹⁰⁴

The lack of publication of data on polling stations is the most significant evidence of electoral fraud. The CEC only provides generalized data at the TEC level. Without this data, statistical analysis of the results is nearly impossible. However, even general data indicates varying levels of "mathematical" proficiency at the oblast level. The authorities have become skilled at manipulating the results to make them appear natural. The 'calculator method' is commonly used and involves selecting a percentage, such as the turnout or votes cast for a candidate, and then adjusting the number of voters accordingly. This number typically coincides with the number of signatures on voter registration lists or ballots in a normal election. In the early days of the 'calculator system,' 'perfect figures' were found in the results. These figures were obtained when the number of voters exactly corresponded to the percentage without rounding. For example, if there were 100,000 voters and the percentage was 50.55%, the perfect figure would be 50,550. Currently, the figures appear more natural. However, it is presumed that Minsk and Minsk Oblast election commissions round the numbers more confidently, while other regions try to stick to what looks like 'recommended' figures.

	Brest Oblast	Viciebsk Oblast	Homiel Oblast	Hrodna Oblast	Minsk Oblast	Mahilioŭ Oblast	Minsk	Republic of Belarus
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¹⁰¹ See Preliminary analytical report on the results of monitoring the elections of deputies on a single voting day on February 25, 2024, p. 27: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/114638>

¹⁰² See the voting results presentation format for comparison.

¹⁰³ See a sample summary of the twenty-eighth convocation's local council election results: <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/folderForLinks/elections-ms28-elect-56-57.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ CEC, Information on the results of the House of Representatives election, access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat64.pdf>,
CEC, Information on the results of elections to local councils of deputies, access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat65-66.pdf>

Total number of voters	985,739	842,191	1,051,624	735,435	1,136,524	783,925	1,290,547	6,825,985
Number of voters who participated in voting	757,821	642,186	799,108	568,625	847,324	604,727	794,646	5,014,437
Percentage indicated by the CEC (rounded to two decimal places)	76.88	76.25	75.99	77.32	74.55	77.14	61.57	73.46
Estimated percentage rounded to three decimal places	76.878	76.252	75.988	77.318	74.554	77.141	61.574	73.461
Differences to be rounded off	0.002	-0.002	0.002	0.002	-0.004	-0.001	-0.004	-0.001

The CEC website did not publish the names of the elected deputies. The state media provides a list of deputies to the House of Representatives,¹⁰⁵ while the websites of the respective executive committees contain name lists of deputies elected to local councils of various levels. However, some executive committees did not disclose the lists of deputies of the councils, even at the oblast level. For instance, there is no information about elected deputies on the website sections of Minsk, Mahilioŭ, and Brest Oblast Executive Committees dedicated to the representative authorities.¹⁰⁶ Lists of deputies' names to the lower-level councils are also published fragmentarily.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ BelTA, "CEC publishes names of deputies of the House of Representatives of the eighth convocation," February 26, 2024, <https://www.belta.by/society/view/tsik-obnarodoval-familii-deputatov-palaty-predstavitelej-vosmogo-sozyva-617780-2024>

¹⁰⁶ Minsk City Executive Committee, "Information on the Minsk Oblast Council of Deputies," access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.minsk-region.gov.by/sovet-deputatov/>
Mahilioŭ Oblast Executive Committee, "Mahilioŭ Oblast Council of Deputies," access date: March 21, 2024, <https://mogilev-region.gov.by/category/predstavitelnaya-vlast/mogilevskiy-oblastnoy-sovet-deputatov>,
Brest Oblast Executive Committee, "Structure of the Brest Oblast Council of Deputies and its bodies," access date: March 21, 2024, <https://brest-region.gov.by/ru/struktura-oblastnogo-soveta-deputatov-i-ego-organov-354-ru/>

¹⁰⁷ Minsk City Executive Committee, "The Minsk City Election Commission summarized the results of the 29th convocation's deputy elections for the Minsk City Council," access date: March 21, 2024, <https://minsk.gov.by/gorsovet/mingorsovet/materialy-iz-sljajdera/261-20240228-itogi-vyborov-deputatov-mingorsoveta>

Based on the published lists of deputies, it appears that the newly elected House of Representatives and – at least – Oblast Councils of Deputies are largely composed of individuals from the 'nomenclature' class, with the majority of elected candidates holding senior positions.

The 29th convocation of the House of Representatives now includes:

- 37 women (33% of the entire deputy corps),
- only one deputy under the age of 31. This may be surprising given the emphasis on working with youth at all stages of the election campaign, active education through the activities of pro-government youth structures, and the creation of the Youth Council under the CEC. This result may provide additional evidence that the educational activities mentioned above are ritualistic in nature and do not aim to create a space for the free initiative of young people, including those who are not members of pro-government associations;
- 20 re-elected (of 20 running) deputies from the 7th convocation, which accounts for 18.2% of the registered candidates;

- 27 re-elected deputies of local councils of the previous convocation (24.5%).¹⁰⁸

Based on CEC data on special campaign accounts for the formation of the election campaign funds for persons nominated as candidates for deputies,¹⁰⁹ 29% of candidates who won seats in the House of Representatives did not open such accounts. It appears that they 'successfully' conducted their election campaigns without funds allocated for this purpose under the established procedure.¹¹⁰ NB: Shortly after the release of the campaign's preliminary analytical report making this assumption,¹¹¹ the website containing the candidate campaigning account information became inaccessible.¹¹²

In local councils of deputies:

- The proportion of women ranges from 27.3% in municipal councils (referring to cities of oblast subordination) to 54% in settlement councils, with a constant tendency of the number of women in the representative body to decrease with increasing level (29.4% of women in the highest – oblast and Minsk city – level councils);¹¹³
- citizens under 31 years of age make up 3.2% of the total number of elected deputies (a total of 4 deputies under 31 years of age were elected to the oblast and Minsk City Councils);
- re-elected representatives of the local councils of the previous convocation generally constitute 50% of the total corps.

Hrodna Oblast Executive Committee, "Deputies," access date: February 28, 2024 [no longer available], https://grodnorik.gov.by/ru/grodno_district_council_of_deputies/,%20https://gomelisp.gov.by/leaders/representative-reign/

¹⁰⁸ CEC, Information on the composition of elected House of Representatives members, access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat70.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ <https://belarusbank.by/ru/33139/41509/41530>

¹¹⁰ See Analytical report on the results of monitoring the election campaigning: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/114587>

¹¹¹ See Preliminary analytical report on the results of monitoring the elections of deputies on a single voting day on February 25, 2024: <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/114638>

¹¹² <https://belarusbank.by/ru/33139/41509/41530>

¹¹³ CEC, Information on the composition of the elected deputies of the local councils of deputies, access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat71-72.pdf>

Position / Oblast Council of Deputies	Homieĺ	Hrodna	Viciebsk
Total number of deputies	57	60	60
Director / Deputy Director / Head of organization	39 (68,4%)	41 (68,3%)	41 (68,3%)
Senior position in a local Council of Deputies / Executive Committee	7 (12,3%)	11 (18,3%)	8 (13,3%)
Medical director	5 (8,8%)	4 (6,7%)	3 (5%)
Senior position in a pro-government public association	2	-	3
"Belaya Rus" party member	28 (49,1%)	27 (45%)	31 (51,7%)
Communist Party of Belarus member	3	2	1
Non-partisan	24 (42,1%)	31 (51,7%)	25 (41,7%)

NEWLY ELECTED DEPUTIES

Career path of elected individuals



Homiel Oblast Council,
57 deputies

Hrodna Oblast Council,
60 deputies

Viciebsk Oblast Council,
60 deputies

- Director / Deputy Director / Head of organization
- senior position in the local Council of Deputies / Executive Committee
- Medical director
- Senior position in a pro-government public association
- other

NEWLY ELECTED DEPUTIES

Party affiliation of elected individuals



Homiel Oblast Council,
57 deputies

Hrodna Oblast Council,
60 deputies

Viciebsk Oblast Council,
60 deputies

- Belaya Rus Belarusian Party, registered on May 2, 2023
- Other parties (Communist Party, Labor and Justice Party, Liberal Democratic Party)
- Non-partisan

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The situation regarding appeals of electoral rights violations in the 2024 elections* contrasts with previous campaigns. It appears that there were very few complaints and appeals during this election cycle. As a result, the CEC chose not to publish the section on its website, which is a departure from previous elections. During this election campaign, any disagreement with violations was perceived as unsafe due to the prevailing atmosphere of fear. Additionally, there were no independent candidates or opposition political parties to appeal against violations of the rights of their representatives, particularly in the process of forming election commissions.

The CEC reported¹¹⁴ that during the House of Representatives candidate registration stage, 25 individuals were denied registration. Of those, 5 filed complaints, with 4 being considered by election commissions and 1 by the court. All complaints were eventually dismissed.

INFORMATION on the Consideration of Complaints against the Refusal to Register Candidates for the House of Representatives Deputies

Councils of Deputies	Number of refusals to register	Number of appeals considered			
		by election commissions		by courts	
		total	dismissed	total	Dismissed
Brest Oblast	5	2	2	1	1
Viciebsk Oblast	2	1	1		
Homiel' Oblast	3				
Hrodna Oblast	3				
Minsk Oblast	3				

¹¹⁴ CEC, Consideration of Complaints Against Refusal to Register Candidates for House of Representatives Deputies, access date March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat42.pdf>

Mahilioŭ Oblast	1				
Minsk	8	1	1		
TOTAL	25	4	4	1	1

The Brest¹¹⁵ and Viciebsk Oblast Executive Committees have published decisions regarding complaints against refusals to register candidates for the House of Representatives on their websites.

“The Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission denied S.A. Nishchymenka’s registration¹¹⁶ as a candidate for the House of Representatives in Akciabrski electoral district No. 20, according to their decision No. 14 of 01.02.2024. S.A. Nishchymenka’s registration was refused due to a failure to provide the information required in the income and property declaration. The return reflects the income earned from December 1, 2022, through December 1, 2023.

Section 1 of the declaration should indicate income received from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022, under paragraph 3 of the Resolution of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus No. 34 of November 21, 2023, which clarifies the procedure for declaring income and property during the elections of deputies on the single voting day on February 25, 2024. No declaration showing income earned between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022 has been provided.”

The Brest Oblast Election Commission reviewed two complaints regarding the decisions to deny the registration of candidates for the House of Representatives.

- 1) Kobryn election district No. 12 denied A.V. Khilko's registration as a candidate for deputy to the House of Representatives. The registration was refused because the signature lists for the candidate's nomination contained over 15% unreliable signatures out of the total number of verified signatures.¹¹⁷
- 2) T.V. Perapialiak was denied registration as a candidate for deputy of the House of Representatives in Pružany election district No. 9. Mr. Perapialiak has not provided documents on the withdrawal of Ukrainian citizenship, which was the reason for the refusal to register.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Decisions No. 9 and 10 of the Brest Oblast Election Commission of 02.02.2024: <https://www.brest-region.gov.by/ru/edg-2024-ru/page/1>

¹¹⁶ Decision No. 14 of the Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission of 01.02.2024: <https://vitebsk-region.gov.by/ru/vybory-2024/>

¹¹⁷ Decision No. 10 of the Brest Oblast Election Commission of 02.02.2024, <https://www.brest-region.gov.by/uploads/files/EDG/Reshenie-oblastnoj-izbiratelnoj-komissii-10.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Decision No. 9 of the Brest Regional Election Commission of 02.02.2024, <https://www.brest-region.gov.by/uploads/files/EDG/Reshenie-oblastnoj-izbiratelnoj-komissii-9.pdf>

The CEC reported¹¹⁹ that during the local councils of deputies' candidate registration stage, 119 individuals were denied registration. Of those, 9 filed complaints, with 8 being considered by election commissions and 1 by the court. 6 complaints were dismissed, and 3 were not considered on the merits.

INFORMATION on the Consideration of Complaints against the Refusal to Register Candidates for the Local Councils of Deputies

Councils of Deputies	Number of refusals to register	Number of appeals considered				
		by election commissions			by courts	
		total	dismissed	dismissed without hearing on the merits	total	dismissed
oblast councils and Minsk City Council	20					
regional councils	47	3	2	1		
municipal councils (cities of oblast subordination)	20	2	1	1		
municipal councils (cities of regional subordination)						
settlement councils						
rural councils	32	3	2	1	1	1
TOTAL	119	8	5	3	1	1

¹¹⁹ CEC, Consideration of Complaints Against Refusal to Register Local Council of Deputies Candidates, access date: March 21, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/uploads/files/Pdf/2024/stat43-44.pdf>

The Homiel' Oblast Election Commission received¹²⁰ an appeal regarding two refusals of registration to local Councils. The regional election commission's decision to reject the registration of a candidate for deputy to the regional council due to a violation of the income declaration submission procedure was deemed valid. There was no information on whether the decision of the Oblast Election Commission was appealed to a court. The complaint against the rural election commission's refusal to register a candidate for the rural council was not considered because the candidate's nomination lists contained more than 15% unreliable signatures. The Regional Election Commission, which has authority over the Rural Election Commission, was deemed responsible for addressing the complaint by the Oblast Election Commission.¹²¹

The Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission, in its Decision No. 15¹²² of February 1, 2024, "*denied registration to V.V. Hrun tou as a candidate for the Viciebsk Municipal Council of Deputies. The registration was refused due to unreliable information provided by V.V. Hrun tou in his income and property declaration. Paragraph 2 of Section II, 'Information on Property' of the declaration does not contain any information about a car registered with the traffic police on 24.12.2015. Report No. 52/10/2236 of the traffic police department of the Directorate of Internal Affairs of Viciebsk Oblast Executive Committee dated January 17, 2024, confirms this fact. Based on the provided certificate of car retirement dated 31.01.2024, the car was removed from registration due to disposition between 01.01.2024 and 31.01.2024. On 12.01.2024, when filling out the declaration, Mr Hrun tou was still the owner of the vehicle.*"

Ihar Karpenka, Chairman of the Central Election Commission,¹²³ stated that there were "12 complaints filed regarding refusals to register candidates, including 2 appeals to the courts. The complaints were dismissed because the nominated individuals did not comply with the requirements of the legislation regarding the number of valid signatures when nominated by citizens, the list of required documents, submission of false data on income and property, and non-compliance with the requirements of the law."

¹²⁰ *Gomel Pravda*, "The Oblast Election Commission considered two complaints from applicants for local council candidates at a meeting," February 1, 2024, <https://gp.by/novosti/obshchestvo/news281561.html>

¹²¹ See Analytical report on the results of monitoring the nomination and registration of candidates, p. 25, <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/news/114313>

¹²² Decision No. 15 of the Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission of 01.02.2024, <https://vitebsk-region.gov.by/ru/vybory-2024/>

¹²³ CEC, "Ihar Karpenka informs international observers about the registration of candidates for deputy," February 24, 2024, <https://rec.gov.by/ru/from-telegram-ru/view/igor-karpenko-rasskazal-mezhdunarodnym-nabljudateljam-o-registratsii-kandidatov-v-deputaty-1547-2024>

As of February 7, 2024, six campaign-related complaints have been filed with the courts and dismissed.¹²⁴ Leanid Anfimau,¹²⁴ Head of Staff of the CIS Election Observer Mission,¹²⁵ reported this.¹²⁶

The Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission, by Decision No. 9¹²⁷ dated December 27, 2023, dismissed the complaint¹²⁸ against Decision No. 3 dated December 22, 2023, of the Viciebsk Municipal Election Commission, which refused to register the electoral association that nominated I.G. Yaskevich as a candidate for the Viciebsk Municipal Council of Deputies. The complaint was dismissed without a hearing on the merits because the applicant missed the deadline for filing it. *“The decision of the Viciebsk Municipal Election Commission was made on December 22, 2023. The complaint was sent on November 26, 2023 [left unedited for spelling or grammar], as evidenced by the date on the application of I.G. Yaskievich and the date of registration in the documents control register.”*

On March 1, 2024, the CEC held a meeting¹²⁹ to discuss the results and outcomes of the elections. During the meeting, the chairpersons of the Oblast and Minsk City election commissions spoke, among others. The chairpersons announced information on complaints and appeals received. The chairman of the Brest Regional Election Commission reported *“that a candidate for deputy of the Novyja Zasimavičy Rural Council filed a complaint with the Novyja Zasimavičy Rural Election Commission of Pružany district, requesting a recount of the votes due to alleged violations of electoral legislation. The applicant was advised to apply to the Pružany Regional Election Commission for a decision on vote counting, as this is within their jurisdiction. He has not exercised that right.”*

Viciebsk, Minsk, Hrodna, Homieĺ Oblast, and Minsk City Election Commissions did not receive any complaints about the election results.

¹²⁴ STV, “No OSCE, so what?” How Belarus is preparing for elections and what August 2020 taught us: Interview with Leanid Anfimau”, February 11, 2024, <https://ctv.by/ne-budet-obse-nu-tak-hto-kak-v-belarusi-gotovyatsya-k-vyboram-i-chemu-nauchil-avgust-2020-go>

¹²⁵ Supreme Court, “2024 Election Campaign: Meeting between Valery Kalinkavich, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus, and Leanid Anfimau, Head of Staff of the CIS Observer Mission”, February 7, 2024, https://court.gov.by/ru/justice/press_office/4f8509553b67469c.html.

¹²⁶ See <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/114356>

¹²⁷ Decision No. 9 of the Viciebsk Oblast Election Commission of 27.12.2023, <https://vitebsk-region.gov.by/uploads/files/28-12-23-10.docx>

¹²⁸ See <https://elections2024.spring96.org/ru/news/113814>

¹²⁹ CEC, “Central Commission Meeting,” March 1, 2024, <https://www.rec.gov.by/ru/news-ru/view/zasedanie-tsentralnoj-komissii-1613/>