

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2025

Right to participate in public affairs

Expert commentary¹

The score:	1.8
<i>Including scores by component:</i>	
● Participation in public affairs in non-electoral contexts	1.4 -0.1
● The right to vote and be elected	2.8
● Access to public service	1.1

A description of the baseline situation regarding the realisation of the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs can be found in the 2019 [review](#). The overall score for 2025 remained unchanged, reflecting the persistence of systemic restrictions and the absence of qualitative improvements. During the reporting period, **experts particularly noted:**

- the restriction of public access to the schedule of court hearings on the website of the Supreme Court, which further limited the possibilities for monitoring the activities of the judiciary and effectively deprived the public of the opportunity to attend proceedings;
 - the lack of State interest in ensuring meaningful participation even of pro-government organisations in processes of engagement with international mechanisms, as well as the performative nature of the corresponding national events and procedures;
 - the comprehensive normative consolidation of the ideological sphere through Directive No. 12 and Directive No. 11, establishing an extensive system of ideological control extending to both the public and private sectors.
- **Participation in public affairs in non-electoral contexts**

Regarding the indicator of ensuring a real opportunity to participate in shaping the decision-making agenda and discussing draft legislation, acts and policies, the majority of experts maintained their

¹ 'Expert' and other nouns of the masculine grammatical gender are used in a gender-neutral sense and refer to all genders.



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previous score, noting the absence of systemic changes amidst a mix of isolated positive and persistent negative practices. Overall, the opportunity to participate in public affairs at this level remains critically limited. With regard to 2025, experts note:

- the earlier-than-usual publication of the legislative drafting plan for 2026 (in November 2025), which hypothetically provided stakeholders with additional time to participate in the adoption of planned legislative acts and their concepts. Furthermore, the plan included a draft law on foreign grant aid and the concept of a law on volunteering, which had previously been on hold,² – indicating partial consideration of proposals submitted during public consultations. In 2025, there were also isolated examples of a more comprehensive approach to public consultations: in particular, during the consultation on the draft waste management strategy, not only the text of the draft was published, but also an explanatory note and a financial and economic justification for it.³
- an increase in discussion activity on the legal forum, which became a more user-friendly platform following an update: despite the limited number of draft documents put forward for discussion, the average number of comments per draft reached its highest level since the platform's inception. At the same time, experts note that such activity may be partly artificial; furthermore, it is still not accompanied by the systematic publication of the results of the discussions.
- A separate positive example relates to the extension of the public consultation period following citizens' appeals in the case of the draft Health Code⁴ (although during the review period, issues were noted regarding the actual accessibility of this draft⁵). At the same time, there have also been instances of direct non-compliance with existing regulations: for example, the timeframe applied for the public consultation on the draft Environmental Code did not meet the legal requirements for acts regulating activities with a potential harmful impact on the environment.⁶

A significant negative development during the reporting period was the cessation, as of March 2025, of public access to the electronic schedule of court hearings,⁷ which critically limits the ability to

² [Belarus: 2026 to bring new bills on volunteering and foreign aid](#)

³ <https://forumpravo.by/publichnoe-obsuzhdenie-proektov-mpa/forum15/17731>

⁴ <https://pravo.by/novosti/novosti-pravo-by/2024/december/79829/>

⁵ <https://www.belhalat.news/guides/minzdrav-napisal-kodeks-o-zdravoohranenii---i-spryatal-ego>

⁶ See paragraph 5 of the Regulations on the procedure for organising and conducting public consultations on draft environmentally significant decisions, environmental impact assessment reports, strategic environmental assessment reports, the recording of adopted environmentally significant decisions, and the participation of legal entities and individuals, including sole traders, in such consultations:
<https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=C21600458>

⁷ [Human rights situation in Belarus. March 2025](#)



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monitor law enforcement practices and effectively excludes the participation of members of the public in civil proceedings, where such participation had previously remained possible, at least formally.

Overall, experts note the persistence of opacity in decision-making processes and the absence of effective mechanisms ensuring meaningful public participation in the discussion of issues of public importance, including the practice of publishing the results of such discussions and the rationale for decisions taken.

Under the indicator assessing the consideration of the views of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making on key issues of public and social life, no significant changes were recorded; experts maintain the low scores of previous periods. It is noted that, despite the formal creation of channels for participation through privileged pro-government organisations, such structures do not perform the function of genuine representation of the interests of the relevant groups and do not demonstrate signs of meaningful advocacy; the mechanisms established do not ensure genuine consideration of public opinion, and the participation channels themselves remain formal in nature.

The score under the indicator concerning the provision of information to stakeholders on the grounds, reasons and consequences of decisions taken has also remained unchanged. Experts note the persistence of negative practices, particularly in those areas where public participation is formally provided for, including the selective nature of the submission of draft regulatory legal acts for discussion and the generalised nature of the published results, which does not allow for an assessment of which proposals were taken into account and for what reasons. Furthermore, there is evidence of the continued institutionalisation of the ideological component in decision-making processes on matters of public importance (see below).

With regard to decision-making at the regional and international levels on a transparent and accountable basis with the participation of affected persons, the majority of experts likewise note no significant changes. At the same time, a deterioration was recorded in the promotion of participation of civil society actors in international mechanisms and forums. In particular, within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2025, for the first time throughout Belarus's participation, no alternative reports were submitted by organisations operating within the country; the discussion of UPR-related issues itself was integrated into events conducted within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.⁸

In the context of the effective dismantling of independent civil society within the country, participation of civil society actors in international processes continues to be carried out predominantly by organisations in exile – while such activity is accompanied by risks of persecution: during the reporting period, the practice of designating organisations engaged in international advocacy on human rights in Belarus as “extremist formations”, and their platforms and content as

⁸ <https://sdgs.by/zasedanie/zasedanie-soveta-po-ustojchivomu-razvitiyu-proshlo-v-minske/>



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“extremist materials”, persisted.⁹ In these circumstances, participation in international mechanisms is, to some extent, carried out in coalition formats, which, according to experts, is due, inter alia, to well-founded concerns regarding transnational repression against such organisations and associated individuals.

With regard to ensuring the free exchange of information and opinions on public and political matters between citizens, candidates and elected representatives, experts, while maintaining an overall low score, additionally note the continued practice of designating the personal pages of politicians and public figures as “extremist”.¹⁰ Such classification renders not only the expression of opinions on these platforms risky, but also access to the information posted there for individuals within the country.

- **The right to vote and be elected**

Experts maintained the previous scores, noting the absence of systemic, qualitative changes in the implementation of this right.

During the review period, the final stages of the seventh presidential election*¹¹ took place, including campaigning, early voting, voting on election day, the counting of votes and the announcement of results.¹² No changes were noted regarding the independence of bodies responsible for monitoring the conduct of elections.¹³ Violations concerning the regularity and predictability of electoral cycles had already been noted by experts in their commentary on the 2024 assessment.¹⁴

The lack of opportunities for the free formation of opinion and genuine choice is due to total administrative control at all stages of the election campaign, as well as the general situation of a dismantled civil and political space: the elimination of opposition parties, the systematic suppression of freedom of expression (including prosecution for private exchanges of views on matters of public

⁹ In particular, see the [designation](#) of the BHC website and Facebook account as ‘extremist materials’, and of the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, the ‘Femgroup Belarus’, ‘Partyzanka’ and ‘Christian Vision’ initiatives, among others, as ‘extremist groups’: <https://ekstremisty.xyz/orgs>

¹⁰ See, among others, [Viktor Babariko’s Facebook page designated as ‘extremist’](#); [Sergei Tikhanovsky’s website and social media accounts included in the list of ‘extremist materials’](#)

¹¹ “The term “elections*” in relation to the 2025 election campaign is used with an asterisk to emphasize the conventionality of this term, since any free and fair election campaign presupposes all conditions under which rights and freedoms are fully realized, including freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful meetings and associations, the right to participate in the governance of one’s state, freedom from discrimination, which are currently practically absent in Belarus.”: <https://elections2025.spring96.org/en/reports>

¹² See the reports on individual stages, as well as the final report, on the website of the ‘Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections’ campaign: <https://elections2025.spring96.org/en/reports>

¹³ See the expert commentary on the assessment of this right for 2024: https://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/11_right_to_participate_in_public_affairs_2024.pdf

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 5, 7



importance), restrictions on access to alternative information,¹⁵ the suppression of opportunities for grassroots mobilisation and free discussion of political programmes, as well as the absence of competitive rivalry even during the campaigning phase.¹⁶ Experts note the continuing practice of holding mass events involving pro-government bodies and with opaque funding, which are not formally classified as campaigning but in fact perform campaigning functions in support of the incumbent authorities.¹⁷

During the period under review, pressure on independent sociology intensified, including the criminal prosecution of sociologists on charges of ‘treason against the state’ for conducting research based on open data,¹⁸ as well as the designation of the ‘Belarusian Analytical Workshop’ as an ‘extremist organisation’.¹⁹ In a context where independent sociology within the country has already been effectively displaced and replaced by the activities of accredited, State-controlled organisations, these measures are aimed at further suppressing the remaining alternative sources of analysis – including those operating from abroad – and restricting access to them for audiences within the country.

Experts also drew attention to the short-term restriction on access to internet resources hosted outside the .by domain zone between 25 and 27 January 2025, coinciding with the voting and the days immediately preceding and following it, when the formal possibility of exchanging views remains.²⁰ Earlier, A. Lukashenko had explicitly pointed to the possibility of introducing such disproportionate restrictions.²¹

In 2025, the previously introduced restrictions on the right to vote and stand for election remained in place. Formally, persons in pre-trial detention were able to take part in the 2025 vote.²² No significant changes were recorded in the removal of barriers hindering the effective exercise of the right to vote.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 14

¹⁶ [Elections*2025. Final analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus](#)

¹⁷ See events held as part of the ‘Marathon of Unity’, in particular the gala concert ‘Time Has Chosen Us!’, with total estimated costs exceeding 3.5 million roubles: [Elections*2025. Final analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus; It is becoming increasingly difficult to surprise Belarusians, but this figure clearly can – they found out how much money was taken from the state budget for events praising Lukashenko](#)

¹⁸ [Three Minsk sociologists accused of ‘treason’ over their research](#)

¹⁹ <https://ekstremisty.xyz/orgs/288>

²⁰ [Freedom on the Net: Belarus](#)

²¹ [A country in a state of incommunicado. How the internet became a hostage to the authorities and how to break out of the blockade](#)

²² [Elections*2025. Final analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus](#)

Citizens abroad were still unable to express their will through voting: no polling stations were established outside the country.²³

In addition to the persistent atmosphere of repression that accompanied the entire election campaign, various forms of coercion to participate in the process were still observed, both during the signature collection stage and during the voting period.²⁴

The secrecy of the ballot and protection against pressure during voting continued not to be ensured. Alongside the above-mentioned practice of coercion to participate in early voting, an atmosphere of intimidation was maintained, including the excessive presence of police officers at polling stations, prohibitions on photographing and removing ballots, and the absence of curtains and other conditions necessary to ensure the secrecy of the vote.²⁵

No qualitative improvements were recorded in ensuring the transparent counting of votes and establishing the genuine will of the electorate. The vote count remained non-transparent in the absence of independent observers and the media. Furthermore, the turnout figures and final results published by the CEC indicate a high likelihood of manipulation of both turnout figures and voting results.²⁶

- **Access to public service**

In this component, experts note the adoption of policy documents formalising the conditions for strengthening control and repressive pressure across the entire administrative hierarchy. In particular, Directive No. 12 “On the Implementation of the Foundations of the Ideology of the Belarusian State” – the first comprehensive instrument regulating the ideological sphere – establishes, in addition to the “foundations of the ideology of the Belarusian State”, an institutionalised system of ideological control extending to “organisations of all forms of ownership” and implemented through an extensive network of specialised ideological structures covering the level of individual organisations, entire sectors of activity and territorial units. At the same time, a mandatory system of positions responsible for ideological work is introduced, with centralised coordination of appointments, dismissals and contract renewals. The heads of organisations and state bodies are held personally responsible for the implementation of ideological work.²⁷ Certain provisions of Directive No. 11 “On Improving the Functioning of the System of State Authorities and Administration, Strengthening Executive Discipline”, adopted in furtherance of Directive No. 12, further reinforce control mechanisms by

²³ [CEC: Belarus is not setting up polling stations abroad](#)

²⁴ [Elections*2025. Final analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus](#)

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 3, 43, 45–47

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 45–48

²⁷ https://president.gov.by/fp/v1/630/document-thumb_64630_original/64630.1744203438.7b044f240f.pdf; [Human Rights in Belarus: Key Trends in Public Policy: January – April'25](#)

establishing the priority of executive discipline in State policy and creating additional conditions for political interference and pressure on public officials in the exercise of their decision-making functions.²⁸

The partial renewal of the composition of the government in 2025, despite the official rhetoric about the arrival of a 'new generation',²⁹ was not accompanied by significant changes in the principle of appointing officials: rotation continues to be carried out predominantly among trusted civil servants, with a strong emphasis on their loyalty to the incumbent authorities.³⁰

²⁸ https://president.gov.by/fp/v1/439/document-thumb_64439_original/64439.1743582185.01065b8016.pdf;
ibid.

²⁹

<https://belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-novoe-pokolenie-kak-bylo-obeschano-segodnja-upravljaet-stranoj-701328-2025/>

³⁰ See also: [Technocrats under pressure: career trajectories and state control in Belarus's economic ministries](#); [Who controls the controllers? Special and control services in Belarus's public administration](#); [Law Enforcement Agencies and the Prosecutor's Office of Belarus: Careers Before/After 2020](#)



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