

Expert Assessments

BELARUS CHANGE TRACKER

(election edition)

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Lukashenka's cult of personality has intensified, and elections have turned into a mere formality.



Economic growth has been replaced by stagnation, but the authorities ignore this.



During elections, the authorities covertly increase pressure on society.

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SUMMARY

Military cooperation between Belarus and Russia has intensified. Minsk participated in joint nuclear exercises. Russia extended its “nuclear umbrella” to Belarusian territory, and both countries signed a treaty on mutual security guarantees. Attempts by Minsk to establish dialogue with the West through pardons for political prisoners and diplomatic initiatives failed against the backdrop of increased sanctions and isolation. At the same time, Belarus has been seeking to develop ties with non-Western partners, offering a common platform to counter “Western Hegemony”. Despite internal debates regarding the strategy of interacting with the Lukashenka regime on the issue of political prisoners, democratic forces continued to lobby for stronger sanctions and advocate for the interests of Belarusians’ mobility.

The winter 2024–25 presidential campaign in Belarus continued the trend of making electoral procedures a bureaucratic formality rather than a political event. Lukashenka’s cult of personality reached new levels with wide propagandistic celebrations of his 30th anniversary in power. Lukashenka revamped the political bloc of his administration and government, appointing more proactive and energetic officials to key positions. The democratic forces around Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya consolidated and strengthened their ideological unity, while those with alternative views found themselves excluded or less active within these structures.

Encouraged by rapid economic recovery, in the reporting period the government continued to actively intervene in the economy, controlling prices and deciding the fate of businesses, while also developing optimistic plans for future investments and associated advanced economic growth.

With significant foreign companies continuing to leave Belarus, new trade partners need to be found, not only in the “far arc” countries, but also in friendly China. Russia remains the main source of new loans.

The relationship between the authorities and society in the reporting period was heavily influenced by the announcement of the date of the next presidential election* (the term “elections” is commonly used by Belarusian experts to indicate the pseudo-character of the upcoming presidential

elections). Initially repressive in nature, it has now shifted towards an electoral “special operation” format with increased repression and intimidation of society. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that the Belarusian regime is making efforts to give external and internal observers the impression that the level of repression is decreasing.

From June 2024 to January 2025, the main narratives of the pro-democratic and pro-government speakers have not changed. The central points of political communication are still the war in Ukraine, the discrediting of the opposite political course and values, as well as the praise or criticism of the Lukashenka regime. However, the events of the last six months, such as waves of releases of political prisoners, the lifting of the incommunicado regime for at least five prominent prisoners, and the election campaign, have added new focuses to the agenda. Despite the continued polarisation in political communication, both sides are making attempts to reduce tensions in their rhetoric.

In the reporting period, there has been a significant increase in confidence in the authorities, which is explained by Lukashenka’s exploitation of the fear of war and the prevention of a visible economic downturn. Lukashenka is perceived as a guarantor of peace. For the first time, there has been a slight increase in the number of those who support the participation of the Belarusian army in the war: most likely, this is due to some Belarusians who believe in Russia’s victory and count on preferences for Belarus following the results of the war. The Belarusian anti-war consensus remains: the majority is against the country’s participation in the conflict. The real turnout in the election is expected to be twice as low as in 2020. Most Belarusians are sceptical about the election being fair. The legitimacy of the Lukashenka regime will not be based on the election procedure.

1

FOREIGN POLICY

Military cooperation between Belarus and Russia has intensified. Minsk participated in joint nuclear exercises. Russia extended its “nuclear umbrella” to Belarusian territory, and both countries signed a treaty on mutual security guarantees. Attempts by Minsk to establish dialogue with the West through pardons for political prisoners and diplomatic initiatives failed against the backdrop of increased sanctions and isolation. At the same time, Belarus has been seeking to develop ties with non-Western partners, offering a common platform to counter “Western hegemony”. Despite internal debates regarding the strategy of interacting with the Lukashenka regime on the issue of political prisoners, democratic forces continued to lobby for stronger sanctions and advocate for the interests of Belarusians’ mobility.

1.1. INCREASING INVOLVEMENT IN RUSSIAN MILITARY STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The period from June to December saw limited progress in terms of Belarus-Russia integration, with most progress being made in technical, rather than institutional and political, areas. In September, both governments concluded an agreement on mutual recognition of electronic [signatures](#). In December, Lukashenka and Putin approved agreements on a common electricity market and the abolition of mobile roaming in the Union State from March 2025, although the practical implementation of the agreement by this date remains uncertain given multiple previous [delays](#).

In the military-political sphere, however, deepening cooperation was more noticeable. In early June, for the first time Belarus participated in joint exercises of non-strategic nuclear forces with [Russia](#). In November, Putin updated Russia’s nuclear doctrine, extending the “nuclear umbrella” to Belarusian [territory](#). Formally, this did not fundamentally change the Moscow-Minsk relationship on this issue, as Russia’s right to defend Belarus with all available forces was already enshrined in the 2021 military doctrine of the Union State, with a reference to Russian nuclear weapons as a [deterrent](#). The previous version of Russia’s nuclear doctrine (2020) also stipulated that nuclear deterrence was directed against threats to both Russia and its allies. With Belarus now being singled out from these allies, the updated doctrine can be interpreted as

a signal that Moscow views Belarus as a space of its full military control and oversight.

Finally, on 6 December, Putin and Lukashenka signed a treaty on mutual security guarantees and the Union State Security Concept, once again formalising the principle of collective defence, including the use of nuclear [weapons](#). In addition, Putin announced the possible deployment of Russia’s new Oreshnik intercontinental missile system in Belarus in 2025.

In other words, Russia is finding new ways to use Belarus to attempt nuclear deterrence and blackmail the West. Each new stage in Minsk’s involvement in Russia’s military-strategic planning further narrows the agency of Belarus, both in the global community’s perception and in reality.

1.2. INVITING THE WEST TO DIALOGUE AMID DETERIORATING RELATIONS

In previous issues of BCT, we have seen Minsk signalling about its willingness to normalise relations with the West, mainly through verbal invitations to dialogue. In the reporting period, Lukashenka went further and pardoned eight groups of political prisoners (a total of at least 227 people) between July and December. However, the authorities’ claim that this gesture was purely humanitarian is contradicted by the profile of those pardoned. Only some of them were elderly or seriously ill, while the majority were young men with relatively short sentences by Belarusian standards. Therefore, interpreting of the authorities’ motives from the foreign policy perspective should be taken into account first while doing the analysis. With the exception of a brief surge in the migration crisis in September, its intensity never reached that attained in spring, and the average weekly attempts to illegally cross the country’s western border remained fewer than 600. Furthermore, the Belarusian MFA invited EU representatives to Minsk in late November to participate in a conference on combating Illegal migration. Later, the Ministry confirmed that the conference was held specifically “to encourage the neighboring EU countries to establish a dialogue with Belarus,” but they did not appreciate this “outstretched hand for [cooperation](#).”

All these signals were unsuccessful. The most common response from Western countries to the waves of pardons

of political prisoners were tweets and press releases from their foreign policy agencies calling for the process to continue, as well as reminders of the ongoing repression and the existing scale of the political prisoner problem. As for the West's participation in the November conference on migration, it was attended only by the Hungarian ambassador and representatives from the UK and Swiss embassies¹.

Western sanctions only intensified during the reporting period. In early June, Lithuania imposed stricter rules on car imports and [food exports](#) from [Belarus](#). Later that month, the EU synchronised sanctions against Belarus and Russia, leading to extensive restrictions on exports and imports of various goods, including their movement across the border by ordinary [tourists](#). Marking the anniversary of the 2020 elections, the EU, US, UK, Canada and Switzerland expanded personal sanctions against Belarusian officials and propagandists, and an aircraft owned by Lukashenka, as well as individual companies mostly seen working with the Russian military-industrial complex. In December, the EU adopted a package of personal sanctions against Belarusian judges, businessmen benefiting from the authorities, and their companies. Lithuania expanded its national sanctions against dual-use goods, and Poland targeted three Belarusian fertilizer suppliers. In September, Lithuania submitted materials to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) relating to crimes against humanity by the Minsk regime against Belarusians. Vilnius argues that these crimes have cross-border implications, i.e. affect the interests of Lithuania, and therefore fall under the ICC (note that Minsk does not recognise the jurisdiction of this [court](#)).

The dissonance between Minsk's increasing attempts to initiate dialogue with the West and Belarus's growing isolation underscores the fundamental insufficiency and inconsistency of Minsk's signals in the eyes of Western capitals.

1.3. TRYING TO INTENSIFY RELATIONS WITH THE "GLOBAL MAJORITY"

Minsk is increasingly trying to gain support from new, non-Western partners, both bilaterally and especially multilaterally. In early June, Lukashenka made his first visit as head of state to Mongolia. At the end of July, the Belarusian delegation headed by the Foreign Minister visited North Korea. In late November, Lukashenka visited Pakistan. Minsk's multilateral diplomacy was even more active. In July, at the Astana summit of the SCO, Belarus was accepted as a member of the organisation, while in October, Minsk became one of the "partners" of the BRICS at its Kazan summit. In November, Lukashenka attended the UN Climate Change Conference.

These diplomatic efforts, like Lukashenka's earlier visits to Africa, are yet to convey tangible economic successes. However, they serve as an opportunity for Minsk to diversify its foreign political ties, demonstrate the absence of any isolation in its own propaganda and articulate theses about the need to consolidate the "global majority", or essentially non-Western countries, especially in Eurasia. Lukashenka used all possible public platforms, including the SCO, BRICS, and CSTO summits and the 2nd Minsk Conference on Eurasian Security in October, calling the participants to join efforts in various areas — from security to alternative payment systems — in order to counter the "West's hegemony" in international relations. The Eurasian security conferences in Minsk, which are becoming annual, as well as Lukashenka's November initiative to host a joint summit of the leaders of the CSTO, ASEAN, SCO, CIS, and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council indicate the country's' ambition to become a platform for such consolidation.

1.4. DEMOCRATIC FORCES: FOCUSING ON OLDER THEMES AND FACING THE GROWING DISSONANCE REGARDING POLITICAL PRISONERS

Belarusian democratic forces continued diplomatic work around traditional themes, such as lobbying for new sanctions against the Minsk regime and international prosecution of its officials. They also focused on reminding partners about the problem of political prisoners, preventing the legitimisation of the Lukashenka regime and its electoral procedures, and opposing discriminatory practices and mobility restrictions against Belarusians. The latter were the subject of intensive consultations with partners when Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were determining the national format for implementing the EU summer package of sanctions. This package unified the sanctions against Belarus and Russia, including the rules for carrying consumer goods across the border and the EU entry procedures for vehicles with Belarusian licence plates.

Furthermore, the democratic forces focused on expanding their international contacts and exploring new ways of interacting with traditional partners. In November, they held their first "strategic consultations" with Canada, which mirrored the strategic dialogue they already have with [the United States](#).

The prisoner exchange between the Western countries and Russia in late July, which included Lukashenka releasing German citizen Rico Krieger and Russian (but not Belarusian) political prisoners, sparked a debate in civil society about the democratic forces' strategy on this issue. The subsequent pardons of political prisoners in Belarus further fuelled these debates. The Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her Cabinet, as well as the politician herself —

¹ Based on data from conference participants

have become more active in raising the issue in meetings with Western counterparts. However, activists and politicians advocating for a more proactive and compromising Western policy on political prisoners have also intensified their own lobbying efforts. At the annual democratic forces conference in Vilnius in August, the ex-speaker of the Coordination Council Andrei Yahorau proposed that the West recognise “the legitimacy of what is happening in Belarus” and send European ambassadors in exchange for the release of political prisoners. In November and December, former members of Tsikhanouskaya’s Cabinet — Valery Kavaleuski and Volha Harbunova, as well as Marya Kalechnikava’s sister, Tatsiana Khomich, visited Austria, the United States, Germany, France and Switzerland (and Kavaleuski separately visited the UK), promoting their vision on this issue, which is an alternative to the position of the Office and Cabinet of Tsikhanouskaya. Andrei Dzmitryeu, a former political prisoner and presidential candidate in 2020, also suggested the need for direct negotiations with the Lukashenka regime during his autumn meetings with European politicians and diplomats in Warsaw and Berlin.

2

DOMESTIC POLITICS

The winter 2024–25 presidential campaign in Belarus continued the trend of making electoral procedures a bureaucratic formality rather than a political event. Lukashenka's cult of personality reached new levels, with wide propagandistic celebrations of his 30th anniversary in power and preparations for the presidential campaign. Lukashenka revamped the political bloc of his administration and government, appointing more proactive and energetic officials to key positions. The democratic forces around Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya consolidated, while those with alternative views found themselves excluded or less active within these structures.

2.1. DEPOLITICISING THE ELECTORAL RITUAL

The winter 2024–25 election campaign continues the long-standing trend of eliminating even decorative pluralism from electoral procedures. There has been no provision in the list of candidates or the composition of electoral commissions at any level for the democratic forces participation for several campaigns in a row. Even those campaign participants who were assigned the role of alternative candidates regularly repeated that they also supported Aliaksandr Lukashenka and went to the elections not to compete with him for power, but to help the authorities. For example, Syarhey Syrankou of the Communist Party defiantly left his signature in favour of Lukashenka's nomination and stated that he was going to the elections "not instead of, but together" with [him](#). Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) nominee Aleh Haidukevich said that even those signing in favour of him admitted to be voting for [Lukashenka](#). The LDP leader also declared his readiness to predict Lukashenka's victory in advance and prepare to congratulate him on the election day.

The authorities in Belarus are no longer hiding their use of administrative resources in support of one particular candidate. Budget money was spent on campaign events in support of Lukashenka ("Marathon of Unity"), and officials openly acknowledged the competition between regions to collect more signatures for [him](#). Lukashenka's nomination itself was accompanied by a flash mob, "Nado!" (You must!), in which workers from public sector and state administration recorded collective videos (sometimes under duress) urging Lukashenka to run for another term. The campaign

also became an occasion for demonstrating loyalty, not only by officials, but also by groups that were previously seen by the authorities as politically problematic. For example, in mid-November a picket to collect signatures in favour of Lukashenka was held in the High-Tech Park (HTP). According to media reports, some IT companies, residents of this park, transferred money to Lukashenka's electoral [account](#).

This essentially shows that electoral procedures in Belarus are consistently deprived of the elements of competition and politics which were inherent to them before 2020. The electoral process has become a bureaucratic formality, which, rather by tradition, remains an occasion for mobilising the state apparatus and provides no space for activity by the regime's opponents.

2.2. THE PERSONALITY CULT ATTAINS NEW LEVELS

The previously reported trend of perpetuating Lukashenka's cult of personality has intensified in Belarus. In July, the authorities decided to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his rule, providing an occasion for an unprecedented flow of praise and glorification of Lukashenka. The examples below are intended to show the scale of this phenomenon.

By the anniversary date of Lukashenka's first inauguration (20 July), ideologists across the country had received a special guidebook on how to explain to the employees of their respective enterprises the significance of having such a "strong leader" as [Lukashenka](#). On the eve of the anniversary, "Za Batsku" (For Father) posters were displayed in public [places](#). Propagandist Ryhor Azarionak launched a special TV project, "Word and Deed", where he described Lukashenka as being Chosen by God and drew parallels between him and [Jesus Christ](#). The head of the Belarusian Handball Federation and ex-speaker of the House of Representatives Uladzimir Kanapleu called Lukashenka "the Belarusian [Khomeini](#)". The head of Lukashenka's administration, Dzmitry Krutoy, said that God sent the July hurricane to the south of Belarus so that Lukashenka could rejoice that his system had coped with the natural [disaster](#). At a special "patriotic forum" to celebrate the anniversary of Lukashenka's rule, pro-government activist Aliaksei Talai

proposed that that Lukashenka be given the title of Hero of [Belarus](#). Azaronak, who attended the event, formulated the national concept of Belarus as "Love, Labour, Strength, Truth, Lukashenka". Local activists were no less active: during Dzmitry Krutoy's visit to Lyelchytsy, the local ensemble called Lukashenka "[a ray of sunshine](#)". State trade unions held drawing contests "My president is the most..." and a photo contest with Lukashenka [quotes](#).

Promoting the cult of the leader continued after the July anniversary. The authorities recommended that schools begin the first lesson of the school year with a discussion of Lukashenka's words about the motherland, and that they display his portraits in [classrooms](#). During the National Unity Day forum in mid-September, Lukashenka was "surprised" with a song about him titled "[Ballad of a Dictator](#)". Among the media products about Lukashenka, the STV channel's film stood out, highlighting his role as commander-in-chief and praising the country's security as "the result of systemic reforms, Lukashenka's far-sighted strategy and [determination](#)". Throughout the second half of 2024, STV ran a weekly series called "Our Own", showcasing stories from "ordinary people" about their encounters with Lukashenka and how it changed their [lives](#). Although the reporting period ends in December 2024, it is safe to say that efforts to normalise Lukashenka's cult of personality as a central element of state ideology will continue throughout the presidential campaign in January 2025 and in connection with Lukashenka's next inauguration.

2.3. RENEWING THE NOMENCLATURE BEFORE ELECTIONS AND THE FLUCTUATING INFLUENCE OF SECURITY OFFICIALS

During June, Lukashenka reshuffled the political bloc of his government and administration. Marat Markau, a TV presenter, former ideologist and military officer, became Minister of Information. Maksim Ryzhankou, the deputy head of Lukashenka's administration, took the post of Foreign Minister, while his place in the presidential administration was given to Natalia Pyatkevich, a veteran of the Belarusian civil service. Dzmitry Krutoy, ambassador to Russia and former Deputy Prime Minister, headed Lukashenka's administration. The common denominator of these appointments is the arrival of proactive, ambitious and often authoritarian officials replacing relatively passive functionaries. One interpretation of this rotation is Lukashenka's desire to "refresh" and make the management of domestic and foreign policy more dynamic ahead of the upcoming presidential campaign.

Mikalai Karpiankou, the deputy head of the Interior Ministry, saw his presence in the state media reduced after increased visibility in the past, revealing another intra-nomenclature trend. Back in February 2024, Lukashenka noticed Karpiankou's "excessive praise" of PMC Wagner. In May, this influential

security official announced the launch of his own charitable foundation, but after that, coverage of his activities diminished. In the seven months of the reporting period, state media limited themselves to routine official news, such as the announcement of Karpiankou's regular direct line in [August](#) and rare reports from the Internal Troops events, where Karpiankou participated in his official capacity ([oath, drills, awarding of maroon berets, etc.](#)). Even his media ally, Ryhor Azarionak, who used to regularly interview Karpiankou, limited himself to reposting the aforementioned official news.

At the same time, the Commission for the Return of Political Emigrants (the Commission), headed by another high-ranking security official, Prosecutor General Andrey Shved, has gained more power, indicating Shved's growing political influence. In August, the Commission reviewed the cases of athletes Stanislav Drahun and Andrei Khachatryan, who were in Belarus and "repented" for their 2020 statements, and allowed them to participate in sporting [events](#). From September onwards, the Commission became involved in selecting political prisoners for [par-don](#). In mid-September, Lukashenka issued a decree formalising the powers of [Shved's Commission](#). Although Belarus already has a permanent pardon commission under Lukashenka, delegating procedures on "forgiving" politically disloyal emigrants, athletes and political prisoners in this way to a separate body highlights the special role played by this Commission and its head in the Belarusian regime.

2.4. DEMOCRATIC FORCES: ACHIEVING IDEOLOGICAL CONSOLIDATION OF TSIKHANOUSKAYA'S STRUCTURES

The Coordination Council (CC) that formed after the May elections did not become a body opposing other democratic forces structures — Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office (STO) and the United Transitional Cabinet (UTC). On the contrary, the alliance between the OST and the winner of the elections, Pavel Latushka, was strengthened. Together with the allied factions in the CC, they formed a majority loyal to the UTC. Latushka's associate, Anzhelika Melnikova, was elected speaker. Already by autumn, the groups of delegates to the CC in opposition to the UTC and OST were no longer active in the public field.

Consolidating most of the democratic forces forces was further demonstrated when they signed a cooperation protocol between the STO, UTC and CC at the annual conference in August. Among other things, the document recognised Tsikhanouskaya as a "national leader", whose mandate will not expire at the end of the election campaign in 2025 but will remain relevant until fair elections are held in the [country](#).

During the reporting period, several important figures left the UTC, including Valery Sakhshchyk, Valery Kavaleuski, Volha Harbunova and Alina Koushyk. And while Koushyk

left to head the editorial office of Belsat, and Sakhashchik showed no fundamental disagreements with the UTC's general line, the departure of Harbunova and Kavaleuski rather fits into the trend of building a greater ideological monolith of Tsikhanouskaya's structures. After their resignations, both Harbunova and Kavaleuski openly disagreed with the dominant position in the UTC, OST and CC on sanctions and negotiations with the regime. By contrast, their successors in the UTC — Uladzimir Astapenka (replacing Kavaleuski) and Volha Zazulinskaya (replacing Harbunova) — are entirely in line with the democratic forces' mainstream approach.

Supporters of alternative, more compromising approaches are still present in the democratic forces, but they are no longer represented in the UTC and STO, or are in a silent minority in the CC. In the last months of the reporting period, there were some attempts to unite supporters of this alternative agenda (see Foreign Policy section), but this process is still at its early stages.

The political agency of the democratic forces' militant wing is shrinking. The turbulent leadership change in the Kastus Kalinousky Regiment (KKR) in July resulted in increased control by the Ukrainian military command over various aspects of the unit's functioning, including recruitment. In its communications surrounding the KKR leadership change, the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate has reiterated that the unit is part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and its independence is out of the [question](#). These changes raise questions as to whether it is still terminologically correct to consider the KKR as an actor in Belarusian democratic forces politics. The "Terror" Battalion, which had previously split from the KKR, was disbanded in November. Other groups, such as CyberPartisans, "Paspalitaye Rushennie", "Supratsiu", Free Belarus, "Rukh Belaruskich Natsyanalistau", showed no noticeable political activity in the reporting period.

3

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

Encouraged by rapid economic recovery, the government continued to actively intervene in the economy throughout the reporting period, controlling prices and deciding the fate of businesses, while also developing optimistic plans for future investments and associated advanced economic growth.

3.1. STAGNATION REPLACING BOOMING GROWTH

The rapid growth of the Belarusian economy, coupled with its substantial overheating in the first half of 2024 was followed by stagnation towards the end of the year. Growth rates against the corresponding months of 2023 showed significant volatility — 5.2% in May, 3.8% in June, 8.4% in July, then a sharp slowdown to 1% in August, 1.6% in September and a slight recovery to 2.6% in October поміняти на , 2.6% in October and only 1% in November. The seasonally adjusted GDP in November was about 1.3% lower than in April.

The sharp fluctuations in July and August 2024 can be attributed to the earlier start of the harvesting campaign, which led to abnormal GDP growth in July and a relative decline in August. It is worth noting that the strong growth in the first half of 2024 was achieved in an overheated economy, with its overly loose monetary policy, high domestic and external demand, and ultra-low unemployment. Nonetheless, the economy has so far held close to the highs and shows no signs of recession. As a result, GDP growth for the year is expected to be around 3.8%, which is consistent with the rate achieved in the first two quarters.

In the previous issue of the Belarus Change Tracker, we speculated that unusually high growth rates after emerging from recession in 2022 could indicate qualitative changes in the economy. Recall that in the past decade, the average GDP growth rate has been around 1% — four times lower than the current rate. However, recent stagnation indicates a one-off shift rather than a long-term trend. In other words, the growth in the first half of the year can be seen as “borrowing from the future”, with a subsequent period of stagnation expected to bring the economy back to long-term equilibrium.

Belarus will probably have to pay for this “borrowing” with increased inflationary pressure and economic imbalances.

2024 saw a significant transformation in the structure of the drivers of economic growth in Belarus. In 2023 and early 2024, the main drivers included industry, related wholesale trade and construction (sectors that directly benefited from increased external — mainly Russian — demand), as well as soft monetary policy and direct public investment. However, the situation changed in the second half of the year.

Having reached their production capacity limits, these traditional drivers of economic growth gave way to other sectors. The IT sector came to the fore, showing signs of recovery after a long period of decline. Meanwhile, domestic consumer demand assumed a greater role, fuelled by two key factors — the continued soft monetary policy and the abnormally fast growth of real wages. The latter was due to both the general overheating of the economy and the unfavourable demographic situation, which created a shortage of labour on the labour market.

3.2. EMERGING CONSEQUENCES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRICE CONTROL SYSTEM

A recent analysis of economic processes in Belarus in 2024 reveals how the system of administrative price regulation has transformed from a tool for controlling inflation into a significant factor limiting the growth of entire sectors of the economy.

In July, the National Bank published statistics according to which, despite a 15% increase in revenues in January–April compared to the previous year, total profits for businesses decreased [by 12%](#). In August, the Ministry of Trade seemed to recognise the need for change, announcing a new version of Decree 713 regulating the price control system. However, promises to make the system “even more [efficient](#)” contrasted with the real situation, as businesses struggled with rising unregulated costs, especially labour costs, while being unable to adjust their own selling prices. It was not until 1 November that Deputy Prime Minister Snopkov publicly acknowledged the negative effects of

the current price control system, even suggesting the possibility of completely abolishing it in the [future](#).

By the end of August, 12 large retail companies and about 300 small regional retailers had filed for [bankruptcy](#) ([link](#)). Analysts predict that this trend will continue, with four more companies associated with the chain "Ostrov Chistoty" also likely to be [affected](#).

The bankruptcy statistics for HY1 2024, published by the Ministry of Economy in September, reveal that retail trade accounted for 41.8% of all bankruptcies — a clear indication that this sector was particularly vulnerable to price regulation. In the meantime, the unexpectedly low share of bankruptcies in [agriculture \(3.4%\)](#) created a false impression of stability in the sector.

The first signs of crisis began to emerge in June in the meat processing industry: 15 of the 16 largest companies showed a drop in profits, despite growing sales, and one even became [unprofitable](#). By November, the problems had engulfed the entire agricultural sector. The harvest results were dismal, as potato yields fell by 35%, [vegetables by 9.5%](#), and the number of pigs fell by 10% across the country, with a complete loss of livestock in some [areas](#). Agricultural producers, unable to offset the increased costs of imported seeds, herbicides and medicines due to sanctions through higher selling prices, were forced to reduce production.

3.3. THE TREASURY NEEDS SACRIFICE, SOMETIMES EVEN THE ULTIMATE ONE

The trend for raising old taxes and introducing new ones continued in the reporting period.

Despite a formally ultra-positive economic situation in 2024, the government consistently increased fiscal pressure on businesses and households. This situation is well illustrated by the mantra repeated by Belarusian officials that "businesses have accumulated fat that needs to be cut", suggesting that making conditions worse for businesses and redistributing funds to the state is acceptable as long as one knows when to stop.

In the reporting period, several significant events highlighted this approach. In August, A1, the telecommunications company with Austrian capital, was fined 84 million rubles for unspecified [reasons](#). Also in August, mobile operators were required to invest more in infrastructure and offer state-regulated social tariff plans. The Finnish owner of the brewing company "Lidskoye Pivo" reported losses for its Belarusian division due to a large [fine](#).

In the meantime, the government was looking for new sources of revenue. Deputy Minister of Trade Nina Emely-

anova announced discussions regarding introducing a tax on [tips](#). Another measure being considered is reducing the duty-free limit on foreign online purchases to [€50](#). On 17 September, Lukashenka signed a decree banning Belarusian citizens from buying cryptocurrency and tokens on foreign platforms, a measure that is probably aimed not so much at combating illegal activity as at expanding the tax [base](#).

The plans to increase tax revenues for 2025 look particularly ambitious, namely a 28% increase in corporate tax collections, 35% in income tax, 18% in value-added tax and 12% in export duties. However, the authorities talk more about strengthening the tax administration than raising tax [rates](#).

The problems has affected even entrepreneurs who are seen as being close to the regime. In November, Serbian businessman Bogoljub Karic failed to challenge sanctions in the [European Court](#), and the management of his key Belarusian company, Dana Astra, was detained after an inspection by the [State Control Committee](#). Another businessman close to Lukashenka, Mikhail Gutseriev, announced the nationalisation of a mining and processing plant in which he has invested some \$500 [million](#).

This trend culminated in a proposal to abolish tax breaks for big businesses, which would effectively increase the overall tax burden to [45%](#). A group of investors has already raised official objections, stating that their businesses are already suffering from Western sanctions.

This increased pressure on even loyal businesses may indicate either that the regime has serious financial difficulties, or that this is an attempt to demonstrate the "fight against oligarchs" before the presidential elections. In any case, the question of how long Belarusian business will be able to withstand such conditions has not only philosophical but also practical significance for the country's long-term future.

4

FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

With significant foreign companies continuing to leave Belarus, new trade partners need to be found not only in the “far arc” countries, but also in friendly China. Russia remains the main source of new loans.

4.1. ALL QUIET ON THE FAR ARC

With the eruption of the political crisis in 2020, and especially after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Belarusian authorities faced the urgent need to reorient foreign trade. However, their attempts to find new trading partners have been largely unsuccessful.

According to the documents from the State Control Committee, leaked in November, the number of countries with which Belarus maintains trade relations continues to decrease, while the concentration of trade is growing. In 2023, five countries accounted for 83% of Belarusian exports — Russia (64.4%), UAE (9.7%), China (5.1%), Kazakhstan (2.3%), and [Brazil \(1.7%\)](#).

In an attempt to diversify trade, Belarus sought new partners among the so-called “far arc countries”. Aliaksandr Lukashenka made an official visit to [Pakistan](#) and tried to establish ties with Botswana and [Angola](#). Attempts were made to develop trade relations with [Nicaragua](#), Uganda, [Serbia](#) and [Cuba](#), where contracts worth \$85 million were signed, but due to sanctions, Belarus had to negotiate barter deals with Cuba instead of traditional trade.

Particular hopes were pinned on China. In August 2023, Li Qiang, the Prime Minister of China, visited Minsk to discuss investments worth \$3 billion, among other [things](#). But instead of new projects, Belarus offered its Chinese partners investment opportunities in existing and largely problematic projects, such as the Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation and state-owned wood and cellulose processing companies. The Chinese side picked projects worth only \$1 billion, postponing discussions of other proposals for the [future](#).

By the end of 2024, it was clear that hopes for China to become a Russia-like financial sponsor had not materialised. China ranks only fifth in terms of investment in Be-

larus with a modest \$38 million, while Russia invested \$451 million and the UAE, [\\$238 million](#). Moreover, fearing Western sanctions, large Chinese companies began to decline cooperation with Belarus, as illustrated by the refusal of the Chinese CRRC Datong Co. to supply 15 electric [locomotives](#).

By September, Belarusian exports outside the CIS had fallen by 42%, which clearly demonstrates the failure of the trade diversification [strategy](#). The problem is not that the Belarusian Foreign Ministry cannot find suitable trade partners — there are simply no such partners. Rich and fast-growing countries focus on the US, the EU, or, at least China, while Belarus has to look for partners among poorer countries that are not afraid of sanctions.

4.2. SIGNIFICANT COMPANIES CONTINUE THEIR EXODUS

Another important trend that started after 2020 — the departure of international companies from the Belarusian market — continued and accelerated in the reporting period. For example, in May, the international leasing company Eleving Group announced completion of its exit from the [country](#), and in early June, the Latvian pharmaceutical company OlainFarm announced plans to sell its production facilities in Belarus and [Russia](#).

Particularly noteworthy was the sale by Austria's Raiffeisen Bank of its Belarusian subsidiary Priorbank to investors from the UAE in [September](#). This was followed by the departure of the German investor Carl Zeiss, a long-time co-operator of one of the Belarusian optical and mechanical [manufacturers](#).

The exodus of such giants as Raiffeisen Bank and Carl Zeiss cannot be measured only in monetary terms. These companies served as bridges between the Belarusian economy and international markets, bringing investments, advanced management practices, technological know-how and high international business standards. Their departure means not just a change of ownership, but a qualitative decline in the level of the business environment in the country, and Belarusian businesses could potentially start to lag behind technologically in the long term.

4.3. RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA: WHAT ELSE COULD PUTIN BECOME INTERESTED IN?

The Belarusian authorities are permanently in search of new ways to attract Russian funding, often using various investment projects as a pretext for loans, while Russians seem to be interested only in war.

In the military sphere, Russia has announced plans to build aircraft repair and maintenance centres in Belarus. Given the country's proximity to the Ukrainian borders, these centres will probably serve military, not civil [aviation](#). Similarly, the Belarusian company Peleng produces sighting devices for Russian [tanks](#).

Financial support from Russia continues to play a key role. In June, RUB4.3 billion were approved for modernising [Grodno Azot](#). In July, information surfaced about a possible new loan worth RUB 105 billion, although it was not officially confirmed by Putin or [Lukashenka](#). Interestingly, the Belarusian side announces new loans even before they are officially approved by the Russian side, creating the impression that agreements have already been reached.

Plans to build energy facilities using "local fuels" are vivid illustrations of such a [strategy](#). "Local fuels" mean peat and wood briquettes, which are hardly the most efficient or environmentally friendly sources of energy. Given that Belarus already has an energy surplus after the construction of the NPP, this project looks like another pretext for obtaining a Russian loan.

In the energy sector, Belarus already receives significant preferences: oil and gas are supplied at favourable prices, giving Belarusian oil refineries an additional \$3.6 billion in [2023-2024](#). The gas price is set at \$128.5 per thousand cubic meters, which is 2-3 times lower than European [prices](#). Despite this, the Belarusian authorities continue to seek new concessions, discussing the revision of the oil price formula and advance payment [issues](#).

Introducing agreements on securities [issuance](#) and financial market [supervision](#) can also be viewed in the context of finding new sources of financing. Although this will make it easier for Belarusian borrowers to access the Russian capital market, the scale of this market is incomparable to the global market. On the other hand, Belarusian assets may be of interest to Russian investors, who are limited in their international opportunities because of sanctions, especially as the country continues to service its sovereign debt in local currency.

In this context, Gazprom's plans to build an LNG plant look like another attempt to attract Russian investments, although this project's economic feasibility is not particularly [obvious](#).

5

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES AND SOCIETY

The relationship between the authorities and society in the reporting period has been heavily influenced by the announcement of the date of the next presidential election*. Initially repressive in nature, it has now shifted towards an electoral "special operation" format with increased repression and intimidation of society. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that the Belarusian regime is making efforts to give external and internal observers the impression that the level of repression is decreasing.

5.1. RANDOMNESS AND A SYSTEM FOR PRESSURING SOCIETY

As in previous periods, the Lukashenka regime continues to consistently prohibit and methodically persecute any manifestations of independent initiative and self-organisation in Belarusian society. The structures and initiatives of diverse profiles and activity areas are included in the lists of extremist materials and extremist formations, and either liquidated or forced to liquidate.

However, it is increasingly difficult to find clear criteria for these practices. For example, the list of liquidated organisations included "Victory — 1945", a fund for supporting WWII veterans and concentration camp prisoners, the public association, "Belarusian Federation of American Football", the local fund for supporting forced migrants "Intergacia-a", the local charity "Action to Help Chernobyl", the public association "Belarusian Society of Neurosurgeons", and the like².

Monitoring of NGOs in Belarus that are in the process of forced liquidation or have decided to [dissolve](#) shows that the average monthly number of (self-)liquidated organisations has been growing steadily with the approach of the new election campaign — 31 in Q1, 32 in Q2, 35 in Q3, and 38 in Q4³.

² A wave of closures of private businesses in the education sector also deserves attention. "Victims" included the Streamline school of foreign languages, the Leader educational centre, and AKC Most.

³ Data for the first two months of Q4.

The randomised approach applied to institutional structures also works for grassroots initiatives and communities — being recognised as extremist at random and in large volumes. Specific information on the volume of extremist lists (materials, citizens and organisations) will be finalised after receiving the December data.

The discussion of this situation at the Belarusian-Lithuanian checkpoint "Kamienny Loh-Medininkai" and the Tik-Tok account of comedian Slava Kamisaranka were recognised as extremist materials. Likewise, the "School of Leadership for Women" and the educational clubs initiative "It Is Good to Be Active" were recognised as extremist formations. Such random inclusion of wildly different entities in so-called "extremist" lists is intended to teach the population to reject any sources of information, initiatives and forms of civil action not verified and not approved by the state. Government representatives put it very clearly: "Unsubscribe as much as possible from everything you do not [need](#)".

5.2. REPRESSIVE AND COERCIVE PREPARATION FOR THE ELECTIONS*

In preparation for the new presidential elections, apart from promoting self-censorship, the Belarusian regime is stepping up technological support for its policy of censoring the information space. On the one hand, it is including media on the list of extremist materials and blocking specific online resources;⁴ on the other, it is trying to work on a larger scale, meaning completely or partially blocking entire platforms. In the first case — LiveJournal, in the second — YouTube during S. Tsikhanouskaya's New Year's address. In addition, the regime continues testing the possibilities for blocking the Internet in Belarus as a [whole](#). While meeting with students, Aliaksandr Lukashenka openly threatened to cut off the Internet if the elections are followed by [protests](#).

⁴ Examples include the website of the Christian project katolik.life, the portal bellit.info dedicated to Belarusian literature, the online store of Belarusian books "Knigauka", the music portal tuzinfm.by

Total control in Belarus is accompanied by permanent coercion to do whatever is necessary for the Lukashenka regime. In the reporting period, the focus of coercion shifted to the election campaign, and people were forced to leave their signatures in favour of Lukashenka and other candidates (so-called "[spoiler candidates](#)") under threat of dismissal.

In addition to imposing the necessary electoral practices, the authorities intensified their efforts to reduce the likelihood of any protests after 26 January 2025 — the announced date of voting. Such efforts cover the following areas:

- intimidating a potentially protesting electorate: all individuals convicted under political articles, both those who have fully served their sentences in penal colonies and those who are under restriction of freedom ("chemists"), are warned against extremist acts.
- demonstrative of law enforcement officers: the Ministry of Internal Affairs holds exercises to practice responses to possible provocations, such as attacks on police stations, hostage-taking, and protests in places of [detention](#).
- strengthening co-operation with Russia in the field of law enforcement: the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior reported that more than 140 people wanted in Belarus were detained in Russia within the interstate "Rozisk" (Search) [measure](#). In addition, Russian officials have already announced their country's readiness to help Belarusian colleagues liquidate possible post-election "[disturbances](#)".

5.3. INCREASING LEVEL OF REPRESSION

The main peculiarity of this reporting period in terms of political repression was a series of "pardons" given to citizens convicted under protest articles. Between late June 2024 and 31 December 2024, the regime had released 227 people.

Unfortunately, it had little effect on the general level of repressive pressure on society. The data collected from human rights sources and official statistics indicate that there was a surge in repressions in the fourth quarter—a 74% increase compared to the level in the third quarter of 2024.

First of all, this is reflected in the number of detentions and arrests. Although it is impossible to specify the exact number of detentions, their scale can be understood from the following two waves of so-called "hapuns" — detentions of activists and participants of backyard communities on 31 October — [1 November](#), and detentions of the relatives and acquaintances of political prisoners that started on 14 [November](#). Andrey Stryzhak, the head of the BySol Solidarity Fund noted that the workload of BySol's evacuation service had doubled in the last [quarter](#), thus indirectly confirming that there is growing repression.

Table 1.
Average Monthly Dynamics of Repressive Pressure by Quarters Compared to the Previous Quarter

	24'I	24'II	24'III	24'IV
Raids ("Hapuns")	75%	-81%	25%	500%
Administrative Persecution	0%	-15%	-63%	164%
List of Citizen Terrorists	-14%	-42%	86%	23%
Extremist Groups	17%	57%	-55%	20%
List of Citizen Extremists	-5%	-8%	8%	18%
Trials for Extremist Materials	24%	3%	-4%	15%
Criminal Prosecution	10%	9%	4%	8%
Extremist Materials	8%	-13%	1%	5%
Recognition as Political Prisoners	-37%	79%	-12%	0%
(Self) Liquidation of NGOs	19%	3%	9%	-14%
	10%	-1%	0%	74%

The data also indicate a 2.5-fold increase in the number of administrative processes with political motives. Notably, the level of criminal prosecution of political opponents of the regime consistently rose throughout the year, with an 8% increase in the fourth quarter compared to the third quarter (previously, it was 4%).

Traditionally, the main groups subject to repression include both opposition politicians, civic activists and journalists in exile, and the Belarusian diaspora in general. One of the main directions of repression against Belarusian representatives abroad in 2024 was in absentia proceedings (110 cases in 2024 compared to 18 in 2023).

The Belarusian authorities are literally hunting for active Belarusians, from former fighters from the Kastus Kalinousky Regiment to diaspora chat room administrators and their [relatives](#). To this end, the government is stepping up pressure on the family members of Belarusians who are now abroad — the law enforcers increasingly urge such relatives, either personally (at checkpoints during border [crossings](#)), or in absentia ([by letter](#)) to persuade those who had left to apply to the Commission for the Return.

Another peculiarity of the reporting period is the spread of repression to new social and socio-professional groups. The increasing repressive pressure on representatives of the LGBTQ+ [community](#) is also worthy of note. All this partially follows trends set by law enforcers in Russia.

Repression against regional information resources, which have already been liquidated or have never dealt with political issues, are becoming increasingly frequent. The most striking examples include the detention of seven staff members of the already liquidated Baranavichy newspaper

Intex-Press, as well as recognition of the popular Hrodna portal S13 and the Pinsk resource “Podslushano Pinsk” as extremist materials. Such increased attention to regional resources mirrors another peculiarity: for the first time, higher levels of repression were observed in the regions than in [Minsk](#).

5.4. SILENCE AND INTIMIDATION AS A BACKGROUND TO ONGOING REPRESSION

As a separate trend, some instances, along with a series of pardons of political prisoners, suggest that the Belarusian regime has started camouflaging the level of repression in the country.

First, on 30 October, ahead of the big “hapun” of members of backyard communities, the Telegram channels associated with law enforcers stopped publishing the so-called “penitential videos” with those detained under political articles. However, such self-censorship did not last long: already on 5 December they had switched to a new format and published audio recordings with similar content.

Second, at about the same time, trials at district police stations (RAUS) without entering them into court schedules became more widespread. Human rights activists confirm that the cases on “distribution of extremist materials” have almost disappeared from court [schedules](#), which makes it difficult to independently record and analyse them.

Third, those convicted under the political articles law are increasingly not provided with the copies of court records and judgements. As a result, people are deprived of the opportunity to appeal against the court decision and even to prove the fact of [persecution](#).

And fourth, human rights advocates are aware of mass invitations for civil activists from non-prohibited and legally functioning organisations throughout the country to attend “conversations” with the KGB. At these conversations, activists are warned about criminal proceedings against them, if any information or statement about the pressure on them gets into the [media](#).

All these facts suggest that the Belarusian regime is currently taking certain actions to conceal the real level of pressure on society.

6

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

From June 2024 to January 2025, the main narratives of the pro-democratic and pro-government speakers have not changed. The central points of political communication are still the war in Ukraine, the discrediting of the opposite political course and values, as well as the praise or criticism of the Lukashenka regime. However, the events of the last six months, such as waves of releases of political prisoners, the lifting of the incommunicado regime for at least five prominent prisoners, and the election campaign, have added new focuses to the agenda. Despite the continued polarisation in political communication, both sides are making attempts to reduce tensions in their rhetoric.⁵

As in the previous issue of the Belarus Change Tracker, we distinguish between fundamental narratives (basic and unchangeable) and event narratives (appearing in relation to a specific event and disappearing after it ends) that characterise the political agenda.

6.1. THE POLARISATION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION REMAINS, BUT A DECREASE IN ITS INTENSITY IS POSSIBLE AFTER THE ELECTION

In the reporting period, the pro-government and opposition speakers remained the main transmitters of political narratives. The political contradictions between the two political blocs continued to account for a high level of polarisation. Both camps continued to promote the already well-known arguments, which we register as unchangeable [fundamental narratives](#). In addition to

⁵ In this issue of the Belarus Change Tracker, the section Political Communication is based on the data of MedialQ's monitoring projects on narratives, disinformation, and propaganda; IS-ANS's review of propaganda and military propaganda; Sense Analytics & Center for New Ideas project on disinformation; previous research on the political narratives of the pro-democratic and pro-government speakers made by the Center for New Ideas & FES, the Belarus Change Tracker, and research on Belarusian propaganda conducted by the Center for New Ideas & FES. These data form the analytical arguments of this section.

them, the polarisation in political communication was intensified by the opposite interpretation of the main events of this period.

Some new individuals emerged among the actors of political communication, who cannot be unequivocally attributed to either the pro-government or opposition bloc, since they do not openly support any of the political courses. Among them are former political prisoner and presidential candidate Andrei Dzmitryeu, human rights activists, and relatives of political prisoners. During the reporting period, these groups offered alternative political narratives, signalling the need for reconciliation and dialogue between the two political camps. So far, these narratives have not come to dominate the political agenda and have not substantially influenced political decision-making.

Although political communication maintains a high level of polarisation in the [coverage of the war](#) in Ukraine and the interpretation of domestic political and [electoral](#) events, for the first time in the last year, there has been a sign of a decrease in the intensity of polarisation in political communication. On the other hand, if the authorities continue to free political prisoners, we can expect not only a decrease in tension in communication between the political camps but also a more pronounced split in the opposition bloc regarding the political agenda.

6.2. THE BASIC NARRATIVES REMAIN UNCHANGED: THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE DISCREDITING OF OPPONENTS

Over the past six months, the war in Ukraine has become not only the central topic for Lukashenka's supporters but also the main topic of [disinformation](#). According to the data of the project of Sense Analytics and the Center for New Ideas⁶, in June-December, about 45% of all recorded in-

⁶ The authors of the project shared data from a study that is not publicly available

stances of disinformation were related to the war in Ukraine. This is an indication that in the eyes of pro-government speakers, the war is an important factor for the regime and the current political agenda in Belarus. Moreover, this approach is often used to divert attention from the domestic agenda. The main aspects that pro-government channels [are](#) interested in are the mobilisation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the supply of weapons to Ukraine, the failures of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as the [need](#) for Belarus to strengthen its defence in the event of impending aggression from the West.

In the context of the war, the topic of the migration crisis is often mentioned and the threat from Poland is hyped up, highlighting that Poland allegedly [poses](#) a threat to Belarus, as it is constantly strengthening its defence. In July, [such a reaction](#) was caused by Poland's announcement of the launch of the "Eastern Dawn" operation. In addition, pro-government speakers [criticised](#) the NATO Summit, where Ukraine's possible membership was discussed, and [predicted](#) the collapse of the alliance. Pro-government channels also issued warnings about the [consequences](#) of Western countries' decision to allow Ukraine to strike the Russian territory with long-range missiles.

For opposition speakers, the war is not a dominant topic, and it mainly manifests itself through discussion of the [humanitarian consequences](#) for Ukraine and its citizens, the security of Belarus in the context of the Russian military presence in the country, and through the discrediting of Russia.

The discrediting of the West has already established itself as one of the leading topics on the agenda of pro-government speakers. Western countries are accused of building up military power, which they allegedly plan to use against Russia and Belarus, as well as of instilling their values and interfering in Belarusian politics through sanctions and their support for democratic forces. In September, a [propaganda film](#) about a Japanese citizen who was accused of spying against Belarus became an example of the narrative on interference. In August, propaganda [reacted](#) to the sanctions against propagandists, condemning them as unmotivated, and Lukashenka called them a hybrid war against Belarus. Discussions of the domestic and foreign policies of Western countries remain quite popular. Among others, this topic [was](#) one of the central topics in publications that contain disinformation.

Since the beginning of the protests in Georgia, polarisation in political communication has been reflected in this topic as well. Independent channels expressed solidarity with the protesters, while the pro-government ones suspected a Western influence in the protests. Pro-government authors also [supported](#) pro-Russian forces in the election in Moldova.

The discrediting of the opponents is still important for both political blocs. Opposition speakers seek to expose the specific actions of the authorities and blame Lukashenka for the

depressing political, social, and economic situation in the country. For pro-government speakers, the new strategy was [not to mention the opponents' names](#). Some channels, however, discredit specific individuals in the democratic forces, for example, [saying](#) that Franak Viachorka and Pavel Latushka oppose the release of political prisoners.

6.3. "NON-ELECTION", DISCREDITING THE REGIME, AND SUPPORTING THE REPRESSED

In June and December, domestic political events were more often central to opposition speakers, while pro-government speakers paid more attention to events in other countries.

During the reporting period, opposition speakers focused on three event topics: political prisoners, the discrediting of Lukashenka and his associates, and the discrediting of the election campaign in Belarus.

The topic of political prisoners manifested itself in discussions about their possible release. From the search for the regime's motives for the release of prisoners and the coverage of new detentions to the discussions about the reaction of Western countries and the feasibility of a possible dialogue — these topics highlighted a number of disagreements in the camp of opposition politicians and activists during the reporting period.

In the context of the first wave of releases of political prisoners, one of the discussions was dedicated to the failure to include Belarusian political prisoners in the list for prisoner exchange between Western countries and Russia, which included previously convicted German citizen Rico Krieger. As these discussions continued, the death of the seventh political prisoner in October 2024 remained virtually off the agenda of the opposition speakers. On the contrary, Raman Pratasevich's interview with Ksenia Sobchak caused active discussion. By the end of the year, Pratasevich became the person responsible for the public demonstration of popular politicians Maria Kalesnikava and Viktor Babaryka.

Opposition speakers continued to promote the narrative of the inhumanity, incompetence, and illegitimacy of the Lukashenka regime. After Lithuania filed a petition to investigate Lukashenka's crimes with the International Criminal Court, opposition speakers discussed the likelihood of bringing Lukashenka to justice, thanked the Lithuanian authorities, and assured Belarusians that representatives of the regime would be punished sooner or later.

The democratic forces responded to the October announcement of the presidential election day [with a joint statement](#). After some hesitation in choosing whether people should or should not participate in the election, the democratic forces came up with a proposal to vote "against all". Some opposition speakers criticised the proposed strategy, pointing out that voting "against all" was ineffective,

and the election should be boycotted. Despite this, opposition speakers [agree](#) that the upcoming election, which the democratic forces call “non-election”, will be rigged.

Although the international agenda did not become one of the dominant event topics for opposition speakers, two lines of such communication were registered during the reporting period. First, there were discussions of the cases of Belarusian political refugees and migrants who faced forced deportation. Among the high-profile cases is the case of Andrei Hnyot, which successfully resulted in the cancellation of Serbia’s decision to deport this Belarusian, who then safely relocated to Poland. Another case is the case of Vasyl Verameychyk, who was arrested by the Belarusian authorities after he had been deported from Vietnam. Secondly, there were statements of support and solidarity with the democratic forces and the peoples of Georgia and Moldova during the elections in these countries.

6.4. LUKASHENKA'S “HUMANITY” AND ANTI-WESTERN RHETORIC

In addition to the main topics, pro-government speakers continued praising Lukashenka and discrediting Western countries. Among the main events that supported these topics were the entry of the Ukrainian army into the Kursk region, Lukashenka’s “humanity” manifested in releasing political prisoners, the conflict with Armenia, criticism of protesters in Georgia, and the election campaign in Belarus.

In early summer, the dominant topic of the war in Ukraine manifested itself through an active discussion of the entry of the Ukrainian army into the Kursk region of Russia. This event was covered by pro-government speakers in two ways: on the one hand, as aggression from Ukraine and an attack on Russia, and on the other hand, it was called insignificant due to Ukraine’s military weakness.

As for the international arena, during the reporting period pro-government speakers highlighted Lukashenka’s successes (in the SCO and BRICS), condemned the “interference” of Western countries in the election in Georgia, and cautiously covered the conflict between Nikol Pashinyan and Lukashenka. In addition, Lukashenka’s press secretary Natalia Eismont reacted to the statements of the President of Ukraine, refuting his version of the conversation with Lukashenka immediately after the outbreak of a full-scale war. Pro-government speakers also paid attention to the US election, at times pinning their hopes on Trump, but also [accusing the US](#) of interfering in the politics of other countries, regardless of who won the election.

The narrative of Lukashenka’s humanity has intensified in this reporting period, firstly, due to the waves of releases of political prisoners. A striking example was the release of German citizen Rico Krieger, who was [sentenced to death](#) on July 19. The release followed Lukashenka’s pardon. Before Krieger’s release, however, propaganda did

not miss the chance to shoot him in a propaganda film. Secondly, at the end of the year, this narrative was supported by the interruption of the incommunicado regime for politicians Maria Kalesnikava and Viktor Babaryka and by the demonstration of state TV stories about journalists of Radio Svaboda Ihar Losik, Andrei Kuznechyk, and Ihar Karnei, as well as opposition activist Yuri Zyankovich. Right before the election, Lukashenka also accused Poland of unwillingness to negotiate the release of Andrei Pochobut.

Despite the interrupted incommunicado regime and the growing number of the regime’s comments about political prisoners, Lukashenka himself and the officials close to him [deny](#) that this way they are sending a signal to the West and trying to engage in dialogue. Instead, pro-government speakers form the image of Lukashenka as a humane ruler and delegate more compromising rhetoric to Pratasevich or Yuri Vaskrasensky. The latter [gave an interview](#) to the independent media Zerkalo, and the former personally visited first Maria Kalesnikava and then Viktor Babaryka in jail.

Finally, the election campaign was not on the agenda until the end of the year, which is confirmed by the quantitative results of the analysed monitoring projects. The fact that pro-government speakers considered the topic of election in the country less significant than the war in a neighbouring country reinforces the thesis about the routinisation and bureaucratisation of the election process in the country. The electoral topic manifested itself in pro-government sources through criticism of elections in other countries as compared to the sovereign and well-functioning electoral system in Belarus. Pro-government speakers offered to vote [for Lukashenka](#), who could [guarantee](#) the stability and prosperity of Belarus; they directly encouraged and also forced employees of state companies to participate in flash mobs. Perhaps for the first time, the presidential election campaign is being linked to militaristic rhetoric.

6.5. CONTENT FORMATS, DISINFORMATION, AND RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

The influence of individual content producers, who position themselves as independent of the authorities, is increasing in Belarus. These sources spread disinformation, contribute to the polarisation of society, and are likely to influence neutral citizens who may accidentally come across their materials. Research shows that more than half of all disinformation about the war in Ukraine in Belarusian social networks is either directly [copied](#) from Russian sources or adapted from them. This shows the close [connection](#) between Belarusian propaganda and Russian media resources.

Telegram remains the top platform for the dissemination of political content in Belarus. Pro-government channels [generate](#) the vast majority of information there — about 72.54% of the total volume, while independent sources remain in the minority. Unlike Telegram, TikTok [remains](#) relatively

unoccupied by pro-government speakers and leaves a gap for active political influence from their opponents.

Digital space control remains a powerful tool for suppressing alternative voices. For example, the authorities tried to block Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's New Year's speech inside the country by disabling access to YouTube for a few minutes, and before the election, on January 10, the national overnight Internet shutdown was tested again. Such measures both prevent equal access to information and strengthen the control over communication by one political bloc.

7

DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC OPINION

In the reporting period, there has been a significant increase in confidence in the authorities, which is explained by Lukashenka's exploitation of the fear of war and the prevention of a visible economic downturn. Lukashenka is perceived as a guarantor of peace. For the first time, there has been a slight increase in the number of those who support the participation of the Belarusian army in the war: most likely, this is due to some Belarusians who believe in Russia's victory and count on preferences for Belarus following the results of the war. The Belarusian anti-war consensus remains: the majority is against the country's participation in the conflict. The real turnout in the election is expected to be twice as low as in 2020. Most Belarusians are sceptical about the election being fair. The legitimacy of the Lukashenka regime will not be based on the election procedure.

7.1. INTERPRETATION OF SURVEY FINDINGS

To properly understand the results of the study used in the Belarus Change Tracker, it is necessary to take into account the data collection method used. We conduct a survey based on an online panel, and our sample represents not the entire society but only the participants of the panel. At the same time, the changes recorded by us for 70,000–100,000 thousand panellists reflect the trends of public opinion among all Belarusians⁷.

What our **research does show?**

- Dynamics of public opinion. We monitor changes in the survey panel and interpret these dynamics as an indicator of changes in society as a whole. For example, if we see that the positive attitude towards the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus has changed by +/-5 percentage points, we can assume potential changes in Belarusian public opinion. If we see a difference of +/-15 percentage points, we can assume that there are significant changes.

⁷ See Technical Annex No. 2 for details.

- Variation across different segments of society. Our survey reflects the structure of opinions within each segment of society. For example, we can accurately assess which side, in the opinion of ardent opponents of the current authorities, is winning the Russian-Ukrainian war.

What our **research does not show?**

- It does not show the exact size of the segments and the distribution of opinions in society as a whole. We do not know how many people in the Belarusian society are inclined to trust or distrust the regime, or how many people support Russia or Ukraine in the war. We deliberately do not show the distribution of the sample as a whole: these figures, when published, for example, in the media, may contribute to an erroneous understanding of the social and political situation in the country.

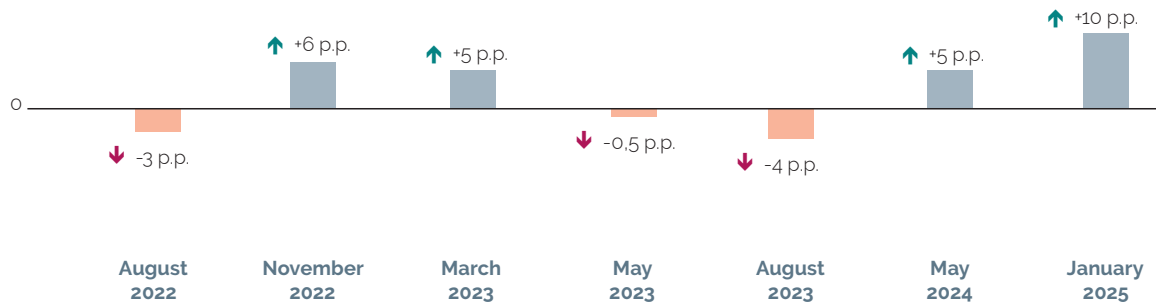
7.2. INCREASE IN CONFIDENCE IN THE AUTHORITIES

Since the last measurement, there has been a noticeable increase in the **Supporters** segments⁸. The hypothesis of increased pre-election anxiety of the respondents was not confirmed: the indicators that we use to monitor the honesty of responses have remained stable. Therefore, the causes of growth must lie in social processes.

In the previous issue, we detected a steady increase in assessments of the situation in the country in the mod-

⁸ To track the dynamics of political sentiments in the Belarusian society, we identify Social Conflict Segments (SCSs). These segments are based on the level of trust in the authorities and those who oppose them: the police, the KGB, the armed forces, state and non-state media, political prisoners, etc. The segments are identified mathematically using cluster analysis. As a result of segmentation, we identify four groups: ardent supporters, moderate supporters, moderate opponents, and ardent opponents. The aggregated segment of Supporters is the sum of ardent supporters and moderate supporters.

Figure 7.1.
Change in the share of the aggregated segment of Supporters relative to the previous measurement
(in percentage points)



The figure shows the difference between the share of Supporters (ardent supporters + moderate supporters) in the specified month and their share in the previous measurement. For example, in August 2022, the segment decreased by 3 percentage points compared to May 2022, and in November 2022 it increased by 6 percentage points compared to August 2022.

erate opponents segment and suggested that, if sustained, this dynamic would translate into increased trust in the authorities. We predicted the transformation of this trend into an increase in confidence in the authorities. The analysis of the dynamics of the Social Sentiment Index (SSI)⁹ shows the continued positive dynamics in assessing the situation in the country and in the families of Belarusians (Figure 7.2). These data are also confirmed by the analysis of perceived economic well-being regularly conducted by the BEROCC center: there is a positive trend in the assessment of the economic situation in the country, Belarusians lose their jobs less.

The data of the new wave of the Belarus Change Tracker confirm the previous prediction: the dynamics in the SCSs over the past 8 months mainly shows an increase in the **moderate supporters** segment and a commensurate decrease in the share of the **moderate opponents**.

Thus, there has been a meaningful change in the sizes of the social conflict segments. Earlier, we explained this dynamic by Lukashenka's skilful use of Belarusians' fear of war and his ability to prevent the economy from a dramatic fall.

⁹ To track the dynamics of assessments of the political and economic situation in the country, we use the Social Sentiment Index (SSI). This index consists of four indicators: 1) A government assessment index (GI), reflecting the level of approval of the state authorities in the country; 2) A family situation index (FI), reflecting respondents' subjective assessments of the emotional and material situation of their families; 3) An expectations index (EI), reflecting people's perceptions of their personal future and that of the country; 4) A country prosperity index (PI), combining assessments of the economic and political situation of the country as a whole.

We believe that the conclusions drawn by the authors in earlier issues of the Tracker that concern the drivers of such growth still remain valid.

The data of the 20th wave of the Chatham House study confirms this assessment. Lukashenka is perceived as a guarantor of peace: only 10% of Belarusians disagree that he prevents the country from being drawn into war. Even among pro-democratic urban residents, only about 50% disagree with this statement. In the assessment of various problems, security shows the lowest dissatisfaction level (8%).

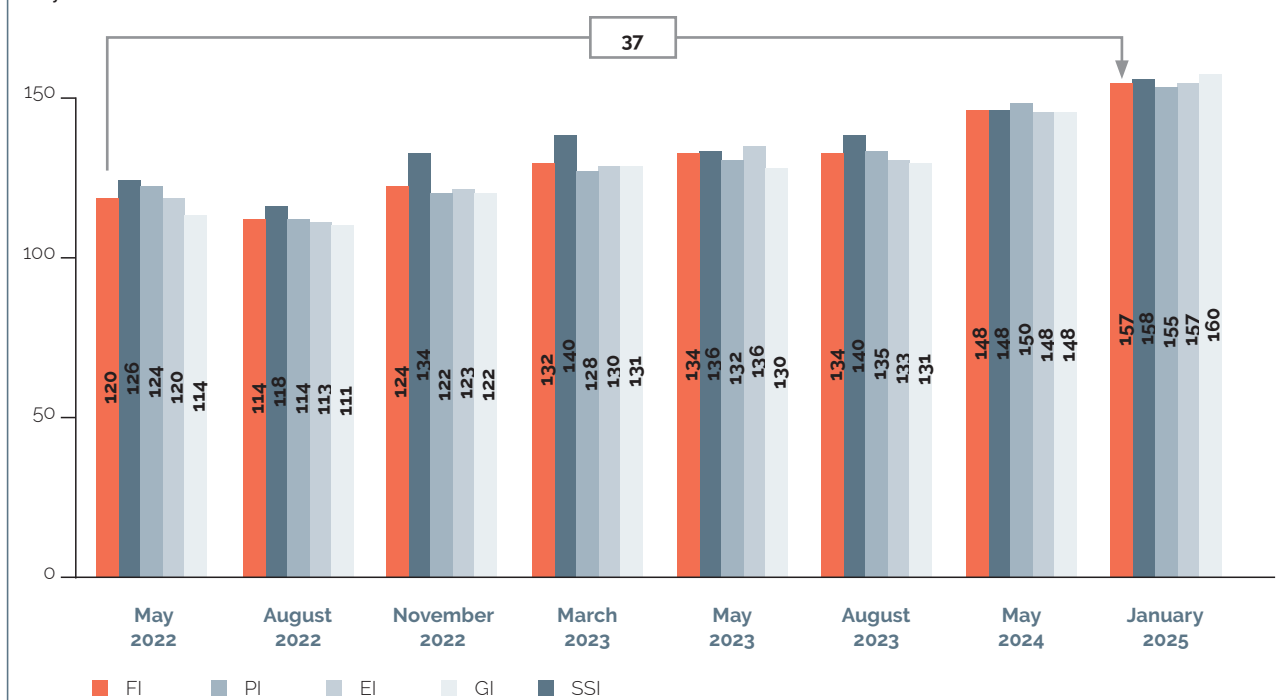
The level of satisfaction with the economic situation, according to the same study, is most often assessed as average (60% of respondents).

This information, combined with the indicators monitored by us and BEROCC, gives reason to assume that despite the fact that Belarusians are aware that their economy has structural problems, the current economic situation and economic stability are perceived positively.

7.3. THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CONFLICT: A SMALL INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SUPPORTERS OF THE WAR

There has been only one significant change in the list of the issues related to the war that we are studying: for the first time since we started the monitoring, we have registered an increase in the number of supporters of the participation of the Belarusian army in the invasion of Ukraine

Figure 72.
Dynamics of the Social Sentiment Index (SSI), a scale from 1 to 200



on the Russian side. The growth was recorded in the **moderate supporters** segment, where the level of support has almost reached the values of **ardent supporters**. The reason for this change is probably the fact that a significant

part of **moderate supporters** would like Belarus to be among the obvious beneficiaries of Russia's victory. Within this segment, the growth rate occurred only among those who are convinced that Russia is winning the war.

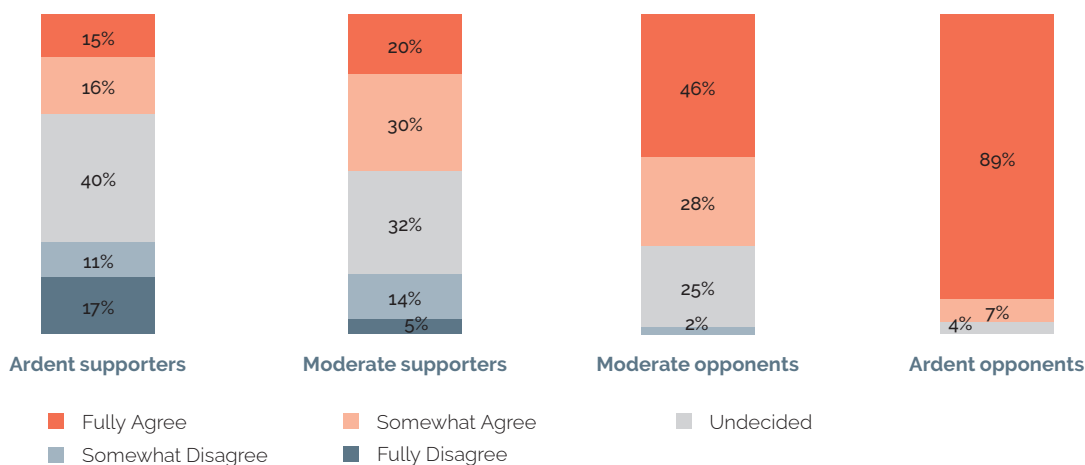
Table 71.
Perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war

		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
The Russian-Ukrainian war has been going on since February 24, 2022. Which of the three statements about the Belarusian army better reflects your opinion?	It should take part in the war on the side of Ukraine	1.5%	0.7%	1.2%	13.5%
	It should take part in the war on the side of Russia	15.1%	13.9% ↑	6.6%	1.4%
	It should not take part in the war on either side	83.5%	85.5%	92.2%	85.1%
Which side, in your opinion, is currently winning the Russian-Ukrainian war?	Ukraine is winning	1.8%	3.0%	6.8%	16.0%
	Russia is winning	49.9% ↑	41.1% ↓	29.4%	18.1%
	Both countries are in a roughly equal position	9.0%	9.4%	24.8%	26.2%
	Difficult to answer	39.2%	46.5%	39.1%	39.7%

↑ Statistically meaningful changes compared to August 2023, inside the segment

■ Significantly higher than in other segments

Figure 7.3.
Idea of the predestination of election results in terms of segments



Answers to the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: it is known in advance who will win the presidential election in Belarus in January".

The overall level of confidence in Russia's victory has decreased by about 5 percentage points compared to the last wave. There is no obvious explanation for this dynamic, so we will monitor this trend in the future.

There have been no other significant changes in the perception of the subjects related to war. The Belarusian anti-war consensus remains: the majority of Belarusians still do not support the country's participation in the conflict. At the same time, the topic remains polarising: **ardent supporters** sympathise with Russia, while **ardent opponents** sympathise with Ukraine.

7.4. ELECTION: NO ENTHUSIASM AND SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE PROCEDURE

The 20th wave of the Chatham House study has been an important source of information about the attitude of Belarusians to the upcoming election.

The researchers assessed the importance of the election for Belarusians, how they assess its fairness, and what they expect after it.

Compared to 2020, the proportion of citizens who are confident that they will take part in the election has almost halved. In addition, Belarusians are very sceptical about the procedure itself: the overwhelming majority believes that an ideal election should feature an objective vote count and give candidates equal access to the media. However, much fewer people believe that the Belarusian election will be exactly like this (87% versus 53% and 75% versus 47%, respectively). Only about a third are confident that politicians of different views will be able to enter the race,

and only about a quarter are confident that independent opposition candidates will be able to participate.

The only segment of Belarusians who are confident that the election will be close to ideal are pro-government Belarusians.

This perception of the election is consistent with a sense of its predestination. Only a small part of Belarusians disagree with the statement about the predestination of the election, both in the Chatham House study and according to the Belarus Change Tracker (Figure 6.3). It should be assumed that for some **ardent supporters** and **moderate supporters**, agreeing with such a statement does not mean agreeing with the idea that the election will be unfair — it is likely that, due to their beliefs, they are simply confident that Aliaksandr Lukashenka will actually win.

Among the pro-democratic audience, almost half express a clear refusal to participate in the vote. This gives an opportunity to speculate about the effectiveness of the electoral plan of the Belarusian democratic forces (voting against all). Considering the problems of communication between the democratic forces and people outside the pro-democratic core described in the previous issues of the Belarus Change Tracker, as well as the intention of almost half of the representatives of this segment in cities to ignore the election, the visibility of voting against all is likely to be low.

All of the above indicates that only respondents who support the authorities see the election as a procedure legitimising Lukashenko. According to the Chatham House results, only in this segment the majority believe that there will be an objective vote count, equal access to the media for candidates, and other attributes of an "ideal election" during this campaign. This reinforces the thesis of the bu-

Table 7.2.

Expectations for the post-election year

		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
The Belarusian authorities will make more efforts to establish relations with the EU countries	Agree	47.0%	45.4%	25.3%	18.1%
	Difficult to answer	45.3%	47.1%	57.6%	25.7%
	Disagree	7.8%	7.5%	17.0%	56.3%
The authorities will significantly less persecute opponents on extremist articles	Agree	17.9%	19.0%	8.8%	1.4%
	Difficult to answer	59.5%	64.5%	53.5%	17.5%
	Disagree	22.6%	16.6%	37.6%	81.0%
In the country, there will be practically no people who are called political prisoners	Agree	34.1%	25.2%	12.3%	5.3%
	Difficult to answer	58.1%	61.7%	48.1%	22.0%
	Disagree	7.8%	13.1%	39.6%	72.7%
The authorities will allow the majority of those who left the country for fear of political prosecution to safely return to Belarus	Agree	45.0%	37.0%	12.8%	3.7%
	Difficult to answer	45.3%	50.0%	44.1%	7.3%
	Disagree	9.6%	12.9%	43.0%	89.0%

■ Significantly higher than in other segments

Answers to the question "There is a list of statements about the situation in the country in the year after the presidential election. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of them?".

reaucratization of the electoral process (see Section 1) — for a considerable proportion of Belarusians, the election looks emasculated and formal.

This does not mean that the power of the regime or of Aliaksandr Lukashenka will not be perceived as legitimate, it only means that the nature of this legitimacy will be based on something else, e.g. coercion to submission or the perceived ability to ensure peace and security.

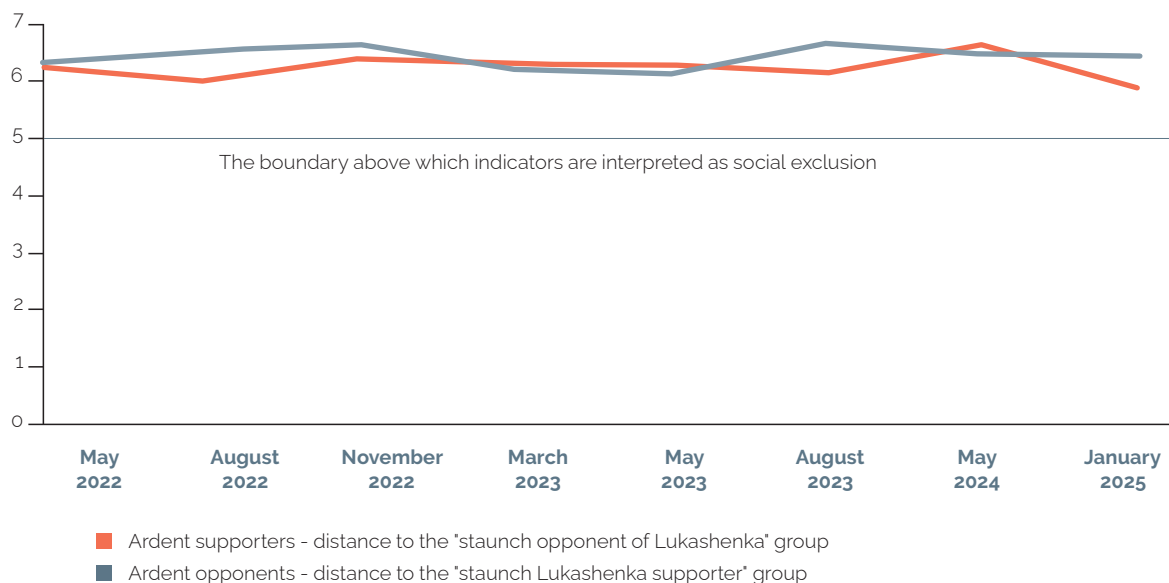
7.5. AFTER THE ELECTION, NORMALIZATION OF LIFE WILL CONTINUE

Expected reduction in repressive measures and persecution of political opponents and attempts to establish relations with the West are strongly associated with the level

of trust in the regime (Table 7.2). The most pessimistic group is **ardent opponents**. This is the result of the consistent and prolonged isolation of this segment from other parts of society, described in the previous issues of the Belarus Change Tracker. These people do not believe in a "thaw" because they think that the regime has no motivation to loosen its grip.

For all other parts of society, things have returned to normal a relatively long time ago. Chatham House shows that social tension was almost never assessed as critical in the period from 2022 to 2024. This also explains the observed great conviction of ardent and moderate supporters that there will be some kind of reduction in tension in the year following the election — these people have been living in a situation of normality and calm domestic political situation for a long time and are ready for greater leniency of the regime towards its opponents.

Figure 7.4. Level of the social distance of the social conflict segments as opposed to each other, scale from 1 to 7, where 7 is maximum rejection



Evaluate what kind of relationship with representatives of different groups or nationalities is acceptable to you personally. Finish the statement: I do not mind having the representatives of this group as...
 1 – close members of my family, 2 – my relatives, 3 – my friends, 4 – my colleagues, 5 – my neighbours,
 6 – people living with me in the same house, 7 – would not wish to see them in my country.

Answers to the question “There is a list of statements about the situation in the country in the year after the presidential election. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of them?”.

On top of this trend, we see the first statistically significant decrease in the social distance between Lukashenka’s ardent supporters and ardent opponents (Figure 7.4). Despite the fact that the level of rejection of the opposing group is still higher than the level of social isolation, a slight warming of the attitude of ardent supporters may be the beginning of a trend towards a more relaxed attitude towards opponents of the regime. A similar trend was regis-

tered in the study of Belarusian national identity-2025, which was conducted under the guidance of the author of the section with the support of FES and which will be published in February 2025. It is important to note that this change is not mutual: the ardent opponents maintain the same level of social distance from the ardent supporters of Lukashenka.

The Chatham House study also registers the demand and readiness for a “thaw.” The problem is that people who may make a decision about such a “thaw” are unlikely to be guided by public opinion, so the willingness of Belarusians to reconcile is unlikely to be a serious motivator for the regime.

TECHNICAL ANNEX

To analyse changes in public opinion, the Belarus Change Tracker team orders surveys from online panel providers. These are services where Belarusians register to participate in surveys. Recruiting is done via snowball effect and online advertising in such services as Google, Yandex, OK, VK (VKontakte), Facebook, etc. An online panel gathers 70,000–100,000 thousand participants. These people regularly receive invitations to fill out various questionnaires. Every month approximately 750 new participants are recruited, most of whom cease to be active panellists within six months, while only about 15% remain active.

In the first few waves of the survey, we used a quota sample. At that time, the sample structure corresponded to the structure of the urban population of Belarus with Internet access by gender, age, settlement size, and education.

From the fourth issue of the Belarus Change Tracker onwards, our team has abandoned the quotas, and now a simple random sample aimed at reflecting the structure of the online panel is used. The data collection provider sends out 25,000 invitations to users and keeps access to the survey open for exactly 7 days. We re-weigh the collected data so that their structure accurately reflects the structure of the online panel by gender, age, settlement size, and education (Table A2.2). The resulting sample represents not the entire population of Belarus but only users of the online panel.

Using this data collection procedure, the authors of the Belarus Change Tracker are guided by the following considerations.

- Significant changes in public opinion in the Belarusian society will inevitably affect the 70,000–100,000 thousand participants of the online panel. Therefore, a sample of ~600 respondents randomly selected from this set (Table A2.1), representative of the panel, will also reflect these changes.
- This data collection method allows us to assume trends and characteristics within the segments of society we study. We mathematically divide the sample into four clusters. Within each of them, the respondents have fairly homogeneous characteristics. We have no reason to assume that the characteristics of these segments in the online panel

that we represent differ significantly from the views of the same segments in the Belarusian society as a whole. This is also confirmed by the fact that other public opinion studies¹⁰ based on the samples corresponding to the entire urban population identify the same segments as our study. Therefore, based on the data of the Belarus Change Tracker, conclusions can be drawn about the distribution of opinions within the segments of the Belarusian society.

For the preparation of all reports, from the fourth issue onwards, the data from the first three waves of the survey were re-weighed by the structure of the online panel and used for the dynamics analysis. A possibility therefore remains that the dynamics observed between the first three and the rest of the issues is due to a change in the sampling approach.

While considering our methods of data collection valid and our data reliable, we acknowledge that any results of public opinion polling in Belarus should be interpreted with caution. The authorities in Belarus systematically prosecute the expression of opinions they do not favour, which is expressed in a certain caution exercised by respondents when answering some of the questions in the questionnaire. Therefore, the share of responses criticising the authorities may be lower than it should be: respondents choose more neutral options instead of what they really think¹¹.

Some respondents also discontinue the survey due to sensitive questions. In the current wave, 13% of those who started taking the survey aborted it at the political questions section at the very beginning of the survey, immediately after the socio-demographic section. This may result in underrepresentation of more neutral and critical opinions¹² in the final distributions.

Also, online polls obviously reflect the opinion of the more economically and socially active urban population. There-

¹⁰ F. Bikanau, K. Nesterovich Belarusian National Identity in 2023 / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2023 — pp. 34–37

¹¹ Belarusians' views on the war and the impact of the fear factor on online public opinion polling / Center for New Ideas, Chatham House, December 2023.

¹² (Dis)honest answers in polls: fear, pragmatism, and sincere neutrality / belaruspolls.org, April 2024

Table A2.1.

Technical indicators of data collection

	Number of people	Percentages
A1. Invitations sent	25000	
A2. Started filling out the questionnaire	1031	
A3. Did not pass the screening part of the questionnaire	46	
A4. Discontinued the survey after the screening part	140	
A5. Completed the survey	627	
Response rate (A2/A1)		4%
Break-off rate (A4/(A2-A3))		14%

Table A2.2.

Socio-demographic structure

Age group	Invitations sent	Completed the survey	In the panel structure (target for weighing)	In the structure of urban population with Internet access
18–24	20%	7%	11%	10%
25–34	37%	21%	26%	22%
35–44	26%	25%	29%	22%
45+	16%	47%	33%	45%
Gender				
Male	22%	54%	31%	44%
Female	78%	46%	69%	56%

fore, the distributions presented in the sample may show a higher level of politicisation and awareness of the socio-political situation than actually exists in society.

The data collection period for the current wave is January 3 — January 10, 2025.

The table below shows the ratio of the structure of the achieved sample, the invitations sent out, the structure of the main online panel and the structure of the urban population of Belarus with Internet access (Table A2.2).

We also make the data sets used for the study freely available:

- dynamic ([.sav;.xlsx](#));
- static ([.sav;.xlsx](#)).

SOCIAL CONFLICT SEGMENTS

The Social Conflict Segmentation (SCS) is based on the assessment of people's confidence in both state and nonstate institutions, as well as in supporters and opponents of government. During data collection, respondents are asked to rate how much they trust or distrust certain groups, for example "the police" or "people designated as political prison-

ers". The analysis of these assessments allows us to divide Belarusian society into four groups according to their degree of trust or distrust in the authorities: **ardent supporters**, **moderate supporters**, **moderate opponents**, and **ardent opponents**. Almost half of society comprises moderate and ardent opponents, and they tend not to trust the government structures. The other half is formed of **moderate** and **ardent supporters**. Both segments vary significantly in socio-demographic characteristics: the group of **ardent opponents** is dominated by men and people with higher levels of education, and representatives of this segment are more likely to live in Minsk and have higher incomes. By contrast, there are more women among the **ardent supporters** of the authorities. **Ardent supporters** are generally less well-educated and have below average incomes. **Ardent** and **moderate supporters** demonstrate high confidence in progovernmental institutions and those social groups that were singled out through factor analysis as "supportive of the authorities".

Below is a list of institutions, people or groups of people that we asked the respondents to rate on a scale of "fully distrust — rather distrust — rather trust — fully trust".

- Armed Forces;
- Police;
- Investigative Committee;

- Prosecutor's Office;
- State Security Committee;
- State media;
- Non-state media;
- Government;
- Officials;
- Citizens of Belarus who emigrated in fear of prosecution at home;
- Participants in protests on the summer and autumn of 2020;
- People who do not trust the authorities;
- People who trust the authorities;
- Supporters of the current government;
- People who reject the results of the 2020 presidential election;
- People who recognise the results of the 2020 presidential election.

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Expert Assessments
BELARUS CHANGE TRACKER
(election edition)



Lukashenka's cult of personality has intensified, and elections have turned into a mere formality.



Economic growth has been replaced by stagnation, but the authorities ignore this.



During elections, the authorities covertly increase pressure on society.