

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Belarus

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-7</td> <td>-7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>11</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	-7	-7	0	Democ:	0	0	0	Autoc:	7	7	0	Durable:		11		Tentative:		Yes		
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Durable:		11																							
Tentative:		Yes																							
SCODE	BLR	CCODE	370	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	1	4	2	4	2																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	15 April 1995		Begin Date	25 November 1996																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1994/1996																								
Executive(s)	President Alyksandr Lukashenko (independent); initially directly elected 1994; most recently reelected 19 March 2006, 82.6%.																								
Legislature	Bicameral: Chamber of Representatives (110 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 28 September 2008) Non-partisans: 103 Communist Party (KPB): 6 Agrarian Party (APB): 1 Council of the Republic (64 seats; 56 members indirectly elected by the deputies of local councils, 8 appointed by the president)																								
Judiciary	Constitutional Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

Alyksandr Lukashenko was originally elected president of Belarus in competitive multiparty elections in 1994. Since that time Lukashenko has carried out a rolling coup. Lukashenko has created a constitutional autocracy by manipulating popular referendums to enhance his constitutional powers and extend his tenure in office. He has also weakened the institutional structures of democracy in Belarus by shutting down parliament and recreating a new legislature limited to his supporters, and by eliminating opposition voices from both the judiciary and media. Lukashenko faced his first serious political challenge in the September

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

2001 presidential election. While polls prior to the vote indicated a close race between the President and his primary political challenger, Vladimir Goncharik, nevertheless, Lukashenko won in a landslide victory. International monitors deemed the vote to be neither free nor fair.

In October 2004 President Lukashenko held a referendum on a constitutional amendment that would permit him to stand for a third term in office. In a vote that was deemed blatantly undemocratic by international observers, the October referendum passed with 79% of the vote. Despite his autocratic ambitions and poor economic performance, Lukashenko continues to amass wide popular support (particularly outside of Minsk).

Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)

While the initial post-Soviet constitution did not provide for an unbridled presidency, President Lukashenko has effectively transformed the political system into one. Through a combination of political populism, electoral manipulation of popular referenda and the widespread use of state coercion, President Lukashenko has systematically consolidated virtually all political power within his hands. Since 1995 neither the legislative nor the judicial branches of government have provided a serious check on the powers of the President. While these institutions continue to function in a constitutionally proscribed manner, there is little horizontal accountability in Belarus. Lukashenko's committed determination to the cause of Belarus-Russian unification has led some political observers to speculate that the Kremlin may be his ultimate political goal. However, in March 2003, Lukashenko rejected a Kremlin proposal to forge a union between the two countries under the Russian constitution with a single government and parliament. This proposal was far from the union of equals sought by Lukashenko.

The flawed October 2004 legislative elections produced an overwhelming majority for candidates and parties supporting President Lukashenko. The first-past-the-post electoral system in combination with government control over the election process and a clampdown on independent press ensured a landslide victory for Lukashenko supporters. Not a single seat was won by an opposition candidate. There were so significant changes in executive constraints in 2006.

Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)

Political opposition to the authoritarian rule of President Lukashenko actively operates inside Belarus. However, government intimidation and coercion, state-control of the media, widespread distribution of patronage to Lukashenko-supporters, and factional splits within the opposition movement itself have all contributed to the weakness and disarray of democratic forces in this country. Lukashenko's reliance on the Presidential Guard, a coercive body with no judicial or legislative oversight, continues to contribute to the poor human rights record within Belarus and adds to Lukashenko's reputation as Europe's last dictator. Both the October 2000 and 2004 legislative elections were plagued by electoral irregularities and government intimidation. Fraud and repression also plagued the 2001 presidential election and the 2004 referendum. Anti-government demonstrations have been violently suppressed in recent years, resulting in widespread international condemnation. In its systemic efforts to suppress the activity of pro-democracy factions, the government initiated a campaign in late summer 2005 against the native population of ethnic Poles, suspected of cooperating with Polish authorities to spread democracy in Belarus. Leaders of Polish political organizations and pro-democracy factions were arrested and replaced by government-nominated officials. As of 2007, ninety-eight of the 110 members of the lower chamber of the legislature were not affiliated with any party; in the 2004 elections, neither the pro-Lukashenko parties nor the main opposition parties won any seats.