



1. Country overview

1.1. System of governance

1.1.1. Executive branch and the presidency

The political system of Belarus is characterised by a highly centralised system of governance, which is based on ‘a strong presidency’ that exerts full control over both the legislative and judicial branches of government. [4](#) The President serves as the head of state and is elected for a five-year term. The Prime Minister is the head of the government but is subordinate to the presidency, as the appointment of the Prime Minister is made by the President.[5](#) According to the Constitution, the President holds extensive powers, including determining the structure of the government and appointing and dismissing key officials, such as deputy prime ministers, ministers, the Prosecutor General, judges of courts of general jurisdiction, and other officials.[6](#)

In 1994, Aliaksandr Lukashenka became the first president of Belarus in elections described as the country’s only democratic vote.[7](#) Since then, and over three decades, Lukashenka has been repeatedly re-elected.[8](#) Following the presidential elections of 26 January 2025,[9](#) in which he claimed to have secured nearly 87 % of the vote according to official results, Aliaksandr Lukashenka entered his seventh consecutive presidency term.[10](#)

The 2025 presidential election took place ‘in a highly restricted political environment,’[11](#) characterised by severe repression[12](#) against political opposition and dissent.[13](#) Following protests related to the 2020 presidential elections, opposition figures were either imprisoned or forced into exile.[14](#) Other potential opposition candidates were arbitrarily disqualified from participating in the electoral process. As a result, there were only four candidates, all of whom supported Lukashenka.[15](#)

The constitutional amendments adopted after a referendum of February 2022 increased the minimum age of presidential candidates from 35 to 40 years and extended the required period of continuous residency in Belarus from 10 to 20 years.[16](#) In addition, both the constitutional changes and the amendments to the Electoral Code in February 2023 barred individuals who hold or previously held foreign citizenship, a residence permit, ‘or other document of a foreign state entitling them to privileges or advantages’ from standing for presidential office.[17](#) Together with the constitutional provision that persons serving a prison sentence are ineligible to vote or be elected,[18](#) the new Constitution effectively excluded political opponents in detention or exile from standing for election.[19](#) At the same time, the authorities abolished polling stations abroad,[20](#) citing alleged security concerns, the reduction in diplomatic personnel,[21](#) and low voter turnout.[22](#)

Due to the absence of genuine competition,^{[23](#)} the presidential election process was described as a ‘sham’ or ‘no-choice election’.^{[24](#)} The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks stated that the election violated Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as the authorities severely restricted the right to vote and to stand for election.^{[25](#)} The authorities did not invite independent observers from the participating states of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), to monitor the election, violating the country’s commitments with OSCE.^{[26](#)} The ODIHR/OSCE was last invited to observe elections in Belarus during the parliamentary elections in 2019.^{[27](#)}

The official results of the 2025 presidential elections have not been recognised by the European Union and its Member States ‘due to substantial doubt about their fairness,’ while independent platforms established by Belarusian civil society organisations reported that the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya secured an absolute majority of votes, based on exit polls and analysis of over 200 polling station protocols.^{[28](#)}

The 2022 constitutional amendments further strengthened presidential powers^{[29](#)} by granting former presidents immunity for actions taken while in office.^{[30](#)} Furthermore, although the amendments reinstated a two-term limit on the presidency, this restriction takes effect only after the 2025 presidential election,^{[31](#)} effectively allowing Lukashenka to potentially serve two further terms, up to 2035.^{[32](#)}

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