



2. State practices affecting civic space

2.1. Human rights context

Following the 2020 presidential elections, the authorities unrolled broad and systematic efforts aimed at suppressing any form of dissent,[128](#) resulting in an environment marked by ‘fear, censorship and self-censorship’.[129](#) The campaign to penalise public criticism continued through 2024[130](#) and 2025,[131](#) with politically motivated charges used against political opponents, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens expressing dissent.[132](#) In the first months of 2026, the human rights situation has remained ‘severe’ as the repression continued.[133](#)

Through the security apparatus, the Belarusian authorities systematically restrict freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.[134](#) State practices aimed at suppression and punishment of any dissent rely on a range of measures, such as various restrictions, surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, ill-treatment, and forced exile.[135](#) Unlike the period before 2020, when waves of arrests and detentions gradually subsided, arrests and detentions following the 2020 protests have persisted. At the same time, the focus of politically motivated prosecutions has shifted from punishing protesters to targeting those who express criticism of the authorities,[136](#) with a growing number of prosecutions being ‘related to the war in Ukraine.’[137](#)

The UN Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights of Belarus noted that arbitrary arrest and detention of those who oppose the authorities or are perceived as doing so, became ‘a permanent fixture of the repressive tactics’ of the Belarusian authorities[138](#) in violation of Article 9 of the ICCPR, ratified by Belarus in 1973.[139](#) Arrests and prosecution have particularly affected people exercising their fundamental rights in connection with the 2020 presidential election, the broader political situation in Belarus, and the war in Ukraine.[140](#) In February 2023, the Government of Belarus withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.[141](#)

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UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025, [url](#), para. 59; Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2026, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

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