



4.2. Protesters

The authorities continue to systematically punish participation in street protests.⁴⁵⁵ Penalties for the participation in the 2020 mass protests have been widely applied over the following years,⁴⁵⁶ with prosecutions continuing in 2024⁴⁵⁷ and 2025.⁴⁵⁸ On 27-28 February 2022, unauthorised protests were reported in connection with the constitutional referendum and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The authorities detained over 1 000 people, amid reported cases of police violence and ill-treatment of detainees. Most of those detained were charged with administrative offences for participation in unauthorised mass events, generally resulting in fines and/or short-term detention of up to 30 days.⁴⁵⁹

To punish participants in the 2020 and 2022 protests, the authorities use Article 342 of the Criminal Code 'Participation in actions that constitute a severe breach of public order',⁴⁶⁰ which carries a maximum penalty of up to three years' imprisonment,⁴⁶¹ including for activities previously treated as an administrative offense.⁴⁶² In some instances, individuals have been sentenced twice for the same act or received multiple sentences based on the same evidence.⁴⁶³ Between July and September 2025, participation in the 2020 protests remained one of the most common grounds for criminal prosecution,⁴⁶⁴ with at least 643 individuals convicted under Article 342 in 2025.⁴⁶⁵

By late 2025, there was a notable shift in the application of Article 342 of the Criminal Code. As this Article has a five-year statute of limitations for criminal liability, an increasing number of cases were discontinued⁴⁶⁶ between October and December 2025.⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, as reported by Viasna, in the first months of 2026, prosecutions for participation in the 2020 protests were still taking place in cases where the statute of limitations had not expired and had not been interrupted by a subsequent offence.⁴⁶⁸ Furthermore, even where cases were dismissed on procedural grounds due to the lapse of the statute of limitations, defendants were still added to the official list of extremists, showing that such designations are made even in the absence of criminal conviction.⁴⁶⁹ In the last three months of 2025, 33 individuals were reportedly added to the list of extremists with a note that they were released from liability due to the expiration of the statute of limitations.⁴⁷⁰

According to Human Constanta, some cases against individuals suspected of participating in the 2020 protests have been closed. However, the source noted that such outcomes depend on various factors, such as, for example, whether the authorities find additional incriminating material on the person's phone. While criminal cases are unlikely to be opened solely for participation in the 2020 protests, such involvement remains known to the authorities, who may initiate prosecution if additional grounds emerge. In 2025, the organisation observed that many people were called for interrogation by the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in connection with the 2020 protests.⁴⁷¹

The authorities increasingly rely on surveillance technologies, including facial recognition technology.^{[472](#)} For identification purposes, law enforcement bodies also use publicly available footages, as many protests have been filmed by state and independent media, as well as by videos posted on social media.^{[473](#)} For example, in July 2025, state-affiliated Telegram channels reportedly posted photos and videos from the 2020 protests held in the cities of Grodno, Bereza, Zhodino, and Baranovichi, asking for help to identify protesters.^{[474](#)} Mobile billing data has also been used as a proof of presence at protests, even in the absence of photo or video evidence.^{[475](#)}

As many Belarusians abroad remain politically active, the authorities have also initiated criminal cases to penalise their participation in protests outside of the country.^{[476](#)} As noted by Human Constanta in email correspondence with EUAA, since 2020, law enforcement has systematically relied on photo and video footage to identify participants at diaspora rallies.^{[477](#)} Following anti-government rallies held abroad on 26 January 2025, the day of the presidential elections, the Investigative Committee reportedly initiated a criminal case involving approximately 400 individuals as suspects.^{[478](#)} After public demonstrations held in Poland, Lithuania, U.S., U.K., and Canada on 22 March 2025 to mark Freedom Day – commemorating the anniversary of the country’s 1918 declaration of independence and a symbol of the protest movement^{[479](#)} – the Investigative Committee identified at least 207 participants,^{[480](#)} with identifications reportedly made through photo and video materials.^{[481](#)} As a consequence, the authorities raided the homes of participants’ relatives in Minsk and other parts of the country,^{[482](#)} subjecting them to searches and interrogations.^{[483](#)} As of August 2025, the number of protesters identified by security forces reportedly rose to at least 467 people.^{[484](#)}

In some cases, as further noted by Human Constanta, Belarusians abroad reportedly cooperate with the Belarusian authorities by recording protests and sending footage to law enforcement.^{[485](#)}

As the authorities perceive the organisers of the March 2025 rallies as extremist formations, the persons identified as participants are treated as suspects under charges of ‘aiding extremist activity’ (Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code).^{[486](#)} This offence is punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment and fines ranging from approximately 7 500 to 750 000 US dollars, depending on the offense and the offender’s financial circumstances. Furthermore, in such cases, the authorities frequently seize property to secure payment, what is reportedly a main reason for raids.^{[487](#)}

Besides Article 361-4, participants in rallies abroad also face charges under Article 361 ‘Calls for restrictive measures (sanctions) or other actions intended to harm the national security’, which carries penalties of up to 12 years of imprisonment. These provisions are often applied together with other articles of the Criminal Code used in politically motivated charges. The authorities treat acts of protests as threats to national security, which is interpreted broadly and enables the use of special (*in absentia*) proceedings to try and sentence individuals abroad.^{[488](#)}

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