



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Report: Belarus September 2020

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (Byelorussian SSR) was a founding member of the Soviet Union. After Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, hundreds of cities and villages in Byelorussian SSR were destroyed, and the capital, Minsk, was left in ruins. Over 2 million Belarusians died, and more than one million buildings were destroyed. Thousands of Jews and Roma people were exterminated at a Nazi concentration camp located in Maly Trostenets.

During Stalin's regime, thousands of Belarusian civilians were killed as part of a large-scale political repression campaign across the USSR. In 1988, [mass graves](#) of victims of Soviet repression were discovered in Kurapaty Forest. The discovery of mass graves shocked Belarusians who participated in mass demonstrations calling for independence, which was finally declared on August 25, 1991.

Belarus's first and only president, Alexander Lukashenko, has ruled the country for 26 years. He amended the constitution to give himself more power and to prolong his term in office. After Lukashenko won a rigged election in 2006, [thousands](#) of protesters joined the "Denim Revolution" in Minsk to demand fair elections. Belarusian riot police were deployed to violently suppress the protesters, injuring and arresting hundreds. When Lukashenko won another rigged election in 2010, [protests](#) again took place in Minsk.

In Belarus, opposition leaders frequently face jail terms on baseless charges. Prominent opposition leaders Yury Zakharenka, Viktor Hanchar, Anatol Krasouski, and journalist Zmitser Zavadski, who spoke out against Lukashenko, were "[disappeared](#)," presumably murdered. Preceding Belarus's 2020 presidential election, mass demonstrations occurred across the country to protest the arbitrary arrests of opposition leaders. Amnesty International [reported](#) that 195 people were arrested in May 2020 and over 360 people were arrested in June 2020. Torture of protestors by the KGB, the secret police, has been rampant.

Belarus's presidential election was held on August 9, 2020. Lukashenko's opponents, Viktor Babariko, Sergei Tikhanovsk, and Svetlana Tikhanovskaya all faced significant threats leading up to the election. Babariko and Tikhanovsk were both [arrested](#) and barred from running. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Sergei Tikhanovsk's wife and Lukashenko's only remaining opponent, was forced to [flee](#) the country with her family following the election. According to official election results, Lukashenko received 80% of the vote. However, the official results were [declared](#) fraudulent by the European Union.

Since the election, protests and strikes have erupted across Belarus calling for Lukashenko's resignation. Over 200,000 Belarusians have [participated](#) in daily peaceful protests that are violently suppressed by authorities. The police have beaten and detained thousands of protesters using clubs, rubber bullets, and flash grenades. At least two protesters have [died](#). Two women opposition leaders have been [exiled](#).

Because the Lukashenko regime in Belarus is deploying riot police to beat, arrest, and torture opposition leaders, protesters, and media, Genocide Watch considers Belarus to be at **Stage 8: Persecution**.

- Genocide Watch condemns Lukashenko's regime for arresting opposition leaders and protesters.
- Genocide Watch supports EU sanctions against Belarusian officials responsible for election fraud and police violence against protesters. The U.S. Global Magnitsky Act sanctions should similarly be imposed.
- Lukashenko must resign, new elections must be held, and Belarus's Soviet-style governmental system needs to be overthrown. All protestors should be released immediately.