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Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies

Research

Toward a New Belarus:
Transformation Factors

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For twenty-six years tyranny has been growing in the nation's body, in its every bone, every capillary. Do you fancy getting rid of it for a couple of days and having no fatigue?
Not this way.
Andrei Skurko*, August 18, 2020

Minsk 2021

*Andrei Skurko is a Belarusian intellectual, journalist and writer. From 2006 to 2017 he was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Nasha Niva*. On July 8, 2021, Andrei was detained and placed in a pre-trial detention centre. On July 12, he was recognized as a political prisoner.

Apart from Andrei, 672 more people are imprisoned in Belarus for political reasons, and the number is growing...

Findings

● From 2020 onwards, procedural (electoral) legitimacy is one of the most vulnerable points of the Belarusian regime. Another vulnerability is the economic component of the social contract.

● The regime still enjoys some advantages in the field of ideological legitimacy. The protection of 'traditional values', friendship with Russia and the cultivation of Soviet heritage – these issues are important for Belarusian society and they are still monopolized by Lukashenka.

● If the autocracy falls, Belarus has a strong chance of successfully transitioning to democracy. This is because of the following: the decline of paternalistic attitudes in favour of personal responsibility, a growing faith in one's individual powers, a growing level of education, an experience of self-organization and horizontal interaction, middle class growth, the absence of serious regional, religious or ethnic conflicts, and low inequality.

● There are at least two factors that negatively affect both the chances of abolishing the autocracy and the chances of transition to democracy: weak national identity and predominantly Russian socialization of Belarusian elites.

● One characteristic feature of the Belarusian situation is the low level of pro-authoritarian mobilization. Supporters of the regime grew active in 2020, but their activism still lagged far behind the pro-authoritarian mobilization in Turkey in 2013 or in Poland in 1980-81. This will play a role in the next stages of political developments in Belarus.

● The mobilization of the protest movement in 2020 has had, and will have, a significant impact on regime loyalists. For them, regime support is no longer a 'default' option, and they are beginning to re-assess the benefits and costs of such support.

● The Kremlin counts on the emergence of a powerful pro-Russian political force in Belarus, which will either exercise power in a new authoritarian format or at least compete with others in a semi-democratic format. As long as this does not happen, the Kremlin will support Lukashenka.

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List of abbreviations

AP – The Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus

BAW – Belarusian Analytical Workroom in Warsaw, a sociological agency

BEROC – Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center, a think tank

BTI – Bertelsmann Transformation Index

CAR – Central African Republic

CEC – Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus

CH – Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs, a British think tank)

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EIU – The Economist Intelligence Unit (research company associated with The Economist weekly)

et al. – et alia (from Latin: and other [co-authors])

EU – European Union

FSI – Fragile States Index by the Fund for Peace

HDI / UNDP – Human Development Index / United Nations Development Programme

EVS – European Values Study

IS NASB – the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus

KGB – Russian: Комитет государственной безопасности, Committee for State Security in Belarus

MAZ – Minsk Automobile Plant

NAVCO – Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (a database)

OSW – Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich w Warszawie (from Polish: The Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw)

PRC – Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, an American think tank

SCRB – the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus

UAE – the United Arab Emirates

V-Dem – Varieties of Democracy Institute at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden

WVS – World Value Survey

Introduction

Why have the 2020 protests not overthrown the Belarusian regime? Will there be changes in Belarus in the near future? What awaits the protest movement? What are the chances for democratization? ...and the risks of a new autocracy after the possible exit of Alyaksandr Lukashenka?

There have been many answers to these questions over the last year. Many of the answers presuppose a simplistic model of socio-political reality, where one or two factors are considered necessary and sufficient for bringing about systemic transformations. *Had Tsikhanouskaya returned to Belarus on August 16, 2020, she would have been able to take over power without any problems, and Lukashenka would have fled abroad. Had administrative buildings been seized at the peak of the protests, the regime would have collapsed. If in the near future Belarusians take to the streets in the same number as last year, the regime will not survive.*

All these claims presuppose too simple a model of reality. Over the last 70 years, there have been about 480 cases of authoritarian rulers' exits (i.e. overthrow, death or resignation).[1] In 45% of cases, these exits resulted in a regime change. In about half of the latter cases, the authoritarian regime was replaced by a democratic one.[2] These processes were caused by various factors, or rather, various configurations of factors: from international, through socio-cultural and economic to situational ones. No single factor or configuration of factors guarantees a systemic political change.

As there are no 'instant-effect' factors, there is also no time frame during which systemic changes 'must' occur. In the Republic of South Africa, almost forty years passed from the signing of the Charter of Freedom in 1955 (the beginning of a coordinated struggle against apartheid) and the holding of general democratic elections in 1994. In the Polish People's Republic, nine years passed from the emergence of the Solidarity movement (1980) to the Round Table (1989), which ended the communist autocracy. However, in Tunisia it only took ten months from the outbreak of the first demonstrations against the Ben Ali regime (December 2010) to institutionalize the transition to democracy through the Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011. Just as the factors of political transformation can be different, so the time period of a transition varies greatly.

The main purpose of this research is to identify factors that are relevant to political transformation in Belarus. There are four types of factors: (a) conducive to the collapse of an autocracy; (b) preventing an autocracy from collapse; (c) conducive to democratization; (d) impeding democratization. Let us emphasize that the collapse of autocracy is by no means tantamount to the emergence of stable democracy. The overthrow of an autocrat does not automatically lead to democracy, in fact, in most cases a new autocracy emerges from the ruins of an old one. The most recent history of Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan or Tunisia shows how problematic the post-authoritarian period is and how serious the risk is of the emergence of a new form of autocracy. This is why it is important to distinguish between *factors of overcoming an autocracy* and *factors of democratization*.

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[1] A. Kendall-Taylor, E. Frantz (2014), 'How Autocracies Fall.' In *Political Science Faculty Publications*. Paper 69. Accessed Sept 1, 2021.

[2] B. Geddes, J. Wright, E. Frantz (2014), 'Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: New Data,' *Perspectives on Politics*, Volume 12, Issue 2. Accessed Sept 1, 2021.

This research paper consists of two parts. The first is devoted to diagnosing the current state of the Belarusian autocracy. We apply the (slightly modified) model of authoritarianism of the German political scientist Johannes Gerschewski. He identifies three pillars of autocracy: legitimation, repression, and co-optation of elites. Two additional factors of stability/instability of an autocracy were also considered: the party of power and the international context.

In the second part we explore the factors of system change. We distinguish five categories of these factors: axiological, structural, tactical, international and black swan factors. We analyse not only the preconditions of changes, but also their probable direction in the medium- and long-term perspective, namely: (1) How is factor F relevant to the collapse of the Belarusian autocracy? and (2) How is F relevant to democratization in case the autocracy falls?

The practical goal of this research is to equip champions of the democratization of Belarus with sound knowledge of weak and strong points of the Belarusian regime as well as risks and advantages of particular options. For some, this study may be helpful in making an existential choice – whether or not they should engage in the political struggle. A timely decision on this issue is also of social importance. None is so problematic for the democratic cause as an 'ex-revolutionary' who has become disillusioned with the idea because its implementation turned out to be more difficult than he had thought. And vice versa: a conscious decision to continue the struggle, made on the basis of a realistic assessment of the situation, will enable the champions of the democratic cause to withstand all sorts of tests that are inevitable in such a situation.

Another important goal is to help avoid serious ethical errors. Although ethical expertise was beyond our purview, an analysis of different options will help proponents of democracy to determine the ethical framework within which the struggle for the democratic future of Belarus must take place.

Basic assumptions and methodology

In this research, we were guided by the explanatory model of Karl G. Hempel,[3] adapted to sociopolitical reality. The adapted Hempel model proposes three steps:

1. Establishing the actual state of affairs.
2. Establishing relevant patterns
3. Diagnosis of the state of affairs through the prism of these patterns

To establish the actual state of affairs in Belarus we used opinion polls, monitoring of the political process, expert reports, media content, statistical data, international indices, etc.

Establishing the patterns of the transformation process was more challenging. In tune with the critical rationalism approach, we proceeded from the assumption that sociopolitical reality is the product of the actions (or inaction) of millions of individuals endowed with reason and free will. Thus, socio-political processes are always somewhat unpredictable.

However, these processes are *not* absolutely unpredictable. Cognitive and behavioural research reveals multiple patterns (loose regularities) of human behaviour. Reason and free will may interfere with these patterns, but the patterns still work. Other things being equal, people prefer quick gains to delayed ones (*hyperbolic discounting*), a routine way of decision-making to a reflexive one (*path-dependency*) – these are the examples of such patterns.

Thus, we sought for the patterns of sociopolitical reality that would be applicable to the Belarusian case. To establish them, we used the following:

● Academic publications on fallen autocracies. We explored dozens of works on this topic – from Samuel Huntington through Adam Przeworski to Barbara Geddes et al.

● Comparison of Belarus to other autocracies based on global indices (EIU index, V-Dem, BTI, World Bank, etc.).

● In-depth studies of different aspects of the functioning of authoritarian regimes (case studies);

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[3] S. Glennan (2006), 'Explanation' in Sahotra Sarkar, Jessica Pfeifer (eds), *The Philosophy of Science. An Encyclopedia*, New York: Routledge, p. 275-276. C.G. Hempel (1965), *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*, New York: The Free Press, p. 247–249.

Part One.

The architecture of a skewed authoritarianism

Belarus as compared to other autocracies

Belarus is one of 57 authoritarian countries and, if Eurasian Russia is not counted, the only autocracy in Europe. In terms of hardness, the Belarusian autocracy is roughly halfway between North Korea, the hardest autocracy, and Mauritania or Mali, the softest ones (see Charts 1 and 2).

Chart 1. Political systems in 2020 (167 countries)

Source: EIU

The autocracies of the past 70 years have been either military juntas, party dictatorships, or absolute monarchies, which together made up about 80% of all post-war authoritarian regimes.[4] The Belarusian autocracy belongs to yet another type – personalistic autocracies, which made up about 20% of post-war autocracies. Personalistic autocracy, sometimes called presidentialism, is a systemic concentration of political power in the hands of one person who does not want to delegate to other actors the right to make decisions, except for the most trivial ones.[5]

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[4] B. Geddes, J. Wright, E. Frantz (2018), *How dictatorships work. Power, Personalization, and Collapse*, Cambridge University Press.
[5] M. Bratton, N. Van de Walle (1997), *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, p. 63. ML Mezey (2013), *Presidentialism: Power in Comparative Perspective*, Lynne Rienner Publishers.

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**Chart 2. Autocracies ranked by their hardness/softness
(2020, 100-point scale, where 100 – the hardest, 1 – the softest)**

Country	Score
North Korea	73
Congo Kinshasa	72
CAR	67
Syria	64
Chad	61
Turkmenistan	57
Laos	56
Tajikistan	52
Equat.Guinea	52
Yemen	51
Libya	51
Saudi Arabia	48
Burundi	47
Uzbekistan	47
Eritrea	46
Iran	45
China	43
Bahrein	38
Sudan	37
Belarus	35
Guinea-Bissau	34
Azerbaijan	33
UAE	33
Djibouti	32
Venezuela	31
Cameroon	31
Togo	30
Afganistan	29
Cuba	29
Vietnam	27
Egypt	27
Oman	25
Myanmar	24
Guinea	23
Cambodia	23
Comoros	23
Rwanda	23
Swaziland	23
Congo (Brazzaville)	22
Kazakhstan	21
Zimbabwe	20
Qatar	19
Niger	18
Russia	18
Ethiopia	16
Mozambique	13
Gabon	12
Nicaragua	10
Iraq	9
Jordan	9
Angola	8
Burkina Faso	7
Algeria	6
Kuweit	5
Palestine	4
Mauritania	2
Mali	2

Source: EIU

Chart 3. Degree of power personalization in authoritarian countries in 2020 (100-point scale)

Country	Score
North Korea	99
Nicaragua	98
Eritrea*	98
Azerbaijan	97
Equat.Guinea	97
Belarus	97
Venezuela	97
Bahrein	94
Tajikistan	94
Burundi	92
Syria	92
Turkmenistan	92
Cambodia	90
Russia	90
Uzbekistan	89
Cameroon	88
Yemen	87
China	86
Chad	86
Vietnam	82
Algeria	81
Cuba	80
Iran	80
UAE	80
Togo	80
Saudi Arabia	78
Gabon	77
Guinea	77
Kazakhstan	77
Congo (Brazzaville)	77
Djibouti	75
Rwanda	74
Sudan*	74
Ethiopia	74
Mauritania	73
Qatar	72
Comoros*	71
Congo (Kinshasa)	69
Afganistan	67
Swaziland	65
Laos	61
Zimbabwe	60
CAR	60
Oman	58
Iraq	52
Palestine	49
Angola	48
Egypt	48
Libya	48
Mozambique	42
Myanmar	38
Нигер	37
Guinea-Bissau	36
Mali	32
Burkina Faso	28
Jordan	27
Kuweit	27

Source: V-Dem

* Since there is no data for 2020, we used the data for 2019.

The degree of personalization of state power is measured by the Varieties of Democracy Institution (V-Dem),[6] using a scale from 0 to 1. For convenience, we converted it to a 100-point scale. As of the beginning of 2021, the degree of personalization of power in Belarus was 97 out of 100 points, which is higher than in any currently existing absolute monarchy (for example, personalization in Saudi Arabia is 77 points) – see chart 3.

Another distinguishing feature of the Belarusian autocracy is the absence of a party of power (for detailed discussion cf. chapter *Party of power*). A high degree of personalization, functioning without a party of power, and its placement in Europe – all this, taken together, makes the Belarusian autocracy quite a unique phenomenon. Now let us move on to a more detailed analysis of Belarusian authoritarianism.

Gerschewski's model

German researcher Johannes Gerschewski distinguished three factors ('pillars') of authoritarianism: *legitimation*, *repression* and *co-optation* of the elites[7] – see Figure 1.

Figure 1. The architecture of authoritarianism (adaptation of Gerschewski's model)

Legitimation is a set of conditions and their accompanying interpretations which maintain the belief in a society that the ruling group is entitled to rule the country. There are two types of actors involved in legitimation: the ruling group and the population. The former creates appropriate conditions and generates appropriate interpretations, and the latter accepts or does not accept them.

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[6] Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Allen Hicken, Garry Hindle, Nina Ilchenko, Joshua Krusell, Anna Luhrmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefine Pernes, Johannes von R¨omer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundstr¨om, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt (2021), 'V-Dem [Country–Year/Country–Date] Dataset v11.1,' *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds21.
[7] J. Gerschewski (2013), 'The Three Pillars of Stability,' *Democratization*, Vol. 20, nr 1.

Virtually no form of legitimation guarantees the stability of an authoritarian regime: either dissidents, or oppositionists, or former members of the ruling group can challenge the system and its main beneficiaries at any moment. Therefore, any autocracy needs a system of repression – a set of punitive measures aimed to increase the risks for those who dare to rebel against the government. The main actors here are the ruling group and the (potential) opposition in the broadest sense of the word.

Co-optation of military, economic and technocratic elites is another challenge for an autocrat and his entourage. *Military elites* are high-rank officers that provide internal and external security (in Belarus they are often referred to as *siloviki*). *Economic elites* are heads of large enterprises and big businesspersons who provide the ruling group with financial resources but refrain from financing the potential opposition. *Technocratic elites* are those who possess professional know-how in the vital areas of government: diplomacy, economics, information technology, statistics, etc.

The distinction between the ruling group and the military / economic / technocratic elites is justified by the following:

1.   Members of the ruling group may combine more than one function: being part of the inner circle and being large businessmen or IT professionals. But it is hardly possible that the ruling group consists of persons who are simultaneously good military officers, businessmen, IT specialists, managers, diplomats, etc. The ruling group must constantly maintain a system of incentives that guarantees the readiness of security officials and professionals to serve the vital interests of the regime and share its fate.

2.   Co-optation of security officials, businesspersons and technocrats presupposes a certain degree of constancy. Although many autocrats tend to prevent the representatives of elites from staying in the same environment for a long time, they must ensure some predictability and continuity for these people. This leads to formation of relatively stable military, economic and technocratic elite blocs.

In addition to the three 'pillars' of autocracy, Gerschewski also distinguishes the 'bonus of complementarity' – a positive side effect of the interaction between legitimation, repression and co-optation. Strong legitimation makes repressions more effective: some people justify them (*They get what they deserve! Why are they undermining stability?*), and some just play them down (*Everything suits me. Why should I care if someone was beaten somewhere?*). Strong legitimation and effective repression, in turn, are the key to successful co-optation: the risk of defection is reduced, and if it happens, the defector can be easily neutralized (imprisoned, left unemployed, pushed abroad, or killed).

We will use the Gerschewski model (slightly modified) to analyse the state of the Belarusian political system in the post-electoral period.

Legitimation
General patterns

Legitimation is constructed in a variety of ways. Since the time of Max Weber, many classifications of legitimation have appeared in academic literature. Without entering into terminological and theoretical discussions, we distinguish five main types of legitimation: *charismatic*, *traditional*, *procedural*, *ideological* and *effect-oriented* – see Table 1.

Table 1. Types of legitimation

The type of legitimation	Explanation (what entitles this leader* to rule the country?)
Charismatic	The leader possesses unusual political, organizational and spiritual qualities. The proclivity of the leader to flout laws and norms can be perceived as a manifestation of strong charisma.
Hereditary (traditional)	The leader is the biological or legal heir to his/her predecessor with strong legitimacy (as a rule, also hereditary).
Procedural (rational and legal)	The leader received the highest public office through established procedures, for example, general election.
Ideological	The leader protects values and cultural beliefs that are important to the society. An international or geopolitical mission can also be part of ideological legitimation
Effect-oriented**	The leader effectively ensures security, order and socio-economic development in the country.

* A leader can be either individual or collective. Hereinafter, for the sake of convenience, we use this word in the singular.
** David Easton calls it 'specified support', cf. D. Easton (1979), A Systems Analysis of Political Life, Chicago University Press, p. 268.

Some explanations are in order here. First, the leader always strives to use more than one form of legitimation. For example, along with the charismatic, he/she also promotes ideological, procedural and effect-oriented legitimation.

Secondly, for legitimation to be effective, the real state of affairs is not so important as the public's perception. For example, electoral procedures may be grossly violated, but the majority of citizens may perceive the situation as quite satisfactory for procedural legitimation. This is not uncommon either because of the lack of information, or because of cognitive biases, or because of unwillingness to care about such things.

Third, in the process of legitimation, the principle of compensation often works: disadvantages of one type of legitimation are compensated for by the (perceived) advantages of another type of legitimation. The functioning of this principle manifests in this everyday communication:

> *Well, suppose he falsified the elections. But under his rule there is stability in the country and pensions are paid on time!* (The lack of procedural legitimation is offset by the perceived benefits of effect-oriented legitimation.)
>
> *Yes, we are going through hard times in the economy. Prices are rising, wages are meagre. But let us be fair: the authorities do not allow same-sex marriage, they care about our culture, our spiritual heritage.* (The problems in effect-oriented legitimation are compensated for by perceived advantages in the ideological realm.)

In addition to five specific forms of legitimation, we can also distinguish 'legitimation by default'. This is a situation when people support the government either because of path-dependency, or because of the fear of the unknown (*We don't know what awaits us in the event of a regime change*) or a feeling of no alternative. This is roughly what David Easton calls 'diffusive support'.[8]

Default legitimation can work when the society is atomized – the opponents of the regime function in semi-closed ghettos, without stable communication channels. This is a situation that can be described with the phrase: *They are a majority, but they do not know it.* As long as opponents of the regime exist in a state of atomization, the regime can count on diffusive support and path dependency.

The electoral process is the Achilles heel of modern autocracies

In the post-Cold War era, most autocrats seek to legitimize their rule through electoral procedures. Full adherence to such procedures carries great risks: people may vote for an alternative candidate, or the electoral success of an autocrat may not be as convincing as he would like. In this regard, elections in autocracies are almost always accompanied by systemic manipulations and falsifications.

However, no amount of manipulation and falsification can guarantee success. In the post-Cold War period, about 26% of authoritarian regimes were overthrown as a result of the (imitative) election going wrong at some point which led to the collapse of the system. It is no wonder that supporters of democratic change often engage in elections, however unfair and unjust they can be. Regime change through the electoral process is one of the least costly ways, in terms of human life and health, to overcome authoritarianism. But this method requires that at least 50% of the population is involved in the voting process and exposing falsifications.[9]

Why do many autocrats hold elections at all? Resignation from elections does not reduce

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[8] *A Systems Analysis*, p. 268.
[9] *How dictatorships work*, p. 180.

risks for the regime, on the contrary, it increases them. Firstly, the autocrat must invent alternative ways of self-legitimation, which is not easy in the modern world, and secondly, the likelihood of a violent overthrow, particularly, a military coup, increases[10] – see Figure 2.

Fig. 2. The risks and problems associated with holding / not holding elections

Metamorphoses of the legitimation of the Lukashenka regime

Procedures, economics, and ideology until 2020

In 1994, Alyaksandr Lukashenka received convincing procedural legitimization: in the second round of the presidential elections, with a turnout of 70.6%, 80.3% voted for him. Neither internal nor external observers recorded any falsifications in favour of Lukashenka. Procedural legitimation was reinforced by strong charisma: long before the presidential campaign, the politician had made the image of a 'man of the people', a fearless fighter against the corruption and lawlessness of the authorities.

Since 1996, when a constitutional referendum was held, the procedural legitimation of the Belarusian regime has undergone erosion due to systematic electoral fraud. Over time, the elections turned into a complete imitation of the electoral process – see Chart 4. But at least until 2014, problems with procedural legitimation were successfully compensated for by economic growth: from 2001 to 2008, the GDP grew almost five times, and after a short perturbation in 2009 -2010, growth resumed again and continued until 2014.[11]

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[10] Ibid.
[11] GDP (current US$) - Belarus | Data, *World Bank* , accessed Sept 17, 2021.

**Chart 4. Index of electoral process and pluralism in Belarus
for 2006–2020 (the highest possible score is 10)**

Source: EIU

The institutionalization of the 'ideology of the Belarusian state' in 2003 testified to the fact that the regime places a special stake in ideological legitimation. In practice, this institution, despite a solid financial, legislative and administrative base, has not become an effective tool for maintaining loyalty to the regime in Belarusian society. In the sphere of ideological legitimation, friendship with the Orthodox Church, an appeal to traditional values and flirting with the idea of integration with the Russian Federation has had a greater effect. But all this could be cultivated without establishing the state ideology as a separate institution.

Lukashenka's charismatic legitimation, which is inherently fragile and volatile, has evaporated over time. He continues to play the role of a brave fighter for justice, and state ideologists portray him as an extraordinary person, almost a messiah, but this is instead an element in strengthening the personalistic character of the Belarusian autocracy. There are few, if any, chances to restore the power of charisma that Lukashenka possessed in the 90s.

Destruction of the remnants
of procedural legitimation in 2020

As can be seen from Chart 4, in 2020, the 'electoral process and pluralism' in Belarus was rated by the EIU experts at 0 points (out of ten possible). Even in Cameroon, where autocrat Paul Biya has ruled for 38 years, the electoral process and pluralism is still at 1.67 points.

Throughout 2020, problems with electoral legitimation worsened and turned into a factor of destabilization. The 2020 election campaign began against a background of extremely low confidence in the Central Election Commission (CEC). According to a sociological survey,[12] held in March–April 2020 by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy

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[12] The public learned about the results of the survey in June 2020; it seems they were not supposed to be made public.

of Sciences of Belarus (IS NASB), only 11% of Minsk residents trusted the CEC.[13] Even if we allow that outside the capital, the degree of trust could be a bit higher, this indicator is still very low. Since the CEC is the main body responsible for the electoral legitimation of state power, the level of trust in it should be considered the upper threshold for the level of procedural legitimation of the regime. The 'upper' because there are other factors, such as barriers to polling or independent observation, that further undermine this form of legitimation.

Within the survey, sociologists also asked citizens about their trust in president Lukashenka. It turned out that only 24% of Minsk residents trusted the current president at the time of the survey (April 2020).[14]

Immediately after the elections, *Telegram in Belarus* conducted its own survey. It is important to clarify that this is (a) the official verified Telegram channel in Belarus; (b) it is only available to users with Belarusian SIM-cards, (c) one must use the Telegram messenger to participate in surveys. The final results of the survey were as follows. If we subtract the number of those who are not from Belarus (do not have a Belarusian passport), as well as those who are from Belarus, but did not take part in the voting, the figure is 1,416 000. Among them, 86.4% said they voted for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who was the main rival of the incumbent president, and 6.8% confessed they voted for Lukashenka.[15]

These data sets contrasted strongly with the officially announced results of the August 9 elections. According to them, Lukashenka got 80.1% of the vote, and Tsikhanouskaya – 10.12%; the turnout was 84%. An attempt by the authorities to ensure convincing electoral legitimation of the current regime had the opposite effect than intended: the *de*legitimization of the regime in the minds of a significant part of society, which by that time had become politically active.

There were a number of other factors that also undermined the procedural legitimation:

● *Audio recordings testifying to falsification*. The most resonant was the audio document about the head of the Oktyabrsky district of Vitebsk, Siarhei Stasheuski. It was recorded that the official forced members of the election commission at polling station No. 25 to falsify in favour of Alyaksandr Lukashenka.[16] Photos of ballots burnt around the edges also became viral; sure enough, alternative candidates were ticked in the ballots.[17] Apparently, burning inconvenient ballots was one of the falsification methods.

● *Failure to post copies of the ballot protocols*, although the law requires electoral commissions to do so. Some commissions did not post the protocols at all and commission members left the polling stations accompanied by police officers and riot police, sometimes from the back door. At many polling stations, protocols were posted without signatures,[18] and in a number of cases the commissions prevented photographing of the protocols.[19]

[13] Институт социологии НАН: В апреле уровень доверия Лукашенко в Минске составлял 24%. *TUT.BY*, Jun 19, 2020. Accessed: June 20, 2020.

[14] Ibid.

[15] За кого Вы проголосовали на выборах президента Республики Беларусь? Final Results, *Telegram in Belarus*. Accessed: Sep 17, 2021.

[16] В Витебске глава Октябрьского района заставлял комиссию переделывать протоколы на участке, где победила Тихановская. АУДИО, *belsat.eu*, Aug 11, 2020. Access: Aug 30, 2020.

[17] Праваабаронцам у Берасьці прынесьлі абгарэлыя бюлетэні для галасаваньня, *Радыё Свабода*, Aug 15, 2020. Accessed: Aug 30, 2020.

[18] Итоговый отчет о выборах президента Республики Беларусь (по данным платформ «Голос», «Зубр» и сообщества «Честные люди»), Aug 20, 2020, A more recent statistical analysis: Исследование о результатах выборов Президента Республики Беларусь 2020 года. На основе официальных протоколов УИК и данных платформы Голос, July, 2021. Accessed: Sept 17, 2021.

[19] Ibid.

● *Statistical anomaly.* Within the joint initiative civic campaigns Golos, Zubr and Honest People published a report based on the 1,310 photographs of protocols (out of 5767) and around 550,000 photographs of individual ballots. It turned out that in the polling stations where it was possible to take a photo of the protocols, the total number of voters for Tsikhanouskaya amounted to 81% – see Chart 5.[20] Photos of individual ballots made it possible to verify the figures in many protocols. There is evidence that at around 400 polling stations (out of 1,310 photographed) significant falsifications took place.

Chart 5. Distribution of votes in ballot protocols: those made public vs those concealed

Source: Golos, Zubr, Honest people

● *Action by state-employed sociologists*. On August 17, 2020, during a protest action, employees of the IS NASB held posters with a statement about falsification of exit polls, demanding to announce the real results of the polls.[21]

● *Authorities' attempts to stop anti-fraud campaigns.* The very fact that the authorities tried to stop civic campaigns for fair elections had a strong impact on the perception of the electoral legitimation. Common sense suggested that if the incumbent really had such high support, why obstruct public opinion polling, alternative vote counting or independent monitoring of the electoral process?

In 2020, it was very difficult for the authorities to maintain the appearance of compliance with electoral procedures. Professionals from the IT sector joined the civic monitoring of elections and developed reliable tools for this purpose. The Golos initiative was launched at the Social Technology Hackathon 2020. Among people who played an important role in the initiative were the founder of EPAM Systems Arkady Dobkin, and one of the initiators of the Hi-Tech Park from EPAM Systems, Pavel Lieber. Attempts by state propagandists to present them as puppets of foreign special services or wannabe politicians could only convince a small part of society at best.

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Социологи НАН РБ призвали коллег озвучить реальные цифры экзит-полов, *Telegraf.by*, Aug 17, 2020. Accessed: 30 августа 2020.

Economic stagnation, Covid and problems with social contract

The economic growth of Belarus' GDP has been stagnating since 2014 – see Chart 6.

Chart 6. GDP growth in Belarus, Russia, Poland and Ukraine

Source: World Bank

In 2019-2020, the incomes of the populace continued to grow at a rate higher than labour productivity,[22] which led to the accumulation of imbalances and pressure on both the exchange rate and inflation.

The growth of income is one of the significant aspects of the social contract. In 2004, the authorities came up with a concrete commitment: an average monthly salary will be at least the equivalent of 500 USD. Between 2004 and 2009, 700 and 1000 USD were repeatedly mentioned as the next goals to achieve. Later, however, due to the permanent crisis, the government dropped these promises; the main task was just to preserve the average monthly salary at 500 USD. But it proved difficult to achieve even this minimum goal – see Chart 7.

Another problem was the discrepancy between the forecasted GDP growth and the real growth – see Chart 8. Thus, even despite the fact that the Programme of Socio-Economic Development in 2016–2020 set rather modest goals, the target GDP growth was ensured only twice in 10 years. Of course, such weak economic results of the second decade meant that the government was unable to live up to the social contract that had existed until 2010.

From December 2019 to April 2020, the number of people who thought the economic situation in Belarus was deteriorating rose significantly: from 38% to 61%. In addition to

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[22] Национальный статистический комитет Республики Беларусь. *Основные социально-экономические показатели по Республике Беларусь, областям и городу Минску в январе-марте 2020 г.* Минск 2020, с. 8. Accessed Sept 17, 2021.

worsening perceptions of the economic situation, a new factor appeared: dissatisfaction with the authorities' response to the coronavirus epidemic.[23]

Chart 7. Average gross monthly salary in Belarus

Source: Belstat

Chart 8. Socioeconomic development goals and reality

Source: Belstat

At the end of March 2020, as part of epidemiological measures, the Russian authorities imposed restrictions on crossing the Belarusian-Russian border. As a result, a significant number of Belarusian guest workers (immigrant labour) were forced to return to their homeland.[24] This measure affected about 650 thousand citizens of Belarus,[25] which, as the

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[23] This follows from the BAW survey and study, see Социсследование показало, почему протест не сдувается, *TUT.BY*, Dec 1, 2020. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.

[24] Ситуация на беларуско-российской границе осложняется, и это новый вызов для режима, *Belarus in Focus*, Jule, 15–21, 2020. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.

[25] В России подсчитали граждан Беларуси, *belsat.eu*, Apr 10, 2019. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.

head of the analytical centre *Belarus Security Blog* Andrei Parotnikau noted, contributed to growing tensions within Belarusian society. The lack of decent jobs in Belarus, meagre state support for unemployment, 2/3 of households having no savings, and the loss of earning opportunities in Russia disposed many Belarusians very negatively towards domestic authorities.[26]

In addition to all this, there was also a background discontent caused by the presidential 2015 Decree 'On the prevention of social dependency' (popularly referred to as the 'Decree on parasitism'). The regulation provided for a tax obligation for able-to-work citizens who were not officially employed and did not pay taxes. At the beginning of 2018, changes were made to the Decree, somewhat softening the requirements for 'able-to-work dependents'. However, the discontent persisted and was still perceived as a violation of the social contract by the authorities.

Ideological zigzags

When procedural legitimation is destroyed, the economic situation deteriorates, and charismatic legitimation does not help, there are two resources left: ideology and diffusive support.

Since its institutionalization in March 2003, the Belarusian state ideology has undergone many changes both in terms of its main message and its political function. In the first stage of its existence, approximately from 2003 to 2013, the main message boiled down to fraternal unity with Russia and the special fate of Belarus in the restoration of 'East Slavic civilization'.

From around 2013, the idea of brotherhood with Russia was gradually diluted in the incoherent rhetoric about 'multi-vector policy', the importance of the national language and culture, and the sanctity of Belarusian independence. While the main function of the official ideology in the first stage was to preserve the Soviet and Russophile status quo, in the second stage it often promoted the ideas that it once fought against: national revival and the European character of Belarus.

The emphasis on independence and polemics with Russia grew especially pronounced during the pre-election period of 2020. In December 2019, state-employed sociologists announced that 'half of Belarusians do not support the union with Russia; they prefer partnership relations with Russia.'[27] This statement was immediately picked up by the state media and used in polemics with the Kremlin. In May 2020, the pro-regime historian and ideologist Ihar Marzalyuk lambasted Lukashenka's main potential opponents – Viktar Babaryka, Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Valery Tsapkala – for the alleged lack of pro-independence commitment. 'Where is there even a word about the sovereignty of the country, where is there even a glimpse of understanding the definition of "national interests","national culture", "our Belarusian values"?'[28]

On May 29, 2020, during a visit to the Minsk Tractor Plant, the president positioned Viktar Babaryka and Siarhei Tsikhanouski as henchmen of the Russian forces.[29] A few days

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[26] Ситуация на беларуско-российской границе…

[27] А. Домбровский (2019), Половина белорусов выступает не за союзнические, а за партнерские отношения с Россией, *Институт социологии Национальной Академии Наук*, Dec 4, 2019, Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.

[28] И. Марзалюк (2020), Вестуны грамадзянскай вайны, *БелТА*, May 3, Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.

[29] «Массовые пикеты за Тихановских и аресты, "Свободу", "Уходи!"», *Belarus in Focus*, May 25–31, 2020.

later, Lukashenka declared the need to 'defend our independence and sovereignty (...) like the apple of an eye'. At that, he cited the examples of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and Ukraine, hinting that the threat comes from Russia.[30] On June 18, the then head of the State Control Committee of Belarus Ivan Tserstel said that Viktar Babaryka was backed by 'puppeteers' from among the 'big bosses in Gazprom, and maybe those in higher places'.[31] In late July, 33 Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group, an unofficial private military formation acting in the interests of the Kremlin, were detained in Belarus.

Immediately after the elections, ideological attitudes regarding Russia and national revival changed dramatically. The West, led by the United States, was now an enemy force trying to destroy Belarus, or rather, the Union State of Belarus and Russia. In place of the rhetoric of national revival came anti-nationalist rhetoric against opponents of the regime: they were depicted as those who, acting on behalf of Western forces, were trying to carry out total Belarusianization, establish Orthodox autocephaly and withdraw from all Russia-led integration projects. Aggressive propaganda began against the white-red-white flag. The regime symbolically recognized the subjectivity of the authorities of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) when Lukashenka invited its prosecutors in Minsk to interrogate the Belarusian journalist Raman Pratasevich.[32] On August 9, 2021, during a big talk with journalists, Lukashenka allowed for the possibility of organizing direct flights to Crimea.[33]

Such ideological zigzags reduce the effectiveness of the ideological component of legitimation. Neither the supporters of the national revival, nor the pro-Russian activists of Belarus perceive the Lukashenka regime as a reliable ally. At best, the regime here can count on tactical support from one camp or another: some may perceive it as a temporary buffer for the spread of a 'more hostile' ideology.

The rhetoric of 'traditional values' and combatting 'moral decay' (eg, same-sex marriage) contains more potential. This rhetoric is consonant with the attitudes widespread in Belarusian society and finds support within the Christian churches, especially the Orthodox. Throughout the entire period of the regime's existence, this component of ideological discourse was the least susceptible to 'zigzags', and therefore its preservation can continue to play an important role in maintaining ideological legitimation.

Diffusive support potential

The seventh wave of WVS / EVS surveys[34] revealed the growth of supporters of 'strong power' in Belarusian society. Between 2011–2018,[35] the number of those who prefer a political system with a strong leader increased from 47% to 51%, and the number of those who believe that the country should be ruled by experts – from 57% to 65%. The most noticeable leap happened in the attitude towards military rule: the number of supporters of this form of government tripled: from 8% to 24% – see Charts 9-11.

[30] Лукашенко пообещал напомнить белорусам, что "Грузия потеряла почти треть своей территории", *Эхо Кавказа*, June 5, 2020. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.
[31] Минск заявил о «кукловодах в Газпроме и выше» у соперника Лукашенко, *РБК*, June 18, 2020. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.
[32] В мае 2021 года Лукашенко пригласил представителей ЛНР для допроса Романа Протасевича, *Ведомости*, June 1, 2021. Accessed: Aug 18, 2021.
[33] Лукашенко об авиасообщении с Крымом: Украина сама проложила маршрут, *РИА Новости*, Aug 9, 2021. Accessed: Aug 18, 2021.
[34] Throughout the world, the survey lasted for 2017-2021; in Belarus, it took place in February 2018 within the European Values Study (EVS) partner project.
[35] Here, we indicate the time frame of surveys in Belarus. In the charts, the duration of the global survey waves is indicated.

Chart 9. 'A political system with a strong leader – low good is it for you country?'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

Chart 10. 'A political system, where the country is led by the army—how good is it for your country?'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

The 7th wave survey was conducted in Belarus two years before the start of the 2020 presidential campaign, therefore, we must allow that the events of 2020 might affect the attitude towards the above-mentioned issues. (The same survey also revealed a decline in the number of those willing to take part in peaceful demonstrations (see Figure 24), but due to the new circumstances, the readiness to demonstrate skyrocketed.)

Chart 11. 'A political system, where the main decisions are made by experts – how good is it for your country?'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

The growth in demand for 'strong power' was most likely influenced by the events on the Maidan in Kyiv in early 2014 and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, separatism in eastern Ukraine and the conflict with Russia. It is quite possible that the surge of violence on the part of state representatives in the context of the 2020 elections and post-election protests to some extent shaken this attitude of the Belarusians. Some could remain convinced of the importance of a strong government, but stopped associating it with Lukashenka. Some could be disappointed with the idea of a strong government, but some, in all likelihood, still believe that Lukashenka is the only one who personifies strong power in the positive sense of the word. Based on the Chatham House surveys,[36] the number of those can be estimated in the range of 30-35% of the population of Belarus. Many of these people support the incumbent 'diffusively', i.e. regardless of any specific form of legitimation.

Consolidation of the protest part of society and weakening of path dependency

Diffusive support for the regime, which acts by inertia, is subject to displacement by the opposite trend, which is the consolidation of the protest part of society. In 2020, supporters of changes in Belarus overcame the state of atomization. The conviction that the opponents of the regime were in the majority became widespread in society. This is a situation where the path dependency effect is weakening, and therefore, in the long term, the regime can no longer count on 'legitimation-by-default'. By tightening repression, the authorities are trying to atomize society again, but without full control over the media, the chances of doing this are minimal. And in the context where more than 80% of the population uses the Internet, it is almost impossible to take control over information flows.

To restore legitimacy, the regime will need to resume economic growth, but this requires more than cosmetic reforms. The problem is that, against the background of procedural delegitimization and brutal repression, any structural reforms create new risks. Aware of these risks, the ruling group tends to impose new restrictions on business. In August 2021, according to sources, they began to prepare a number of restrictions for small and medium-sized businesses (for example, for most of the types of activities, individual entrepreneurs will not be able to hire employees; increase in income tax for individual entrepreneurs to 18%; abolition of the single tax for most types of activities).[37] In such a situation, economic recovery is not expected, especially if we consider the factor of international sanctions.

The experience of protest movement consolidation in 2020 has had a significant impact on the regime supporters. For them, regime support is no longer a default option, and they begin to seriously consider the costs and benefits of such support. Many of them take a 'wait-and-see' attitude and try not to show either one stance or the other.

The most reliable for the regime are its ideological supporters, but the problem is that as the autocracy closes and the ruling elite enriches, the circle of the regime's supporters increasingly consists of opportunists and careerists. The number of those who are ready to defend the regime 'in spite of everything' is getting smaller.

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[36] R. Astapenia (2021), Belarusians' views on the political crisis. Results of a public opinion poll conducted between 20 and 30 April 2021, *Chatham House*, June 11. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. R. Astapenia (2021), Why has the Belarusian revolution stalled? *Chatham House*, February 9. Accessed Sept 1, 2021.

[37] Увеличат ли подоходный налог для ИП? Спросили у бизнеса и Минфина, *Onliner.by*, Aug 20 августа 2021, Aug 21, 2021.

Repressions
General patterns

Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way distinguish between 'high-intensity repressions' and 'low-intensity repressions'. The former refers to visible punitive or preventive measures directed against prominent opposition figures, large numbers of people (e.g. mass demonstrations), or opposition organizations. Low-intensity repression is a less visible measure directed against ordinary individuals and non-political groups. Such repressions are most often of a preventive nature and manifest themselves in such forms as surveillance, wiretapping, preventive conversations, blacklists of cultural figures, informal prohibitions on employment in some areas, restriction of political and civil rights, etc.

Repression is a costly tool for maintaining order because once it is used, it usually has to be applied over and over again. The more severe the repression, the more discontent in society; the more discontent, the higher the likelihood of rebellion, the higher the likelihood of rebellion, the greater the need for new repression - and so the circle closes.[38] The vicious circle of repression is depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The vicious circle of repression

According to a study by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, who analysed 323 cases from 1900–2006, about 88% of nonviolent protests faced severe repression from the authorities. Researchers found that repression reduces the likelihood of success for all campaigns, but increases the likelihood of success for nonviolent campaigns (compared to violent campaigns) by 22%.[39]

[38] Cf. C. Massaro (2018), *The Dictators' Dilemma: Repression or Concessions in the Face of Resistance. A master's thesis*, The City University of New York.
[39] E. Chenoweth, M.J. Stephan (2011), *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia University Press, p. 51, 68. For criticism of the study, see the *Nonviolent vs Violent Struggle* section in Part Two.

Croissant, Kuehn and Eschenauer also came to similar conclusions. Of the 19 dictatorial endgames in which the security forces used brutal repression, in 12 cases the current regimes were featured, which later fell. This happened due to increased pressure within the ruling coalition, as well as due to changes in models of political loyalty.[40]

To avoid the opposite of the intended effect, authoritarian regimes need to find an optimal balance in the dosage of repression. The problem is that in times of crisis, autocrats often overtighten repression and threaten both the social contract and the cohesion of the elites. As Treisman's study suggests, the collapse of autocracies due to 'overdose' of repression happens much more often than due to their 'shortage'.[41]

Short-term effect of 2020-2021 repression in Belarus

Repression has always played an important role in the functioning of the Lukashenka regime, but in 2020-2021 it grew to an unprecedented scale. For sixteen months, from May 2020 to September 2021, there have been over 36 thousand politically motivated detainments.[42] As of September 21, 2021, the number of political prisoners serving sentences in correctional colonies, in open correctional institutions, held in pre-trial detention centres, and under house arrest was 673 people.[43] Detainees and prisoners were often tortured and morally humiliated. By the beginning of September 2020, UN experts claimed they knew of 450 documented cases of torture and ill-treatment of people.[44] As the newspaper *Nasha Niva* noted, 'these are the most massive political repressions in Europe over the past 40 years.'

In a situation of a multilevel crisis of legitimation, the incumbent has only two choices: either to leave or to intensify the repressions. Since leaving the presidency for Lukashenka seemed a too risky and humiliating option, he decided to intensify the repression.

The escalation of repressions was not a spontaneous and situational decision. Lukashenka was preparing his apparatus for them long before the elections. On December 19, 2019, he signed the interdepartmental *State Defence Plan*, where considerable attention is paid to preventing the 'internal destabilization of the country.' Alyaksandr Valfovich (at that time acting as the chief of the general staff, and since January 2020 - the chief of the general staff) speaking on the threat to internal stability, put the political opposition and sabotage-reconnaissance groups on an equal footing[45]. On February 25, 2020, when appointing new leaders of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Lukashenka focused them on preventing destructive influence on Belarus from the outside (for the KGB) and combating extremism (for the Ministry of Internal Affairs)[46].

Starting from mid-May 2020, the repressive apparatus began to unfold. Low-intensity repressions were utilized in the first stages. An example of such were the regulations of the

[40] A. Croissant, D. Kuehn, and T. Eschenauer (2018), 'The "Dictator's Endgame": Explaining Military Behavior in Nonviolent Antiincumbent Mass Protests,' *Democracy and Security*, Volume 14, p. 148.

[41] Cf. D. Treisman (2020, March), 'Democracy by mistake: How the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government,' *American Political Science Review*. To similar conclusions came Gerschewski, 'The Three Pillars…' p. 16, and D. Acemoglu, J. Robinson (2012), *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press.

[42] Колькасць рэпрэсаваных працоўнікаў Аляксандра Лукашэнкі набліжаецца да 50 тысяч, *Наша Ніва*, Sept 12, 2021, accessed Sept 18, 2021.

[43] The monitoring by Human Rights Center *Viasna*. Accessed Sept 19, 2021.

[44] UN human rights experts: Belarus must stop torturing protesters and prevent enforced disappearances, *UN Human Rights. Office of the High Commissioner*, Sept 1, 2020. Accessed Sept 18, 2021. Cf. also: За август по «протестным» уголовным делам осуждено не менее 136 человек, *Вясна*, Sept 1, 2021. Accessed: Sept 1, 2021.

[45] А. Поротников (2020), Положение в области национальной безопасности Беларуси (декабрь 2019 года), *Belarus Security Blog*, Jan 14. Accessed: Sept 1, 2021.

[46] А. Поротников (2020), Положение в области национальной безопасности Беларуси (февраль 2020 года), *Belarus Security Blog*, March, 12. Accessed: Sept 1, 2021.

pre-election campaign. Only six places have been approved for campaigning in Minsk (a city with a population of two million), within the maximum distance from the movement of most of the citizens (one place allowed for campaigning per 300 thousand inhabitants). In Brest there were only two places on the outskirts of the city, one place for 150 thousand inhabitants; there were three places in Homel, that is, one place for 170 thousand inhabitants. All places allowed for campaigning were remote from busy streets, it was difficult to reach them by public transport, and they were not very spacious[47].

However, the authorities could not rely on low-intensity repression, and from the end of May 2020, they began to resort to high-intensity repression. On May 29, May 31, June 7, and June 18, four popular politicians were detained and jailed (2 of them were presidential candidates): Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Mikola Statkevich, Pavel Sevyarynets and Viktar Babaryka. By the beginning of July 2020, human rights defenders stated that the scale of repression had already reached the level of the most severe human rights crisis in 2010-2011. More than 1,200 cases of arbitrary detention and 23 politically motivated criminal cases were registered during the election campaign.[48]

The escalating repressions had very strong side effects. After Siarhei Tsikhanouski was detained on May 29, people began gathering at the places of collecting signatures in support of the candidacy of his wife Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. This happened not only in Minsk but also in many other cities: Brest, Homel, Vitsyebsk, Hrodna, Maladzyechna, Rechytsa, Zhlobin, Pinsk, and Maryina Horka. People chanted 'Freedom' and 'Go away!' and stood in lines not only for signature collectors but also for the microphones and cameras of the media. The queue in the centre of Minsk stood for seven hours. An unprecedented number of people gathered in Babruysk, Lida, Orsha, Barysau – even more than pickets with the participation of Tsikhanouski himself gathered the day before.'[49] Immediately after the arrest of Tsikhanouski, the audience of his YouTube channel 'Country for Life' increased sharply.[50]

In August 2020, after the public became aware of the torture utilized by the security forces against the detained demonstrators, the protests became unprecedentedly widespread. On August 16 and 23, the number of participants in anti-presidential demonstrations in the country reached, according to various estimates, from 300 to 500 thousand. Based on the monitoring study, which was carried out from September to November 2020, prof. Andrei Vardamatski concluded that about 60% of the protesters could have come to terms with falsified elections, if not for the brutality of the actions of the security forces.[51]

By the end of 2020, the effects of repression became visible – demonstrations halted, protest symbols, with a few exceptions, stopped appearing in public spaces, many activists either left the country, or distanced themselves, or ended up in prison. Nevertheless, the discontent and outrage of a significant part of the population have not gone anywhere and, as can be seen from discussions on social networks, it is even growing. In the medium term, the authorities will be forced to make concessions, especially since an important precedent has emerged in the world of modern autocracies – in August 2021, the regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela announced its decision to negotiate with the opposition.

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[47] Размах репрессий достиг уровня 2010 года, по всем остальным показателям ситуация еще хуже, *Belarus in Focus*, 29–05.07.2020

[48] Аналитический отчет по результатам наблюдения за выборами Президента Республики Беларусь, *Вясна, БХК*, Aug 10, 2020, Accessed Sept 1, 2020.

[49] Массовые пикеты за Тихановских и аресты, «Свободу», «Уходи!» *Belarus in Focus*, 25–31 мая 2020.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Социсследование показало...

Co-optation of elites
General patterns

In the course of recruiting personnel for senior bureaucratic posts in any system, there are two main criteria: loyalty to the system and professional skills. No regime can do without economists, IT specialists, diplomats, military strategists, etc.

There is no radical difference between authoritarian and democratic regimes in this regard: in any state, officials are required to have a certain level of loyalty to state policy. But there is a big difference in terms of interaction: in democracies, the ruling elites strive to win loyalty, and this is possible only through constant dialogue and compromise. A different philosophy prevails in autocracies: the very fact that you were allowed to take a high position should be a sufficient reason for you to remain loyal, and at the same time use your knowledge and skills 'for the good of the state,' or rather, the ruling group.

This is where the next vulnerability of any autocracy lies. It is extremely difficult to combine the dedication and professionalism of civil servants in autocracies, especially in times of crisis and turmoil. Often you have to choose: either devotees or professionals.

Autocrats often choose loyalty. This is due to the fact that professionals in key positions, even if they are far from the opposition, are very unreliable in times of crisis. Professionals are characterized by greater internal autonomy, and they have more opportunities for self-realization outside the system.

But by avoiding the risk of disloyalty, the regime risks exacerbating the governance and economic crisis. Replacing professionals with serviceable executors usually leads to the erosion of state institutions, a decline in the quality of management, a decrease in the motivation of officials to make any efforts, and an increase in the number of opportunists. Even in such an ideological organization as the Iraqi offshoot of the Baath Party under Saddam Hussein, opportunistic sentiments began to prevail at some point.[52]

Another source of risk for many autocracies is information policy. Autocrats, as a rule, do not want their subordinates to know too much and seek to minimize information about the real state of affairs in the country, especially about the situation within the ruling group. Officials, including high-ranking officials, are forced to make important decisions in conditions of insufficient or distorted information. This inevitably leads to all sorts of mistakes[53].

The resource of fear and control is also not endless. It turns out to be a vicious circle: the fewer professionals within the system, the worse the quality of management. The worse the quality of governance, the greater the stake on control and punitive measures. The more often control and punitive measures are used, the fewer professionals within the system.

Leaving the system of civil servants can be motivated by various factors:
1.   *Moral rejection.* When the regime sharply increases the intensity of repression, some officials, including those who were previously very loyal, are unable to 'digest' this and leave for purely moral reasons.

[52] Geddes et al., *How dictatorships work*, p. 227.
[53] Ibid., p. 225-226.

2.   *Professional rejection*. When an official realizes that he can no longer self-actualize within this system, and cannot develop professionally.

3.   *Career calculation*. When an official has a growing conviction that the system will collapse in a short time and they need to think about their career future in the new system (very few people want to 'die for a dictatorship', albeit in a career plan).[54]

4.   *Grievances*. For example, exclusion from the inner circle of the regime, a situation when you were unfairly removed from office, and higher-level amateurs appropriated your achievements, etc. In autocracies, where the reward system is tied to opaque, even unintelligible for some principles, this is a fairly common phenomenon.[55]

Regardless of what the main motivation for leaving the system is, the perception of the current state of the system (and the official's place in this system), as well as the expected state of the new system (and the official's place in it), plays an important role. Geddes et al. identified five probabilities perceived by officials that influence the decision 'to leave or stay' or (for those who remain) 'to act for the good or to the detriment of the system':

1.   The likelihood that the current system will hold out for years to come.

2.   The likelihood that an official will retain his position in the current system or get a new one that is not worse than the current.

3.   The likelihood that (in the event of a regime change) an official who went over to the side of the opposition before the fall of the regime will receive a position not worse than the current one (or will be able to settle down well outside the state system).

4.   The likelihood that an official who remained in the service of the current regime until the end, in the event of a regime change, will still get a position not worse than the current one (or will be able to settle down well outside the state system).

5.   The likelihood that the new system will form as expected.[56]

Separately, we note two additional factors: the uncertainty of the future and the willingness to take risks.

Uncertainty factor. The moment of uncertainty about a possible change of regime and the place of the current civil servant often serves as a deterrent. But you shouldn't exaggerate its importance. As Geddes et al. observed, the level of uncertainty is already high within any autocracy. Much here rests on shared notions and informal rules, and there is never any certainty that you, even with all your loyalty and diligence, will not be fired, demoted, or imprisoned. The lack of an impartial arbiter exacerbates feelings of uncertainty about the future.[57]

The higher the risk, the higher the chances. Since the opposition movement also forms its vision of *us* and *them* (in a hard or soft form), hesitant officials usually take into account the likelihood of being accepted by the opposition in the event of defection. By default, the principle applies here: *The earlier you 'jumped off', the higher the likelihood of being recognized as 'one of our own' in the opposition environment.*[58] And the higher the likelihood of becoming 'one of our own', the higher the chances of getting a good position in the event of a regime change.

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54 Ibid., p. 183.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., p. 182.
57 Ibid., p. 183.
58 Ibid.

Belarusian elites: the problem is not loyalty, but its stability

Within the Belarusian authoritarian system, a clientelist network was formed, where for a long time the key figures were security officials and large businessmen closely associated with them. Lukashenka is primarily a political beneficiary of this network in the sense that the internal struggle prevents the consolidation of the regime elite and at the same time allows him to play the role of an arbiter in this struggle. He is most likely also the main financial beneficiary.

Until the end of the 2000s, the main figure in this network was Viktar Sheiman. He subordinated to his influence not only power structures, but also a significant part of big business. Occupying key power posts and having a reputation as the 'right hand of the president', Sheiman had unlimited opportunities to get rid of some and make others dependent – all under the pretext of combating economic crimes.

Fig. 4. Siloviki vs technocrats until 2007-08. Key figures

'Siloviki'
Main interests: maintaining the influence of the siloviki, maintaining ties with Russian oligarchs, controlling the local oil business, arms exports

'Technocrats'
Main interests: limiting the influence of security officials, liberalizing the economy, professionalizing the state

By the middle of the 2000s, key posts in the ladder of power were occupied by Sheiman's people: Stsiapan Sukharenka became head of the KGB in 2005, and Henadz' Nyavyhlas became head of the AP in 2006. Sheiman's ally at that time was, in all likelihood, businessman Vladimir Peftiyev. He was the only arms exporter left untouched in 2002-2003 when the security forces brutally cracked down on all other arms dealers.[59] This would hardly have been possible without the patronage of Sheiman, who was then the Attorney General. Perhaps Sheiman's ally was also Andrei Vtyurin, who from 1995 to 2014 was an employee of the Presidential Security Service (from 2007 – Head of Presidential Security Service).[60]

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[59] Олигарх дрожащий. Павел Шеремет — о карьере самого богатого человека в Белоруссии, *Огонек*, Apr 9, 2012. Accessed: Dec 1, 2020.
[60] On July 27, 2020, Vtiurin was sentenced to 12 years in a strengthened regime colony. Officially – for receiving a bribe in the amount of 192 thousand dollars.

Sheiman's main rivals for the president's attention and influence within the power structures were Uladzimir Navumau, the long-term minister of internal affairs, and Uladzimir Makei, a presidential aide, the head of the AP, and later – the long-term foreign affairs minister (he also holds this position at the time of the preparation of this text).

As the clientelist network grew, it became more difficult to guarantee the confidentiality of communication within that network. In addition, the number of dissatisfied or offended people grew, who could deliberately leak information to expose their competitors to the president. The security forces were constantly faced with the problem of distinguishing between ordinary economic crimes, which had to be counteracted within the framework of statutory responsibilities and business schemes implemented within the framework of a network sanctioned at the very top. This state of affairs led to an outflow of professionals from these structures, since in such a system it became extremely difficult to combine professional self-realization with a more or less safe existence within the system.

Fig. 5. Siloviki vs technocrats in 2009–19. Key figures

'Siloviki'
They accept new rules of the game: they pacify their financial appetites, do not interfere unnecessarily in the affairs of technocrats, work to improve the image of their departments

'Technocrats'
Main interests: limiting the influence of security officials, liberalizing the economy, professionalizing the state apparatus, improving relations

In 2007-2008, Lukashenka gave the go-ahead for the enrichment of the nomenclature, which was facilitated by a linear income tax of 12%, a reduction in bureaucratic requirements and access to foreign investment.[61] By the end of the 2000s, the influence of the siloviki was weakening and the influence of the 'technocrats' began to grow. The key figures are Siarhei Sidorski, Viktar Lukashenka, Alyaksei Aleksin and Peftiyev, who quickly adapted to new circumstances. This is primarily due to the policy of liberalization, attempts at rapprochement with the West and the consulting activities of the British PR specialist Timothy Bell.

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[61] A. Wilson (2021), Belarus. The Last European Dictatorship. New Edition, Yale University Press.

The authorities, or rather the intellectual stratum of the power structure, realized that society was changing and that the absence of reforms threatened the system itself. This was one of the reasons why economic liberalization and rapprochement with the West was carried out in 2015-2016, in connection with which the role of 'technocrats' increased even more. As elections approach, first in the parliamentary elections in November 2019, and then in the presidential elections in 2020, the authorities have tackled one of the most common irritants in society: the arrogance and rudeness of law enforcement agencies.

The PR campaign to 'humanize' the police began in June 2019, when Yuriy Karayev was appointed Minister of Internal Affairs instead of Ihar Shunevich. One of the tasks of the new minister was to improve the image of law enforcement agencies: to overcome the linkage of these structures exclusively with punitive functions and increase public confidence in them.

However, as the year of the presidential election approached, the campaign to humanize the image of law enforcement agencies was gradually replaced by measures to bring these structures to a state of alert in case of political revival of society. As a result, the tendency to humanize the image of the police was gradually transformed into its opposite – the strengthening of its repressive and punitive functions.

Figure 6. 2020–?: the renewal and institutionalization of siloviki domination

- Siloviki restore and strengthen influence within the power structure
- Viktar Lukashenka goes into the shadows
- Liberalization of the economy is suspended
- The influence of the Russian security forces is growing

The unprecedented political revitalization of society in June-October 2020 and the crisis of procedural legitimization of Lukashenka's government created a serious threat to the status quo. The power structures became the only support to the regime in such a situation. Starting in the spring of 2020, their role in these power structures began to increase and this trend continues at the time of the finalization of this text (August 2021). On April 24, 2021, Lukashenka announced the signing of a decree according to which presidential powers, in the event of his sudden departure (for example, assassination), would be transferred to the Security Council, in which representatives of the security forces play a key role. It is worth noting that not long before that Viktar Lukashenka (who for 15 years had played one of the key roles in personnel policy and sympathized with the 'technocrats') was removed from the Security Council.

Strengthening the role of the siloviki in governing the state is not a guarantee of loyalty on the part of this group. There is indirect data that indicates a certain degree of tension between the ruling group and the security forces. According to the co-founder of the BySOL Solidarity Fund, Yaroslav Likhachevsky, at least 461 law enforcement officers had resigned as of November 11, 2020. On May 4, 2021, Lukashenka signed a decree according to which more than 80 former military personnel and employees of various law enforcement agencies were deprived of military and special ranks. The political underpinnings of this gesture were not even hidden:

> *During the aggravation of the socio-political situation in the country [Belarus] with the aim of destabilizing it, individual servicemen and employees of law enforcement agencies whipped up protest inclination in society, and organized and participated in unauthorized events.*

– that is how BelTA substantiated the incumbent's decision.[62]

There is also the possibility of alienating the army from the ruling group. Belarus is one of the few countries in the world where defense costs are lower than those for internal security and law enforcement[63]. In addition, the Belarusian regime never offered the military a clear perspective for the future. On December 19, 2019, the Concept for the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces until 2030 was approved. As Andrei Parotnikau notes,

> *[the concept] does not imply any significant changes, the national army as a whole will retain the existing composition and structure. It focuses on quality development and rearmament. It is planned that over the next 10 years, spending on the army will rise to 1.5% of the GDP. This is the negligible amount of 15 USD per year in the rate of 2018.[64]*

In the context of the 2020 elections, the military also had to take a humiliating part in political games. A week after the arrest of the Wagner group, Lukashenka, during a meeting on ensuring the security of the election campaign with the participation of the leadership of the country's security bloc, said:

> *To be honest, you probably won't tell me anything new: we don't know what they [Russian fighters] are capable of. We don't even know who they are. Either it is the Americans with NATO, or someone is pressing us from Ukraine, or our Eastern brothers 'love' us so much–-we do not even know.[65]*

According to Parotnikau, 'The statements of the leadership of the security bloc, made to please the political moment, are then disavowed by A. Lukashenka, which undermines the authority of the generals and security agencies as a whole (...). The law enforcement agencies, judging by the statements made by A. Lukashenka, are unable to assess either the scale of the threats or the direction from which they come.'[66]

The Decree of the transfer of presidential power to the Security Council in the event of Lukashenka's sudden departure can to some extent solve the problem of military co-opta-

[62] Более 80 бывших белорусских силовиков лишены званий за дискредитирующие поступки, *БелТА*, May 4, 2021. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.
[63] A. Wilk (2021, March), 'Rosyjska armia białoruska. Praktyczne aspekty integracji wojskowej Białorusi i Rosji', *Raporty OSW*, p. 5. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.
[64] А. Поротников, Нацбезопасность Беларуси (декабрь 2019 года) | Belarus Security Blog, Jan 14, 2020. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.
[65] Лукашенко заявил о задержании людей с американскими паспортами, *Коммерсантъ*, 6 августа 2020. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.
[66] Заявления А. Лукашенко дискредитируют силовые ведомства Беларуси, *Belarus in Focus*, Aug 3–9, 2020. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.

tion. The document assumes that in the event of transit, the military will have their representatives in the Security Council and influence key decisions. Having in front of them at least some prospect for the future and not having any special motivation to actively fight the current regime, the military is unlikely to want to overthrow the Lukashenka regime (for more details, see the section *The Belarusian regime: under what circumstances can it collapse?*).

Giving privileges to security officials hardly solves the problem of co-optation, since the beneficiaries of the new order are, most likely, a small part of this group. The 'big brother' from the East remains an important stabilizing factor here: since a significant part of the military in terms of value and professionalism is strongly oriented towards Russia, and the Russian authorities still support the Lukashenka regime, the army will remain more or less loyal. But in the situation of aggravation of the political crisis or a difficult moral choice (to shoot or not shoot at the demonstrators), the probability of disobedience on the part of the military is quite real. The Romanian (1989) or Tunisian (2011) scenario may be repeated, when the disobedience of the military played a decisive role in overthrowing the autocrats.

The subordination of technocrats to the siloviki carries with it obvious risks on the line *the ruling group* vs *the economic and technocratic elites*. Economist Dzmitry Kruk put this problem well:

> *Put yourself in the shoes of an official who in all previous years, albeit with some doubts, believed that he was doing good things for the country's economy. Competent officials understand where we are going now. It is unlikely that any of them want to be responsible for the decline of the GDP and the financial crisis. Therefore, the economy will be an important background factor for the demotivation and disorganization of the state apparatus.[67]*

Party of power
General patterns

In addition to the third pillar of autocracy, co-optation of elites, it is worth discussing the role of the party in ensuring the stability of an authoritarian regime.

Let's start by distinguishing between the *party of power* and the *authoritarian party*. The former is a party that is used by a personalist autocrat or military junta to consolidate and maintain its power. As an example, one can cite United Russia as the party of power of the personalist regime of Vladimir Putin or the Union Solidarity and Development Party as the party of the military junta in Myanmar.

An *authoritarian party* is a party that itself is a collective subject of authoritarian power. An example is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period.

Research shows that:
- partocracies (authoritarian regimes led by an authoritarian party) are stabler than military juntas and personalist regimes;

[67] Умные люди, YouTube, Nov 18, 2020. Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.

● military juntas and personalist regimes that have a power party at their disposal are more stable than their counterparts without such a party.

A study by Barbara Geddes showed that of the military dictatorships that existed in 1946, only 11% survived until 1998 – all the rest collapsed. From personalist regimes, 15% survived, while from one-party (partocracies) – 50%.[68]

In a more recent study, Geddes and colleagues found that:
● military dictatorships with their own party have an annual risk of collapse of 5%;
● for military dictatorships that do not have their own party, the risk of collapse in each year is on average 10%.[69]

Erica Frantz and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, having studied about 100 personalist regimes, came to similar conclusions: personalist autocracies with a party of power[70] are stabler than their counterparts without such a party.[71]

Why are partocracies and authoritarian regimes with a party of power stabler? A party of power or an authoritarian party creates a space for internal competition, which eliminates the cadres least suitable for the reproduction of the regime: disloyal and/or amateurs. The presence of a party also makes it possible to resolve intra-elite conflicts without 'washing dirty linen in public,' that is, it reduces the number of cases of scandalous defections from the system. A part of power is also a convenient platform for generating and testing new ideas, which in turn allows the regime to more successfully meet public demand and prevent revolutionary outbursts.[72]

Belarus: the absence of a party of power is a risk factor

As it was noted in the section 'Belarus as compared to other autocracies', the peculiarity of the Belarusian regime is an extremely high degree of its personalization (see Chart 3) and the absence of a party of power. How it looks compared to other modern autocracies can be seen in Chart 12.[73]

Most modern autocracies have their party of power. In the Russian Federation, this is the United Russia party, in Kazakhstan – Nur Otan, in Venezuela – the United Socialist Party. There are also such parties in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, although the V-Dem index assessed their influence on the head of state or government as 'none'.

Belarus belongs to the autocracies, where there is no party of power at all. Over the entire post-war period, there are no more than 25 cases of personalist autocracies without the party of power. The figure is small, considering that during this period about 500 authoritarian regimes existed.

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[68] B. Geddes (1999), 'What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?' *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2. See also: L. Blaydes (2010), 'Elections and Elite Management,' in *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (pp. 48-63), Cambridge University Press; J. Gandhi, A. Przeworski (2006), 'Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion under Dictatorship,' *Economics and Politics*, 18; B. Geddes (2005), 'Why parties and elections in authoritarian regimes?' *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*; B. Magaloni (2006), *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*, Cambridge University Press.
[69] *How Dictatorships Work*, p. 225.
[70] Especially if those parties were created by the autocrats themselves on the eve or immediately after coming to power.
[71] E. Frantz, A. Kendall-Taylor (2016), 'Pathways to democratization in personalist dictatorships,' *Democratization*, 2016.
[72] J. Brownlee (2007), *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*, Cambridge University Press; Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*...
[73] The 'role of the ruling party' in V-Dem refers to the degree of dependence of the head of state and the head of government on the ruling party. The term 'ruling party' refers to what we call a 'party of power' and an 'authoritarian party'.

**Chart 12. The role of a ruling party and the degree of personalization
(2020, 100-point scale)**

■ The role of ruling party   ■ Personalization

Source: V-Dem   ** Since there is no data for 2020, we used the data for 2019.*

As the study of Frantz and Kendall-Taylor shows, a characteristic feature of 'non-partisan' personalist autocracies is their short life – 5-6 years on average.[74] The exceptions to this rule are five autocracies: Sukarno's regime in Indonesia (lasted 17 years), Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya (42 years), Askar Akayev's regime in Kyrgyzstan (14 years), the semi-authoritarian Kocharyan/Sargsyan regime in Armenia (20 years in total)) and the Lukashenka regime in Belarus (27+ years).

Due to the high degree of personalization, the power centre is well identifiable, which is a positive moment for some parts of the elites, especially the security forces. But the costs of this state of affairs are much more significant. Personalization of power reduces the quality of management, which in turn can lead to failures in the management system. The absence of a party of power deprives the system of the ability to amortize managerial failures. Since one person, for purely physical reasons, is not able to manage all processes, and there is no mechanism for delegating authority through the party of power, the system is not able to regenerate and adapt to changing circumstances. Many managerial problems simply accumulate and at any moment can turn into a systemic crisis.

After the outbreak of protests in 2020, the Belarusian elites resumed the idea of establishing a power party. In September 2021, the head of pro-government public association Henadz' Davydz'ka described the plans for such a party in the following way:

> *It is planned that after the [constitutional] referendum is held, the legislation on political parties is amended, the role of parties is clarified, and parties are re-registered, then, most likely, we will declare our ambitions [about creating a power party.*

The working name of the would-be party is *Za Rodinu* (*For Fatherland*).[75]

Such vague considerations about creating a power party testifies to indecision within the elites about its effectiveness. On the other hand, they are indicative of the fact that elites are getting aware of the risks that the lack of power party entails.

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Председатель «Белой Руси» Давыдько рассказал о планах создания провластной партии «За Родину», *БелТА*, Sept 11, 2021. Accessed Sept 18, 2021.

International context
General patterns

The international context, informal communication between citizens of different countries, as well as cultural interaction have a significant impact on internal political changes. Seva Gunitsky, a professor at Toronto University, attempted to analyse the influence of the international factor on democratization over the past two centuries.[76] The result of the study was the identification of thirteen waves of democratization, which were classified into four categories depending on the type and strength of the international factor.

Depending on the source of influence, Gunitsky first distinguishes between *vertical* and *horizontal* waves of democratization. In the first case, sudden changes in the structure of global hegemony have become an important or even a major factor in democratization. A good example of such a change is the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which resulted in regime change in most of the countries of the former communist bloc; many countries have made the transition to democracy.

In the second case, the factor leading to democratization was local sparks of protest, which spread horizontally across the region due to cultural and communication ties and similar challenges.[77] An example is the Arab Spring (2011-2012). There was little change in the structure of global hegemony at that time, but a wave of protests against autocracies swept through almost 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Regime change took place only in four countries: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, and only one of them (Tunisia) managed to rebuild on a democratic path. In another country, Morocco, protests contributed to democratization, but no regime change took place.

Depending on the type of international influence, the author distinguishes between *contagious* and *emulative* waves. In the first case, the international factor plays a more significant role than domestic circumstances. A characteristic feature of this wave is its rapid spread: the average period for the spread of a viral wave in the region is three years. An example is, again, the Arab Spring: within two years, the wave covered almost all countries in the region.

Table 2. International impact on political transformations in particular countries

	Vertical	**Horizontal**
Contagious	*Example: democratization of the late 80s and early 90s of the twentieth century*	*Example: Arab Spring (2011-2012)*
Emulative	*Wave of African decolonization (1955-1968)*	*Example: colour revolutions in the former Yugoslavia and the post-Soviet space (2000 - 2010)*

In the case of an emulative wave, internal factors persist primarily, while international processes play a supporting role. This type of wave propagates slowly – over 13 years on average. An example of an emulative wave is the *colour revolutions* (or their attempts) of

[76] S. Gunitsky (2018), 'Democratic Waves in Historical Perspective,' *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(3).
[77] Ibid., p. 635.

the last two decades in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. Many of the countries that have experienced regime change as a result of colour revolutions have moved towards democracy, but they are still dominated by hybrid (authoritarian-democratic) forms of government.

Vertical vs horizontal waves intersect with viral vs emulative waves and form four cross-categories – see table 2.

Belarus: the struggle for democracy without external incentives

Belarusian protesting against authoritarianism, which began in 2020, should be considered as part of an emulative-horizontal wave of democratic movements in the post-Soviet space. At this stage, no major changes took place in the structure of global hegemony; there were no signs of a contagious spread of protest movements in the region. The protests in Armenia (2018), in Belarus (2020-2021), in Kyrgyzstan (2020) and in Russia (2020-2021) in terms of causes, progress and results were very different from each other and had a minimal mutually contagious effect.

Horizontal emulative waves are characterized by the fact that the influence of the international context is insignificant and the success of a protest depends primarily on internal factors. The process of democratic transformation in such situations is usually lengthy. In addition to the colour revolutions of the first decade of the XXI century, Gunitsky lists among such waves the 'Atlantic Wave' in 1774–1795 (transformations, or attempts at transformations, in North America, Ireland, and Poland) and the 'Modernization Wave' in 1974–1988 (democratization in the Southwest Europe, South America and Southeast Asia). The transformational processes were lengthy, and the democratization effect was often not achieved immediately.

In the case of the horizontal emulative wave, revolutionary enthusiasts are quickly weeded out, and the work to promote democratic values is carried out by a few people of a more rational nature. Apparently for this reason, the most stable democracies are observed in those countries that have experience of struggle in the context of two previous horizontal emulative waves. It is too early to speak about the results of the last wave of this type, which began in 2000, but it can be assumed that in the long term, countries that have democratized under such conditions also have high chances of becoming stable democracies. This also applies to Belarus.

It is also worth noting that the Belarusian state is highly immunized from the influence of external forces. According to the V-Dem Index, the level of internal autonomy of the Belarusian state in 2018 was 1.94 points out of 2.00. This is slightly higher than Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (by 1.92), but lower than Russia (1.95), China (1.97) and the United States (1.97). When assessing internal autonomy, the susceptibility to informal influence from other states is taken into account. The influence of other countries or the international community associated with participation in international agreements (for example, NATO), international organizations (for example, the World Trade Organization) or confederations (for example, the European Union) is not taken into account here.

Typical circumstances of the collapse of autocracies
Statistics of the post-World War Two period

Any authoritarian system is subject to constant risks: either the economic situation is deteriorating, or the elections will not be held according to a scenario, or there is a value gap between the population and the government, or conflicts occur within the elites or repression is applied chaotically. None of these risks are individually fatal to the system, but each of them can set off a chain reaction and lead to its collapse. The 'bonus of complementarity' can suddenly turn into a 'curse of complementarity': a crisis of legitimation can lead to a split within elites, and excessive repression can undermine legitimacy.

Barbara Geddes et al. grouped the circumstances of the fall of autocracies into seven categories: *military coups, electoral process, popular uprising, insurgency, insider rule change, external influence* and *state dissolution*. On the basis of extensive empirical material, scientists have established that in the post-war period autocracies most often disintegrated as a result of military coups (but often new autocracies came in their place). About a quarter of autocracies collapsed as a result of elections that went wrong; 17% – due to popular uprisings[78] (see Table 3).

Table 3. Typical circumstances of the collapse of autocracies[79]

35%	Coup
26%	Election
17%	Popular uprising
0,8%	Insurgency
0,8%	Insider rule change
0,4%	Foreign rule imposed
0,2%	State dissolution

The Belarusian regime: in what circumstances can it collapse?

On April 17, 2021, Alyaksandr Lukashenka announced that an attempt was being prepared on his life and the lives of his relatives, which was to become part of a 'military coup'. The coup, according to the version of events given by the Belarusian and Russian authorities, was planned by lawyer Yury Ziankovich, politician Ryhor Kastusiou, literary critic Alyaksandr Fiaduta and several other people.[80]

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[78] Apparently, this refers to non-electoral protests. Election as a cause of regime collapse was almost always accompanied by mass protests, and therefore this type of protest, in theory, was counted in 26% of cases of post-electoral disintegration of autocracies.
[79] *How dictatorships work*, p. 179.
[80] ФСБ раскрыла подробности заговора против Лукашенко, *РИА Новости*, Apr 17, 2021, Accessed: Aug 21, 2021.

The operation to detain the Belarusian 'conspirators'' was most likely an attempt to create a propaganda counterbalance to the story of the detention of Russian Wagner group fighters in July 2020. Its function was to strengthen in the minds of the Belarusian security officials the conviction that a threat to Belarus could come only from the West (and not from Russia), and to show the population that resistance to Lukashenka's rule was by no means peaceful. Among the numerous groups that discussed the theoretical possibilities of the use of force to remove Lukashenka from power, the group of Zenkovich and Feduta was chosen. Zenkovich and his comrades, either out of curiosity, or for an experiment, decided to take some practical steps towards establishing contacts with the opposition-minded security officials, thereby playing along with the Belarusian and Russian special services in staging the disclosure of a dangerous conspiracy.

How high is the probability of a military coup in Belarus in general? At first glance, the high level of trust to the army on the part of the population, the growth of supporters of military rule over the country and the alienation of the army from the ruling group are preconditions for such a scenario. But here the fact that the Belarusian military has no experience of political participation, and the consequences of the seizure of power are too unpredictable plays a significant role. It is possible that Lukashenka's supporters and supporters of democratization will take up arms against the power of the military. The military is unlikely to probe public opinion for support from the population of a hypothetical military junta, but even if so, they would have to reckon with the fact that, despite the growth in supporters of such a rule, the majority of Belarusians still do not accept it.

Second, an important guideline for the military is the behaviour of the Kremlin and the opinion of colleagues from the Russian security forces. And while Lukashenka remains the 'lesser evil' for the Russian authorities, a conspiracy against him by the military is practically out of the question.

The disintegration of the state, which, in the case of Belarus, could only have occurred as a result of the annexation by Russia, is also unlikely for two reasons: (a) the idea of annexation of Belarus is very unpopular in Russian society; (b) Russia is already subject to risk of collapse due to (temporarily frozen) separatist tendencies and the tendency towards oligarchization.[81] The probability of an armed uprising is also low due to the commitment of Belarusians to the idea of nonviolent action, as well as the fact that the state's monopoly over the use of weapons remains strong.

Four realistic options for regime change remain: in the context of the next electoral or referendum campaign, under pressure from electoral or non-electoral protests, due to changes in internal rules or external influence. What are the chances of overcoming the autocracy, and if so, how likely the transition to functional democracy is – depends on many factors, which we will analyse in detail in the next part of the study.

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[81] See P. Rudkouski (2020), 'Make love, not war. Will Belarusians' russophilism protect them from the Kremlin's aggression?' *Varta. Belarus Security Magazine*. Online version is available on BISS website: https://belinstitute.com/en/article/make-love-not-war, as well as the subsection 'Two probable scenarios of Russia's behaviour towards Belarus' of Part Two of this research.

Conclusion of Part One

The Belarusian autocracy is going through a period of a crisis of legitimation, at two key levels simultaneously: the procedural and social contract levels. An incoherent and volatile official ideology is unable to compensate for the deficit in procedural and social contract legitimation, and the charisma of a leader can affect only a small part of the population. A certain level of diffusive support remains, that is, support without being tied to any form of legitimation, but against the background of the consolidation of the protesting part of the population, this type of support is prone to marginalization.

Intensification of repression is a natural phenomenon in the context of a multilevel crisis of legitimation in an authoritarian regime. But this measure has many side effects that have already manifested themselves at previous stages and will appear in the future. The attempt to suppress the post-election protest with unprecedented brutality shocked previously apolitical or loyal social strata: officials, law enforcement officers, churches, labor collectives. The international resonance, even despite the loyal position of the Kremlin, brought serious costs to the regime: most Western countries and organizations did not recognize the legitimacy of Lukashenka's re-election, sanctions were introduced: at first, personal, later – economic.

There has not yet been a visible split within the ruling elites. Some of the elites are involved in clientelistic networks of informal ties for the distribution of material resources and spheres of influence, due to which they have neither the incentive nor the moral strength to challenge the regime. The long-term tactics of frequent transfers of managers from place to place has also borne fruit: not being able to build strong trusting ties, officials are atomized and can never be sure that their colleagues will support them in case of disobedience to the system. Geopolitical identity and international socialization also play a role: since pro-Russian sentiments are strong within the Belarusian elites and these elites communicate with their Russian counterparts more often than with the Western ones, Kremlin's attitude to the Lukashenka regime is an important reference point for them.

There is a problem of the co-optation of technocrats. For a successful restart, the regime needs to obtain the support of professionals in the fields of economics, information technology, journalism, management, diplomacy, law, sports, culture, and science. In some authoritarian countries, this happened: in Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, autocrats at one time managed to find a balance between loyalty and professionalism in personnel policy. Modern China and Russia are trying to do this, but it is too early to say how successful they will be.

In Belarus, in the post-electoral period, against the backdrop of a crisis of legitimation, intensification of repression and privilege of security officials, there is a massive withdrawal of professionals from state structures. If this trend continues, there will be constant failures in the management system, as happened during the preparations for the Tokyo Summer Olympics. Failure to comply with orders or failure to fulfill plans will not occur due to civil disobedience, but due to lack of human resources and appropriate competencies. This state of affairs could lead to the self-destruction of the regime in the medium term.

Part Two.
Two transformations

The collapse of authoritarianism does not always lead to democratization, but it always creates a chance for supporters of democracy. What factors are conducive to democratization, and what are not?

Based on the research literature, we identified eighteen potential factors for overcoming authoritarianism and/or democratization and grouped them into five categories: axiological, structural, tactical, international, and lottery – see Figure 7.

Fig. 7. Classification of the factors relevant to overcoming autocracy and/or democratization

FACTORS				
Axiological	**Structural**	**Tactical**	**International**	**Lottery**
- *The values of an open society* - *National identity* - *Education* - *Experience of co-operation and dialogue*	- *Middle class* - *Social equality* - *Stability of the state*	- *Pro-democratic mobilization* - *Non-violent struggle* - *Using the chances that election and plebiscites offer*	- *Changes in the structure of global hegemony* - *Transformations in other countries of the region* - *International socialization of elites* - *Globalization* - *Sanctions*	- *Shocks and crises* - *Death of the autocrat* - *Mistakes of the autocrat*

Value preconditions

We mean the values that are widespread in a given society and significantly affect the evaluative interpretation of personal and social events. Evaluative interpretation, in turn, predetermines political behaviour.

Prevalence of open society values

Description of the factor

The thesis that the political structure of a society largely reflects the 'image of the soul' of the members of this society was quite popular in ancient Greek philosophy. Plato, highlighting five political systems - aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny – also identified five types of the human soul: aristocratic, timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical. The dominant type of soul in a given society, according to him, predetermines the type of political system. So, in a society where most people value wealth, avarice, business skills, an oligarchic system will emerge. In a society where freedom and self-indulgence are valued, democracy appears. The value changes that occur in the souls of individuals entail changes in the state system.

In the twentieth century, such prominent researchers of totalitarianism as Karl Popper or Hannah Arendt argued that the basis of a totalitarian system is a way of thinking, a basic approach to socio-political reality. *What is more important – an individual or a collective? Is history a product of human actions, or superhuman laws? What are the possibilities of the mind?*

The way people answer these questions for themselves influences basic attitudes towards democracy. The answers to these questions determine the answer to the fundamental question: *Does democracy make sense?* Those who believe that the collective is more important than the individual, that the course of history is predetermined 'from above' and that reason is powerless in terms of optimizing social life, will hardly see any meaning in democracy. And if someone does not see the point in democracy, then they will not fight for it. When in a given society there are people with such a mindset in the majority, then any democratic project here is doomed to fail.

Conversely, the belief that an individual can influence the course of events, belief in one's own strengths, and relativization of collective entities are incompatible with an authoritarian system. The prevalence of such attitudes in society creates important prerequisites for democratization, and after the transition to democracy they are the factors of its stability. The presence of such attitudes is much more important than, for example, the willingness to participate in demonstrations or sign petitions. While willingness/unpreparedness for public activity is a situational phenomenon that can change quickly and radically depending on the circumstances (outrageous actions of the authorities, the apparent weakness of the regime, the appearance of a feeling that 'there are many of us,' etc.). Attitudes such as learned helplessness vs belief in the subjectivity of the individual are deeper and more stable, they take longer to form, and they are affected only to a small extent by situational factors.

Based on Karl Popper's concept of an open society[82] seven principles of thinking or attitudes inherent to an open society were singled out: critical thinking, individualism, the historical and social agency of the individual, critical dualism, piecemeal engineering, and the idea of objective truth. For clarity, we will present them in comparison with the elements of thinking characteristic of a closed society – see Table 4.

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[82] K.R. Popper (2020), *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton University Press.

Table 4. Attitudes characteristic of an open and closed society

The principles of thinking and value attitudes characteristic of –			
– OPEN SOCIETY		**– CLOSED SOCIETY**	
clarification	principle	principle	*clarification*
Preference for rational analysis in solving public problems	Critical thinking	Irrationalism	*Examples: utopianism, mysticism, conformism, aestheticism, absolutization of power, etc.*
Ethical superiority of the individual over supraindividual entities	Individual-ism	Collectivism	*Ethical superiority of supra-individual entities over the individual*
History depends on human agency. Rejection of the idea of 'historical laws'	Historical agency of humans	Historical determinism (historicism)	*Forces of history, nature, evolution, genetic code, gods or artificial intelligence completely determine social and historical process*
The individual is potentially free in relation to social structures	Social agency of humans	Social determinism	*The individual is completely dependent on social structures (discourse, culture, religion, class, etc.)*
Distinguishing between the realm of natural laws and the realm of social norms	Critical dualism	Naive naturalism	*Perceiving customs, norms and traditions as 'laws of nature'*
Preference to step-by-step reforms combined with critical analysis of what was affected by the reforms	Piecemeal engineering	Total engineering	*Idée fixe about radical and irreversible transformation of the society as a whole*
The belief that reality exists independently of our cognition and that the main goal of cognition is to get an adequate picture of reality	The idea of objective truth	Relativism	*The belief that reality is always constructed by cognition and/or cognition inevitably depends on a 'standpoint'*

Belarus: a value shift towards an open society

During the second decade of the 21st century, serious value changes have taken place in Belarusian society. This follows from the WVS / EVS data.[83]

First, the number of decisive supporters of state paternalism has decreased almost three-fold: from 36% at the beginning of the decade to 12% at the end. At the same time, the number of those who unequivocally support the thesis that people, not the state, are responsible for their own well-being has almost quadrupled: from 7% to 27% – see Chart 13.

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[83] The data given in this chapter is taken from the official website of this project: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp

Chart 13. Paternalism vs individualism. '1' – 'The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for'; '10' – 'People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

Second, the number of decisive supporters of the thesis that a person has complete freedom of choice and can influence what their life will be like has doubled. The number of followers of the 'philosophy of helplessness' has decreased – see Chart 14.

Chart 14. Sense of agency. 'How much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way life turns out. Please use this scale where 1 means "none at all" and 10 means "a great deal".'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

Third, there are signs of a shift away from conformist thinking in favour of a more individualistic approach. This is evident from the dynamism of religious attitudes. In recent years, for the first time, there has been a decrease in the number of those who attach importance to religion (in 1990–2010, there was an upward trend). But against the background of the refraction of this trend, the importance of non-conformist positions increased: on the one hand, the number of people praying several times a day increased, on the other hand, the number of atheists increased as well. Thus, we are dealing with a departure from superficial (conformist) religiosity in favour of non-conformist options: either deep religiosity or atheism.

The situation is more complicated with regards to the attitude to democracy as such. On the one hand, over the past ten years, the number of those who believe that democracy is a 'fairly good' or 'very good' system of government has increased – from 85% to 90% (see Chart 15). However, against the background of adherence to the idea of democracy, the

number of supporters of 'strong power' has grown; in particular, the number of supporters of military power has increased – see the section *Potential of Diffusive Support* in Part One. It is possible that against the background of the events of 2020, some have rethought their attitude towards strong power. But it should be borne in mind that Belarusians remain under the influence of the Russian interpretation of the events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 and the fear of chaos can still influence the perception of democratic transformations.

Chart 15. 'Having a democratic political system – would you say it is a very good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country?'

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

Belarusians remain very critical of some emancipatory values, especially homosexuality. Among all European societies surveyed in the framework of the 7th wave of the WVS project, Belarusians are in the last place in terms of accepting homosexual parenting (when children are raised by a homosexual couple). The percentage of those who oppose this form of parenting is 65 percent higher than the percentage of those who accept it. For comparison, in Russia the prevalence of opponents is 55%.

The values of an open society and emancipatory values are not identical, moreover, these two value systems were formed on the basis of different philosophical traditions: the former on the basis of British empiricism, Kant's rationalism and Popper's critical rationalism; the latter is based on Marxism, critical theories and postmodernism. Nevertheless, since an open society presupposes minimizing institutional restrictions on individual freedom, the ethical traditionalism of Belarusians creates a hotbed of tension in the emerging liberal value system.

National identity

Description of the factor

American political scientist Lucan Way argues that in the countries of the former Soviet Union, 'the presence of a popular national identity, which was convenient to present as incompatible with the current political course, undermined the potential of the regime and helped to mobilize opposition even where civil society was weak.'[84] In this sense, according to Way, a strong national identity has democratizing potential.

Strong national identity is still a controversial factor in democratization. In the Polish People's Republic (PPR) or the Baltic republics of the Soviet period, a strong sense of national and cultural identity played an important (perhaps key) role in the process of overcoming authoritarianism and democratization. And in Yugoslavia during the time of Slobodan Milosevic or in the modern states of Central Asia,[85] nationalism was rather successfully instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes and became a component of their legitimation.

What role a strong national identity plays in the fate of authoritarianism depends on whether a given authoritarian regime is capable of making nationalism a central element of its ideology. If a society has a highly developed national feeling, but an authoritarian regime fails to develop a sufficiently nationalist ideology and become a monopoly in this area, then sooner or later nationalism will become a catalyst for regime change.

In the PPR, the authorities tried to synthesize nationalism and communism, but this synthesis was unconvincing and unacceptable for many, since the rhetoric of the class international persisted, friendly relations with the USSR remained an obligatory element of state policy, and there were too many taboos in the sphere of historical memory. In the case of the Baltic countries, the situation was similar, with the difference that there were not even special attempts to work out a similar synthesis: the cultural and political existence of these nations was subordinated to the idea of creating a 'Soviet super-people'. As a result, nationalism in these countries became at some point an important factor in the overthrow of the old regime.

Thus, in the context of the overthrow of autocracy and democratization, the significance of the strength of national identity is relative. If a society has a well-developed national identity, but the regime has failed to find a «common language» with nationalism, then this factor will be a constant threat to the regime. Moreover, it is a threat that is very difficult to eliminate by repressive methods. If in a society with a strong national identity, the regime nevertheless managed to become a convincing exponent of the national pride of the people, then the power of national identity begins to function as an inhibiting factor: it is much more difficult to overthrow such a regime.

Weak national identity is usually compensated for by increased demand for a supranational (e.g. Pan-Slavism, Russian world, Western world, Eurasianism) or sub-national (e.g. tribal, clan, regional) identity. If a weak national identity is compensated for at the supranational level and this supranational identity presupposes democracy as one of the key values

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[84] L. Way (2005), 'Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine,' *World Politics*, Volume 57, Number 2, January, p. 232. V. Silitski (2005), 'Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus,' *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 4, October, p. 85.
[85] We mean primarily Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

(for example, the Western world), then this set of factors becomes a positive element in overthrowing the authoritarian regime and the transition to democracy. A good example in this regard are the former colonies of Great Britain: Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean countries. Difficulties with national identification in these countries stimulated the development of a supranational identity, which became, in their case, belonging to the British community and Western civilization. This, in turn, contributed to the democratization of these countries, and in the event of the emergence of autocracies, their rapid overthrow.

If a weak national identity is compensated for at the subnational level, the chances of overthrowing the regime increase, since in this case, it is easier to mobilize one or another group of the population in the name of liberating one's tribe, clan, region, etc. But the chances of a transition to a stable democracy in such countries are, on the contrary, lower: strong attachment to subnational communities often leads to serious conflicts, civil wars and the abuse of democratic institutions, if any appear.

Figure 8. The model of three types of identity

Supranational identities
(Western world, British Commonwealth,
Russian world, eurasianism, Slavic world,
Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism etc.)

National identity

— if weak, it is compensated for at the subnational or supranational level

Regional, class, ethnic, clan (...) identities

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Inconsistent national identity of Belarusians[86]

Soviet culture lost its mobilization power long before the collapse of the USSR, but in Belarus it still retains its potential as an element of collective identification. A public opinion poll conducted in 2018 showed that 44.4% of Belarusians positively assess the ubiquity of Soviet symbols in public space. (We are talking about the names of streets, avenues and squares in honor of Lenin, Dzerzhinsky and other communist leaders.) In addition, 2.6% of respondents said that there should be even more such names. Only 7.4% said that all «communist» names should be replaced with others.[87]

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[86] When writing this subchapter, fragments of the article were borrowed: P. Rudkouski, H. Korszunau, Rosja jest przyjaciółką, lecz większą przyjaciółką jest demokracja, *Fundacja St. Batorego: Forum Idei,* 11.03.2021. Accessed Sep 1, 2021.
[87] 44% белорусов – против переименования советских названий, *Thinktanks.by*, Nov 11, 2018. Accessed Feb 9, 2021.

Against the background of attachment to Soviet symbols, we observe a rather specific attitude of Belarusians to the classical elements of national self-identification: language, historical narrative, as well as the pre-Soviet flag and coat of arms.

Language. Belarus is the absolute leader in Europe in terms of denying the importance of the national language as a key element of national identity. This follows from the results of a public opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015-2017 in 34 European countries. Among all these countries, Belarus took the last place in terms of the number of people who consider the Belarusian language as an important component of being 'truly Belarusian': only 54% of respondents answered in the affirmative to this question – see Table 5[88].

Table 5. % who say the national language is very important to truly share their national identity (e.g. to be truly Danish, ...truly Belarusian etc.)

Rank	Country	%	Rank	Country	%
1	Hungary	98	11	Italy	87
2	Bulgaria	97	11	Latvia	87
2	Norway	97	12	Belgium	86
3	Netherlands	96	12	Germany	86
4	Portugal	95	12	Russia	86
4	Czech Republic	95	12	Switzerland	86
5	Poland	94	13	Austria	85
6	Denmark	93	14	United Kingdom	83
7	Armenia	92	14	Serbia	83
7	Lithuania	92	15	Ireland	82
7	Georgia	92	15	Croatia	82
7	Romania	92	16	Bosnia	69
7	Slovakia	92	17	Finland	68
8	Estonia	90	18	Moldova	66
9	Greece	89	19	Ukraine	62
9	Spain	89			
9	Sweden	89	**20**	**Belarus**	**54**
10	France	88			

Source: PRC

Narrative. Belarusians are also in no hurry to accept a historical narrative that would emphasize the identity of the Belarusian nation. In November 2020, about 47% of urban Internet users said that «Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians are part of the triune Slavic nation.» The thesis about the cultural and historical distinctiveness of the Belarusian nation was supported by 48%. There is a slow growth in the number of supporters of the second thesis – see Table 6.

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[88] Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues, *Pew Research Center*, Oct 29, 2018. Accessed Sep 1, 2021.

Table 6. [National Narrative] 'Which of the following statements do you agree with the most?', %

	2009*	2020	
		May**	November***
Belarusians are a distinct nation, with their own history and culture	51,8	41,5	47,8
Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians are branches of the triune Slavic nation	41,9	54,8	46,8
Belarusians were created artificially; they were invented by intelligentsia. In fact, Belarusians are Russians	1,5	2,9****	-
Belarusians were created artificially; they were invented by Russians. In fact, Belarusians are Poles	1,1		-
DK/NA	3,6	0,8	5,4

* Source: The Laboratory NovAK. National survey conducted face-to-face
** Source: Satio. Survey among urban internet-users. CAWI method
*** Source: Chatham House. Survey among urban internet-users. CAWI method
**** This part of the question was framed this way: 'Belarusians were created artificially; they were invented by others' (no specification of 'others')

It should be noted that at least since 2008, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) has been of particular importance in the historical memory of Belarusians – see Table 7. The latest public opinion poll on this topic, conducted in December 2020, confirmed the strong positions of the GDL in the historical memory of Belarusians – see Chart 16.[89]

Table 7. 'What are the origins of Belarusian statehood?', %

	2009*	2018**
Polatsk and Turau Principality	17,7	15,9
Great Duchy of Lithuania	38,1	30,4
Belarusian People's Republic	5	7
Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic	12,4	21,8
The Republic of Belarus	9,2	9,3
DK/NA	17,7	15,7

* The nationally representative survey was conducted by the NovAK Laboratory within the 2008-2009 research by the consortium of BISS, NovAK and the Budzma campaign.
** Belarusian Analytical Workroom

Symbols. In 1995, at a referendum initiated by Alyaksandr Lukashenka, 75% of Belarusians voted for the restoration, in a slightly modified form, of the symbols of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic as state symbols of independent Belarus. The white-red-white flag and the coat of arms «Pagonya», pre-Soviet symbols that were linked to the national historical narrative, were then rejected.

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[89] (2021) 'Belarusians on Poland, Russia and themselves. Analysis of a public opinion poll commissioned by the Centre for Eastern Studies,' *OSW Commentary*, January 29. Accessed Sep 1, 2021.

Chart 16. What historical tradition should Belarus primarily draw upon? (Nov-Dec 2020)

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania	39,7
The USSR	28
The Belarusian People's Republic	16,2
The Principality of Polatsk	8,8
The Polish-Lithuanian Commonnwealth	6,3
Other	1,4
Don't know/No answer	14,5

Source: OSW

Neo-Soviet symbols still receive more public support than historical symbols, but after a surge in protests in 2020, the latter have grown in popularity. In May slightly more than 23% of urban Internet users perceived the white-red-white flag and the 'Pahonya" coat of arms as potential state symbols, and in April 2021 this percentage was 26.7%. At the same time, neo-Soviet symbols lost about 20% of sympathizers: among urban Internet users in May 2020, 66% supported them, and in April 2021, this percentage fell to 46.5%.[90]

There is no doubt that in 2020 there was not only a political activation of Belarusian society, but also an attempt to thoroughly rethink the existing formula of national identity. However, this identity is still very problematic, and its polishing will take a long time.

Due to the weakness (inconsistency) of Belarusian national identity, the process of compensation is taking place at a different level. Since subnational identities in Belarus are rather poorly expressed, compensation occurs at the supranational level. The main (although not the only) competing systems of self-identification at this level are the Western world and the Russian world. Since over the past 25-30 years, emancipatory values (gender equality, LGBT+ rights, multiculturalism, etc.) have become a characteristic feature of the Western world, and Belarusian society is quite critical of these values, the Russian world is acquiring special significance as a supranational identity.

This can be schematically represented as follows:
1. [Deficit of national identity] → [Increased demand for subnational identity] OR [Increased demand for supranational identity]
2. In Belarus, subnational identities (regional, ethnic, class, religious, etc.) are generally poorly expressed. Therefore, (3):
3. Supranational identity: [Western world] OR [Russian world]
4. For Belarusians, the Western world is incomprehensible or unacceptable. Therefore, (5):
5. The Russian world is the main factor of cultural self-identification.

[90] Survey conducted by Satio among urban internet-users between 8 and 20 May, 2020. Sample's size: 1589 respondents. The survey was conducted using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. Chatham House survey was conducted among urban internet-users between 20 and 30 April 2021. Sample's size: 937 respondents. The survey was also conducted using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method.

Below is a visualization of this scheme, see Figure 9.

Figure 9. Compensation of the weak national identity of Belarusians

| Western world | Russian world (Russkiy mir) | *Supranational identities* |

The national identity of Belarusians: *weak, incoherent, in statu nascendi* — *National identity*

Regional, class, ethnic (…) identities — *Subnational identities*

Strong compensational relation

Weak compensational relation

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Education of the population

Description of the factor

A study by Eduardo Alemán and Yeaji Kim showed that there is a positive correlation between the education level of a population and the enactment of democracy.[91] At the same time, the authors note that the cause-and-effect relationship is not always obvious here, as much depends on whether other preconditions for democratization have appeared.

The authors also note that the impact of education on democratization is much stronger in poorer countries. In these cases, the coefficient for the interaction variable is statistically significant and in the expected direction.

Belarusians' education is on the rise

According to the global UN Education Index, in 2019, the educational level of the Belarusian population was 0.838.[92] Thus, Belarus ranked 32nd among 189 countries covered by the Index. Over the course of thirteen years (2007–2019), the educational level of the population of Belarus increased by 0.078 points – see Chart 18.

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[91] E. Alemán, Y. Kim (2005), 'The democratizing effect of education,' *Research & Politics*, 2 (4).
[92] United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Index (HDI): Education Index [URL: hdr.undp.org].

Chart 17. Correlation between education and democracy

Source: Polity IV, UNESCO, Расчеты: Barro and Lee (2013), Aleman and Kim

Chart 18. The level of education in Belarus in 2007–2019. The logarithmic scale

Source: HDI/UNDP

As sociologist Andrei Vardamatski notes, 'with that level of education, authoritarian regimes are impossible'.[93] Perhaps it is worth softening the categoricalness of this statement: *...it is very difficult for authoritarian regimes to persist,* but one has to admit the veracity of the basic message. The ongoing rise in the education level of the population will become an increasingly greater challenge for the autocracy. It is also a factor that creates positive preconditions for the transition to democracy, as evidenced by the above-mentioned study by Alemán and Kim.

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[93] Социсследование показало...

Experience of cooperation and dialogue

Description of the factor

In a study of political processes in post-colonial countries, scholars outlined the following pattern: former British colonies were more successful in transitioning to a democratic form of government than former non-British colonies. This is especially evident in the example of the Caribbean countries: of the seventeen Caribbean countries, only two, Cuba and Haiti, currently do not have liberal democratic governments.[94] Three countries: Suriname, Guyana and Grenada, have had periods of undemocratic rule in the past (but now are democratic). Among these five 'problematic' countries, only two, Grenada and Guyana, are former British colonies. All other Caribbean countries since independence have been stable democracies and all of them are former British colonies.[95]

In Africa, of the fifty countries that became independent after World War II, only three (Botswana, Mauritius and Namibia) have had a continuous democratic government since independence, and two of them (Mauritius and Botswana) are former British colonies. No country that was under Dutch, American, Spanish or Portuguese rule remained continuously democratic throughout the entire period of independence.

Myron Weiner explains this pattern by the following factors: Great Britain, during a long period of control over its colonies, transferred its own administrative traditions, first of all:
- setting restrictions for colonial authorities;
- setting norms of behaviour for those who exercise power;
- creating conflict management procedures.[96]

This explanation looks quite convincing, therefore, the experience of cooperation and dialogue is singled out as a positive precondition for democratization. It is also considered a positive factor in overcoming the authoritarian regime.

The ethos of cooperation in Belarus is growing

The state of the ethos of cooperation can be outlined based on some indirect data. One of these indicators is attitudes towards competition. At first glance, competition is the opposite of cooperation, but the common denominator here is an orientation towards transparent rules and horizontal interaction. If a positive attitude towards competition predominates in society, then it is likely that the ethos of cooperation will be high, and vice versa.

During 2010–2020, the average value of a positive attitude towards competition in Belarus increased significantly: from 6.01 points to 6.66 (on a ten-point scale). It is worth emphasizing that there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of those who strongly support the ethos of competition, i.e. those who, in response to the question about the benefits/harms of competition, rated their confidence in the benefits of competition at 10 or 9 points out of ten (see Chart 19).

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[94] J.I. Domínguez (1998), *Democratic Politics in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 14.
[95] There were coup attempts in Dominica, Jamaica, Saint Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago, but they were unsuccessful.
[96] M. Weiner (1987), 'Empirical Democratic Theory' in M. Weiner and E. Özbudun (eds.) *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*, Duke University Press, p. 19.

Chart 19. Attitude to competence: 'How would you place your views on this scale? 1 means "very harmful"; 10 means "very good", and if your views fall somewhere in between, you can choose any number in between'

Source: WVS, Waves 6 and 7

The ethos of cooperation among Belarusians manifested itself in the context of two serious challenges in 2020: the CoViD-19 pandemic and repressions. In March-April, there was a large-scale grassroots movement of assistance to doctors, in which tens of thousands of citizens were involved in one form or another. This, according to prof. Vardamatski, was an important incident of self-organization[97].

In response to the intensification of repressions, many different kinds of initiatives have emerged aimed at helping the victims: from structured (for example, BySOL) to spontaneous (for example, a monetary donation to a randomly encountered relative of a political prisoner). Sociologists also note as one of the features of the Belarusian protest in 2020 the fact that 'the need for a leader's physical presence at the scene has disappeared. This has given rise to self-organization and the phenomenon of fluid leadership.' The ethos of cooperation also prevailed over political ambitions. In June 2020, Dzmitry Kukhlei stated: 'Political organizations renounce mutual criticism and are consolidating their efforts to provide support for victims'.[98]

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[97] Социсследование показало...

[98] Политорганизации консолидируются в ответ на репрессии, ГО продолжает сбор помощи медикам, *Belarus in Focus*, 15–21.06.2020. Accessed Aug 20, 2021.

Synopsis of value factors

Table 8.1. Value factors relevant to (a) overcoming an autocracy; (b) democratization
(NEG – negative impact; POS – positive impact; NEU – neutral impact)

Factors		...relevant to:	
		- overcoming an autocracy	- democrati-zation
More people accept values of an open society		POS	POS
Strong national identity	Nationalistic autocracy	NEG	NEU
	Autocracy is based on a non-nationalist ideology	POS	POS
Weak national identity	...which is compensated for at the supranational level where democratic values are welcome	POS	POS
	...which is compensated for at the supranational level where democratic values are not welcome	NEG	NEG
	...which is compensated for at the subnational level	POS	NEG
Highly educated population		POS	POS
Experience of cooperation and dialogue		NEU	POS

Table 8.2. Belarus: the configuration of value factors

In Belarus:	Relevant to:	
	- overcoming the autocracy	- democratiza-tion
Values of an open society are getting more widespread in the society	POS	POS
Weak national identity, which is compensated for by reinforced supranational identity – the Soviet past and Russian world	NEG	NEG
The level of the society's education is on the rise	POS	POS
Ethos of cooperation and dialogue is gaining in significance	NEU	POS

Structural preconditions
Strong middle class

Description of the factor

As Samuel Huntington notes, 'Democracy rests on majority rule, which is extremely difficult in a situation of concentrated inequality, when a large, impoverished majority is opposed to a small, wealthy oligarchy'.[99] The fact that Colombia or Costa Rica are characterized by a longer and stronger democracy is explained primarily by the circumstance that these countries have formed a strong middle class.[100]

Acemoglu and Robinson identify four ways of how the middle class can influence democratization: (1) as a driving democratic force; (2) as supporters of the inclusion of the poor in political life, which facilitates the transition from partial to full democracy; (3) as a buffer between the rich and the poor, making the rich less afraid that democracy will be used to fight them (in such a situation the rich elites are less inclined to resort to violence); (4) as a participant in state governance: members of the middle class are more likely to oppose repression and act in favour of the democratic transition.

Nevertheless, in the stage of overcoming autocracy, the role of the middle class is ambiguous. In autocracies with liberal economic policies, a strong middle class can become a factor in slowing down democratic transformations. An example here are countries such as Singapore, South Korea or Taiwan: the middle class, being the beneficiary of the economic policies of the authoritarian regimes of these countries, was not particularly interested in a rapid transition to democracy.

The situation is different in socialist-populist autocracies, such as Tunisia in the time of Ben Ali, Libya in the time of Gaddafi, Venezuela and Belarus. In such regimes, the middle class is «uncomfortable»: the continuous interference of the state in economic processes constantly irritates representatives of this class, and restrictions of political freedoms are felt more painfully.

The importance of the middle class for democratization is due to the following patterns:
1.   The more experience you have in earning money on your own, the less need for government tutelage.
2.   As material needs are satisfied, the demand for «post-material» needs, such as freedom and self-realization, increases.
3.   With the development of small and medium-sized businesses, the demand for transparent and understandable rules increase, and the need to live '*po ponyatiyam*' (by informal codes) is increasingly rejected.

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[99] S. Huntington (1991), *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, p. 66.
[100] D. Acemoglu, J. Robinson (2012), p. 256.

In the second decade:
not only bankers are 'bourgeoisied'

Lilia Ovcharova, Director of Social Research at the Higher School of Economics, in a commentary to RBC, gave the following characteristic to the middle class:

> The middle class, in addition to income, as a rule, has certain professional competencies, is prone to change, and is mobile in terms of career. The meaningful difference between the middle class and others is that it begins to invest its resources in education, health care and other development-related costs.[101]

At the end of 2019, IS NASB conducted a study of how many Belarusians belong to the middle level of subjective well-being. The study revealed that 53.5% perceived their material situation 'in the middle', and 11,7% described it 'fairly good'. According to Anna Dzianiskina, a researcher at the Department of Economic Sociology at the IS NASB, the two groups, which summarily make up 65.2%, constitute the 'subjective middle class'.[102] A similar estimation was proposed by the academic Yaugen Babosau. In terms of mentality and values, the number of Belarusians who belong to the middle class was, according to him, within the range of 50.5-55%.[103]

Slight liberalization between 2017–2019 created important preconditions for the development of a class that, in terms of material and professional growth, relies more on itself, and not on the state. Moreover, the development of small and medium-sized businesses has contributed to the spread of the understanding that the state is largely dependent on private business. As of January 1, 2020, there were 257 thousand individual entrepreneurs and 111 thousand small and medium-sized enterprises in Belarus, including 97 thousand micro-organizations, 12 thousand small organizations (11%) and 2 thousand medium-sized organizations (2%).[104] The contribution of small and medium-sized businesses to the GDP of Belarus in 2019 amounted to 26.1%.[105]

Socio-economic inequality

Description of the factor

Acemoglu and Robinson argue that there is a non-monotonic (i.e., inverted U-shaped) relationship between social inequality and the likelihood of democratic transition. In societies with low levels of inequality, revolutions and social unrest are not attractive to citizens. There are either no challenges to undemocratic systems, or any challenges can be resolved with temporary measures such as limited reallocation. In other words, in such societies, citizens already benefit from productive resources of the economy, so they do not impose any further stringent demands. This is the likely reason that democracy has been established late in a number of fast-growing economies with low socio-economic inequality, such as South Korea and Taiwan, or Singapore.

[101] Сколько зарабатывает средний класс в Беларуси и России? *Директор*, June 28, 2018. Accessed Aug 21, 2021.

[102] Институт социологии: 65,2% белорусов относят себя к среднему классу, *Беларусь сегодня*, Feb 6, 2020. Accessed Sept 18, 2021.

[103] Половина населения нашей страны отождествляет себя со средним классом. Академик Евгений Бабосов — о среднем классе в Беларуси, *Беларусь сегодня*, May 11, 2019. Accessed Aug 21, 2021.

[104] Вклад малого и среднего бизнеса в ВВП Беларуси составил 26,1%, *БелТА*, May 19, 2020. Accessed Aug 21, 2021.

[105] Belarus's middle class begins to turn on Lukashenka, *Financial Times*, June 23, 2020, accessed Aug 21, 2021.

In contrast, in societies with high levels of inequality (for example, the South African Republic before 1994), many citizens have good reasons to be dissatisfied and often try to rebel against the system. But since rich elites have a lot to lose if the system collapses, they have a strong incentive to maintain the status quo at any cost, including brutal repression. This mechanism may also explain the persistence of undemocratic regimes in Latin American countries with extreme socio-economic inequality such as El Salvador and Paraguay. Thus, Acemoglu and Robinson's theory suggests that democracy is more likely to emerge in societies with moderate levels of inequality.[106]

Inequality is low, but even if it grows it is not a problem

Belarus has a low Gini index (see Figure 20), comparable to the level of the Scandinavian countries. This effect was achieved largely due to the equalizing pension system and other direct budget transfers to the population.[107] The development of the IT industry in the country and the high-paying jobs associated with it did not affect the overall income differentiation in society.

Chart 20. Gini index in Belarus and selected neighbouring countries

Source: World Bank

In addition, the level of tolerance to income inequality is increasing in Belarus. During the second decade of the 21st century, the share of strong supporters of the thesis that income inequality is a good stimulus for development increased from 9% to 23% – see Chart 21.

Thus, the socio-economic structure of Belarusian society and the growing tolerance for possible income inequality do not create additional preconditions for social protest. But in the long term, if autocracy is dismantled due to other factors, these conditions might facilitate the transition to democracy.

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[106] Acemoglu & Robinson, p. 37.
[107] K. Bornukova, G. Shymanovich, and A. Chubrik (2017), Fiscal Incidence in Belarus: A Commitment to Equity Analysis, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 8216, October 12. Accessed Nov 1, 2020.

Chart 21. How would you place your views on this scale? '1' – incomes should be more equal; '10' – one who works more should have higher income

Source: WVS/EVS, Waves 6 and 7

State stability

Description of the factor

State stability is manifested primarily in the state's monopoly over the use of legal coercion and in maintaining control over the entire territory. Difficulties with a monopoly over coercion and maintaining control over a territory usually arise when a part of the population disputes the very existence of a given state or its sovereignty over certain territories.

From the point of view of overcoming authoritarianism, the stability of the state is an ambivalent phenomenon. In autocracies, state stability is closely associated with mechanisms for suppressing dissent and political freedoms, so the stronger such a state, the more difficult it is to break free from the shackles of authoritarianism.

What is the role of state stability in terms of democratization? There is no consensus in the scientific community on this,[108] but a number of scholars believe that there is a positive correlation between the development of democracy and the stability of the state.

> *Before you can have a democracy, you must have a state, but to have a legitimate and therefore durable state you eventually must have democracy. The two are intertwined, but the precise sequencing of how and when to build the distinct but interlocking institutions needs very careful thought.*

– Francis Fukuyama in one of his articles.[109]

> *Stateness is largely a prerequisite for the four democratic attributes: suffrage, political freedoms, rule of law, and social rights*

– asserted Dankwart Rustow.[110] This position was subsequently reflected in the indices of democracy and political transformation. For example, the Bertelsmann Transformation

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[108] In one of the recent publications on this topic, the authors are rather skeptical about the thesis of the essential importance of preliminary state formation for democratization, see: A. Croissant, O. Hellmann (eds) (2020), *Stateness and Democracy in East Asia*, Cambridge University Press.

[109] F. Fukuyama (2005, January), 'Stateness First,' *Journal of Democracy*, p. 88.

[110] J.Møller & S.-E. Skaaning (2011), 'Stateness first?', *Democratization*, 18..

Index (BTI) or The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) both consider the development of government institutions and the existence of effective governance mechanisms as an important factor in democratic development.

Within our research, we take a position that echoes the position of Rustow, BTI and EIU: *The stability of the state in the stage of non-democracy reduces the chances of changing the system, but if the change happens, then, other things being equal, state stability increases the chances of successful democratization.*

Strong stateness of Belarus

In the Index of State Fragility for 2020, which is compiled by the Fund for Peace, Belarus with a fragility level of 65.8/120 took 103rd place out of 178 (the stronger the state stability, the lower the place in the fragility rating). For comparison, the fragility of Russia was estimated at 72.6/120, Ukraine – 69.1/120, USA – 38.3/120, Venezuela – 91.2/120 (see Table 9).

Table 9. The fragility index of Belarus as compared to selected countries (2020)

Country	*Total Index (maximum: 120)*	*Rank (of 178 countries)*
USA	38,3	149th
Poland	41,0	145th
Armenia	64,2	108th
Belarus	**65,8**	**103rd**
Moldova	66,1	100th
Georgia	71,2	80th
Ukraine	69,0	92nd
Russia	72,6	76th
Kyrgyzstan	73,9	73rd
Venezuela	91,2	28th

Source: Fragile States Index powered by the Fund for Peace[111]

The stability of the Belarusian state is high according to BTI: in 2020 it was rated at 8.8 points out of 10. For comparison: the stability of the Russian state was rated at 8/10, Ukrainian – at 7.5/10.

The relatively high level of durability of the Belarusian state complicates the process of overcoming autocracy. But if transformation happens, the presence of functioning state institutions will contribute to a successful democratic transition.

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[111] Internet link: *https://fragilestatesindex.org/data/*

Synopsis of structural factors

Table 10.1. Structural factors relevant to (a) overcoming an autocracy; (b) democratization
(NEG – negative impact; POS – positive impact; NEU – neutral impact)

Factors		...relevant to:	
		- overcoming an autocracy	- democratization
Strong middle class	Autocracy with market economy	NEU	POS
	Autocracy with planning economy	POS	POS
Socioeconomic inequality	Low inequality	NEU	POS
	High inequality	POS	NEG
The stability of a state	High stability	NEG	POS
	Low stability	POS	NEG

Table 10.2. Belarus: the configuration of structural factors

In Belarus:	Relevant to:	
	- overcoming the autocracy	- democratization
The trend towards the strengthening of the middle class against the background of a predominantly illiberal economic policy	POS	POS
Social inequality is small. Increased tolerance for income inequality	NEU	POS
High state stability	NEG	POS

Tactical preconditions

Pro-democratic mobilization

Description of the factor

The importance of the democratic mobilization of society does not raise any particular objections in the scientific community. An empirical study by Dawn Brancati, based on the study of mass protests over the years 1989–2011, showed that in 25% of cases such actions were the main factor of democratization.[112]

In the media, you can find references to the so-called *3.5% law*. The 'law' states that if more than 3.5% of the population participates in protests at their peak, then the fall of the regime is inevitable within one year. Journalists refer to the study by Chenoweth and Stephan, according to which there was not a single case when more than 3.5% of the population took part in the protests at the peak and the protesters would not have achieved their main goals within one year[113].

This 'law', however, should be approached with a dose of skepticism. First, it was falsified by the Venezuelan case: in April 2017, approximately 6 million people participated in protests against the rule of Nicolas Maduro (which is more than 20% of the population). The main goal, the resignation of Maduro and his government, was achieved by the protesters neither in a year nor for the next three years. At the time of preparing the study for release (August 2021) negotiations began between the Venezuelan authorities and the opposition, but so far the transfer of power has not been discussed. Second, in socio-political reality, there are no 'iron' laws at all. There are just patterns. It is clear that the more society is mobilized to participate in protest actions and the more people take part in such actions, the higher the chances of overthrowing autocracy and subsequent democratization.[114] But no amount of protesters guarantees that their goals will be achieved.

Nevertheless, there is some truth in Chenoweth and Stephan's claims. When at least 3-4% of the country's population participates in protest actions, such actions leave a strong imprint on the self-consciousness of citizens and officials, and also create a new image of society at the international level. Each protester has dozens of relatives, friends and acquaintances who are involved in the protest indirectly, through conversations and discussions. And even if some acquaintances are supporters of the regime, it is important that resistance to the regime ceases to be something distant and abstract, but becomes a tangible reality. In such a situation, support for the regime or indifference cease to be the default options. People have to rethink their attitude towards the political reality and search for an answer to the question: *Why do I support the regime? or Why am I staying on the side-lines?* This rethinking does not necessarily lead to the adoption of opposition views, but knocks out the usual rut of thinking, and the alternative that appears before one's eye at the moment of the next weakness of the regime can become a serious temptation.

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[112] D. Brancati (2016), *Democracy Protests: Origins, Features and Significance,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[113] «Правило 3,5%»: как незначительное меньшинство может без насилия изменить мир, *BBC News. Русская служба*, 10 августа 2019. Accessed: 21 августа 2021.

[114] См. B. Lebanidze (2020), *Russia, European Union, and the Post-Soviet Democratic Failure*, Springer VS, p. 39.

2020 protests in Belarus: an experience with long-term effects

According to V-Dem, the index of pro-democratic mobilization in Belarus in 2020 amounted to 3.99 points out of four and became not only a record in the history of the country but also one of the highest in the world over the past 50 years – see Table 11.

Table 11. Top-15 largest cases of pro-democratic mobilization in 1970–2020

1. Belarus (2020)	3,99	3. Togo (2017)	3,97
1. Hong Kong (2019)	3,99	3. Ukraine (2014)	3,97
2. Lebanon (2019)	3,98	3. Myanmar (1988)	3,97
2. Armenia (2018)	3,98	3. The Philippines (1986)	3,97
2. Turkey (2013)	3,98	3. Poland (1980)	3,97
2. Bahrein (2011)	3,98	3. South Africa (1976-78)	3,97
3. Thailand (2020)	3,97	3. Portugal (1974)	3,97
3. Bolivia (2019)	3,97		

Source: V-Dem

Pro-democratic mobilization in Belarus in 2020 ranks among the 15 largest and longest mobilizations among more than 100 countries in 50 years. Even the Ukrainian mobilization of 2014 and the Venezuelan mobilization of 2017 are lower in some parameters to the Belarusian one. (Demonstrations in Venezuela at their peak were more powerful than in Belarus, but scored slightly lower in the V-Dem index, most likely due to the fact that they were inferior to Belarusian ones in terms of duration, frequency and diversity).

A characteristic feature of the Belarusian situation is that the pro-authoritarian mobilization level is generally low, which can be seen from Charts 22 and 23.

There are pro-authoritarian activists in any autocracy. But in most autocracies they are more militant and active than in Belarus. Belarusian supporters of authoritarianism are generally passive. They have seen some rise in 2020, but this cannot be compared with the pro-authoritarian rise in Turkey in 2013, in Poland in 1980-81, or in Cuba in 2021. And this condition will play an important role in the next stages. Passive and mediocre supporters of autocracy against the background of energetic and creative supporters of change are a constant factor in the deterioration of the regime's image, both domestically and internationally.

After a large-scale pro-democratic mobilization in the summer and autumn of 2020, not without the influence of brutal repressions, its fall followed. This is a frequent and natural phenomenon in the process of overcoming autocracy. The longest mobilization took place in South Africa in 1976-78, with a high degree of political activity lasting over two years. But after a while, the mobilization also began to decline, not reaching its goals. One of the largest mobilizations took place in 1980 in Poland (like in Belarus in 2020, it was estimated by V-Dem experts at 3.99 points). After the introduction of martial law in December 1981, the society was «demobilized» – the protests practically stopped, and the Solidarity movement was practically paralyzed.

Nevertheless, the mobilization of 2020 left an imprint on the mentality of Belarusians, including (and above all) the nomenklatura and security officials. With another trigger for protest or weakness within the regime, a resume in mobilization is highly likely.

Chart 22. Pro-authoritarian mobilization in response to pro-democratic mobilization

Source: V-Dem.

Chart 23. Pro-democratic vs pro-authoritarian mobilization in Belarus in 1990–2020 (4-point scale)

Source: V-Dem.

Nonviolent vs violent struggle

In 2002, political scientist and businessman Peter Ackerman with his colleague founded the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC). The purpose of ICNC, as he said in an interview with Deutsche Welle, is «to prove the preference of nonviolent struggle».[115] With support of the ICNC at Harvard University, the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) database was created. At the time this text was prepared (August 2021), there were already 622 cases[116] in the NAVCO database for the period 1900–2019.

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[115] Мирные протесты: ужас для тиранов” (интервью с Петером Акерманом), *Deutsche Welle*, May 27, 2013. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[116] See List of Campaigns in NAVCO 1.3 https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/ON9XND

Chart 24. Effectiveness of violent vs nonviolent protest campaigns

Source: NAVCO

The researchers note that since the 2000s, the effectiveness of nonviolent campaigns has declined, although this form of resistance is still generally more effective than violent, see Chart 25.[117]

Chart 25. Violent / nonviolent campaigns: success rate (%)

Source: NAVCO

In *Why Civil Resistance Works*, Chenoweth and Stephan argue that nonviolent resistance remains effective even when authorities react with brutal repression.[118]

When asked why nonviolent campaigns are generally more effective, the researchers point to several factors:

It is easier to involve the broad masses in the resistance. On average, nonviolent protests attracted four times as many participants (200,000) as the average violent campaign (50,000). Violent actions scare away those people who do not accept bloodshed for moral reasons or are afraid of it. There are fewer physical barriers for participating in peaceful protests. A person does not need to be physically fit or in excellent health to participate, for

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[117] E. Chenoweth (2020), 'The Future of Nonviolent Resistance,' *Journal of Democracy*, July, vol. 31/3.
[118] *Why Civil Resistance Works*, p. 51.

example, in a strike. Nonviolent protests tend to be easier to discuss openly, which means that information about them can reach wider audiences.[119]

Higher costs of repression. Nonviolent actions (as mentioned above) attract more participants, respectively, more financial, human and time resources are required to suppress such actions. On the other hand, when nonviolent protests are suppressed, security forces have a much lower risk of fatal outcomes, and this to some extent balances the quantitative factor of cost. But two additional cost and risk factors remain relevant: reputational costs and the risk of persecution should the regime be overthrown. It is more difficult for authorities to justify brutal repression and draconian measures (such as martial law or a state of emergency) for domestic and international audiences[120].

It is easier to create horizontal bonds of solidarity, which fosters resilience to repression and tactical innovation.

The likelihood of a split in the elites is higher: the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators creates a split between groups supporting the current government, reducing the cohesion of the elites. The 'moderate' part of the elites may begin to sympathize or openly side with the opposition. There is a growing understanding among economic elites that a protracted conflict will be very costly for the economy, and this in turn may push them to put pressure on the regime to adopt a conciliatory policy towards the protesters[121].

Violent struggle, on the other hand, forces the authorities to consolidate[122]. «Regime officials are less likely to view armed protesters as potential negotiating partners than peaceful protesters».[123]

Chenoweth and Stepan's research, as well as the NAVCO base, have recently become the subject of methodological criticism. The object of criticism was both the criteria for distinguishing between 'violent' and 'non-violent' campaigns, and the identification of 'successful' campaigns, as well as the causal relationship between the campaign and the changes that have come. In addition, critics noted that the database did not account for some violent campaigns that were successful on the one hand, and some unsuccessful non-violent ones on the other.[124]

The controversy surrounding the study by Chenoweth and Stephan and the NAVCO base is mainly due to two problems: (1) there is a rather large 'gray area' of cases that are difficult to classify within the framework of the violent-nonviolent campaign dichotomy; (2) when the unit of classification is complex socio-political processes, the risk of errors is quite high.

At the same time, alternative classification criteria, in particular those proposed by Andrei Illarionov[125] are also problematic. For example, for Illarionov, the fact that the army has

[119] Правило 3,5%...

[120] See. B. Martin (2005), *Justice ignited: The dynamics of backfire*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 163. E.F. Thomas, WR Louis (2013, December), 'When Will Collective Action Be Effective? Violent and Non-Violent Protests Differentially Influence Perceptions of Legitimacy and Efficacy Among Sympathizers,' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

[121] According to Wood, the accumulating costs of the uprisings in South Africa and El Salvador and the accompanying repression eventually convinced the economic elites to force the regimes to negotiate, changing the balance of power within the regimes between supporters of compromise and supporters of tough measures (E.J.Wood (2000), *Forging Democracy from Below. Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*, Yale University, p. 6).

[122] Chenoweth, 'The Future of Nonviolent…', p. 48.

[123] Ibid., p. 47.

[124] See. A. Anisin (2020), *Debunking the Myths Behind Nonviolent Civil Resistance*, Critical Sociology, April 29.

[125] А. Илларионов (2020), Россия Беларусь — как странам с жестким режимом сменить власть — последние новости / НВ, Dec 11, 2020. Accessed Sept 1, 2021.

gone over to the side of the protesters is a sufficient reason to classify this protest movement as 'violent'.

After examining the NAVCO database and weighing the criticisms, we come to the following conclusion. It is worth refraining from arguing that the non-violent nature of the protest in most cases is effective in overthrowing autocracy. At the same time, we support the thesis that the predominantly non-violent nature of the overthrow of the regime increases the likelihood of a successful transition to democracy. We agree with Chenoweth and Stephan that violent campaigns provide a set of methods that institutionalize modes of action and thus remain outside of their immediate results. Most autocracies emerged as a result of a violent change of government, either through a military coup (45% of all autocracies), or an armed uprising (14% of all autocracies).[126] A military coup is one of the fastest and most effective ways to overthrow a regime, but at the same time it almost never leads to democratization. Armed uprisings are much less effective in terms of regime change and also rarely lead to democracy.

Electoral boycott

Since elections or plebiscites imply observance of certain rules by all competing forces, and under conditions of authoritarianism this is in principle impossible, it is not surprising that in such situations the idea of a boycott appears regularly. The motives of the electoral boycott within the conditions of a deliberately dishonest election campaign are understandable. But how effective is such a boycott?

In 2010, the Brookings Institution published a study called *Threaten but Participate: Why Election Boycotts are a bad idea*.[127] The text presents the results of an analysis of 171 cases of boycotts of elections for the period from 1990 to 2009. The analysis showed that only in 4% of cases the boycott had a positive result for the boycotters. In the remaining 96% of cases, the consequences for boycotters were negative. It is extremely rare that a boycott led to the achievement of set goals (for example, a change in the conditions of the election campaign, a weakening of the ruling group, a decisive reaction of the international community). At the same time, there were often such consequences as the marginalization of the boycotters, the growth of tension and disagreements within the opposition, the strengthening of the positions of the ruling group or the current leader.

Belarus: experience of decentralized action

Although the demand for democracy in Belarusian society has been relatively high over the past ten years, there were no signs of protest readiness before the start of the presidential campaign. During the 2019 parliamentary campaign, politicians and experts noted a high level of apathy among the population, particularly in Minsk.[128] The 7th wave of WVS surveys, which were conducted in Belarus in 2017-2018, revealed a decrease in willingness to participate in peaceful demonstrations compared to the situation at the beginning of the second decade or in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. Interest in politics, willingness to sign petitions or join strikes either increased slightly or remained at about the same level – see Chart 26.
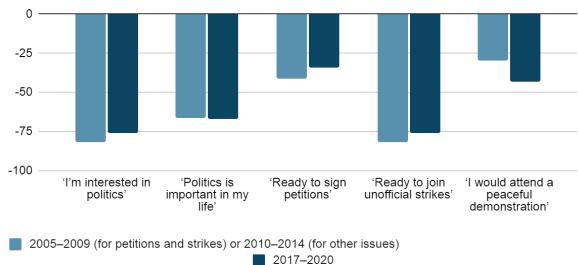
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[126] Geddes et al., *How dictatorships work*, p. 28.

[127] M. Frankel (2010, March), Threaten but Participate: Why Election Boycotts Are a Bad Idea, *Brookings Policy Paper*, Nr 19. Accessed June 1, 2021.

[128] Выборы-2019: О чем говорят избиратели? *BISS Reports*, 13 ноября 2019.

Chart 26. Mobilization potential of Belarusians before the elections in 2019 and 2020 (the percentage of those who answered positively minus the percentage of those who answered negatively)

2005–2009 (for petitions and strikes) or 2010–2014 (for other issues)
2017–2020

Source: WVS, Waves 5. 6 and 7

Nevertheless, at a deeper value level, significant changes took place in Belarus (see the section *Belarus: a value shift towards an open society*). These changes, coupled with some situational factors such as the outbreak of the pandemic and the emergence of a strong alternative in the candidacy of Babaryka or Tsapkala, led to spontaneous activation of large segments of the population.

In the post-election period, an unprecedented variety in different forms of protest emerged: Sunday opposition marches in Minsk and some other cities, Saturday women's marches, processions of pensioners, disabled people, chains of solidarity, collective video messages, open letters. With the exception of some episodes, the actions were peaceful.

Sociologist Andrei Vardamatski notes the following points as significant for the formation of the protest movement in 2020:
● the large-scale movement to help doctors in the context of the pandemic in March-April 2020 was an important incidence of self-organization, which was later employed during political protests;
● orientation towards long-term protest: 'The part of the society, determined to achieve change, is aware that this will not happen overnight, so they do not give up after the dispersals';
● 'The need for a leader's physical presence on the scene has disappeared. This gave rise to self-organization and the phenomenon of fluid leadership. This also allows us to recognize as leaders those who are far away.'
● The psychological need to participate in the decision-making process of advocates of change.[129]

As the crackdown intensified in November 2020, protests on the streets virtually ceased. However, the reasons for the protest were not eliminated, but aggravated. In the protest milieu, the option of transitioning towards tougher resistance was being actively discussed. A video released in the YouTube channel Malanka Media on May 6, 2021, titled *Andrey Il-*

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[129] Социсследования показали…

larionov: Zero chances of a peaceful revolution,[130] within ten days gathered almost 90 thousand views and received more than 6 thousand likes. The protest movement appears to be in search of new tactics, and this is still happening in a decentralized manner. Decentralization in a situation of intensified repression is a forced option, but, as the events of 2020 showed, it has a double effect. On the one hand, it reduces the mobilization potential, and on the other hand, it is a factor of unpredictability for the authorities: a protest can resume at an unexpected moment and in an unexpected form.

Synopsis of the tactical factors

Table 12.1. Tactical factors relevant to (a) overcoming an autocracy; (b) democratization
(NEG – negative impact; POS – positive impact; NEU – neutral impact)

Factors		...relevant to:	
		- overcoming an autocracy	- democratization
Pro-democratic mobilization		POS	POS
Nonviolent struggle		NEU or POS	POS
Violent struggle	Military coup	POS	NEG
	Armed uprising	NEG	NEG
Boycott of elections and plebiscites		NEG	NEU

Table 12.2. Belarus: the configuration of tactical factors

In Belarus:	Relevant to:	
	- overcoming the autocracy	- democratization
The protesting part of society tends to take chances elections and plebiscites offer	POS	POS
The protest part of society is decentralized	NEU	POS
In 2020, 5-10% of the population participated in protest actions at their peak	POS	POS
The actions of the protest movement were predominantly peaceful. Low likelihood of violent action or military coup	NEU	POS

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[130] Андрей Илларионов: Нулевые шансы мирной революции / Протесты не меняют режимы / Право на восстание

International preconditions

International socialization of state officials

Description of the factor

In the first part of the paper the importance of the co-optation of elites for the self-preservation of the regime was analysed. Here we will consider one of the important factors of elite loyalty/disloyalty: international socialization and the geopolitical identity of elites.

Geopolitical identity is a set of cultural-value beliefs that underlie the commitment of the elites to a particular integration project (for example, the EU vs the EAEU).[131] International socialization is a set of informal ties to the elites of other states and representatives of international organizations. Such connections are made during university education in another country, internships, joint projects, as well as through various forms of personal communication.[132]

As Bidzina Lebanidze notes in his study, the geopolitical identity and international socialization of the elites «have a direct bearing on the strength of leverage that external actors wield in relation to the target country»[133]. Elites are interested in maintaining good relations with foreign colleagues, especially if these relations have developed against the background of a corresponding geopolitical identity. This value-communicative factor influences the behaviour of elites in a situation of political crisis. With strong Western socialization and Western identity, the elites are less inclined to support repression; it is much more likely that they will choose to negotiate with the opposition; and if repression is too severe, there will be a massive defection from the system.

Pro-Russian background of Belarusian officials

It follows from Bidzina Lebanidze's research that during 2000–2015 the identity of Belarusian officials in foreign policy was clearly pro-Russian. Unlike Ukraine, where there was an alternation: *pro-Russian – pro-Western – pro-Russian – pro-Western*, the Belarusian bureaucratic elite was pro-Russian all the time (see Table 13). The period from 2015 to 2021 was not covered by Lebanidze's analysis, but on the basis of general trends in the Belarusian cadre policy, it can be assumed that in 2016–2019 there was a certain shift in favour of a pro-Western identity, but since mid-2020 it has given way to the opposite trend.

Until 2005, the number of officials with a Russian educational background varied in the range of 45-58%. Then this percentage began to decline, but until 2014 did not fall below 37%. Until 2011, there were only a small number of officials with a Western educational background. In 2012 their number increased to one percent, and in 2013 and 2014 up to two percent – see Chart 27.

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[131] See. B. Lebanidze, *Russia, European Union*, p. 36-37.
[132] See: Levitsky, (2010), p. 41.
[133] B. Lebanidze, *Russia, European Union*, p. 36-37.

Table 13. Geopolitical identity of officials in Belarus and selected post-Soviet countries

Armenia	2000–2015: mainly pro-Russian
Belarus	2000–2015: pro-Russian
Georgia	2000–2015: pro-Western
Ukraine	2000–2004: double, but pro-Russian orientation slightly dominated
	2005–2010: pro-Western
	2010–2013: rather pro-Russian
	2014–2015: pro-Western

Source: Lebanidze, 2020

The exact calculations that Lebanidze carried out based on the database of state websites ended in the year 2014. Based on general trends in public policy, we offer rough estimates of the proportions of the two categories of officials of interest here in 2015–2021. Based on our estimates, a slow trend towards an increase in the number of officials with a Western background continued until 2018, but this number is unlikely to exceed 4%. The number of officials with a Russian background is likely to have declined slightly until 2018. In 2019–2021, there was most likely a reverse trend: the number of "Western" ones decreased, and "Russian" ones increased or remained at the same level.

Chart 27. Percentage of officials with Western vs Russian education in Belarus (%)

Source: for 1999–2014 Lebanidze (2020).
For 2015–2021 rough estimations by BISS

Estimation by BISS on the basis of general trends

The degree of integration of the Belarusian bureaucracy into the Russian environment becomes especially noticeable if we compare the proportions of bureaucrats with Russian / Western education in Belarus and in three other post-Soviet countries: Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine – see Charts 28 and 29.

**Chart 28. Percentage of officials with Russian education
in four post-Soviet countries**

Source: Lebanidze (2020)

The strong pro-Russian orientation of Belarusian officials is a deterrent to political trans-formations. But this factor should not be exaggerated: at the informal level, within the Russian elites, different assessments of the Lukashenka regime are present and different options for solution of the political crisis are being discussed.

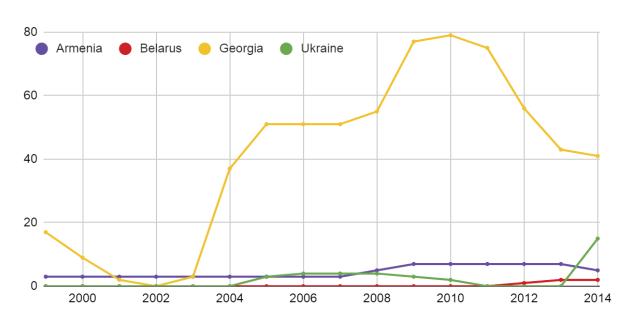**Chart 29. Percentage of officials with Western education in four post-Soviet countries**

Source: Lebanidze (2020)

Globalization, international sanctions and support

Description of the factors

According to Acemoglu and Robinson, one of the factors of democratization is the presence of close economic ties with other countries, especially if these countries are democratic. In a situation where such ties are weak, economic elites who have succeeded through cooperation with an authoritarian regime have good reasons to fear a transition to democracy: they might become the object of expropriation as former accomplices of the regime. But if the economy is strongly integrated into the global economy, the risks for the «pro-regime» economic elites are lower, since in this situation it is easy to transfer capital to another country.[134]

Sanctions, personal or economic, are an artificial measure, the purpose of which is to influence the incentive system of some actors: to make the costs for some actors from certain actions (for example, involvement in repression) higher. In the context of a relatively stable social contract in an authoritarian country, international sanctions are not very effective as the regime can easily subject it to propaganda processing and strengthen its legitimacy as a defender of the country from external enemies. In a crisis of legitimacy, especially if it is associated with problems in the economy, the risks for the regime from sanctions are much higher.

However, the impact of sanctions on democratization as a whole is very relative. Research by Gary Hufbauer et al. suggests that out of 80 cases of the introduction of international sanctions with the aim of regime change and democratization, only in 25 cases the goal was achieved.[135] The success/failure of international sanctions depends on a number of internal factors: the degree of informational influence of autocrats on their population, the cohesion of the elites, and the availability of natural resources.

It is important to note that sanctions affect not only those on whom they were imposed, but also those on whom they were not imposed. Moreover, this second type of influence is often more important. Companies or individuals, who have already been subject to sanctions, face an uncertain situation: they know where they will not be able to go in the upcoming years and whom they should not rely on in terms of investments or cooperation. In accordance with this they rebuild their business strategy or individual plans. This may be an annoying situation, but there is certainty in it. For those who have not yet been subject to sanctions, this is a powerful incentive to reconsider their priorities. These actors are forced to seriously reevaluate costs and benefits of supporting the regime.

Impact of sanctions on the situation in Belarus

In response to electoral fraud and systematic violence against protesters, dozens of countries have imposed sanctions against the Belarusian authorities or supported their imposition as part of a collegial decision at the European Union level. At the time of the release of this study, the EU had imposed four packages of sanctions. On September 2, 2021,

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[134] Cf. M.S. Manger, M.A. Pickup (2016), 'The Coevolution of Trade Agreement Networks and Democracy,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, p. 60.

[135] G.C. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott, K.A. Elliott, and B.Oegg (2007), *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd edition, Columbia University Press, p. 127. Similar conclusions can be found in Geddes et al., *How Dictatorship Work*, p. 59.

Brussels-based journalist Rikard Jozwiak tweeted that work on the fifth package had begun. At first, these were symbolic personal sanctions, but starting from the third package, they became tougher and were aimed at undermining the financial stability of Lukashenka and his entourage. From June 3, 2021, the sanctions introduced by the United States in 2006 (and frozen since 2015) affecting nine Belarusian enterprises, including the concern Belneftekhim, Hrodna Azot, and Naftan, were reintroduced. On August 9, 2021, the United States additionally imposed sanctions against two large state-owned enterprises – Belaruskali and the Hrodna tobacco factory Neman.[136]

In response to the forced landing of a Ryanair airliner in Minsk, the EU introduced sectoral sanctions in June 2021, which are quite sensitive for the Belarusian regime. In particular, restrictions were introduced on the trade of oil products, potash fertilizers and raw materials for the tobacco industry, financial restrictions, including closing access to European capital markets, a ban on insurance of the Belarusian government and state bodies.[137]

The current assessment of the impact of the sanctions is hampered by the termination of Belstat's updates on the state of exports of potash and oil-processing industries, which are primarily targeted by the sanctions.[138] But experts agree that in the medium term, sanctions will be an unprecedented test for the regime. Research company *Incomein* estimates probable GDP losses in the range of 7-14%.[139] BEROC researcher Dmitry Kruk believes that in the short term (from six months to a year) the damage to GDP will amount to 6-8%, in the longer term – to 10-13%. The actual impact of the sanctions on the economy depends, among other things, on the further actions of the authorities: will they be able to find new sales markets, provide financial assistance to enterprises, and finally, will political prisoners be released and other steps taken towards dialogue.[140]

The sanctions threaten not only the financial stability of the ruling group, but also exacerbate problems with the social contract. This applies to income and employment of the population, as well as the exchange rate. The impact of the sanctions will be felt primarily by enterprises and sectors of the economy that are directly blacklisted. A decrease in tax revenues to the budget will affect the income of employees of budgetary organizations. Some foreign organizations can act cautious and avoid cooperation with Belarusian enterprises, so as not to fall under the pressure of sanctions and prevent reputational losses.[141] In the situation of a deep crisis of procedural legitimation and a drop in trust in the state-run media, it will be difficult for the Belarusian regime to convince the population that external forces and the 'fifth column' are solely to blame for the worsening of the situation. On the other hand, financial and diplomatic support from Russia can soften the sanctions' impact.

International sanctions will most likely have a delayed effect: as the political crisis turns to the economic crisis, the question of the cost of the conflict with the West will arise more and more often within the Belarusian elites. In other words, the sanctions will not lead to the collapse of the regime, but will strongly affect the «profitability» of the political status quo. Economic elites, and with them the siloviki and Lukashenka's own entourage, will have to look for less costly ways to preserve the system, right up to reforming it.

[136] Treasury Holds the Belarusian Regime to Account on Anniversary of Fraudulent Election.
[137] EU imposes sanctions on Belarusian economy - Consilium.
[138] Санкции ЕС могут не затронуть нефтепродукты, калий и табачную продукцию до конца года. Вот почему, *Информационный портал «Tut.by»*, June 25, 2021. Accessed: Aug 20, 2021.
[139] «Готовьте подушку безопасности». Запад расширяет санкции против Беларуси — каких потрясений ждать *Про бизнес*, 17 августа 2021. Accessed: Aug 20, 2021.
[140] Потери белорусской экономики из-за введенных западных санкций могут составить до 7% ВВП, *Исследовательская компания InComeIn*, June 23, 2021. Accessed: Aug 20, 2021.
[141] Ibid.

Synopsis of international factors

Table 14.1. International factors relevant to (a) overcoming an autocracy; (b) democratization
(NEG – negative impact; POS – positive impact; NEU – neutral impact)

Factors		..relevant to:	
		- overcoming an autocracy	- democratization
Changes in the structure of global hegemony	In favour of democratic superpowers	POS	POS
	In favour of autocratic superpowers	?	NEG
Contagion effect: in many places of the region people revolt against autocrats		POS	NEU
Geopolitical identity of international socialization of officials	Western	POS	POS
	Russian	(rather) NEG*	NEG
International sanctions against the regime		NEU or POS	NEU

* Depends on Russia's behaviour: in some cases, Russia supported the overthrow of an inconvenient autocrat (e.g. Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan) or took a neutral position (e.g., overthrowing Sargsyan in Armenia)

Table 14.2. Belarus: the configuration of international factors

In Belarus:	Relevant to	
	- overcoming the autocracy	- democratization
There are no significant changes in the structure of international hegemony, but there is a slow decline in the global index of democracy	NEG	POS
There are no contagious democratization processes in the region	NEU	NEU
Pro-Russian geopolitical identity and socialization of Belarusian officials	NEG	NEG
Western countries imposed personal and economic sanctions against the Belarusian regime	POS or NEU	NEU

Two scenarios of Russia's behaviour towards Belarus

In response to protests in Belarus, the Kremlin has so far followed the tactic of temporarily supporting Lukashenka's regime, coupled with promoting a constitutional reform in a year or two. At the same time, the Kremlin apparently looks forward to the emergence of a powerful pro-Russian political force in Belarus, which will either exercise power in a new authoritarian format, or at least compete with others in a semi-democratic format.

Scenario A:

[protests subside] ⇨ [constitutional reform is carried out] and [pro-Russian political force emerges] ⇨ [pro-Russian power becomes most powerful] ⇨ [pro-Russian power establishes its own authoritarian rule, either by changing the constitution or using constitutional loopholes]

Scenario B:

[protests subside] ⇨ [constitutional reform is carried out] and [pro-Russian political force emerges] ⇨ [pro-Russian force becomes one of the main political forces] ⇨ [pro-Russian force competes with others in a semi-democratic framework]

The first scenario is preferable to the Kremlin, but the question is, how far is it willing to go in order to implement this preferable scenario? Under what circumstances is the Kremlin ready to employ emergency measures: hybrid war, fomenting separatist tendencies, attempts at annexation, etc.?

The Kremlin's policy towards Belarus is and will most likely be influenced by the following factors[142]:

(1) Belarusians are fed up with Lukashenka's regime.

(2) At the moment, Eurosceptic and Russophile sentiments dominate in Belarus.

(3) There is a fairly strong consensus in Belarusian society regarding the country's independence (although national identity remains problematic).

(4) The idea of annexing Belarus is very unpopular in Russian society.

(5) Russia is already prone to disintegration due to (temporarily frozen) separatist tendencies.

(6) Belarus is one of the five most important trade partners of Russia in both import and export.[143]

It is likely that the Kremlin is strongly tempted to try to establish a more predictable pro-Russian authoritarian regime in Belarus instead of Lukashenka's. Factor (2), at first glance, appears to be positive for such a scenario. However, much depends on how the Kremlin strategists interpret factor (1). They might speculate that the anti-authoritarian revolt is just an ephemeral whim, a byproduct of economic stagnation, the regime's response to CoViD19, and fatigue from Lukashenka's rule for over a quarter-century. A fresh figure, no matter how authoritarian they may be, can find recognition among the majority of Belarusians.

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[142] The factors are analysed in detail in the article 'Make love, not war. Will Belarusians' russophilism protect them from the Kremlin's aggression?' *Varta. Belarus Security Magazine*, 2020. Electronic version available on the BISS website: Make love, not war

[143] Source: Federal customs service

This mindset is likely to shape the Kremlin's policies in the near future. At the same time, Kremlin strategists will most likely take into account the risk of a decrease in pro-Russian and an increase in pro-Western sentiments in the event of extremely aggressive promotion of authoritarian options. In the situation of dilemma **D**:

> **(D)** *Support the authoritarian regime and put at risk the Belarusians' pro-Russian sentiment, OR partially support democratization and reduce the risk of anti-Russian sentiment.*

it would be rational to bet on the situation described in the second part of the disjunction.

Factors (3), (4), (5) and (6) are pushing to this option (second part of **D**). In addition, they all reduce the risk of 'emergency scenarios' (hybrid war, incitement of separatist tendencies, etc.). Such scenarios are not discarded, but are an extreme measure for the Kremlin that can be applied if Belarus tries to change its integration policy by 180 degrees (for example, declares its accession to the EU and NATO) and/or adopts a tough nationalist policy and/or will send troops to Donbass to fight on the side of Ukraine. Considering the current sentiments in Belarusian society and the likely configuration of political forces in Belarus after Lukashenka's resignation, there are weak preconditions for 'emergency scenarios'.

The above analysis was largely based on the assumption that Kremlin's politicians were rational. As in economics, we should account for the fact that decisions are made in conditions of bounded rationality. It is possible that the *availability heuristic* will affect the assessment of the significance of factor (1). Kremlin strategists are unlikely to analyse in detail the transformations of values in Belarus; rather, they will rely on more superficial phenomena such as the dynamics of mass protests.

However 'limited' the rationality of Russian political elites may be, it is unlikely that most of the factors listed in paragraphs (1) – (6) will be underestimated by them. Consequently, the risk of 'emergency scenarios' is low.

Lottery factors
Shocks and crises

Shocks and crises such as epidemics, economic depression, financial crisis, war, and poor harvest are always a test for an existing system, both democratic and authoritarian. Autocrats can use crises as a pretext to tighten control over society, but at the same time they have to face a number of managerial challenges. Crises and shocks usually require creative thinking and innovative approaches. The model which is habitual for autocracies: '*Do what you're told and thinking is the boss's task*' does not work in a crisis context. Thus, crises and shocks often expose regime's weaknesses in governance, which in turn damages its reputation, leads to disillusionment among loyalists, and increases the chances of success for supporters of change.

From the democratization standpoint, the role of shocks and crises is ambivalent. Shocks rarely end at the moment of the overthrow of an autocracy; even if they do, their conse-

quences are still present for a long time. This can impede the consolidation of democracy and create a constant risk that a democratic government will either be overthrown or transformed into a new form of autocracy.[144]

Death of an autocrat

Description of the factor

Since ancient times, the death of a 'tyrant', either natural or violent, was perceived as the fastest and most convenient way to overthrow his rule. But empirical studies show that the demise of an authoritarian ruler rarely became the demise of his system. Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz found that the rule of 79 autocrats was cut short by death during 1946–2012. But in the vast majority of cases (92%), the authoritarian system survived.[145] For example, neither the death of Stalin (1953), nor Mao Zedong (1976), nor Kim Il Sung (1994) led to the collapse of the systems they created, except perhaps for minor modifications.

The last decade (which was not covered by the study) has brought new examples of the 'life of autocracy after the death of an autocrat'. In 2013, the authoritarian ruler of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, died, but the system of governance he created remained. In 2016, the autocrat of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov died, but the regime, again, did not undergo much change.

Thus, the death of an autocrat does not contribute to democratization. Moreover, there are reasons to suggest that such an outcome inhibits regime change, at least in the short term. The fact is that regime propaganda in such situations actively exploits the imperative of respect for the memory of the deceased, inherent in all cultures. Authorities arrange a magnificent funeral, declare days of mourning, create an atmosphere of grief and reverence, and against this background it is difficult for the opposition to organize mass protests. This allows the ruling group to buy time to restart the mechanisms of power retention. Succession to the 'course of the great predecessor' becomes a factor of legitimation.

At the same time, there is no reason to believe that if a change of power does take place, the fact of the recent death of an autocrat will negatively affect the democratization process. In terms of democratization, we regard the death of an autocrat as a neutral factor.

What happens in case of hypothetical death of Lukashenka

In considering the Belarusian case we need to take into account two factors that may affect the statistical regularities established by Kendall-Taylor and Frantz: (a) the Belarusian autocracy is highly personalist; (b) it has so far existed without a power party. These factors unlikely make the Belarusian case exceptional, but they do somewhat increase the chances of regime collapse if Lukashenka dies.

Belarusian elites lack the experience of arbitration between various groups of influence in the absence of the usual arbiter. In the event of the death of the leader, rivalry between

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[144] Cf. Acemoglu and Robinson, p. 32

[145] A. Kendall-Taylor and E. Frantz (2016, October), 'When Dictators Die,' *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 27, Number 4.

various groups of influence will inevitably begin. Several informal leaders will emerge: biological heirs of the deceased leader (Lukashenka's sons); officials with long experience and authority within the system (like Mikhail Myasnikovich or Viktar Sheiman); supporters of rapprochement with Russia or the West; representatives of big business; higher security officials; finally, the prime minister, who is formally empowered by Decree No. 2, 2021, to preside siloviki in case of a sudden death of Lukashenka.

The abovementioned Decree states that 'in the event of the death of the first person as a result of an assassination attempt, an act of terrorism, external aggression or other violent actions, all state bodies and their officials act in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council, whose meetings are chaired by the Prime Minister.'[146] This formula of regime preservation in case of Lukashenka's death has a number of weaknesses.

First, the members of the Security Council will not have experience of decision-making and striking compromises in the absence of the usual arbiter (Lukashenka). If the regime possessed a functional power party, the situation might have been different. Even if such a party is created, it will be very difficult for it to develop mechanisms of arbitration and conflict-solving, given that Lukashenka is psychologically accustomed to interfering with any power entity in the state.

Secondly, the eldest son of Lukashenka, who for 15 years had played one of the key roles in personnel policy and sympathized with the 'technocrats', was removed from the Security Council shortly before the decree was adopted (cf. Part 1). It is unlikely that he will passively observe what is happening and will not make any attempts to influence the transit of power. Thus, the formal supremacy of the Security Council can be destroyed. Thirdly, the prime minister as the interim president will be able to simply nullify Decree No. 2 (2021) or adopt a new version of it in order to get rid of the Security Council.

In the process of this rivalry, some of the elite groups will likely try to rely on the opponents of Lukashenka. In addition, the opposition leaders at this moment will themselves become more active in the search for new allies among the power elite.

There is no way to claim that the hypothetical death of Lukashenka will lead to regime change and democratization. However, given that his regime is highly personalized, the chance of its disintegration is somewhat higher than in most cases covered in the study of Kendall-Taylor and Frantz.

Autocrat's mistakes and situational triggers

Many changes in sociopolitical life occur as a result of situational triggers and the miscalculations of autocrats. An example of a situational trigger is the self-immolation of a young street merchant, Mohammed Bouazizi, in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. This act triggered a cascade of events that ultimately led to the overthrow of the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali, which in turn created an opportunity for a democratic transition.

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[146] Lukashenko signs decree on the transfer of power in the event of his death, *IntelliNews,* May 10, 2021. Accessed Sept 18, 2021.

Chart 30. Democratization: deliberate, unplanned and 'by mistake' (%)

Legend:
- Deliberate democratization
- Unplanned but unavoidable
- By mistake

Values: 23, 3, 74

Source: Treisman, 2020

Chart 31. Typology of 'mistakes' with democratizing effect, %

Values: 'Too many concessions' 10, 'Insufficient concessions' 13, 'Too much repression' 22, 'Insufficient repression' 12, 'Bad policy' 18, 'Mishandled election' 22, 'Offended elites' 15, 'Offended security forces' 26, 'Fatal appointment' 8, 'International conflict' 17, At least one mistake 74

Source: Treisman, 2020.

Let us elaborate in more detail on the 'mistakes' of autocrats as a factor in democratization. This point has been well studied by the American political scientist Daniel Treisman.[147] Based on 316 cases covering the period from 1832 to 2015, Treisman came to the conclusion that most of the democratic transformations occurred as a 'by-product' of the attempts of the ruler or ruling group to avoid these transformations and maintain the status quo.

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[147] D. Treisman (2020, March), 'Democracy by mistake: How the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government,' *American Political Science Review*.

Treisman grouped the 'mistakes' into three categories:

1. *Relations with domestic outsiders*: miscalculations in control over the opposition and civil society, untimely exposure of the hotbeds of protest and its neutralization. Most common mistakes in this category are: excessive or inappropriate concessions; no concessions in situations where they should have been made; excessive or unnecessary repressions; lack of repressions that could weaken opposition and prevent democratic mobilization; failed sectoral policies that alienate key groups for the regime; miscalculations in the organization and conduct of electoral events or referendums.

2. *Relations with regime insiders*: miscalculations in the selection of cadres, unsuccessful distribution of powers and tasks within the ruling elite. Common mistakes in this category are: delegating important powers to a person who is either sympathetic to democratization or is too weak to defend the status quo; alienation of the army or security services (or parts of them); avoidable alienation of loyal civilian elites.

3. *Relations with international actors.* Foreign policy failures, which provoke intervention or isolation of the regime.

Treisman also classified errors and established approximate relationships between the frequency of various kinds of errors. The results are shown in Chart 31.

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Explanations for Chart 31:

'Too many concessions': excessive or poorly targeted concessions that strengthen the opposition and trigger a 'slippery slope'. For example, the policy of Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of the 80s. Gorbachev wanted to create a 'socialism with a human face' and adapt the Communist Party to new realities. The directive towards 'glasnost' and 'democracy' launched a cascade of concessions that eventually led to the fall of the communist regime.

'Insufficient concessions': the inability to make concessions that would enable the autocrat to divide and demobilize the opposition or gain new allies. An example is the position of Mali President Moussa Traore in 1990-1991. Traore, despite popular discontent, took up an uncompromising position and refused to perform even cosmetic reforms. This intensified the protests and ended with the removal of Traore from power by the military.

'Too much repression': excessive or poorly targeted repressions that ultimately reinforce the protest movement, 'counterproductive violence'. Bangladesh is a good illustration; in 1990, during a brutal crackdown on protests the authorities shot several students and one professor. This sparked massive demonstrations across the country and led to the delegitimization of the regime. As a result, autocrat president Hussein Ershad resigned (and was subsequently arrested). The use of repression against protesters in Ukraine in early 2014 had a similar effect: a package of laws passed in January significantly restricting freedom of speech and freedom of assembly sparked massive protests, and the shooting of demonstrators on February 18-20 exacerbated the split within the ruling group, as a result of which President Viktor Yanukovych fled the country, and the power passed to supporters of Euromaidan.

'Insufficient repression': omissions in terms of exposing conspiracies in a timely manner or preventing protests when they are few in number, when protesters are easy to isolate from the rest of society and prevent metastases to other segments of society.

'Bad policy': Major domestic policy failures that discredit the incumbent and alienate key groups. Poor economic management and widespread corruption are a great risk. The

luxury of a ruler and his entourage against the background of the deteriorating economic situation in the country is, as a rule, a strong factor in the discontent of the population and at any time can lead to mass protests.

'Mishandled election': miscalculations in the organization and conduct of elections or plebiscites, for example, ineffective campaigning, omissions in terms of manipulating the election results, obvious falsifications. A classic example of electoral miscalculation is the 1988 plebiscite in Chile, where citizens had to express their consent or disagreement to the extension of the presidential term of autocrat Augusto Pinochet. Being confident in his victory, the president did not interfere with the free campaigning of the opposition; there was also no significant falsification of the voting results. As a result, Pinochet lost the plebiscite (56% voted against). But electoral manipulation and falsification are also risky. In 1986, Ferdinand Marcos, realizing that amid economic problems and dissatisfaction with repressions he was losing popularity, actively used vote-buying, intimidation, deprivation of voting rights and outright falsifications. This provoked unprecedented mass protests, a split of the elite and the removal of an autocrat from power.

'Offended elites': alienating previously loyal civilian elites or allowing/provoking disagreement between regime insiders. A historical example is the conflict between Juan Perón (Argentine autocrat in 1946-1955) with the Catholic episcopate, which previously remained loyal to the regime.

'Offended security forces': alienation of the army or security services (or their part), leading to undermining the repressive potential of the regime. An illustrative example in this regard is the case of Tunisia, where the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali was overthrown in early 2011. As Risa Brooks notes in her research: 'Ben Ali sought to keep the military at a distance from the regime, limiting its influence and investing in police and security services to act as the mainstay coercive forces of the regime. (...) This led to the Army lacking incentive to protect the regime in January 2011'[148]. The military's refusal to use force against the protesters played a key role in the overthrow of the Tunisian autocrat.

'Fatal appointment': delegating key powers to a person who, at heart, sympathizes with democratization or who is too weak to prevent democratic reform. In this regard, again, Mikhail Gorbachev, whom the Soviet Politburo elected as the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in 1985, can serve as an illustration. Gorbachev turned out to be a sympathizer towards democratic reforms, which gradually led to a radical state-political transformation.

'International conflict': a major foreign policy failure that provokes foreign intervention, discredits the regime and leads to international isolation. An example is the Falklands War, started by Argentine autocrat Leopoldo Galtieri in 1982. The defeat in this war severely undermined Galtieri's reputation in society and within the elite, especially the military, as a result he lost power.

It is worth noting here that the statement of a *mistake* implies that the negative consequences of an action could have been avoided if the subject had chosen a different mode of behaviour. This means that such statements are always based on a counterfactual statement: '*If the subject did this and that, the result would be different*'. Counterfactual state-

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[148] R. Brooks (2013), 'Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36/2, p. 207-208.

ments generally cannot be tested empirically, although they can be tested using thought experiments. Therefore, in many cases it is difficult to say unequivocally whether it was a 'mistake' or just a situation where an action that is optimal from the point of view of the probability of success is performed, but the outcome is unsuccessful.

This methodological problem can be avoided by reformulating Treisman's findings as follows: in many cases, *democratization occurred because of the natural cognitive limitations of autocrats*. It is never possible to foresee 100% of the consequences of certain actions, be it hard or soft repression, a policy of concessions or one which is uncompromising, a policy of distancing the army or giving it privileges. Any action and any tactic carries the risk of failure.

This is the 'lottery factor' of the democratization process: without diminishing the importance of planning and strategy, it is worth remembering that success always depends in part on a coincidence, which can be favourable or unfavourable. The art is not in developing an impeccable, thorough 'plan', but in noticing and using favourable chances in time.

Black swans of the Belarusian regime

The unprecedented large-scale political mobilization of Belarusian society in 2020 was largely due to a series of 'black swans' (unforeseen coincidences) faced by the Belarusian regime. Two 'black swans' appeared in the form of spontaneous shocks: a global one – the CoViD19 pandemic; and a local one – poisoned water in several micro districts of Minsk in June. The authorities reacted to these atypical challenges according to the usual pattern: an attempt to conceal information, belittling the seriousness of the problem, ridiculing grassroots initiatives aimed at solving problems, and disparaging statements about those who suffered from CoViD19 or poisoned water. All this happened against the background of economic stagnation (which began long before the pandemic) and value transformations in Belarusian society.

Another 'black swan' was the decision of the chairman of Belgazprombank Viktar Babaryka and the former head of the High Technology Park Valery Tsapkala to participate in the election campaign. Both had extensive experience in government and business environments; both had a wide network of international contacts, primarily with Russia (a neuralgic point for the regime); both were perceived by senior officials as harbingers of a new quality of management, which has long been in demand within the state system; both were wealthy enough to fund their campaign on their own, without any foreign grants.

The authorities were ready for the fact that the heavyweights of the old opposition, such as Pavel Sevyarynets or Mikola Statkevich, or the star of the new opposition, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, would want to challenge the incumbent president. These politicians were alien to the nomenclature and most of the business community, so they could be locked up in pre-trial detention centres without much risk to the stability of the system. It was not the same thing with Babaryka or Tsapkala. After their appearance on stage, Lukashenka had to quickly adapt the scenario, with all the risks and side effects that usually arise in such cases: unconvincing arguments, the emergence of new opponents of the regime within the government (including the security forces) and an exacerbation of a sense of injustice on part of the state.

Another 'black swan' appeared when, on July 15, immediately after the registration of presidential candidates, three campaign headquarters of Viktar Babaryka, Valery Tsapkala and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya united. They formulated a simple and understandable mini-program: fair elections and the return of Belarus to the path of democracy. Three women came to the forefront: Maria Kalesnikava (representative of Babaryka's headquarters) Veranika Tsapkala (wife of Valery Tsapkala) and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as the central figure.

Either because of gender stereotypes, or because of an attachment to familiar schemes, the regime did not take the emergence of the 'women' headquarters seriously. For Lukashenka's political strategists, the female 'trio' was supposed to become a convenient object of humorous and ironic comments, which could be used to divert attention from a number of neuralgic topics and defuse the tense pre-election atmosphere.

In fact, the joint headquarters not only united the protest electorate, but also mobilized many previously apolitical citizens. Thousands of people at rallies in the regions and tens of thousands in the Belarusian capital was an unprecedented success; no opposition force has managed to gather so many protesters in the past 20 years.

The authorities had to adjust the scenario again, with many side effects. Increased pressure on local election commissions prompted some commissions' chairmen to organize 'dress rehearsals' of ballot counting and announce the 'correct' previously prepared voting results. This type of action, in turn, is fraught with new risks: when exposed to inquisitive citizens, they begin to act as a new trigger.[149]

By December 2020, the authorities managed to regain control over the situation in society and in the nomenklatura, and this control is being retained at the time of preparation of this text. But this is done at a very high cost: brutal repressions, mass defection of officials (including security officials) from the system, and delegitimization both within the country and in the international arena. In such a situation, the risk of Treisman's 'mistakes' of the following categories increases: 'Too much repression', 'Bad policy', 'Offended elites' and 'International conflict'.

Risks and chances for the regime that will appear in the future, to a large extent, depend on random, 'lottery' factors, which are almost impossible to create or plan. But what is within the power of supporters of change is to prepare and make use of the next opportunities if they arise.

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[149] Cf. П. Рудкоўскі (2020), Кошт аўтарытарызму, *Беларускі інстытут стратэгічных даследаванняў (BISS)*, Aug 10. Accessed Sept 1, 2021.

Synopsis of lottery factors

Table 15.1. Lottery factors relevant to (a) overcoming an autocracy; (b) democratization
(NEG – negative impact; POS – positive impact; NEU – neutral impact)

Factors	...relevant to	
	- overcoming an autocracy	- democratization
Shocks and crises	POS	NEG or NEU
Death of an autocrat	NEG	NEU
Mistakes of an autocrat	POS	POS (if there are other preconditions) or NEU

Table 15.2. Belarus: the configuration of lottery factors

In Belarus:		Relevance to:	
		- overcoming the autocracy	- democra-tization
The pandemic of SARS-CoV-2		POS	NEU
Low probability of Lukashenka's death within the next 2-3 years		NEU	NEU
The likelihood of negative consequences for the regime (Treisman's 'mistakes') over the next 2-3 years due to the following:	'Too few concessions'	POS	POS
	'Too much repression'		
	'Bad policy'		
	'Mishandled election or plebiscite'		
	'Elites offended'		
	'Security forces offended'		
	'International conflict'		

Conclusion

Electoral legitimation remains the main and almost only form of substantiating claims to the highest state power. Some receive electoral legitimation in an honest way, others – through deceit. However, the principle remains the same for everyone: to be a legitimate ruler, you must be elected, or at least give the impression that you are elected.

As long as electoral fraud is invisible to the majority of the population, electoral legitimation can perform quite well. In Belarus, it worked with varying degrees of success from the end of the 90s until 2020. The unexpected political activation of the population, on the one hand, and all too obvious falsifications, on the other, led to destruction of the remnants of the electoral legitimation of the regime. Shrinking audiences of state-run media and the lack of trust in it have exacerbated the problem of legitimation: the authorities are no longer able to convince the majority (or even a significant minority) that the incumbent does indeed have a popular mandate and that the whole story of falsification has no basis whatsoever. Non-recognition of the election results by most European countries, as well as the United States, Canada and Japan, the introduction of international sanctions and the diplomatic isolation of the regime will keep the problem of electoral legitimation in the spotlight for a long time, both domestically and internationally.

The middle class has grown and strengthened in Belarus. During the period of relative liberalization in 2015–2019, tens of thousands of enterprising people experienced their independence from the state both in terms of material self-sufficiency and self-realization. This incapacitated the social contract between the regime and society, which was rooted in provision of a stable income and some social guarantees from the state. The economic stagnation of recent years and the prospect of serious problems in the near future will not allow restarting the social contract as acceptable to the majority.

The regime still has some trump cards in terms of ideological legitimation. The ruling group is well aware that the Belarusian population is skeptical about a number of emancipative values of the West (LGBT+ rights, feminism, multiculturalism) and actively uses these sentiments to position Lukashenka as a defender of the 'traditional values' of the Belarusian people. The rhetoric of the defense of 'traditions' resonates with the Orthodox Church, as well as with some Catholics and Protestants. All this is superimposed on the feeling of cultural-linguistic closeness of Belarusians to Russians and attachment to the Soviet past as a marker of self-identification. These three areas: protection of 'traditional values', friendship with Russia and the cultivation of the Soviet legacy are still monopolized by Lukashenka.

The events of 2020 have become a serious test for the cohesion of the Belarusian elites. In general, the regime managed to withstand this test, although not without significant losses. The system built by Lukashenka is a clientelistic network with elements of internal struggle, due to which he can play the role of an arbiter. As the dominance of the security forces in this network increases, the proportion of the 'offended' will grow, which may lead to an imbalance within the system. The pressure of sanctions and a surge of economic problems can have a twofold effect: it can contribute to the mobilization of the elites and unite their efforts to preserve the system; but it is quite possible that this will exacerbate disagreement amongst the elites (some will begin to blame the problems on others).

Our research has identified more preconditions for democracy than for overcoming autocracy. In other words, in the event of a collapse of authoritarianism, Belarusians have a good chance of building a functional democracy. These are the main preconditions for democracy: the weakening of paternalistic sentiments in favour of individual responsibility, growth in self-confidence, growth of the education level of the population, experience of self-organization and horizontal interaction, strengthening middle class, absence of acute conflicts in society (ethnic, religious, regional, etc.), low levels of social inequality, and state stability.

Most of these preconditions are conducive both to overcoming autocracy and beginning democratization. But some of them affect these two processes in different ways. The absence of acute conflicts and low social inequality facilitate the launch of democratic institutions, but do not contribute to the mobilization of society against autocracy. A high degree of state stability is an even more ambivalent factor, since within the stage of autocracy it complicates regime change. However, if regime change happens, state stability contributes to the establishment of functional democracy.

In the Belarusian case, there are at least two factors that negatively affect both the chances of overcoming autocracy and the chances of democratic development: weak national identity, which is compensated for by attachment to the Soviet past, the Russian world and ethical traditionalism; and the Russian socialization of Belarusian officials.

Belarusian pro-democratic mobilization occurred during the period of slowdown (or stop) of the development of democracy. According to *Freedom House*, 2020 was the 15th year of deterioration in the global democracy index. The economic successes of (authoritarian) China, the contradictory presidency of Donald Trump, Brexit, the rise of so-called right-wing populism in Western countries, the restoration of Taliban rule in Afghanistan: all this creates a negative background for democratic aspirations.

Belarusian autocracy is unable to overcome some civilizational barriers. It will have to maintain the semblance of procedural legitimation in any case, conducting 'elections', 'referendums' or 'public discussions'. And this is one of the most vulnerable spots in the regime. Among the post-war autocracies, 26% were overthrown as a result of a (simulated) electoral process that went wrong.

A characteristic feature of the Belarusian situation is a low level of pro-authoritarian mobilization. The government's supporters became more active in 2020, but this activity level is still incomparable with the pro-authoritarian mobilization in Turkey in 2013 or in Poland in 1980-81. This moment will play an important role in the next stages. Passive and mediocre supporters of autocracy, against the backdrop of energetic and creative supporters of change, will wear down the image of the regime, both domestically and internationally. In the medium term, the authorities will be forced to make concessions, especially since an important precedent has emerged in the world of modern autocracies – in August 2021, the regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela announced its decision to negotiate with the opposition.

The experience of consolidating the protest movement in 2020 has had a significant impact on the supporters of the regime. For them, supporting the regime is no longer a default option, and they begin to seriously consider the costs and benefits of such support.

Many of them adopt a 'wait-and-see' attitude and try not to identify with either side of the conflict.

Russian authorities will continue the tactics of public support for the Lukashenka regime, combined with the advancement of constitutional reform throughout 2022. The Kremlin counts on the emergence of a powerful pro-Russian political force in Belarus, which will either exercise power in a new authoritarian format or at least compete with others in a semi-democratic format. The annexation of Belarus is unlikely to be seen as a solution to the Belarusian crisis.

Belarus is ripe for democracy, but the transformation process may drag on for several years. In this regard, Belarus is unlikely to become an exception to the rule: the systemic transformation of states is almost always a long and painful process. And this process does not happen automatically – it depends on the action/inaction of individual persons

Intensive care has begun.
And the Belarusian organism turned
out to be surprisingly strong. This gives hope.
Andrei Skurko, August 18, 2020

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