

**THE LEGAL EVOLUTION OF ELECTIONS IN BELARUS AND THEIR ROLE
IN CHANGING THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL SYSTEM
(using the example of elections President of Belarus in 2025)**

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The article examines the main historical stages of the evolution of elections in Belarus since its sovereign existence.

The purpose of the study is to identify the main characteristics of the legal evolution of electoral legislation and to establish the trends that they shape in the entire political system of the Republic of Belarus.

The object of the study was the electoral system of Belarus, and the subject was the presidential elections in 2025.

The research methodology included traditional document analysis, secondary data analysis of long-term and short-term monitoring of the presidential elections conducted by the expert group of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Countries as an international observer, which included the author of this article.

The main findings of the study are as follows: the author identified a significant qualitative impact of the legal evolution of the country's electoral system on the functioning of political institutions and the development of the entire political system.

Keywords

Elections, electoral system,
Republic of Belarus, presidential
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1. Introduction.

More than three decades ago, the Republic of Belarus (RB) embarked on a path of independent political development, striving to establish a national and state identity, assert sovereignty, and define principles for organizing public life. This period was marked by the formation of new legal norms, the modernization of political institutions, and the holding of elections. As a result, the country acquired unique political institutions and mechanisms for their functioning, including rules for organizing and conducting elections.

This process is of both scholarly and practical interest. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the institution of elections and its impact on the transformation of Belarus's political systems, combining theoretical research with applied studies.

On January 26 of 2025, the presidential election of the Republic of Belarus was held. It became a true test of the strength of the country's entire political system, as preparations for it, from a legal perspective, began immediately after the well-known events (the attempted "color revolution") in 2020.

2. Stages of Formation of the Modern Electoral System of Belarus.

The new political systems of the states that gained independence and became sovereign after the collapse of the USSR developed gradually and largely resembled each other. Regarding the Republic of Belarus, it is worth noting that the transition to democracy began in the late 1980s and was closely linked to changes in the electoral system. In this regard, four main stages of transformation of the political and electoral systems can be identified:

Stage I (late 1980s - 1994)

The characteristics of this stage are given in detail in the work of Belarusian researchers A.V. Postalovsky and O.A. Postalovskaya [1].

Specifically, the presidential election campaigns of the Republic of Belarus are unique among the post-Soviet republics. On the one hand, Belarus was the latest of all the former Soviet republics to elect a president, on July 10, 1994. On the other hand, the election results in Belarus demonstrate the stability of the political system and the incumbent president's continued high approval

ratings among the population. Meanwhile, in a number of other states that emerged from the territory of the former Soviet republics, the electoral process was not always democratic and even led to destabilization of the socioeconomic and political situation in the country.

The institution of the presidency began to emerge in the Soviet republics during the late perestroika period (1990-1991), emerging as a result of the nomenklatura conflict between regional (republican) political elites and the Union center.

As Belarusian experts A.V. Postalovsky and O.A. Postalovskaya note, the situation in the Republic of Belarus is somewhat different from that in the vast majority of former Soviet republics. There was no pronounced conflict in relations with the Union center. The national movement was in its infancy and lacked a radical political orientation. The Belarusian Popular Front acted more as a sociocultural public organization than a radical political force. Even during the period of the revived national movement's greatest popularity (1989-1991), BPF representatives received only 37 mandates in the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR of the 12th convocation (elections on May 4, 1990) out of a possible 345 seats [1].

Real power was in the hands of the conservative party and economic nomenklatura, which did not seek to perceive itself as the ruling elite of an independent state, preferring to maintain strong ties with the Union center. As Y. V. Shevtsov notes, "successful industrialization led to the strengthening of the position of the directorates of large industrial enterprises within the BSSR and to the increasing dependence of Belarusian regional and republican elites on industrial giants, leading to the absorption of other Belarusian social groups by industrial giants and associated social fragments" [2, p. 78].

An important aspect of the militarization of society should not be overlooked. The Belarusian Military District was one of the largest and most advanced in terms of combat training, due to the need to forestall a potential threat from the Western strategic direction. The military and those close to them were unwilling to embrace change, despite their staunchly democratic character. In the initial period following the Republic of Belarus's secession

from the USSR, the country's political system was a transforming system of checks and balances between the branches of government, as in most post-Soviet countries. The Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus played the primary role in the system of state power. The introduction of the institution of President in 1994 was primarily motivated by the need to resolve the conflict between the executive and legislative branches of government.

As a result of all these developments, the first presidential elections in Belarus were held on June 23, 1994.

Stage II (1994-1996)

This stage marked a transition from a parliamentary-presidential to a presidential form of government. It was characterized by a struggle to establish a stable political system, the key element of which was the figure of a national political leader with a high level of personal legitimacy, polarization of interests within the elite, and the intensification of political conflicts. These contradictions were resolved through republican referendums in 1995 and 1996, which led to the transformation of existing political institutions. The republic transformed from a parliamentary-presidential to a presidential system, with broad powers for the head of state in relation to the legislative and executive branches of government.

Stage III (1996-2020)

A political and administrative structure of public administration is taking shape, characterized by strong centralized power under the leadership of the President.

Stage IV (2020-present) is characterized by a shift in the domestic and foreign policies of the Republic of Belarus toward strengthening statehood and the formation of new mechanisms of public administration through constitutional reform, legislative and administrative innovations aimed at strengthening state sovereignty, and a higher level of legitimization of power through enhanced communication between the state and society (the All-Belarusian People's Assembly).

Today, the Constitution, adopted in 1994 and amended in 1996, 2004, and 2022, defines the foundations of the activities of all branches of government in the Republic of Belarus. Furthermore, since 2014, Belarus has been a party to the

"Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms of Citizens in the CIS Member States," the fundamental legal norms of which are also incorporated into the country's electoral system [3].

The political system of the Republic of Belarus, guaranteed by the Constitution, is based on the principle of separation of powers: legislative, executive, and judicial. State bodies, within the limits of their authority, are declared independent: they interact with each other, restraining and balancing each other.

According to Article 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, democracy in the Republic of Belarus is realized on the basis of the ideology of the Belarusian state, as well as the diversity of political institutions and opinions. The ideology of political parties, religious or other public associations, or social groups cannot be established as mandatory for citizens.

The President is the head of state, the guarantor of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, and the rights and freedoms of man and citizen. He personifies the unity of the people, guarantees the implementation of the main directions of domestic and foreign policy, and represents the Republic of Belarus in relations with other states and international organizations. The President takes measures to protect the sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus, its national security, and territorial integrity, ensures political and economic stability, continuity, and interaction between government bodies, and mediates between government bodies.

The All-Belarusian People's Assembly is the highest representative body of popular power in the Republic of Belarus, determining the strategic directions for the development of society and the state, ensuring the inviolability of the constitutional order, the continuity of generations, and civil harmony. Its main powers are: approving the main directions of domestic and foreign policy, military doctrine, and the concept of national security; approving the program of socio-economic development of the Republic of Belarus; hearing the Prime Minister on the implementation of socio-economic development programs of the Republic of

Belarus; proposing amendments and additions to the Constitution; proposing the holding of national referendums; considering the legitimacy of elections; deciding on the removal of the President from office in the event of a systematic or gross violation of the Constitution, or the commission of treason or another serious crime; declaring a state of emergency or martial law in the Republic of Belarus in the presence of grounds stipulated by the Constitution, and in the event of the President's inaction on these matters.

Parliament – the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus – is a representative and legislative body and consists of two chambers – the Council of the Republic (upper house) and the House of Representatives (lower house).

The Council of the Republic, consisting of 64 members, is the chamber of territorial representation. The upper house of parliament is formed by indirect voting. A total of 56 members of the Council of the Republic are elected by secret ballot from each region and Minsk at meetings of local councils. Eight members of the Council of the Republic are appointed by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

The House of Representatives consists of 110 deputies. Election of members of the House of Representatives is carried out in accordance with the law on the basis of universal, free, and equal direct suffrage by secret ballot under a majoritarian electoral system.

A member of the House of Representatives must be a citizen of the Republic of Belarus who has reached the age of 21. Members of the House of Representatives exercise their powers in Parliament on a professional basis. A member of the House of Representatives may simultaneously serve as a member of the government. A member of the House of Representatives may not simultaneously serve as a member of both chambers of Parliament. A member of the House of Representatives may not serve as a member of a local Council of Deputies. The parliamentary term is four years.

Since 2022, significant **changes have taken place in the Republic of Belarus's electoral system:**

- Introduction of a single voting day for parliamentary elections—the last Sunday in February.

Changes regarding presidential candidates

Age: at least 40 years old.

Residence: at least 20 years of continuous residence in the Republic of Belarus immediately prior to the election.

Citizenship: only of the Republic of Belarus.

Tenure: no more than two terms.

Changes in the work of Parliament

Term of office: 5 years.

New powers: annually hears reports from the Prosecutor General, the chairs of the State Control Committee, and the Board of the National Bank.

The status of the Council of the Republic has been strengthened as a territorial representative body responsible for developing local self-government.

There is active discussion about the introduction of remote electronic voting (REV). However, unlike in Russia, such a voting system is not yet in use. The underdevelopment of electronic, remote voting systems is primarily due to cybersecurity issues and the limited accessibility of polling stations, unlike, for example, in the mountainous regions of Tajikistan or northern Russia. As Russian researcher V.A. Lukushin notes in his article on the legitimization of electronic voting in Russia, Belarus is currently addressing similar issues to ours, ensuring that its electronic voting system complies with all democratic principles [4].

It should be noted that political parties play a central role in the electoral process in Belarus, as they do in all CIS countries. The socio-political role of parties is enshrined in the constitution, and electoral legislation thoroughly regulates their participation at various stages of the election campaign. Moreover, the legislation of a number of CIS countries, including the Republic of Belarus, contains provisions according to which a party's failure to participate in elections may result in its loss of political party status. Parties not only nominate candidates but also organize election campaigns, form party lists, and distribute parliamentary mandates [5].

We conducted a sociological study in February 2025 using an expert assessment method. The experts were international observers from the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS, who participated in long-term monitoring of the

Belarusian presidential election and short-term monitoring, i.e., were present at polling stations on election days. Seventeen experts (international observers) from four countries – Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – were interviewed, using the principles of a specially developed election observation methodology [6].

Since any sociological research, even using semi-structured expert interviews, is conducted anonymously, we will present the experts' opinions without providing their names. One of the key issues in election observation is the accessibility of polling stations for electoral participants. Here's an expert's opinion on the accessibility of polling stations in the Republic of Belarus:

□ What's considered difficult to access in Belarus is simply some remote polling station, for which, say, you have to hire an election commission and get them in a car to get there. No other difficulties are observed.

The nomination and registration of candidates for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus, in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, takes place in several stages and is regulated by the provisions of the Electoral Code.

Requirements for candidates nominated for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus include:

- ✓ Belarusian citizenship by birth,
- ✓ the right to vote,
- ✓ no current or past foreign citizenship, residence permit, or other foreign document entitling to benefits and other advantages,
- ✓ at least 40 years of age,
- ✓ permanent residence in the Republic of Belarus for at least 20 years immediately prior to the election,
- ✓ it is not permitted to combine the duties of President of the Republic of Belarus with the simultaneous holding of a position as a member of the House of Representatives, a judge, a member of the Council of the Republic, a member of the Council of Ministers, or a member of a local Council of Deputies.

Candidates for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus are nominated by citizens of the Republic of Belarus upon receipt of at least 100,000 voter signatures.

The nomination of candidates for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus begins 80 days and ends 50 days prior to the election and is carried out by an initiative group of at least 100 voters. In the presidential election campaign from late 2024 to early 2025, the number of participants in the election campaign was 11 at the stage of submitting applications to register initiative groups nominating candidates for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus. This number was reduced to seven at the initiative group registration stage, and five at the candidate registration stage.

In both presidential and parliamentary elections, voters can vote "against all," crossing out all candidates' names on the ballot. This occurs when a voter cannot find a suitable candidate and prefers to reject all candidates. According to the Central Election Commission, the share of such voters in the 2025 presidential election was 3.6%.

Elections are considered valid if more than half of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus included in the voter list participated.

3. Analysis of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Belarus.

In January 2025, five candidates participated in the presidential election in the Republic of Belarus, including Oleg Sergeyeovich Gaidukevich, Chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus; Anna Anatolyevna Kanopatskaya, Head of the Public Center for Legislative Initiatives; Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko, the incumbent President of the Republic of Belarus; Sergei Alexandrovich Serenkov, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus; and Alexander Nikolaevich Khizhnyak, Chairman of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice.

Financing for the preparation and conduct of the presidential election in the Republic of Belarus is provided from the national budget in accordance with Article 48 of the Electoral Code. Expenditures for these purposes may also be covered by political parties, other organizations, and citizens of the

Republic of Belarus who contribute their funds to the off-budget fund created by the Central Election Commission to provide additional funding for the preparation and conduct of the election.

Coverage of the election campaign is conducted in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, which is currently undergoing continuous improvement and is being comprehensively implemented. Legislative amendments are emerging, both in relation to regulations and in relation to information support for elections [7].

The Central Election Commission and subordinate commissions for the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus are actively working to inform citizens about the progress of the election campaign and to build trust in the electoral process and the institution of the presidency.

To inform voters about the upcoming vote, election administration bodies use various visual aids – posters, billboards, and banners – designed in a uniform style. Appropriate announcements are broadcast in public places (large shopping centers, markets, public transportation, etc.).

Since January 10, 2025, every citizen has been able to check at their polling station whether they are included on the list and whether the information on the list is accurate.

To promptly inform and advise citizens on the organization and conduct of elections, the Central Election Commission began operating an information and reference center on November 1, 2024.

Media coverage of the election campaign is very intensive. The Central Election Commission regularly updates and updates information on its official website. A special section, "Election of the President of the Republic of Belarus," provides basic information on the progress and conduct of the election campaign in an accessible and user-friendly format, including candidate financial reports, CEC resolutions, and information on the accreditation of international and national observers. The CEC's official Telegram channel is updated regularly and quickly, providing detailed coverage of the commission's work and promptly informing citizens about the results of its meetings. The presidential

election is also widely covered by major news agencies such as BELTA and print media, including the newspaper SB. Belarus Segodnya and the newspaper Zvyazda.

International observers who worked during the presidential election noted (expert opinion):

- Everything was fine in Belarus. After 2022, as I understand it, a huge amount of work was done by the Central Election Commission. The Chairman of the Central Election Commission himself visited all the enterprises, telling everyone everything, reaching out to everyone, and negotiating with everyone. They conducted a huge outreach effort, and they even have a Telegram channel, created specifically to cover the elections.

Active outreach efforts among young people were recorded. Experts noted:

- Young people, students, are visiting universities, explaining why voting is important and how it works. This is especially important for first-time voters.

Election Campaigning

The rules governing the forms and methods of election campaigning and its coverage in the media during the presidential election campaign are reflected in Articles 45-47 of the Electoral Code, as well as in CEC resolutions. It should be noted that the permitted forms of election campaigning are very similar to legal Russian technologies that can be used in the Russian presidential elections [8].

For election campaigning, in accordance with current legislation, registered candidates for the post of President of the Republic of Belarus are provided free airtime on television and radio channels and newspaper space for publishing their election platforms.

Candidates also use personal and party pages on social media and messaging apps for campaigning purposes: advertising and campaign messages are published on the official VKontakte group of the Communist Party of Belarus; on the party Telegram channel of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus and the personal Telegram channel of O.S. Gaidukevich; and on the Telegram channel of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice. The parties' official pages are regularly updated and filled with relevant information, which contributes to the

openness and transparency of the election campaign.

According to expert observers in Belarus, attracting voters to polling stations is more traditional; going to the polling station is positioned and perceived by voters as a festive event, with refreshments available and entertainment programs organized. Below are excerpts from an expert interview with international observers from the CIS IPA:

- I believe the main thing there is, let's call it, the entertainment program, which, of course, takes place on weekends. But even on the [weekdays] when I was there, programs were posted at the polling stations with performances by orchestras and creative groups – I saw that.

- But in Belarus, for example, there's also a general festive mood. People are out and about, with their families, with their children. There's a rather friendly atmosphere at the polling stations.

Free public transportation on election day has become a common practice. During the last presidential elections in Belarus, another trend emerged aimed at ensuring order and security: the deployment of "people's militias" within a radius of 10 to 500 meters from precinct election commissions. This is a public initiative that has received the approval of all participants in the electoral process. Active information and campaigning are among the factors contributing to the very high electoral turnout. According to the Central Election Commission, 85.7% of voters participated in the presidential election in the Republic of Belarus. Moreover, a significant proportion (42%) voted early. Early voting is conducted for five days prior to election day. During the expert interview, the experts noted:

- In Belarus, for example, a particular characteristic is that a large percentage of voters, up to 40%, do not vote early.

The IPA CIS IIMRD expert group notes numerous instances of foreign interference in the presidential election campaign in the Republic of Belarus, which violate the norms of national legislation of the Republic of Belarus and the provisions of the Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of

Independent States [9]. However, this activity does not have a significant impact on the electoral process due to the highly professional work of state authorities and election administration bodies in countering foreign interference. For this reason, remote electronic voting is not used in the country.

4. Conclusion.

Overall, the electoral system in the Republic of Belarus currently has the following features and characteristics:

- Electoral legislation is built on the fundamental principles of democratic electoral law – universal suffrage, the principle of equal voting rights, the principle of secret ballot, and the principle of direct suffrage [10].

- Candidates with extremely low levels of support are excluded at the registration stage.

- High voter turnout (turnout in the January 2025 presidential election was approximately 85%) across various socio-demographic groups.

- Option to vote "Against All"

- High proportion of voters voting early, within 5 days before the main election day.

- High information transparency of the Central Election Commission and the electoral process.

- Lack of practical experience in applying the Election Election System.

A comparison of the electoral systems of Russia and Belarus is warranted. Despite existing differences, as a result of legislative changes and the mutual adoption of the successful experiences of both countries, the electoral systems of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are increasingly moving toward a more unified model with common characteristics [11]. These include:

✓ **Enshrining the principles of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot.**

✓ **A similar mechanism for defining electoral districts.** Their boundaries are designated, a list of administrative-territorial units or settlements included in each electoral district is determined, the number of each electoral district, the location of each electoral commission, and the number of voters in each electoral district are indicated.

✓ **A system of electoral commissions, including a central electoral commission,** territorial electoral commissions, district electoral commissions, and precinct electoral commissions.

✓ **A single voting day.**

✓ **The possibility of voting over several days: three days in the Russian Federation and six days in the Republic of Belarus.** In the 2025 presidential elections under consideration, it was precisely the six-day voting that ensured such a high voter turnout at the polling stations, which increased the legitimacy of the elected president. This will likely be reflected in the electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus and will be implemented on an ongoing basis. Amendments to electoral legislation regularly appear after each election held in the republic [7].

✓ **Elimination of candidates with extremely low levels of support at the registration stage.**

✓ **Strict legal requirements for the legality, accessibility, and openness of the electoral campaign.** Mutual monitoring of the electoral process by observers from both countries, including through election observation [12].

✓ **Electoral security is a necessary condition for ensuring the electoral sovereignty of the state:** the higher the level of protection of citizens, organizers, and infrastructure within the framework of electoral security, the less effective external interference in electoral processes [13]. At the same time, the very concepts of electoral sovereignty and external interference require further development. Extensive work is being carried out in this area, both in the Republic of Belarus and throughout the CIS.

The evolution of the electoral system of the Republic of Belarus was aimed at creating a stable foundation for the country's entire political system. At the same time, the Republic's electoral law has its own national roots, allowing citizens to shape their civic identity.

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