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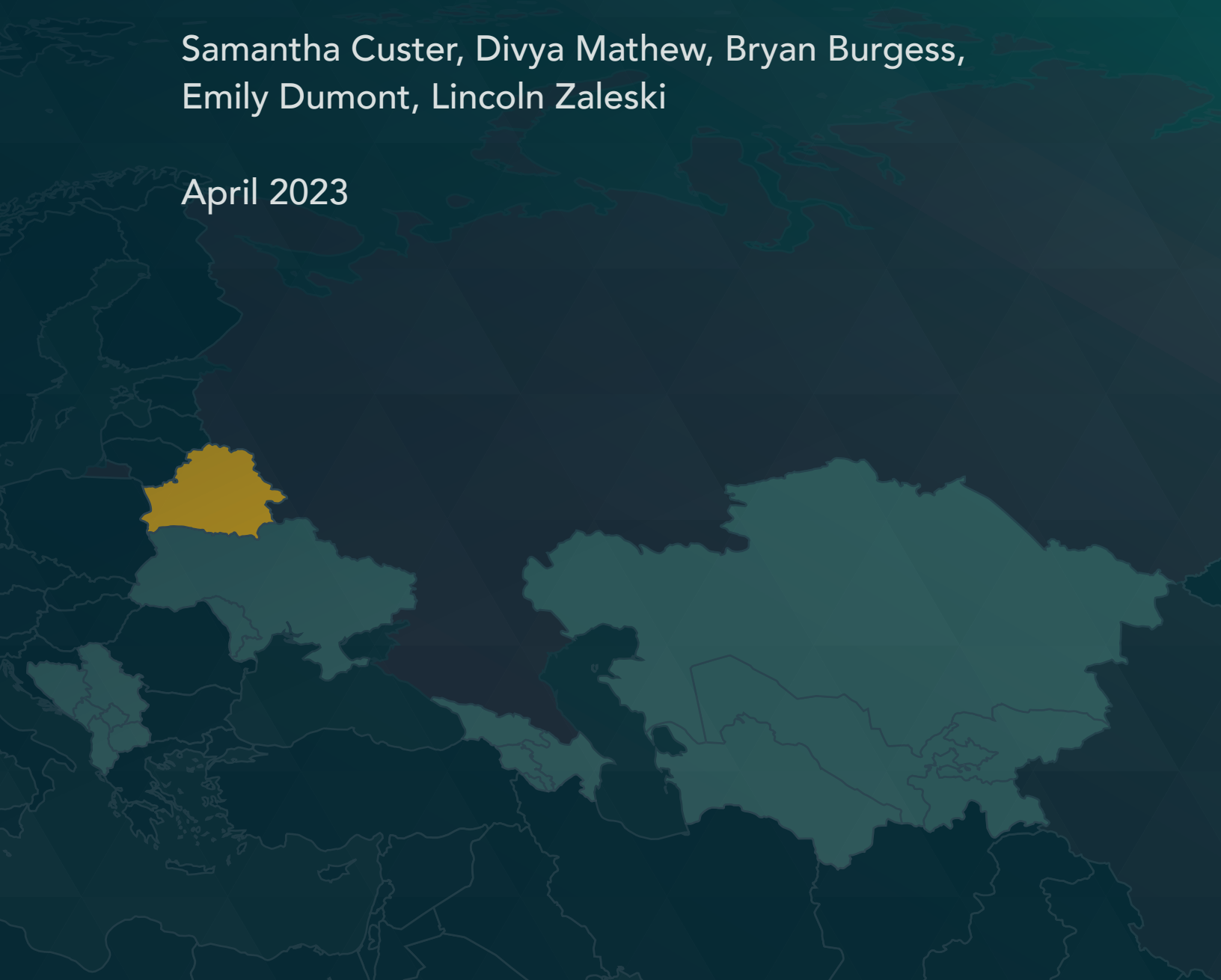
A Research Lab at William & Mary

Civic Space Country Report

Belarus: Measuring civic space risk, resilience, and Russian influence

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Executive Summary

This report surfaces insights about the health of Belarus' civic space and vulnerability to malign foreign influence in the lead up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Research included extensive original data collection to track Russian state-backed financing and in-kind assistance to civil society groups and regulators, media coverage targeting foreign publics in the region, and indicators to assess domestic attitudes to civic participation and restrictions of civic space actors. Crucially, this report underscores that the Kremlin's influence operations were not limited to Ukraine alone and illustrates its use of civilian tools in Belarus to co-opt support and deter resistance to its regional ambitions.

The analysis was part of a broader three-year initiative by AidData—a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute—to produce quantifiable indicators to monitor civic space resilience in the face of Kremlin influence operations over time (from 2010 to 2021) and across 17 countries and 7 occupied or autonomous territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E). Below we summarize the top-line findings from our indicators on the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Belarus, as well as channels of Russian malign influence operations:

- **Restrictions of Civic Actors:** Belarus accounted for the largest volume of restrictions (2,146) initiated against civic space actors in the E&E region between January 2015 and March 2021, driven by high instances of both harassment or violence (46 percent of instances) and state-backed legal cases (53 percent of instances). Thirty-one percent of restrictions were recorded in 2020, related to the presidential election, with the upsurge continuing into the first quarter of 2021 which alone accounted for 262 cases. Political opposition members (i.e., democratic forces) were most frequently targeted, and the Belarusian government was the primary initiator. The Russian government was involved in four instances of restrictions of civic space actors and the Ukrainian government in one case.
- **Attitudes Towards Civic Participation:** Belarusians tended to report higher interest in politics than their regional peers, holding relatively steady (41-43 percent) between 2011 and 2018. This interest in politics has not

led to high levels of civic participation, however. In 2018, Belarusians had extremely low rates of participation in civic activities, trailing most other countries in the region in their willingness to engage in demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, or petitions. Membership in all types of voluntary organizations has declined since 2011. Even outside of the political arena, far fewer Belarusians donated to charities, helped strangers or volunteered with organizations in 2019 than 2010, plummeting to the bottom of the rankings in the region's Civic Engagement Index.

- **Russian-backed Civic Space Projects:** The Kremlin supported 21 Belarusian civic organizations via 30 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 to August 2021. The Russian government routed its engagement in Belarus through 14 different state channels; however, the Gorchakov Fund and Rossotrudnichestvo alone supplied over four-fifths of all identified projects. The Kremlin's cooperation activities more heavily emphasized Russian-Belarusian integration and promoted the framework of the Union State. Youth-focused programming was a common strategy, from general patriotic education to more intentional efforts to mobilize their support for integration.
- **Russian State-run Media:** Belarus was a popular target audience for Russian state media, capturing 12 percent of the Kremlin's media mentions across the region and lagging only Ukraine. The preponderance of civic actor mentions (1,547 instances) coincided with the 2020 presidential elections and anti-government protests, with an uptick in coverage continuing into early 2021. Three-quarters of these mentions were of domestic actors, most often formal civil society organizations and media outlets, with the remainder including references to intergovernmental and foreign organizations operating in Belarus' civic space. Russian media coverage of these civic space actors, as well as democratic norms and rivals (1,195 mentions), became increasingly negative as the Kremlin grew concerned of a potential color revolution and losing a staunch pro-Russia ally in President Lukashenko.

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A Note on Vocabulary

The authors recognize the challenge of writing about contexts with ongoing hot and/or frozen conflicts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consistently label groups of people and places for the sake of data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that terminology is political, but our use of terms should not be construed to mean support for one faction over another. For example, when we talk about an occupied territory, we do so recognizing that there are *de facto* authorities in the territory who are not aligned with the government in the capital. Or, when we analyze the *de facto* authorities' use of legislation or the courts to restrict civic action, it is not to grant legitimacy to the laws or courts of separatists, but rather to glean meaningful insights about the ways in which institutions are co-opted or employed to constrain civic freedoms.

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1. Introduction

How strong or weak is the domestic enabling environment for civic space in Belarus? To what extent do we see Russia attempting to shape civic space attitudes and constraints in Belarus to advance its broader regional ambitions? Over the last three years, AidData—a research lab at William & Mary’s Global Research Institute—has collected and analyzed vast amounts of historical data on civic space and Russian influence across 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (E&E).¹ In this country report, we present top-line findings specific to Belarus from a novel dataset which monitors four barometers of civic space in the E&E region from 2010 to 2021 (see Table 1).²

For the purpose of this project, we define civic space as: the formal laws, informal norms, and societal attitudes which enable individuals and organizations to assemble peacefully, express their views, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction.³ Here we provide only a brief introduction to the indicators monitored in this and other country reports. However, a more extensive methodology document is available via aiddata.org which includes greater detail about how we conceptualized civic space and operationalized the collection of indicators by country and year.

Civic space is a dynamic rather than static concept. The ability of individuals and organizations to assemble, speak, and act is vulnerable to changes in the formal laws, informal norms, and broader societal attitudes that can facilitate an opening or closing of the practical space in which they have to maneuver. To assess the enabling environment for Belarusian civic space, we examined two indicators: restrictions of civic space actors (section 2.1) and citizen attitudes towards civic space (section 2.2). Because the health of civic space is not strictly

¹ The 17 countries include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

² The specific time period varies by year, country, and indicator, based upon data availability.

³ This definition includes formal civil society organizations and a broader set of informal civic actors, such as political opposition, media, other community groups (e.g., religious groups, trade unions, rights-based groups), and individual activists or advocates. Given the difficulty to register and operate as official civil society organizations in many countries, this definition allows us to capture and report on a greater diversity of activity that better reflects the environment for civic space. We include all these actors in our indicators, disaggregating results when possible.

a function of domestic dynamics alone, we also examined two channels by which the Kremlin could exert external influence to dilute democratic norms or otherwise skew civic space throughout the E&E region. These channels are Russian state-backed financing and in-kind support to government regulators or pro-Kremlin civic space actors (section 3.1) and Russian state-run media mentions related to civic space actors or democracy (section 3.2).

Since restrictions can take various forms, we focus here on three common channels which can effectively deter or penalize civic participation: (i) harassment or violence initiated by state or non-state actors; (ii) the proposal or passage of restrictive legislation or executive branch policies; and (iii) state-backed legal cases brought against civic actors. Citizen attitudes towards political and apolitical forms of participation provide another important barometer of the practical room that people feel they have to engage in collective action related to common causes and interests or express views publicly. In this research, we monitored responses to citizen surveys related to: (i) interest in politics; (ii) past participation and future openness to political action (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests); (iii) trust or confidence in public institutions; (iv) membership in voluntary organizations; and (v) past participation in less political forms of civic action (e.g., donating, volunteering, helping strangers).

In this project, we also tracked financing and in-kind support from Kremlin-affiliated agencies to: (i) build the capacity of those that regulate the activities of civic space actors (e.g., government entities at national or local levels, as well as in occupied or autonomous territories); and (ii) co-opt the activities of civil society actors within E&E countries in ways that seek to promote or legitimize Russian policies abroad. Since E&E countries are exposed to a high concentration of Russian state-run media, we analyzed how the Kremlin may use its coverage to influence public attitudes about civic space actors (formal organizations and informal groups), as well as public discourse pertaining to democratic norms or rivals in the eyes of citizens.

Although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine February 2022 undeniably altered the civic space landscape in Belarus and the E&E region for years to come, the historical information in this report is still useful in three respects. By taking the long view, this report sheds light on the Kremlin's patient investment in hybrid tactics to foment unrest, co-opt narratives, demonize opponents, and cultivate sympathizers in target populations as a pretext or enabler for military action.

Second, the comparative nature of these indicators lends itself to assessing similarities and differences in how the Kremlin operates across countries in the region. Third, by examining both domestic and external factors in tandem, this report provides a more holistic view of how to support resilient societies in the face of autocratizing forces at home and malign influence from abroad.

Table 1. Quantifying Civic Space Attitudes and Constraints Over Time

Civic Space Barometer	Supporting Indicators
Restrictions of civic space actors (January 2015–March 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of instances of harassment or violence (physical or verbal) initiated against civic space actors • Number of instances of legislation and policies (newly proposed or passed) that include measures to further limit the ability of civic space actors to form, operate or speak freely and without retribution • Number of instances of state-backed legal action brought against civic space actors in an effort to intimidate citizens from assembly, speech or activism
Citizen attitudes toward civic space (2010–2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of citizens reporting that they are interested in politics • Percentage of citizens reporting that they have previously engaged in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) • Percentage of citizens reporting that they might be willing to engage in civic actions (e.g., petitions, boycotts, strikes, protests) in future versus those who say they would never do so • Percentage of citizens reporting that they engaged in apolitical civic engagement (e.g., donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers) • Percentage of citizens who reported trust/confidence in their public institutions
Russian projectized support relevant to civic space (January 2015–August 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects directed by the Russian government to institutional development, governance, or civilian law enforcement in the target country • Number of projects directed by the Russian government to support formal civil society organizations or informal civic groups within the target country
Russian state media mentions of civic space actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of mentions of civic space actors operating in Belarus by Russian state-owned media

(January 2015–March 2021)

- Sentiment of mentions of civic space actors operating in Belarus by Russian state-owned media
- Frequency of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Belarus by Russian state-owned media
- Sentiment of mentions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S., and the European Union, as well as the terms “democracy” and “West,” in Belarus by Russian state-owned media

Notes: Table of indicators collected by AidData to assess the health of Belarus’s domestic civic space and vulnerability to Kremlin influence. Indicators are categorized by barometer (i.e., dimension of interest) and specify the time period covered by the data in the subsequent analysis.

2. Domestic Risk and Resilience: Restrictions and Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Belarus

A healthy civic space is one in which individuals and groups can assemble peacefully, express views and opinions, and take collective action without fear of retribution or restriction. Laws, rules, and policies are critical to this space, in terms of rights on the books (de jure) and how these rights are safeguarded in practice (de facto). Informal norms and societal attitudes are also important, as countries with a deep cultural tradition that emphasizes civic participation can embolden civil society actors to operate even absent explicit legal protections. Finally, the ability of civil society actors to engage in activities without fear of retribution (e.g., loss of personal freedom, organizational position, and public status) or restriction (e.g., constraints on their ability to organize, resource, and operate) is critical to the practical room they have to conduct their activities. If fear of retribution and the likelihood of restriction are high, this has a chilling effect on the motivation of citizens to form and participate in civic groups.

In this section, we assess the health of civic space in Belarus over time in two respects: the volume and nature of restrictions against civic space actors (section 2.1) and the degree to which Belarusians engage in a range of political and apolitical forms of civic life (section 2.2). Belarus accounted for the largest volume of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in the E&E region between January 2015 and March 2021, driven by high instances of both harassment or violence and state-backed legal cases. Against this backdrop, it is perhaps unsurprising why there is such a pronounced gap between Belarusians' professed high degree of interest in politics juxtaposed with extremely low willingness to participate in common forms of civic life, political or otherwise. We delve into greater detail about these trends and other developments in Belarus' domestic civic space in the remainder of this section.

2.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Belarus: Targets, Initiators, Trends Over Time

Belarusian civic space actors experienced 2,146 known restrictions between January 2015 and March 2021 (see Table 2). Thirty-one percent of restrictions

were recorded in 2020, related to the presidential election, with the upsurge continuing into the first quarter of 2021 which alone accounted for 262 cases.⁴ These restrictions were weighted toward state-backed legal cases (53 percent) and instances of harassment or violence (46 percent). There were fewer instances of newly proposed or implemented restrictive legislation (1 percent); however, these instances can have a multiplier effect in creating a legal mandate for a government to pursue other forms of restriction. These imperfect estimates are based upon publicly available information either reported by the targets of restrictions, documented by a third-party actor, or covered in the news (see Section 5). This data is best understood to be event-level data in that it records reported episodes of violence and harassment, as well as state-backed legal cases, as opposed to a count dataset that attempts to capture the universe of how many individuals were harassed.⁵

Table 2. Recorded Restrictions of Belarusian Civic Space Actors

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021-Q1	Total
Harassment/Violence	98	106	138	98	62	364	120	986
Restrictive Legislation	7	2	0	5	2	6	10	32
State-backed Legal Cases	83	124	163	193	144	289	132	1128
Total	188	232	301	296	208	659	262	2146

Notes: Table of the number of restrictions initiated against civic space actors in Belarus, disaggregated by type and year. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

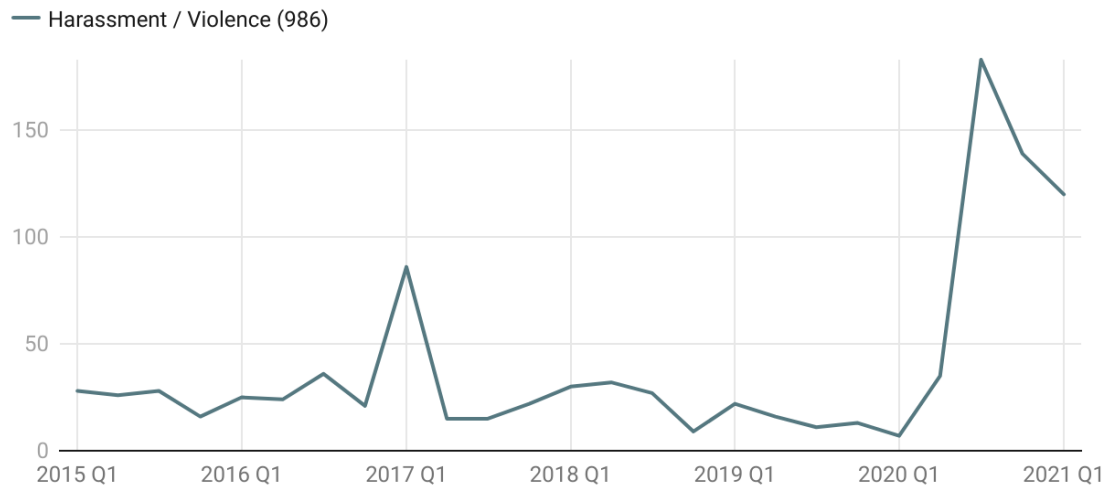
⁴ Belarus saw massive waves of protests, beginning a few months before the Presidential election where Lukashenko sought his 6th term in office. At one point, the protests were held every Sunday. They escalated after the election results were announced and Lukashenko claimed to win 80% of the votes. Authorities cracked down on protesters, and sometimes on innocent bystanders, thousands were detained.

⁵ Much like with other cases of abuse, assault, and violence against individuals, where victims may fear retribution or embarrassment, we anticipate that this number may understate the true extent of restrictions.

Figure 1. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Belarus

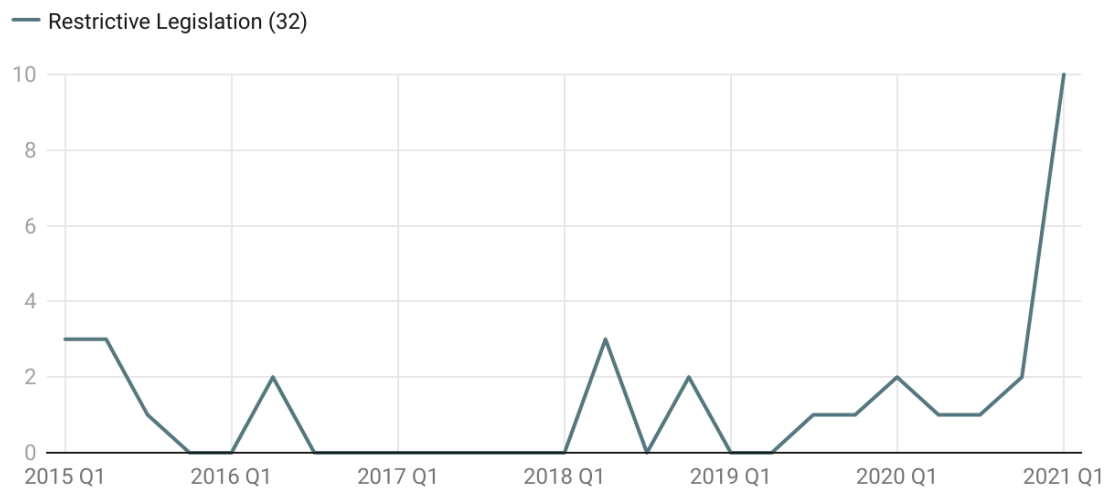
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment/Violence



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Restrictive Legislation



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State-backed Legal Cases



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Key Events Relevant to Civic Space in Belarus

March 2015	Russian President Putin calls for a single currency with the Kremlin's closest ex-Soviet allies, along with his Kazakh and Belarusian counterparts.
August 2015	President Lukashenko pardons six jailed opposition leaders in a move widely seen as an attempt to persuade the EU to open up trade with Belarus.
October 2015	President Lukashenko secures a fifth term. Belarusian independent media accuse the government of blocking websites pre-election.
March 2016	The Ministry of Justice denies registration for the 6th time to the Belarusian Christian Democracy party due to "gross violations of law."
September 2016	Only two opposition candidates win seats in parliamentary elections. Activists say the pair's success was engineered by the authorities.
February 2017	Protests in Gomel call for Lukashenko's resignation over "social parasite tax" that targets the under-employed.
April 2017	Leading opposition figure Mykalay Statkevich is jailed. A widespread wave of protests breaks out and another is called for on May 1st.
November 2017	The EU pledges to deepen ties with 6 former Soviet states, including Belarus, as part of efforts to counter Russian influence.
April 2018	Belarusian parliament prohibits unauthorized comments on online forums and requires online outlets to register as mass media.

August 2018	After a scandal involving embezzlement of funds from the health service, Lukashenko dismisses Prime Minister Kabyakow and several ministers.
Jan-Mar 2019	Washington and the Kremlin tussle for influence in Belarus, as it tries to negotiate oil prices with Russia and lifts a restriction on the number of U.S. diplomats allowed in its territory.
November 2019	Opposition groups in Belarus lose their only two parliament seats and many activists are barred from running.
January 2020	U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo says the U.S. is willing to provide Belarus with 100% of its oil and gas, taking aim at Russia which recently cut off supplies.
April 2020	Hundreds of thousands of state employees take part in a government-decreed day of civic labor despite the country's rapid rise in COVID-19 cases.
August 2020	Mass protests follow allegations of rigging after the political opposition is barred from presidential elections. The Prosecutor General's Office opens a criminal probe into the opposition's attempts to "seize power." Lukashenko claimed "foreign interference" and Russian President Putin promised him assistance upon request.
October 2020	Lukashenko orders the partial closure of Belarus's borders with Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. He expels 35 diplomats from Poland and Lithuania after accusing NATO countries of meddling in internal affairs.
February 2021	Russian President Vladimir Putin hosts his Belarusian counterpart for talks, amid reports suggesting that Lukashenko was going to Russia to secure another loan.

Notes: The above charts visualize instances of civic space restrictions in Belarus, disaggregated by quarter and accompanied by a timeline of events in the political and civic space of Belarus.

Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

The Belarusian government was the most prolific initiator of restrictions of civic space actors, accounting for 938 recorded mentions. The police and other security forces were the most frequent channels of restrictions of civic space actors, though politicians and bureaucrats were also initiators of hostility including verbal attacks and threats (Figure 2). Domestic non-governmental actors were identified as initiators in 27 restrictions and there were many incidents involving unidentified assailants (31 mentions). By virtue of the way that the state-backed legal cases indicator was defined, the initiators are either explicitly government agencies and government officials or clearly associated with these actors (e.g., the spouse or immediate family member of a sitting official). Political opposition members (i.e., democratic forces) were the most

frequent targets of violence and harassment, appearing in 33 percent of all recorded instances (Figure 3).

There were five recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors during this period involving the governments of Russia (four cases) and Ukraine (one case):

- In February 2016, Russian trolls targeted the Nasha Niva media portal amid their reporting on an entrepreneurs' strike. The trolls criticized the protestors and praised President Lukashenko as a great leader of all Slavs.
- Russian national and member of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious group, Nikolai Makhlichev, was detained in February 2020, spending 40 days in custody in Belarus after the Kremlin put him on an international wanted list. He was arrested for belonging to a banned religious community.
- Anton Rodnekov, Ivan Kravtsov and Maria Kolesnikova, leading members of Belarus' political opposition (i.e., democratic forces), were seized by security forces in Minsk and forcibly taken to the Ukrainian border. The deportation, in September 2020, appears to have been in cooperation with the government of Ukraine, as Rodnekov and Kravtsov were arrested on the Ukrainian side.
- In October 2020, Russia placed Belarusian opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, on its wanted list. The move was a blow to the protest movement in Belarus, which had denied having an anti-Russian agenda and sought Kremlin involvement in efforts to resolve the political crisis.
- In November 2020, the Kremlin placed Stepan Putilo and Roman Protasevich, founders of the Nexta Live opposition Telegram channel, on an international wanted list subsequent to the Belarusian government's adding the individuals to a list of terrorists.

Figure 4 breaks down the targets of restrictions by political ideology or affiliation in the following categories: pro-democracy, pro-Western, and anti-Kremlin.⁶ Pro-democracy organizations and activists were mentioned 1576 times as targets of restriction during this period.⁷ Pro-Western organizations and activists were mentioned 811 times as targets of restrictions.⁸ There were 349 instances where we identified the target organizations or individuals to be explicitly anti-Kremlin in their public views.⁹

It should be noted that this classification does not imply that these groups were targeted because of their political ideology or affiliation, merely that they met certain predefined characteristics. In fact, these tags were deliberately defined narrowly such that they focus on only a limited set of attributes about the organizations and individuals in question.

⁶ These tags are deliberately defined narrowly such that they likely understate, rather than overstate, selective targeting of individuals or organizations by virtue of their ideology. Exclusion of an individual or organization from these classifications should not be taken to mean that they hold views that are counter to these positions (i.e., anti-democracy, anti-Western, pro-Kremlin).

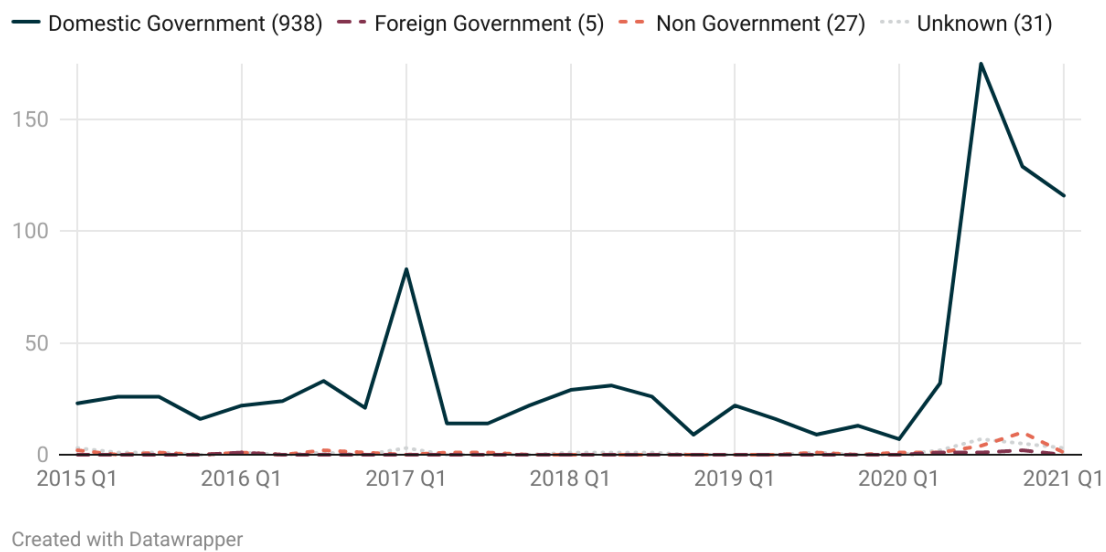
⁷ A target organization or individual was only tagged as pro-democratic if they were a member of the political opposition (i.e., thus actively promoting electoral competition) and/or explicitly involved in advancing electoral democracy, narrowly defined.

⁸ A tag of pro-Western was applied only when there was a clear and publicly identifiable linkage with the West by virtue of funding or political views that supported EU integration, for example.

⁹ The anti-Kremlin tag is only applied in instances where there is a clear connection to opposing actions of the Russian government writ large or involving an organization that explicitly positioned itself as anti-Kremlin in ideology.

Figure 2. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Belarus by Initiator

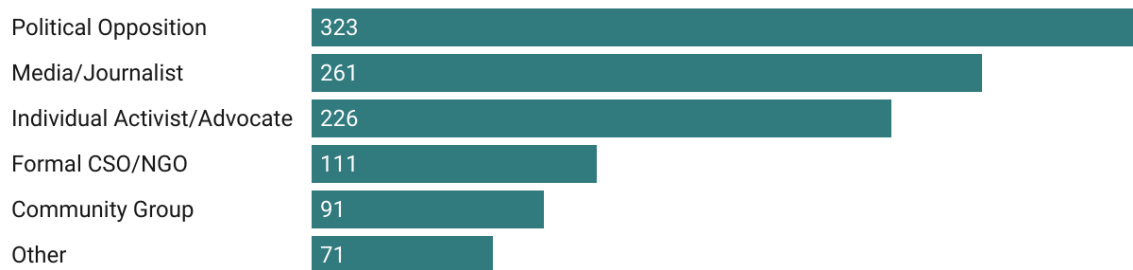
Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: The figure visualizes the number of recorded instances of restrictions of civic space actors in Belarus, categorized by the initiator. If an instance of violence or harassment targeted multiple groups, it is counted for each group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 3. Harassment or Violence by Targeted Group in Belarus

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021

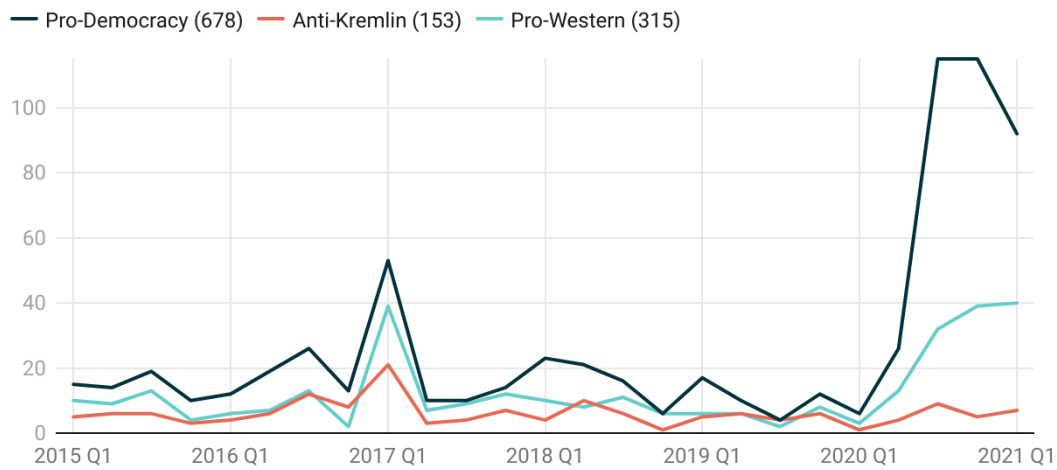


Notes: This figure shows the number of instances of harassment/violence initiated against civic space actors in Belarus, disaggregated by the group targeted. If an instance of violence or harassment targeted multiple groups, it is counted for each group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 4. Restrictions of Civic Space Actors in Belarus by Political or Ideological Affiliation

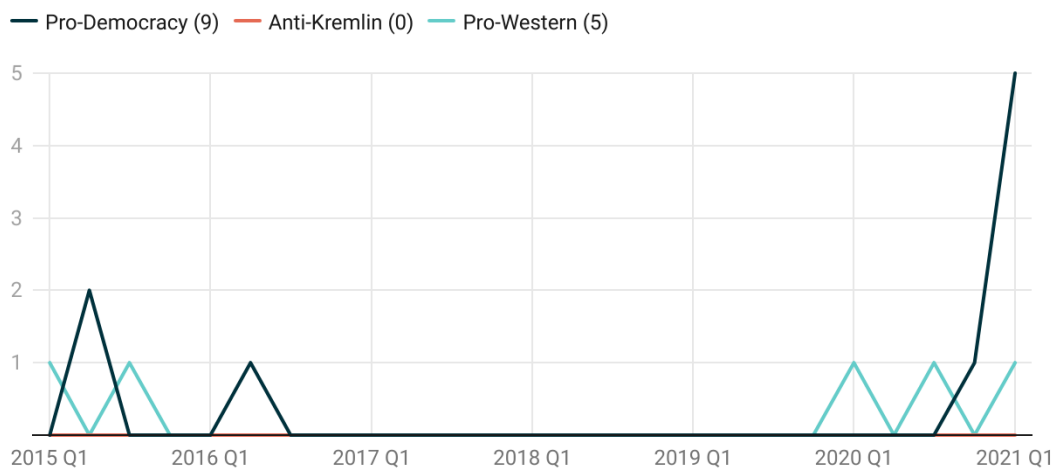
Number of Instances Recorded

Harassment / Violence



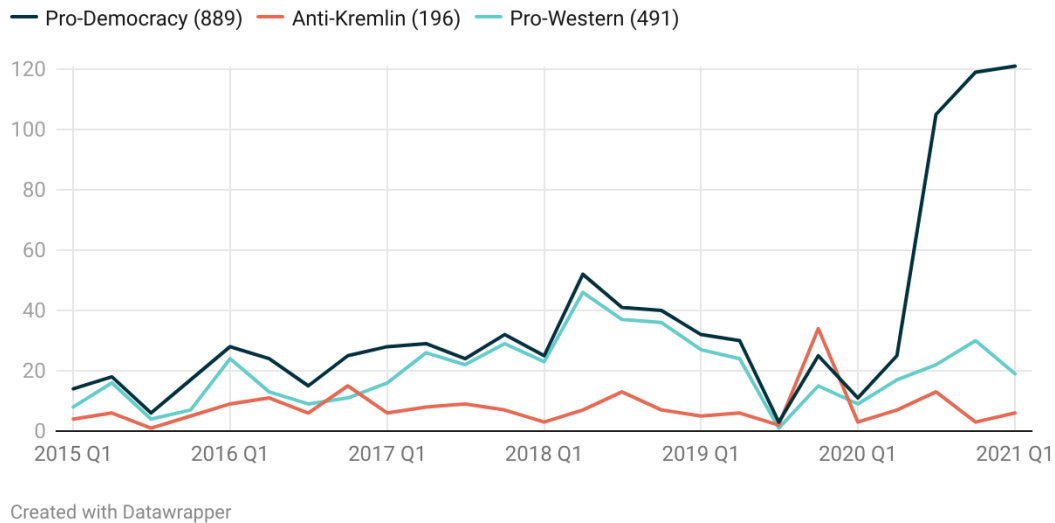
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Restrictive Legislation



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State-Backed Legal Cases



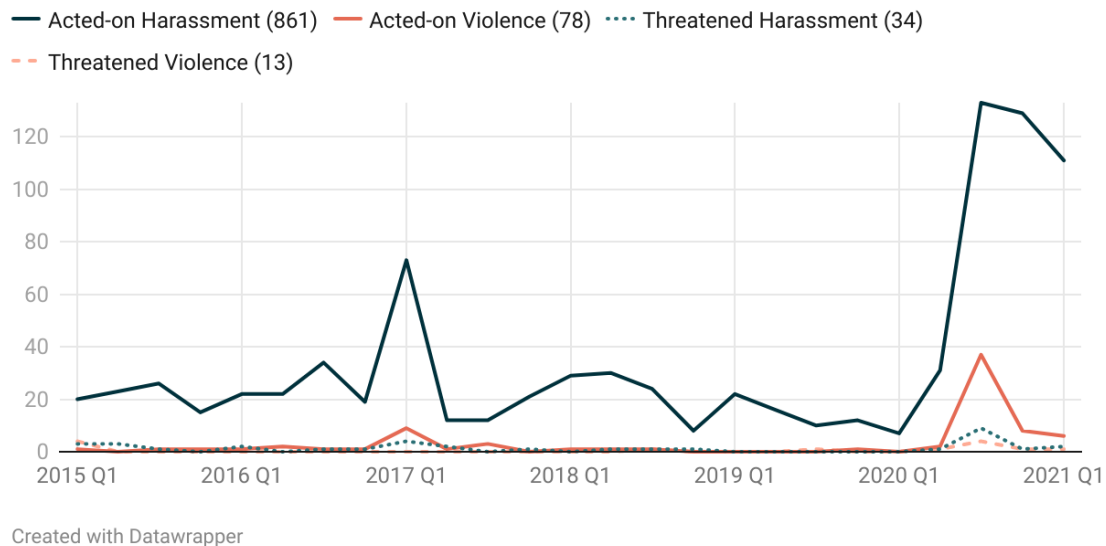
Notes: These figures visualize instances of harassment/violence and restrictive legislation initiated against civic space actors in Belarus, categorized by whether targets were known to be "pro-democracy," "pro-Western," or "anti-Kremlin" as manually tagged by AidData staff. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

2.1.1 Nature of Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

Instances of harassment (34 threatened, 861 acted upon) towards civic space actors were more common than episodes of outright physical harm (13 threatened, 78 acted upon) during the period. The majority of these restrictions (95 percent) were acted on, rather than merely threatened. However, since this data is collected on the basis of reported incidents, this likely understates threats which are less visible (see Figure 5). Of the 986 instances of harassment and violence, acted-on harassment accounted for the largest percentage (87 percent).

Figure 5. Threatened versus Acted-on Harassment or Violence
Against Civic Space Actors in Belarus

Number of Instances Recorded



Notes: This figure visualizes instances of harassment/violence against civic space actors in Belarus by type. For definitions, please refer to the associated methodology document. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Recorded instances of restrictive legislation (32) in Belarus are important to capture as they give government actors a mandate to constrain civic space with long-term cascading effects. This indicator is limited to a subset of parliamentary laws, chief executive decrees or other formal executive branch policies and rules that may have a deleterious effect on civic space actors, either subgroups or in general. Both proposed and passed restrictions qualify for inclusion, but we focus exclusively on new and negative developments in laws or rules affecting civic space actors. We exclude discussion of pre-existing laws and rules or those that constitute an improvement for civic space.

- The Belarusian government pursued numerous measures to curb independent media: expanding its power to block websites, remove content, restrict access to content it deemed to be “extremist,” as well as hamper the operations of foreign or partly foreign-owned media outlets.

- The regime also sought opportunities to hinder the activities of civic activists, formal non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and trade unions. It limited the ability of NGOs to secure foreign funding, selectively wielded a controversial “social parasite tax” to target individual human rights defenders and vocal opposition groups and required those organizing protests to agree to “hefty payments for policing services.” Moreover, the government ordered the unionizing of all enterprises under the leadership of the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions, increasing scrutiny and control of their activities.
- Nine new pieces of legislation were proposed or drafted in March 2021 alone, all aimed at criminalizing peaceful protests. The proposals ranged from increased scrutiny of lawyers who defended opposition activists to a bill to combat “the glorification of Nazism.” If passed, these laws would make it impossible to challenge the regime without inviting state-backed legal action.

Civic space actors were the targets of 1128 recorded instances of state-backed legal cases between January 2015 and March 2021. Individual activists and advocates were most frequently the defendants (Table 3). As shown in Figure 6, charges in these cases were often directly (96 percent) tied to fundamental freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, assembly). There were some indirect charges (3 percent) such as drug trafficking or bribery, often used by regimes throughout the E&E region to discredit the reputations of civic space actors. There were 4 instances where the nature of the charge was coded as “unknown,” as there was insufficient information to make the determination.

Table 3. State-Backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Belarus

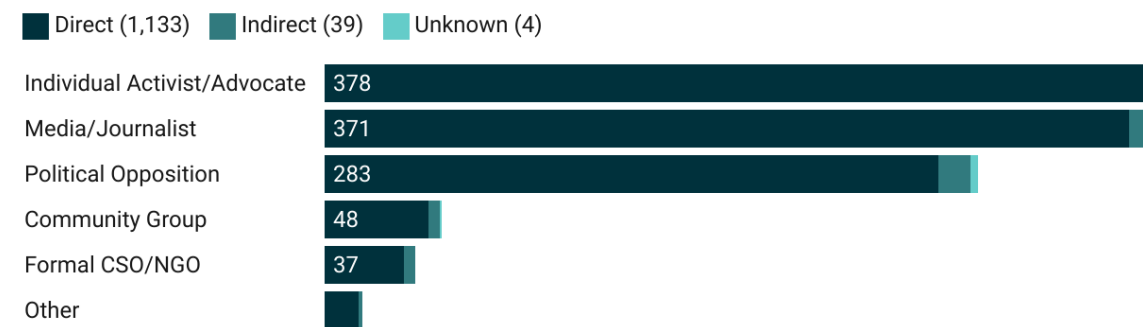
Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021

Defendant Category	Number of Cases
Media/Journalist	379
Political Opposition	301
Formal CSO/NGO	42
Individual Activist/Advocate	382
Other Community Group	54
Other	18

Notes: This table shows the number of state-backed legal cases against civic space actors in Belarus, disaggregated by the targeted group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 6. Direct versus Indirect State-backed Legal Cases by Targeted Group in Belarus

Number of Instances Recorded, January 2015–March 2021



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: Bar chart of the number of state-backed legal cases brought against civic space actors in Belarus, disaggregated by the group targeted and the nature of the charge. If an instance of a state-backed legal case targeted multiple groups, it is counted for each group. Sources: CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus and Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

2.2 Attitudes Towards Civic Space in Belarus

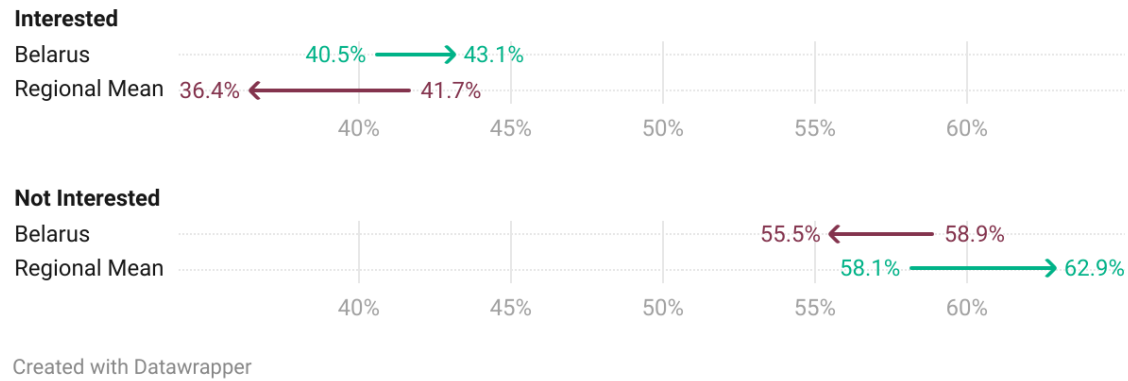
Belarusians' interest in politics held relatively steady, hovering around 40 percent between 2011 and 2018—the two most recent waves of the World Values Survey. This interest in politics has not led to high levels of civic participation, however, and trends appear to be worsening. In 2018, Belarus had extremely low rates of participation in civic activities, and membership in all types of voluntary organizations declined since 2011. The one exception—high rates of membership in trade unions—is likely symptomatic of the legacy of Soviet trade unions and President Lukashenko's use of the Federation of Trade Unions in Belarus to sideline other political activity. Outside of the political arena, far fewer Belarusians donated to charities, helped strangers or volunteered with organizations in 2019 than 2010, according to the Gallup World Poll, plummeting to the bottom of the region.

In this section, we take a closer look at Belarusian citizens interest in politics, participation in political action or voluntary organizations, and confidence in institutions. We also examine how Belarusian involvement in less political forms of civic engagement—donating to charities, volunteering for organizations, helping strangers—has evolved over time.

2.2.1 Interest in Politics, Willingness to Act, and Membership in Voluntary Organizations

In 2011, 41 percent of Belarusians expressed an interest in politics, and by 2018 that share had grown slightly larger (+2 percentage points), according to the World Values Survey (Figure 7). Still, the majority remained disinterested in politics in both years. This muted interest was further reflected in extremely low rates of reported political action in Belarus (Figure 8). In 2018, only a small fraction of Belarusian survey respondents had joined a petition (10 percent), demonstration (7 percent), boycott (2 percent), or strike (2 percent). Although Belarusians reported relatively equal levels of interest in politics as their regional peers, they were comparatively less likely to have engaged in these common forms of civic activities (by -2 to 10 percentage points). The slight preference for petitions and demonstrations over boycotts and strikes is in line with citizens' preferences across the E&E region as a whole.

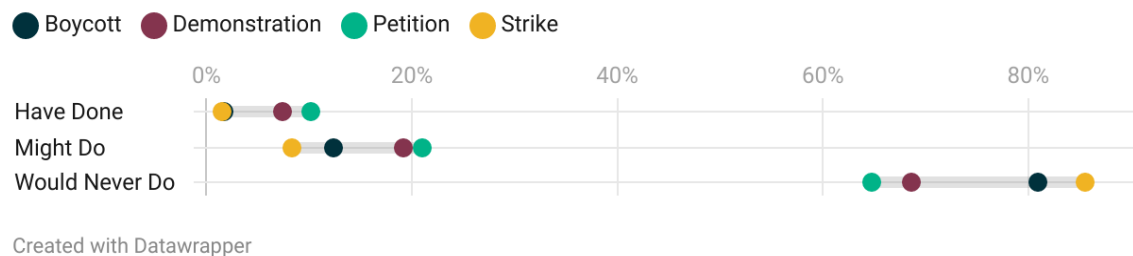
Figure 7. Interest in Politics: Belarusian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Belarusian respondents that were interested or not interested in politics in 2011 and 2018, as compared to the regional average. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 8. Political Action: Belarusian Citizens' Willingness to Participate, 2018

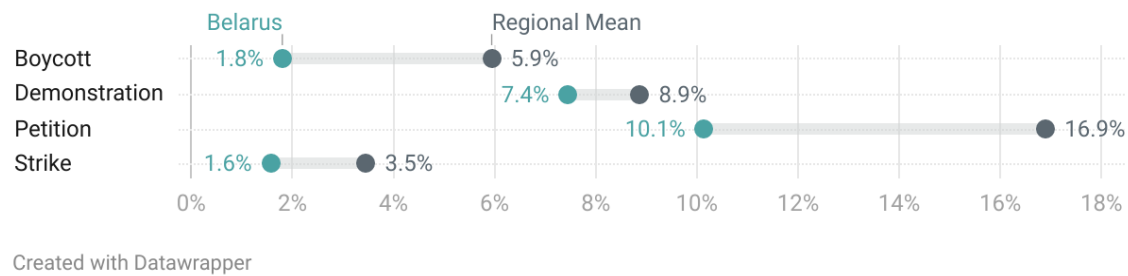
Percentage of Respondents



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Belarusian respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action—petition, boycott demonstration, and strike—as well as their future willingness to do so. This information was not available for Belarusian respondents in 2011. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 9. Political Action: Participation by Belarusian Citizens versus Regional Peers, 2018

Percentage of Respondents Reporting “Have Done”



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of Belarusian respondents who reported past participation in each of four types of political action in 2018, as compared to the regional average. This information was not available for Belarusian respondents in 2011. Sources: Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

It is reasonable to assume that low levels of political participation are symptomatic of the Lukashenko regime’s track record of restrictions of civic space actors (see Section 2.1), which likely has had a chilling effect on Belarusians’ willingness to engage in public displays of collective action or expression. However, this dynamic does not appear limited to the political arena alone, as the majority of Belarusians were also not members of voluntary organizations, either political or nonpolitical.¹⁰ Belarusian membership in voluntary organizations consistently trailed the region, on average. While only one dimension of civic engagement, membership in voluntary organizations¹¹ is a useful barometer of the willingness of citizens to join with one another outside of work, government, or familial networks.

In both 2011 and 2018, fewer than 10 percent of Belarusians said they were members of most types of organizations—from churches and sports teams to environmental organizations and political parties—lagging behind their regional

¹⁰ The questions assessing political participation were not asked on the WVS 2011 in Belarus.

¹¹ These include church or religious organizations; sport or recreational organizations; art, music or educational organizations; labor or trade unions; political parties; environmental organizations; professional associations; humanitarian or charitable organizations; consumer organizations; consumer organizations; self-help or mutual aid groups; and other organizations.

peers (Table 4). Belarusian respondents were also less likely to be members of political parties than citizens in other E&E countries: a gap that held relatively steady between 2011 (-6 percentage points) and 2018 (-4 percentage points). Restrictions imposed by President Lukashenko on the registration and operation of non-governmental organizations likely serve as barriers to civic participation (see Section 2.1).¹²

Labor and trade unions were the notable exception to this general rule (Figure 10). Over 40 percent of Belarusian respondents to the World Values Survey in 2011 and 2018 said they were members of a trade union. This comparatively high rate of membership is likely driven by the long-standing Federation of Trade Unions in Belarus, a Soviet era institution that claims approximately 97 percent of working Belarusians as members.¹³ Ostensibly, Lukashenko's co-optation of the Federation of Trade Unions in Belarus, which serves as a government-operated NGO (GONGO), could undercut other forms of civic participation. The regime installed party loyalists at the helm of the Federation, inhibiting the ability of anti-Lukashenko factions to politically organize, and sidelining the growth of independent trade unions.¹⁴

In a departure from low levels of political activity and organization membership, Belarusian citizens' had confidence in their country's institutions on par with their regional peers.¹⁵ In 2011, 56 percent of Belarusians said they were confident in their country's institutions, on average. Belarusian citizens gave their highest high marks to the military (75 percent) and churches (73 percent), consistent with

¹² http://aei.pitt.edu/90422/1/PB2017_civil_society_Belarus2.pdf

¹³ <https://fpb.1prof.by/oficialnaya-informaciya/>

¹⁴ For example: Poczobut, Andrzej. "Between Collaboration and Conflict." *New Eastern Europe*, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp. 91–96. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,url,shib&db=poh&AN=111434358&site=ehost-live&scope=site; <https://fpb.1prof.by/istoriya-profsoyuznogo-dvizheniya-belarusi/>; Matonytė, Irmėna, and Chulitskaya, Tatsiana. "The Third Sector and Political Communication in Belarus: Highlights on the Topic of Social Policies from the Presidential Campaign 2010." *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2012, pp. 235–263.

¹⁵ Regional means were calculated from World Values Survey Round 6 respondents: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine, and the Joint EVS/WVS 2017–2021 respondents Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

a number of countries across the E&E region. Interestingly, despite their extremely high rates of membership in labor unions, Belarusian respondents had lower levels of confidence in them (44 percent), perhaps reflective of their known co-optation by the government. However, as political parties and the press had lower rates of confidence (35 percent and 39 percent, respectively).

Belarusian trust in institutions overall declined by an average of 7 percentage points in 2018, though this was driven by a large drop in confidence in the nation's civil service—from 65 percent of respondents in 2011 to 31 percent in 2018 (Table 5). It is unclear if there was a single incident that sparked this massive decline in trust, or more general frustration with the government's lack of transparency, independent bodies to investigate official corruption, and closed graft trials. The civil service remains a weak spot in Belarus, even as it faces pressure from President Lukashenko, who has forced officials to resign after supporting opposition figures.¹⁶

Table 4. Belarusian Citizens' Membership in Voluntary Organizations by Type, 2011 and 2018

Voluntary Organization	Membership, 2011	Membership, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	11%	8%	-3.2
Sport or Recreational Organization	9%	4%	-4.8
Art, Music, or Educational Organization	6%	4%	-2.7
Labor Union	44%	40%	-4.6
Political Party	2%	2%	-0.3
Environmental Organization	1%	1%	-0.1
Professional Association	5%	3%	-2.2

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/magazine/belarus-mural.html>

Humanitarian or Charitable Organization	3%	2%	-0.6
Consumer Organization	1%	0%	-0.9
Self-Help Group, Mutual Aid Group	1%	1%	+0.5
Other Organization	5%	3%	-1.1

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Belarusian respondents that reported membership in various categories of voluntary organizations in 2011 and 2018. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Figure 10. Voluntary Organization Membership: Belarusian Citizens
versus Regional Peers, 2011 and 2018

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Membership



Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This graph highlights membership in a selection of key organization types for Belarus. "Other community group" is the mean of responses for the following responses: "Art, music or educational organization," "Church or religious organization," "Sport or recreational organization," "Environmental organization," "Professional association," "Humanitarian or charitable organization," "Consumer organization," "Self-help group, mutual aid group," "Other organization." Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

Table 5. Belarusian Confidence in Key Institutions, 2011 and 2018

Institution	Confidence, 2011	Confidence, 2018	Percentage Point Change
Church or Religious Organization	73%	58%	-14.5
Military	75%	64%	-10.7
Press	39%	37%	-1.6
Labor Unions	44%	49%	+5.1
Police	55%	59%	+4.9
Courts	55%	57%	+2.2
Government	56%	50%	-6.1
Political Parties	35%	26%	-9.3
Parliament	49%	46%	-3.4
Civil Service	65%	31%	-34.5
Environmental Organizations	66%	54%	-11.3

Notes: This table shows the percentage of Belarusian respondents that reported confidence in various categories of institutions in 2011 and 2018. Sources: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2011) and the Joint European Values Study/World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021.

2.2.2 Apolitical Participation

The Gallup World Poll's (GWP) Civic Engagement Index affords an additional perspective on Belarusian citizens' attitudes towards less political forms of participation between 2010 and 2019. This index measures the proportion of citizens that reported giving money to charity, volunteering at organizations, and helping a stranger on a scale of 0 to 100.¹⁷ Belarus began the period slightly ahead of its E&E regional peers (+4 percentage points), with civic engagement scores of 29 and 25 in 2010, respectively. However, its performance on the index subsequently began a sharp descent beginning in 2013 through 2019, the last year of available data.¹⁸ By 2019, Belarus had dropped to the bottom of the region's rankings with a civic engagement score of 16 points (-13 percentage points from 2010).

Declines in Belarusians' willingness to engage in activities such as volunteering and helping strangers contributed to the country's weakening civic participation scores. At its peak performance, in 2010, 36 percent of Belarusians reported helping a stranger and 35 percent had volunteered with an organization. By 2019, the average Belarusians' appetite to engage in these apolitical forms of civic participation had tapered off, as only 24 percent of those surveyed said they had helped a stranger that year, while a mere 8 percent had volunteered. Comparatively, Belarusians' level of charitable contributions held relatively steady with only a minor decline (-2 percentage points) from 16 percent in 2010 to 14 percent in 2019.

Unlike what we have observed elsewhere in the E&E region, Belarus' index scores do not appear to correlate with the country's economic performance.¹⁹ Instead, Belarusians' decreasing involvement in apolitical channels of civic life is

¹⁷ The GWP Civic Engagement Index is calculated at an individual level, with 33% given for each of three civic-related activities (Have you: Donated money to charity? Volunteered your time to an organization in the past month? Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know in the past month?) that received a "yes" answer. The country values are then calculated from the weighted average of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

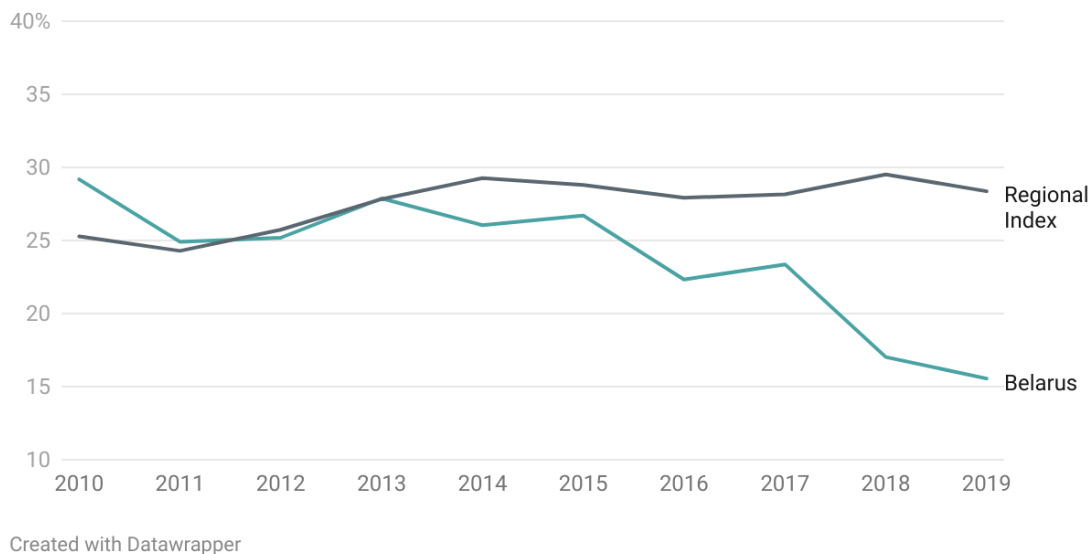
¹⁸ Although the GWP was conducted in other countries in 2020 and 2021, data was not available for Belarus in these two years.

¹⁹ The CE Index correlates with GDP (constant Belarusian ruble) at -0.227, $p = 1.000$, but is not statistically significant.

more likely reflective of the increasingly restrictive environment for expression and collective action under Lukashenko's ongoing rule.

One final note is that these trends may have reversed following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Gallup has not conducted its World Poll in Belarus in 2020 or 2021, there was an uptick in citizen engagement elsewhere in the region and around the world as citizens rallied in response to COVID-19, even in the face of lockdowns and limitations on public gatherings. When facing the unique stresses of disease, lockdowns, and economic turbulence, citizens reported increasing their commitment to their community, rather than holding onto their strained resources. That said, we cannot say for certain that these broader regional trends bore out in Belarus due to limited data.

Figure 11. Civic Engagement Index: Belarus versus Regional Peers



Notes: This graph shows how scores for Belarusian citizens varied on the Gallup World Poll Index of Civic Participation between 2010 and 2019, as compared to the regional mean of E&E countries. Sources: Gallup World Poll, 2010-2019. While the poll was conducted in other countries in 2020 and 2021, data was not available for Belarus in these two years.

3. External Channels of Influence: Kremlin Civic Space Projects and Russian State-Run Media in Belarus

Foreign governments can wield civilian tools of influence such as money, in-kind support, and state-run media in various ways that disrupt societies far beyond their borders. They may work with the local authorities who design and enforce the prevailing rules of the game that determine the degree to which citizens can organize themselves, give voice to their concerns, and take collective action. Alternatively, they may appeal to popular opinion by promoting narratives that cultivate sympathizers, vilify opponents, or otherwise foment societal unrest. In this section, we analyze data on Kremlin financing and in-kind support to civic space actors or regulators in Belarus (section 3.1), as well as Russian state media mentions related to civic space, including specific actors and broader rhetoric about democratic norms and rivals (section 3.2).

The Kremlin supported 21 Belarusian civic organizations via 30 civic space-relevant projects between January 2015 to August 2021. Somewhat of a departure from its *modus operandi* in other countries in the region, the Kremlin focused its activities in Belarus on promoting Russian-Belarusian integration and promoting the framework of the Union State,²⁰ as opposed to its emphasis elsewhere on cultural programming with minority groups of ethnic Russians.

Belarus was a popular target audience for Russian state media, which captured 12 percent of the Kremlin's media mentions across the region, lagging only Ukraine. The preponderance of this coverage coincided with the 2020 presidential elections and anti-government protests in Belarus, continuing into early 2021, as the Kremlin grew concerned of a potential color revolution and losing a staunch pro-Russia ally in President Lukashenko.

We delve into greater detail about these channels of Kremlin influence in Belarus' civic space in the remainder of this section.

²⁰ The Union State is "an attempt at political and economic integration between [Russia and] the former Soviet republics". The Union State framework also includes a set of bilateral agreements between Moscow and former Soviet states.
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/belarus/union.htm>

3.1 Russian State-Backed Support to Belarusian Civic Space

Moscow prefers to directly engage and build relationships with individual civic actors in Belarus, as opposed to investing in broader based institutional development which accounted for a mere 13 percent (4 projects) of its overtures. The Russian government's interest in cultivating these relationships with Belarusian civic actors appears to be fairly durable, with a slight uptick from 2019 to 2020, despite partial data and disruptions due to COVID-19 (Figure 12). The lack of identified projects in 2021 is likely due to the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and the partial data for that year.

The Kremlin routed its engagement in Belarus through 14 different channels (Figure 13), including government ministries, federal centers, language and culture-focused funds, the Eurasian Communication Center, the Moscow Center for International Cooperation, and the Russian embassy in Minsk. The stated missions of these Russian government entities emphasize themes such as education and culture promotion, patriotic training for civic space leaders, and security-related issues. Many entities couch their activities in the language of Eurasian integration, to a greater extent than that seen in other E&E countries.

However, not all of these Russian state organs were equally important. The Gorchakov Fund²¹ and Rossotrudnichestvo²² supplied over four-fifths of all known Kremlin-backed support (15 organizations via 25 projects) to civic space actors and regulators in Belarus. Indeed, many of the other Russian organizations identified as directing support to civic space actors undertook their activities in conjunction with either the Gorchakov Fund or Rossotrudnichestvo. The Gorchakov Fund, accounting for 37 percent of projects between 2015 and 2020, promotes Russian culture and provides support to non-governmental organizations to bolster Russia's image abroad. Rossotrudnichestvo—an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign

²¹ Formally The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, founded in 2010 as a soft power instrument to promote Russian culture abroad and provide funding to CSOs/NGOs.

²² Rossotrudnichestvo, or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, is an autonomous agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that holds the mandate for promoting political and economic cooperation with Russia.

Affairs with a mandate to promote political and economic cooperation abroad—is associated with 53 percent of the Kremlin’s overtures to Belarusian civic actors.

Figure 12. Russian Projects Supporting Belarusian Civic Space
Actors by Type

Number of Projects Recorded, January 2015–August 2021

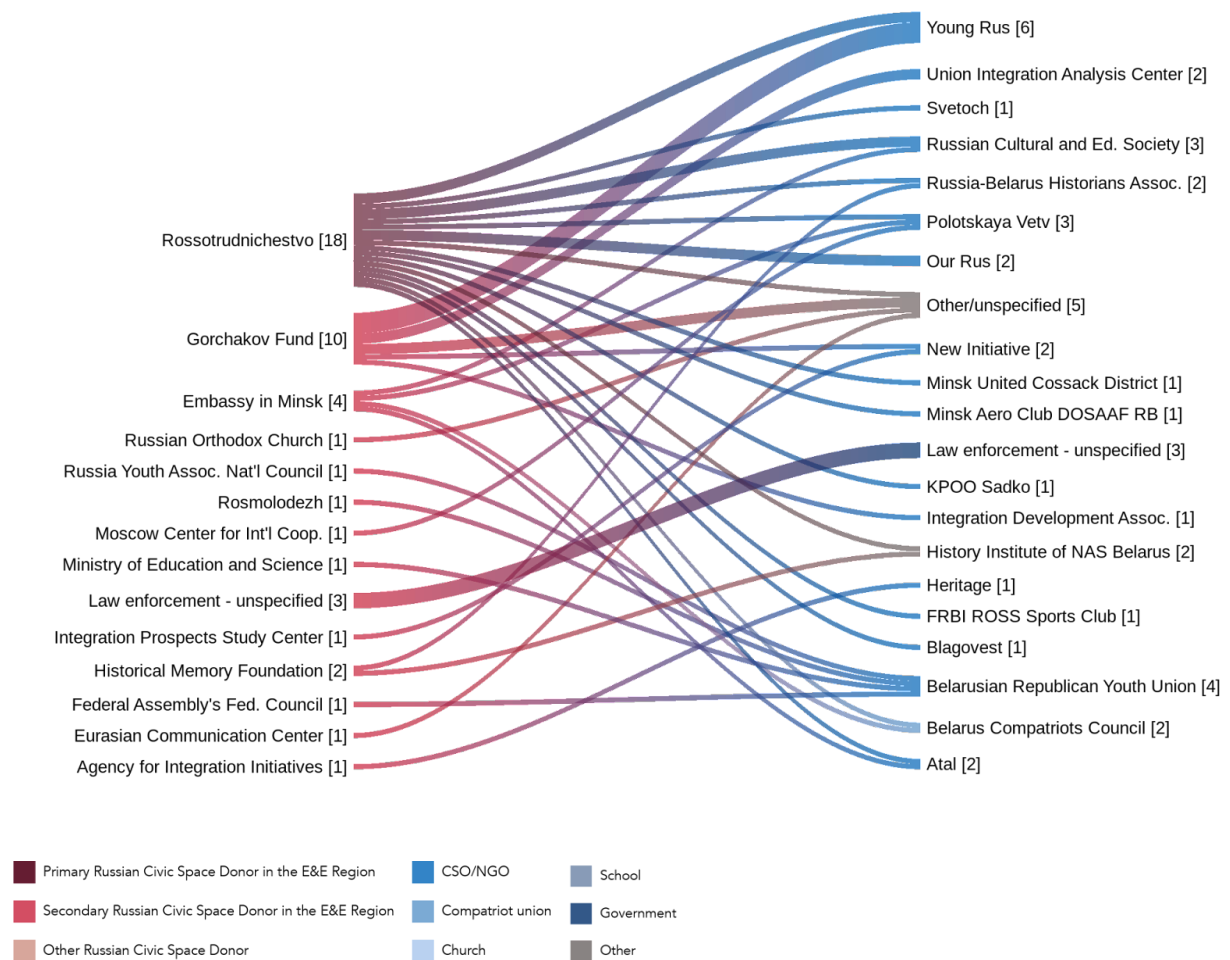
Year	CSO Support (26)	Institutional Development (4)
2015	2	0
2016	3	0
2017	6	1
2018	9	1
2019	2	0
2020	4	2
2021	0	0

Created with Datawrapper

Notes: This figure shows the number of projects directed by the Russian government to either civic society actors or government regulators of this civic space between January 2015 and August 2021. No new activities were identified in 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 13 Kremlin-affiliated Support to Belarusian Civic Space

Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This figure shows which Kremlin-affiliated agencies (left-hand side) were involved in directing financial or in-kind support to which civil society actors or regulators (right-hand side) between January 2015 and August 2021. Lines are weighted to represent counts of projects. The total weight of lines may exceed the total number of projects, due to many projects involving multiple donors and/or recipients. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.1.1 The Recipients of Russian State-Backed Support to Belarusian Civic Space

Civil society organizations (CSOs) were the most common beneficiaries in 77 percent of identified Russian-backed projects in Belarus. Other recipients of the Kremlin's attention included a forum training leading bloggers in Belarus and the Belarusian police force.

Nearly all of the Belarusian recipient organizations work in the education and culture sector (19 organizations), most often with an emphasis on promoting shared Russian-Belarusian history or facilitating educational forums and patriotic training. In contrast to its efforts in other countries, the Kremlin's collaborations with civic actors on religious or social issues were relatively more limited in Belarus and when they did occur, were typically wrapped into educational or cultural events. Rossotrudnichestvo's support to the religious organization Blagovest to host a children's art exhibition as part of the competition "Beauty of God's World," is one such example.

As in other countries, many Belarusian beneficiaries of Kremlin support were organizations with an explicit emphasis on working with youth (11 organizations, 58 percent of identified organizations). The Russian Orthodox Church has similarly targeted youth in its support of military-patriotic boot camps for Belarusian children. These activities are aligned with the goals of the Suvorov military schools, in particular the training of future military and civic leaders, albeit with far looser institutional structures.

Rossotrudnichestvo also supported two groups promoting distinct ethnic and cultural identities: the public association for the Chuvash population Atal and the Minsk United Cossack District. This second group, which promotes Cossack and Russian culture, is notable as Cossack groups have been used by the Kremlin as paramilitary units in Donbas and Crimea, as well as police and anti-protest political enforcers within Russia.²³

Many Belarusian recipient organizations were comparatively newer than those Russia engages with in other countries. Of those with a known founding date,²⁴ nine (56 percent) were founded after 2010. This may reflect the difficulties for CSOs to register and be recognized by the Belarusian government, but it is also noteworthy that the profile of the newer organizations diverges from those founded in the earlier 2000s.

²³ Katchanovski, Ivan. "The Separatist War in Donbas: A Violent Break-up of Ukraine?" *European Politics and Society* (Abingdon, England), vol. 17, no. 4, 2016, pp. 473-489. Roth, Andrew. "4 Things You Need to Know about the Cossacks Fighting Russia's Opposition Groups." *The Washington Post*, 2016, pp. The Washington post, 2016-05-18. <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-cossacks-battle-coronavirus-and-promote-kremlins-foreign-policy/>

²⁴ 16 of the 21 organizations.

Integration was a unifying theme among the newer organizations: the association “Promoting the Development of Integration, International Social, Cultural and Business Cooperation,” (founded in 2018); the Center for Research on Union Integration Issues “New Initiative,” (founded in 2019); and the Center for Analysis and Forecasting of Union Integration Processes (founded in 2020).²⁵ Presenting themselves as modern think tanks, these organizations are a stark contrast with longer-standing organizations such as the cultural and educational association (KPOO) Sadko that also received Kremlin support. Founded in 2010, Sadko aims to preserve Russian culture and promote Belarusian-Russian friendship and hosts holiday celebrations, historical discussions, and film nights.

The Kremlin also partnered with the Belarusian police on several occasions on projects relevant to civic space: training provided in September 2018 in preparation for the European Games, a commitment for a reserve unit of Russian law enforcers to intervene in August 2020 amid protests against Lukashenko’s government, and a September 2020 joint training exercise in the Brest region to “combat terrorism.”²⁶ Given the importance of southern Belarus as a staging ground for the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is plausible in hindsight that these joint exercises could have served dual purposes of both influencing civic space within Belarus, as well as helping Moscow lay important logistical groundwork for its subsequent military hostilities against the authorities in Kyiv.

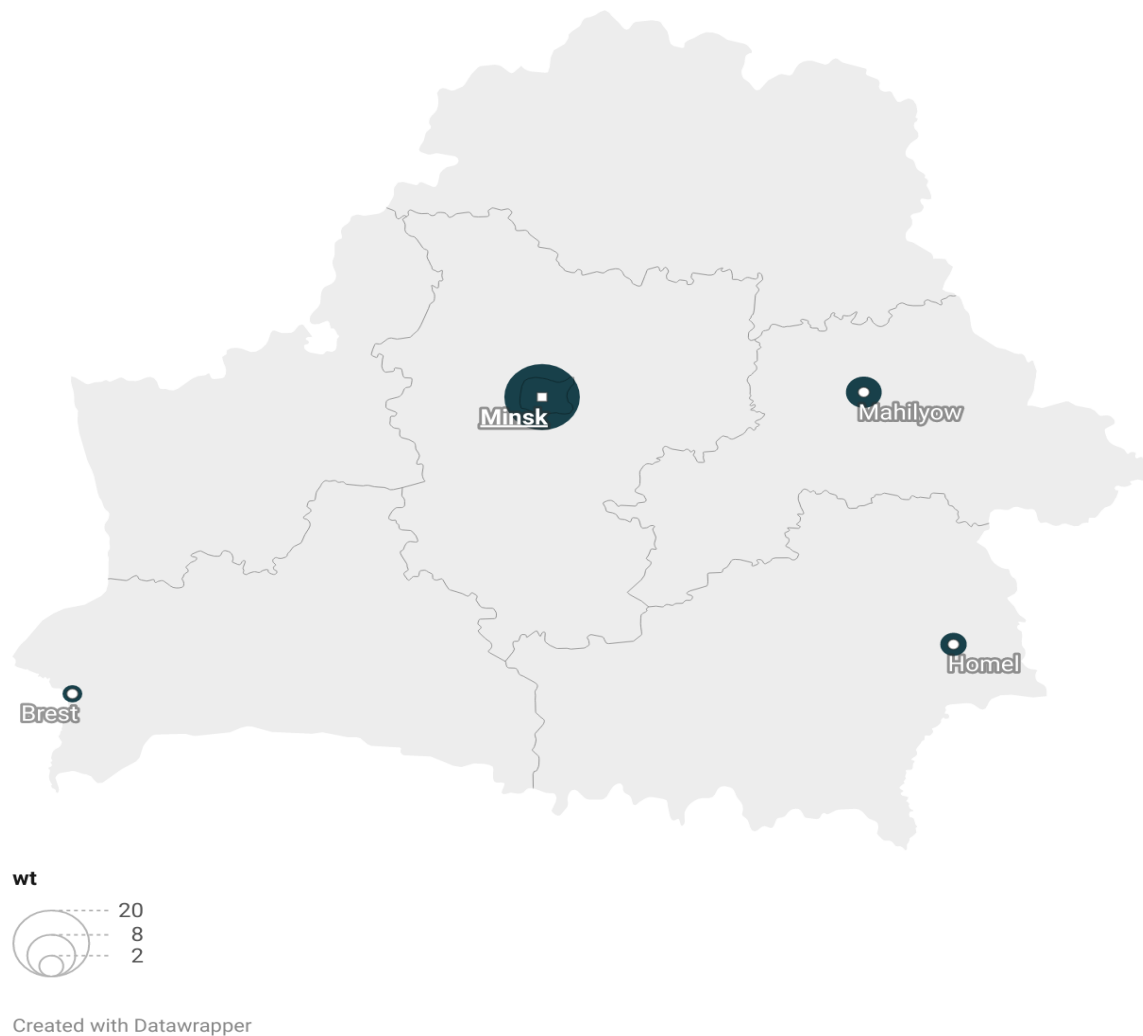
Geographically, Russian-state overtures were oriented towards Minsk, or organizations based in the Belarusian capital, which received 67 percent of all projects (Figure 13). Mahilyow, Belarus’s third largest city, also captured a fair amount of attention from Moscow (13 percent of projects). Gomel, Belarus’s second largest city and just over 20 miles from the Russian border in the country’s southeastern corner, received two projects, both of which involved hosting the International Forum of the Leaders of the NGOs of the Union State at the Russian Center for Science and Culture. The lack of activity in Belarus’s eastern cities may be simply a result of their smaller and less ethnically Russian

²⁵ All three of the newest organizations are directly tied to the Gorchakov Fund, with the Center for Research on Union Integration Issues “New Initiative” also receiving support from the Moscow-based Center for the Study of Integration Prospects.

²⁶ “Summary of Russian press for Monday 14 September 2020.” BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union via Factiva. Published September 14, 2020.

populations, but it may also indicate a Russian focus on building support in the regions closest to its own border.

Figure 14. Locations of Russian Support to Belarusian Civic Space
Number of Projects, 2015–2021



Notes: This map visualizes the geographic distribution of Kremlin-backed support to civic space actors in Belarus. Three projects are unmapped because their geographic focus is unspecified.
Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.1.2 Focus of Russian State-Backed Support to Belarusian Civic Space

As seen elsewhere in the E&E region, the primary mode of Russian support in Belarus appears to not be direct transfers of funding but rather non-financial “support.” Only two of the projects we identified described recipients receiving grants, both of which were awarded by the Gorchakov Fund. Instead, the Russian government relies much more extensively on supplying various forms of non-financial “support,” such as training, technical assistance, and other in-kind contributions to its Belarusian partners.

The Kremlin places outsized emphasis on event support to Belarusian civic actors since 2015, referenced in 22 projects. Russian institutions co-sponsor activities with a Belarusian CSO, school or compatriot union to undertake a particular event, frequently focused on promoting Russian values, supporting youth politics, and developing networks between pro-Russian associations. The Kremlin’s “support” is typically in the form of space, materials, or other logistical and technical contributions to Belarusian partners.

Supporting youth-focused programming is a common strategy for the Kremlin in Belarus. The Kremlin’s relationship to two Belarusian CSOs—the Belarusian Republican Youth Union and the socio-cultural association Young Rus—is illustrative of this approach. In 2016, the National Council of Youth and Children's Associations of Russia and the Belarusian Republican Youth Union partnered to host the Russian-Belarusian Youth Forum in Minsk. Intended to promote Russian history and cooperation between the two countries, the youth forum received logistics support from three Kremlin-affiliated organs: the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh). Similarly, Young Rus hosted the International Forum of the Leaders of NGOs of the Union State in 2017, 2018, and 2020 with support from the Gorchakov Fund and Rossotrudnichestvo.²⁷

The emphasis of the aforementioned Young Rus forum series on mobilizing youth to support greater integration of the Union State is also part of a broader

²⁷ In 2017 and 2020, the Gorchakov Fund publicly awarded Young Rus grants for the forum, while Rossotrudnichestvo provided event space and logistical support all three years.

theme in the Kremlin's programming in Belarus. Sixty-four percent of the Kremlin-affiliated organizations (9 of 14 actors) supporting civic space-relevant projects in Belarus sponsored at least one activity that directly referenced the Russian-Belarusian Union State and broader integration language as a core theme. There was even an identified instance of a Belarusian NGO, supported by Russia, promoting Eurasian integration abroad at a political summer camp for Moldovan youth in August 2016.

In a noticeable point of departure from its go-to playbook elsewhere in the region, the Kremlin backed relatively few activities with local Russian compatriot unions.²⁸ There are likely three reasons for this break from standard practice. First, Russian's status as the predominant language in Belarus may eliminate the need to promote informal communities of local Russian speakers. Second, the Kremlin may view promoting the framework of the Russian-Belarusian Union State as better advancing its influence objectives than pursuing soft power via its compatriot policy. Third, a smaller proportion of ethnic Russians in Belarus consider themselves a minority than in other countries in the region.²⁹

A final insight from the Kremlin's engagement with civic actors in Belarus is that Russian activities appear to build on one another, signaling deepening engagement over time. For example, Rossotrudnichestvo's commitment to open a Russian Center for Science and Culture in Mahilyow in 2018 was built upon the foundation of a pre-existing relationship it established with the Mahilyow-based Russian Cultural and Educational Society to co-host a "festival" in October 2017: "We Live in Friendship with Neighbors."

²⁸ Russia has often emphasized support to compatriot unions as part of its influence playbook since 2013, providing funding and logistical support from the Embassy to coordinate and approve membership. Through these groups, the Kremlin aims to "organise and coordinate the Russian diaspora living in foreign countries to support the objectives and interests of Russian foreign policy." Estonian Internal Security Service, 2013. pp. 5-6 <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

²⁹ Ziegler, C. E. (2006). The Russian Diaspora in Central Asia: Russian Compatriots and Moscow's Foreign Policy. *Demokratizatsiya*, 14(1), 103–126. <https://doi.org/10.3200/DEMO.14.1.103-126>. 112.

3.2 Russian Media Mentions Related to Civic Space Actors and Democratic Rhetoric

Two state-owned media outlets, the Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News, referenced Belarusian civic actors 1,547 times from January 2015 to March 2021. Three-quarters of these mentions (1,165 instances) were of domestic actors, while the remaining quarter (515 instances) focused on foreign and intergovernmental actors operating in Belarus' civic space. To understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Belarusian citizens, we also analyzed 1,194 mentions of five keywords in conjunction with Belarus: North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West.

3.2.1 Russian State Media's Characterization of Domestic Belarusian Civic Space Actors

Roughly one-quarter (27 percent, 317 instances) of Russian media mentions pertaining to domestic actors in Belarusian civic space referred to specific groups by name. The named domestic actors represent a diverse cross-section of organizational types, ranging from political parties to CSOs to media outlets. However, formal civil society organizations are the most frequently named organization type, accounting for 57 percent (182 mentions) of named domestic actors in Belarus. The large number of formal CSO mentions is driven by three organizations: the Coordination Council (65 mentions), the Viasna Human Rights Center (39 mentions),³⁰ and the Tell the Truth Movement (Govori Pravdu) (28 mentions). Domestic media were also prominent, capturing 30 percent of mentions (94 instances). The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) was most frequently mentioned in this group, accounting for 36 mentions alone.³¹

Russian state media mentions of specific Belarusian civic space actors were most often neutral (81 percent) in tone. The remaining coverage was mostly negative (16 percent), with only 10 mentions (3 percent) receiving positive coverage. The Coordination Council took the brunt of the negative sentiment (35 of the total

³⁰ Notably, our data collection in Section 2 benefited heavily from Viasna reporting to identify relevant instances of reported restrictions of civic space actors, most prominently by the Lukashenko regime.

³¹ Similar to Viasna, our data collection in Section 2 also benefited substantially from BAJ reporting on restrictions of journalists.

50 negative mentions of named domestic groups). Created by the main Belarusian opposition candidate in the 2020 election, Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, to facilitate a democratic transition of power, the Coordination Council remained the driving organizer of the Belarusian protests against President Alexander Lukashenko following allegations of election fraud. Interestingly, there is a discernible shift in the tone of Russian media coverage of the Coordination Council from initially positive at the start of the protests in mid-August 2020 to decidedly negative beginning in September 2020.

Voices of the political opposition (i.e., democratic forces) were also more likely to attract negative coverage including the Belarus Christian Democracy Party and Belarusian Democratic Movement (4 negative mentions), Belarusian Left Party (1 negative mention), Belarusian National Front Party (2 negative mentions), and the Nexta Live opposition Telegram channel (2 negative mentions). Other named domestic organizations attracting negative coverage included the Viasna Human Rights Center (3 negative mentions), BelTA (2 negative mentions), and the Zubr Youth Movement (1 negative mention). Conversely, pro-Lukashenko voices such as the Belarusian Orthodox Church (1 positive mention), BelaPAN (1 positive mention), and the Communist Party of Belarus (1 positive mention) were more likely to receive favorable attention in accordance with the Kremlin's consistent support of its staunchly pro-Russian ally in Belarus.

Aside from these named organizations, TASS and Sputnik made 848 more generalized references to domestic Belarusian non-governmental organizations, protesters, opposition activists, or other informal groups during the same period. Although the preponderance of this coverage was still neutral (58 percent), it was noticeably more negative (34 percent) than that typically accorded to organizations by name with only 64 positive mentions.

When looking at the domestic civic space actors as a whole, the top mentioned groups center around the 2020 Belarusian protests following a fraudulent presidential election (Table 6). At the outset of the unrest, the Russian government did not take a strong stance and appeared to put pressure on the incumbent leader Alexander Lukashenko, evidenced by more neutral or positive coverage of opposition or anti-regime groups. However, following the continued protests, Russian state-owned media sentiment towards these organizations

radically shifted to portraying Belarusian protesters, opposition groups, and anti-Lukashenko political parties in a negative light.

Moscow's extensive coverage of these protests reflects the Kremlin's concerns regarding the prospect of new "color revolutions" in countries close to its border. Negative coverage accorded to opposition voices and civic space actors viewed as anti-Lukashenko underscores the Kremlin's use of its state-run media to discredit domestic civic space actors and maintain the status quo.

Table 6. Most-Mentioned Domestic Civic Space Actors in Belarus by Sentiment

Domestic Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
Opposition	7	92	127	4	0	230
Protesters	9	54	121	23	1	208
Protest	1	32	39	1	0	73
Coordination Council	2	33	28	2	0	65
Viasna Human Rights Center	0	3	36	0	0	39
Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)	0	0	35	0	1	36

Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the domestic civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.2.2 Russian State Media's Characterization of External Actors in Belarusian Civic Space

While the majority of Russian state media mentions covered domestic organizations, TASS and Sputnik mentioned by name 72 foreign organizations (382 mentions), 22 intergovernmental organizations (133 mentions), and 26 general foreign actors (66 mentions). The majority of external actors were mentioned in connection to coverage of the 2020 presidential election and

subsequent protests. As a case in point, the top-five most frequently mentioned external actors were in relation to international election observer missions (Figure 7), and Dozhd TV is an independent Russian media outlet that covered the Belarusian elections.

Russian state media mentions of external actors in Belarus' civic space, both named and unnamed, was predominantly neutral (79 percent) in tone. The remaining coverage was largely negative (17 percent), with Western-affiliated intergovernmental actors, such as the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, bearing the brunt of negative sentiment. Russian state media typically employed two narratives—that the Western intergovernmental organizations should have been more involved in monitoring the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus and that Western organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, acted as puppeteers for the protests following the election and facilitated grassroots mobilization in Belarus. This negative coverage is consistent with the Russian media's attitude towards any Western institutions and entities that did not recognize the legitimacy of Lukashenko's election.

Table 7. Most-Mentioned External Civic Space Actors in Belarus by Sentiment

External Civic Group	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Grand Total
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) / Including Minsk and ODIHR	5	6	28	4	43
European Union / Including European Commission, Parliament, Council of Europe	9	4	15	1	29
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	0	0	19	1	20
Dozhd TV (TV Rain)	0	3	16	0	19
International Election Observers	0	0	15	0	15

Notes: This table shows the breakdown of the external civic space actors most frequently mentioned by the Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) in relation to Belarus between January 2015 to March 2021 and the tone of that coverage by individual mention. Sources: Factiva

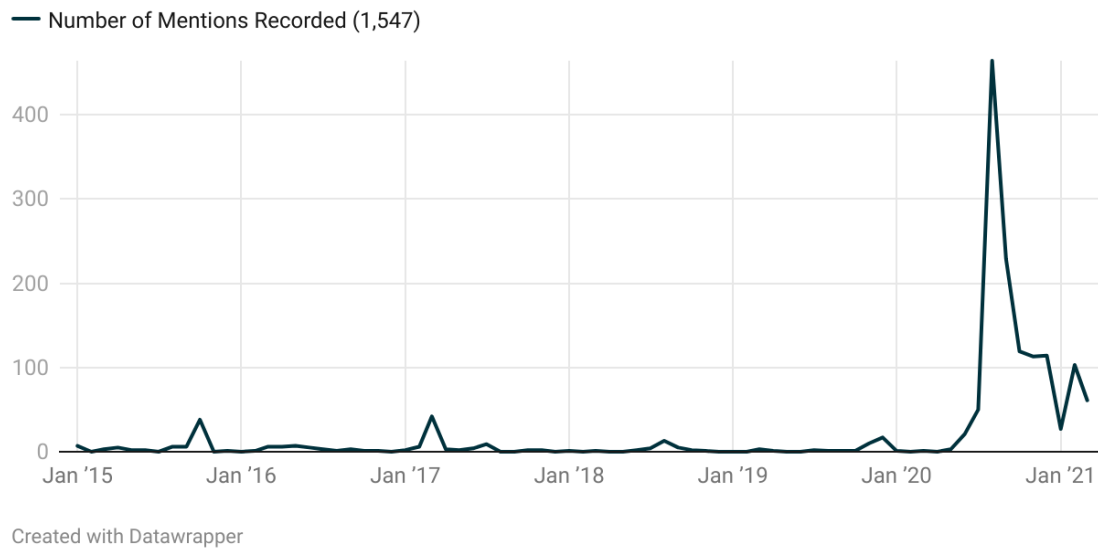
3.2.3 Russian State Media's Focus on Belarus's Civic Space over Time

The preponderance of media mentions (72 percent) related to Belarusian civic space occurred in just one year: 2020 (1,115 mentions). However, similar to what we observed in section 2 with restrictions of civic space actors, the uptick in Russian state media coverage continued into the first quarter of 2021 (the end of our reporting period) with an additional 191 mentions in those three months alone. Although there were minor spikes in Russian state-run media coverage in October 2015 for the Belarusian presidential elections and in February and March 2017 for the “March of the Angry Belarusians” protests, the coverage of the 2020 presidential election and subsequent protests was at a scale that dwarfed previous mentions (Figure 15).

The 2020 presidential election attracted substantial international media attention in response to growing reports of police violence and human rights abuses towards anti-government protesters. As previously mentioned, Russian state media coverage of the elections was largely neutral in tone; however, coverage became increasingly negative the longer the protests drew on and as the Kremlin grew concerned of the prospects of another color revolution on its border and the potential launch of an ally in Lukashenko. These findings are not dissimilar to comparable coverage by Russian state media of elections and related protest movements in Moldova and Armenia.

Figure 15. Russian State Media Mentions of Belarusian Civic Space Actors

Number of Mentions Recorded



Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of Belarusian civic space actors between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

3.2.4 Russian State Media Coverage of Western Institutions and Democratic Norms

In an effort to understand how Russian state media may seek to undermine democratic norms or rival powers in the eyes of Belarusian citizens, we analyzed the frequency and sentiment of coverage related to five keywords in conjunction with Belarus.³² Russian News Agency (TASS) and Sputnik News referenced all five keywords from January 2015 to March 2021 (Table 8). Russian state media mentioned the “West” (326 instances), the European Union (300 instances), the United States (273 instances), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (254 instances), and democracy (41 instances) with reference to Belarus during this period. Fifty-one percent of these references were negative in tone, with the remainder of the coverage largely neutral (42 percent). Consistent with what we observed with civic actor mentions in sections, there was a dramatic uptick in

³² These keywords included North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, the United States, the European Union, democracy, and the West

Russia state media mentions of terms related to democratic norms and rivals during and immediately following the 2020 presidential election in Belarus (Figure 16).

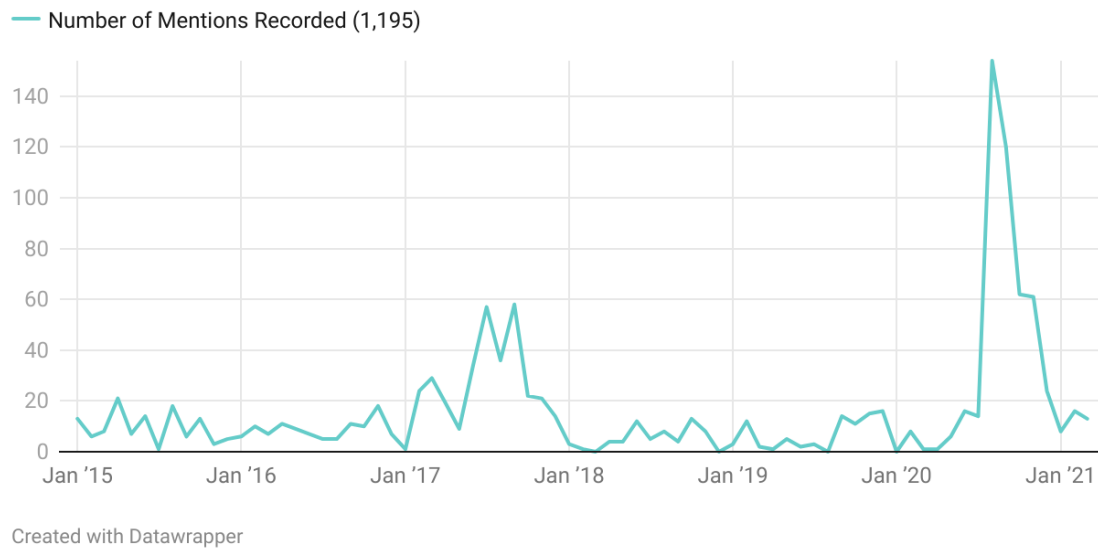
Table 8. Breakdown of Sentiment of Keyword Mentions by Russian State-Owned Media

Keyword	Extremely Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Extremely Positive	Grand Total
West	66	158	86	16	0	326
European Union	17	95	153	35	0	300
United States	33	89	127	23	1	273
NATO	26	112	110	6	0	254
Democracy	2	11	24	4	0	41

Notes: This table shows the frequency and tone of mentions by Russian state media (TASS and Sputnik) related to five key words—NATO, the European Union, the United States, democracy, and the West—between January 2015 and March 2021 in articles related to Belarus. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Figure 16. Keyword Mentions by Russian State Media in Relation to Belarus

Number of Unique Keyword Instances of NATO, the U.S., the EU, Democracy, and the West in Russian State Media



Notes: This figure shows the distribution and concentration of Russian state media mentions of five keywords in relation to Belarus between January 2015 and March 2021. Sources: Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Data manually collected by AidData staff and research assistants.

Of these terms, Russian state media mentioned the West the most frequently (326 instances) and the majority of this coverage was negative (69 percent) or neutral (26 percent). Russian state media used its coverage to fan the flame of disapproval for the West's purported meddling in the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus and accusing Western organizations of instigating the resulting protests. For example, one article about the protests argued that "...the West had launched preparations for protests long before the elections."³³ Additional topics where the West was mentioned negatively include the Russian annexation of Crimea, perceived NATO expansion, and sanctions against Russia.

The next most frequently mentioned terms were the European Union (300 instances), closely followed by the United States (273 instances). The majority of these mentions were in relation to the Minsk accords and general cooperation

³³ "US Plays Key Role in Events in Belarus - Russian Foreign Intelligence Chief." TASS. Published September 16, 2020.

between the EU, the U.S., and Russia. Coverage was most often neutral in the case of 51 percent of mentions for the EU and 47 percent for the U.S. Nevertheless, both actors attracted a sizable share of negative coverage, most often in cases where Russian media sought to portray the EU (37 percent negative mentions) and U.S. (45 percent negative mentions) as less attractive partners for Belarus than Russia.

This use case for state-run media—presenting Russia as a superior partner instead of Western democracies and coalitions—is likely mutually reinforcing with the Kremlin’s efforts to cultivate the support of Belarusian civic actors for the Union State and Belarusian-Russian integration. Perhaps in a similar vein, NATO attracted 254 Russian state media mentions in relation to Belarus during this same period, the majority (54 percent) of which were negative in tone. Once again, the context of many of these negative mentions were in the service of advancing a narrative of Russia as a preferred partner for Belarus in contrast to the coalition of Western democracies. The timing of these mentions tended to coincide with NATO exercises near the Belarusian border.

Lastly, we recorded 41 mentions of democracy in Russian state media articles in relation to Belarus during this time period. The majority of mentions (59 percent) were neutral and often in the context of the Belarusian presidential election. Consistent with what we have observed elsewhere in the E&E region, the remaining coverage was split between positive references to democracy (10 percent) when it served the Kremlin’s interests (e.g., the 2020 election observed democratic processes and the West should accept Lukashenko’s win as legitimate) and negative references (32 percent) when it sought to discredit democratic voices within the country as being co-opted by the West, particularly in the context of anti-government protests.

4. Conclusion

The data and analysis in this report reinforces a sobering truth: Russia’s appetite for exerting malign foreign influence abroad is not limited to Ukraine, and its civilian influence tactics are already observable in Belarus and elsewhere across the E&E region. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see clearly how the Kremlin invested its media, money, and in-kind support to promote pro-Russian sentiment within Belarus and discredit opposition voices wary of its regional

ambitions in the years leading up to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin was adept in deploying multiple tools of influence in reinforcing ways to amplify the appeal of closer integration with Russia, raise doubts about the motives of the U.S., EU, and NATO, as well as legitimize its actions as necessary to protect the region's security from the disruptive forces of democracy.

Its overtures in Belarus underscore that the Kremlin does not have a one-size fits all influence playbook, as Putin adapted his strategy to fit the local context. Recognizing that relatively fewer ethnic Russians consider themselves to be a minority in Belarus, the Kremlin de-emphasized its efforts to stoke feelings of disenfranchisement among this group and instead emphasized other activities. Given the affinity between the Putin and Lukashenko regimes, the Kremlin explored closer ties with the Belarusian police to curb dissent among the pro-democracy opposition in ways that compound civic space vulnerability. Such joint exercises plausibly could have served dual purposes of influencing civic space within Belarus, as well as helping Moscow lay important logistical groundwork for military hostilities against Kyiv. These avenues would not have been as feasible to pursue in many other countries across the E&E region.

Taken together, it is more critical than ever to have better information at our fingertips to monitor the health of civic space across countries and over time, reinforce sources of societal resilience, and mitigate risks from autocratizing governments at home and malign influence from abroad. We hope that the country reports, regional synthesis, and supporting dataset of civic space indicators produced by this multi-year project is a foundation for future efforts to build upon and incrementally close this critical evidence gap.

5. Annex — Data and Methods in Brief

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the data and methods used in the creation of this country report and the underlying data collection upon which these insights are based. More in-depth information on the data sources, coding, and classification processes for these indicators is available in our full technical methodology available on aiddata.org.

5.1 Restrictions of Civic Space Actors

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of harassment or violence, restrictive legislation, and state-backed legal cases from three primary sources: (i) CIVICUS Monitor Civic Space Developments for Belarus; (ii) RefWorld database of documents and news articles pertaining to human rights and interactions with civilian law enforcement in Belarus operated by UNHCR; and (iii) Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. AidData supplemented this data with country-specific information sources from media associations and civil society organizations who report on such restrictions. Restrictions that took place prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of civic space restrictions.

5.2 Citizen Perceptions of Civic Space

Survey data on citizen perceptions of civic space were collected from three sources: the World Values Survey Wave 6, the Joint European Values Study and World Values Survey Wave 2017-2021 and the Gallup World Poll (2010-2021). These surveys capture information across a wide range of social and political indicators. The coverage of the two surveys and the exact questions asked in each country vary slightly, but the overall quality and comparability of the datasets remains high.

The fieldwork for WVS Wave 6 in Belarus was conducted during November and December 2011 with a nationally representative sample of 1535 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.³⁴ The documentation does not specify the language that the survey was conducted in. Research team provided an estimated error rate of 2.6%. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases.”³⁵ The E&E region countries included in WVS Wave 6, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested you have been in politics over the last 2

³⁴ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

³⁵ <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

years?" were first collapsed from "Very interested," "Somewhat interested," "Not very interested," and "Not at all interested" into the two categories: "Interested" and "Not interested." Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries.

Regional means for the WVS Wave 6 question "Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes" were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven E&E countries as well. This question was not asked in Belarus in 2011.

The membership indicator uses responses to a WVS Wave 6 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group). Respondents to WVS 6 could select whether they were an "Active member," "Inactive member," or "Don't belong." The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from the seven countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the "Other community group" cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in "Art, music or educational organizations," "Environmental organizations," "Professional associations," "Church or other religious organizations," "Consumer organizations," "Sport or recreational associations," "Self-help or mutual aid groups," and "Other organizations."

The confidence indicator uses responses to an WVS Wave 6 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service). Respondents to WVS 6 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," or "None at all." The "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" options were collapsed into a binary "Confident"

indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.³⁶

The fieldwork for EVS Wave 5 in Belarus was conducted in Russian between February and March 2018 with a nationally representative sample of 1548 randomly selected adults residing in private homes, regardless of nationality or language.³⁷ The research team did not provide an estimated error rate for the survey data after applying a weighting variable “computed using the marginal distribution of age, sex, educational attainment, and region. This weight is provided as a standard version for consistency with previous releases.”³⁸

The E&E region countries included in the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 dataset, which were harmonized and designed for interoperable analysis, were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Regional means for the question “How interested have you been in politics over the last 2 years?” were first collapsed from “Very interested,” “Somewhat interested,” “Not very interested,” and “Not at all interested” into the two categories: “Interested” and “Not interested.” Averages for the region were then calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries.

Regional means for the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Signing a petition; Joining in boycotts; Attending lawful demonstrations; Joining unofficial strikes” were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen E&E countries as well.

The membership indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several voluntary organizations (e.g., church or religious organization, political party, environmental group, etc.). Respondents to WVS 7

³⁶ For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

³⁷ See <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>.

³⁸ European Values Study (EVS). (2020). *European Values Study (EVS) 2017: Methodological Guidelines*. (GESIS Papers, 2020/13). Köln. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssar.70110>.

could select whether they were an “Active member,” “Inactive member,” or “Don’t belong.” The EVS 5 survey only recorded a binary indicator of whether the respondent belonged to or did not belong to an organization. For our analysis purposes, we collapsed the “Active member” and “Inactive member” categories into a single “Member” category, with “Don’t belong” coded to “Not member.” The values included in the profile are weighted in accordance with WVS and EVS recommendations. The regional mean values were calculated using the weighted averages from all thirteen countries included in a given survey wave. The values for membership in political parties, humanitarian or charitable organizations, and labor unions are provided without any further calculation, and the “Other community group” cluster was calculated from the mean of membership values in “Art, music or educational organizations,” “Environmental organizations,” “Professional associations,” “Church or other religious organizations,” “Consumer organizations,” “Sport or recreational associations,” “Self-help or mutual aid groups,” and “Other organizations.”

The confidence indicator uses responses to a Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 question which lists several institutions (e.g., church or religious organization, parliament, the courts and the judiciary, the civil service, etc.). Respondents to the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2021 surveys could select how much confidence they had in each institution from the following choices: “A great deal,” “Quite a lot,” “Not very much,” or “None at all.” The “A great deal” and “Quite a lot” options were collapsed into a binary “Confident” indicator, while “Not very much” and “None at all” options were collapsed into a “Not confident” indicator.³⁹

The Gallup World Poll was conducted annually in each of the E&E region countries from 2010-2021, with the exception of the countries that did not complete fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic. The GWP was conducted in Russian each year in Belarus. Each country sample includes at least 1,000 adults and is stratified by population size and/or geography with clustering via one or more stages of sampling. The data are weighted to be nationally representative. The Civic Engagement Index is an estimate of citizens’ willingness to support others in their community. It is calculated from positive answers to three questions: “Have you done any of the following in the past

³⁹ For full documentation of the questions, see doi:10.4232/1.13560, pp. 293-294

month? How about donated money to a charity? How about volunteered your time to an organization? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?" The engagement index is then calculated at the individual level, giving 33% to each of the answers that received a positive response. Belarus's country values are then calculated from the weighted average of each of these individual Civic Engagement Index scores.

The regional mean is similarly calculated from the weighted average of each of those Civic Engagement Index scores, taking the average across all 17 E&E countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The regional means for 2020 and 2021 are the exception. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2020 was not conducted for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan. Gallup World Poll fieldwork in 2021 was not conducted for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Montenegro, and Turkmenistan.

5.3 Russian Financing and In-kind Support to Civic Space Actors or Regulators

AidData collected and classified unstructured information on instances of Russian financing and assistance to civic space identified in articles from the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones between January 1, 2015 and August 30, 2021. Queries for Factiva Analytics pull together a collection of terms related to mechanisms of support (e.g., grants, joint training), recipient organizations, and concrete links to Russian government or government-backed organizations. In addition to global news, we reviewed a number of sources specific to each of the 17 target countries to broaden our search and, where possible, confirm reports from news sources.

While many instances of Russian support to civic society or institutional development are reported with monetary values, a greater portion of instances only identified support provided in-kind, through modes of cooperation, or through technical assistance (e.g., training, capacity building activities). These were recorded as such without a monetary valuation.

5.4 Russian Media Mentions of Civic Space Actors and Democratic Rhetoric

AidData developed queries to isolate and classify articles from two Russian state-owned media outlets (TASS and Sputnik) using the Factiva Global News Monitoring and Search Engine operated by Dow Jones. Articles published prior to January 1, 2015 or after March 31, 2021 were excluded from data collection. These queries identified articles relevant to civic space, from which AidData was able to record mentions of formal or informal civic space actors operating in Belarus. It should be noted that there may be delays in reporting of relevant news. Each identified mention of a civic space actor was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive. More information on the coding and classification process is available in the full technical methodology documentation.

Russian state media mentions pertaining to democratic norms or democratic rivals are potentially consequential for civic space in E&E countries in a few different ways. AidData staff identified several keywords to operationalize this concept of democratic norms or democratic rivals in the E&E region including democracy, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States, and the West:

- Democracy: we include all mentions of the word “democracy” (except in the context of named organizations like “National Endowment for Democracy”). To measure anti-democracy sentiment, we also included mentions of different ideologies, including words related to democracy, fascism, authoritarianism, and dictatorships, which allows us to better explore Russian state media coverage of non-democratic sentiment.
- European Union: we include both general terms “European Union” and “EU,” as well as specific EU bodies, such as “European Parliament,” “EU Courts,” “EU Human Rights Councils,” but not individuals.
- NATO: we include both general terms “North Atlantic Treaty Organization” or “NATO,” as well as specific bodies associated with NATO, but not individuals.

- United States: we include both general terms "United States," "U.S.," "American," "America" (unless referring to the continents), as well as specific government bodies (such as Congress, US Department of State). We do not include references to "White House" or specific individuals, with the exception of mentions of the president when combined with U.S./American in front.
- West: we include all non-geographic mentions of "West" or "Western," but exclude geographic mentions of "west," such as "the western portion of Armenia."

Each identified mention of a keyword was assigned a sentiment according to a five-point scale: extremely negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, and extremely positive.