

BELARUS: CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO
CIVIC FREEDOMS





INTRODUCTION

Repression against Belarusian civil society, which was documented by the Monitor after mass protests broke out [before](#) and [immediately after](#) the disputed August 2020 presidential elections, has continued relentlessly to date. Since last year, authorities have raided, attacked, detained and charged hundreds of protesters and journalists, sentenced a former presidential candidate, disbanded CSOs and media outlets, and amended laws to prevent citizens and journalists from organising and reporting respectively.

REPRISALS AGAINST 2020 PROTESTERS AND SUPPORTERS

In July 2021, attacks on human rights defenders and independent journalists [intensified](#). Authorities staged raids and detained dozens of people in several cities across the country after they were accused of supporting the mass protests in the summer of 2020 or protecting people involved in those protests. The police also continued to [detain](#) participants of peaceful protests and regular citizens for using white-red-white symbols, including in their private residences. In June 2021, former presidential candidate in the 2020 elections Viktor Babaryka was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in a high-security penal colony, and as of 29th July 2021, the list of political prisoners reached [589 people](#).

INSPECTIONS AND DISBANDMENT OF NGOS AND MEDIA OUTLETS

At least 40 NGOs were disbanded by authorities in July 2021, in most cases without advance notice, in what Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko called a "[mopping-up operation](#)" against "bandits and foreign agents." The website [Nasha Niva](#), one of the country's oldest [independent](#) newspapers, was blocked on 8th July 2021 by the Ministry of Information following a notice issued by the General Prosecutor's Office.

The number of inspections against civil society organisations by registration authorities and the tax inspectorate also [increased](#). Organisations were required to produce a considerable number of documents related to the receipt and expenditure of funds including financial reports, contracts and documents received through email.

DRACONIAN AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW

The attacks against civil society come against the backdrop of recent draconian [changes](#) to the Mass Media Law and to the law on mass events which were adopted in May 2021. The laws were amended to effectively prohibit criticism against the government, enable authorities to strip journalists of accreditation without a court order, ban real-time news coverage of mass events and prohibit the collection and use of funds to pay fines for participation in protest rallies, among other restrictions.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that provides quantitative and qualitative data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries. The data is generated through a collaboration with more than 20 civil society research partners, and input from a number of independent human rights evaluations.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#) rates civic space – the space for civil society – in [Belarus](#) as "**Repressed**".



RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT

- Immediately and unconditionally release all those who have been arbitrarily detained in relation to the 2020 protests, including human rights defenders, journalists and protesters, and drop all the spurious charges made against them
- Unconditionally release former presidential candidate in the 2020 elections Viktor Babaryka and any other member of the political opposition
- Create an independent mechanism to investigate the violence against protesters, members of the political opposition, human rights defenders and journalists and hold perpetrators accountable for these acts
- Stop carrying out unlawful raids on the offices and homes of representatives of civil society, journalists and human rights defenders
- Reinstate all the civil society organisations and media outlets which have been disbanded and allow them to continue their work, and
- Review the new amendments to the Media Law and the Law on Public Gatherings which restrict the rights to peaceful assembly and expression and withdraw restrictive provisions of the laws which are at variance with Belarus's human rights obligations.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Call for urgent and immediate action to address fundamental rights violations of the right to peaceful assembly and expression
- Hold Belarus accountable for its human rights violations and ensure that Belarus respects its national and international human rights obligations.