



EEA

East European Affairs

1

2026

THE ARCHITECTURE OF PREVENTIVE AUTHORITARIANISM IN BELARUS

Aram TERZYAN*

Abstract

This article analyzes the consolidation of preventive authoritarian rule in Belarus from 2021 to 2025, a period shaped by the disputed August 2020 presidential election, the subsequent protest wave, and the state's alignment with Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022. The core claim is that Belarus shifted from reactive protest policing toward a preventive governance model designed to remove the organizational, informational, and legal conditions that enable sustained collective mobilization. Using qualitative synthesis and indicator tracking across Freedom House Freedom in the World editions 2022–2025, Human Rights Watch annual country summaries 2021–2025, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights assessment of systematic violations, and United States Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2022–2024, the study identifies five reinforcing mechanisms: the expansion of extremism and national security enforcement, administrative liquidation of civil society and independent media, judicial subordination and the weakening of legal defense, routinized coercion in detention including incommunicado practices, and regulatory governance of exile through in absentia proceedings and documentation controls. The findings indicate institutional capacity destruction rather than temporary emergency rule, producing systematic impunity and further contraction of political representation.

Keywords: Belarus; preventive authoritarianism; authoritarian consolidation; extremism legislation; civil society liquidation; judicial subordination; political prisoners; transnational repression; securitization; managed elections.

1. Introduction

Belarus has long been characterized as an entrenched authoritarian regime, yet the period following the disputed August 2020 presidential election marked a distinct shift in how repression is organized and justified. The 2020 protest wave did not end authoritarian rule, but it reoriented it. In the years that followed, state authorities moved beyond dispersing demonstrations and toward dismantling the preconditions of future mass mobilization. This article conceptualizes that shift as the consolidation of preventive authoritarian rule, defined as a governance strategy that removes the organizational, informational, and legal infrastructure through which collective dissent is formed, coordinated, defended, and publicly communicated (Freedom House, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

* Aram Terzyan, PhD is Research Director of Center for East European and Russian Studies, Eurasia Institutes - California, USA., email: a.terzyan@eurasiainstitutes.org.

A second structural driver emerges in February 2022, when Belarus enabled Russian military operations from its territory. Alignment with Russia's war against Ukraine supplied a durable security frame that widened prosecutorial latitude and facilitated the recoding of nonviolent dissent as a national security threat (Human Rights Watch, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024; Freedom House, 2024). The empirical aim of the article is to synthesize and explain how these dynamics interacted from 2021 to 2025. The analytical aim is to extract generalizable findings for the study of authoritarian resilience, especially in contexts where overt mass violence is complemented by administrative closure, legal engineering, and extraterritorial coercion.

This article positions Belarus within the broader literature on authoritarian resilience and institutionalized repression. While earlier scholarship often emphasized overt coercion or elite patronage as pillars of regime durability, the Belarusian case suggests a shift toward administrative and legal saturation. Repression is embedded not primarily in spectacular violence but in routine governance practices that preclude the re-emergence of collective capacity. In this sense, Belarus represents a mature case of preventive authoritarian consolidation in which the state re-engineers the political field to make mobilization structurally improbable rather than merely punishable.

2. Data and method

The study relies on structured synthesis across four reporting streams. Freedom House Freedom in the World country assessments are used for indicator tracking of political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House editions are cited by publication year and primarily assess developments in the preceding year. Human Rights Watch annual country summaries provide detailed narrative evidence of repression practices, including political prisoner counts reported at the time of writing and descriptions of legal changes and enforcement. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights assessment is used to contextualize the scale and character of violations, including findings that some patterns may amount to crimes against humanity. United States Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices provide granular detail on policing, detention conditions, judicial practice, transnational repression, and legal frameworks. Methodologically, the article combines qualitative process tracing with descriptive indicator analysis. It tracks cross source convergence rather than treating any single report as exhaustive. Where counts are used, they are interpreted as reported snapshots rather than comprehensive annual totals, consistent with reporting that many figures are provided at the time of writing (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

3. Conceptual framework: preventive authoritarianism and capacity destruction

Preventive authoritarianism refers to a governance strategy that targets the structural preconditions of collective mobilization rather than responding only after protest emerges. In Belarus, the post 2020 period illustrates what may be termed institutional capacity destruction. The regime systematically targets organizations, independent information channels, legal defense capacity, and transnational support infrastructures. Five mechanisms are central. Organizational eradication dissolves nongovernmental and professional associations and criminalizes participation in unregistered entities (Freedom House, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022). Informational closure uses extremist labeling,

blocking, and punitive enforcement to criminalize access to independent reporting and digital association (Freedom House, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Legal containment subordinates courts and weakens defense counsel through disbarment and restrictions on confidential access (U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Deterrence diffusion targets families and donors, raising participation costs across social networks (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Exile governance relies on in absentia proceedings, citizenship and documentation restrictions, and property measures to preserve leverage beyond borders (Freedom House, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

4. Empirical trajectory and institutional changes, 2021–2025

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the core trajectory. Table 1 maps durable trends in governance and rights, while Table 2 identifies year by year inflection points. Both tables draw on cross source convergence across the reporting streams described above (Freedom House, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2022, 2023, 2024; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

Table 1. Core trends in governance and rights (2021–2025)

Area	Observed direction	Analytical interpretation
Political system and elections	February 2024 parliamentary elections held without opposition candidates; January 2025 presidential election conducted in a highly restricted environment; OSCE not invited to observe the February 2024 parliamentary elections.	Elections operate as confirmation mechanisms rather than competitive selection. Registration barriers and criminal prosecution eliminate viable opposition, while exile targeting and in absentia tools prevent external organization from translating into domestic contestation.
Constitutional and institutional design	2022 referendum formalized the All Belarus People’s Assembly; Lukashenka became its chair in 2024; amendments introduced immunity provisions for presidents.	Institutional layering reduces succession risk. A parallel constitutional body consolidates executive dominance beyond formal electoral cycles and embeds continuity of rule within a constitutional architecture.
Repression architecture	Broad application of extremism and national security enforcement; widespread arbitrary detention; routine publication of coerced confession and repentance videos.	Legal categories expand punishable behaviors, converting routine expression and association into prosecutable conduct and embedding repression into everyday governance.
Civil society	By mid November 2024, almost 1,200 nongovernmental organizations had been shut	Organizational eradication removes monitoring and legal defense capacity, reducing documentation, weakening

	down; leading organizations designated extremist.	accountability claims, and strengthening deterrence through impunity.
Media and information	Virtually all independent domestic media eliminated or forced into exile; journalists and media workers imprisoned; websites blocked and domains annulled.	Informational closure narrows discourse and criminalizes access to alternative narratives, raising the cost of independent reporting and limiting collective coordination.
Detention and rule of law	Persistent torture and ill treatment; prolonged incommunicado detention; deaths in custody documented in 2023, 2024, and 2025; no credible accountability for security forces.	Coercion in detention functions as an enforcement technology sustained by systemic impunity.
Exile governance	Expanded in absentia prosecutions; passport and consular restrictions; citizenship revocation provisions; harassment of relatives.	Exile is governed rather than tolerated. Documentation and property controls preserve coercive leverage over diaspora communities and deter sustained opposition organizing abroad.
Religion and social control	2024 amendments required religious reregistration and introduced criminal liability risk for unregistered activity; clergy prosecuted for dissent.	Religious regulation operates as political discipline by creating administrative switches that can criminalize communities and constrain public moral authority outside state control.
War alignment	Belarus enabled Russian military operations from its territory and hosted transfers of over 2,000, and in some reports more than 2,400, Ukrainian children to facilities in Belarus.	War alignment provides a securitization frame that expands prosecutorial latitude and increases the state’s capacity to portray dissent as destabilization or betrayal.

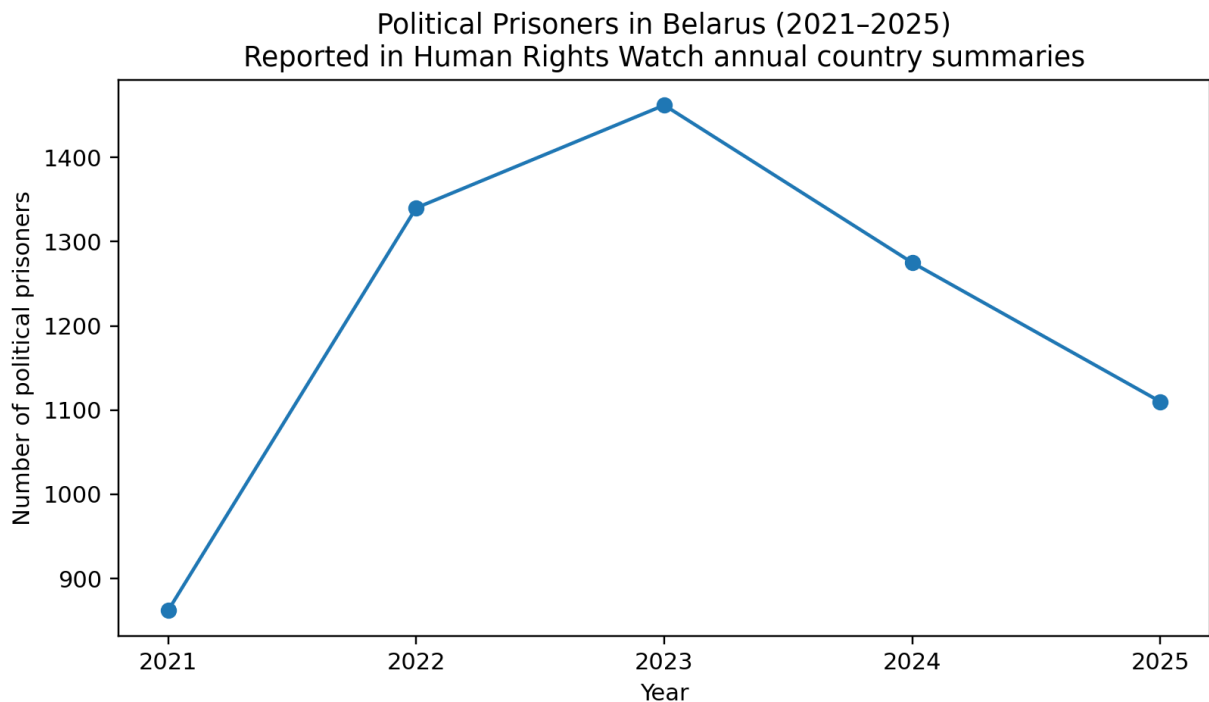
Source note. Derived from Freedom House (2022–2025), Human Rights Watch (2022–2025), U.S. Department of State (2022–2024), and OHCHR (2023).

Table 2. Year by year inflection points (2021–2025)

Year	Key developments	Structural significance
2021	Mass prosecutions following the 2020 protests; forced diversion of a Ryanair flight and arrest of Raman Pratasevich; large scale NGO and media shutdown campaign.	Transition from protest suppression to dismantling independent civic infrastructure and deterring transnational support through demonstrative coercion.
2022	Nontransparent constitutional referendum; antiwar protests dispersed; trials in absentia legalized; citizenship revocation amendment adopted in December 2022.	War alignment institutionalized securitization and extended repression to exiles through legal tools that detach prosecution from physical presence.
2023	OHCHR reported systematic and widespread violations and noted that some patterns may amount to crimes against humanity; nearly 1,500 political prisoners reported; major sentences for Viasna leaders.	International recognition of systematic persecution coincided with intensified prison based coercion and the targeting of monitoring and legal defense infrastructure.
2024	Parliamentary elections held without opposition candidates; religious reregistration regime took effect; continued deaths in custody; expanded targeting of family and support networks.	Electoral closure and social deterrence converged to fragment solidarity networks and deepen administrative control over civic life.
2025	Freedom House score declined to 7 and Political Rights to 1; trial schedules removed from the public domain; forced expulsions of pardoned prisoners reported.	Further contraction of political representation and increased opacity, combined with coercive population management through conditional release and expulsion.

Source note. Derived from Freedom House (2022–2025), Human Rights Watch (2022–2025), OHCHR (2023), and U.S. Department of State (2022–2024).

Figure 1. Political prisoners as a structural indicator (2021–2025)



Note. Figures reflect political prisoner counts reported in Human Rights Watch annual country summaries for the respective reporting years. Human Rights Watch frequently references data compiled by the Viasna Human Rights Center. Counts are described in the reports as at time of writing and may not represent end of year totals.

5. Findings: Mechanisms of Preventive Authoritarian Consolidation

5.1 Organizational liquidation and administrative closure

A central mechanism of preventive authoritarian consolidation in Belarus has been the systematic dismantling of organized civic life. By 2021, repression was no longer limited to dispersing demonstrations or punishing visible protest leaders after the fact. It increasingly took the form of a sustained campaign to eliminate the institutional foundations through which dissent could be organized, documented, defended, and reproduced over time. Human Rights Watch describes escalating prosecutions, extensive raids, and a broad purge of civil society organizations, while Freedom House likewise documents mass dissolutions of nongovernmental organizations and deepening restrictions on associational life that sharply reduced independent organizational capacity in the public sphere (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Freedom House, 2022).

By 2022 and 2023, this pattern had hardened into a regular mode of governance. Participation in unregistered or dissolved organizations was once again treated as a source of legal exposure, extending risk not only to formal activists but also to peripheral supporters, volunteers, and those associated with targeted networks (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Freedom House, 2023). The significance of this process lies not merely in the number of organizations closed, but in the institutional effects that follow from their disappearance. The

removal of independent monitors, legal advocates, and support structures diminishes the production of credible information about abuses, weakens channels for legal contestation, and narrows the practical basis for accountability. This dynamic is consistent with repeated findings that officials responsible for abuses operated with impunity and that authorities failed to take credible steps to investigate or punish them (U.S. Department of State, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Human Rights Watch reports that by mid November 2024 authorities had shut down almost 1,200 nongovernmental organizations, while Freedom House presents comparable figures drawn from monitoring sources (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Freedom House, 2025). The cumulative effect of this administrative closure is the removal of the very scaffolding through which dissent is ordinarily aggregated and sustained. It not only eliminates institutional functions such as legal aid, advocacy, and documentation, but also deepens individual vulnerability and weakens collective resilience.

Preventive authoritarian consolidation does not require the disappearance of oppositional beliefs. Rather, it changes the practical conditions under which political attitudes can be translated into collective action. As organizational density declines and solidarity networks fragment, engagement increasingly shifts from collective mobilization to individualized strategies of caution, withdrawal, or survival. Reporting across the period from 2021 to 2025 reflects a reduction in large scale public protest relative to 2020, not because grievances were resolved, but because the organizational means through which those grievances could be transformed into public action were deliberately dismantled (Freedom House, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The broader implication is that preventive authoritarianism secures stability less through persuasion than through structural demobilization. Under such conditions, apparent passivity should not be read as evidence of political consent. More often, it reflects adaptation to an environment in which the costs of collective engagement have been made prohibitively high.

5.2 Informational control and extremism based criminalization

Preventive authoritarian governance also depends on informational closure. In Belarus, one of the most consequential developments of the post 2020 period has been the use of extremism frameworks to convert expression, digital communication, and forms of association into prosecutable conduct.

A defining feature of this model is legal elasticity. Extremism provisions have been applied in ways that extend well beyond violence or direct incitement, encompassing dissemination of content, subscription to digital channels, symbolic display, financial support, and association with designated entities (Freedom House, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). This elasticity performs at least two important functions. First, it lowers the threshold for state intervention by widening the range of conduct that can plausibly be treated as unlawful. Second, it makes the boundaries of punishable behavior increasingly indeterminate, since designation powers are heavily administrative and liability may be imposed retroactively.

The result is not simply repression, but anticipatory compliance. Citizens do not refrain only from overt protest. They begin to avoid conduct whose legal status is uncertain,

politically charged, or vulnerable to later reinterpretation. In this way, the chilling effect extends beyond organized opposition into routine digital communication and everyday social interaction. The regime thus depends less on repeated visible waves of arrest than on a structure of uncertainty in which ordinary civic behavior may become a basis for criminal exposure.

Freedom House documents the near elimination of independent media and the criminalization of critical expression, including reliance on antiextremism legislation and the blocking of websites (Freedom House, 2022; Freedom House, 2024). The State Department describes related mechanisms, including compulsory access to personal devices, monitoring of communications, publication of coerced confessions, and expansive state authority to block online content and prosecute engagement with materials designated extremist (U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

The destruction of domestic independent media has therefore been accompanied by the criminalization not only of publication, but also of access. The State Department reports that virtually no independent media outlets remained in operation and that journalist and opposition voices were labeled extremist, thereby providing a legal basis for detention and prosecution (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Human Rights Watch similarly documents the use of forced repentance videos and public humiliation as part of the broader repertoire of informational repression (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Once engagement with independent information channels may itself be treated as evidence of extremism, individuals are incentivized to withdraw from the networks through which alternative narratives, coordination, and collective interpretation of events might otherwise emerge. The effect is fragmentation of the informational sphere and a corresponding decline in collective coordination capacity.

5.3 Judicial subordination and the weakening of legal defense

Judicial subordination remains one of the most durable structural features of the Belarusian political order. Freedom House characterizes the courts as subservient and political competition as fundamentally foreclosed, while the State Department details the concentration of procedural power in prosecutorial institutions, restrictions on access to counsel, monitoring of lawyer client communications, and the use of closed proceedings in politically sensitive cases (Freedom House, 2022; Freedom House, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Human Rights Watch further reports the targeting of defense lawyers through disbarment and prosecution and depicts the judiciary as a central instrument for imposing lengthy penalties on opposition figures and civic actors (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Within this broader pattern, the expansion of in absentia proceedings is especially significant. Freedom House reports legislative changes enabling trials in absentia and their subsequent application against exiled opposition figures, while Human Rights Watch documents the growing use of special procedures that permit prosecution without the defendant's presence (Freedom House, 2023; Freedom House, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2025). These developments materially expand the state's capacity to preserve coercive reach beyond national borders.

The weakening of legal defense is not merely ancillary to this process. It is constitutive of it. Disbarment, prosecution, and intimidation of defense counsel narrow the space for adversarial challenge, reduce public verifiability, and reinforce broader structures of impunity (U.S. Department of State, 2024). In such a system, the court does not function as a site of meaningful contestation, but as an institutional mechanism through which already formed state claims are formalized.

5.4 Coercion in detention: incommunicado practices, medical neglect, and deaths in custody

Detention practices in Belarus function not simply as a means of confinement, but as a broader technology of coercive enforcement. Human Rights Watch reports torture, ill treatment, prolonged incommunicado detention, punishment cells, and forced repentance videos, while the State Department documents torture, forced public confessions, denial of medical care, and detention conditions characterized by overcrowding, unsanitary facilities, and deliberate degradation (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Reported deaths in custody in 2023, 2024, and 2025 underscore the severity of detention conditions and the consequences of neglect and abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2025). Incommunicado detention is especially important analytically because it reduces the possibility of outside scrutiny, delays advocacy, and generates uncertainty both for detainees and for those attempting to trace them. This uncertainty itself becomes coercive. Human Rights Watch further reports that in 2025 authorities removed court hearing schedules from public access, further insulating coercive institutions from observation and limiting the ability of families, lawyers, and independent actors to monitor proceedings (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

5.5 Social deterrence and targeting of families and support networks

Another defining feature of preventive rule is the diffusion of risk beyond the immediate political actor. Human Rights Watch reports that from 2023 onward Belarusian authorities increasingly targeted family members of political prisoners and those who provided them with assistance. Support initiatives were designated extremist, recipients were questioned or raided, and donors were exposed to legal risk (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This redistribution of risk across social networks significantly raises the cost of political engagement.

The logic is cumulative. Criminalizing aid reduces the material and humanitarian resources available to prisoners and their families. Reduced support increases dependency and vulnerability. Increased vulnerability discourages further participation and weakens the durability of solidarity networks. In this way, repression operates not only against political organization in the formal sense, but also against the informal ties through which civic life may regenerate after formal institutions have been destroyed.

This mechanism is especially consequential because it undermines the possibility that civil society can reconstitute itself through decentralized or interpersonal forms once its visible organizations have been liquidated. The erosion of support networks thus functions as a second layer of preventive repression, aimed not at immediate protest but at the long term social reproduction of dissent.

5.6 Governance of exile and transnational coercion

Exile in the Belarusian context is not simply a condition of departure. It is increasingly subject to administrative regulation and coercive reach. Freedom House reports amendments permitting citizenship revocation for persons convicted of extremism related offenses while residing abroad, including those prosecuted in absentia (Freedom House, 2023; Freedom House, 2024). Freedom House and Human Rights Watch further describe restrictions on consular services and passport renewal abroad, while the State Department reports efforts to control mobility through identity document revocation and denial of consular access, measures that may pressure individuals toward return or render them more precarious abroad (Freedom House, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

The State Department also documents credible reports of politically motivated Interpol notices and bilateral efforts to induce foreign states to take adverse action against exiled Belarusians (U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Human Rights Watch reports expanded in absentia investigations and raids targeting relatives of exiled activists (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Collectively, these mechanisms transform exile from a condition of escape into a regulated political status. The state does not simply lose the dissenter. It reconstructs new forms of leverage over them through legal, documentary, and transnational means.

6. War alignment and securitization after February 2022

Belarus's alignment with Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine substantially broadened the justificatory basis for coercion and intensified the securitization of domestic governance. Human Rights Watch reports the violent dispersal of antiwar protests and prosecutions linked to antiwar expression and to the sharing of information concerning troop movements (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2023). The State Department likewise documents prosecutions for online activity framed as extremism and describes surveillance and coercive enforcement directed at dissenting expression (U.S. Department of State, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Reporting also documents the transfer of Ukrainian children to facilities in Belarus. Freedom House and the State Department cite figures indicating more than 2,400 children transported, while Human Rights Watch refers to findings suggesting over 2,000 children transferred (Freedom House, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024). OHCHR reported systematic and widespread violations and noted that some documented patterns may amount to crimes against humanity (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

The significance of this wartime alignment is not that it created authoritarian repression in Belarus, which long predated 2022. Rather, it expanded the range of conduct that could be framed as threatening state security and supplied a durable narrative through which dissent could be redescribed as disloyalty, destabilization, or complicity with external enemies.

7. Measurement: Freedom House scores and floor effects

Freedom House scores provide a standardized, though necessarily compressed, measure of political closure. Belarus remained categorized as Not Free throughout the

relevant period. Its total score held at 8 out of 100 in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 editions, before declining to 7 out of 100 in the 2025 edition. Political Rights fell from 2 out of 40 to 1 out of 40, while Civil Liberties remained at 6 out of 60 (Freedom House, 2022; Freedom House, 2023; Freedom House, 2024; Freedom House, 2025).

In systems already positioned near the bottom of the scale, measurement compression is unsurprising. Once most political rights and civil liberties have already been extinguished, additional restrictions may not immediately alter the aggregate score. Movement becomes visible chiefly when the few remaining residual forms of representation or contestation are removed. The decline recorded in the 2025 edition is therefore consistent with reporting that the February 2024 parliamentary elections were held without opposition candidates and that the political environment before the January 2025 election remained extremely restricted (Freedom House, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025).

8. Conceptual findings and implications

The Belarusian case yields three broader conceptual implications. First, constitutional formalism and electoral ritual may coexist with profound institutional capacity destruction. Constitutional amendments and new institutional layers can preserve the external appearance of procedural continuity while substantive political competition disappears (Freedom House, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2022). Second, securitization linked to external conflict may accelerate authoritarian consolidation without being its original source. Belarus's alignment with Russia's war broadened the range of conduct treated as threatening and strengthened the discretion available to coercive institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Third, the diffusion of deterrence through the targeting of families and solidarity networks raises the costs of participation in ways that weaken the informal social infrastructure upon which dissent depends (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

For policy and diplomatic practice, these findings suggest that engagement focused narrowly on electoral procedure is unlikely to alter the overall trajectory where organizational, informational, and legal capacities remain structurally suppressed. Measures aimed at accountability, protection of documentation channels, and reduction of transnational coercion risks for exiles are more closely aligned with the mechanisms through which preventive consolidation is sustained (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

The Belarusian trajectory also differs from hybrid regimes in which restricted competition and limited pluralism continue to exist. In Belarus, pluralism has not simply been constrained. It has been administratively dismantled. Unlike regimes that tolerate a narrowed but still functioning civil sphere, Belarus has pursued extensive organizational liquidation (Freedom House, 2025). Unlike settings where judicial capture coexists with partial procedural defense space, Belarus has combined judicial subordination with a systematic weakening of the legal profession itself (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

For that reason, Belarus is best understood not as a merely competitive authoritarian or hybrid case, but as an advanced form of authoritarian consolidation characterized by minimal tolerance for autonomous institutional life and a high reliance on administrative closure as a governing technique.

9. Conclusion

Between 2021 and 2025, Belarus did not simply intensify repression; it restructured it. The regime consolidated a preventive authoritarian model grounded in institutional capacity destruction rather than episodic coercion. Organizational liquidation, informational criminalization, judicial subordination, detention-based coercion, social deterrence through the targeting of families and support networks, and regulatory governance of exile form an integrated architecture of control. These mechanisms operate cumulatively, ensuring that dissent is neutralized before it can translate into collective political force.

Cross-source convergence across Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United States Department of State consistently depicts repression as systematic and institutionally reproduced rather than reactive or exceptional (Freedom House, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Alignment with Russia's war against Ukraine deepened securitization and expanded prosecutorial latitude, but it did not initiate the trajectory. Instead, it reinforced a preexisting transformation: dissent was converted into a legally administrable condition, embedded within elastic extremism frameworks and enforced through structural impunity.

The central development of this period is therefore not the recurrence of repression but its normalization. Political opposition in Belarus is constrained not only by fear or visible violence, but by the systematic dismantling of the organizational, legal, and informational infrastructures required for collective action. Preventive authoritarian consolidation has rendered dissent structurally precarious, administratively punishable, and institutionally isolated. Under these conditions, regime durability rests less on public consent than on the engineered absence of autonomous capacity for sustained political aggregation.

References

Freedom House. (2022). Freedom in the world 2022: Belarus. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2022>.

Freedom House. (2023). Freedom in the world 2023: Belarus. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2023>.

Freedom House. (2024). Freedom in the world 2024: Belarus. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2024>.

Freedom House. (2025). Freedom in the world 2025: Belarus. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2025>.

Human Rights Watch. (2022). World report 2022: Belarus. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus>.

Human Rights Watch. (2023). World report 2023: Belarus. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/belarus>.

Human Rights Watch. (2024). World report 2024: Belarus. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/belarus>.

Human Rights Watch. (2025). World report 2025: Belarus. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2023). Report on the human rights situation in Belarus. United Nations.

U.S. Department of State. (2022). 2022 country reports on human rights practices: Belarus. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/belarus>.

U.S. Department of State. (2023). 2023 country reports on human rights practices: Belarus. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/belarus>.

U.S. Department of State. (2024). 2024 country reports on human rights practices: Belarus. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/belarus>.