



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Belarusian citizens protest presidential election, 2006

• Colour Revolutions (2000s)

19 March

2006

to: 8 April

2006

Country: Belarus

Location City/State/Province: Minsk

Location Description: Most protests occurred at October Square

Goals:

Protestors wanted to have a second vote to show that Alexander Lukashenko should not be president for a third term.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors › Citizens flew EU flags and banned Belarusian independence flags.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Belarusian protestors rally against the re-election of the president.
- 121. Refusal of public support › Refusal to acknowledge the 2006 election results as legitimate
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials › Refusal to accept Lukashenko as president
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Belarusian citizens disobeyed the ban on protests of the election
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › Belarusian protestors gathered and protesting in October Square, refusing to leave until forced out.

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Belarusian protestors rally against the re-election of the president.
- 121. Refusal of public support › Refusal to acknowledge the 2006 election results as legitimate
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials › Refusal to accept Lukashenko as president
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Belarusian citizens disobeyed the ban on protests of the election
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › Belarusian protestors gathered and protesting in October Square, refusing to leave until forced out.

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 010. Newspapers and journals › Protestors used the internet for independent reporting, untainted by the government.

Notes on Methods:

Methods during segments 3-6 are not known, or portrayed in the media, but the campaign seemed to continue on until the inauguration in April.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Urban citizens
- democratic demonstrators

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Alaksandar Kozulin (Belarusian Social Democratic Party Presidential Candidate), Alaksandar Milinkievi? (Presidential Candidate)

Partners:

Anatoly V. Lebedko (an opposition leader and ally of the main opposition challenger, Aleksandr Milinkevich), Alyaksei Yanukevich (chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front)

External allies:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, European Union, United States, Czech Republic

Involvement of social elites:

Czech Republic government, United States government

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Alyaksei Yanukevich
- Anatoly V. Lebedko
- Czech Republic
- European Union
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- United States
- Urban citizens
- democratic protestors

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, European Union, United States had all been involved since before the campaign.

Segment Length: *Approximately 3 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President-elect Alexander Lukashenko, the riot police, Lt. Gen. Stephan N. Sukhorenko, Sergey V. Lavrov (Russian Foreign Minister), Andrei Popov (Moldovan politician)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Arrests and riot police intervention, beatings and killings done by the police.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Despite efforts, the campaign was largely a failure as Lukashenko became president.

On 19 March 2006, Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko won his third term in office. The citizens of Belarus, however, did not meet the announcement of Lukashenko's 82.6% majority win with cheers. Rather, immediately after the Sunday election, oppositional forces organized by presidential candidates Alaksandar Kozulin and Alaksandar Milinkievi? claimed that the Belarusian government had rigged the vote. Citizens came to a mass rally in October Square in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. Between 5,000 and 10,000 people demonstrated within the square during the night of the 19th, the largest gathering the government's opposition had organized in years. Protestors waved the European Union flag and the independent Belarusian flag, both of which the government had banned. Chanting slogans that demanded freedom, the citizens rallied in protest of the election results. During this gathering Kozulin demanded a second round of voting.

These protests were not the first to occur. In September of 2005, civilian protestors had demonstrated against Lukashenko in the "Jeans Revolution." The term "Jeans Revolution" represented the act of a young man waving his jean shirt, a symbol of the West, in the air once the police had seized the former Belarusian flags. This revolution greatly influenced the protests that took place in March of 2006.

This discontent also did not appear without warning. Much of Belarus anticipated protests regarding the upcoming election, as many citizens were unhappy with Lukashenko's rule and distrusted the legitimacy of the upcoming March 2006 elections. In fact, this distrust extended beyond the nation and provoked other nations to intervene. Prior to the elections, the European Parliament and the United States Congress warned Belarus that, should the state violate human rights during the election, they would impose sanctions on Belarus. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe even sent monitors to Belarus to ensure that the elections were fair and democratic. These actions did not, however, prevent Lukashenko from continuing to threaten any opposition forces.

The oppression that the opposition and its supporters faced had started long before the elections. On 2 March 2006 Kozulin, the candidate for the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, tried to enter the meeting of the All Belarusian People's Assembly hosted by the president. There, security officers arrested and beat him, charging him with disorderly conduct. Actions like these demonstrated the Lukashenko-led government's desire to diminish oppositional candidates. Government officials made announcements ensuring that, should people protest the elections, they would be charged with terrorism. Police arrested dozens of citizens to prelude the vote. On the day before the elections, an anonymous source sent out a text message to many Belarusian mobile phones warning that protestors might gather and there would be bloodshed. This text message urged people to stay away from the protest, something that the government wanted as well. Despite these attempts to discourage protests, Kozulin and Milinkievi?, another candidate representing the United Democratic Forces of Belarus, led protestors into a week of rallies following the election.

Following the day of elections and the initial protest, citizens formed a tent camp in October Square on 20 March 2006. Throughout the day, between 300 to 5,000 members gathered in the camp. Milinkievi? announced that the protestors would not recognize the election. Here, protest leaders declared that the protests should continue until Saturday, 25 March 2006. These oppositional forces were planning a major rally on the 25th, for it was the anniversary of the creation of the first independent Belarusian republic in 1918.

The international community became further involved when, on 21 March 2006, the United States determined that the elections were rigged and called for a new vote. The international community at large expressed its disappointment with Belarus's government for the alleged fraudulent elections. Also on this day, police arrested Anatoly V. Lebedko, an opposition leader and ally of the main opposition challenger, Alaksandar Milinkievi?.

On 23 March 2006, the Constitutional Court of Belarus rejected the opposition's appeals for a new vote.

Then, on 24 March 2006, the day before the intended large rally on the anniversary of Belarus' independence, riot police broke up the protest in October Square in Minsk. Demonstrators ignored the police's calls to leave the square, and continued protesting in the sub-zero temperatures at night. The riot police then intervened, and arrested between 300 and 400 citizens, both protestors and journalists. This suppression dismantled the demonstration. At the same time, the European Union agreed to a summit to impose sanctions on Belarusian leaders, including a travel ban on Lukashenko.

Despite the riot police's actions the night before, protestors gathered on 25 March 2006 to mark the anniversary of independence in 1918. Tens of thousands took to the streets, as the police had closed off October Square to prevent the gathering. Riot police clashed with the protestors, killing one demonstrator. Four explosions went off, signaling the police's use of grenades. The police arrested Kozulin along with many other demonstrators. Also on 25 March 2006, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe determined that the elections had failed to meet democratic standards. The Organization's observers declared that Lukashenko had used state authority for intimidation and suppression.

All throughout this week of protesting, Lukashenko and the government continued to oppress the opposition. The government had complete control over the media, thus television programs failed to address the reality of the violence in Minsk. Moreover, the state detained several members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe electoral observation team and put them under the custody of the Belarusian Frontier Guard. In doing this, Lukashenko was able to rig the results of the early voting polls.

Although the government had initially vowed to crush unrest in the case of large-scale protests, Lukashenko decided to use more subtle means of suppression. Perhaps the most notable method of subduing protestors was when Lukashenko declared the defeat of the “Jeans Revolution.” In declaring the defeat of the “Jeans Revolution,” Lukashenko implied that he had already beaten the oppositional forces as they continued rallying.

Ultimately, despite the large numbers of citizens that gathered in support of Milinkievič and Kozulin, the government was successful in suppressing the protestors. The riot police were violent, beating and arresting those that got in their way. Accusations of closed trials without legal representation or defense witnesses, and unfair treatment within holdings went unchallenged. Despite the external and internal opposition, Belarus’ president remained in power. Moreover, Lukashenko gained additional strength when Russia announced its support for Belarus’s president, condemning the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe for being biased.

The numbers of protestors slowly dwindled throughout the week due to government-initiated violence, and the campaign failed to achieve its goals.

On 8 April 2006, Lukashenko was sworn in as president. Later, on 14 July, Kozulin was sentenced to five and a half years of jail.

Research Notes

Influences:

(1) The Orange, Rose, and Tulip protests (all Color Revolutions) in Kiev, Berlin, Kyrgyzstan respectively, were influential on this campaign. The campaign was also influenced by the "Jeans Revolution" in Belarus, a one-day protest in 2005 that was quickly repressed.

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