



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

FAQs: Belarus
Constitutional Referendum
February 27, 2022

Europe & Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Referendum Snapshot

- Referendum Day: Sunday, Feb. 27, 2022
- Registered voters: 6,818,948
- Polling stations: 5,510
- Physical distancing: 1-1.5 meters
- Observers
 - Domestic: 39,909
 - International: 101 (92 from CIS countries)
- Poll workers: 58,355

When is the referendum?

The Republic of Belarus will hold a nationwide constitutional referendum on Sunday, Feb. 27. Early voting will take place between Feb. 22 and Feb. 26, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. A minimum of two voting precinct commission members will be present in each polling station during early voting, as required by law.¹ Voting on Feb. 27 will take place from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.² in 5,510 polling stations across the country, including 217 in various medical facilities and 12 in military units.³ A total of 58,355 poll workers have been assigned to work across the 5,510 polling stations.⁴

Why is this referendum important?

The government of the Republic of Belarus is organizing the referendum to formalize several proposed changes to the Constitution.

First, the changes would reintroduce presidential term limits of two five-year terms. The limits would come into effect with the next election, allowing current President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who was first elected in 1994, to stand in these elections and remain in his role until 2035.⁵

Second, the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, an unelected body of representatives appointed by the ruling government, would gain the power to impeach a future president, appoint court judges and appoint Central Election Commission members. If passed, this group (likely chaired by the president), would eclipse Parliament as the country's most powerful representative body. **These constitutional changes could thus represent a further consolidation of power by President Lukashenka.**

¹ Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 53.

² Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 50.

³ Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Voting Stations Set Up for Referendum*. February 2, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

⁴ Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Information on the Composition of Precinct Referendum Commissions*. Accessed [here](#).

⁵ ABC News. *Belarus Calls Referendum that Could Strengthen Lukashenko*. January 20, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

The referendum question will be **“Do you accept the amendments and additions to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus?”** Voters will be able to vote by filling in either “Yes” or “No.”⁶

Opposition leaders, including the unified Democratic Forces, have called for voters to dissent through mass ballot-spoiling, marking both “Yes” *and* “No” on their ballots and sending pictures of their ballots for alternative counting through a digital application.⁷

The election is scheduled to take place while war is raging in Ukraine, which shares a border with Belarus. The unprovoked escalation of war on Ukraine is being staged in part from Belarus by the Russian Federation.

What is the legal framework for conducting the referendum?

The legal framework for referendums in Belarus comprises the Constitution; the Election Code; laws on political parties, public association, mass media and mass events; Code of Administrative Offenses; criminal code; civil procedural code; and resolutions and decisions of the Central Election Commission (CEC). The latter are binding for all electoral stakeholders and are entirely within the CEC’s mandate. By law, CEC decisions and resolutions are not subject to any consultation with or approval by executive or legislative bodies.⁸

Belarus has signed and ratified major international and regional instruments related to the holding of democratic elections, namely the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1965 International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 2003 UN Convention Against Corruption and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2014, Belarus acceded to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Convention on the Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms. Belarus is an associate member of the Venice Commission and a member of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).⁹

Who is eligible to vote and how many registered voters are there?

All citizens of the Republic of Belarus who are at least 18 years old are eligible to take part in voting. Exceptions may be made for citizens recognized by the courts as incapable or those being held in institutions of confinement under a court sentence or in pre-trial detention. As no polling stations will be opened outside the country, Belarusian citizens living abroad will be effectively unable to vote unless they return to Belarus to vote in person.¹⁰ The Central Election

⁶ Website of the President of the Republic of Belarus. *On Calling the Nationwide Referendum*. January 20, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

⁷ Atlantic Council. *Belarus Pro-democracy Opposition Plans to Target Sham Referendum*. January 23, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

⁸ IFES. *Review and Analysis of the Legal Framework for Presidential Elections and Referendums in Belarus*. Accessed [here](#).

⁹ Office for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE). *International Election Observation Mission: Republic of Belarus*. 2019. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁰ Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 20. Accessed [here](#).

Commission announced that 6,818,948 people are registered on the voter list for the upcoming referendum.¹¹

Who is responsible for managing the referendum process?

Four levels of election administration are responsible for conducting referendums – the Central Election Commission (CEC); oblast and Minsk City commissions (nine to 13 members); region, city and city district commissions (seven to 11 members); and precinct election commissions (PECs).¹² The CEC is a permanent body with a five-year mandate and comprises of 12 members. Six are appointed by the president (including the chairperson) and six by the Council of the Republic (the upper house of Parliament). In December 2021, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka replaced four members of the CEC, including the long-serving chief of the Commission, Lidia Yermoshina, and reappointed two members from the previous composition.¹³ The Council of the Republic also replaced three members.¹⁴ The new chief is Igor Karpenko, former leader of the pro-Lukashenka Communist Party of Belarus and former Minister of Education.¹⁵ There are four women and eight men in the current CEC composition.¹⁶

Local executive and representative bodies form local-level election commissions from 20 to 30 days prior to referendums. Commission members are nominated by political parties, public associations and citizens. Citizens can nominate election commission representatives through the collection of signatures and rallies of labor collectives. At least one-third of the members of each local commission must be representatives of political parties or public associations, and no more than one-third of commission members may be government employees.¹⁷

What is the election management body doing to safeguard the referendum and voters during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Central Election Commission has announced that curtains will be removed from voting booths to prevent the spread of COVID-19.¹⁸ Opposition members argue that this measure will be used to limit voter privacy and discourage voters from taking photos of their ballots as evidence of their votes.¹⁹

¹¹ Central Election Commission of Belarus Telegram Account. *More than 6.8 million citizens are included in the voting lists for the republican referendum*. February 16, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

¹² Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 31.

¹³ BelTA News. *Lukashenko Appoints Members of Central Election Commission of Belarus*. December 13, 2021. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁴ BelTA News. *The Council of the Republic agreed to the appointment of Igor Karpenko as the Chairman of the CEC*. December 17, 2021. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. *Veteran Chief of Belarusian Election Commission Replaced Ahead of Referendum*. December 13, 2021. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁶ Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Composition of the Commission*. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁷ Official Website of the Republic of Belarus. *Election Commissions of the Republic of Belarus*. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁸ Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Methodological Manual for Precinct Commissions*. 2022. Accessed [here](#).

¹⁹ Belsat News. *CEC Publishes Referendum Guidelines*. January 28, 2021. Accessed [here](#).

<https://belsat.eu/en/news/28-01-2022-cec-publishes-referendum-guidelines/>
<https://rec.gov.by/uploads/folderForLinks/metod-uch.pdf>

The commission provided other non-mandatory recommendations to polling stations:

- Commission members, observers and media should report symptoms of COVID-19 and work only if they have no symptoms;
- Wearing masks and disinfecting their hands regularly is recommended for commission members;
- People at the polling stations should respect social distancing of one to one and one-half meters;
- Poll workers should provide voters with some means of disinfection;
- Polling stations should be regularly ventilated;
- Voters should show their identification cards without handing them to poll station workers;
- Voters should use their own pens for to mark ballots; and
- Those infected with COVID-19 are allowed to vote at home, and polling staff who collect ballots in portable ballot boxes should take special measures to limit transmission, including wearing disposable robes, masks and gloves.²⁰

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of persons with disabilities?

The government of the Republic of Belarus has outlined several measures to facilitate voting for persons with disabilities.²¹ Voting stations must be located primarily on the ground floors of the buildings where the voting will be conducted. For those who use wheelchairs or have musculoskeletal disorders, each polling station should be equipped with either special tables or a larger voting booth so voters can fill in ballots while seated. Magnifying glasses and special stencils will be provided to accommodate voters who are blind or have visual impairments.

Precinct election commissions (PECs) are obliged to provide the opportunity to vote to those who, for health or other valid reasons, cannot come to a polling station on Referendum Day. For citizens who make requests orally or in writing, PECs organize mobile (home) voting; voters are not required to provide official confirmation of inability to come to the polling station.²²

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

The Republic of Belarus Electoral Code states that citizens can vote at designated voting precincts abroad.²³ On Feb. 2, 2022, however, the Central Election Commission announced a decision by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that no polling stations would be formed outside the Republic of Belarus due to concerns over the pandemic, the inability to ensure adequate security and the absence of adequate numbers of citizens on consular records. Therefore,

²⁰ Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Recommendations for Conducting Sanitary and Anti-epidemic Evens During the Republican Referendum of 2022*. Accessed [here](#).

²¹ Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Republican Referendum (Slide 11)*. Accessed [here](#).

²² Belarus Helsinki Commission. *Parliamentary Election: Final Report*. September 23, 2012. Accessed [here](#).

²³ Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 20. Accessed [here](#).

citizens living abroad will be effectively unable to vote unless they return to Belarus for the referendum.²⁴

Who is managing security for the referendum?

The Ministry of Internal Affairs traditionally ensures public order at all polling stations. The Minister of Internal Affairs announced reinforced security measures starting with the first day of early voting. Polling stations will be guarded 24/7. In addition, it is agreed that employees of law enforcement bodies will permit the presence of volunteers to provide security on referendum day.²⁵

Who may observe the referendum?

Belarusian electoral law allows for both national and international observers.²⁶ National observers can include members of political parties, public associations, labor teams, citizen representatives and deputies. They are accredited by local or regional electoral commissions. International observers are invited by the head of state, House of Representatives, Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Central Election Commission (CEC). They are accredited by the CEC.

Opposition platform *Zubr* has called for citizen observation of the referendum in lieu of the formal national observer registration process due to the Belarusian government's recent repression surrounding elections.²⁷ Citizen observers can report referendum violations via a Telegram chatbot.²⁸

As for international observers, the Belarusian government has confirmed credentials for observers from Russia,²⁹ a delegation from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and a delegation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.³⁰ The CEC has also sent invitations to the other CIS member countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.³¹ Observers from the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe were not invited. As of Feb. 14, 2022, 39,909 citizen observers and 101 international observers (92 from CIS) had received accreditation.³²

²⁴ Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Voting Stations Set Up for Referendum*. February 2, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

²⁵ BelTA News. The police will switch to a reinforced version of the service from Feb. 21 in connection with the referendum. December 18, 2021. Accessed [here](#).

²⁶ Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Election Observation*. Accessed [here](#).

²⁷ Website of ZUBR. *What do we Propose?* Accessed [here](#).

²⁸ Telegram. *@ZUBR_in_bot Account Page*. Accessed [here](#).

²⁹ BelTA. *Russia to Send Observers for Referendum in Belarus*. February 1, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

³⁰ Viasna News. *CIS and SCO missions accredited to observe the constitution referendum in Belarus. OSCE mission not invited*. February 2, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

³¹ BelTA. *Russia to Send Observers for Referendum in Belarus*. February 1, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

³² Website of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus. *Citizens observers. International observers*. Accessed [here](#).

When will the referendum results be announced?

Referendum results for districts, cities and city districts must be signed and submitted by Wednesday, Mar. 2, three days following the end of voting. Referendum results for regions and the city of Minsk must be signed and submitted by Thursday, Mar. 3, four days following the end of voting.³³

The Central Election Commission must publish the referendum results in the press by Sunday, Mar. 6, seven days after the close of voting. At least 50 percent of eligible voters must have participated for the referendum to be recognized as valid.³⁴ The results of the referendum will enter into effect by Mar. 16, 10 days after their publication.³⁵

³³ Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 199, 120.

³⁴ Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus, Article 121.

³⁵ Website of the President of the Republic of Belarus. *On Calling the Nationwide Referendum*. January 20, 2022. Accessed [here](#).

Resources

- [Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus](#)
- [2022 Methodological Manual for Precinct Commissions in the Republic of Belarus](#) (Belarusian)
- [Website of the Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus](#) (English version limited)
- [Constitution of the Republic of Belarus](#) (English)

About IFES in Belarus

The International Foundation for Electoral (IFES) began programming in Belarus in September 2020 in partnership with the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute. The work in Belarus was prompted by the presidential elections in August 2020, when Alyaksandr Lukashenka claimed victory in a disputed election. IFES' programming is centered around three core areas of expertise: electoral reform, civic education and media monitoring.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Central Election Commission as of Feb. 23, 2022, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.