

Belarus

Ethnicity in Belarus

Group selection

We identify the following politically relevant groups: **Byelorussians, Poles, and Russians.**

Power relations

1990-2005

The demographic majority in Belarus are Byelorussians, they operate as senior partners next to the largest minority, the Russians. The Russians are junior partners throughout. Russians of Belarus represent an advantaged minority. The current regime of Alexander Lukashenka is decidedly pro-Russian in economic, political and cultural terms. The Russian and Belarusian languages are very similar. And most Belarusians hold a clear affinity to and identification for Russia and the Soviet Union in general. Many of the former differences between the Belarusian and Russian culture and languages were diminished during Soviet rule. A large part of the Belarusian population identifies with Russia ⁽²⁸²⁾. The Russian and Byelorussian languages have equal legal status, but, in practice, Russian is the primary language used by the government ⁽²⁸³⁾. Russians have also a special status in Belarus, because the country is dependent on Russia (trade, energy) ⁽²⁸⁴⁾. Therefore the Belarusian government adopted inclusive policies towards the Russian minority. The ruling party for example, is ethnically mixed and extremely pro-Russian ⁽²⁸⁵⁾.

²⁸² [Eke Kuzio, 2000]

²⁸³ [U.S. State Department, 2005 - 2009]

²⁸⁴ [Hancock, 2006]

²⁸⁵ [Eke Kuzio, 2000]

2006-2017

The Byelorussians are the senior partners in the power-sharing regime with the ethnic Russians, who are the largest minority, as junior partners. Belarus is an autocratic state and the power is concentrated around president Lukashenka. Lukashenka nominated several ethnic Russians as ministers of the government. The current prime minister is an ethnic Russian ^(286; 287).

The Polish minority was powerless until 2005, then they became discriminated. Starting in May 2005, there was increased governmental and societal discrimination against the ethnic Polish population ⁽²⁸⁸⁾. The government interfered in the internal affairs of the most important Polish NGO: The Union of Belarusian

²⁸⁶ [Bohdan, Siarhei, 2013]

²⁸⁷ [Council of Ministers, 2017]

²⁸⁸ [U.S. State Department, 2005 - 2009]

Poles held a congress to elect new leaders. Credible sources stated that the BKGB and the police stopped the Union of Belarusian Poles members' cars in order to prevent them from attending the congress, warned other members to stay away, and pressured others to change their vote in an unsuccessful attempt to secure the re-election of pro-government leaders. Later, the Ministry of Justice declared the congress to have been undemocratic and invalid. And the government-run Grodno regional printing plant refused to print the Union of Belarusian Poles' newspaper, *Glos znad Niemna*, and began printing pro-government versions of the paper without the knowledge of the group's leadership. The defense ministry newspaper *Vo Slavu Rodiny* published an article and poem that denounced the election of the Union of Belarusian Poles' leadership as undemocratic and illegal, likening it to Hitler's fifth column and insinuating that it was aiding a foreign country in trying to overthrow the government. The poem encouraged the public to meet such efforts with violence, such as using clubs against "these" Poles. To date, the Polish minority is still politically discriminated due to ongoing arbitrary harassment against and detention of representatives of the Union of Poles of Belarus, the largest political organization of Poles in Belarus (289; 290; 291). Moreover, the government created its own Polish Union, including pro-government representatives. Thereby, the government manages to control activism in the Polish community (292; 293).

The other minorities, such as Ukrainians and Jews, are irrelevant at the national level. Belarus is an autocratic and repressive state, where the president Lukashenka holds all the power resulting discrimination and suppression of any political opposition (294).

²⁸⁹ [BelarusDigest, 2010]

²⁹⁰ [BelarusDigest, 2012]

²⁹¹ [Radio Free Europe, 2014]

²⁹² [Belarus Digest, 2017]

²⁹⁴ [von Steinsdorff, 2010]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Belarus

From 1991 until 2005

| Group name | Proportional size | Political status |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Byelorussians | 0.78 | SENIOR PARTNER |
| Russians | 0.132 | JUNIOR PARTNER |
| Poles | 0.041 | POWERLESS |

From 2006 until 2017

| Group name | Proportional size | Political status |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Byelorussians | 0.78 | SENIOR PARTNER |
| Russians | 0.132 | JUNIOR PARTNER |
| Poles | 0.041 | DISCRIMINATED |

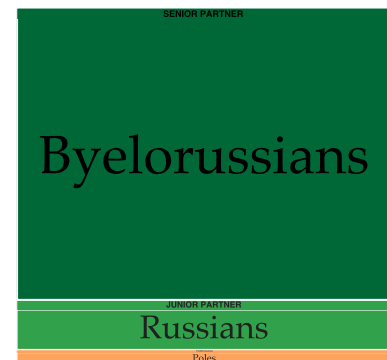


Figure 44: Political status of ethnic groups in Belarus during 1991-2005.

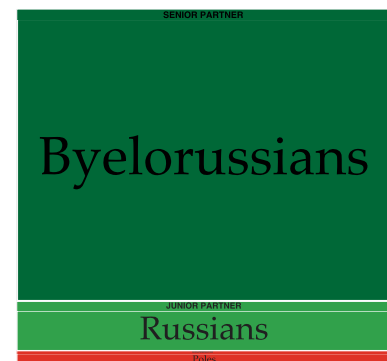


Figure 45: Political status of ethnic groups in Belarus during 2006-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Belarus

From 1991 until 2017

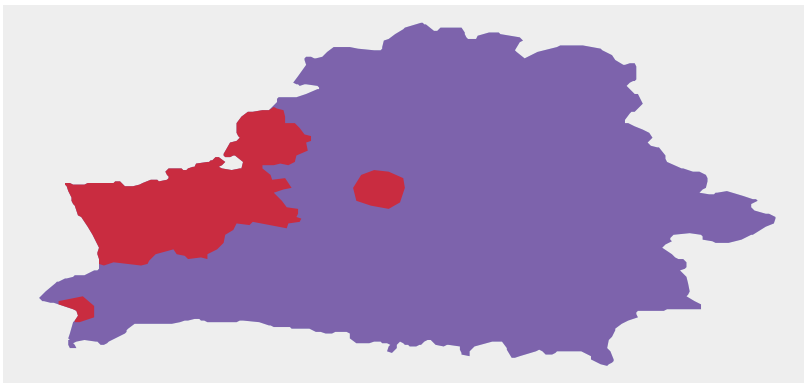


Figure 46: Map of ethnic groups in Belarus during 1991-2017.

| Group name | Area in km ² | Type |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| ■ Russians | 206 838 | Statewide |
| ■ Byelorussians | 206 838 | Statewide |
| ■ Poles | 28 126 | Regionally based |

Table 19: List of ethnic groups in Belarus during 1991-2017.