

# Elections and Power in Belarus

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From 2003-2005, a wave of Color Revolutions brought about regime change in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. These Color Revolutions all saw fraudulent elections lead to the ouster of undemocratic leaders. Although, for the most part these events failed to bring about the democratic advances which many hoped they would, the Color Revolutions were dramatic, largely peaceful events which inspired many people in that region and beyond. The wave of Color Revolutions did not last long, as fraudulent elections in Azerbaijan in 2005 and Belarus in 2006 led to some demonstrations followed by displays of state strength that ended those demonstrations quickly. Despite efforts in Iran and elsewhere, the Color Revolution model has not been successfully replicated since 2005.

Nonetheless, it is impossible not to watch the developing events in Belarus and think about Color Revolution. It is still too early to know what will happen. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka, who was reelected with 79% of the vote on Sunday, in an election which [western observers described](#) as “indicat(ing) that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments, although some specific improvements were made. Election night was marred by detentions of most presidential candidates, and hundreds of activists, journalists and civil society representatives.” [Lukashenka has vowed to stay in power and has stated that “There will not be any more tolerance of attempts to destabilize the situation in the country.”](#)

The Belarusian regime has already resorted to violence and repressive measures, arresting presidential candidates and numerous activists, cracking down on demonstrations and beating demonstrators. In this regard the Lukashenka regime is significantly different than the regimes in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005 who were all either unwilling or unable to use violence to crackdown on demonstrators. This suggests that if regime change occurs in Belarus, it will not be as peaceful as it was in these other countries.

Ironically, in recent years Lukashenka, long viewed as the last dictator in Europe, has sought to reposition his government away from Russia and closer to the U.S. and Europe. Visible rifts between the Belarusian and Russian regimes, Lukashenka’s unwillingness to support Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have contributed to this. Lukashenka probably could have gotten away with a reasonably bad election without encountering any negative consequences from the west or jeopardizing promised assistance. However, it will be extremely difficult for the U.S. and Europe to continue efforts to strengthen their relationship with Belarus after this election.

Lukashenka has, therefore, isolated himself. It is far from certain that he can repair his damaged relationship with Russia, and unlikely that the west will greet him with open

arms anytime soon. This will make remaining in power over even the medium term difficult, particularly given Belarus's need for foreign assistance due to ongoing economic problems. The Belarusian president has backed himself into a corner.

Although Lukashenka may face a difficult time remaining in power, the evidence thus far suggests he will not leave power easily. His willingness to use violence means that as long as he controls the security forces, he will be able to stay in office. This is not a recipe for a quick, easy or peaceful resolution of the problem.