The Lukashenko regime in Belarus

Frear, M.J.; Baturo, A.; Anceschi, L.; Cavatorta, F.

8

The Lukashenko Regime in Belarus

Matthew Frear

Introduction

Shortly after Belarus emerged as an independent republic from the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), the political landscape came to be dominated by Alexander Lukashenko,[1] the country's first, and, so far, only president. During his tenure, Belarus has been dubbed the last dictatorship in Europe and an outpost of tyranny. Unlike neighbouring Poland and the Baltic states, Belarus had not previously enjoyed a significant period of independence or prior experience with democratic institutions. The republic's transformation from a predominantly peasant society through industrialization and modernization had only really taken place after World War Two. A more parochial mindset remained strong in many families, even after widespread urbanization (Ioffe 2014). Thus, a paternalistic leadership style was initially welcomed. Lukashenko proved able to engage in a 'deft exploitation of every defect in the national, political and social psyche' (Mihalisko 1997, 275).

Attempts to define the regime have ranged from a 'demagogical democracy' (Korosteleva 2003), to 'preemptive authoritarianism' (Silitski 2005), to 'adaptive authoritarianism' (Frear 2019a). Belarus has not demonstrated an organizational form of non-democratic rule, which might feature a military junta or a single-party system (Brooker 2014, 25–32). Unlike other post-Soviet republics (Bader 2011), there is not even a dominant party of power that has been created to bolster his rule. Instead, Belarus has fallen squarely into the personalist camp (Frantz et al 2020, 373) and the regime has been described, to varying degrees, as neopatrimonial (Fisun 2012, 94) or even sultanistic (Eke and Kuzio 2000).

During the 1990s, Lukashenko presided over the transition from an autocratic Soviet model to a different form of non-democratic regime, which featured elections alongside personalistic forms of rule (Nisnevich and Ryabov 2020, 14; Silitski 2005). In doing so, he swiftly imposed one-man rule on the newly independent state following his election in a relatively free and fair vote for the new position of

[1] Belarusian names are transliterated into English based on their Russian spellings ('Lukashenko' instead of 'Lukashenka'), which tend to be more commonly used in English. Belarusian is an official language alongside Russian in Belarus, and this choice of spelling does not represent any political stance on the part of the author.

Matthew Frear, *The Lukashenko Regime in Belarus*. In: *Personalism and Personalist Regimes*. Edited by: Alexander Baturo, Luca Anceschi, and Francesco Cavatorta, Oxford University Press.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192848567.003.0008

president in 1994, a position which he has gone on to hold for more than a quarter of a century. During that time the Lukashenko regime has moved further along the neopatrimonial continuum, towards ever-increasing personalization of power in all aspects of politics and society.

The biography of Lukashenko on the official presidential website begins by hailing him as 'a people's politician' and 'president of the ordinary people'.[2] On state television the evening news bulletin invariably begins with coverage of Lukashenko's daily activities or addresses. Examples of hagiographic pseudo-folklore praising the president and his upbringing have been published during his tenure (Astapova 2016, 36–37). Lukashenko has been happy to embrace the nickname *batka* (father), used to describe him by some of his spin-doctors and supporters (Burgis 2006). This can be interpreted as 'father of the nation' and 'provider for the people', but his detractors also deploy it more dismissively to indicate the more parochial nature of his rule. This nickname epitomizes the idea of patrimonial rule.

Since 2008 Lukashenko has also been prominently portrayed as a literal father after acknowledging he had a third, illegitimate, son—Nikolai (Vorsobin 2008)—who frequently accompanies his father to official events, from the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, to audiences with the Pope, to the United Nations General Assembly. Notoriously, fifteen-year-old Nikolai was seen toting a rifle alongside his father on a visit to the presidential palace at the height of anti-regime protests in August 2020 following Lukashenko's fraudulent re-election for a sixth term (Scollon 2020).

From his first election as president in 1994 to riding out nationwide protests against his staged re-election in 2020, Lukashenko has shaped and dominated Belarusian politics. This chapter will begin by outlining the creation of the Lukashenko regime in the 1990s. It will go on to identify how and why the regime successfully consolidated since the turn of the century. Finally, it will explore the current state of Lukashenko's rule and the prospects for the future.

Creation of the Lukashenko Regime

When independence was thrust upon Belarus with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was little in the way of past experiences of statehood to draw on. A short-lived Belarusian People's Republic (BPR) in 1918 had soon been replaced by Soviet rule. Over the following decades the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) experienced one-party rule under the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), a party regime that did also display strong personalist attributes and cults of personality under leaders such as Stalin at the federal

[2] Available at https://president.gov.by/en/president/biography, accessed 4 March 2022.

centre (see Chapter 4 in this volume). Within the BSSR itself there were also popular and charismatic rulers, such as Pyotr Masherov, First Secretary of the party in the republic between 1965–1980 (Marples 1999, 19–23). This was coupled with tendencies towards patronage and clientelism in the BSSR (Urban 1989, 79–97).

Belarus was largely unprepared to be a newly independent state in 1992. Minsk had not been a major driver for the breakup of the USSR before the August putsch in 1991. The communist *nomenklatura* had been resistant to political and economic reform (Frear 2019a, 6) and the old institutions and appointees of the BSSR remained in post for the early years of independence, including the Supreme Soviet elected in 1990 and the prime minister appointed in 1990—Vyacheslav Kebich. No position of president had been created before the collapse of the Soviet Union, so the role of head of state fell to the speaker of the Supreme Soviet, namely Stanislav Shushkevich. A reformer, Shushkevich was outnumbered by communist deputies in the Supreme Soviet. Kebich's government had good relations with many of these deputies while at the same time clashing with Shushkevich. Meanwhile, Lukashenko was sitting as a rank-and-file MP, a position he would later use as the launch pad for his rise to the presidency.

The new post-Soviet Constitution introducing the position of president was not passed by parliament until 1994. Despite some calls for early parliamentary elections for a new Supreme Soviet after independence, which would have ensured the legislature had democratic legitimacy and could have presented stronger checks and balances for the new national executive about to appear, most sitting deputies rejected such proposals in order to keep their seats for a little longer (their term was to expire in 1995). In his biography, Kebich claimed that he would have preferred to create a parliamentary system, but the inexperience of the Supreme Soviet meant that he instead chose a presidential model as the 'least bad' option (Kebich 2008, 402–403). After more than two dozen constitutional drafts, the position of president created in the 1994 Constitution was tailor-made to be won by Kebich, the incumbent prime minister, and so a relatively powerful presidency was seen as an opportunity for those already in power to consolidate it (Burkhardt 2016a, 466–469; Frear 2019a, 32–33). However, it was an outsider, Lukashenko, who emerged as the victor in the most free and fair Belarusian elections to date, aided by his image as an 'anti-bourgeois and anti-nomenklatura' maverick (Matsuzato 2004, 234), as well as Kebich's poor campaign. Kebich himself later acknowledged he did not do enough to appeal directly to voters (Kebich 2008, 419–422).

Lukashenko's background included stints as a teacher and a border guard. He spent time as a director of a state farm in eastern Belarus, which served as the stepping stone for his election to the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR in 1990 (Ioffe 2014, 121–125). In parliament Lukashenko had no clear home, approaching but not joining several factions, from nationalists to communists. He really came to nationwide prominence when he became chair of an anticorruption committee in 1993. As sessions were broadcast on television, the public became aware of this

young deputy in his late thirties. He was seen as a good orator, a natural politician with a common touch. He was also an operator: months before the presidential election, Shushkevich was voted out of his post as a speaker, and thus as a head of state at the time, based on bogus corruption charges that originated from within Lukashenko's committee. Lukashenko then decided to run on an anticorruption platform as candidate in the first presidential election in independent Belarus, with the support of ambitious deputies who thought they could take advantage of his profile to shake up the old establishment.

Lukashenko did not stand on any policy platform, however. His simple appeal resided in the fact that he was neither a member of the old communist elite who had presided over the initial post-Soviet economic collapse, nor was he a member of the nationalist opposition whose message was perceived as too radical and alien by many. He campaigned on populist anti-elite slogans such as 'Not with the Left, not with the Right, but with the people' (Feduta 2005, 156).

A few months before the first presidential election, Lukashenko's opinion poll rating was only about 3 per cent (Koktysh 2004, 77). He proved capable of riding a wave of anti-establishment sentiment during the two rounds of voting, however. In a multi-candidate election, Lukashenko, Kebich, and Shushkevich were joined on the ballot by the party leaders of the Belarusian Popular Front, the Agrarian Union, and the Communist Party. Lukashenko secured 45 per cent of the vote in the first round, while Kebich trailed behind in second place with just 17 per cent. Lukashenko then faced off against Kebich in the second round of voting and, drawing from anti-incumbent sentiment at the time, defeated him in a landslide, taking 81 per cent of the vote against Kebich's 14 per cent in what has been described as the 'first free and unimpeded expression of political will of the Belarusian people' (Savchenko 2009, 171). Once in power as an incumbent himself, however, Lukashenko made sure that a free and fair election from which he benefited himself as a challenger would no longer be possible under his watch, as I discuss in this chapter.

On the socio-economic front, Lukashenko's populism and anti-establishment position tapped into widespread disillusionment with what the collapse of communism and independence had brought for most citizens. In the Soviet Union, the BSSR had been the second most developed republic, featuring some of the highest standards of living within the union (Ivanauskas et al. 2017, 185). Belarus tried to maintain Soviet-style economic structures but, as was the case with many newly independent post-Soviet states at that time, it failed (Savchenko 2009, 167–168; Wilson 2011, 239–240). In the 1990s, the country endured a severe economic decline and a dramatic drop in living standards. Lukashenko promised to tackle corruption and protect ordinary Belarusians from a painful economic transition (Trantidis 2021, 122).

What soon became clear was the Belarusian economy's 'double dependence' on the Russian Federation (Martynau 2013, 75), which represented the main market

for Belarusian goods and, at the same time, the key source of the heavily subsidized energy resources required to produce those goods. The Kebich government had reached an agreement with Russia on proposals for a monetary union, which had been criticized by Lukashenko for making too many concessions. After Kebich's defeat, Moscow abandoned the agreement, which had been pursued more for domestic political reasons from the Russian side (Danilovich 2006, 33–36).

Minsk's economic dependence on Russia was coupled with a model of Belarusian statehood that had emerged within the BSSR under Soviet rule. This reflected paternalistic, autocratic, and pro-Russian sentiments (Sahm 1999, 650). During *glasnost*, it was economic matters, rather than national issues, that prompted the largest demonstrations in the republic (Eke and Kuzio 2000, 525–526). After centuries of alternating Russian or Polish rule, it was not uncommon in the 1990s to question whether Belarus even existed as its own distinct nation (Shevtsov 2005, 34). Economic crises saw nostalgia for the USSR grow and support for the independence of Belarus decline during the 1990s (Sahm 1999, 651).

Ethnic Belarusians did make up the majority of the population upon independence (78 per cent), followed by ethnic Russians (13 per cent) and ethnic Poles (5 per cent). However, the republic was highly Russified, and the Belarusian language was not widely used in everyday life (Eke and Kuzio 2000, 533–535). Unlike the nationalist movements of the Baltic states, opposition forces confluenced in the *Belaruski Narodny Front* (Belarusian Popular Front—BPF) did not take power or participate in governments after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Immediately after the failed coup in 1991 however, they did secure the adoption of new state symbols, including the national flag and coat of arms. The BPF's more radical national project was more explicitly anti-Soviet and anti-Russian than the more moderate one that national democrats such as Shushkevich set forth. Meanwhile, Lukashenko's campaign tapped into nostalgia for the familiar Soviet era rather than Belarus's own sovereignty and independence and Lukashenko presented himself as a natural successor to the popular and charismatic Masherov (Wilson 2011, 116; Sahm 1999, 653–654).

At the time of Lukashenko's election, the actual balance of power between the three branches of government had not yet been tested and, as such, it proved relatively easy for the new regime to tamper with the legislative and judicial branches to strengthen the presidency even further. Many ambitious deputies who had rallied behind Lukashenko in his bid for the presidency, perhaps in the hope that they could be able to exert control over the inexperienced politician, soon came to regret that decision and began to turn against him (Ioffe 2014, 131–132).

The first two years of Lukashenko's rule witnessed the steps that enabled him to mount his presidential putsch in 1996 (Mihalisko 1997, 265). A loyal part of his team was centred around colleagues from the Mogilov region (eastern Belarus), who had worked with him on the state farm and first got him elected to the Supreme Soviet. In accessing power, Lukashenko also swiftly co-opted many of

the former *nomenklatura* members: while Kebich did not stay on as prime minister, several other ministers did. Within the administration, previously subordinate officials were often promoted, ensuring that they owed their elevated positions and loyalty to Lukashenko (Frear 2019a, 51–53).

The new regime soon faced some pushback. As Lukashenko sought to strengthen state control by replacing the editors of some of the country's largest newspapers, mass media openly condemned his attempts at censorship (Sahm 1999, 654). Deputies in the Supreme Soviet, in particular those from the BPF, also began to challenge his rule. In 1995, hunger-striking MPs in parliament protesting plans to replace the state flag and national emblem with modified versions of their old Soviet equivalents were simply cleared out by security forces (Feduta 2005, 241).

In the run-up to the first post-Soviet parliamentary elections in 1995, which had the potential to serve as a channel for public disillusionment against the new president, Lukashenko actively discouraged voters from taking part in the vote, destroying his own ballot paper to indicate how irrelevant the poll was in his eyes (Frear 2019a, 34–35). Instead, voters were encouraged to take part in a national referendum on the same day as the parliamentary election. This proposed replacing national symbols, which were now deemed fascist because they had been used by some collaborators under Nazi occupation, with a new state flag and coat of arms based on previous Soviet versions, and raising Russian up to the status of state language alongside Belarusian (Rudling 2017, 86; Sahm 1999, 654–655). By offering these options, Lukashenko sought to show that he was in touch with the interests of the average voter rather than with those expressed by parliamentarians (Karbalevich 2010, 137–145; Marples 1999, 72–75). All the proposals in the referendum were carried with a healthy margin.

At the same time, turnout for the elections to the Supreme Soviet was low, and where it fell below 50 per cent, the results were declared invalid. It took several more rounds of voting over several months throughout 1995 before a quorate parliament could be formed and no representatives from the BPF, the most vocal opposition to Lukashenko, were elected. During this period, without a new parliament, the president seized the opportunity to rule by decree (Frear 2019a, 35). The deterioration of relations between the presidency and other branches of government only intensified when the Constitutional Court began to strike down some of the presidential decrees and Lukashenko simply responded by issuing another decree telling authorities to disregard the court's ruling (Yekadumava 2001, 71).

In 1996, as Lukashenko faced calls for impeachment, the negotiation of a compromise led to the approval of a consultative referendum on whether more power should be in the hands of the president or parliament. When the proposals Lukashenko put forth were carried, he reneged on the promise that this should only be a consultative referendum and immediately implemented his proposed changes, in what has been described as a 'constitutional coup' (Potocki 2002, 144).

The powers of the presidency were strengthened, and the make-up of parliament changed as it moved from a unicameral to a bicameral system (Feduta 2005, 295). Rather than fresh elections, members of the new upper chamber were appointed and the number of deputies in the lower house was reduced to those loyal to Lukashenko by simply dismissing opponents (Baturo and Elgie 2018, 923). Under intense pressure, the Constitutional Court sided with Lukashenko. Based on these amendments, Lukashenko also reset the clock on his own term as president, and he postponed the poll for his possible re-election from 1999 to 2001.

At the time, there were still attempts to challenge the personalization of the regime. This included trying to stage an alternative presidential election in 1999 on the original date that Lukashenko's first term would have ended, as well as calls for a boycott of the 2000 parliamentary elections (Frear 2019a, 130–131). By then, however, the regime was willing to resort to far more coercive measures: in 1999–2000, Belarus witnessed the disappearance and presumed extrajudicial killing of four prominent opposition figures, including a former interior minister and a former chair of the Central Election Commission (Silitski 2005, 88; Wilson 2011, 190–192). The opposition to Lukashenko was left weakened and marginalized. In 2001, Lukashenko was re-elected in the first round of voting in a poll, which was judged by international observers as neither free nor fair. Lukashenko's extended first term as president had allowed him to increase his personal influence over the political system, describing the 'the legislature, executive and judiciary as branches on the tree of the presidency, giving the president power to trim them as he sees fit' (Danilovich 2001: 13). Having seized power and transformed Belarus into a non-democratic regime following its short-lived flirtation with democracy and pluralism in the early 1990s, Lukashenko then set out to consolidate his personalist rule.

The Consolidation of the Lukashenko Regime

In 1994, as Lukashenko accessed the presidency, Article 100 of the constitution stipulated that the president should adopt measures to ensure the country's political and economic stability. Lukashenko interpreted the dictates of the article as conferring on him 'an absolute carte blanche to reign and rule at his will' (Lukashuk 2001, 309). The constitutional coup in 1996 laid the foundations for personalist autocratic rule; Lukashenko's endeavours to accumulate and consolidate power have continued since then. All three branches of government were undermined through circumvention, subordination, and commandeering (Frear 2019a, 31). Personalization of power was channelled through formal institutions, which were, however, infused with neopatrimonial tendencies and patron–client networks. The justification for Lukashenko's autocratic rule has also evolved over time, adapting to changing public priorities and interests.

Circumvention saw alternative bodies or sites of power bypassed, ignored, or denigrated. This was demonstrated with regards to legislative branch as early as the first parliamentary elections in 1995, as noted above. Since then, the legislature has been effectively transformed into a puppet parliament, filled with 'independent', non-partisan MPs loyal to the president. Lukashenko had not risen to power with the backing of a political party, and since attaining power he has eschewed a dominant 'party of power' as unnecessary (Hale 2015, 258). Lukashenko's direct appeals to the public through plebiscites have continued in the twenty-first century.[3]

Not that the 1996 version of the constitution failed to empower the president. The 1996 amendments to the constitution not only weakened the powers of the parliament in favour of the presidency, they also subordinated the Council of Ministers to the Presidential Administration (Antanovich 2001, 95–96). The Presidential Administration could therefore take credit for any successes and the Council of Ministers be blamed for any failures (Frear 2019a, 41). The Constitutional Court was reduced to 'a decorative function', and ceased to represent a judicial body that could balance the powers of the presidency (Pastukhow and Vashkevich 2001, 90). The judiciary was further subordinated by dismissing laws that were perceived as not serving the interests of the president or matching the mood of 'the people' as 'nonlegal' and therefore to be ignored (Lukashuk 1998, 46).

Finally, the weakened branches of government were commandeered by installing leaders and officials loyal to Lukashenko and his regime. Parliament, which, in the early years of his presidency, had served as a base for opposition to Lukashenko, was eventually tamed by ensuring that pro-government, independent, non-party parliamentarians were selected by the authorities to stand for election, backed by election fraud to ensure their victory (Silitski 2005, 86–87). Lukashenko also had the power to appoint and dismiss ministers and officials in bodies such as the Presidential Administration, the Security Council, the Central Election Commission, and the National Bank. Judges in the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court and even regional courts are nominated by the presidency.

This personalization of power by commandeering bodies and infusing the state apparatus with neopatrimonial properties requires the availability of patron–client

[3] The 2004 parliamentary elections, for instance, were again overshadowed by a national referendum, this time to amend the two-term limit set in the Constitution (Burkhardt 2016a, 479–480). As recently as February 2022, the regime held another referendum on constitutional amendments. While, at first glance, the proposals included in the 2022 referendum appeared to be paving the way for Lukashenko to step down as president in reaction to the anti-regime protests in 2020 and possible pressure from the Kremlin, in reality they created new bodies and procedures that circumvented existing rules and potentially reduced the powers of any eventual successor as president (Kłysiński 2022; Liubakova 2022). The two-term limit for presidents was to be re-introduced for all presidents elected after Lukashenko—or, for that matter, Lukashenko himself should he run again after the expiration of his five-year term that began in 2020. The unelected All-Belarusian People's Assembly would be elevated to a republican body alongside the presidency, government, parliament, and judiciary, taking on some of the current powers of the executive and legislative branches but, initially, Lukashenko himself would be the assembly's chair while remaining president. Potentially, the All-Belarusian People's Assembly could serve as an alternative power base for Lukashenko in the future if necessary.

networks for the appointment of officials. Clients within the ruling elites owe their positions to being loyal to Lukashenko as their patron. As noted above, this was not unique to this regime as it had been present within the BSSR as well. For most of his rule Lukashenko has not relied on one particular grouping to support him in positions of power, but instead has drawn on a variety of factions as and when expedient (Bohdan 2013, 8–9; Frear 2019a, 61; Liahkovich 2009, 37–38). There has also been a constant circulation of the cadres over the decades.

In the 1990s he rose to power with the support of reliable old associates from his home region in Mogilov and by installing his own loyal appointees in the security services and law enforcement agencies (*siloviki*).[4] However, he did not remain dependent on any one grouping and instead played factions off against each other. After the turn of the century, new blood was brought into the elites in the form of technocrats and economic nationalists (Kłysiński and Wierzbowska-Miazga 2009, 75–76). Unlike Ukraine or Russia, a powerful oligarchic business class with the ability to exert power and influence in politics has not been able to emerge in the predominantly state-run economy (Bohdan 2013, 12–13). Different factions within the ruling elites would sometimes work with or against each other, but all depended on Lukashenko as the ultimate patron.

Despite the appearance of strong authoritarian control and stability, the undercurrents beneath the surface indicate that Belarusian society has undergone profound changes since the election of Lukashenko in 1994.[5] In 2020, society had clearly outgrown the antiquated regime of Lukashenko when the whole country, from the capital city to small urban centres, exploded in a series of mass non-violent protests over the fraudulent re-election of Lukashenko in August of that year (Way 2020). Lukashenko held on to power by the skin of his teeth and the loyalty of his *siloviki*. Following the nationwide protests against Lukashenko after his disputed re-election in 2020, he became ever-more reliant on the *siloviki* to maintain his rule, and they have never been more dominant (Burov 2021; Shraibman 2020). Both Roman Golovchenko, the current prime minister, and Igor Sergeenko, head of the Presidential Administration at the time of writing, are drawn from the *siloviki* (Glod 2020, 23–24). Regions that witnessed significant protests in 2020, such as Minsk, Grodno, and Brest, saw the appointment of presidential plenipotentiaries with backgrounds in the *siloviki* (Kłysiński 2020, 2). They were trusted not only to repress protesters, but also to deter defections from within the ruling elites (Marples 2021, 289).

[4] Lukashenko learnt his lesson after his minister of the interior (i.e., in charge of all police forces), Yuri Zakharenko refused to follow illegitimate orders from the president, was fired in 1995, and then joined the opposition ranks and challenged the leader of Belarus (Silitski 2005, 88). Lukashenko had since placed personal loyalty above other criteria in all his *siloviki* appointments.

[5] Even in the early 2000s, some public opinion surveys ranked Belarusians as one of the most committed democrats amongst the public in the post-Soviet countries (Haerpfer 2003).

It should be noted that the *siloviki* did not form a unified power block (Wilson 2018, 10–11). Two significant but often rival institutions are the security services (KGB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Other relevant bodies subordinate to the president include the Operations and Analysis Centre (responsible for control of the Belarusian internet), the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Investigative Committee. These bodies all monitor and report against each other as well, and loyalty to Lukashenko is prized above all. Personnel are regularly reshuffled to deter personal loyalty for the head of any one of these agencies from building up (Shraibman 2018, 7). Spending on internal security is higher than that for national defence, and the military have traditionally been a less important institution to reckon with. There are more people in uniform serving in the Ministry of Internal Affairs than in the Ministry of Defence. In fact, there are twice as many police officers per capita in Belarus than in neighbouring Russia and Ukraine; their number almost quadruples the world average (Smok 2012; Żochowski 2021, 3–4).

An important element of effective patron–client relations is the ability of the patron to not only provide positions but also to offer access to wealth and resources for loyal clients. The Department for Presidential Affairs (also known as the Presidential Property Department)—which reports to Lukashenko himself rather than to the presidential chief of staff: that is, the head of the Presidential Administration—has access to funds that may in part be used to enrich Lukashenko and his family but are also exploited to provide benefits and favours for certain groups and individuals in the elite (Feduta 2005, 414–418). There is a general lack of transparency on exactly where funds come from or how they are spent, but the Department for Presidential Affairs is widely believed to control large swathes of prime real estate in Minsk, several tourism and sports complexes, and a number of lucrative commercial activities across the country. These include cigarettes and alcohol, chemical products, construction materials, and weapons (Frear 2019a, 46).

While Belarus is not resource rich itself (with the possible exception of its reliance on *Belaruskali*, one of the largest producers of potash fertilizers in the world), from early on Lukashenko's regime has been adept at exploiting its close relations with Russia for supply of energy resources, such as cheap oil. In turn, Belarus has an industrial capacity to refine Russian oil and then export petroleum products abroad. This has resulted in significant financial inflows to enrich various budgetary and extra-budgetary funds, although Moscow has been seeking to restrict Minsk's opportunities on that front (Trantidis 2021, 127–128). Available monetary reserves are also channelled into special funds placed outwith the state budget to finance Lukashenko's pet projects in agriculture, housing, and pensions, which could then be used to fund presidential elections campaigns and distribute benefits to social groups in return for political support (Romanchuk 2002, 160–161).

Lukashenko cultivated support amongst specific elite factions, while nurturing his traditional support bases in society. His most loyal backers tended to be the socially vulnerable who depend on the state for jobs or benefits. State regulation of Belarus's largely unreformed economy has meant that many employees have restricted access to the country's large public sector, while opportunities in the private sector are generally limited. Likewise, no equivalent to powerful oligarchic groups, such as those found in Russia and Ukraine, emerged in Belarus (Marples 2021, 283; Matsuzato 2004, 254; Trantidis 2021, 124–125). The regime promised social safety, low unemployment (on paper at least), and steady (albeit low) salaries (Chubrik and Haiduk 2009, 29–30). Lukashenko's initial populist appeal drew on a rural conservatism, paternalism, and Soviet nostalgia (Frear 2019a, 66). To some extent, there is no denying the fact that his appeal largely resonated in the society in the 1990s and, to a lesser extent, the early 2000s. As a charismatic leader, Lukashenko displayed an ability to secure emotional support, particularly when, as in the early years in power, he would apparently deliver some of his populist promises, such as those on keeping unemployment under control, providing access to free or discounted healthcare and education, and subsidizing public utilities (Karbalevich 2010, 236–237).

This reliance on Lukashenko's charisma and nostalgia were effective in the 1990s but, as a consumer society began to emerge, people moved out of poverty, and widespread travel abroad (including the European Union) has become the norm, simple pro-poor policies lost their capacity to generate popular support. In the early 2000s, the regime had to adapt to seek legitimacy from the new societal actors and groups, an end pursued through an informal, unwritten social contract between the regime and the post-Soviet generation, including entrepreneurs and middle-income families. The latter were encouraged, and largely prepared, to accept the restrictions on political rights and freedoms in return for a predictable standard of living (Frear 2019a, 84). This helped carry Lukashenko through the 2006 and 2010 presidential election cycles with a degree of popular support, but the regime still had to resort to election fraud and a mass crackdown to ensure landslide victories for Lukashenko and to quell post-election protests. Lukashenko could not afford to rely on performance legitimacy alone in order to ensure his election victories. The anti-Lukashenko opposition had to be seen not only as a weaker, unrealistic alternative to Lukashenko but as no alternative at all and, as such, thus had to be shown to be comprehensively defeated (Marples 2021, 285).

By the 2010s, in the wake of the global financial crisis and due to Moscow's unwillingness to continue to provide economic support for Belarus without something in return, the regime was struggling to deliver on its social contract. With Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the authorities appeared to find it expedient to refocus on sovereignty and security concerns in the public eye. Arguably, a new security contract emphasizing independence and safety began to emerge

alongside, or even to take precedence over, a social contract promising economic growth and financial benefits that could no longer be fulfilled as generously and predictably as it had in the past (Bedford 2021, 811; Moshes and Nizhnikau 2021, 169–171; Wilson 2016, 79–81).

At its onset, the Lukashenko regime had demonized the nationalist opposition as fascists; national identity and a Belarusian patriotism eventually were recognized as capable of serving a useful role (Burkhardt 2016b; Leshchenko 2004). A soft-Belarusization has developed, including policies to provide more space for the Belarusian language without denying the status of Russian as a state language (Bedford 2021, 812–813; Hansbury 2021, 47–51; Rudkouski 2017). Russia and Belarus were portrayed as brotherly countries but Belarus was still independent and distinct from Russia. Any tangible plans to strengthen the Union State (a treaty to reinforce the ties between Russia and Belarus in the so-called Union State was first signed in 1997) were held back by Minsk unless Belarus and Russia would enjoy equal status in such a state (Frear 2019b, 238–239; Ioffe 2014; 172). Rather than the provider of socio-economic benefits, Lukashenko came to be portrayed increasingly as the natural defender of the Belarusian state and the national ideology that had been introduced under his rule (Burkhardt 2016b, 160–161).

The national ideology introduced in 2003 lacked cohesion as it could stand for many different, often contradictory, things. It broadly proclaimed the state's central role in the economy and society, and the ambition to avoid the errors of both the West and Russia (Feduta 2006). The regime is not tied down by socialist dogma, nationalist fervour, or a specific economic model, however. Regime policies often contradict this self-proclaimed national ideology (Frear 2019a, 147).

The national ideology also emphasizes the importance of having a strong leader, although not necessarily Lukashenko himself, even though this was obviously implied. Officially, there is no promotion of a cult of personality around him. No statues are erected in his honour and no town, street, or building has been named after him. There is no equivalent of some great written work attributed to Lukashenko to guide the development of the Belarusian people, akin to the *Ruhnama* in Turkmenistan under President Saparmurat Niyazov (see Luca Anceschi, Chapter 9 in this volume). No honorary title, such as Father of the People or Father of the Nation, has been given to him and, so far, he has not styled himself as such. The informal nickname of *batka* is not actually widely used. Posters which adorn the centre of major cities promote concepts such as 'Flourishing Belarus' or 'Belarus for the People' rather than featuring the image of Lukashenko himself.

Nevertheless, daily evening news programmes almost invariably begin with features on Lukashenko, while the news on Belarusian politics is always presented and framed in relation to the president. This can include coverage of Lukashenko meeting various foreign dignitaries or visiting foreign capitals, as well as him summoning government officials to tell them what they should be doing, including how to harvest potatoes or husband domestic animals, or haranguing them

for not meeting the needs to the people. At other times, state television may show him engaged in everyday pursuits to indicate that he still has the common touch, such as helping with harvests or playing ice hockey and other sports. Lukashenko's constant sport and fitness activities are a regular feature in national television broadcasts as they serve to remind Belarusians about Lukashenko's physical strength and apparent virility. Simply put, Lukashenko has to appear as an indispensable political leader, the only one that Belarus has, or ever did have: when the first leader of independent Belarus, Stanislav Shushkevich, passed away in 2022, his obituary on the main state news website did not even mention that he had been the head of state before Lukashenko (BelTA 2022).

Elsewhere in the post-Soviet space, and Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in particular, we have seen the emergence of political dynasties, with sons succeeding their fathers as presidents. The dynastic option, however, does not appear to be seriously pursued in Belarus (Schraibman 2018, 7–8). This does not mean there has been no speculation in the ranks of the opposition and the international media: Lukashenko himself has had to deny on several occasions that he is grooming his youngest son Nikolai for succession (Lewshyna 2012; Sindelar 2011). The speculation was partly triggered by Lukashenko himself who alleged, perhaps jokingly, that Nikolai is more likely to take over after him than his eldest son, Viktor. With the constitutional amendments introduced in 2022, the age at which a citizen could stand for election as president was raised to forty. This means that it is decades before Nikolai could even be elected within the very system that Lukashenko himself has crafted. Still, the ease with which constitutional changes were made in 2022—or for that matter, in 1996 or in 2004—suggests that there is no problem with amending any constitutional clause whatsoever, whenever.

Lukashenko has two other adult children: Viktor and Dmitri; the president has dismissed suggestions that he plans to hand over the presidency to his eldest son, Viktor (Karbalevich 2010, 318). There has been constant speculation that Viktor was about to be offered a position that would be a stepping stone to the presidency (Frear 2019a, 56). In practice, Viktor was made an advisor to the president on national security on the Security Council in 2007, a position that he maintained until the early 2020s. It is believed that he also took on an unofficial role in making appointments in the security apparatus and keeping the *siloviki* in check at that time (Bohdan 2013, 18; Liakhovich 2012). During the 2010s, some officials did seem to start gravitating towards Viktor as a possible heir apparent and future patron but, ultimately, he was never appointed to more prominent positions (Frear 2019a, 58; Kłysiński and Wierzbowska-Miazga 2009, 72; Liakhovich 2009, 43–44). In 2021, he was moved from the Security Council to become president of the National Olympic Committee of Belarus—arguably, further away from the organs of political power. Many offspring of personalist dictators—Uday Hussein, the eldest son of Saddam Hussein, and Ilham Aliyev, who succeeded his father Heidar as the president of Azerbaijan in 2003—have incidentally served in the

very same role, chairing their national Olympic committees. Viktor has had time to develop his informal networks within the political system while cultivating his own business interests: as a consequence, it is possible that he wields some degree of influence.

In summary, the only consequential political post in the Lukashenko regime is that of the president, and the only political actor that has any relevance is Lukashenko himself. Having been installed in the presidency, Lukashenko set to work raising the post to a status over and above the other branches of government, which could no longer effectively exercise checks and balances. From early on, elites were appointed on the basis of personal loyalty to Lukashenko, but he did not depend on any one political faction, clan, regional base, or oligarchic or industrial grouping. Lukashenko was the ultimate patron who could turn to other elite groups for support in an opportunistic manner as and when expedient. He also portrayed himself as a man of the people who worked in their interests, but who those people were in society and what his regime promised to provide for them has evolved over time. So, where has this left the political system in the 2020s?

The State of the Contemporary Lukashenko Regime

In terms of everyday politics, one of the most obvious consequences of Lukashenko's tenure has been the lack of a mature functioning party system and the absence of a so-called party of power to represent the regime. There has been no equivalent in Belarus to *Edinaya Rossiya* (United Russia) built around Vladimir Putin, or to *Nur Otan* (recently renamed *Amanat*) in Kazakhstan. Lukashenko is not the leader of any specific party. Small pro-regime parties do indeed exist, but they simply fulfil roles in the electoral process, such as sitting on election commissions and conducting observations. These parties resemble small and insignificant pro-governmental NGOs rather than political parties proper. Their purpose is not to achieve a majority in parliament or form a government (Bedford 2017). A public association, *Belaya Rus* has been considered a potential party of power in waiting, but it has not yet received the blessing of Lukashenko to be transformed into one. It appears that Lukashenko does not want, nor feel that he needs, any sort of intermediary between him and his 'people' (Frear 2014, 353; Rust 2017, 22–23). No political party can come to serve as a potential channel for any sort of future rival within the political system; hence, parliament is predominantly filled with loyal, non-partisan deputies.

As a party of 'constructive' opposition, the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (LDPB) has been allowed to stand in presidential and parliamentary elections to ensure the appearance of pluralism and competition. Even then, the LDPB has never been allowed to win more than one seat in parliament (Frear 2019a,

114). Other, openly anti-regime opposition parties have been repressed and marginalized and lost all representation in national legislative bodies from 1996. They have still been allowed to field some candidates in parliamentary or local elections, but with the express goal that they should be seen to lose and be presented as out of touch and lacking the support of the average voter (Ash 2015; Bakunowicz 2015; Bedford 2017). In short, all political parties, be they pro-government or pro-opposition, have close to zero power in Lukashenko's regime.

In Belarus, political careers are not developed and maintained by standing for election, with one notable exception: namely, the elections for president where one and the same constantly winning candidate keeps developing his career, and his career alone. The MPs sit in a 'rubber stamp' parliament to approve laws handed down to them from the Presidential Administration instead of—being legislators, after all—initiating their own legislation. Governors of the regions and the mayor of Minsk are directly appointed (Matsuzato 2004, 250–252). Only Lukashenko can be seen as the true personification of the will of the electorate; other elected officials are expected to implement the wishes and interests of the president rather than develop their own platforms or policies.

Senior positions in the Presidential Administration, the Council of Ministers, the Security Council, and other state organs are usually filled based on personal links or loyalty to the president and his entourage (Bohdan 2013; Liakhovich 2009; Rust 2017, 20–22). As noted earlier, some of these appointments are based on personal relationships dating back to Lukashenko's roots and many such officials were with him when he first rose to power, notably his erstwhile henchman, Viktor Sheiman, a former Security Council secretary, prosecutor general, and the president's chief of staff. Others were co-opted into the new regime at a later stage and adapted to the new system. The longer the regime has lasted, the larger the number of a generation of *siloviki*, technocrats, and others that has only socialized under Lukashenko's system. This generation sees their future prospects as strongly tied to maintaining the regime, having developed their own careers within it. They understand how Lukashenko's system works and are willing to replicate it in their own interests (Frear 2019a, 60–62; Shraibman 2018; 23).

This does not mean that all senior officials are simply cronies of Lukashenko without the necessary skills and competencies to run the administration or actually deliver policies. Appointments may indeed be made because officials hold the relevant skills, particularly at a time when the regime might be seeking to normalize its relations with the West or attempting to implement tentative economic reforms (Hansbury 2021, 33–37). These figures, however, can just as easily be dismissed or sidelined when they have served their purpose or when Lukashenko's focus shifts to preserving his position through repression and coercion. There is a regular circulation of cadres within the administration and security service so that no senior individual can build up their own regional or institutional power

base. Anybody who might be seen as an emerging potential rival or successor to Lukashenko is dismissed or moved to a new post (Shraibman 2018, 24).

Although not all senior posts are filled by cronies, officials in top positions are not necessarily acting selflessly or in the interests of the wider population. Lukashenko may have come to power in 1994 riding on an anticorruption platform: his regime, however, is not devoid of corruption. Most citizens do not perceive that they contend with corruption in their daily lives to the same degree as in neighbouring Russia and Ukraine (Ioffe 2014, 78–79); this does not mean, however, there are no corrupt practices at higher levels. The perception is obviously helped by the lack of free media, but it probably has some grounds too. The absence of widespread and apparent corruption in the state front-line services on a daily basis certainly helps Lukashenko's populist credentials. However, there is no denying that many officials, including Viktor Lukashenko and his brother Dmitry, have quietly built up their own business interests through their family connections (France 24 2014; Kłysińnski and Wierzbowska-Miazga 2009, 72–73; Konończuk 2021). Enterprises founded by the Department for Presidential Affairs are nominally state owned but, in reality, are treated like private property by powerful individuals (Frear 2019a, 52–55; Shukan 2005). Furthermore, the *siloviki* are thought to pursue business interests and opportunities, using the resources available to them through law enforcement to engage in turf battles with other segments of the ruling elite (Kłysińnski and Wierzbowska-Miazga 2009, 71). While this can be tolerated at times, when Lukashenko finds it expedient to revive his anticorruption credentials high-profile arrests and dismissals follow, even though it is his system that enabled such corrupt practices (Frear 2013, 130; Matsuzato 2004, 248–250).

For the most part, rank-and-file officials, civil servants, and diplomats can get on with day-to-day work (Bohdan 2013, 10). However, under Lukashenko's personalist system, policy priorities and expectations can be subject to the whims of the president. His annual 'state of the nation' addresses often include elements of micromanagement as he claims that his knowledge and experience mean that he has the best solutions for problems in the economy and society. For example, as the father of a school-age son, he decided that he had the best, uniquely suited, ideas for improving the national education policy (Dunaev 2018). With Nikolai about to start university, Lukashenko's penchant for meddling and micro-managing may now be turning to the higher education sector (Zerkalo 2022). Furthermore, attempts by the government to introduce economic reforms or diversify the economy have often been ultimately stymied by Lukashenko himself (Shraibman 2018, 22–23). While being adaptive and willing to change policies has often helped to maintain Lukashenko's popular support over the decades, his interference makes policies erratic and bound to fail, ultimately undermining his public stance. This has been starkly demonstrated by the governmental response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Bedford 2020). In early 2020, Lukashenko denied that Covid-19 was

a serious problem and discouraged serious attempts to stop its spread. Later in 2020, having contracted Covid-19 himself, Lukashenko proclaimed that Belarus had delivered the best response to it in the eyes of the world.

Most Belarusians did not have such a positive view of the state's performance during the pandemic. In fact, the government's dismissive and often-arrogant attitude vis-à-vis Covid-19 was one of the sparks that ignited the protests in 2020. The initial lack of response was very much seen as being driven by Lukashenko himself, especially because the system he had built meant that he had to be portrayed as at the forefront of decisions, getting others only to implement his decisions through policies. Coupled with other developments, he faced the greatest challenge to his regime ever during the 2020 presidential election (Bedford 2021; Kascian and Denisenko 2021; Marples 2021; Way 2020).

If in the past he had been able to claim credit for socio-economic stability, by the late 2010s living standards had started to decline and the regime was finding it difficult to afford to maintain the implicit social contract. While he had weathered past economic downturns, dissatisfaction with his regime's response to Covid-19 energized the usually apathetic electorate to find a competent alternative candidate. The early arrest of several prominent regime opponents, even before the election campaign was properly launched, galvanized the people to rally around Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who became the symbolic figurehead of the anti-Lukashenko forces. Despite electoral manipulation and fraud being the norm in Belarus since the turn of the century, the degree of support received by Tikhanovskaya and her clear lead over Lukashenko throughout the country led to an explosion of nationwide protests in the summer of 2020, which were supressed with uncharacteristic brutality.

In understanding how the regime weathered this storm, it is important to consider not only Lukashenko as the pinnacle of his own regime in Belarus itself, but also his relations with and attitudes towards Russia, which in many ways has enabled Lukashenko's personalist rule from early on (Frear 2019b; Gould-Davies 2020; Yakouchyk 2016). Relations between the two countries have been driven by Lukashenko's personal connections to Russian leaders and other politicians, including all three presidents of Russia. In the 1990s, Lukashenko had supported Russian proposals for a Union State of Russia and Belarus but, after Putin succeeded Yeltsin, any ambitions Lukashenko had to be the head of that Union State were unrealistic. Moscow was no longer willing to prop up the Belarusian economy indefinitely without it being opened up more to Russian control. Lukashenko spent many years promising to make concessions to the Kremlin to continue to secure loans and access to the Russian market, which were essential for maintaining his state-controlled economic system and fulfilling his social contract without having to undergo very painful market reforms. Lukashenko's calls for the Kremlin's continuous support are usually framed within emotional appeals to the countries' common history and identity, or to Belarus's role as Russia's first

line of defence in the event of a NATO invasion. Flirtations with the West, alternatively, became instrumental in suggesting that Moscow risked losing its most loyal ally if it withdrew too much support. While personal relations between Putin and Lukashenko are not thought to be generally good, Lukashenko remains more tolerable to Moscow than an unknown alternative—a case of the 'better the devil you know' (Deyermond 2004; Ferris 2022; Frear 2013; Marples 2008; Martynau 2013).

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 rang alarm bells in Minsk, as it became clear that Moscow could resort to coercion to enforce compliance and to ensure closer integration and economic concessions to Russia (Gretskiy 2018; Rudkouski 2017). As the president of a sovereign independent country, Lukashenko was not interested in conceding power to Russia, but it was also clear that, on the economic front, the interdependencies ran very deep (Frear 2019b, 238–241). He sought to demonstrate loyalty to Russia while also recognizing the territorial integrity of Ukraine, trying to position himself as a mediator on the international stage by hosting international negotiations: the so-called 'Minsk' and 'Minsk-2'.

After the 2020 elections and the ensuing wave of repression, Lukashenko found himself a pariah to much of the international community. During the campaign he had accused Russia of backing the opposition; after the election, when he had nowhere left to turn, his rhetoric soon changed to condemning the West for meddling in Belarus's internal affairs (Glod 2020, 10–13; Pan'kovskii 2021). With Moscow's economic backing, and the *siloviki*'s unwavering loyalty sustained by the clear messages of support from Russia, Lukashenko was able to defeat the nonviolent uprising (Kłysiński 2020, 5–6; Marples 2021, 290; Way 2020, 24–26). Since August 2020, thousands have been arrested, and many more have escaped or were driven to exile: a significant brain drain of entrepreneurs and economically active citizens, as well as bureaucrats and civil servants, increased the risk that the government's ability for policy delivery will be significantly hampered in the future (Bedford 2021, 815–816).

Throughout 2020–2021, Russia intensified its own pressure on the Lukashenko regime (Leukavets 2021). Hoping to become a player in any eventual post-Lukashenko transition, the Kremlin encouraged new constitutional amendments (see footnote 3), a reform package that Lukashenko himself had often deemed not necessary. As noted earlier, however, the amendments passed in 2022 do not point towards an imminent post-Lukashenko transition, not least because the Belarusian leader is likely to have learnt the lessons taught by the cases of failed managed transitions that surfaced across the former Soviet Union, including Armenia in 2018 (Iskandaryan 2018) and Kazakhstan after 2019 (see Anceschi, Chapter 9 in this volume). The Kremlin's increased pressure also reinvigorated the debate on the Union State, with Lukashenko being invited to Russia on several occasions for negotiations in 2020–2021.

In mid-2022, the Russia–Belarus axis seems to be a relationship between two otherwise isolated parties, and an enhanced partnership has been developing in

the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Belarusian territory became a launchpad for the invasion of northern Ukraine: for years, the Belarusian government had denied Russian requests to have a military base in the country but, after the 2020 protests limited Lukashenko's options for international partnerships, Moscow could use Belarusian territory regardless of whether they had a sanctioned military presence. To all intents and purposes, Belarus has to be seen as a co-combatant in the invasion, as Lukashenko repeatedly stated his support for Putin's military actions, denouncing Ukraine's military plans to strike Belarus (Leukavets 2022; Mudrov 2022; Pierson-Lyzhina 2022; Shraibman 2022).

Conclusion

Lukashenko rose to power in 1994 with a profile and political messages that present him as a populist anti-elite, man of the people. Through cunning, guile, and luck, the Lukashenko regime has managed to evolve, muddling through for close to three decades. Its personalist nature has prevented the emergence of alternative centres of power, with no ruling party or other elected officials capable of seriously challenging the president. Belarus provides an example of a bureaucratic patrimonial rule rather than one dominated by oligarchs seeking to exercise state control or the purest form of sultanism. While Lukashenko himself is the preeminent figure on the Belarusian political scene, he has yet to build a full cult of his personality and has not developed any visible plan for dynastic succession, although the future relevance of this latter option is not to be altogether discarded.

Domestically, Lukashenko himself is Belarus's ultimate patron, as he provides access to power and wealth to an often-changing group of elites from different backgrounds and usually trying to ensure that no single group comes to anything resembling dominance. After so many years of Lukashenko in power, many officials simply do not know any other system: regime entrenchment constrained the number of high-profile defections, limiting the options for a palace coup when the regime appeared to be at its most vulnerable in 2020. His highly personalized control over institutions and elites has long served Lukashenko's dominance over the system well, and it withstood the ultimate test in 2020.

Proclaiming that he understands and defends the interests of 'the people', Lukashenko has sought electoral legitimation; however, he maintains tight control of the electoral process so as not to risk an actual defeat or even the need for a second round of voting. Manipulation, fraud, and an unfair playing field have produced landside victories in five re-elections. Nostalgia for the Soviet era evolved into a post-Soviet socio-economic stability provided by the state under Lukashenko's leadership. Dynamics for regime legitimation also included the image of the president as a patriot defending the independence and sovereignty of Belarus. In the classic game of 'good tsar, bad boyars', policy successes were

attributed to Lukashenko while policy failures were typically laid at the feet of ministers or officials, even though he had a hand in appointing them. This served the personalist rule of Lukashenko well but came under pressure with the response to Covid-19 in 2020.

Prior to 2020, the regime may have been seen as able to adapt and evolve its policies to stave off serious challenges through many election cycles. In 2020, it was clearly caught out by the perfect storm of an economic downturn, a poor response to the pandemic, and a badly run electoral campaign followed by a bloody and brutal crackdown, which was seen as excessive and indiscriminate even by some of his traditional supporters. The regime has been resilient enough to survive this threat, but it did weaken Lukashenko and his associates: the president is now even more reliant domestically on repression, and the *siloviki*, and internationally, is more worryingly embedded in a dangerous embrace with Russia.

References

Antanovich, N. 2001. 'The Structure and Transformation of Organs of Power in the Republic of Belarus'. In V. Bulhakaw (ed.) *The Political System of Belarus and the 2001 Presidential Election*, pp. 92–104. Minsk: Analytical Group.

Ash, K. 2015. 'The Election Trap: The Cycle of Post-Electoral Repression and Opposition Fragmentation in Lukashenko's Belarus'. *Democratization*, 22 (6): 1030–1053.

Astapova, A. 2016. 'Political Biography: Incoherence, Contestation, and Elements of the Hero Pattern in the Belarusian Case'. *Journal of Folklore Research: An International Journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology*, 53 (2): 31–62.

Bader, M. 2011. 'Hegemonic Political Parties in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Towards Party-Based Authoritarianism?' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 44 (3): 189–197.

Bakunowicz, T. 2015. 'A Game Played According to Lukashenka's Rules: The Political Opposition in Belarus'. *OSW Commentary* No. 176: 1–8.

Baturo, A. and R. Elgie. 2018. 'Why do Authoritarian Regimes Adopt Bicameralism? Cooptation, Control, and Masking Controversial Reforms'. *Democratization*, 25 (5): 919–937.

Bedford, S. 2017. 'The Election Game: Authoritarian Consolidation Processes in Belarus'. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 25 (4): 381–405.

Bedford, S. 2020. 'The Covid-19 Pandemic In Belarus: Wither The Social Contract?' *Baltic Worlds*, 16 June 2020. https://balticworlds.com/the-covid-19-pandemic-in-belarus-wither-the-social-contract/; accessed 17 July 2022.

Bedford, S. 2021. 'The 2020 Presidential Election in Belarus: Erosion of Authoritarian Stability and Re-politicization of Society'. *Nationalities Papers*, 49 (5): 808–819.

BelTA. 2022 'Umer Stanislav Shushkevich'. *Belta*, 4 May. https://www.belta.by/society/view/umer-stanislav-shushkevich-499542-2022/; accessed 17 July 2022.

Bohdan, S. 2013. 'Who Rules Belarus?' *Centre for Transition Studies Analytical Paper* No. 1.

Brooker, P. 2014. *Non-Democratic Regimes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Burgis, T. 2006. 'Who's The Daddy?' *openDemocracy*, 1 May. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/lukashenko_3495jsp/; accessed 17 July 2022.
Burkhardt, F. 2016a. 'Belarus'. In A. Fruhstorfer and M. Hein (eds.) *Constitutional Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: From Post-Socialist Transition to the Reform of Political Systems*, pp. 463–493. Wiesbaden: Springer.
Burkhardt, F. 2016b. 'Concepts of the Nation and Legitimation in Belarus'. In M. Brusis, J. Ahrens, and M.S. Wessel (eds.) *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 148–171. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Burov, N. 2021. 'Administratsiya prezidenta: Peretekanie polnomochii k Sovbezu'. In A. Pankovski and V. Kostyugova (eds.) *Belorusskii Ezhegodnik 2021*, pp. 23–32. Vilnius: Nashe Mnenie.
Chubrik, A. and K. Haiduk. 2009. 'Social Contract: Waged Workers'. In K. Haiduk, E. Rakova, and V. Silitski (eds.) *Social Contracts in Contemporary Belarus*, pp. 26–48. St Petersburg: Nevskij Prostor.
Danilovich, A. 2001. 'Understanding Politics in Belarus', *DEMSTAR Research Report* no. 3, Aarhus: 1–42.
Danilovich, A. 2006. *Russian–Belarusian Integration: Playing Games behind the Kremlin Walls*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Deyermond, R. 2004. 'The State of the Union: Military Success, Economic and Political Failure in the Russia–Belarus Union'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 56 (8): 1191–1205.
Dunaev V. 2018. 'Obrazovatel'naya politika: Svorachivanie modernizatsii'. In A. Pankovski and V. Kostyugova (eds.) *Belorusskii Ezhegodnik 2012*, pp. 135–143. Vilnius: Nashe Mnenie.
Eke, S. and T. Kuzio. 2000. 'Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52 (3): 523–547.
Feduta, A. 2005. *Lukashenko: Politicheskaya Biografiya*. Moscow: Referendum.
Feduta, A. 2006. 'Kollektivnii Politinformator i Agitator'. *Neprikosnovenniy Zapas*, 3: 120–132.
Ferris, E. 2022. 'Belarus and Russia: Brothers in Arms?' *RUSI*, 7 March. https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/belarus-and-russia-brothers-arms, accessed 17 July 2022.
Fisun, O. 2012. 'Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective'. *Demokratizatsiya*, 20 (2): 87–96.
France 24. 2014. 'Inside the Belarus Network'. *France 24*, 17 October. https://webdoc.france24.com/inside_belarus_networks/, accessed 17 July 2022.
Frantz, E., A. Kendall-Taylor, J. Wright, and X. Xu. 2020. 'Personalization of Power and Repression in Dictatorships'. *The Journal of Politics*, 82 (1): 372–377.
Frear, M. 2013. 'Belarus: Player and Pawn in the Integration Game'. In R. Dragneva and K. Wolczuk (eds.) *Eurasian Economic Integration: Law, Policy and Politics*, pp. 119–138. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
Frear, M. 2014. 'The Parliamentary Elections in Belarus, September 2012'. *Electoral Studies*, 33 (4): 350–353.
Frear, M. 2019a. *Belarus under Lukashenka: Adaptive Authoritarianism*. London: Routledge.
Frear, M. 2019b. 'Evolution and Adaptation in Belarusian Strategic Culture'. In K. Miklóssy and H. Smith (eds.) *Strategic Culture in Russia's Neighborhood: Change and Continuity in an In-Between Space*, pp. 229–258. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Glod, K. 2020. *The Future of Belarus*. Washington DC: Center for European Policy Analysis.
Gould-Davies, N. 2020. 'Belarus and Russian Policy: Patterns of the Past, Dilemmas of the Present'. *Survival*, 62 (6): 179–198.
Gretskiy, I. 2018. 'Belarus in a Post-Crimean Deadlock'. *New Eastern Europe*, 24 (6): 157–162.
Haerpfer, C.W. 2003. 'Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared.' In E. Korosteleva, C. Lawson and R. Marsh (eds.) *Contemporary Belarus*, pp. 103–117. London: Routledge.
Hale, H.E. 2015. *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hansbury, P. 2021. 'Domestic Constraints on Foreign Policy Change in Belarus'. *Journal of Belarusian Studies*, 11 (1): 27–55.
Ioffe, G. 2014. *Reassessing Lukashenka: Belarus in Cultural and Geopolitical Context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Iskandaryan, A. 2018. 'The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: How To Lose Power in Two Weeks'. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 26 (4): 465–482.
Ivanauskas, V., G. Jasutis and L. Kojala. 2017. 'The Question of Interdependence between Belarus and Russia'. In V. Ivanauskas, T. Janeliūnas. L. Jonavičius, L. Kojala, G. Jasutis, L. Kasčiūnas, and V. Keršanskas (eds.) *Scenarios of Russia's Development: Implications for the Lithuanian and Regional Security*, pp. 161–198. Vilnius: East European Studies Centre.
Karbalevich, V. 2010. *Alyaksandr Lukashenko: Politicheskii Portret*. Moscow: Partizan.
Kascian, K. and V. Denisenko. 2021. 'Society in the Authoritarian Discourse: The Case of the 2020 Presidential Election in Belarus'. *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 7 (4): 124–138.
Kebich, V. 2008. *Iskushenie Vlast'yu*. Minsk: Paradoks.
Kłysiński, K. 2020. 'The Regime's Fight to Survive: 100 Days of Political Crisis in Belarus'. *OSW Commentary* No. 366: 1–6.
Kłysiński, K. 2022. 'Voting Under Special Supervision. The Constitutional Referendum in Belarus'. *OSW*, 28 February; https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-02-28/voting-under-special-supervision-constitutional-referendum-belarus, accessed 17 July 2022.
Kłysiński, K. and A. Wierzbowska-Miazga. 2009. 'Changes in the Political Elite, Economy and Society of Belarus. Appearances and Reality'. *OSW Studies* No. 30: 53–98.
Koktysh, K. 2004. 'Postsovetskaya Transformatsiya Belorussii'. *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, 2: 72–79.
Konończuk, W. 2021. 'Regime-Sanctioned Oligarchs: Big Business in Belarus'. *Sprawy Miedzynarodowe/International Affairs*, 74 (2): 133–156.
Korosteleva, E. 2003. 'Is Belarus a Demagogical Democracy?' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 16 (3): 525–533.
Leshchenko, N. 2004. 'A Fine Instrument: Two Nation-Building Strategies in Post-Soviet Belarus'. *Nations and Nationalism*, 10 (3): 333–352.
Leukavets, A. 2021. 'Russia's Game in Belarus: 2020 Presidential Elections as a Checkmate for Lukashenka?' *New Perspectives*, 29 (1): 90–101.
Leukavets, A. 2022. 'The Role of Belarus in the Ukrainian Crisis'. *Focus Ukraine Blog*, 4 April. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/role-belarus-ukrainian-crisis, accessed 17 July 2022.

Lewshyna, I. 2012. 'Lukashenka Denies that he Grooms his Son Kolya as his Successor'. *Belorusskie Novosti*, 22 October. http://naviny.by/en/rubrics/english/2012/10/22/ic_articles_259_179653, accessed 17 July 2022.
Liakhovich, A. 2009. 'Belarusian Elites—Change and Authoritarian Rule'. In S. Fischer (ed.) *Back from the Cold? The EU and Belarus in 2009*, pp. 37–48. Chaillot Paper no. 119, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies.
Liakhovich, A. 2012. 'The Role of Security Services in Belarus Politics'. *Belarus Digest*, 14 March. https://belarusdigest.com/story/the-role-of-security-services-in-belarus-politics/, accessed 17 July 2022.
Liubakova, H. 2022. 'Belarus Dictator Prepares to Extend Reign Via Farcical Referendum'. *Atlantic Council*, 11 January. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/belarus-dictator-prepares-to-extend-reign-via-farcical-referendum/, accessed 17 July 2022.
Lukashuk, A. 1998. 'Yesterday as Tomorrow: Why it Works in Belarus', *East European Constitutional Review*, 7 (3): 43–49.
Lukashuk, A. 2001. 'Constitutionalism in Belarus: A False Start'. In J. Zielonka (ed.) *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe Volume 1: Institutional Engineering*, pp. 293–318. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Marples, D. 1999. *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
Marples, D. 2008. 'Is the Russia-Belarus Union Obsolete?' *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55 (1): 25–35.
Marples, D. 2021. 'Changing Belarus'. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 63 (3–4): 278–295.
Martynau, A. 2013. 'Political Bargaining in the Union State of Russia and Belarus'. *Contemporary European Studies*, 8 (2): 27–46.
Matsuzato, K. 2004. 'A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception Among CIS Countries'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 56 (2): 235–261.
Mihalisko, K. 1997. 'Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism'. In K. Dawisha and B. Parrott, (eds.) *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, pp. 223–281. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Moshes, A. and R. Nizhnikau. 2021. 'The Belarusian Revolution: Sources, Interim Outcomes, and Lessons To Be Learned'. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 29 (2): 159–181.
Mudrov, S.A. 2022. '"We did not unleash this war. Our conscience is clear": The Russia–Ukraine Military Conflict and its Perception in Belarus'. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 30 (4): 1–12.
Nisnevich, Yu. and A. Ryabov. 2020. 'Post-Soviet Authoritarianism'. *Russian Social Science Review*, 61 (6): 538–554.
Pan'kovskii, A. 2021. 'Belarussko-Rossiiskie otnosheniya: Igry prezidentov'. In A. Pankovski and V. Kostyugova (eds.) *Belorusskii Ezhegodnik 2021*, pp. 80–91. Vilnius: Nashe Mnenie.
Pastukhow, M. and V. Alyaksandr. 2001. 'The Constitutional Court and the Constitutional Crisis of 1996'. In V. Bulhakaw (ed.) *The Political System of Belarus and the 2001 Presidential Election*, pp. 78–91. Minsk: Analytical Group, 2001.
Pierson-Lyzhina, E. 2022. 'In Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, Lukashenko Makes for an Uncomfortable Bedfellow'. *The Conversation*, 17 March. https://theconversation.com/in-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-lukashenko-makes-for-an-uncomfortable-bedfellow-179244, accessed 17 July 2022.

Potocki, R. 2002. 'Darks Days in Belarus'. *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (4): 142–156.
Romanchuk, J. 2002. 'Chasing the Old Ghost: Neo-Socialist Policies in an Emerging Market (1991–2001)'. In A. Lewis (ed.) *The EU and Belarus*, pp. 155–172. London: Federal Trust.
Rudkouski, P. 2017. 'Soft Belarusianisation: The Ideology of Belarus in the era of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict'. *OSW Commentary* No. 253: 1–6.
Rudling, P.A. 2017. '"Unhappy Is the Person Who Has No Motherland": National Ideology and History Writing in Lukashenka's Belarus'. In J. Fedor, M. Kangaspuro, J. Lassila, and T. Zhurzhenko (eds.) *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, pp. 86–134. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Rust, M. 2017. 'A Belarusian House of Cards'. *New Eastern Europe*, 23 (5): 19–25.
Sahm, A. 1999. 'Political Culture and National Symbols: Their Impact on the Belarusian Nation-Building Process'. *Nationalities Papers*, 27 (4): 649–660.
Savchenko, A. 2009. *Belarus: A Perpetual Borderland*. Leiden: Brill.
Scollon, M. 2020. 'Batka Gets His Gun. Belarusians Take Note. Laughter Ensues'. *RFE/RL*, 24 August. https://www.rferl.org/a/batka-gets-his-gun-belarusians-take-note-laughter-ensues-/30800435.html, accessed 17 July 2022.
Shevtsov, Yu. 2005. *Ob'edinennaya Natsiya: Fenomen Belarusi*. Moscow: Evropa.
Shraibman, A. 2018. *The House That Lukashenko Built: The Foundation, Evolution, and Future of the Belarusian Regime*. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center.
Shraibman, A. 2020. 'Lukashenko's Vicious Circle'. *Carnegie Moscow*, 17 November. https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/83247, accessed 17 July 2022.
Shraibman, A. 2022. 'Won't Get Fooled Again: Is Lukashenko Trying to Distance Himself From Russia?' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 17 May. https://carnegieendowment.org/eurasiainsight/87140, accessed 17 July 2022.
Shukan, I. 2005. 'La Biélorussie: Stratégies présidentielles de domination personnelle'. *Critique Internationale*, 3: 37–45.
Silitski, V. 2005. 'Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus'. *Journal of Democracy* 16 (4): 83–97.
Sindelar, D. 2011. 'Father & Son: The Unusual Childhood of Kolya Lukashenka'. *RFE/RL*, 1 March. https://www.rferl.org/a/father_son_childhood_kolya_lukashenka/2325080.html, accessed 17 July 2022.
Smok, V. 2012. 'Belarus Police on the Edge of Reform'. *Belarus Digest*, 7 November. https://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-police-on-the-edge-of-reform/, accessed 17 July 2022.
Trantidis, A. 2021. 'The Political Economy of Autocratization: The Case of Belarus, 1994–2006'. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 54 (4): 117–136.
Urban, M.E. 1989. *An Algebra of Soviet Power: Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966–86*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Vorsobin, V. 2008 'Aleksandr Lukashenko: Mladshii Syn—Moi Khvost'. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda v Belorussii*, 2 July: 4–6.
Way, L. 2020. 'Belarus Uprising: How a Dictator Became Vulnerable'. *Journal of Democracy*, 31 (4): 17–27.
Wilson, A. 2011. *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*. London: Yale University Press.
Wilson, A. 2016. 'Belarus: From a Social Contract to a Security Contract?' *The Journal of Belarusian Studies*, 8 (1): 78–91.
Wilson, A. 2018. 'Softly, Softly Belarus'. *New Eastern Europe*, 23 (5): 7–13.

Yakouchyk, K. 2016. 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ambitious: Democracy and Autocracy Promoters Competing in Belarus'. *European Political Science Review*, 8 (2): 195–224.

Yekadumava, I. 2001. 'The Split in the State Organs of Power as a Result of the Constitutional Crisis in November 1996'. In V. Bulhakaw (ed.) *The Political System of Belarus and the 2001 Presidential Election*, pp. 65–77. Minsk: Analytical Group.

Zerkalo. 2022. '"Ya spat' he mogu iz-za etogo TsT". Lukashenko vyzval k sebe ministrov, rektora BGU I dekana biofaka'. *Zerkalo*, 16 June. https://zerkalo42.global.ssl.fastly.net/news_/life/16231.html, accessed 17 July 2022.

Żochowski, P. 2021. 'Lukashenka's Last Line of Defence. The Belarusian Security Apparatus in a Time of Crisis'. *OSW Commentary* No. 402: 1–7.