

# Belarusian political cartography based on the results of the Presidential elections in 1994–2006<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The article analyzes territorial peculiarities of the electoral behavior in Belarus on the basis of the official ballots during the Presidential elections in 1994, 2001 and 2006. The author concludes that regardless of the lack of full trust to the official data (in particular in 2001 and 2006), its analysis allows to retrace the territorial peculiarities of voting and to localize the relatively «oppositional» and «anti-oppositional» areas which reflect the essential regional differences preserved by the authoritarian regime.

*Key words:* Presidential elections, election, elections of 1994, 2001 and 2006 in Belarus, electoral behavior, map of the electoral behavior, political forces in Belarus.

This text aims to specify the problem of Belarusian territorial division. Most models divide Belarus into two (Western and Eastern) or three (Western, Eastern and Central) parts. Such division has usually an apriori character and is thought to be the result of the 1921 division of Belarus between the newly created Soviet state and Poland. Therefore the peculiarities of the Western Belarus political choice are explained by a less degree of Sovietization and by a Polish-Catholic influence. According to historical versions such

division could be explained by the modern division of the territory into “Litva” (historical Lithuania) and “Belaya Rus” (White Ruthenia) in XV-XVIII centuries.

Our task is not to contest this division which is obviously natural however to review political signs of this division by analyzing the results of the electoral campaigns of 1994, 2001 and 2006. It should help to specify the model of Belarusian regional peculiarities and to localize the regions with different types of political behavior more concretely.

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As empirical grounds for this analysis the official results of the Presidential election campaigns of 1994 (the first ballot), 2001 and 2006 have been used. As there is no complete table with the 1994 voting results published openly, we had to resort to the voting results printed in local newspapers. The practice shows that such data can differ from the official results. It is usually explained by journalists' mistakes or sometimes by falsification. Besides, not all newspapers had the results published. So, the 1994 data is not complete and has to be improved in the future. Nevertheless it features a more or less complete picture of Belarusian voting. A similar situation was with the 2006 elections – on the day this article was being prepared, there was no complete official information on the voting results, and we had to use the data from the local newspapers.

The information source about the 2001 elections was an edition published by the Social and Political Research Institute of the Administration of the President of Belarus (Dmitriev. E.I., Khurs M.N., 2002). The regional voting results were provided in the addendum. Data provided by the local newspapers has been used as well in order to compare the two sources.

Due to the fact that our analysis is based on the official data, an issue of falsification comes up immediately. The 1994 campaign is thought to be the most transparent, its data is trusted. However there were a few questions concerning probable falsifications mostly for the benefit of V. Kebich however there was no concrete information. Certain manipulations might have been taking

place, said to the regional elites, however it would be impossible to specify them now. Nonetheless we think that if there were such practices their effect was insignificant.

The situation with the 2001 and 2006 campaigns is more difficult. There is a lot of information about manipulations with the voting results proved by the facts of the Electoral Law infringements registered by the international and national observers (Republic of Belarus..., 2001) and by various polls. According to the NISEP data, there is an 18 % difference between the official results and the real ones (Manaev, 2002: 122). Given these circumstances and issue rises how the official data should be treated. We are not interested in the voting results per se which were obviously rigged but rather in certain territorial disproportions and those areas which were similar or differed from those in 1994. Therefore the 2001 results, even if we treat them critically, reflect somehow different models of political support.

There are even more difficulties with the 2006 Presidential elections. Besides the obvious falsification of the results there is an even bigger discrepancy between the official and the real data. Nevertheless some tendencies of 1994 and 2001 have repeated and they should be explained.

Our main subject is the electoral behavior in the rural areas and towns. Such strategy has been chosen to reveal the presence of the territorial division among the most conservative part of the Belarusian electorate, i.e. the territorial divisions and differences which are rooted in the deep social and political level. It may exclude a big part of the

Belarusian electorate however it corresponds to our task. When it was possible, we tried to exclude all the more or less big towns, too.

The analysis of the results may be stratified and touches various aspects of the electoral process. Some useful information can be found in the voting results of both major and local candidates, as well as in the voting results of early voting and “against all candidates”. Considering the limited scope of this article we shall regard only one criterion – voting for the democratic opposition in 1994, 2001 and 2006. We believe that it is the criterion that demonstrates the territorial differences in the political behavior and opinion.

In 1994 the democratic opposition was represented by Zianon Pazniak and Stanislau Shushkevich. The sum of votes for these candidates is the index of support of the democratic opposition. While their programs and political backgrounds were different, they had similar views on democracy, independence of Belarus, pro-Western orientation of the country and development of the national culture. In 2001 the democratic opposition was represented by Viktor Hancharyk (Viktor Goncharik), the single candidate of the democratic forces supported by all the biggest oppositional parties and organizations. In 2006 the democratic opposition is represented by Aliaxandr Milinkevich (Alexander Milinkevich) and Aliaxandr Kazilin (Alexander Kozulin).

A separate issue is the choice of the scale while analyzing the results of the electoral campaigns of 1994, 2001 and 2006, and comparison of the results of the Presidential campaigns. Using the

overall makes no sense due to a considerable discrepancy between the democratic electorate representations after 1994. Therefore we use different scales. In reflecting the 1994 voting results the regions could be divided into four major groups and an additional one. The major groups are as follows:

1. Support to the democratic opposition less than 10 percent (low level);
2. Support to the democratic opposition 10 - 20 percent (mid level);
3. Support to the democratic opposition 20 - 30 percent (high level);
4. Support to the democratic opposition more than 30 percent (dominating areas).

The additional group includes districts (*rajons*) where the representatives of the democratic opposition had less than 5 percent. It is important to study this group in order to reveal and localize the territories where the corresponding political forces had no support (an “anti-center” if compared with the districts where the democrats dominated). This group creates a single area which can be interpreted in regional categories.

The above-mentioned scale cannot be used during the analysis of the 2001 election because the data presented by the Central Electoral Commission varied less. In 1994, the support data could vary 10 – 15 times, in 2001 – only 3 - 5 times. As a result a new scale was chosen. It has four basic intervals and an additional one.

1. Support to the democratic opposition up to 5 percent;
2. Support to the democratic opposition 5 - 10 percent;
3. Support to the democratic opposition 10 - 15 percent;

4. Support to the democratic opposition more than 15 percent;

The additional interval specified the districts where the support to the opposition according to the official data was less than 2 percent. Only three districts (Lelchytsy, Brahin and Vetka) could be found in this group. It is important that in 1994 the “anti-center” was located in the Mahilou Region (*voblast* in Belarusian, *oblast* in Russian) however in 2001 it moved to the Homiel Region and included the districts which suffered from the Chernobyl catastrophe.

In 2006, it became even more difficult to specify the opposition character as the official data was more undifferentiated. A shortened 2001 scale was used.

1. Support to the democratic opposition up to 5 percent;

2. Support to the democratic opposition 5 - 10 percent;

3. Support to the democratic opposition more than 10 percent;

As an additional criteria for analysis a territorial localization of districts was chosen where, according to the official data, the support to the democratic opposition was less than 2 percent (minimal support) and more than 7 percent (mid level).

Finally, let's review the distribution of the voting results in the administrative-territorial units. One should be reminded that the 1994 and 2006 information is not complete, and that there is no information at all about 15 percent of the districts.

## I. The 1994 Presidential elections

The 1994 Presidential elections official results demonstrate a presence of rather complete areas of various levels with the support to the democratic opposition. Regardless of the lack of information on approximately 15 Districts the existing data allows to draw some conclusions. Unlike the wide-spread opinion about the Western Belarus as the base for the opposition, the level of towns and villages transfers this base to the North - West, i.e. along the border with Lithuania, not Poland. The opposition-dominated area starts to the North - West of Minsk and creates a conditional triangle with its peaks in Minsk, Lida and Braslau. Therefore only the Eastern part of the Hrodna Region is in this sector (Lida, Navahrudak, Iuje, Smarhon and Ashmiany). It also includes the North-Western part of the Minsk Region (Vileyka, Maladzechna, Miadzel) and the Western part of the Vicebsk Region (Pastavy, Braslau and Hlybokaye).

According to the 1994 results, it was the part of Belarus that formed a rather complete area supporting the democratic opposition. It should be noted that the specified zone has a specific ethnic composition. Practically all of this territory was a part of historical Vilnia Region, being a place of rivalry of the Belarusian and Polish (sometimes Lithuanian) national movements. This area was not always a place of the high concentration of the Polish minority and Catholic population. The correlation with the Polish

minority and Catholic population has a fractional character. The area with the largest Polish population, e.g. Voranava, Shchuchyn and Zelva Districts, were not in this area, while the Hrodna District was in the mid level zone (10 – 15 percent). At the same time, the Orthodox and the Belarusian districts of the Minsk Region demonstrated a high level of support.

A symbolic center of the dominating zone is the town of Smarhon and its districts. It was the only district where the democratic opposition had the absolute majority of votes, 54 percent. Besides the area to the North – West of Minsk, a high level of the support to the democratic opposition was in Niasvitzh and Stolín Districts, which should be studied additionally. In Stolín District, it could be explained by a large Protestant community. It is also interesting that all the high level zones had not been a part of the Belarusian Soviet Socialistic Republic before 1939. Still, not all districts of the Western Belarus demonstrated a high level of support, e.g. in Kobryn and Kamianiets Districts it was less than 10 percent.

The 20 - 30 percent support zone is a direct continuation of the dominating area, thus creating a relatively single space which includes all central parts of the Hrodna Region, the North and the North – East of the Brest Region (with the only enclave, Biaroza District), the Central Belarus (enclaves: Stoubtsy, Minsk and Smalavichy Districts), and the West of the Vicebsk Region. Therefore the zone is a single area with some enclaves, including practically all the North – West Belarus and environs of Minsk. In 1921 – 1939, almost entirely

this high level support zone was part of Poland. Minsk was also in this zone.

The 10 - 20 percent support zone also created a single area, including the geographic center of Belarus. It included the remaining districts of the Hrodna Region, the majority of the Brest Region, and almost entire Minsk Region. This zone can be called “intermediate” as it divided the areas of the high and low support levels. There was only one place in the Vicebsk Region where the high support zone met the low support one. Unfortunately, due to the lack of data from all districts, there was only one certain enclave in the mid support zone, i.e. the Homiel District.

The low (10 percent) support zone included only the Eastern Belarus: the Eastern part of Vicebsk Region (along the line Rasony – Polatsk - Vorsha), almost all Mahilou and Homiel Regions (Zhytkavichy and Homiel Districts). It is quite difficult to explain the presence of the following enclaves: Kobryn and Kamianiets Districts. The low support zone was a single area with an enclave in the Vicebsk Region, i.e. Lozna District. The minimal support territory could be considered as an electoral antithesis to the Smarhon-centered area.

## II. The 2001 Presidential elections

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The 2001 official data changed considerably the 1994 zones however sometimes restored the basic tendencies of the regional distribution of the electoral behavior, which would not have happened if there were simple manipulations without considering the real expression of will.

According to the official data, the high support zone (more than 15 percent) decreased considerably and broke into enclaves however still reflected the 1994 dominating area. Indeed, its configuration was greatly influenced by the falsified results and the fact that the local authorities were controlled by the central power. It was particularly obvious concerning the Hrodna Region where there was a District with a record-high support and a District with a low support of less than 5 percent (Shchuchyn District). The other Regions had some succession. However the geographic center of the 1994 high-support area somehow survived. According to the official data more than 20 percent of the voters supported the democratic candidate, which together with the Minsk District was a record of voting in towns and villages. Smarhon District was supported by Miadziel and Vilejka Districts, thus forming a single area. The “more than 15 percent” zone included also the Hlybokaje District and the enclaves of Minsk and Dziarzhynsk Districts (it followed the 1994 model). A separate enclave was formed by Brest and Zhabinka Districts, which were in the high support zone this time. Perhaps it happened due to a relatively low degree of falsifications there.

The 10 - 15 percent zone is broken into enclaves and reflected partly the 1994 trends. It included the center of the Hrodna Region (Bierastavitsa, Masty, Vaukavysk, Lida and Navahrudak Districts). At the same time, according to the official data, the whole landscape of the Hrodna Region had changed considerably. A lot of districts with the high support level in 1994 disappeared,

e.g. Iuje – 44% in 1994, 9% in 2001. The 10 – 15 percent zone also included a part of the Brest Region, along the line Kamianiets - Ivatsevichy and Luniniets Districts. The 1994 Stolín phenomenon was leveled; in 2001 it did not show anything. The central part of the Minsk Region belonged to this zone as well. The Northern part of Minsk Region and the Western part of Vicebsk Region were of a special interest because they reflected the 1994 high support zone. The Horki District of the Mahilou Region was an enclave then. Summing up the results, we notice that the largest part of the support zone of more than 15 percent and 10 – 15 percent was again in the territory of the Western Belarus, including some environs of Minsk. Regardless of the fact that the political landscape based on the official data looked differently certain tendencies remained the same.

The 5 – 10 percent support zone included the rest of the Minsk Region (except Luban District), the rest of the Hrodna and Vicebsk Regions (except Polatsk District), representing a kind of an analog of the 1994 intermediate zone, and the North – Western part of the Mahilou Region, including the Mahilou District.

It is interesting that the support zone of less than 5 percent formed a complete area connected strongly to the Mahilou and Homiel Regions, coinciding with the districts which suffered from the Chernobyl catastrophe. The lowest support center left the Mahilou Region and moved to the Homiel Region. The districts with less than 2 percent support (Lelchytsy, Brahín and

Vietka) were in the Homiel Region only and did not create a single area.

### III. The 2006 Presidential elections

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The year of 2006 is the most difficult from the point of view of analysis. According to the official data, the political map became more monotonous, there was not enough information too. It is extremely difficult to specify the zones of high and low support levels. The uniformity was strengthened by the active work of the regional and local bureaucracy. However it is still possible to trace some tendencies even in these conditions. There was a "traditional" oppositional center: it no longer included the Smarhon District however it still included Maladziechna and Vilejka Districts, as well as Slonim and Pinsk Districts (more than 10 percent support). Unfortunately, there is no information concerning the Minsk Region. Comparing the zones of 5 – 10 percent and less than 5 percent, one might say that the former does not form a single area however included the Central and Western Belarus. The latter included the Eastern part of Vicebsk, Mahilou and almost all of the Homiel Regions, plus six Districts of the Hrodna and eight of the Minsk Regions. The Homiel Region was the same. For the sake of territorial analysis, we shall talk about the areas where there was more than 7 percent support and those with less than 2 percent support. The former has a number of enclaves without forming a single area, from the North – West to the North – East, from Kamianiets and Luniniets Districts to Braslau and Hlybokaje Districts, coin-

ciding with the Western and Central Belarus. The latter is in the Homiel Region, along the line Lelchyttsy – Naroula and Karma – Lojeu.

### Conclusions

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Conclusions of this article would only be preliminary as there were lots of facts which had to be studied additionally.

Firstly, the majority of the official data concerning the 1994, 2001 and 2006 Presidential elections reflect certain territorial disproportions and allow to specify geographic areas, which existence needs to be explained, especially considering the probable manipulations of the data in 2001 and 2006. There is a certain continuity of the areas from 1994 to 2006, especially in Vicebsk Region.

Secondly, it is obvious that the authorities leveled the regional differences, making it difficult to structure the regions politically. A particular levelling attention was given to the Hrodna Region.

Thirdly, it is possible to say that a considerable amount of facts proved that there were stable regional differences along the line West – East (or North - West to South - East), however a detailed border should be studied additionally. The territorial division is not linked (at least directly) to the Polish minority and Catholic population. A conventional center of the oppositional moods is on the border of the Minsk, Hrodna and Vicebsk Regions; the "anti-center" is formed by the Districts of Homiel Region alongside the Russian and Ukrainian border.

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