

New Polls: Belarusians Support Lukashenka and Do Not Want an Euromaidan

At the end of April, the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies published the results of two polls.

The polls demonstrate that the crisis in Ukraine became an informational tidal wave that has been sweeping over Belarus, with 90% of Belarusians following the events. Belarusian society has become strongly politicised for the first time in many years.

However, most Belarusians consider the ousting of Yanukovych a coup and do not want to host a similar revolution in Belarus. Moreover, Belarusians prove reluctant to participate in mass protests and enjoy the current stability provided to them under the Lukashenka regime, which the growth of his approval rating proves.

For Lukashenka, the crisis has been a challenge and a gift at the same time. Relations with Russia have deteriorated and Belarus may yet lose its valued Ukrainian markets. Yet Lukashenka still now has the chance to become a true national leader and consolidate the nation as the protector of sovereignty of Belarus.

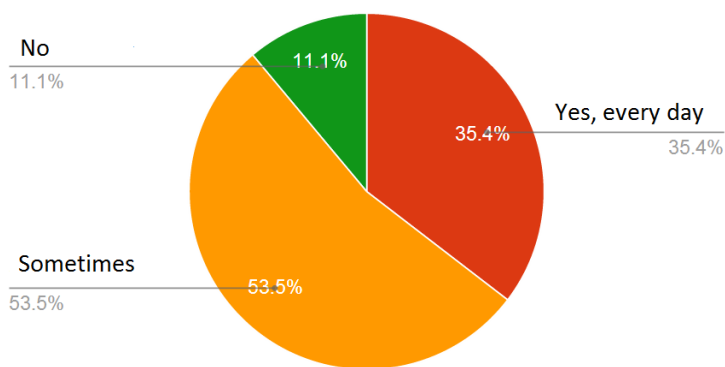
Mass opinion on Euromaidan

Broader Belarusian public opinion on the events in Ukraine remains largely unstudied, since very few polls are held in Belarus. Those made by the government usually remain confidential. Perhaps the only publication on their public opinion recently appeared in a study done by the

Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, the oldest independent polling institute of Belarus currently registered in Vilnius.

The IISEPS conducted the poll in March, therefore it did not include the events surrounding Crimea or the current conflict in Eastern Ukraine. However, it provides a good picture of attitudes of Belarusians towards mass protests and coups, as well as shows the level of their attention to Ukraine events.

Did you follow political conflict in Ukraine, which ended in the ousting of president Yanukovich?

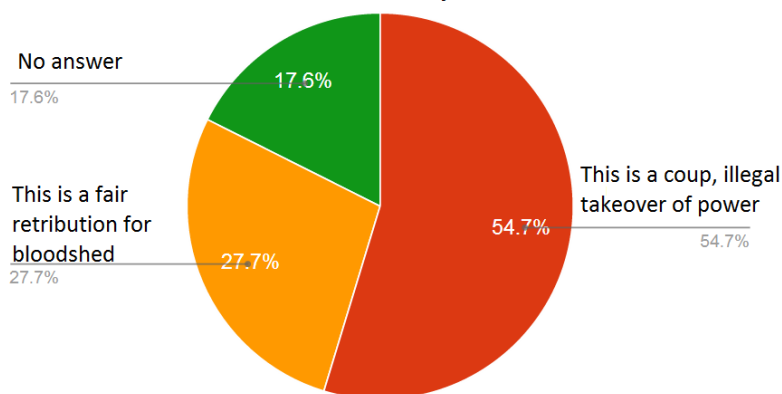


The poll shows that the crisis in Ukraine has been hugely influential in Belarusian media space. Almost 90% of Belarusians followed the crisis' developments. Moreover, a third of Belarusians reported that they followed the Ukrainian crisis every day. In Belarus, where real political struggle has not existed for quite some time, and most people are interested only in routine and private issues, these figures look like a populace awakening after a long political winter.

People were discussing Ukraine in the streets and in public places, which is the first such instance perhaps since the beginning of the 2000s. Every media outlet had Ukraine headlining, and these stories garnered a virtually unfathomable number of comments. Heated discussions were unfolding, dividing people into pro and against Maidan camps.

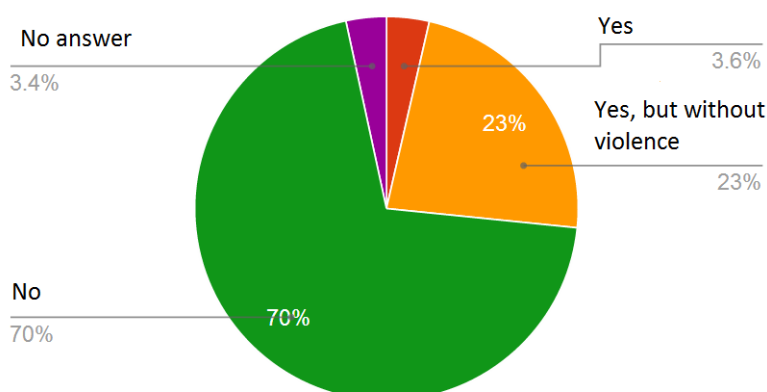
Many Belarusians were able to articulate for themselves their values on the matters of freedom, material wellbeing, national identity and violence. The events in Ukraine have had a significant on the minds of Belarusians, making them consider their own position and future choices.

President Yanukovich was ousted in Ukraine. What do you think of these developments?



A question on their personal perception of Euromaidan showed that a majority of Belarusians (55%) consider the ousting of Yanukovich a coup and not a democratic revolution or fair retribution. However, almost a third seems to support Euromaidan.

Would you like events similar to Ukrainian happen in Belarus?

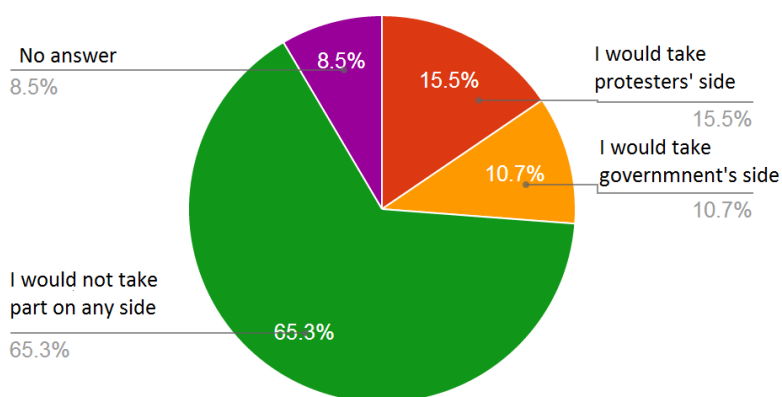


In this question Belarusians demonstrated their famous love for stability. They would rather not have a similar revolution even provided that it is peaceful. 23% of respondents would

accept a non-violent revolution in Belarus, while only 3.6% are ready to shed blood in the fight against Lukashenka regime. This means Belarus will hardly ever experience a revolution, at least until people have a minimum level of wellbeing and sense of security.

Although economically Belarusians feel that they are only slightly better off than Ukrainians in terms of corruption and security. For them, Belarus looks to be in a considerably position overall and people appreciate it. Ukraine has indeed become a fine example of poor government, associated, in public opinion, with scuffles in parliament, oligarchs and omnipresent corruption.

If events similar to Ukraine happen in Belarus, would you take part in them?



This diagram supports the previous one, and still sheds light on some interesting details. While most Belarusians state they are reluctant to participate in any kind of mass protests, only 11% are ready to defend the current political regime. This means the majority would simply observe the developments without interfering with them.

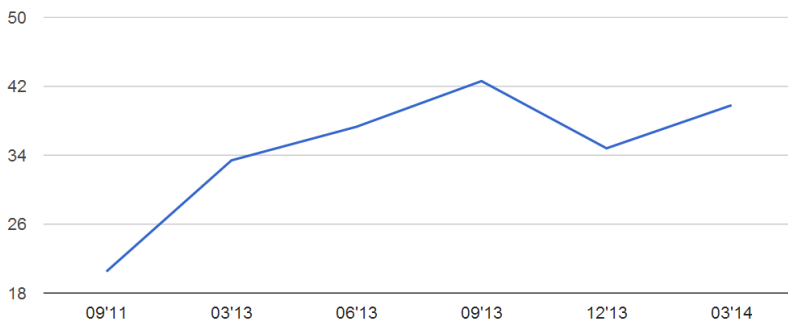
Perhaps some of them would change their mind and take one side or another, but the general trend seems to be relatively clear. And importantly, 15% are ready to struggle against the regime via a Belarusian Maidan, which is more than the number of its active defenders.

In the end, however, a majority Belarusians would accept any developments of potential conflict and largely prefer not to interfere – a strategy they have typically employed throughout their history.

A Present for Lukashenka before Elections

The same institution, IISEPS, also measured Lukashenka's approval rating in March 2014. Since December 2013 it has grown from 35% to 40%. Lukashenka surely remains far behind Putin, who currently enjoys an 82% approval rating according to Russian Levada-Centre estimates, and who has capitalised pretty well on the intervention in Ukraine under the “protection of Russian civilisation” mask.

Dynamics of Lukashenka's Approval Rating



But despite a much lower rating compared to Putin, Lukashenka has shown himself to be a true national leader in the Ukrainian conflict. Despite Belarus' heavy economic dependence on Russia and political and military union, he [refused to recognise the annexation of Crimea](#) and Belarus' official position remains in favour of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. He also spoke out against the federalisation of Ukraine, a point that Russia is strongly advocating for in negotiations with the west.

He is also continuously accusing Yanukovich of outrageous levels of corruption in Ukraine and named it the root of Ukraine's current malaise. Moreover, Lukashenka quickly recognised the new government of Ukraine, personally met with

Turchynov and later discussed with him some developments in Ukraine over the phone – a move Vladimir Putin would hardly approve of.

[In his address to the nation and parliament on 22 April](#), Lukashenka for the first time spoke about protecting the Belarusian language and ordered the KGB to identify pro-Russian "diversionists". He also criticised the position of Russia on the Eurasian Union, the main geopolitical project of Vladimir Putin.

The moves of Lukashenka appealed not only to his traditional electorate, but also to many of his opponents who agreed with him on at least some of his points. Ahead of the 2015 presidential elections, Lukashenka may appear to be a true national leader and protector of Belarus against Russian aggression. Meanwhile, his opponents remain in the shadows and are largely unknown to the majority of Belarusians.

Although economically [quite damaging for Belarus](#), Lukashenka received an invaluable present before the next elections – the chance of becoming a truly popular leader and consolidate the nation. At this point it looks like Lukashenka can already be called the next president of Belarus, and maybe this time around he will not even need to use fraud to do it.