

Belarus becomes safer, but political persecution continues

Numbeo, the world's largest database of user-confirmed data about cities and countries worldwide, ranked Belarus the safest country in the region in 2017. Other global metrics also indicate that Belarus is a relatively safe part of the world.

Domestic trends demonstrate that all kinds of crime have decreased over the past decade, with the exception of drug crime. However, political repression tarnishes the generally positive picture, as world media and local journalists report on these cases extensively.

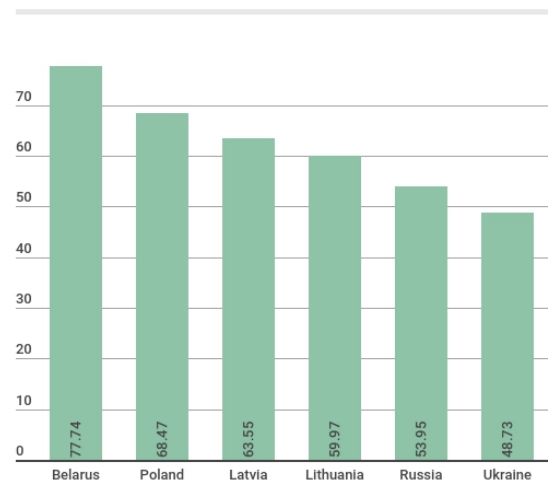
The authorities should stop targeting the regime's opponents if they want to further develop relations with the civilised world and strengthen the rule of law at home.

Belarus: a safe country according to world rankings

In 2017, Belarus scored 10th in a ranking of crime and safety published by Numbeo, the world's largest database of user-contributed data about cities and countries worldwide. The country went up by 15 positions since 2016. According to the ranking, Belarus's neighbours are far more dangerous: Poland took 30th place, Latvia – 40th, Lithuania – 50th, Russia – 67th, and Ukraine – 85th.

In a world ranking of intentional homicide, Belarus took 116th position, remaining between Albania and North Korea. In total, the rating included 219 countries. This rating was last compiled in 2013 according to the methodology of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Compilers of the rating recorded 5.1 murders per 100,000 people in Belarus, while in 2016 the figure decreased to around 4.5.

Country safety index according to Numbeo (2017)



This is one of the most reputable indicators to assess the overall level of physical security in a particular state or region. Often, it is perceived as an index of the level of violence in society as a whole.

In the Global Terrorism Index 2016, prepared by the Institute of Economics and Peace in cooperation with the University of Maryland, Belarus scored 86th of 130 countries. According to the index, Belarus is a country with a low level of terrorism. Among the countries of the former USSR, Ukraine has the highest level of terrorism and ranked 11th. Russia (30), Tajikistan (56), Kyrgyzstan (84) also appeared below Belarus as more prone to terror. However, neighbouring EU members – Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania – ranked 130th as countries with no threat of terrorism at all.

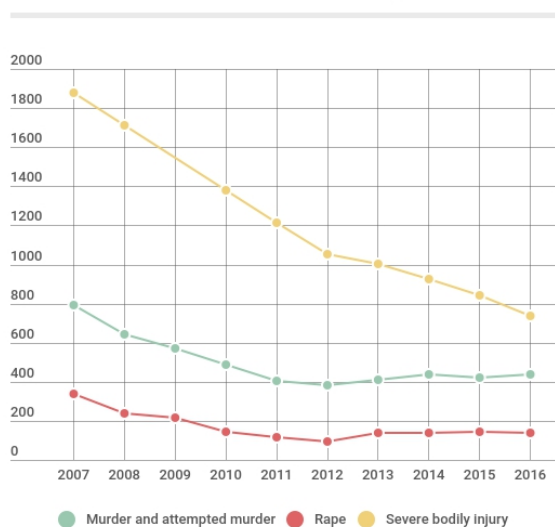
The American nonprofit Prison Policy Initiative also published a study according to which Belarus ranks 12th in the world in terms of number of prisoners. According to their data, Belarus has 306 inmates per 100,000 people. A total of about 200 countries, along with every US state, is included in the ranking.

The United States was the world leader in this ranking, with

693 inmates per 100,000 people. Turkmenistan, a post-Soviet authoritarian regime, scored second with 583 prisoners, while Russia was third with 453. Belarus's other neighbours keep fewer people locked up: examples include Lithuania (254), Latvia (224), Poland (189), and Ukraine (173).

Domestic crime trends

Number of crimes in Belarus, 2007-2016



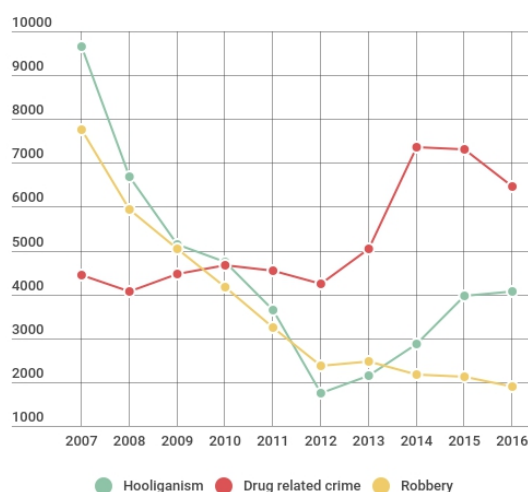
Belarus has experienced a steady decline in most types of crime over the past decade. Theft, the most common crime, fell by almost three times – from 103,000 to 37,000 cases. Serious crimes, such as murder and attempted murder, rape, and assault all decreased about 2.5 times, while robbery fell by four times. Hooliganism also halved, although it had seen a certain upsurge since 2012.

The only crime that grew over this period appears to be drug-related crime. Following an upsurge in the popularity of synthetic drugs (also known as spice) in the 2010s which lead to [many deaths](#), the government started paying more attention to drug issues and [made anti-drug legislation much harsher](#). Thus, the rise in drug crime could simply be a result of tougher legislation and the growing attention of the police,

rather than a decrease in drug trade or consumption.

Nevertheless, alcohol remains the number one trigger of crime in Belarus. Belarusians commit over 80% of murders while drunk. Moreover, it remains one of the main [causes of suicide](#).

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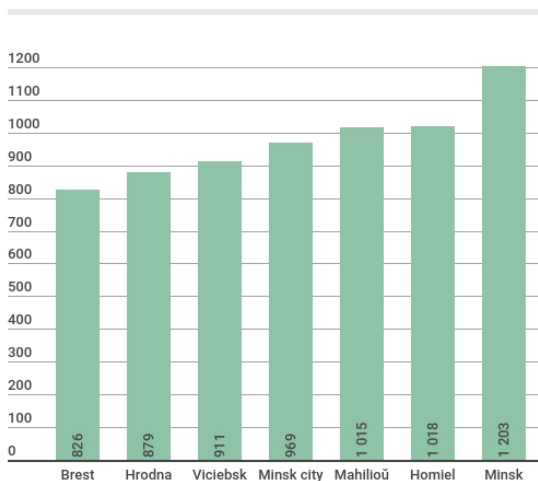


As for the regional distribution of crime, the western regions of the country are traditionally less crime-ridden than the eastern and central regions. This could be explained by their large [Roman Catholic](#) and [Protestant](#) communities, as well as their geographical and historical proximity to Europe. Although Homiel Region was traditionally considered the [most criminal](#) in Belarus, it has now ceded its place to Minsk Region: the economic, financial, and human resources centre of the country.

Safety only for loyal citizens

Although Belarus may indeed be safer than its post-Soviet peers and neighbours, and the crime rate is consistently decreasing, one detail spoils its 'safe' image. Politically motivated persecution of the opposition and activists continues to be widespread. When it comes to politics, the good guys and bad guys reverse roles.

Crime rate in Belarusian regions per 100,000 people (2016)



False evidence presented by police officers during political trials has already become a legend within civil society circles. The same officers who detain activists after mass rallies or other demonstrations usually serve as the primary witnesses. Their usual formula at the witness stand is that activists were swearing, waving their hands, and shouting anti-governmental slogans. In many

cases, the police testify against a particular person even though they did not personally detain him or her or the suspect was even abroad at the time.

Their false evidence usually serves as grounds for administrative arrest or a fine. In more serious criminal cases, such as the recent [White Legion case](#) (a supposed illegal armed group), the authorities often fabricate a more sophisticated set of evidence, bolstered by [large-scale TV propaganda](#). For instance, in the White Legion case, the KGB brought in a false informant ('Frau A' from Germany), accused the detainees of links with ISIS, plans to bomb the Moscow metro, and other outrageous claims.

This machine of political repression mars the image of Belarus as a safe country, and the world media and local journalists report extensively on such cases. Thus, Belarus retains its reputation as a dictatorship despite the many positive trends. The authorities should stop such repressive practises targeting the regime's opponents if they want to further develop relations with the civilised world and strengthen rule of law at home.