

The 'spiral of silence' in election campaigns in a post-Communist society

The case of Belarus

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This article analyses the 'spiral of silence' as a mechanism of political communication in post-Communist Belarus in the cases of the presidential elections in 2001 and the general election in 2008, using methods of public opinion polls and content analysis of Belarusian state-run press. The authors argue that the phenomenon of the 'spiral of silence' – a classic problem in political communication – has some important peculiarities in the case of authoritarian post-Communist societies. On the one hand, authorities use mass media as an instrument of political control, mainly control of public opinion, especially during important political campaigns (elections and referenda). On the other hand, post-Communist society has an 'additional precondition' for the effectiveness of this mechanism: contrary to democratic societies (in both developed and developing countries), people in this society have much less cultural and psychological heritage of resistance to pressure from the majority due to the dominance of the principles of collectivism and unity.

Theoretical framework

Individuals are pressured by others to conform to standards of dress, behaviour and attitudes in a wide range of circumstances, even when the pressure comes from outside social circles. German sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann took the idea of group pressure to conform and added another component: the influence of the media. Noelle-Neumann posited that public opinion is formed as individuals try to determine whether their

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opinions are in the majority – a process that involves, by definition, the media because the media is the way that people gauge public opinion.

Noelle-Neumann maintains that media reporting helps individuals decide which opinions they might express without being seen as social outcasts and which opinions are in the minority. As individuals self-censor their minority opinions, those opinions do not get expressed, and thus do not get reported at all in the media, or only in minority media.

Thus, a spiral effect occurs, when the majority expresses a dominant opinion and the minority keeps silent, which makes the majority opinion seem even more dominant and the minority view seem even further outside the mainstream. The media publicises which opinions are dominant, which opinions are on the increase and which opinions may cause social isolation if they are stated in public.

Over the years, this 'spiral of silence' has been somewhat controversial, with studies employing a variety of research designs and producing inconsistent results. Most important, studies contend, is the need to consider socio-cultural differences when examining the spiral. Cross-cultural factors are a key variable in the decision to speak out on an issue, and some researchers recommend returning to a macroscopic view of the theory (e.g. Rosenberry & Vicker 2009). Although considerable research has been devoted to the effects of the spiral of silence on electoral behaviour in Western democratic societies, much less attention has been paid to its development and application in the post-Communist societies.

Our major hypothesis could be formulated as follows:

In an authoritarian society, where the state authorities use mass media as an instrument of political control, especially during important political campaigns (elections, referenda, etc.), the 'spiral of silence' becomes a mechanism not just of political communication, but of control over public opinion. The socio-cultural peculiarities of post-Communist society significantly strengthen its effectiveness.

Methodology

In this paper we use two basic research methods – a series of nationwide public opinion polls conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) in 2001 and 2008 (usually 1500 respondents aged 18+ were interviewed face to face; sampling error did

not exceed 0.03)¹ – with the active participation of the authors, as well as a content analysis of Belarusian state-run press conducted by one of the authors in 2008 (Yuran 2008). Sources for content analysis included:

- the state-run national daily newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (Soviet Belarus), the most popular state-run Russian-language newspaper, with a weekly circulation of more than 2.5 million; 169 articles from 120 issues were analysed
- the state-run national daily newspaper *Zvyazda* (Star), the most popular state-run Belarusian-language newspaper, with a weekly circulation of 168,000; 237 articles from 125 issues were analysed
- the state-run regional newspaper (twice weekly) *Vecherniy Brest* (Evening Brest), with a weekly circulation of 50,000; 52 articles from 50 issues were analysed.

The time frame was September–November 2005 (224 articles were analysed); September–November 2007 (234 articles were analysed). In total, 458 articles from 297 issues of the above three newspapers were analysed.

Belarus: politics and media

Background

After more than seven decades as a constituent republic of the USSR, Belarus attained its independence in December 1991. It has retained closer political and economic ties with Russia than any of the other former Soviet republics. Belarus and Russia signed a treaty on a two-state union on 8 December 1999, envisioning greater political and economic integration.

Since his election in July 1994 as the country's first president, Alexander Lukashenko has steadily consolidated his power through authoritarian means.



Figure 1 Location of Belarus

¹ www.iiseeps.org/polls

Government restrictions on freedom of speech and the press, peaceful assembly and religion continue.²

Power

Since sweeping to power 15 years ago, President Alexander Lukashenko has consolidated his hold on the former Soviet republic. His methods have brought criticism from the West, particularly the US Bush administration, which has described him as the 'last dictator in Europe' at the head of an 'outpost of tyranny' (Feduta 2003). Lukashenko was able to seek re-election for an unprecedented third term thanks to a controversial national referendum in 2004 that abolished the constitution's two-term presidential limit.

Human rights campaigners and Western governments complain that opposition voices are harassed and stifled, and independent media have been all but eliminated. Opposition activists are closely monitored by the secret police, still called the KGB. However, the president does enjoy the support of many Belarusians for maintaining political and economic stability – a campaign slogan in 2006 and 2008.

Media

Most media, especially broadcast, are state owned, and only a dozen independent newspapers offer alternative viewpoints. These are facing constant oppressions – legal, economic and political. The weekly circulation figures for the two most popular state-run newspapers (*Soviet Belarus* and *The Republic*) are more than 2,750,000 compared to weekly circulation figures of less than 60,000 for two main independent newspapers (*People's Will* and *Belarusians and Market*). State-run media tend to translate only one viewpoint: pro-Lukashenko, pro-government.

Similarly, the government has kept an unwavering grip on the press distribution channels and telecoms infrastructure. The average correlation of state-run and independent mass media (of public-political type) in Belarus is approximately 10:1 (not taking into account the various obstacles independent media are facing to the dissemination of their publications) (Bykovski 2006, p. 298).

² Belarus, in CIA – *The World Factbook*. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

The 'spiral of silence' in the presidential elections of 2001

The 2001 Belarusian presidential elections were held on 9 September 2001, with three candidates competing. The incumbent president, Alexander Lukashenko, was one of the candidates running for office. Two other candidates who sought to unseat Lukashenko were Vladimir Goncharik (a candidate from the United Democratic Opposition) and Sergei Gaidukevich (leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus).

According to the country's central election commission, 4,666,680 people, or 75.65% of those who took part in the voting, voted for Mr Lukashenko; 15.65% for trades union leader Vladimir Goncharik, the candidate supported by a broad opposition coalition; and 2.48% for Sergei Gaidukevich.

Belarus's presidential election 'failed to meet the OSCE commitments for democratic elections formulated in the 1990 Copenhagen Document and the Council of Europe standards', the International Limited Election Observation Mission (ILEOM) said on 10 September, the day after the election (Manaev 2006, pp. 522–523).

However, the results of national public opinion polls conducted by IISEPS in July 2001 (before the election) and September–October 2001 (just after the election) (Manaev 2006) demonstrate not just different results, but one of the important mechanisms that insured a victory for Alexander Lukashenko (Table 1).

Table 1 For whom would you like to vote for at the presidential election? (July 2001)

Answer	%
For A. Lukashenko	35.9
For a candidate from the United Democratic opposition	9.8
For an independent candidate	24.6
For a candidate from another party	2.2
Don't know/no answer	25.8

As one can see, three months before the 2001 presidential elections 35.9% of respondents said that they planned to vote for Lukashenko. The combined percentage of those who wanted to vote for other candidates was 36.6%. This number is a little bigger than the number of Lukashenko supporters. The correlation of those who wanted to vote for Lukashenko to those who wanted to vote for other candidates is 98/100 (almost 1/1).

But when the same people, at the same time, were asked about their opinion on how the majority would vote, this revealed different numbers: 44.5% of respondents assumed that the majority would vote for

Lukashenko, and only 21.5% surmised that the majority would vote for one of the other candidates (Table 2). This correlation is very different: 207/100 (more than 2/1).

Table 2 In your opinion, for whom do you expect the majority of Belarusians will vote? (July 2001)

Answer	%
For A. Lukashenko	44.5
For a candidate from the United Democratic opposition	5.4
For an independent candidate	13.7
For a candidate from another party	2.4
Don't know/no answer	33.1

The results in Table 3 illustrate how people actually voted: 57.9% of them gave their votes to Lukashenko, with 31.3% combined for other candidates. The proportion here is 185/100 (close to 2/1).

Table 3 For whom did you vote in the presidential election of 2001? (September/October 2001)

Answer	%
For A. Lukashenko	57.9
For V. Goncharik	27.9
For S. Gaidukevich	3.4
Don't know/no answer	10.8

Table 4 shows the cumulative results and their correlations.

Table 4 Cumulative results and their correlations

Answer	July 2001	October 2001
Respondents themselves – for A. Lukashenko	35.9%	57.9%
Respondents themselves – for other candidates	36.6%	31.3%
Expected majority – for A. Lukashenko	44.5%	
Expected majority – for other candidates	21.5%	
Respondents themselves – don't know/no answer	25.8%	10.8%
Expected majority – don't know/no answer	33.1%	
Correlations		
Respondents themselves – for A. Lukashenko/other candidates	0.98	1.85
Expected majority – for A. Lukashenko/other candidates	2.07	

The correlation between those who wanted to vote for Lukashenko and those who wanted to vote for other candidates (almost 1/1) appears to differ from the correlation between those who assumed that the majority of Belarusians would vote for Lukashenko and those who assumed that the majority would vote for other candidates (more than 2/1). Surprisingly, the correlation of those who actually voted in favour of Lukashenko to those who voted for other candidates (1.85) is closer not to 0.98 (as voters really intended to vote), but to the ‘expected majority voting’ (2.07). And that brings us to the conclusion that people followed the will of the majority, or, what actually happened, they followed what they thought was the intention of the majority. In other words, we are facing the phenomenon of the ‘spiral of silence’.

The ‘spiral of silence’ in the general elections of 2008

The Belarusian parliamentary election was held on 28 September 2008. The 110 seats in the House of Representatives were at stake.³ According to the official results, the oppositional parties failed to gain any of the 110 available seats, all of which were given to parties and non-partisan candidates loyal to President Alexander Lukashenko.

The Central Election Commission declared this to be due to the overwhelming popular fear of mass demonstrations and of the ‘radical political changes’ demanded by the opposition. This declaration was met with immediate anti-government demonstrations in the centre of Minsk, protesting perceived electoral fraud. President Lukashenko commented that the opposition in Belarus is financed by foreign countries and is not needed.

According to the OSCE, the elections were non-democratic, and the work of international observers was seriously hindered as the observers were refused access to the facilities where the votes were counted.

Discussed below are the results of the July 2008 (three months before the elections, when the official campaign started), September 2008 (just before the elections) and October 2008 (just after the elections) IISEPS national public opinion polls,⁴ which once again clearly demonstrate how the ‘spiral of silence’ works during election campaigns.

³ 276 candidates for the House of Representatives registered in Belarus. National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus. Available at <http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/F944D00B0205AA4EC2257B400429894?Open Document>.

⁴ Results of National Opinion Polls, IISEPS Archives. Available at <http://iiseps.org/earhdata.html>.

Right before the beginning of the general election campaign, 39.6% wanted to vote for a supporter of Lukashenko and 49.1% for other contestants (Table 5). The correlation between these people is 81/100 (i.e. 8/10).

Table 5 For which candidate would you like to vote? (July 2008)

Answer	%
For a supporter of President Lukashenko	39.6
For an opponent of President Lukashenko	17.7
For a neutral candidate	31.4
Don't know/no answer	11.3

At the same time, 54% of respondents thought that the majority would give their votes to Lukashenko's supporters and 26.9% assumed that the majority would follow Lukashenko's other contestants (Table 6). This correlation is 200/100 (or 2/1).

Table 6 For which candidate do you think the majority of Belarusians will vote? (July 2008)

Answer	%
For a supporter of President Lukashenko	54.0
For an opponent of President Lukashenko	13.3
For a neutral candidate	13.6
Don't know/no answer	19.1

As the campaign approached its end, people's opinions changed and, immediately before the elections, 43.5% of people were ready to give their votes to Lukashenko's supporter and 41.5% to other contestants (Table 7). The correlation between these people is 104/100 (compared to 8/10 three months before – this difference is not crucial but visible).

Table 7 For which candidate would you like to vote? (September 2008)

Answer	%
For a supporter of President Lukashenko	43.5
For an opponent of President Lukashenko	19.6
For a neutral candidate	21.9
Don't know/no answer	15.0

Table 8 illustrates the really crucial difference.

Table 8 In your opinion, for which candidate will the majority of Belarusians vote? (September 2008)

Answer	%
For a supporter of President Lukashenko	59.6
For an opponent of President Lukashenko	10.6
For a neutral candidate	9.4
Don't know/no answer	20.4

Immediately before the elections, 59.6% of respondents assumed that the majority of people would vote for Lukashenko's supporter and only 20% expected the majority to follow Lukashenko's opponents. Three times more people thought that the majority would support Lukashenko's supporter: this correlation is almost 3/1.

Table 9 shows how people actually voted.

Table 9 What was your choice in the 2008 general election? (October 2008)

Answer	%
A supporter of President Lukashenko	31.6
An opponent of President Lukashenko	4.2
A neutral candidate	13.7
Don't know/no answer	50.5

Just after the elections, 31.6% of respondents said they voted for Lukashenko's supporter and 17.9% said they voted for other (i.e. alternative) candidates (see Table 10). So, the final correlation is again approximately 2/1.

Table 10 reveals some very interesting facts.

- While the correlation between those who wanted to vote for supporters of President Lukashenko and those who wanted to vote for other candidates (i.e. by self-assessment) at the beginning of the electoral campaign was in favour of alternatives (0.81), the correlation between those who assumed the majority would vote for Lukashenko's supporters and those who assumed the majority would vote for other candidates (i.e. assessment of 'others') was more than double in favour of the President's supporters.
- During the electoral campaign these correlations changed significantly. The first correlation (by self-assessment) changed in favour of the President's supporters (from 0.81 to 1.05), while confidence in

Table 10 Cumulative results and their correlations

Answer	June 2008	September 2008	October 2008
Respondents themselves – for supporters of President Lukashenko	39.6%	43.5%	31.6%
Respondents themselves – for other candidates	49.1%	41.5%	17.9%
Expected majority – for supporters of President Lukashenko	54.0%	59.6%	
Expected majority – for other candidates	26.9%	20.0%	
Respondents themselves – Don't know/no answer	11.3%	15.0%	50.5%
Expected majority – Don't know/no answer	19.1%	20.4%	
Correlations			
Respondents themselves – for supporters of President Lukashenko/for other candidates	0.81	1.05	1.77
Expected majority – for supporters of President Lukashenko/for other candidates	2.01	2.98	

majority voting (assessment of 'others') in favour of the President's supporters increased by almost 1.5 times (from 2.01 to 2.98)!

- The correlation of actual results (i.e. those who actually voted in favour of Lukashenko's supporters to those who voted for other candidates (1.77)) was much closer not to 0.81 or 1.05 (as voters intended to vote three months earlier and just prior to the election), but to the 'expected majority voting' (2.01). A real surprise is that general correlations between self-assessment, assessment of 'others' and actual voting are similar to those we noted six years earlier at the presidential election!

The role of the media

Of course, many varied factors affected electoral behaviour – social, economic, political, legal, cultural, etc. (for example, strong administrative resources are usually involved in this process, i.e. direct orders of the state authorities to their employees and students to vote 'appropriately'). But, as the post-general election opinion poll (October 2008) proved, *a majority of voters (two-thirds) got information about running candidates and their programmes from the mass media*. As stressed earlier, the average ratio of state-run to independent mass media in Belarus is approximately 10:1. This means that the absolute majority of Belarusian voters get information about

running candidates and their programmes not just from the mass media, but from state-run outlets. And these have a very clear task – to support the existing regime ‘by information means’. In practice, this means that they try to promote ‘official candidates’ and discredit their opponents, or just to exclude them from political discourse altogether. It’s not surprising, then, that, in responding to the question: ‘In your opinion, do candidates for presidency have equal access to the state-run media as A. Lukashenko has?’ on the eve of election, 57.4% of respondents said ‘no’, while only 25.1% said ‘yes’ (and 17.5% don’t know/no answer).

Let us illustrate this with the results of content analysis of state-run press focused on media coverage of political leaders in Belarus, conducted before two major political campaigns – the presidential election in 2006 and the general election in 2008 (Figure 2).

As you can see, during both periods only the president and to much less degree MPs (one should keep in mind that the Belarusian parliament of that time had no opposition) gain the attention of the state-run media (almost 94%). All other political leaders receive media coverage, we might say, ‘accidentally’. Importantly, this correlation remained almost the same during both periods of time, despite a difference of two years (Figure 3).

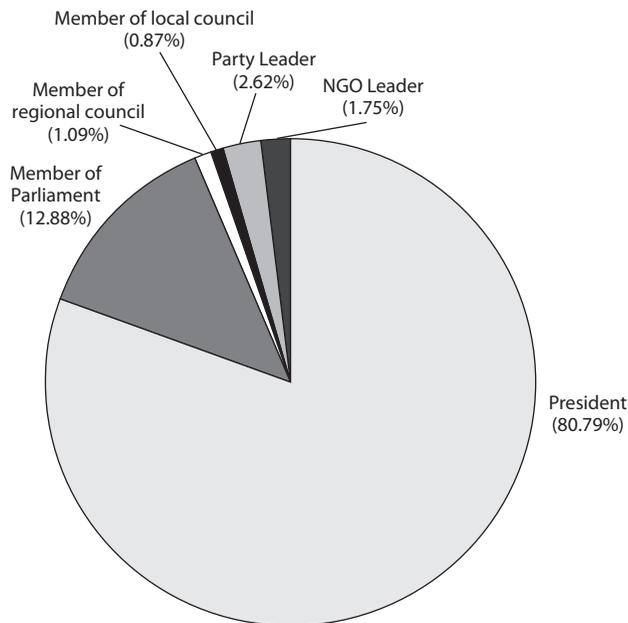


Figure 2 Total distribution of percentage of media coverage of political leaders before elections campaigns in 2006 and 2008

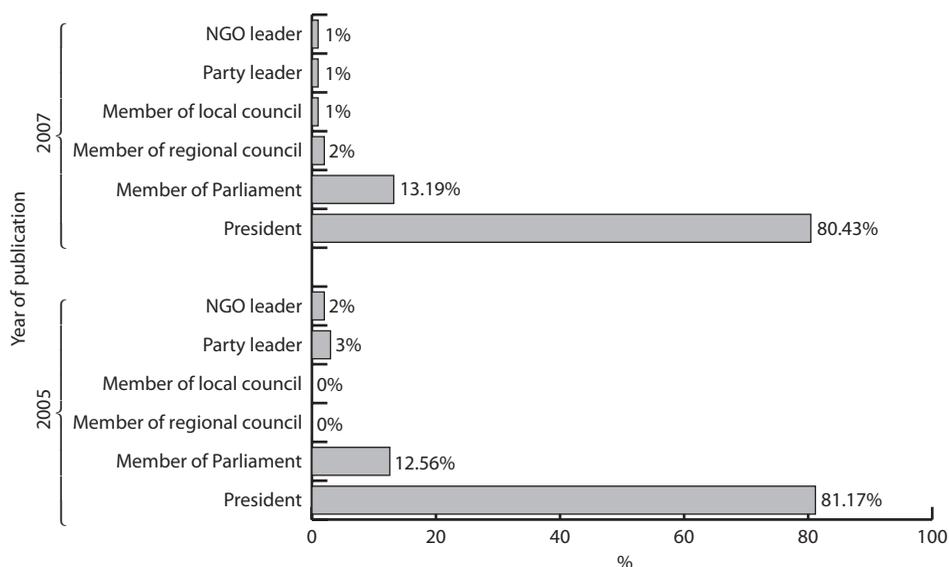


Figure 3 Comparative distribution of percentage of media coverage of political leaders before election campaigns in 2006 and 2008

One should also bear in mind the additional circumstances that make this situation even more dramatic for opposition and independent candidates.

- Election campaign periods are quite short (according to the Belarus Electoral Code, they officially start only three months prior to elections).
- During election campaigns the state-run media significantly minimise coverage of these candidates (because of growing control from the state authorities).
- Before and during election campaigns, the state-run media published results of various polls conducted by the state-run institutions (e.g. the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences, Belarus State University), demonstrating the 'obvious electoral advantage' of the incumbent president and 'insignificant support' to his opponents (usually more than 60% vs less than 10%) (Dmitrieva 2001).
- At the same time, authorities try to limit to the very minimum, or shut down altogether, any independent research centres that provide the public with the unbiased results of professional public opinion polls, and prevent manipulation of public opinion. The dramatic fortune of the IISEPS itself is a shining example of this kind (Jakubowicz 2006).

Almost the same picture was proved by the OCSE special observers who conducted content analysis of candidates' coverage by state-run TV.⁵

This analysis explains the significant changes in correlations of self-assessments (from 0.81 to 1.05), as well as correlations of assessments of 'others' (from 2.01 to 2.98) in favour of the president's supporters during the general election campaign of 2008: the coverage of the official campaign by the state-run mass media during the three months 'pumped' public expectations of 'majority voting' in favour of pro-Lukashenko candidates, making these candidates 'double visible' on the political stage. These 'pumped expectations' affected, first, self-assessments and, second, the actual voting in favour of 'official candidates'. On the other hand, expectations of 'minority voting' in favour of alternative candidates pushed out to 'the silence zone', and their candidates become 'invisible'.

Discussion and conclusion

Some politicians and experts tend to explain these results not by the mechanism of the 'spiral of silence' but by the dictatorial character of the Belarusian regime, and its tough control over the mass media, as well as the 'fear factor' (i.e. respondents' concern to face political pressure – or even repression – in the case of their expression of disloyalty during public opinion polling). This 'counter-argument' has been used in Belarus (and sometimes abroad) for almost two decades.

We do not deny these factors. They are real. But, first, they do not explain (or explain only partly) the phenomena described above. Second, some of these factors do not affect public opinion directly but just through the 'spiral of silence' mechanism. One of the very important aspects of the 'spiral of silence' is that supporters of one opinion do speak and express their position publicly, while their opponents, supporters of alternative opinion, remain silent. The opinion of official media, especially during election campaigns, affects the public not only directly, but also through its re-transmitting by convenient supporters of the existing political regime. The opinion of official media supports their confidence in their opinion and motivates them to express their opinion in public, while expression of the alternative opinion is, to some extent, limited by fear of facing pressure and retaliation.

However, the 'spiral of silence' works under these circumstances too, because the matter is not only what official media speak about but mostly

⁵ www.baj.by/osce.

what supporters to regime transmit to society and what its opponents remain silent about! The experience of 'colour revolutions' (Serbia 2000, Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004) proves that, under some circumstances, control over the media and the fear factor no longer works, and the 'spiral of silence' does not 'twist' in favour of the political regime; official propaganda does not motivate its supporters to speak loudly; and fear does not force its opponents to remain silent. This means that the problem is not in the control over the media and fear factor per se.

The explanation of the above changes in public opinion just by the authoritarian regime and fear of repression is not supported by our data. Thus, according to the post-electoral opinion poll (Table 3), 27.9% of respondents stated that they had voted in favour of the alternative, opposition candidate Vladimir Goncharik. The number of dissidents who are ready to suffer, to lose their jobs and security for their ideas, is limited in any society, including authoritarian ones. It is impossible to imagine that more than a quarter of the population in North Korea today, or in the USSR under Stalin or Brezhnev would, during opinion polling, express their support of an opposition politician and prefer him to the incumbent dictator. The society where each fourth member is a hero could not, by definition, be a dictatorship. That's why the explanation that support for Alexander Lukashenko and its dynamics is determined exclusively by fear of repression and the authoritarian character of the Belarusian regime, is obviously not enough. When more than a quarter of respondents expressed their support for the opposition candidate during post-electoral polling, it proves that those who expressed their support to the incumbent president were also sincere in their responses. Besides, only 4.7% of respondents to the post-election poll conducted in October 2001 said that they 'feared to vote in favour of the candidate that I really supported', and just 8.7% that they 'faced any pressure to vote in favour of some particular candidate'.

It is impossible to explain the gap between direct and projective ratings by referring only to the authoritarian character of the Belarusian regime and fear of repression (Tables 1 and 2). If people are afraid of expressing their disloyalty, they would be afraid to express it in any case, responding to questions about their attitudes to the incumbent president. After all, an expression of personal unwillingness to vote in favour of Alexander Lukashenko is much more seditious and dangerous behaviour than an abstract assessment of the opinion of the majority. If the 'fear factor' had an important meaning, the correlation between direct and projective ratings would be the opposite: the number of those who express readiness to vote in favour of Lukashenko (sincerely or due to fear) would be more

than those who said the majority would vote in favour of him. But the real correlation, as presented in Tables 1 and 2, does not prove this. This means that the mechanism of the 'spiral of silence' explains this gap more adequately than any other.

Finally, explanation of this gap as exclusively due to the authoritarian character of the Belarusian regime is also disproved by the correlation between respondents' electoral preferences and their political and economic attitudes. For example, questions about geopolitical preferences, advantages of a market or planned economy, and the desired extent of state paternalism, are not as politically sensitive as questions about attitudes to the president. Obviously, Belarus is not a totalitarian state where there is a high risk of facing repression for deviation from the ideological canon. Negative attitudes towards the integration of Belarus with Russia, positive attitudes to NATO enlargement, preferences for private rather than state ownership – all these opinions expressed during polling could not lead to any repression. If the interpretation of Lukashenko's popularity by the 'fear factor' were true, we should expect that the number of his supporters among those who agree and disagree with these opinions would be the same. When responding to the questions that do not directly indicate their political loyalty, people would respond sincerely, yet responding to the question about their attitudes towards the president would be influenced by fear of repression for their expression of disloyalty. However, the data do not prove this. On the contrary, they prove a very strong correlation between respondents' political and economic attitudes, and their attitudes to Alexander Lukashenko.

As one can see from Table 11, in April 2001 when the pre-electoral indoctrination of the population by the state-run media did not reach its maximum, President Lukashenko had an obvious advantage among supporters of attitudes and ideas that he promotes and personifies by himself, while he did not lead among those who had alternative views, and his rating was comparable with that of his opponents. In this case, his supporters' preferences seem quite rational and not determined by fear of repression: they prefer him just because he personifies and expresses their attitudes and ideas the most. Of course, the existing political regime and the official information policy affect the process of attitude formation, but in the frame of these social expectations the political choice of Belarusians is not determined by fear.

To reinforce this conclusion, let's compare these data with data from an August opinion poll conducted on the eve of elections.

Table 11 Dependence of electoral preferences on political and economic attitudes (April 2001), %*

	Electoral preferences (Whom will you vote for at the September presidential election?)					
	For Sergey Gaydukevich (4.5)	For Vladimir Goncharik (10.1)	For Semen Domash (8.1)	For Sergey Kalyakin (2.8)	For Alexander Lukashenko (39.8)	For Michael Chigir' (17.9)
Political and economic attitudes						
If a referendum about Belarus–Russia unification takes place today, how will you vote?						
For (56.6)	4.1	7.2	4.2	3.0	54.0	2.7
Against (28.4)	5.3	18.8	17.8	2.5	16.0	12.7
What variant of Belarus–Russia relations is the best from your point of view?						
Good-neighbour relations between independent states (38.4)	4.1	13.1	14.6	1.5	24.1	11.4
Union of independent states (33.7)	4.9	9.4	6.4	3.5	41.1	4.3
Unification into one state (26.5)	4.6	7.8	3.8	3.2	55.4	2.3
Is NATO enlargement eastwards a danger for Belarus?						
Yes (36.8)	3.2	8.8	4.6	3.6	50.4	3.1
No (23.5)	7.9	20.0	21.2	2.6	15.0	14.4
What type of enterprise would you like to work at?						
State-run (46.1)	4.1	9.0	6.5	2.4	56.1	4.6
Private (41.5)	4.8	11.6	9.4	2.5	21.9	8.6

* Tables 11 and 12 show comparable data for April 2001 and August 2001. Percentage for the whole sample is shown in brackets. Percentage more than average is shown bold.

As one can see from Table 12, in August 2001 when the pre-electoral indoctrination of the population by the state-run media reached its maximum, the pattern of correlation between the electoral preferences and political/economic attitudes of voters remained almost the same. This means that state propaganda is not all-powerful, but it could influence, including via the 'spiral of silence' mechanism, those people who had attitudes and ideas close to Alexander Lukashenko's (i.e. his potential electorate was consolidating), as well as some people who had attitudes and ideas 'intermediate' between presidential and opposition electorates. Meanwhile, neither the massive influence of the state-run media nor the 'fear factor' significantly affected respondents who had attitudes and ideas alternative to those of the president. As in April, they demonstrated a quite moderate tendency to vote in favour of Lukashenko, and a more definite tendency to vote in favour of his opponents. *The major problem is that the latter were in the minority both in April and August (and, unfortunately, remained the minority during all 15 years of Lukashenko's rule).*

In our opinion, these arguments prove that the changes in electoral support to the authorities in Belarus during election campaigns can't be explained only by a dictatorial character of the Belarusian regime and its tough control over the mass media, as well as by the 'fear factor' in mass consciousness. Namely, the 'spiral of silence' reveals a latent mechanism of this process.

We should also stress that the IISEPS has (inside and outside the country) the strong image of an institution affiliated neither with the Belarusian authorities nor with the opposition, which is why the respondents did not perceive the pollsters themselves as pro- or anti-government, and the polling could not have a significant effect on their honesty.

Thus, our major hypothesis is proven: in the authoritarian society authorities use the mass media as an instrument of political control – and primarily the control of public opinion, especially during important political campaigns (e.g. elections and referenda). Under these circumstances the 'spiral of silence' becomes a mechanism not just of political communication, but a mechanism of insuring such control.

Moreover, post-Communist society has an 'additional precondition' for the effectiveness of this mechanism: in opposition to democratic societies (in both developed and developing countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa), people in post-Communist societies have a much weaker cultural and psychological heritage of resistance to pressure from the majority, and the state as its major representative. The principles of individualism and diversity dominant in Western societies

Table 12 Dependence of electoral preferences on political and economic attitudes (August 2001), %

	Electoral preferences (Whom will you vote for at the September presidential election?)				
	For Sergey Gaydukevich (4.1)	For Vladimir Goncharik (11.4)	For Semen Domash (12.1)	For Alexander Lukashenko (47.4)	Other options (25.0)
Political and economic attitudes					
	If a referendum about Belarus–Russia unification takes place today, how will you vote?				
For (57.4)	2.3	7.3	8.0	62.9	19.5
Against (20.9)	7.5	23.6	23.9	20.4	24.6
	What variant of Belarus–Russia relations is the best from your point of view?				
Good-neighbour relations between independent states (36.4%)	6.3	13.8	20.7	32.2	27.4
Union of independent states (41.4)	3.3	12.2	9.9	46.9	27.7
Unification into one state (20.5)	2.6	6.1	3.2	73.3	14.8
	What future for Belarus do you consider best?				
Join the EU (18.2)	6.2	19.2	29.3	14.1	31.2
Strengthen Belarus–Russia union (40.1)	2.5	7.9	7.9	59.4	22.3
Integrate with Russia (16.2)	1.6	5.3	4.1	75.6	13.4
Remain independent neutral state (14.6)	8.6	22.5	16.2	27.5	25.2
	What type of enterprise would you like to work at?				
State-run (47.3)	2.8	7.1	7.0	67.0	16.2
Private (38.5)	6.5	18.0	19.2	23.8	32.4
	What type of economy would you prefer for Belarus?				
Market economy with minor state regulations (33.3)	5.5	23.3	22.1	23.3	25.7
Market economy with significant state regulations (24.3)	3.3	9.8	7.3	60.2	19.5
Planned economy (18.2)	2.9	1.4	8.7	68.6	
	What type of ownership is more effective?				
Private (44.7)	5.7	20.2	19.6	24.9	29.6
State (40.8)	2.7	4.8	5.5	72.4	14.6

* Tables 11 and 12 show comparable data for April 2001 and August 2001. Percentage for the whole sample is shown in brackets. Percentage more than average is shown bold.

significantly reduce the effect of the ‘spiral of silence’, while the principles of collectivism and unity still dominant in post-Communist societies significantly strengthen it (when in non-post-Communist countries, like in Venezuela under President Hugo Chavez’s rule, developments look the same, they have the opposite origins, and are grounded not on the majority but on the minority) (Manaev 1996). Thus, 27% of Belarusian respondents in 2001 believed that ‘it is impermissible that citizens disagreeing with the authorities would publicly criticise the president and the government’; 21.2% believed that ‘activities of people or groups which I disagree with should be forbidden’; 47.1% believed that it is ‘possible’ or ‘sometimes possible to ignore laws if they hinder my activity’; 18.2% ‘completely’ or ‘mostly’ agreed that ‘for introducing order and discipline political and civil rights should be limited’; 30.2% preferred ‘strong hand’ to ‘democracy as better government’.

This means that institutional changes in post-Communist societies (including the introduction of free media and the rule of law) are not enough for real democratic transformations without parallel social-cultural changes (Jakubowicz 2007). And, as the cases of Belarus, Russia and other post-Communist countries demonstrate, these transformations take time (probably, at least a generation).

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