



# HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR FREE ELECTIONS

## **Elections of members of Local Councils of the Republic of Belarus of the twenty-eighth convocation**

### **Report on monitoring the registration of candidates for deputies**

*Observation is carried out by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Human Rights Center "Viasna" in the framework of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections".<sup>1</sup>*

*The observation campaign involves 29 long-term observers.*

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- according to the CEC<sup>2</sup>, 17,542 nomination groups were registered, which is 99.9% of the total number of nominations. In the previous local elections of 2014, the registration percentage was 99.7%.
- the election commissions did not create significant obstacles to the registration of nomination groups, with almost all groups having been registered. It should be noted that the election authorities registered all the groups formed to nominate members of political parties.
- 78% of the campaign's observers were not admitted directly to the verification procedures and were not able to report a comprehensive and unbiased approach by the commissions. The observers were only able to attend the meetings where the results of verification were announced and decisions on registration were taken. This significantly reduces credibility of the work of election officials, calls into question not only individual decisions to refuse the registration of candidates, but also the decisions which allowed their registration. This gives reason to believe that the Belarusian authorities have not put into practice the recommendations of the OSCE ODIHR.
- according to the CEC<sup>3</sup>, 22,278 candidates were registered, which is 98.09% of the total number of nominations. The percentage of registration of candidates from the pro-government political parties exceeds that of the opposition parties.
- statistics of refusals to register and withdrawn nominations not only demonstrate the level of political intensity, but also the level of applying the technical procedures of registration (verification of signatures, declarations, etc.) in the political struggle. In particular, the number of refusals to register candidates for the Minsk City Council was 23%, the Councils at the district level — 1.5%, the rural councils — 0.3%. Analysis of the practice and quantitative data suggest that the audits were used selectively, primarily against opposition candidates.

---

<sup>1</sup> Belarusian Helsinki Committee, <http://belhelcom.org>; HRC "Viasna", <http://spring96.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS27-sved16.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect\\_34-35.pdf](http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect_34-35.pdf)

## I. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In accordance with Art. 60 of the Electoral Code, the right to nominate candidates for deputies of local councils belongs to political parties, labor collectives and citizens (through signature-collecting). Political parties can nominate candidates for deputies of local councils only in the presence of registered organizational structures. Nomination of candidates for deputies of the corresponding councils is carried out by the labor collectives located in their respective territories. The nomination of candidates for local councils is carried out by a group of voters (nomination group) consisting of 3 to 10 people. A person nominated as a candidate should be supported by the voters residing in the territory of the electoral district, in the amount of: regional and Minsk City Council of Deputies — at least 150; district, city (cities of regional subordination) Councils of Deputies — at least 75; city (cities of regional subordination), settlement and rural Councils of Deputies — at least 20.

Collection of signatures may be conducted in the form of picketing. No permission is required if it is held in places not prohibited by local executive and administrative bodies.

Anyone with a right to vote, i.e. a citizen of Belarus who is 18 years old, can sign in support of the nomination of the proposed persons<sup>4</sup>. The voter has the right to sign in support of several candidates, but only once in support of the same candidate.

Participation of administrations of organizations in collecting signatures, as well as coercion in the process of collecting signatures and reward to voters for signing is not allowed. Applicants for the status of a candidate do not have the right to involve their subordinates in working hours in the implementation of nominating activities. Failure to do so may be grounds for refusal of. The signature sheets shall be submitted to the corresponding DEC to validate the signatures of voters and to authorize the registration of the candidate.

The Electoral Code has not regulated the ability of observers to attend the verification of signatures and other documents submitted for registration. Given that one of the grounds for refusal of registration of candidates is inaccurate signatures for nomination and other documents, monitoring the compliance of their verification with the provisions of the Electoral Code is crucial.

The procedure of verification of signatures is regulated by Art. 67 of the Electoral Code. The main requirement is that the audit covers not less than 20% of the number of signatures required for the registration of the candidate. If the number of invalid signatures exceeds 15% of the number of verified signatures, an additional check is carried out for another 15% of the amount required for registration. If the total number of invalid signatures exceeds 15% of the total number of verified signatures in signature sheets, verification of signatures is terminated. Validation of signatures in the signature sheets is carried out in the manner prescribed by para. 15, 16, 18 and 19 of Art. 61 of the Electoral Code.

---

<sup>4</sup>According to Art. 4 of the Electoral Code, citizens found incapable by the court, persons serving sentences in prisons, as well as persons held in pre-trial detention may not participate in the elections. Art. 58 of the Code entitles Russian citizens permanently residing in Belarus to run in local elections.

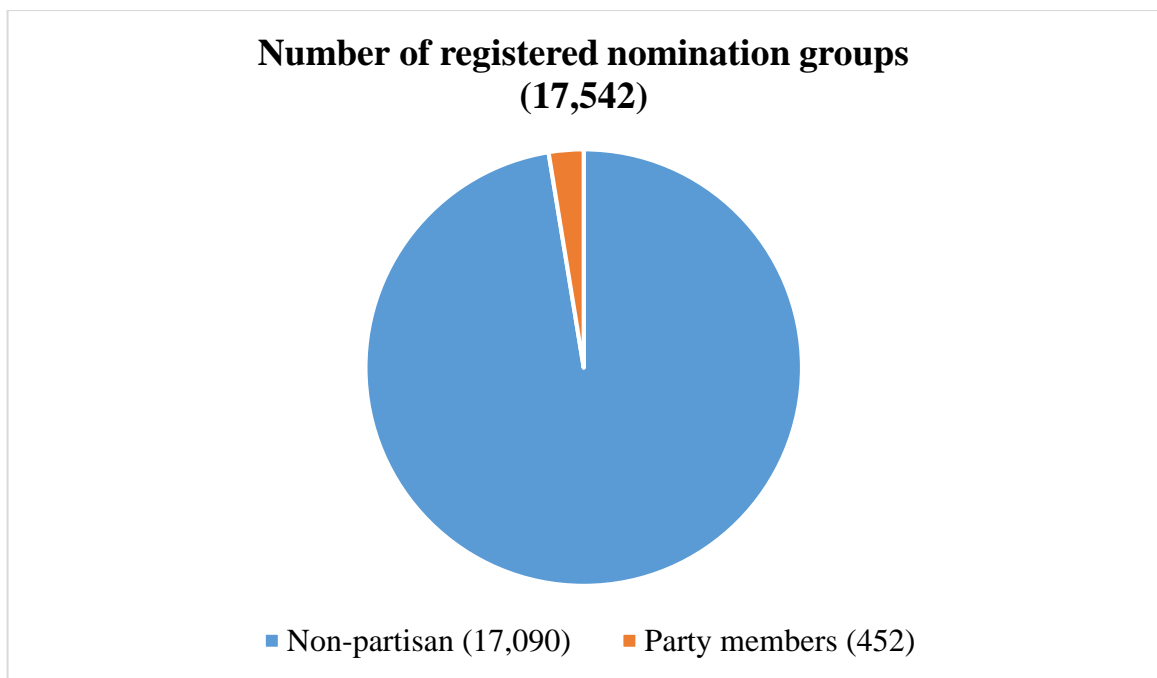
## II. REGISTRATION OF NOMINATION GROUPS

The registration of nomination groups and the issuance of certificates and signature sheets to members of these groups took place according to the Schedule. The CEC reports<sup>5</sup> that 17,542 nomination groups were registered. As few as 16 nomination groups were denied registration, 7 applications were withdrawn and 1 application was not considered. It should be noted that all the nomination groups formed to nominate members of political parties have been registered; refusals of registration only affected non-party nominees.

Compared to the previous elections, the number of failures in the registration of nomination groups decreased by more than two times. This is due, among other things, to the fact that during the last local elections the election commissions made an active use of a newly adopted provision allowing the running of a candidate in only one electoral district. When a person submitted applications for the registration of their nomination groups in several districts, district election commissions ruled to refuse the registration of all of the person's nomination groups.

During the current elections, there were no cases of refusing to register a nomination group on the grounds of applying for registration in several districts.

Thus, 2.6% of the total number of registered nomination groups are those formed to nominate party members and 97.4% — non-partisan nominees.



Observers of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections” report that the election commissions in most cases did not create obstacles to the registration of nomination groups.

In several cases, the registration of nomination groups was denied because of the nominee's criminal conviction. It was for this reason that the Rečyca district election commission refused to register two groups of *Tell the Truth* campaign. The Viciebsk city election commission refused to register a group formed to nominate Dzmitry Dycher, after it found an error in the submitted

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect\\_18-19.pdf](http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect_18-19.pdf)

documents (the application indicated electoral number 48, while there are only 40 districts located in cities).

According to the observers, the registration of nomination groups was marked by several flaws, e.g. in the Orša district commission<sup>6</sup>. The commission registered a nomination group of Sviataslau Chernikau, head of the Radunskaje agricultural enterprise, who specified his party affiliation as the “Belaya Rus party”. After observers of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections” objected that there is no such party in the country, the commission agreed but did not change its decision, promising to look into the matter.

### **III. COLLECTION OF SIGNATURES AND VERIFICATION OF NOMINATION DOCUMENTS**

In accordance with the Electoral Schedule, the local authorities identified the places prohibited for pickets to collect signatures (no later than December 4).

Almost all observers report certain liberalization of signature-collecting procedures. As compared to the elections in 2014 and 2016, the situation in Homiel has changed for the better: the number of places prohibited to collect signatures has decreased significantly, but this year the city’s central square was added to the list. The situation has improved in Maladziečna: collecting signatures is only forbidden on railway platforms and public transport stops. In Mahilioŭ, the number of prohibited places has significantly decreased. Similar information has been received from other regions.

100% observers of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" reported that at the stage of collecting signatures nomination groups were not hampered by the authorities. When collecting signatures was held in illegal locations, no significant interference was reported, either. There were no cases of collecting signatures by unauthorized persons.

There are still numerous cases of abusing administrative resources. In Orša, signatures for candidate Kazlova, director of the local branch of the Belarusian State University of Transport, running in electoral district number 24, were collected by her subordinates during working hours. Dormitory supervisor collected signatures from the college students.

Students of the BSU’s Faculty of Economy were sent through social networks to take part in the nomination pickets of separate candidates<sup>7</sup>. Those who agreed were promised a bonus of 15 rubles, and exemption from classes for the day. Valiantsin Stefanovich, expert of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections,” urged the Central Election Commission to investigate the report and to take appropriate measures. A probe conducted by the Minsk city election commission did not find any violations of the electoral legislation and the use of administrative resources in the actions of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union activists<sup>8</sup>.

In accordance with the Electoral Schedule, registration of candidates took place from 9 to 18 January.

The verification of signatures and other documents submitted for registration were still opaque. Only 22% observers were allowed to monitor the procedures. “Technically, I saw the commission members checking the signature sheets,” says the campaign’s observer in the

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://elections2018.spring96.org/be/news/88620>

<sup>7</sup> <https://elections2018.spring96.org/be/news/88612>

<sup>8</sup> <https://elections2018.spring96.org/be/news/88698>

Svietlahorsk district election commission. "But I did not see what was in those sheets, nor did I see the minutes of meetings and other documents. At the meeting of the commission, I only heard the results of their verification." 85% observers responded negatively to the question of whether the validation of information about the candidates in their applications and declarations of income and property was open and public.

In its final reports, the OSCE ODIHR also made critical observations on the verification procedure and mentioned as a priority recommendation that the observers should be allowed to monitor all aspects of the elections. "Measures should be taken to ensure unrestricted access of observers to all aspects of the electoral process. Observers should be able to observe the entire working process of election commissions, including verification of signatures and other documents for candidate registration, inspect voter lists, and receive certified copies of election commission protocols," the OSCE ODIHR said after observing the 2016 parliamentary elections<sup>9</sup>. The Belarusian authorities have not yet put into practice the OSCE ODIHR recommendations.

On January 14, the Maladziečna district election commission did not allow observer of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" Eduard Balanchuk to be present during the verification of signatures and nomination documents. Chairman of the commission Yurchyk said in a written reply: "Verification of voters' signatures and related information <...> is the responsibility of the members of the district election commission, not the observers. Similarly, the presence of an observer during the audit is not stipulated in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus." A similar situation was reported from the Mazyr district election commission, where observer Uladzimir Tseliapun was denied admission to the verification of signature sheets.

A similar ban was reported by observer Aleh Matskevich working with the Barysaŭ district election commission. On January 10, he submitted a written request, but received no response from the commission chairman. Leanid Markhotka in Salihorsk and Valiantsina Sviatskaya from Minsk were also denied the opportunity to observe the verification of signatures and documents submitted for the registration of candidates.

On January 17, during an incident at the entrance to the Žodzina City Executive Committee observer of the campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" Aliaksei Lapitski was not allowed to enter the building by a police officer. The observer was searched. An unknown plainclothes officer took part in the search. The incident was settled after the intervention of Iryna Karpovich, head of the executive committee's ideology department. According to the electoral legislation, observers do not require certificates when being accredited with the election commissions (certificates are only issued to international observers).

At the same time, there were some positive results of observers' interaction with the commissions. On January 16, Leanid Sudalenka was allowed to attend the meeting of a working group of the Homieĺ city election commission in charge of verifying the signatures and documents of persons nominated as candidates for the City Council of Deputies. Observer Raman Yurhel in Hrodna said that he was allowed to view the collected signatures and documents of the three candidates running in electoral district number 11. Observer Viktor

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486?download=true>

Adzinochanka was not forbidden to access the data in district election commission No. 18 in Homiel'. However, he was not able to do so because of inaccurately specified time of the meeting.

The election commissions announced reasons for denying registration. In particular, the Mahilioŭ city election commission did not register 12 candidates (including a pro-government nominee, director of Belgosstrakh's city office). It was reported that their documents contained false information about taxes, type of nomination and an earlier criminal conviction. Among those who disagreed with the decision of the Mahilioŭ city election commission was first deputy of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) Ihar Barysau. According to him, a number of signatures were found invalid because of wrong description of the boundaries of the district in which extra houses were included.

Most nominees and their nomination groups, according to the observers, were not involved in the process of verifying the documents for registration, often not even present at the meetings of election commissions.

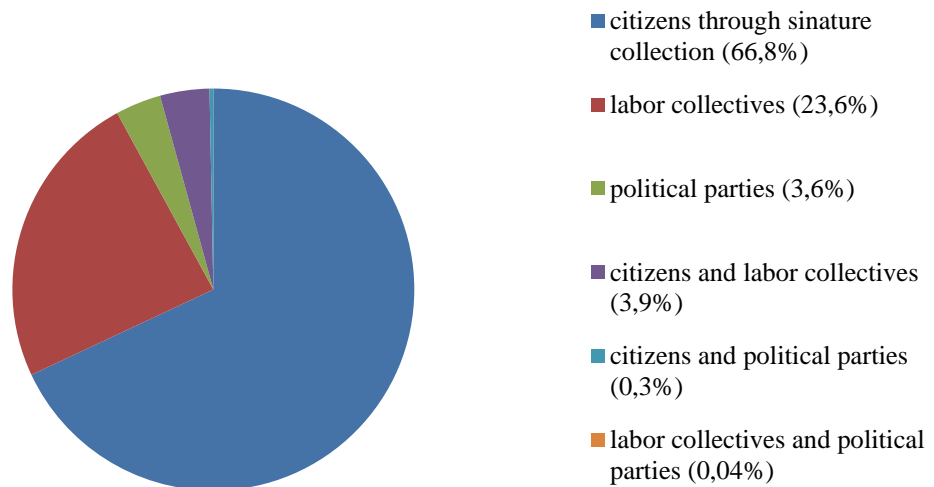
#### **IV. RESULTS OF THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL COUNCILS**

A total of 22,713 candidates for local councils of the twenty-eighth convocation have been nominated, which almost equals the number nominated during the last local elections of 2014 (22,784).

Most candidates were nominated by citizens through signature collection — 15,172, which represents 66.8% of the total number of nominees, labor collectives — 5,356 (23.6%), political parties — 813 (3.6%). Compared to the 2014 local elections, the number of candidates nominated by citizens through signature collection has increased by 8.8%. At the same time, the number of candidates nominated by labor collectives decreased by 15%. In comparison to the previous elections, there has been a 22% increase in the number of candidates nominated by political parties. However, their proportion is extremely low (about 4%).

Although the activity of labor collectives in the current elections has slightly decreased, however, they remain a significant actor in the campaign. They nominated more than a quarter of all candidates. Such a high level of political activity is unnatural for groups sharing the same employer, especially in today's difficult economic situation.

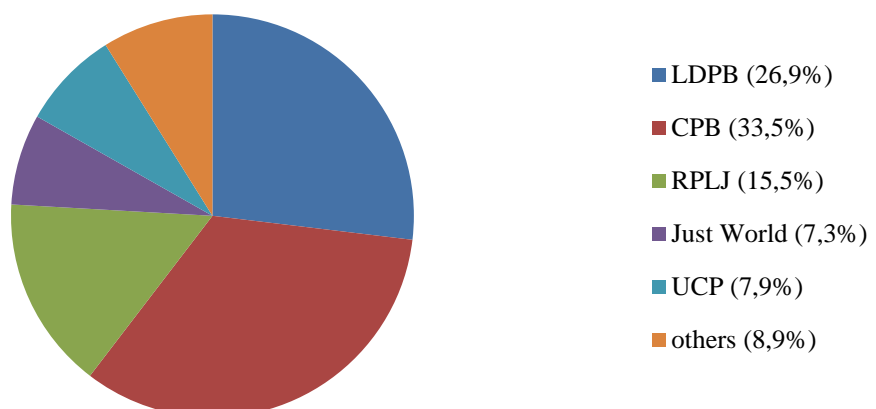
## Nominations (by type of nomination)



11 out of 15 registered political parties nominated their candidates for deputies of local councils.

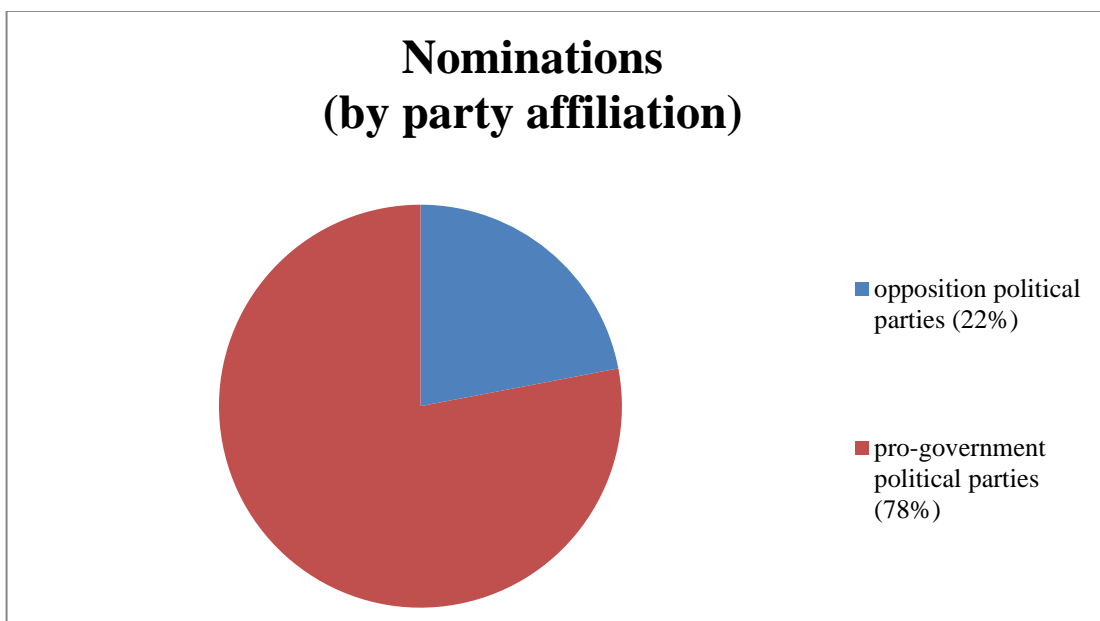
Among the leaders are the Communist Party of Belarus (333 candidates or 33.5% of the total amount nominated by the political parties), the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus (267 candidates or 26.9%), the Republican Party of Labor and Justice ( 154 candidates or 15.5%), the United Civil Party (78 candidates or 7.9%), the Belarusian Party of the Left "Just World" (72 candidates or 7.3%).

## Nominations (by party affiliation)



Compared to the 2014 elections, opposition political parties showed much less activity in the nomination of their candidates. While in 2014 the opposition political parties nominated a total of 315 candidates or 39% of the total number of nominees from political parties, during the current campaign only 219 candidates or 22% were nominated. Pro-government political

parties, on the contrary, have nominated more than two times as many candidates compared to the previous elections: 315 candidates in 2014 and 774 in 2018.



The following conclusions have been made after analyzing the CEC data on the results of the nomination of candidates. It is well known that political activity is most concentrated in the country's capital: competition to the Minsk City Council was 6 nominees per seat, while in the district councils the competition was 1.29, and in rural councils — 1.17. Representatives of both opposition and pro-government parties are primarily nominated in Minsk. Few of them compete for seats in the district councils, with the village councils being formed with little participation of party members.

#### **V. RESULTS OF THE REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES FOR DEPUTIES OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

In accordance with the Electoral Schedule, the election commissions administered the registration of candidates between 9 and 18 January inclusive.

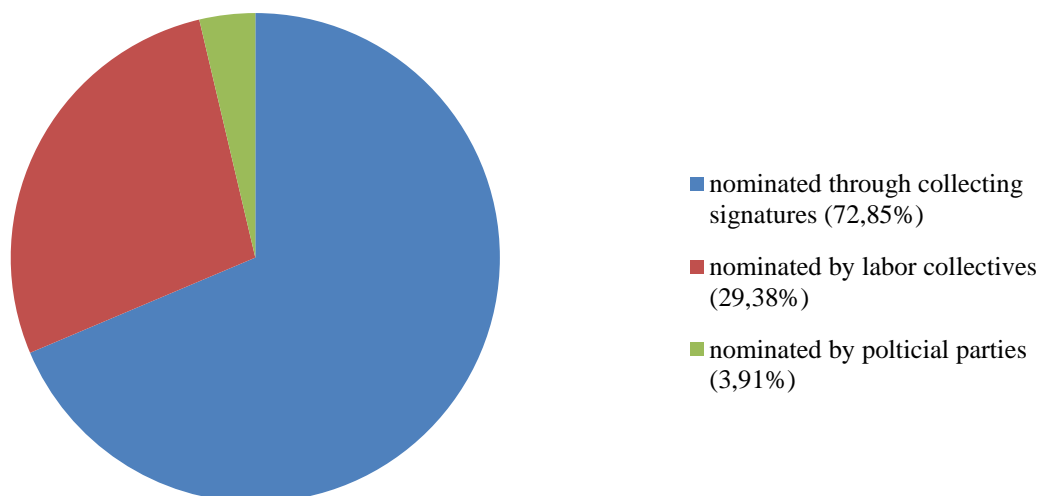
According to the CEC<sup>10</sup>, 22,278 candidates were registered, which is 98.09% of the number of nominees. The same percentage of registration was documented in the previous elections to the local councils. The commissions registered 16,229 candidates nominated by citizens through collecting signatures, representing 72.85% of the total number of registered candidates, 6,546 candidates nominated by labor groups (29.38%), and 871 candidates nominated by political parties (3.91%).

---

<sup>10</sup> [http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect\\_34-35.pdf](http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/Elections-MS28-elect_34-35.pdf)

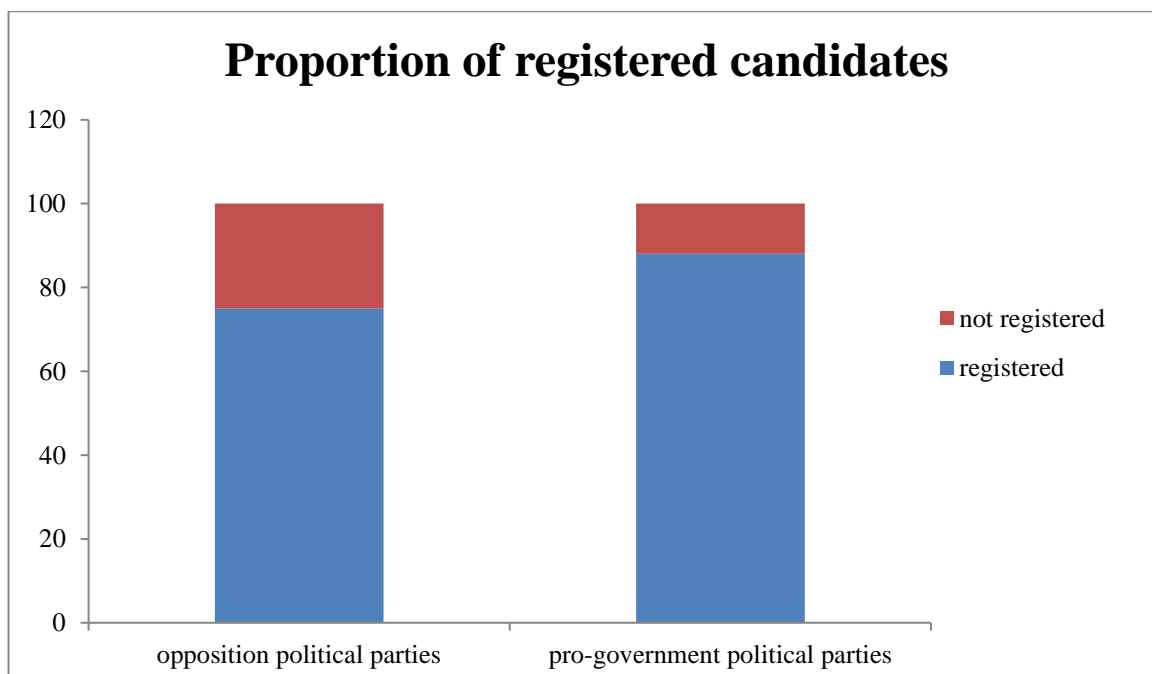


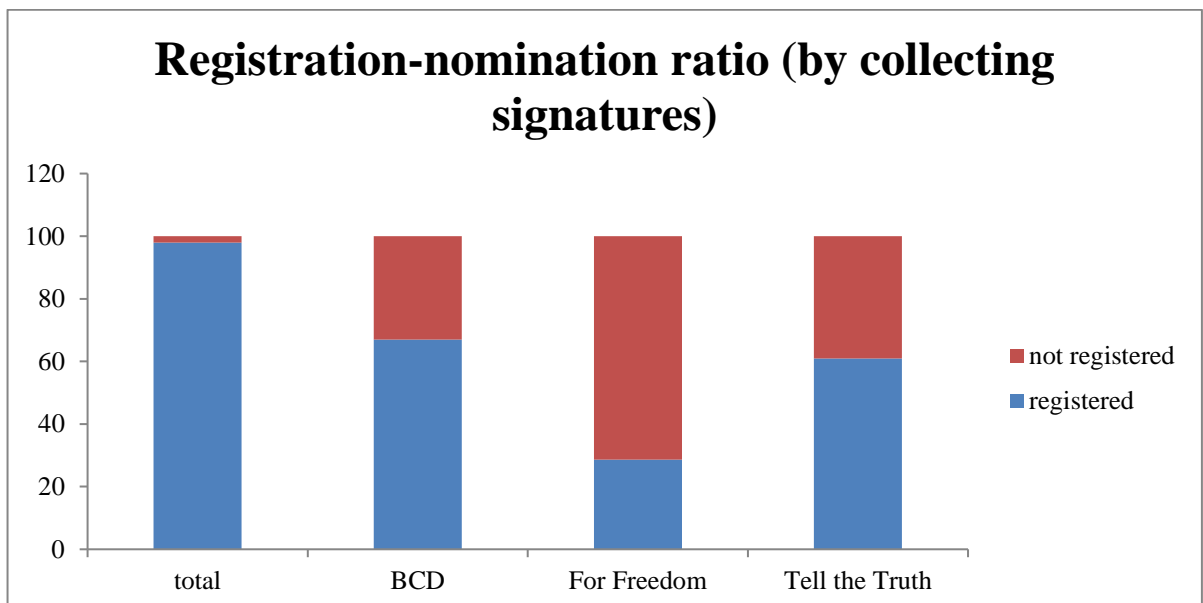
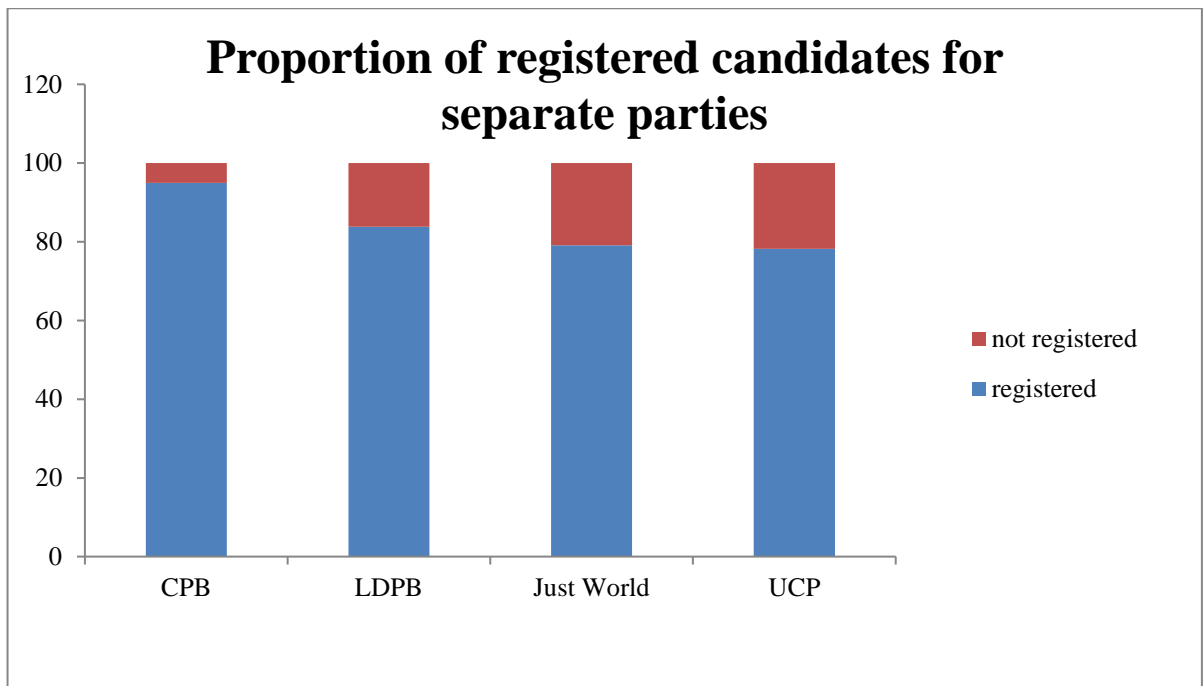
## Registered candidates (by type of nomination)



The percentage of registration of candidates from the pro-government political parties exceeds that of the opposition parties. In particular, 4 opposition parties nominated 219 candidates, of whom 174 were registered, representing 79.5% of the total amount nominated by the opposition parties (in the past elections, the figure was about 75%). At the same time, the average percentage of registration of candidates from the pro-governmental parties is higher. Candidates from the Communist Party of Belarus were registered in 95% of cases, the Republican Party of Labor and Justice — 92.8%.

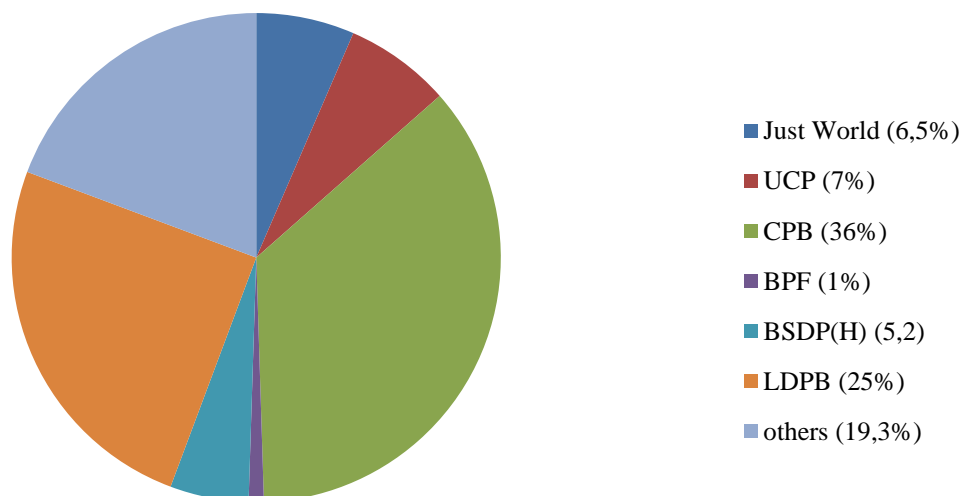
## Proportion of registered candidates





There have been apparent differences in the approaches to the opposition representatives who were nominated by collecting signatures. The total percentage of registered candidates nominated through the collection of signatures was 98% (the same figure as in 2014), while for the Movement “For Freedom” was 28.6%, the unregistered BCD Party — 33%, and the Tell the Truth campaign — 60.9%.

## Registered candidates (by party affiliation)



130 persons representing the political parties were registered in 57 districts of the Minsk City Council, with 238 candidates from the parties in 3,767 electoral districts of the district-level councils, and as few as 123 party candidates in 13,225 village councils.

Statistics of refusals to register and withdrawn nominations not only demonstrate the level of political intensity, but also the level of applying the technical procedures of registration (verification of signatures, declarations, etc.) in the political struggle. In particular, the number of refusals to register candidates for the Minsk City Council was 23%, the Councils at the district level — 1.5%, the rural councils — 0.3%. The difference in the quality of submitted documents cannot be explained by the level of training of candidates for deputies at the lower level compared to the experienced party members and activists in the capital. Experts of the campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections” believe that the election commissions continued to use technical procedures selectively when considering submitted documents and allowing or denying registration of candidates.