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Children of the dictatorship:

*Indoctrination and Militarization
of Belarusian Youth after 2020*

Alice Mironava, May 2026

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While Soviet-inspired [state-controlled initiatives aimed at the ideological integration of younger generation](#) have been part of Lukashenka's regime educational policy for a while, they received a significant boost following mass-scale protest movement of 2020-21. Mass participation of Belarusian youth in the protests made the authorities in Minsk realize that it was losing the battle for the new generation. Those events served as a wake-up call, demonstrating a gap between the regime and the new generation as well as a direct threat that modern, often western-leaning, youth could pose for the current regime.

As a reaction, since 2020, Belarusian authorities have significantly expanded their activities in the field of military-patriotic education for children and youth. Further ideologization of education and several new initiatives have been introduced. Despite the fragmented nature of reports on these changes, the regime appears to be on the way to building a more consistent and holistic approach to education and exercising strict control over it. The main goal is to educate the next generation of Belarusians in accordance with the views of the leadership, raise loyal young people for the regime, foster adversity towards opposition-minded individuals, and identify at an early stage those who might become critics of the authorities in the future. These measures cover a variety of changes at schools, summer camps and even extend to kindergarten. Responses to those initiatives are not well known but will likely range from enthusiasm to apathy and disobedience. While some cases of resistance – such as teachers or pupils expressing opposition to these changes – occasionally [enter the public eye](#), the reality is that the highly repressive system makes most conform, even if performatively.

Main objectives: Loyalty and Indoctrination

A central element of educational policy in Belarus is interpretation of the country's history as an [inseparable part of Russia-led entities, glorification of the Soviet past, and adversity towards political opposition](#). Further, this includes [the promotion of traditional values](#) as a bulwark against Western influence and [the idea of loyalty](#) to the leadership as a way to avoid war and preserve peace.

The Belarusian leadership is pursuing three main goals in its policy towards children and youth. First, it wants to secure loyalty of the next generation to the current regime and its ideas. In this context, political apathy that often came as a result of rigid state educational policies is no longer enough; the goal is a more active mobilization of ideologically aligned Belarusian youth. Ideological indoctrination begins as early as from kindergarten, where toddlers starting from 3 years old are invited to attend lectures on the [“genocide of the Belarusian people”](#) during the Second World War.

Generally, the value of education as a tool of indoctrination is being reconsidered. For example, in 2021, the Council of Ministers approved a program for patriotic education of the citizens of Belarus for 2022–5. According to its text, the program was created as a response to “geopolitical challenges” and the need to achieve “national unity”. As part of this reform, the regime has introduced the positions of military-patriotic education leaders in secondary schools. Their tasks include organization of “patriotic events”, training camps, and military-patriotic competitions. [As of 2025](#), such leaders are a permanent part of teaching staff at all educational institutions. A university in [Mahiliou](#) even opened a new degree program to prepare leaders of military-patriotic education.

Second, military-patriotic education serves the purpose of discrediting and demonizing opposition-minded individuals inside Belarus and abroad. For example, [textbooks of history](#) contain mentions of collaboration of Belarusians with the Nazi occupiers. In this context, the white-red-white flag, used by the current pro-democracy movement, is presented as a Fascist symbol and Belarusian opposition as heirs of collaborators. In 2022, the [Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs added the slogan](#) Zhyve Belarus! (Long Live Belarus!) to the list of fascist symbols, equalizing it with the Nazi party salute ‘Heil Hitler’.

Finally, the education policy in the country further pursues the goal of militarization and recruiting young people for the military who will be ready to defend the regime and maintain loyalty towards it. For instance, since academic year 2022/23, a compulsory course [“Pre-conscription Training”](#) started to include a field training exercises, which include elements of military training. In kindergartens and primary schools, regular visits of military officers in uniforms are accompanied by the demonstration of [weapons](#), with children allowed to hold them. The aim is to restore the reputation of the military and the police after the suppression of the peaceful protests as well as to raise a militarized generation for whom army service and defense of the ruling regime are of importance.

Types of measures

Lukashenka's regime relies on a variety of measures taken to promote military-patriotic education. Some of them are a general compulsory part of the school program in different subjects, other measures are adapted for specific target and age groups. The main elements of them include ideologization and new elements of curricula at schools and universities; militarization of education; increased control and surveillance; and explicit rejection of Western influences in the system of education.

In 2024, the Minister of Education Andrei Ivanets [announced](#) that the informational session of the "genocide of the Belarusian people" will be held in schools once a month. The Ministry further invested in textbooks on the subject for pupils of all grades. This new state-sponsored memory narrative aims to [equate the fate of Belarusians with Jews](#), thus effectively neglecting Holocaust. Moreover, the overall curricula concerning history and literature has been undergoing revisions to marginalize or eliminate topics that highlight Belarus' European roots. Some classical works, like those by the 19th century writer Vincent Dunin-Martsinkevich, were [proclaimed extremist](#) as they were said to include calls to fight against the Russian Empire. Consequently, school program becomes aligned more with the Russian narratives.

A big component of state-sponsored narratives is centered around the Second World War. Schools teach a whole separate class on the topic. As in the earlier years, these classes are often complemented with interactive activities, such as [home visits to veterans of war](#) or [their visits to schools](#). Such activities focus on historical suffering of the Belarusian nation and the value of peace as well as necessity to avoid any conflicts and wars. The idea fosters a mindset where political and economic grievances become secondary to the preservation of peace and security. In the context of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, these deeply rooted anti-war sentiments have had an impact on the social dynamics and slightly increasing approval ratings of Lukashenka.

Lukashenka's regime is also counting on the militarization of education to ensure its survival. In 2022, Lukashenka signed a decree on the [creation of military-patriotic clubs](#) supervised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. While not new, militarized tournaments and competitions have gained new momentum in the past years, although with intensified military training. Republican tournaments such as [Vyzov \(Challenge\) or Proryv \(Breakthrough\)](#) become regular activities, serving the purposing of building up the discipline and motivating the youth to "defend the motherland".

Another noticeable development is increased control and surveillance at schools. At part of this campaign, the Belarusian education system has experienced mass repression in the past years, resulting in more than [6,000 teachers](#) being fired on political grounds. The recruitment process has also undergone changes, with more control over political views and monitoring of the digital presence of candidates for work. These positions are now taken by explicitly loyal staff, which inevitably has consequences for the content and quality of education and development of children's skills such as critical thinking.

A critical area of activity for the regime is digital space. Acknowledging its profound role in the lives of young Belarusians, the state attempts to increase its presence on different platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Telegram. To that end, [numerous profiles](#) have been launched to promote the image of Lukashenka and his model of governance. The channels largely include populist content, featuring [videos and photos](#) of Lukashenka giving presents to students, reaching out to people in rural areas, or publicly berating state officials. Their effectiveness, however, is likely doubtful due to a rather standardized content and not tailored to the interests and trends among the younger generation.

A related area of concern for the regime is Western influences on Belarusian youth and the system of education. In 2025, [a law was passed](#) that forbids Belarusians living in the country to get online education from abroad. Since 2024, [the number of English language classes and their content](#) changed as well. While these classes typically introduced schoolchildren to culture and history of the UK and other English-speaking countries, they are now focused on explaining the Belarus-Russia relations and the importance of the "red-green" flag, reintroduced by Lukashenka in 1995.

Reception of changes

According to [the opinion poll](#) conducted by the exiled Belarusian youth council RADA, political apathy dominates the mood of young people. Many do not believe in positive changes in the country in the near future, fear engaging in political action due to high risks, and prefer to adapt and find "safe" spaces to act around.

[Occasional news report](#) show that Belarusian students continue to get detained, expelled from universities and arrested in front of their groupmates. According to Cyberpartisans, only in three years, from 2020 to 2023, [140 students](#) were expelled. Fearing persecution and having unclear prospects at home, many decided to take their chance abroad. Within one year, from 2022 to 2023, the number of university students in Belarus dropped [by almost 25%](#), which amounted to 56.000 students in total.

Facing a crisis, the Ministry of Education introduced several measures to keep young people in the country. They are further exacerbated by the restrictions on visa and travel that Belarusians have been facing since the start of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine. One of the initiatives is the [resolution](#) to make candidates who go for studies or internships abroad provide a written commitment to return to Belarus after their completion. Another negative way of preventing brain drain is the withholding of diploma and transcript documents by some universities as well as multiple bottlenecks in the process of getting apostilles on the relevant files.

The regime's efforts to trap young people through bans and indoctrination show that the national education system is in a state of deep crisis and the introduced changes are not as welcome. They will, however, likely have deep effects on the generations to come.

Children of the dictatorship or...?

Lukashenka's regime is concerned about the future generations and their political views. Military-patriotic education and further ideologization of the school program can be understood as a way to "win over" the next generation of Belarusians. These activities quickly develop and find space in all educational institutions, from universities to kindergartens.

The impact of this policy is not yet clear. One might expect that part of the Belarusian youth will follow the propaganda line. At the same time, the persistent trauma since 2020 and political apathy that opinion polls often show might indicate that these regime-sponsored policies will not easily succeed in quickly bringing into line the younger generation. In the medium term, propaganda campaigns and militarization will likely increase polarization of society. Additionally, mobilizing broader opposition to these measures will take some time.

Through activities in the educational sphere, Belarusian authorities try to secure their longer-term support among the population. Yet the effectiveness of these measures remains rather uncertain as the political views of this demographic are still evolving and are often poorly understood by those in power. A disconnect between rigid state vision and poorly known sentiments of the youth makes many different trajectories of political and social evolution possible in the future.

AUTHOR

Alice Mironava