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45.3% of Young Belarusians intended to vote for Babaryka

The oppositional candidate Viktor Babaryka who has just been excluded from the presidential election was by far the most popular candidate among young Belarusians. A new ZOiS survey among young people shows the high level of political interest and an awareness of political protests.

Ahead of the presidential election, ZOiS has conducted a survey among people in Belarus aged 18 to 34 living in the six largest cities. Compared to a previous cross-sectional ZOiS survey from February 2020, the results clearly show the extent to which the presidential campaign over the last months has attracted the interest of young Belarusians. A significant share expresses a desire for political change, which the former director of Belgazprombank Babariko embodied.

Uptick in political interest

The number of those who said that they were interested in politics rose from an average of 36.9% in February of this year to 58% in June, which is a remarkable increase in a short period of time (**Fig. 1**). At a time when politics has gained in public visibility and has become increasingly part of everyday debates, this shift illustrates the mobilising potential of elections even in autocratic political systems such as the Belarusian.

Presidential election: from disillusion to hope and back again

36.8% of the respondents were interested and 39.5% rather interested in the presidential election (**Fig. 2**) and a clear majority of 78.6% said that they wanted to vote. Before the final list of candidates was established on 14 July, many young people perceived this election as offering a genuine political choice.

The oppositional candidate Viktor Babaryka who has been banned from running in the election is a strong favourite among young people. 45.3% of the respondents said they intended to vote for him, 12.9% wanted to vote for the former ambassador Valery Tsepkala who has also been excluded from the election, while only 9.7% favoured incumbent Aljaksandr Lukaschenka (**Fig. 3**).

Increase in protest awareness and reported participation

The percentage of those who had heard about protests in the country in the last year increased from an average of 59% in February to 86% in June (**Fig. 4**). 18.5% of respondents said that they personally knew someone who has participated in these protests, which is a remarkably high share given the risk of detention or police violence. However, in a survey only 5% stated that they got themselves involved in political protests.

With the final list of candidates being a clear disappointment of these political expectations, it remains to be seen where the political interest that has developed over the last weeks will lead to. While it is conceivable that the networks that sustain the protests are going to persist, the harsh repressions and police violence will also limit the extent to which protests can become a mass phenomenon.

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Figure 1:

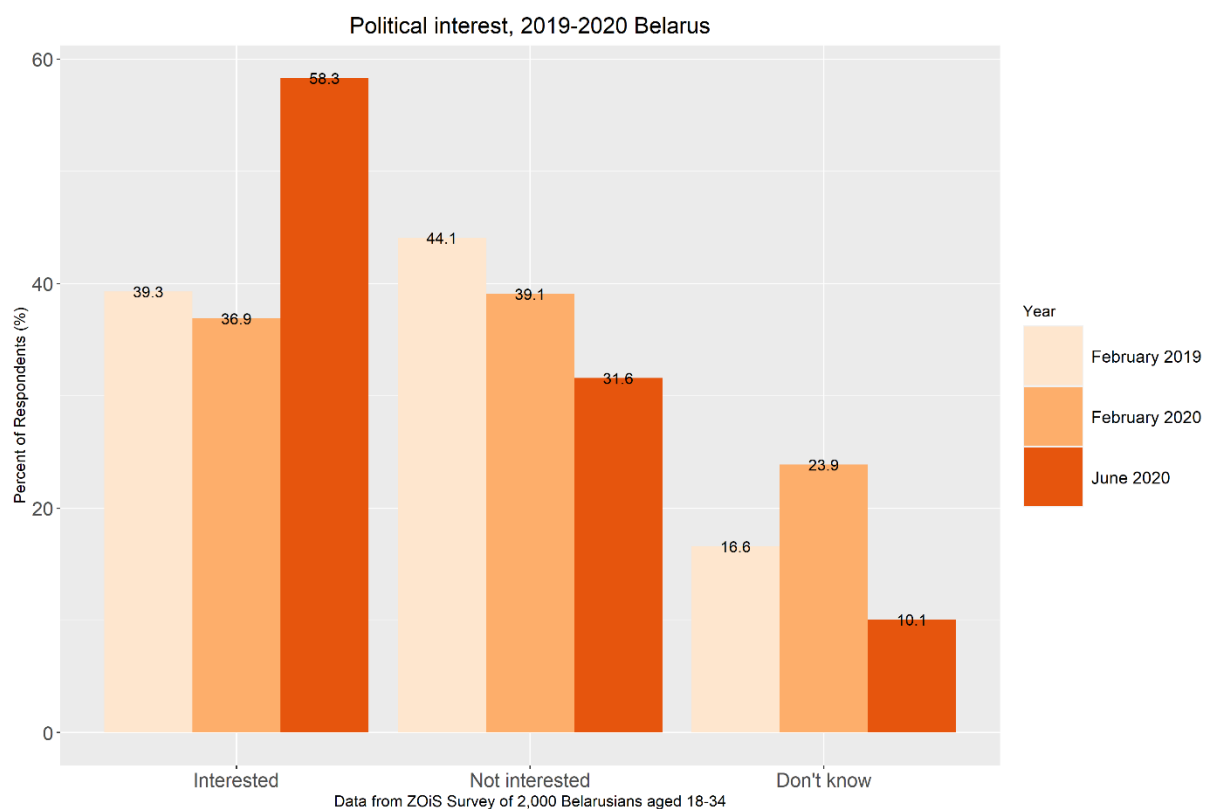


Figure 2:

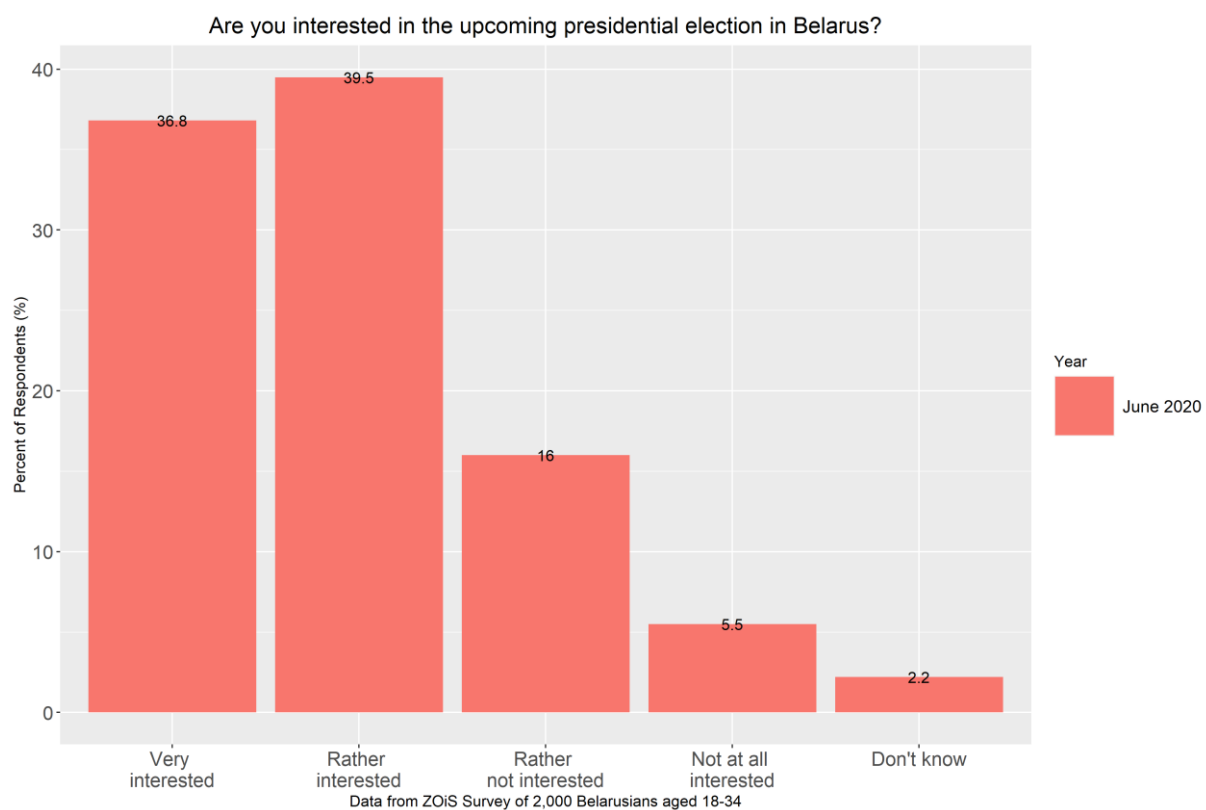


Figure 3:

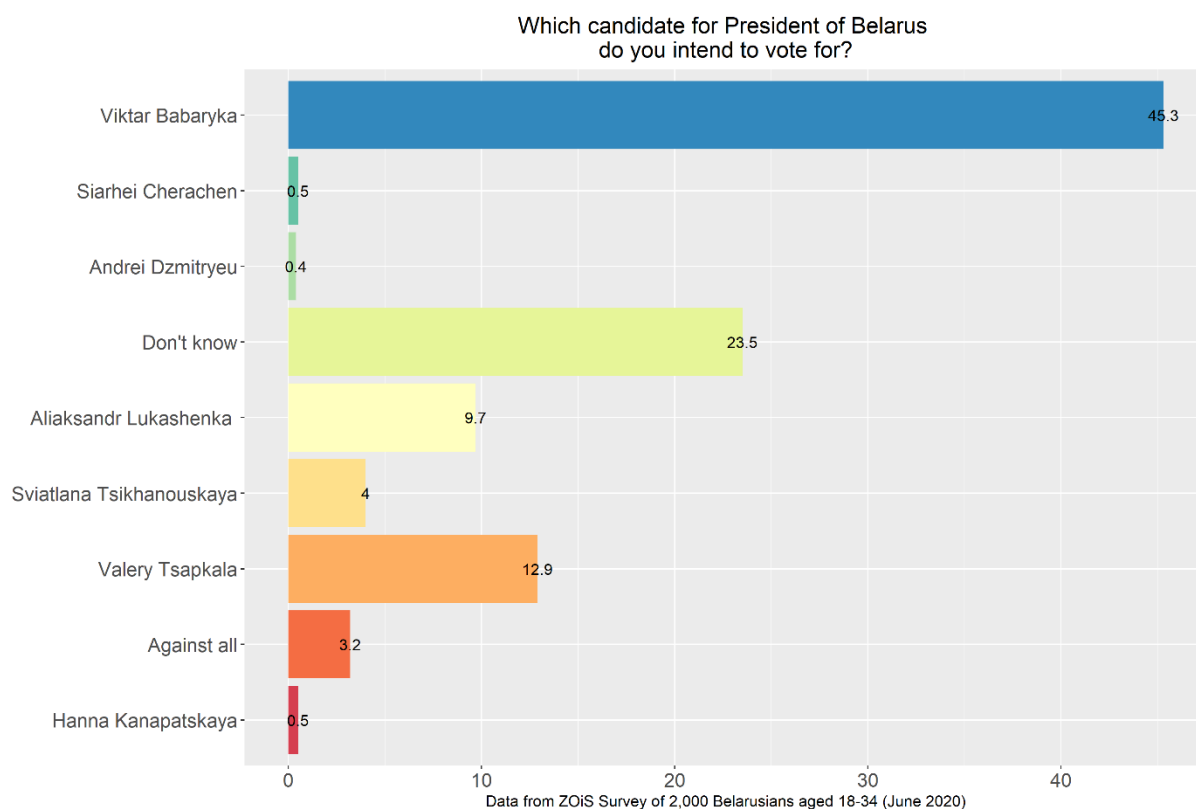
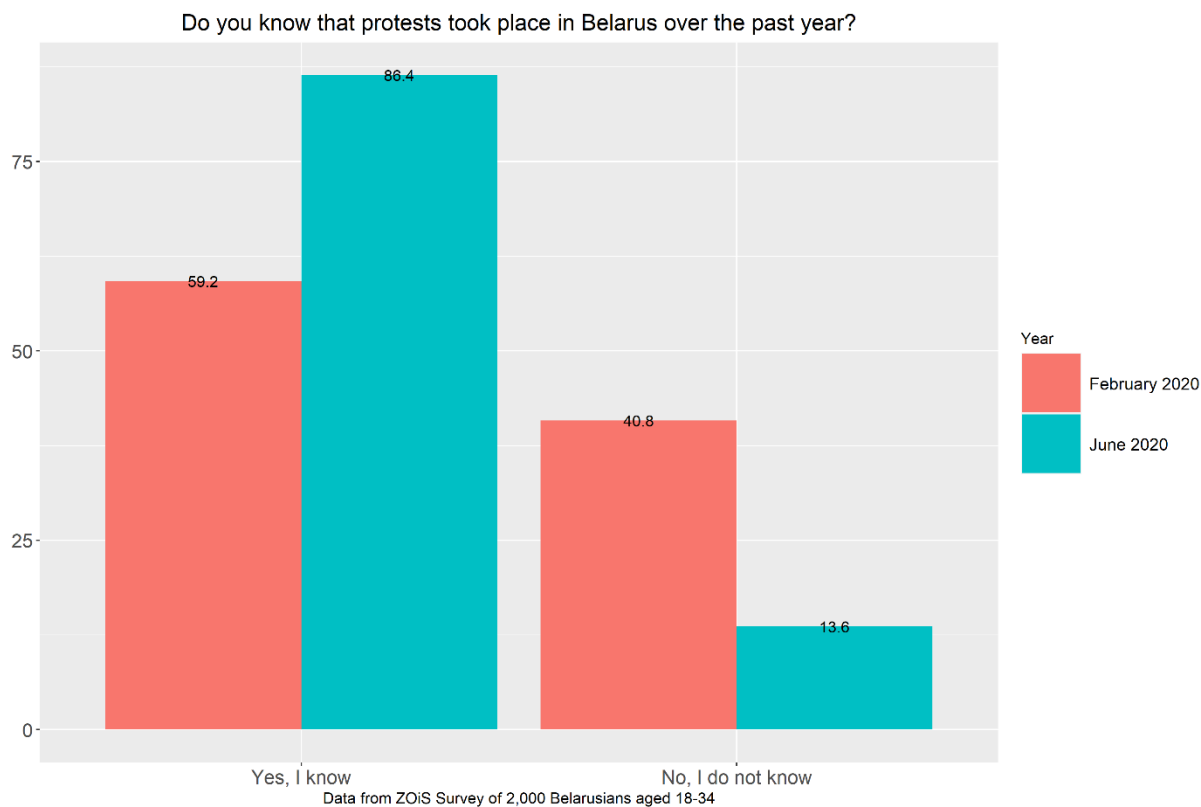


Figure 4:



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