

# When doing nothing is free expression

In 2011, the Belarusian police arrested scores of people at a silent protest in Minsk. Annabelle Chapman looks at the case.



On 20 July 2011 many people assembled publicly in Minsk, Belarus. The gathering had been [coordinated](#) by social media, to protest against Belarus's authoritarian regime and growing economic hardship. There were no banners or slogans to be seen. The "silent protest" was one of the imaginative new ways that Belarusians have found to express their dissatisfaction, in an environment where any opposition is repressed. Others include [gatherings](#) where people clap or make their mobile phone alarms ring together.

On 20 July 2011, the police dispersed the gathering and arrested many people. In response to these events, the Belarusian Parliament amended the law on mass events. The new law, adopted on 3 October 2011, [prohibits](#) the pre-planned "joint mass presence of citizens for the purpose of [...] action or *inaction*" [italics added] that is "a form of public expression of the public or political sentiments or protest". In June and July that year, over 500 people in Belarus received sentences of between five and 15 days' imprisonment for involvement in these gatherings.

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