

Freedom of the press in Belarus

Fact Sheet



Freedom of the press in Belarus

Fact Sheet

Belarus has long been considered "Europe's last dictatorship" because of the lack of democratic values and respect for fundamental rights. The fundamental rights and freedoms of a person, including freedom of speech and expression, are protected under Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. Censorship in Belarus is prohibited by the country's constitution. However, the language in the constitution is vague and it uses undefined terms, while censorship is enforced by a number of laws in the country. The law that prohibits insulting the president foresees punishment of up to five years in prison, while criticising Belarus abroad is punishable by up to two years in prison.

While Belarus' constitution prevents censorship, the notion and definition of censorship are unspecified, and press freedom is *de facto* severely constrained.

- State-owned media report to the president, and intimidation and suppression of independent media are common.
- Both independent and international media are subjected to continuous political harassment by the government, particularly for reporting on the deteriorating economy and human rights violations, thus 'discrediting' the country.
- Journalists are persecuted and detained for covering 'unauthorised protests' or collaborating with unregistered media firms.
- Journalists (like Aleh Byabenin) have been found dead under 'mysterious circumstances'.
- The majority of local independent media outlets often engage in self-censorship.
- The state keeps monopoly over the broadcast media. Only the state media broadcasts nationwide.

Since 2009, there has been increasing state control over the media. Licensing and registration procedures for media have become rather politicised in Belarus, while all media outlets, including websites, need to either register with government outlets or face blockage. Similarly, a presidential decree has mandated a wide range of internet restriction/censorship measures, while during the 2010 presidential election the government repressed opposition media by limiting internet access, arresting and even beating journalists, and raiding the headquarters of several independent publications. Belarus' administration has also curtailed freedom of expression online and offline, particularly media freedom, since the 2020 presidential elections, in breach of its international duties and OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) commitments. In this regard, all outlets that "threaten the state's interests" can simply be denied accreditation and/or shut down.

Media crackdown following 2020 Presidential Election

After the 2020 blockage of more than 3,000 online media outlets and the crackdown of Belarusian independent media from distributing their material, their representatives were arrested, fined, and interrogated, while at least 33 journalists were imprisoned for, inter alia, expressing support for Ukraine. Yet, despite the continuous oppression of independent journalists, media outlets carry on with reporting uncensored information aiming to combat propaganda and misinformation.

Empirical Evidence

- As of June 2023, following government monitoring, more than 9,000 websites, including news sites and information pages, were blocked in Belarus.
- In September 2023, the Belarusian Supreme Court classified the Belarusian Investigative Center (BIC), an independent Czech Republic-based investigative media outlet, as 'extremist'. Outlets labelled as 'extremist' are banned from operating in Belarus.

- In July 2023, Belarusian authorities detained Ihar Karnei, a former independent journalist, while computers and phones in his apartment were seized by the police. Karnei was facing criminal charges, but the authorities did not disclose the reason for Karnei's detention.
- In June 2023, Justyna Prus, a Polish correspondent of the Polish state news agency PAP, received a document by the Belarusian Authorities stating that she was banned from entering Belarus until June 7, 2028.
- In May 2023, the Belarusian authorities blocked *Dev.by*, a site that covers Belarus's tech sector.
- Since April 2023, the authorities have focused on restricting Belarusian-language websites, as it is considered to be the language of the opposition, blocking inter alia *Audiobooks.by*, a website that allows access to Belarusian-language books.
- In March 2023, the Belarusian government blocked the popular online regional newspaper *Brestskaya Gazeta (b-g.by)*.
- In December 2022, the government restricted the TGStat website, which tracks the statistics and rankings of Telegram channels.
- In October 2022, the Belarusian authorities blocked one of the oldest companies on digital advertising and marketing, *Marketing.by*, for allegedly sharing information "prohibited for distribution".
- In October 2022, Aliaksandr Lychauka, a historian and independent reported with *The Village*, and his wife Snezhana Inanets, an independent reporter with *Onliner*, were detained by Belarusian Police Authorities for subscribing to Telegram channels and chats, criticising President Aleksandr Lukashenko and allegedly distracting public order.
- In May 2022, Aliaksandr Lyubyanichuk, an independent journalist of *Belstat TV*, was convicted and imprisoned for three years for allegedly reporting for 'extremist' channels.



- In May 2021, Belarusian Authorities diverted a commercial Ryanair flight from Athens, GR to Vilnius, LT to Minsk, BY and arrested the journalist Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend for reporting in independent channels that allegedly caused public unrest.
- In November 2020, Katsiaryna Andreyeva, a correspondent of a Poland-based independent broadcaster *Belsat TV* in Belarus, and her colleague Daria Chultsova were arrested while reporting on protests in Minsk, and they were later found guilty of violating public order.

The list of detained and imprisoned journalists in Belarus is constantly growing, while violation of freedom of speech and expression as well as access to information rights is deteriorating. Since 2020 and the re-election of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, more than 26 journalists have been accused of reporting to 'extremist' channels, disturbing public order and causing social unrest.

Resources

- [Access to marketing.by has been restricted in Belarus](#) [translated], Euroradio.fm
- [Aliaksandr Lychauka, The Village: Imprisoned in Belarus](#), Committee to Protect Journalist
- [Aliaksandr Lyubyanchuk, Belsat TV: Imprisoned in Belarus](#), Committee to Protect Journalists
- [Belarus](#), Silitski V. & Pikulik A.
- [Belarus 2022. Amnesty International Report 2022/23: the state of the world's human](#), Amnesty International
- [Belarus detains journalist Ihar Karnei on undisclosed charges](#), bans Polish journalist Justyna Prus, Committee to Protect Journalists
- [Belarusian authorities label investigative media outlet Belarusian Investigative Center as 'extremist'](#), Committee to Protect Journalists
- [Freedom on the net 2023: Belarus](#), Freedom House
- [Katsiaryna Andreyeva, Belsat TV: Imprisoned in Belarus](#), Committee to Protect Journalists
- [Raman Pratasevich, NEXTA, Belarus Golovnogo Mozga: Imprisoned in Belarus](#), Committee to Protect Journalists
- [26 Journalists Imprisoned in Belarus](#), Committee to Protect Journalists