

Belarus Human Rights Index

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2024

Right to Freedom of Expression

Expert Commentary

The score:	1,2
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<i>Including scores by component:</i>	
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- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| ● Freedom of opinion and expression | 1,0 |
| ● Access to information | 1,3 |

A baseline description of the situation regarding the realization of this right is available in the 2019 [overview](#).

In their 2024 assessment of the state of freedom of expression, Index experts maintained the low scores assigned in 2023. The situation remains consistently unfavorable, with certain negative developments in legislation and law enforcement practices that have further – albeit slightly – worsened the overall landscape.

- **Freedom of opinion and expression**

Despite persistently minimal scores for this component, experts highlight the following legislative and enforcement trends that have further aggravated the situation:

- The extraterritorial application of several criminal law provisions has been expanded. It is now possible to prosecute individuals for acts committed outside the jurisdiction of the Republic of Belarus, including incitement of racial, national, religious, or other social hatred; rehabilitation of Nazism; denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people; and “discrediting” the state.¹
- In addition, the number of cases initiated through special (in absentia) proceedings – which fail to guarantee the right to a fair trial² – has grown significantly, including in cases involving restrictions on freedom of expression³. In 2024, formal charges of “promotion of terrorism”

¹ For the full list, see Article 6 of the Criminal Code: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=hk9900275>; and [Human Rights in Belarus: The Main Trends of Public Policy \(September–December 2024\)](#), p. 12.

² See expert commentary on the situation regarding the right to a fair trial (2024): <https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

³ [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 8



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under Article 289-1 of the Criminal Code were filed for the first time within such special proceedings.⁴

- Freedom of expression continues to be suppressed through the broad and arbitrary application of the “anti-extremist” legal framework.⁵ According to the Minister of Information, as of September 1, 2024, approximately 14,000 internet resources had been blocked, more than 5,000 of which were designated as containing “extremist” content. This marks an almost 35-fold increase in the number of banned websites compared to the period from 2015 to 2020.⁶
 - In 2024, the first-ever conviction⁷ was issued for “denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people”.⁸
 - The Ministry of Information introduced a new category of “prohibited” print materials: the “List of Printed Publications the Distribution of Which May Harm the National Interests of the Republic of Belarus”.⁹ This list already includes, among other things, works on LGBTQ+ topics, erotic fiction, and unofficial publications on the history of Belarus. As of November 2024, the list contained 35 titles.¹⁰
 - A criminal case was documented in which monitoring of open court proceedings – a common human rights practice – was treated as “assisting extremist activity”.¹¹
 - In February 2024, it was reported that Belarus and Russia were working to merge their lists of “extremists” and “extremist resources,” a step that could expand the grounds for prosecution in both countries.¹²
- Active prosecution on charges of high treason (Article 356 of the Criminal Code)¹³ and conspiracy or other acts aimed at seizing state power (Article 357 of the Criminal Code) remains ongoing. The authorities continue producing propaganda films featuring so-called “investigations” –

⁴ [Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024](#)

⁵ According to Human Constanta, during the reporting period, human rights defenders recorded criminal prosecution for a variety of digital activities, including: registering with chatbots, joining opposition chat groups, creating videos, participating in online training, taking part in livestreamed shows, sharing information on the movement of military and police units, developing software for pro-democracy organizations, posting TikTok videos about social issues, doxxing government officials, speaking in chat roulettes, and messaging Belarusian military units deployed in Ukraine. See [Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024](#).

⁶ [Mass media in Belarus: 2024](#)

⁷ Three years of imprisonment for publishing a text on a historical issue.

⁸ [Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024](#)

⁹ [Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024](#)

¹⁰ [The list of 35 banned printed publications prohibited for distribution in the Republic of Belarus](#)

¹¹ [Results of the fight against “extremism” in Belarus in 2024](#)

¹² [“Extremist” grocery shows and arrests for promoting “terrorism”: Overview, January–March 2024](#)

¹³ At least 45 convictions were recorded in 2024. See [Human rights situation in Belarus in 2024](#), p. 7



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often including individuals whose guilt has not been legally established at the time of release¹⁴ – and claiming to expose foreign spies, including in some cases minors.¹⁵

The year 2024 was also marked by two electoral campaigns: the single voting day and the initial stages of the 2025 presidential election.¹⁶ Experts note that while arbitrary searches and detentions in connection with the electoral period continue, the number of such incidents reported by independent media has declined – largely due to fear among victims and their relatives of being subjected to additional persecution for sharing such information. It was also observed that the arbitrary application of “anti-extremist” legislation during the reporting period affected not only those the state views as dissidents, but also supporters of the authorities.¹⁷

Experts continue to record no signs of improvement in the situation of journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders. In particular, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) reports growing pressure on media workers by law enforcement – especially in the lead-up to the presidential campaign – for instance, in Baranavichy, there was a mass detention of former staff from the Intex-press newspaper.¹⁸ Pressure also persisted against journalists and bloggers in custody, including torture-like conditions of detention and new criminal cases brought against them.¹⁹ All imprisoned media representatives have been listed as “persons involved in extremist activity,” and seven have been officially designated as “terrorists”.²⁰

Journalists forced to flee Belarus under threat of repression also continue to face pressure – including searches at their registered Belarusian addresses in the context of in absentia criminal cases, intimidation of relatives, harassment (including via pro-government Telegram channels), and threats of confiscation of property by the state (including housing).²¹

When it comes to investigations into reports of persecution of human rights defenders, journalists, and bloggers, expert assessments remain at a minimum. No official investigations have been launched into the many reports of torture following the 2020 elections. Experts also note a widespread reluctance

¹⁴ See expert commentary on the situation regarding the right to a fair trial (2024):

<https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>

¹⁵ [Seven young people were detained; some were charged with "acts of terrorism" and "high treason."](#)

¹⁶ See reports by the Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections campaign:

<https://elections2025.spring96.org/en/reports>, <https://elections2024.spring96.org/en/reports>

¹⁷ See, among other things, examples of the persecution of civil servants: [“Extremist” grocery shows and arrests for promoting “terrorism”: Overview, January–March 2024](#)

¹⁸ [Mass media in Belarus: 2024](#)

¹⁹ [2024, the darkest and most repressive year for Belarusian media](#); E-newsletter ‘Mass Media in Belarus’. No. 4 (78) 2024

²⁰ [2024, the darkest and most repressive year for Belarusian media](#)

²¹ Ibid



among citizens to approach competent authorities with new evidence of persecution, which reflects the absence of effective legal remedies and impartial investigative mechanisms.

Although no legislative changes were introduced in 2024 that would qualitatively improve the situation regarding media freedom, experts note the adoption of a number of new provisions that continue previously established repressive trends:²²

- In January 2024, amendments were made to the Law “On Advertising”, affecting a broad range of issues – including the rules and timelines for placing advertisements in the media, requirements for advertising certain types of goods and services, and the introduction of new regulations for online advertising. Notably, the distribution of online advertising is now permitted only for individuals and organizations listed in the Register of Advertising Distributors, maintained by the Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade – a restriction that limits the activities of bloggers. In addition, the list of entities permitted to advertise employment and education abroad is now limited to organizations directly involved in these services.²³
- In April 2024, Order No. 69 of the Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus was issued.²⁴ It provides for the annulment of domain names of internet resources included in the Republican List of Extremist Materials. Once annulled, these domains are added to a registry and cannot be re-registered.
- Under Council of Ministers Regulation No. 665, adopted on September 11, 2024, a new list of television channels included in the mandatory basic public television package was approved. The list now includes a new pro-government news channel, “Pervy Informatsionny” (“First Informational”).²⁵

With the component assessing the promotion of media independence and diversity remaining at a minimal level, experts report an increase in propaganda efforts by state-owned media, bolstered by new internet platforms and the creation of the pro-government television channel “First Informational”, now included in the mandatory public TV package, as well as the requirement for all providers to broadcast state-run TV channels under threat of being blocked.²⁶

In addition to previously noted changes in the country’s media landscape and deepening self-censorship, experts point to shifts in the editorial policies of certain outlets that continue operating

²² For a full list of measures adopted in 2024, see the BAI monitoring report: [Mass media in Belarus: 2024](#)

²³ [Mass media in Belarus: 2024](#)

²⁴ Ibid; <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=T62405642>

²⁵ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=C22400665>

²⁶ For more details on the media landscape in Belarus in 2024 and further evidence of expanding state propaganda, including the launch of a multimedia portal consolidating socio-political content from state-run media, and the establishment of a joint media company of the Union State, see the BAI monitoring report: [Mass media in Belarus: 2024](#)

inside Belarus. Some of these outlets, previously considered neutral, have begun actively promoting state narratives.

- **Access to information**

With the score for this component remaining low, experts continue to observe the persistent trend of arbitrary restrictions on access to information – affecting both journalists and the general public. One manifestation of this trend was the aforementioned Order No. 69 issued by the Operational and Analytical Center under the President, which provides for the annulment of domain names of websites designated as “extremist”.²⁷

No qualitative improvements were recorded in the functioning of the national statistical system.

As for access to government-held information of public interest, restrictions on access to state-run internet resources from abroad remain in place. In 2024, this included a particularly impactful measure: broad access to the electronic database of anonymised court decisions was limited, significantly hindering the public’s ability to monitor current law enforcement and judicial practices.

Experts also noted disruptions in the functioning of several key online platforms critical to the exercise of human rights, including the National legal Internet portal, subscription-based legal database, as well as the official websites of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the Investigative Committee.

²⁷ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=T62405642>