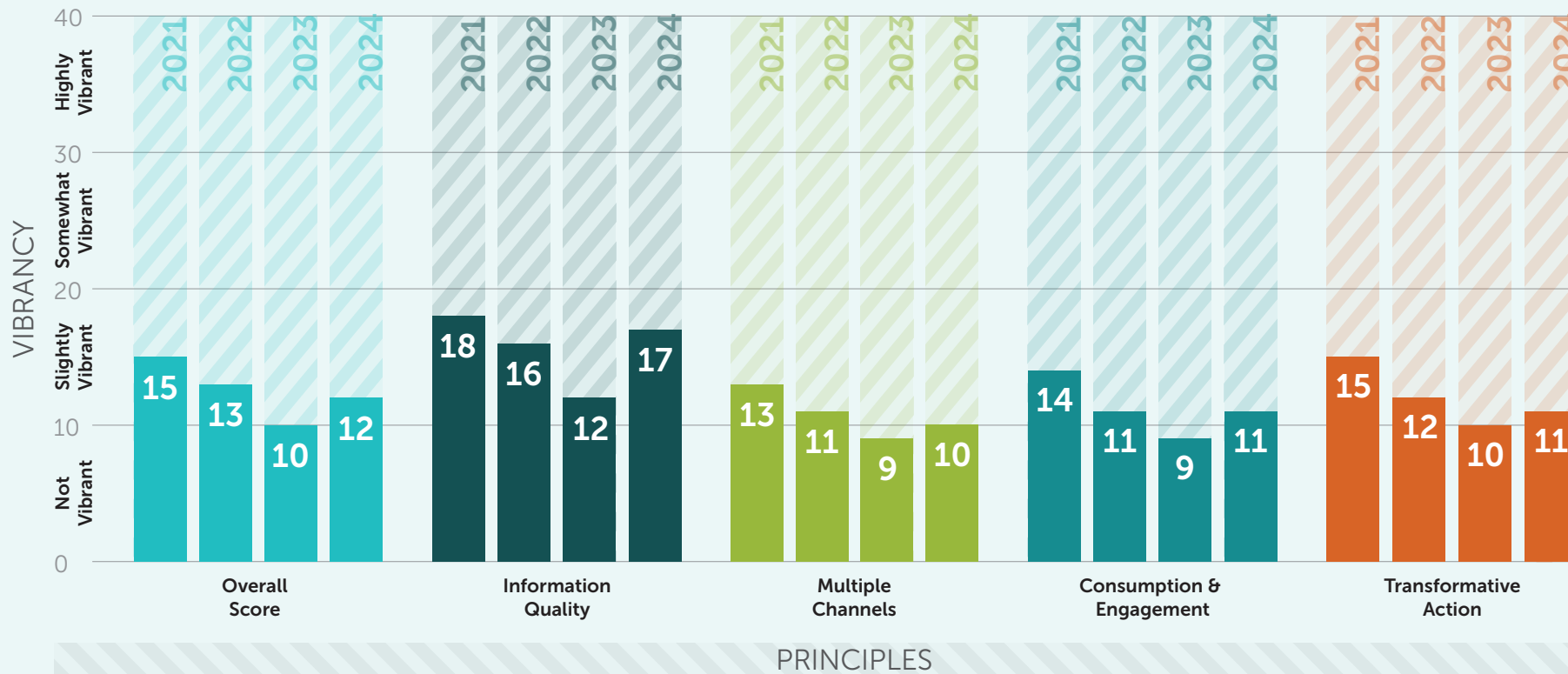


BELARUS

Vibrant Information Barometer

2 0 2 4





Not Vibrant (0-10): Quality information is extremely limited in this country. The vast majority of it is not editorially independent, not based on facts, or it is intended to harm. People do not have the rights, means, or capacity to access a wide range of information; they do not recognize or reject misinformation; and they cannot or do not make choices on what types of information they want to engage with.

Slightly Vibrant (11-20): Quality information is available on a few topics or geographies in this country, but not all. While some information is editorially independent, there is still a significant amount of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in circulation, and it does influence public discourse. Most people do not recognize or reject misinformation.

Somewhat Vibrant (21-30): Quality information is available in this country and most of it is editorially independent, based on facts, and not intended to harm. Most people have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information, although some do not. Most people recognize and reject misinformation, although some do not.

Highly Vibrant (31-40): Quality information is widely available in this country. People have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information; they recognize and reject misinformation.

Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL SCORE

12

In 2023, Belarus experienced a notable decline in media freedoms and an escalation of government repressions. Long recognized as one of Europe’s most dangerous countries for journalists, Belarus continued its crackdown on media, which has intensified since the Russian government’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Arbitrary arrests of reporters, bloggers, and activists surged, with many receiving lengthy prison sentences. At the end of 2023, [34 Belarusian journalists and three media workers](#) were detained due to their professional activities. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), around 400 journalists have been forced into exile, and those remaining in the country have to work clandestinely.

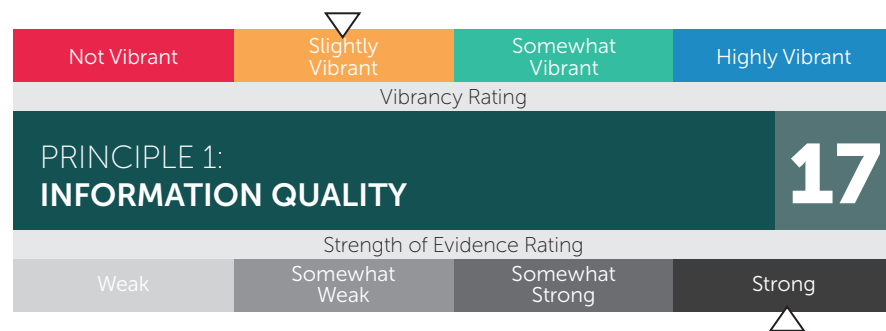
The Belarusian authorities ramped up suppression of critical online voices by closing independent media outlets and labeling them as “extremist” or “terrorist.” The state also bolstered the use of propaganda and disinformation amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, further manipulating the online information space. New legislation introduced harsh penalties for online activism, criminalizing it as actions “discrediting the army and breaching state secrets,” and even extending the death penalty to state officials convicted of high treason. Belarusian security forces conducted raids, employed torture, and released forced confession videos to silence dissent. These measures, along with widespread website blockages, have severely curtailed free expression and alternative information flow in Belarus.

However, heightened repression also made Belarusian independent media more resilient and spurred some notable investigative reporting this year, ironically catalyzing innovation, collaboration, and expanded reach. Belarusian journalists were remarkably adaptable, finding new ways to gather and report information and forging new relationships with international organizations, such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the International Consortium

of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The growing recognition of Belarusian journalists’ work on the global stage has likely allowed them increased influence and protection for those operating abroad. At the same time, the proliferation of new media platforms has created more opportunities to engage with audiences in Belarus. Within Belarus, however, genuine journalism is suppressed in favor of propaganda outlets.

The overall score for Belarus improved by two points in this year’s study thanks largely to the contributions of Belarusian independent journalism in exile, particularly in Principle 1 (Information Quality), which saw a five-point increase from last year. Principle 2 (Multiple Channels), although improving by one point, scored the lowest in the study, with a disparity between moderate success in access to information via VPN tools and severe limitations in the right to create and share information. Principle 3 (Information Consumption and Engagement) improved by two points, but with a notable difference between reasonable media engagement and poor information engagement, indicating a need for a balanced approach to audience interaction and content production. Principle 4 (Transformative Action) increased by one point but remained relatively low, underscoring the limited impact of exiled media on governance and human rights within Belarus.

This analysis, conducted exclusively by panelists from independent media outside Belarus, underscores the stark contrast between the repressive state-controlled media within the country and the free press operating abroad. The improved scores are a testament to the resilience and integrity of exiled Belarusian journalists, rather than an indication of progress in Belarus’s internal media environment. The results also underscore the continued need for external funding and collaborations to enhance Belarusian audience interaction and engagement with alternative information sources.



In 2023, Belarusian media in exile registered a modest improvement in the quality of information they provide, leading to a five-point increase increasing from 12 in 2022 to 17. The indicators assessing the availability of quality information and inclusivity and diversity of content scored the highest, a moderate achievement that suggests commendable efforts to produce accurate information and diverse content but also highlights significant ongoing challenges. These scores reflect steady, albeit limited, improvement in the quality and inclusiveness of media content.

Indicator 1: There is quality information on a variety of topics available.

As Belarusian media adapt to exile in countries including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Georgia, they are constantly looking for ways to produce quality information for audiences back home and abroad. They have embraced a digital-first approach, using online tools for editorial coordination and to overcome the logistical hurdles of not having a central office and managing different time zones. Tools like virtual private networks (VPNs) and mobile apps, which help evade Belarusian censorship, have turned the necessity of going digital into a core strength.

This transition has also involved re-registering media operations and ensuring staff are legally recognized in their new countries, while preparing for potential financial challenges, including periods without pay and seeking new sources of funding. Exiled Belarusian media

depend almost entirely on funding from governments and foundations, which has ebbed as they increasingly compete for the same support as their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts.

On the other hand, these exiled outlets have a wealth of training opportunities available to them, typically from international organizations, including a “boot camp” in Prague, the International Press Institute’s Local News Accelerator, and training in economics journalism, podcasting, and data analytics, as well as scholarships from various institutions abroad. Meanwhile, Belarusian State University’s journalism school has [eliminated](#) admissions for paying students in favor of those sponsored by the state, reflecting Information Minister Vladimir Pertsov’s [characterization](#) of journalism students as “bayonets in the information war.”

Independent Belarusian media uphold standards far above those of state-affiliated outlets. With a dedication to professional journalism amid government restrictions and even the criminalization of their content, independent organizations such as Zerkalo, Euroradio, and RFE/RL consistently score well in the respected [Media IQ](#) monitoring project, conducted by the Belarusian Press Club working from Poland. In contrast, state-owned channels, such as STV, Belarus One, and ONT, lean heavily into government propaganda.

Media IQ cited confusion between facts and opinions as the most prevalent problem in news reporting, present in 63 percent of cases it reviewed in the first half of 2023, followed by incomplete information at 53 percent. Independent media generally avoided these pitfalls, although Media IQ found that Belsat did not distinguish fact from opinion in more than 45 percent of the reports monitored.

Belarusian journalists are increasingly mounting serious investigations, often in partnership with global organizations such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Project (OCCRP) and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). This shift from traditional news reporting is not just a tactical response to the difficulties of reporting from exile and securing financial support, but also a response to an increasing public appetite for a better grasp of the intricate

challenges confronting Belarus. Substantial breaches of government networks by the opposition [Cyber Partisans](#) hacktivist collective have given independent journalists a wealth of information, facilitating investigations that were previously impossible. This [collaboration](#) between independent journalists and activists is a novel phenomenon in Belarusian media, reflecting the adaptive strategies employed to combat state propaganda and censorship.

Among the exposés that the Belarusian Investigative Center (BIC), working with the OCCRP and ICIJ, published in 2023 were [revelations](#) that Alexander Shakutin, an associate of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, had evaded EU and US import sanctions against Russia, [resulting](#) in his inclusion on the US sanctions list; that Ukrainian children were being forcibly taken to Russia and Belarus, prompting the European Parliament to [call](#) for Lukashenka’s arrest; that the Belarusian Red Cross had engaged in [financial misconduct](#); and that some companies in the EU were importing Belarusian timber in [violation of sanctions](#), prompting Lithuanian authorities to [investigate](#) nine businesses.

Simultaneously, 2023 saw vibrant growth in the Belarusian digital media landscape. New YouTube [programs](#) such as Plan B, Bureau, Night with Chaly, Para, and Free offer a diverse range of content, from analytical discussions to investigations. Additionally, the rising popularity of entertainment YouTube channels such as Zaraz, Chinchinchannel, and many others indicates a growing demand for varied, nonpolitical content.

Alongside these achievements, however, Belarusian journalists in exile face enormous challenges simply reporting the news and maintaining standards. Panelists said that media deemed “extremist” by the government cannot get information from state agencies. As a result, independent journalists often must use state-run media sources or pose as ordinary Belarusians to interact with government bodies. This restricted access to information complicates fact-checking, potentially resulting in the dissemination of inaccurate content. Without direct access to sources and statistics from within Belarus, exiled media also struggle to deliver in-depth analysis, to separate facts and opinions, and to provide comprehensive, on-the-ground reporting.

Further complicating the media landscape in 2023 was the [rise](#) of media outlets such as [Tochka.by](#) and Smartpress, which position themselves as neutral sources for those tired of negative, political news, yet reprint items from state media, along with many new amateur media players and bloggers who take a more aggressive stance against the state, often resorting to counterpropaganda tactics. Panelists said this trend has brought down ethical standards throughout the broader alternative Belarusian media.

Additionally, journalists in exile often rely on a limited pool of experts, which can lead to a narrow range of perspectives, compounded by the inability to safely access and include opinions from ordinary people within Belarus. “We used to rely on local experts and ordinary Belarusians for our stories,” one panelist said. “But now, we’re mostly limited to the voices of those who have left Belarus, as many are afraid of repercussions for their families if they speak out.”

A heavy reliance on donors, who have their own priorities, also narrows the scope of coverage for Belarus’s independent media, making it difficult to produce entertainment or content for or about women and children.

Indicator 2: The norm for information is that it is based on facts.

The ferocious crackdown on independent media in Belarus, the third most frequent jailer of journalists worldwide, has driven almost all nonstate media from the country, frustrating their efforts to get accurate information and check facts and making it impossible for them to attend events or interact with officials, experts, and ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, government information is often misleading or withheld.

Panelists said that prior to 2020, verification was more straightforward, with many sources available from various government bodies. Today, however, few want to risk engaging with independent “extremist” media by commenting, subscribing, sharing, or even liking, which are criminal offenses.

“As someone labeled a ‘terrorist,’ like my colleagues, I have to be cautious with the information I use,” an editor on the panel said. “Any outreach to our audience or experts can endanger them in Belarus. Consequently, we often have to rely on unconfirmed data or wait for natural confirmation, given the risks associated with our ‘extremist’ status.”

The editorial teams mostly maintain prior networks of verified observers and contributors to collect information. Panelists from NEXTA, an online outlet operating from Poland, said approximately 80 percent of their audience lives in Belarus, with some individuals actively sending in new information. The team uses a range of verification methods, including online searches for photo and video verification and original sources. Still, they acknowledge the growing difficulty in directly covering stories from Belarus.

Meanwhile, well-funded state media propagate manipulated or misleading information, adding another layer of complexity and leading independent media to inadvertently amplify these falsehoods due to challenges in verification. Despite these hurdles, journalists strive to correct errors once identified.

Journalists struggling with unconfirmed information or delayed verification can turn to Fakeby.org, launched in 2020 by the International Strategic Action Network for Security (iSANS), an expert group that works to counter hybrid threats to democracy or the rule of law in Eurasia. The platform categorizes major instances of manipulated information in Belarusian propaganda, helping journalists to spot and counteract them. iSANS has [identified](#) 25 key propaganda topics, including false portrayals of the war in Ukraine, denigrating Belarus’s democratic neighbors, and misrepresenting the US and EU.

The obstacles facing Belarusian independent media are steering them toward a decentralized, network-based model of journalism that relies

on technology and community-sourced information while aiming to uphold rigorous journalism standards.

Indicator 3: The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm.

Belarusian journalists in exile focus primarily on maintaining quality journalism and professional standards, aiming to use information as a tool for positive change. Meanwhile, state propaganda uses hate speech and threats aiming to [provoke](#) hostility, primarily at critics of the government, European diplomats, independent media, and citizens deemed disloyal, echoing the tactics of the Russian media that are widely broadcast in Belarus. To counter this onslaught, independent media diligently monitor their own social networks, filtering out hostile comments. Social media algorithms aid this process by detecting hate speech and halting the spread of manipulated information.

The state media’s biased reporting, particularly on religious, gender, and ethnic issues, often sparks intense criticism from journalists abroad but brings no repercussions within Belarus, as state funding continues

to support these channels. Additionally, Telegram channels with ties to the security forces and official propaganda outlets foster animosity toward various groups, including LGBTQ+ people, Poles, so-called “Anglo-Saxons” (the United States and United Kingdom), Catholics, Protestants, and Belarusians abroad.

Media IQ notes that journalists and experts in Belarusian state media consistently use dehumanizing rhetoric and justify violence against dissenters. For instance, a propagandist on the STV state television channel has described law enforcement as “modest, simple guys” who “mercilessly, harshly deal with all traitors of the Motherland,” while a political analyst has likened dissidents to “weeds” that need to be “pulled out.”

“Belarusian journalists in exile face enormous challenges simply reporting the news and maintaining standards. Panelists said that media deemed “extremist” by the government cannot get information from state agencies.

The Belarusian government also uses information to bolster its power, [depicting](#) the deployment of military forces such as Russia's Wagner Group in Belarus as a national security measure. It also exaggerates external threats to build public support for Lukashenka and justify an increasing Russian military presence, including nuclear weapons deployment. In a similar vein, the Belarusian state media's portrayal of Poland oscillates between openness to post-election dialogue, on the one hand, to depicting Polish policies as historically unfriendly on the other.

Indicator 4: The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.

Content in Belarus is becoming narrower and less diverse. With state policies and media so deeply entwined with those in Russia, the Belarusian language itself has long been an embattled signifier of opposition, at risk of marginalization. Further, both independent and state media adopt traditional ideas of gender roles and identity. Aside from the democratic opposition, most marginalized groups in Belarus lack the funding, staffing, or skills to make themselves heard.

Though Russian-language content dominates mainstream media, several YouTube channels, including a particularly popular video blog on Belarusian culture, provide wide-ranging, Belarusian-language content. Independent media are increasingly using the Belarusian language, partly to distance themselves from Russian media since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

On issues of gender, a 2023 Media IQ [study](#) of state and independent outlets found little coverage and said both state-affiliated and independent media tend to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes. Television channels, regardless of their affiliation, displayed a higher interest in gender matters than other media. The study also highlighted a disproportionate representation of male speakers in the media—

men were featured as subjects or experts three times more frequently than women. Male experts were nearly seven times more likely to be portrayed as professionals rather than as individuals sharing personal experiences.

“The state media's biased reporting, particularly on religious, gender, and ethnic issues, often sparks intense criticism from journalists abroad but brings no repercussions within Belarus, as state funding continues to support these channels.”

The most pronounced patriarchal stereotypes [are found](#) in state-run media's coverage of government policies. Lukashenka has [said](#) that nontraditional and childless families threaten state stability and has called male same-sex relationships a “gross perversion.” Journalists for Tolerance (J4T), which monitors hate speech, [found](#) that 22 of 28

independent and state-owned outlets reported on LGBTQ+ issues at least once from January to October 2023. A narrow majority of those reports, 51 percent, used appropriate language, but even they sometimes veered into inciting hostility.

Coverage of ethnic and religious minorities in state media is limited. In 2023, Belarusian nonstate media's religious content strongly emphasized the country's majority Christian denominations, Orthodox and Catholic. For Orthodox believers, there is priest and vlogger Alexander Kuhta's [“Batushka Responds,”](#) while Catholics can watch priest Ksiondz Barok's [YouTube channel](#) and stream events on [Catholic.by's channel](#), among others. Smaller religious communities such as Judaism and Islam, while not ignored, receive less visibility.

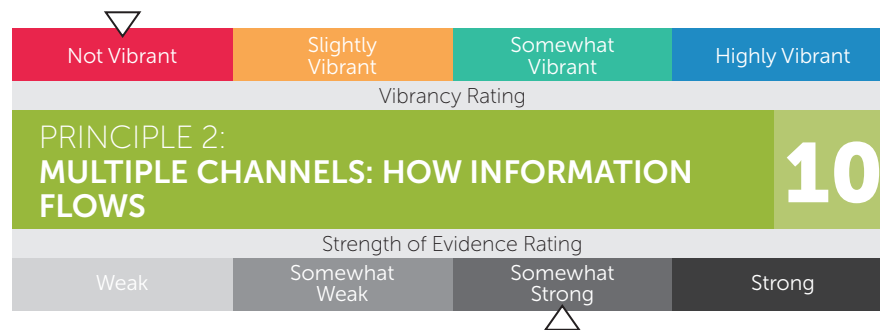
Among other marginalized communities, many Belarusians still seem interested in reports on political prisoners, even as coverage of them declines, according to a Media IQ [analysis](#) of Belarusian Telegram channels in the third quarter of 2023. Coverage appears mostly on a few key channels, notably the government-friendly Telegram channels ZhS Premium and Yellow Plums, which disparage the prisoners, as well as independent Belsat TV.

Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced.

In Belarus, state funding goes to pro-government media, while businesses that advertise in exiled independent media risk criminal prosecution. As a result, independent journalists, particularly those abroad serving Belarusian audiences, are heavily reliant on donors, in competition with Ukrainian and Russian liberal media also fleeing repression and war. This predicament [forces](#) Belarusian journalists to constantly validate their critical role in countering state propaganda.

Even the most successful of the exiled news organizations are far from financially self-sufficient. Life in the EU, with its higher taxes and cost of living, has compounded these financial challenges. Meanwhile, media targeting audiences in Belarus are in a catch-22: they get little interest from advertisers in Poland or Lithuania, but a shift in focus to secure funding from these advertisers would lead to an audience loss in Belarus, raising questions about the purpose of their existence. In this bind, these media require assistance from the West to keep going.

The donor-based funding model, which often emphasizes short-term, results-oriented projects, further limits these journalists. Small editorial teams are trapped in a cycle of addressing immediate issues, unable to delve into broader, more diverse topics and projects. The challenges became clear last year, as several prominent exiled Belarusian media, notably Radio BA, The Village Belarus, Dzejaslou, and [KYKY.org](#), [shut down](#). By year's end, Reform.by narrowly avoided closure with the help of 17,000 EUR (\$18,500) [raised](#) by its readers.



The score for this principle rose one point from the previous year, but with notable variation within its indicators. Access to information scored relatively high, while rights to create and share information scored the lowest, emphasizing the government's chokehold over what journalists can report. Although independent media in exile have been adaptable and resilient, especially in the digital realm, the media environment within Belarus remains severely constricted and polarized.

Indicator 6: People have rights to create, share, and consume information.

In Belarus, the constitution nominally guarantees freedom of speech and the press, but this means little in practice. The government severely restricts these freedoms through [legislation](#) broadly defining “extremism” and “terrorism,” applying these labels arbitrarily. The resulting harsh penalties include long prison sentences for journalists. In the digital sphere, the government uses extensive surveillance and censorship, all of which forces independent media to either operate in exile or brave severe repression.

In 2023, the country continued its steady slide in global press freedom indexes. An ongoing crackdown saw 46 journalists detained, 34 searches and inspections, and at least 16 administrative arrests, according to the [Belarusian Association of Journalists](#) (BAJ). Officials labeled 21 media organizations and 33 journalists as “extremist” and another 12 journalists as “terrorists.” As of December 2023, there were [37 journalists and media workers](#) detained in Belarus.

Further, the BAJ [reported](#) approximately 700 pieces of content deemed “extremist” in the first half of 2023 and 18 media outlets—including Belsat TV, RFE/RL, and BelaPAN, along with the BAJ itself and the Belarusian Investigative Center—[branded](#) as “extremist” organizations. Simultaneously, the Belarusian government has escalated its online censorship, [blocking](#) more than 9,000 websites. Notably, officials cut off access to YouTube on New Year’s Eve 2023 during a broadcast by opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya and blocked access to the investigative media site Bureau Media shortly after it posted an exposé of wrongdoing by the Belarusian Red Cross’s top management.

Wielding its control over the digital infrastructure and the regulatory process, the Belarusian government systematically pressures ICT providers to block “extremist” websites and platforms, severely restricting public access to diverse information sources. Through entities such as Beltelecom, the state-owned provider, and the National Center for Traffic Exchange, the government keeps a tight grip on internet gateways, enabling direct surveillance, content filtering, and personal-data harvesting, effectively isolating independent media.

To foil potential digital blocking, including on YouTube, Belsat has introduced a mobile app and begun broadcasting via Telegram, which has emerged as a key information source, albeit sometimes a conduit for manipulated information, essentially mirroring YouTube’s content. The platform’s search-friendly nature and use of chatbots for conducting anonymous surveys are effective tools for gathering and disseminating information.

Panelists stressed the importance of being able to work anonymously, as in the case of the animated Sad Kolenka YouTube channel. A common practice is to establish a new digital platform not yet deemed “extremist,” although panelists said even this strategy does not guarantee safety.

“ The Belarusian government systematically pressures ICT providers to block “extremist” websites and platforms, severely restricting public access to diverse information sources.

Prosecutors accused more than [3,500 people](#) of participating in “extremist activities” in 2023.

Among them, Yana Pinchuk [received](#) a 12-year prison sentence for her role in managing the Vitebsk97% Telegram channel and blogger Mykola Klimovich faced a year’s imprisonment, notably for a social media reaction, before dying in custody under [unclear circumstances](#). Media professionals Maryna Zolatava and Liudmila Chekina each [received](#) 12-year sentences for “inciting hatred” and advocating sanctions, among many other examples.

Regional newspapers such as *Intex-press* and *Info-Courier* faced harsh crackdowns in 2023, including detentions and being labeled “extremist,” leading to their eventual shutdown, the BAJ reported. In Svetlogorsk, the private television and radio company Ranak was searched and later [designated](#) an “extremist” organization. Its staff faced administrative prosecution, and criminal charges were brought against three of its journalists.

Belsat panelists noted a disturbing new development, with some of their former staff journalists being imprisoned for their previous work with the network. As of November 2023, 13 current or former Belsat employees were incarcerated in Belarus due to this association.

This comprehensive crackdown compels journalists in the country to steer clear of topics such as politics, economics, and the war in Ukraine, narrowing the scope for public discourse.

Belarusians speaking or writing on sensitive topics not only face legal repercussions but also social ostracism, professional barriers, and financial penalties, such as fines and account freezing.

Indicator 7: People have adequate access to channels of information.

Belarus boasts [high internet](#) penetration and cutting-edge technology. As of late 2022, nearly 90 percent of Belarusians use the internet thanks to extensive coverage, low prices, and advanced mobile connectivity, gradually bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Belarus ranks among the countries with the most affordable internet access, with costs for mobile and fixed broadband data remaining low relative to income. Moreover, 2G and 3G networks blanket almost the entire country, and 4G services reach more than 80 percent of the territory. Trials for 5G networks are also underway.

As of January 2023, [4.27 million](#) people in Belarus, about 45 percent of the population, used social media. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, VK, and Telegram have caught on by offering diverse and engaging content, with TikTok [particularly](#) popular with young people.

Nevertheless, this easy access to technology falls well short of meeting most people's information needs, given stringent state censorship. This control includes suppression of media in nondominant languages, particularly Belarusian, which the government often links to opposition groups. Moreover, the specific ICT needs of vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities are not adequately met, with essential adaptations such as screen readers or simplified interfaces in scarce supply. Nonliterate individuals also face challenges, as visual and audio content—crucial for their engagement with the digital world—is also subject to censorship. The government's chokehold on media also serves to restrict information for vulnerable or politically sensitive groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, Catholics (due to association with the West), and ethnic Poles.

Disparities in access also persist. Urban residents are more likely to have internet access than those in rural regions, and women are more likely to

go online than men, according to 2022 government statistics. Belarusian women's internet usage rate exceeds the averages of their counterparts in the EU and Commonwealth of Independent States, according to Freedom House.

In the event of disruptions of one form of telecommunications infrastructure, such as television, Belarusians do have alternative means to access information through the internet, which, despite heavy censorship, remains a vital alternative information source, especially given the availability and use of mobile devices. Radio, though not as dominant as the internet, provides an additional layer of redundancy for receiving information, particularly in more remote areas where internet access might be less reliable.

However, these channels can be compromised by government interference such as internet throttling or shutdowns during periods of political tension, making virtual private networks (VPNs) crucial for Belarusians seeking unrestricted internet access. Exiled media use digital

tools, including mobile applications and Telegram channels, to navigate around blocked websites.

For instance, following the example of Belsat TV, Malanka Media's Telegram channel has introduced an app that allows users in Belarus to access its content without the need for a VPN and is poised

to expand its reach through satellite broadcasting this year, thus "overcoming the financial constraints typically associated with servers or streaming," said one panelist, a Malanka representative.

Malanka Media is also spearheading the development of a streaming platform for exiled Belarusian media, particularly in the face of potential shutdowns of platforms such as YouTube. Its offerings will be diverse and will include content from Euroradio, among others. Once launched, Malanka will invite other independent media outlets to join it, the panelist said.

“Information that comes via state media is carefully stage-managed. A 2023 presidential decree obliges state-owned outlets to consistently showcase examples of the government solving problems.”

Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information.

The constitution and laws of Belarus ostensibly protect freedom of expression and access to public information. In practice, however, these laws are superseded by other, conflicting legislation on the control of information. For instance, officials frequently cite national security, anti-extremism, or data protection laws to restrict access or classify information as state secrets. The information provided is often delayed or incomplete.

Information that comes via state media is carefully stage-managed. A 2023 presidential [decree](#) obliges state-owned outlets to consistently showcase examples of the government solving problems. Conversely, when an outlet reports on an outstanding problem or issue, it is required to notify the relevant state agency, essentially allowing the agency to get ahead of the issue.

Belarusian state bodies and officials often shun independent media. A 2023 [decree](#) by the Council of Ministers makes it more difficult for independent journalists to get information from Belarusian officials, as it allows officials to ignore anonymous calls and shut down conversations deemed detrimental to the country's image. Revised protocols for direct phone-line communications now require callers to disclose their full name, patronymic (if applicable), and address before officials can respond.

Some panelists said that in seeking data for journalistic investigations, they must rely on indirect sources such as figures released at Lukashenka's meetings, requiring a time-consuming process of piecing together information. This method is necessary even for understanding broader economic trends, such as the impact of global price changes on local Belarusian exports. In a more transparent environment, direct statistical data would suffice, but in Belarus, it can take weeks or months for crucial information, such as the country's reports to international organizations like the WHO or other UN bodies, to be leaked or officially released.

Meanwhile, media struggle to cover other news, including courts and crime, due to limited access to local sources and the government's tight control over information. The result is an information vacuum even on online platforms that previously had abundant content in these areas and significant gaps in the public's knowledge of crime in Belarus.

Many people in Belarus are wary of seeking out government information that might not put the country in the best light, given the government's harsh treatment of its critics. State agencies have press offices and spokespeople, but their function is limited by the government's restrictive approach to information.

Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow.

The Belarusian government's determination to control the flow of information means that the country lacks ready access to diverse media. Although there is no law regulating concentration of media ownership, the state is a de facto monopoly, as government-owned or aligned media are the only outlets that do not face persecution and enjoy plentiful resources. Officials can use administrative methods to shut down media and place stringent controls on launching new outlets. In addition, the regulatory framework severely restricts foreign participation in the media sector, effectively barring foreigners from establishing or operating media outlets.

The advertising industry, too, has come under stricter scrutiny. Since 2022, ad distributors have been required to register with the government, and legislation pending at the end of 2023 would end an exemption for bloggers or influencers in an official attempt to ensure that any content producer who is deemed "extremist" is cut off from ad revenues within Belarus.

Belarus does not require disclosure of media ownership, nor are its broadcasting frequencies allotted through a transparent and fair process. It is also increasingly difficult to launch a new media organization in Belarus, with broader laws on "extremism" excluding more people from the process. License denials are an opaque, administrative process that cannot be challenged in the courts. Meanwhile, media regulations are

enforced as arbitrary tools of oppression against outlets that run afoul of the government.

Panelists lamented the absence of truly public media in Belarus. Although the country has so-called public-service media, they fall far short of international standards for news and information, with these government-controlled outlets functioning more as a propaganda arm. Independent monitoring, including by [Media IQ](#), noted that these media frequently confuse fact with opinion.

Through entities such as the Operations and Analysis Center, which monitors online activity ostensibly for national security purposes, and the National Traffic Exchange Center, the government wields control over both state-owned and private internet service providers (ISPs). It has used “extremist” lists to block more than 9,000 internet identifiers, including websites and digital platforms such as NEXTA, election watchdog platforms Golos and Zubr, and various websites affiliated with human rights groups and opposition political movements, according to the [Human Constanta](#) rights organization. ISPs discriminate against some users based on factors including their identity, the type of content they produce, and their address or the addresses of sites they visit, employing methods such as IP filtering, DNS record disabling, and deep packet inspection.

Indicator 10: Information channels are independent.

In 2023, the only independent information channels serving Belarus were operating from abroad, struggling to be heard and stay afloat. Domestically, state media is a hegemon, dominating airtime, the internet, government resources, and advertising revenue. Approximately [60 million EUR](#) (\$65.3 million) went to state media in 2023. The government also introduced a [special tax](#) on most commercial advertising, with proceeds going to state media.

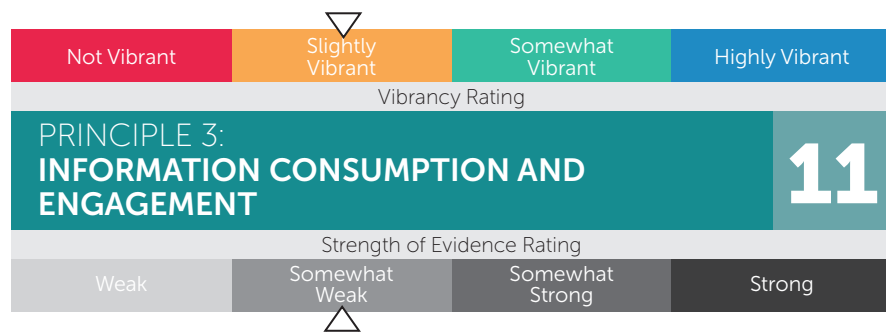
Furthermore, the [creation](#) of a single media company for the Union State of Russia and Belarus represents a unified front in the face of Western sanctions and a strategic consolidation of propaganda assets and narratives in the future. Among other results is skewed coverage of

the war in Ukraine and frequent attacks on the United States and the European Union as instigators of international crises. Moreover, [plans](#) by the official Belarus Telegraphic Agency (BelTA) to strengthen ties with Xinhua, China’s state news agency, underscore the growing influence of external actors in supporting Belarusian propaganda content.

In Belarus, the line between newsroom and business operations is increasingly blurred. State-aligned entities exert pressure through strict regulations, subtle censorship, and financial rewards or penalties tied to editorial content. For example, state subsidies and advertising contracts are often used to influence editorial decisions and ensure they align with government narratives. Additionally, government-appointed bodies often dictate which stories are covered and their presentation.

The bodies tasked with overseeing frequency allocations, licenses, and telecommunications services lack the independence and neutrality crucial for fair regulation. Instead, they operate under direct government influence, particularly under the purview of the Ministry of Communications and Informatization and the Operations and Analysis Center, which was formerly a part of the State Security Committee (KGB) and is now under the presidential administration. The OAC holds significant sway over internet service providers, sets information security standards, conducts surveillance online, and manages top-level domains. These tight governmental connections cast doubt on the impartiality of regulatory and licensing decisions.

Although Belarusian media in exile rely heavily on grants, their biggest supporters, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Western governments, are also proponents of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and free media.



The Belarusian digital media landscape proved increasingly resilient amid intensifying repression in 2023, improving by two points from last year’s study. Within this principle, however, some indicators fared much better than others. Media’s engagement with audience needs scored the highest, while consumer’s information engagement scored the lowest. The stark contrast between these scores is likely due to people’s fear of engaging in any way with media the government deems “extremist.”

Indicator 11: People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.

Legal structures for data privacy and digital security in Belarus nominally exist but are frequently compromised by the government’s extensive surveillance capabilities. Officially, legislation such as the law “On Information, Informatization and Protection of Information” aims to protect the personal data of Belarusian citizens. However, these laws also provide broad powers for the government to monitor and intercept communications, often under the guise of national security and with minimal judicial oversight. This discrepancy results in a divergence between the intent of the law and its practical application, with state interests typically overriding individual privacy rights.

Surveillance practices have intensified under a 2022 presidential decree that granted sweeping powers to law enforcement to install monitoring devices and access user data from communications operators, internet providers, and website owners. The government’s surveillance techniques include [extracting](#) information from personal chats to

identify dissenters. Authorities deploy fake links, bots, and websites to capture users’ IP addresses and then track their online activity.

Many Belarusians use VPNs to bypass government censorship. Ways of navigating website blocking in Belarus vary. Major corporations like Amazon and Google offer solutions including links for mirror sites, but often with a hefty price tag. For instance, Euroradio’s [collaboration](#) with VPN provider Psiphon initially attracted one million views monthly, but Psiphon’s subsequent monetization model, priced at \$16,000 per month, was too much for Euroradio, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable funding strategies for free media.

Notably, more than 200,000 Belarusians unknowingly exposed themselves to surveillance via a fake Telegram bot while signing up for the opposition’s [Peramoga](#) (Victory) plan for mobilization, leading to [numerous](#) arrests. In a concerning [incident](#) in November 2022, a KGB officer infiltrated the opposition “Black Book of Belarus” Telegram channel, compromising the personal data of approximately 10,000 Belarusians, potentially leading to their prosecution. Law enforcement agencies further exploit personal accounts to download targets’ contact books and private correspondence, building networks based on online interactions.

The routine use of real names in private chats aids the state’s pervasive online spying, as does metadata in shared files, revealing device types and user names, and acts as mundane as commenting or subscribing can result in criminal charges. Most [detentions](#) for online activity are linked to Instagram use, followed by Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube, in that order. Notoriously, one resident of Hrodno was [sentenced](#) to 2.5 years in prison merely for liking a post criticizing Lukashenka.

As a result of these challenges, independent media are compelled to adopt strong encryption and secure communication tools to shield their activities from government eyes. NGOs, media, and the BAJ offer [guidance](#) on digital security, emphasizing the importance of VPNs and online activity [awareness](#) in Belarus. In a similar vein, developers are creating tools, such as the [@FindMessagesBot](#) for Telegram launched in July 2023, that help users identify and delete their past messages

from “extremist” chats. Despite these measures, media still remain susceptible to sophisticated cyber attacks orchestrated by the state, such as phishing and DDoS attacks, designed to disrupt their operations.

Belarus has not ratified the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, major cybersecurity providers like [DigitCert](#) and [Avast](#), along with other tech companies, halted their operations in Belarus. This withdrawal of critical security services may lead to an increase in hacking, cybercrime, and government surveillance. Thus, even with comprehensive security measures in place, media’s defenses against state-sponsored cyberattacks remain tenuous, emphasizing the vulnerability of independent journalistic practices to ongoing state threats.

Indicator 12: People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate.

The government of Belarus has no interest in encouraging media literacy, and there are no well-meaning public campaigns or school lessons on the subject. However, there is no data available on the Belarusian public’s level of media literacy.

Media consumption in Belarus is fragmented, according to recent [research](#) by Chatham House. 33 percent of respondents said they get their news from television channels owned or linked to the Belarusian or Russian governments. 24 percent turn to nonstate media, while another 25 percent watch the news on state television but also consult independent sources.

Media audiences navigate a range of sources of varying credibility and biases. Many, too, are weary of a relentless stream of reports about crackdowns and repression, and they are consuming less news. This fatigue, coupled with fear or apathy, does not encourage critical

thinking. Nonetheless, independent media outlets in exile persist in educating their audiences, promoting fact-based investigative [projects](#) to counter information manipulation and propaganda.

“**The government’s surveillance techniques include extracting information from personal chats to identify dissenters. Authorities deploy fake links, bots, and websites to capture users’ IP addresses and then track their online activity.**”

Panelists stressed the need to get ahead of propaganda, calling for predictive measures to prepare Belarusian audiences for potential manipulated information in the future. However, they said this goal is complicated by tech companies’ algorithms and content moderators—often not Belarusian ones—removing information produced by so-called “extremist” media while propaganda and bad information remain.

Indicator 13: People engage productively with the information that is available to them.

Although free speech and free media are enshrined in Belarus’s laws and the constitution, the government makes no pretense of tolerating dissenting views. It does, however, sometimes arrange stage-managed issue discussions on state television that inevitably support the official positions. Thus, aside from online discussion areas hosted by independent media in exile, Belarus has no public venues for real debate.

Discussions on state media deploy ostensibly independent commentators who blur the boundaries between journalism and government policymaking. Bloggers and social media influencers are also often recruited to spread government-sanctioned messages, creating an illusion of diverse opinions while keeping a tight grip on the main narrative.

In this ideological desert, some Belarusians turn to alternative platforms to engage in discussions, get information, and express dissenting views, albeit with varying degrees of caution and anonymity. Panelists representing independent Telegram channels said their traffic surges

during critical events, such as the deployment of Wagner troops in Belarus or the outbreak of war, when state media do not provide the full picture. Telegram offers timely and independent information and fosters discussions among diverse communities at these times. The platform's anonymity provides users with a degree of protection, enabling them to participate in discussions without fear of retribution.

Even on Telegram, however, the Belarusian KGB monitors discussions of sensitive topics, and some channel administrators have restricted comments to ensure their users' own safety, underscoring the tension between facilitating free expression and safeguarding individuals from potential harm in a hostile environment.

Despite [risks](#) that include being labeled “extremist,” having law enforcement surveil or seize their residences in Belarus, losing their citizenship, and even having their friends and families threatened, dissenters abroad continue to use platforms such as Telegram or Signal, in a show of resilience and adaptability.

Indicator 14: Media and information producers engage with their audience's needs.

Independent exiled media rely on data from democracy- and media-development organizations such as the National Democratic Institute, Internews, Press Club Belarus, and the BAJ to learn about their audiences' demographics and preferences. They also conduct their own audience surveys on topics of interest and use Google Analytics and Phlanx to delve deeper into audience engagement and interaction patterns.

Independent media also proactively engage with their audiences in Belarus through platforms like Signal and Telegram to deliver real-time updates and cultivate community discussions. These efforts not only facilitate prompt discussions but also help build a sense of community among Belarusian users, united by shared experiences and the exchange of information. As one panelist, an editor, noted, their

Both state-owned and independent media struggle to produce nonpolitical content, driving viewers to Russian alternatives.

Telegram channels use bots to filter specific keywords and prevent new users from posting links for the first 24 hours. Additionally, comments are automatically deleted after one day, enhancing safety. Moreover, during discussions on sensitive topics, they often disable comments at the request of subscribers due to concerns about police surveillance. This cautious approach helps protect users, especially those in Belarus, from potential repercussions in response to their emotional engagement with the news.

The decline in subscriptions, likes, and comments across independent media platforms indicates several key problems: a general turn away from politics among ordinary Belarusians, a genuine fear of imprisonment for subscribing or interacting, and a distance from audiences due to independent journalists' inability to report from within Belarus. Although being labeled as “extremist” can also lead to a drop in subscribers, it does not usually have a significant effect. “Few people have the means to meticulously track which media outlets have been labeled as ‘extremist’ to then unsubscribe from them,” said one panelist. “In the eyes of the audience, independent media are often perceived as ‘extremist’ regardless of whether they have officially been given that status by the state.”

Fear of repercussions, however, does impact groups such as the relatives of political prisoners, who have largely ceased contact with independent journalists. Several panelists said Belarusians often reach out to editorial offices requesting the removal of past articles in which they were mentioned or quoted due to safety concerns. Editorial teams consistently honor such requests, albeit at the expense of content diversity.

Both state-owned and independent media struggle to produce nonpolitical content, driving viewers to Russian alternatives.

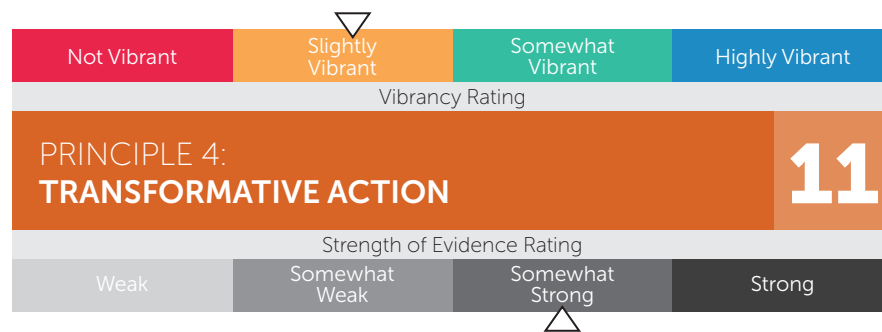
The absence of successful entertainment projects and prominent personalities exacerbates the issue, potentially leading younger people to gravitate toward content produced by Russian state television. At the same time, some panelists said exiled media's efforts to reach a new,

neutral audiences with nonpolitical content risks alienating their core Belarusian audiences, which seek information and emotional support. It also raises questions about the best use of editorial resources and the fundamental mission of exiled media.

Financial reliance on donors and investors, who may prioritize sociopolitical programming, can also complicate media’s efforts to connect with audiences. Funding for children’s and women’s content is notably more difficult to secure, and some projects beloved by the Belarusian audience, such as Malanka Art, centered on protest art, struggle to attract sponsors, resulting in program closures. As a result, Belarusian independent media operate primarily as mission-driven initiatives rather than businesses, with substantial dependence on donor funding.

Indicator 15: Community media provides information relevant for community engagement.

Panelists largely agreed that community media does not exist in Belarus. However, some panelists viewed local media organizations as fulfilling some functions of community media by providing information not covered by national outlets. These organizations face the same repressive pressures and have largely disappeared from the public sphere. Many have moved instead to more secure and private platforms, such as closed-chat groups, messaging apps, and hidden social networks to evade state control.



The score for this principle increased by one point from last year’s study but remains relatively low, reflecting the shortcomings of media engagement with civil society. The indicator on civil society’s use of quality information for community improvement scored the highest within this principle, while information support for good governance and democratic governance scored the lowest. Despite the resilience and adaptability of Belarusian media in exile, they have little impact on the human rights situation in Belarus and decisions by its leaders.

Indicator 16: Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.

Non-partisan Belarusian media, exemplified by media outlets like Nasha Niva, Zerkalo (the exile successor to TUT.by), and others operate from abroad and still manage to maintain Belarusian audiences across their various social media platforms. Following the government’s block of all independent news and analytical websites in the country, Belarusian audiences migrated to social media and messaging app channels of these outlets. [As of August 2023](#), TikTok had emerged as the leading platform with 4.7 million users in Belarus, followed by Instagram with 3.5 million and Vkontakte with 3.4 million.

This data reveals that Belarusians primarily access alternative information through digital platforms, demonstrating a strong demand for it. Although the widespread use of VPNs in Belarus complicates the accurate measurement of audience sizes, the high subscription and

viewership figures on social media platforms suggest a significant and engaged audience for these exiled media outlets. This is consistent with [recent research](#) conducted by The Fix and JX Fund, further underscoring the resilience and reach of non-partisan Belarusian media.

These measures facilitate swift discussions and foster a sense of belonging and community through the exchange of information and experiences. Nevertheless, a panel expert mentioned that managing online comments presents significant challenges. On YouTube, NEXTA employs features to filter out aggressive comments and hate speech by using stop words. Telegram poses a greater challenge, however, due to its rapid comment refresh rate and large subscriber base. Despite this, NEXTA's team of moderators diligently manages comments, working to distinguish between bot activity and genuine user opinions. To maintain a respectful and safe environment, the editorial team removes personal attacks and personal data, ensuring that their community remains protected from harassment and abuse. Similarly, most exiled non-partisan media adopt advanced moderation tools and comment management tactics to ensure secure and responsive communication with their audiences.

In general, the Belarusian media landscape is marked by “informational tribalism,” in which different information sources have spurred Belarusians to not only sort themselves into distinct ideological camps but also to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging within their chosen “tribe.” This phenomenon extends beyond mere consumption patterns to encompass social interactions, cultural norms, and personal values.

It is difficult for many in Belarus to break out of their information silos, even if they wanted to. The state's tightening grip on independent media, now branded “extremist,” has led to a divide within Belarusian society

between those who consume predominantly state propaganda and those who rely solely on independent sources. One panelist lamented “a deepening profound gap in societal discourse, with one segment of the population unable to comprehend the perspective of the other.”

As [noted](#) by the New Belarus Vision think tank, state and nonstate media in Belarus seize on the same topics to foment ideological and political opposition. Their efforts to discredit each other and build support permeate political interactions on Belarusian social networks. The war in Ukraine is a good illustration of this divide. In a December 2023 survey, [Chatham House](#) found that attitudes toward the conflict

had barely budged over a year and a half, with consumers of state media much more likely than the audience for nonstate media to support Russia's actions. Supporters are typically older and living outside Minsk, while opponents are more likely to live in Minsk, be young or middle-aged, and have a higher education.

Though this generational and ideological divide, partly fueled by the digital literacy and global connectivity of Belarusian youth, may be a harbinger of significant social change, it also thwarts any meaningful political dialogue.

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Indicator 17: Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.

Given the deep informational divide in Belarusian society and state media's propaganda role, many people in Belarus are walled off from reliable information. Those who rely on independent media are much more likely to use quality information in forming opinions on social or political issues. For example, the limited support in Belarus for Ukraine in its war with Russia is in part thanks to independent media coverage of the Kremlin's actions long before the full-scale invasion in 2022 and before most of these outlets were forced into exile.

More recently, the new Belarusian [Hajun](#) project won significant public trust as a source of uncensored news about the war in Ukraine. With more than 400,000 subscribers on Telegram, down from a peak of over 500,000, it has become a [critical source](#) of verified, crowd-sourced content, hosting thousands of photographs and hundreds of videos related to the conflict. As of February 2023, more than 30,000 people had contributed to Belarusian Hajun, and at least six Belarusians had been prosecuted for their involvement with it.

Generally, however, the government's tight grip on information and harsh penalties for dissent have all but stifled civic engagement and encounters with elected officials are inconsequential. The barrage of censorship, extremism charges, online blocking, and state propaganda create widespread fear, distorting political campaigning and people's voting behavior. Official election results are highly suspect.

The state's approach to information has shaken people's confidence in other areas, such as when the government downplayed the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and strayed from the World Health Organization's guidelines. During the early stages of the outbreak, Lukashenka promoted unscientific remedies such as drinking vodka and using saunas, sowing public confusion and a disregard for essential measures such as social distancing and vaccination. As the crisis receded, so did the government's attempts to manipulate public health information, but there is likely a lingering public distrust of the government's advice on the topic.

Indicator 18: Civil society uses quality information to improve communities.

Within Belarus, quality information cannot lead to citizen activism, by government design. For Belarusians in exile, however, it is a catalyst for action.

The International Accountability [Platform](#) for Belarus, operating in exile, is a prime example of data-driven efforts to lay the groundwork for reform and, ultimately, justice. The IAPB includes the Danish Institute Against Torture, the Viasna human rights group, and the Legal Initiative,

which advocates for human rights and the rule of law in Belarus. As of March 2023, it had compiled more than 20,000 documents, including witness testimonies and medical reports, that provide a comprehensive view of human rights violations in Belarus.

The success of initiatives like the [BYSOL](#) Foundation's crowdfunding campaign, which raised over 1.1 million EUR (\$1.2 million) for victims of political repression, relied partly on its ability to inform and mobilize a community abroad. This solidarity extends beyond Belarusian borders, as evidenced by the foundation's success in raising awareness and support for Ukrainian refugees in neighboring countries since 2022.

Furthermore, the engagement of Belarusian civil society with global technology companies, facilitated by independent media and Tsikhanouskaya's cabinet in exile, aims to promote Belarusian counterpropaganda. Efforts to adjust algorithms on platforms like Google and YouTube to favor independent Belarusian media, as well as Tsikhanouskaya's [urging](#) Google's vice president to prioritize alternative Belarusian content over propaganda online, reflect a strategic approach to ensuring access to unbiased information.

The Belarusian Investigative Center, whose [exposés](#) of corruption and sanction-evasion schemes worth over \$3 billion landed Russian oligarch Alexander Shakutin on the US sanctions list in 2023, also demonstrates the power of quality information to effect policy changes internationally.

Indicator 19: Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.

The low score for this indicator reflects the state's practice of using quality information from independent media in a manner that ultimately undermines the media, experts, and the subjects of media reports, to the detriment of its own citizens.

Belarus has government press councils and press centers, ostensibly to foster dialogue among the state, civil society, and the media, but they are little more than mouthpieces. Weekly press conferences at the National Press Center are a venue for disseminating government-

approved narratives rather than a platform for meaningful dialogue with independent media or critical voices—who have been frozen out of public life, in any event.

Government officials and state-controlled media rarely engage deeply with evidence or facts. For example, Belarusian officials have claimed that no country has done as much for the safety and wellbeing of Ukrainian children as Russia and Belarus, a statement that contradicts widespread international reports and lacks verifiable evidence. The discourse often involves attacking or discrediting the opposition rather than engaging with their arguments, further stifling legitimate debate. Even in settings like press conferences, which could allow for more interaction, the discussion is carefully managed to avoid sensitive topics.

“**The manipulation of information is central to Belarus’s political discourse. Leading up to the February 2024 parliamentary elections, for instance, state-run media painted Belarus as a formidable empire, with Lukashenka as a successful leader revered on the international stage.**”

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Belarus’s pro-democracy diaspora is branded as fugitives and traitors, while Belarusian propaganda on Ukraine echoes Russian claims that Ukraine is not a sovereign nation and that Ukrainians are merely an extension of the Russian people.

In addition, state media sometimes co-opt information from independent media for propaganda purposes. “The state media ... often repurpose our materials, presenting them in a completely different light,” a panelist from Belsat said. “They are essentially rebranding our work to fit their narrative. It’s intriguing to see how our content hits their sore spots, but it’s also a challenge to figure out how to deal with this manipulation.”

Belarusian officials rarely incorporate input from independent media or civil society, or even rely on facts, when explaining policy decisions.

For example, they frequently warn of a genocide against the Belarusian people, orchestrated by the West in coordination with the democratic opposition, to justify widespread repression. On typically less controversial issues like public health, sanitation, and infrastructure, the Belarusian government’s use of expert advice is inconsistent, such as its early, muted response to the pandemic. The government generally dismisses any independent expertise that differs from its own perspective.

There is occasional evidence that officials pay attention to the independent press, and sometimes even act to rectify problems that it uncovers. Notably, the Health Ministry [moved quickly](#) after an article published by Zerkalo in early 2023 about a Minsk woman who blamed doctors at a maternity hospital for the death of her infant daughter. Her Instagram appeal to a modest number of followers had been

overlooked or ignored by state media.

Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic rights.

This indicator scored the lowest within this principle, reflecting the dire situation in Belarus where quality information is too scarce to support democratic rights and good governance. Domestically, state-controlled media do not launch serious investigations or uncover rights abuses.

Exiled media, however, continue to cover the topics of corruption, human rights, civil liberties, and elections despite facing significant risks and restrictions. For example, the Belarusian Investigative Center (BIC) has been pivotal in uncovering over \$3 billion in corruption and sanctions evasion, revealing deep-seated corruption among high-level Belarusian government officials and their associates. Additionally, organizations like the International Accountability Platform for Belarus have documented extensive human rights abuses, amassing [over 21,000 documents](#) as of September 2023.

These efforts do sometimes achieve results. For example, independent Belarusian journalists helped make the case for the EU's targeted sanctions against Belarusian state-sponsored media and propagandists, as well as Ukraine's sanctions against key purveyors of Belarusian state propaganda, such as television hosts Rihor Azaronak and Ihar Tur and political scientist Aliaksandr Shpakouski. TikTok has also [banned](#) Minskaya Pravda, an online propaganda outlet with around 70,000 followers. Belarusian independent reporting has also influenced international policies, indirectly resulting in the [barring](#) of the Belarusian state television channel from broadcasting the Olympic Games for the next decade.

Due to the sensitive media environment, panelists in the Georgia study will remain anonymous.

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