

## State of Press Freedom in Belarus

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### **Background**

More than five years into the large-scale media crackdown following the disputed August 2020 re-election of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and the subsequent mass protests, Belarusian authorities continue [repressive measures](#) to silence and censor independent reporting. The Lukashenko regime raids journalists' homes and imprisons them on fabricated anti-state charges. It also carries out acts of transnational repression against those forced into exile. New arrests continue and have [offset](#) the release of 11 journalists in 2025.

### **Key issues**

#### **Imprisonment of journalists**

Belarus is the world's fifth largest [jailer of journalists](#), currently holding [24 journalists](#) behind bars. Journalists who remain in the country are at constant risk of imprisonment in retaliation for their reporting. Law enforcement officers raid their homes, confiscate journalistic equipment, detain them, and compel on-camera confessions.

Journalists are often tried behind closed doors and sentenced to lengthy prison terms or put under house arrest; their [lawyers](#) are forced to sign non-disclosure agreements. Prison authorities deny journalists necessary medical care and subject them to harsh treatment. Imprisoned journalist [Siarhei Satsuk](#), serving an eight-year prison sentence, suffers from a serious heart condition and has been denied needed medical treatment.

#### **"Extremism" laws weaponized against journalists**

Belarusian authorities weaponize so-called "[extremism](#)" laws to [jail](#) critical journalists or charge them with "discrediting Belarus" or participating in the 2020 protests. Those convicted on "extremism" or "terrorism" charges, such as [Andrey Famin](#), face additional restrictions in detention, including limits on parcels and family visits.

Extremism laws, [tightened](#) in 2021, have also been widely used to silence critical media. Nearly 50 media outlets currently [labeled](#) "extremist" are [banned](#) from operating in Belarus.

Individuals suspected of distributing "[extremist](#)" content can be detained for up to 15 days. Those charged with creating or participating in an "extremist" group [face](#) up to 10 years in prison. Additional penalties include up to eight years in prison for [financing](#) "extremism" and up to seven years for [facilitating](#) "extremist activity." Authorities also weaponize these laws to [block](#) independent news websites by adding them to the country's register of "[extremist materials](#)."

#### **Targeting of journalists in exile - a case study in transnational repression**

At least 400 independent journalists have fled Belarus since the 2020 mass protests. Belarusian authorities have launched criminal investigations against [more than 60 journalists in exile](#), with at least 13 of them being [sentenced in absentia](#). The regime also confiscates journalists' property after they are sentenced and orders them to pay heavy fines.

Belarusian authorities have even weaponized international police cooperation through wanted-person databases shared with foreign governments, Interpol Red Notices, and extradition requests. Belarusian filmmaker and journalist [Andrey Gnyot](#) spent a year in detention in Serbia while Belarusian authorities attempted to extradite him on fabricated tax charges. He was freed following international advocacy, including by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). These actions against exiled journalists demonstrate the Belarusian regime's pervasive and flagrant use of transnational repression to intimidate and silence journalists and other critical voices abroad.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) offers the following recommendations to the U.S. Congress and Administration in support of free speech and a free press in Belarus:

- Building on the [release](#) of [multiple](#) Belarusian [journalists](#) in 2024 and 2025, continue diplomatic efforts to secure the release of all other jailed journalists in Belarus.
- Restore funding for Belarusian exiled media outlets to ensure that the people of Belarus have access to independent, uncensored news and information.
- Lead the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) to deliver expedited emergency visas for at-risk Belarusian journalists.
- Work with Poland, Lithuania, and other host countries to simplify and expedite the granting or renewal of residency permits, humanitarian visas, and/or asylum for exiled journalists.
- Demand access to, and attend, trials of imprisoned journalists in Belarus.
- Press U.S. tech and social media companies to refrain from amplifying Belarusian state propaganda and to help highlight independent reporting.

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