1.3. State control over information and culture

The information and media landscape in Belarus is characterised by extensive state dominance, with state-owned media outlets and television channels serving as the primary source of information.86 Numerous independent newspapers, radio stations, and television channels had their licences removed or were forced to close.87 In November 2024, the Ministry of Information ordered distributors of print materials to remove publications deemed to be 'harming the national interest of Belarus', including those deemed to 'distort the historical truth and justice', 'promote non-traditional sexual relations' and 'popularise subcultures that are not traditional for Belarusian society'. 88 The same month, the ministry issued a list of 35 printed publications – including 'LGBTIQ+ literature, erotic fiction, and unofficial studies on the history of Belarus', which were declared banned from distribution in the country.89

According to the human rights organisation PEN Belarus,90 336 books were 'banned for political or ideological reasons' as of mid-April 2026.91 Moreover, between 2020 and November 2025, five independent publishing houses were shut down.92 In February 2026, the authorities conducted raids against publishing houses and book distributors in Minsk,93 resulting in the arrest and detention of several individuals associated with a suspended publishing house. In addition, the State Security Committee (KGB) designated a publishing house operating in exile as an extremist formation.94

As of February 2026, a blacklist maintained by the Ministry of Culture contained names of 'hundreds' of persons, reflecting widespread cultural, political, and ideological censorship. The official cultural policy is based on public support for President Lukashenka, the state's control over the interpretation of historical memory, and growing cooperation with Russian cultural institutions.95 The authorities have intensified a 'campaign of historical revisionism,' including through restrictions on 'alternative narrative of Belarusian identity' and the promotion of 'pro-Russian disinformation.' As a result, the country faces political polarisation and highlighted divisions between supporters and opponents of the authorities.96

Educational institutions have been increasingly militarised through expansion of military-patriotic clubs and classes.97 Patriotic clubs are led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and parents who do not enrol their children may face suspicion of disloyalty to the state. There were cases where the General Prosecutor's Office investigated schools for insufficient involvement in patriotic activities, treating low participation as a national security issue that could lead to

further scrutiny or prosecution.98

While the country has two official languages – Belarusian and Russian,99 sources noted on the dominance of Russian language in state media, government institutions, and education.100 Many public services, including courts and law enforcement agencies, provide information only in Russian.101 Following the 2020 protests, the authorities closed and declared numerous Belarusian-language media outlets and publishing houses as extremist.102 Speaking Belarusian in everyday life became perceived as a marker of opposition to authorities,103 and, as reported by Belarusian independent media outlet Belsat, individuals had been detained 'for simply reading books by Belarusian authors in public.'104

The authorities continuously expand restrictions on dissemination of and access to information, 105 systematically increasing control over the internet.106 Independent media outlets have been blocked and their content criminalised through anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation. 107 In February 2025, the Minister of Information stated that the authorities had blocked over 15 000 webpages, including websites designated as extremist.108 As noted by Freedom House, the list of blocked online materials includes websites of independent media outlets and human rights organisations.109 In February 2026, several resources of the human rights organisation Viasna – including its TikTok account and two specific campaign websites, #FreeViasna and Human Rights Defenders Against the Death Penalty – were classified as extremist materials.110 For more information, see chapter 2.2.2. Anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws, a) List of extremist materials.

In September 2025, the authorities introduced new procedures for restricting internet access, allegedly to eliminate conditions that facilitate online crime. Under the new rules, request for internet access restrictions can be issued by 'the Prosecutor General, the head of the Investigative Committee, the chairman of the KGB, the Minister of Internal Affairs or their authorised officials.'111

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