

[About Us](#) | [DONATE](#) | [Blog](#) | [Conte](#)[Reports](#) | [Programs](#) | [Initiatives](#) | [News](#) | [Experts](#)

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Belarus

[Belarus](#) | [Freedom of the Press 2013](#)- Select year - 

Belarus's media environment remained extremely restrictive in 2012, as the government continued to aggressively suppress independent voices ahead of deeply flawed September parliamentary elections in which progovernment parties won all of the seats. The authorities sustained their crackdown on opposition activists, protesters, a journalists while attempting to stave off economic deterioration, the influence of the Arab Spring uprising, pressure to move toward European integration, political meddling by the Kremlin, and the growing influence of social media among younger Belarusians.

Despite constitutional provisions for freedom of the press, criticism of the president and the government was considered a criminal offense, and libel convictions can result in prison sentences or high fines. Judges, prosecutors, police officers, tax officials, and bureaucrats from the Information Ministry regularly used politicized court rulings and obscure regulations to harass independent newspapers and websites during the year, especially those reporting on postelection demonstrations. In February, the independent newspaper *Nasha Niva*, charged with defamation by a state television journalist, was ordered by a court in Minsk to pay 5 million rubles (\$600) causing "moral damage." In June, Andrzej Poczobut, a correspondent for the Warsaw daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* based in the western city of Hrodna, was arrested, held for nine days, and charged with libeling the president in a series of articles he published in the independent media. The charges carry a sentence of up to five years imprisonment. As a condition of his bail, Poczobut was required to remain in Hrodna pending trial.

A draconian new media law took effect in 2009, forcing all outlets to register with the Information Ministry, including domestic and international websites, which face blockage for failure to comply. The stipulation has forced many independent publications to switch to domain names based in neighboring countries. It has also made it easier for the government to deny required accreditation and shutter outlets for coverage that does not "correspond to reality" or that "threatens the interests of the state." The law even allows penalties against outlets for reporting statements by others—for example, by political parties or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that "discredit the Republic of Belarus."