DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TRENDS IN BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE:

Narratives, Perceptions, and Reaction of the State

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→ The Belarusian authorities have almost entirely purged the political and civil field within Belarus, forcing opponents of the regime to operate primarily online.

→ Telegram and TikTok have emerged as important platforms for political competition, used to discredit opponents and promote narratives.

→ By infusing online projects with concrete political meaning and ideas, democratic initiatives can maintain their support and connection with Belarusians inside the country.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media, online platforms, software, and apps have empowered the Belarusian democratic community, including politicians, media, and activists. Online platforms provided the protest movement with additional tools during and after the opposition's election campaign in 2020. Initiatives, such as Voice and Honest People, along with opposition politicians, turned to online platforms as alternative means of information dissemination to mobilise Belarusians. Numerous Telegram channels emerged to inform and support the protest movement and collect financial aid for the families of political prisoners and other groups. In 2022, Belarusian IT specialists introduced the New Belarus platform, which offered mechanisms for disseminating information on cultural and educational initiatives and tax deductions for specific projects. Social media and digital platforms remain the only secure link between the Belarusian democratic opposition in exile and its supporters in Belarus.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian regime, which traditionally communicated with society via the state media, has also entered the digital space, competing for the electorate, threatening political opponents, and spreading propaganda. This has manifested as propaganda channels on Telegram, the so-called confession videos of detained dissidents, and the growing influence of state-controlled channels. Social media is employed to create alternative narratives and identify and suppress supporters of democratic resistance, including threatening them through private messages.

All of this indicates a significant increase in the importance of technology in Belarus's political life and the digitalisation of the political and civic spheres for opposition and state stakeholders alike.

This study aims to explore various aspects of the digitalisation of Belarusian politics, with a focus on four different areas of the digitalisation of democratic resistance.

The first part of the study presents the views and opinions of media experts, political analysts, and digital initiative creators on the status, effectiveness, challenges, and prospects for digital projects as part of Belarusian democratic resistance.

The second part surveys pro-democracy Belarusians — the primary audience of digital projects — to gauge perceptions of the effectiveness and significance of such projects by those who oppose the Lukashenka regime and currently reside in Belarus.

The third part provides a brief analytical review of Belarusian legislation regulating online activity. It also outlines trends and fundamental principles of Internet regulation in the country and the relationship between citizens and the state in the information sphere.

The fourth and final part presents the results of a three-month monitoring of pro-regime and pro-democracy political narratives on Telegram and TikTok. It analyses formats and trends of content presentation and compares the narratives of the two opposing political forces on each platform.

The author of the study — **Alesia Rudnik**, Director of the Centre for New Ideas, political scientist, PhD candidate in political science — would like to thank her research assistants: **Anna-Maria Lebedevskaya, Gleb Lepeyko, Anastasia Bekareva, Denis Ryabchuk, Vladimir Mazur, Herman Zabaronak, Artem Pripisnov, and Nikita Chaikovsky**.

1

DIGITAL SPACE — A LAST RESORT OR THE FUTURE OF BELARUSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS?

To what extent can digital projects and initiatives address the political tasks of democratic society? What are the main challenges and successes of these projects? The goal of this analysis is to outline the motivations, challenges, and benefits of political digital projects through interviews with media experts, political analysts, and digital project representatives. **Digital projects** in this context refer to **civic and activist initiatives that advocate for the democratisation of Belarus and focus on activating and involving citizens whose civic or political stance is in opposition to the Alyaksandr Lukashenka regime.** These projects are characterized by activity in the digital space and communication through technological solutions, such as Telegram channels and bots, standalone apps, online crowdfunding platforms, and closed groups on messaging apps or social networks. Examples include New Belarus, "Dvizheniye Bolshinstva" (**Majority Movement**), BeHelp, BySol, Cyberpartisans, "Razam" (**Together**) Party, Belarusian Hajun, and others.

Belarus has one of the highest Internet penetration rates among Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, with a rate of 82%[1]. The undemocratic political context has long encouraged opponents of the government to use digital platforms to express alternative opinions. Notable examples include Aliaksandr Milinkevich's election campaign in 2006, organisation of the so-called anti-parasite protests in 2017, and mobilisation and information support for actions against integration with Russia in December 2019. In a country where opponents of the government have limited access to state-owned newspapers, radio, and television, online platforms serve as a valuable resource for expressing dissenting views.

However, this phenomenon is not unique to Belarus. Studies show that in authoritarian countries where there is still Internet access, social media and other digital platforms serve as places for freely expressing political opinions, gathering protest demands, and mobilising the public for civil

or political resistance[2]. Furthermore, digital platforms enable cost-effective and rapid scaling of protests, the promotion of protest messages, and the formation of group identities. This also explains the growing role of social media in protests in democratic countries, such as to coordinate actions within the Occupy Wall Street (2011) and Black Lives Matter (2020) movements in the United States, and in semi-democratic countries, as seen in the organisation of the Euromaidan in Ukraine in 2013[3]. Experts attribute the significance of technology in protests to the fact that it is **the only available tool** in authoritarian states with high Internet penetration and **the best available tool** in all other political regimes with high Internet penetration. Did the growth of digital projects in Belarus in 2020 result from the initiative creators' belief that online platforms are the most effective tool? Or was the use of digital platforms driven solely by security considerations and limited access to traditional resources? Regardless of the answer, the surge in digital projects related to democratic resistance in Belarus in 2020 serves as the starting point for this study.

Methodology

Twelve respondents were interviewed as part of the study. While the purpose of these interviews is exploratory and the sample cannot be used for quantitative arguments, our aim was to select the widest possible range of respondents representing various positions on the topic. Semi-structured interviews focused on the digitalisation of Belarusian politics and civil society.

1   Statista, Mobile internet user penetration rate in selected Central and Eastern European countries in 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1133949/mobile-internet-reach-in-cee-region/

2   Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. Foreign affairs, 28–41.
Tufekci, Z., & Wilson, C. (2012). Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from Tahrir Square. Journal of communication, 62 (2), 363–379.
Breuer, A., Landman, T., & Farquhar, D. (2015). Social media and protest mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian revolution. Democratization, 22 (4), 764–792.

3   Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2018). How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks. Political psychology, 39, 85–118

They were conducted on the Zoom platform and typically lasted between 20 and 55 minutes. The interviewees included political analysts, media experts, human rights activists, and representatives of New Belarus, ByHelp, Politzek.me, the Razam party, and the Cyberpartisans initiative. To ensure anonymity and comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the survey did not include respondents' names, gender, or other personal information unrelated to their professional activities.

1.1. THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL PROJECTS FOR DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE IN BELARUS

The pre-election atmosphere and COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 prompted civic and political initiatives to intensify their online activities. Respondents mention the NEXTA media project as one that significantly contributed to the politicisation of society during the election campaign: *"NEXTA attracted a lot of fresh and previously depoliticised audience, and it brought them into politics. It happened through digital [means]."* Digital tools that had already been in use in Belarus for quite some time were increasingly utilized to disseminate information that differed from state sources, mobilise the public to address social issues, and engage in political activism: *"It became useful for politicians to go online because they sought a direct connection with the audience; they were deprived of the opportunity to use state-monopolised television, and they weren't always able to reach newspapers."* Due to their emigration, most political structures that emerged during or after the election campaign, such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, the Coordination Council, the National Anti-Crisis Management, SKHOD, the Razam Party, and the United Transitional Cabinet, maintained communication with Belarusians in the country through digital channels.

The 2020 election campaign also catalysed initiatives like Voice, a platform for alternative vote counting, and Honest People, a training platform for election observers. Both projects underwent transformations. Voice was activated once after the elections — for the popular vote in the spring of 2021. Later, its creators introduced the New Belarus app, uniting various Belarusian initiative on a single platform and enabling users abroad to allocate a portion of their taxes to support specific projects. Crowdfunding initiatives that emerged a few years before the 2020 elections represent another facet of the digitalisation of civic engagement in Belarus. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, the ByHelp campaign successfully garnered financial and volunteer support for healthcare facilities. In the post-election period, crowdfunding platforms took on fundraising for victims of politically motivated detentions. These platforms, along with the aforementioned civic and political initiatives, became targets for the Belarusian regime, which imposed sanctions on both activists and user-donors. In parallel, unconventional projects like Cyberpartisans, a hacktivist communi-

ty that uses cyber-attacks to achieve political and social goals, emerged. Towards the end of 2020, the Politzek.me project appeared, followed by Politvyazanka, both engaged in advocacy and media support for political prisoners, with Politvyazanka focusing more on female political prisoners.

In 2020, the scope of Belarusian digital initiatives and work formats expanded considerably. From the perspective of protest movement researchers, *all the projects under review have transitioned beyond the protest cycle* — either adapting, seeking sustainability, or shutting down. As a result, it would be inappropriate to rely on the experience of digital protest networks in other countries when analysing digital projects in Belarus. Conceptually, it is more accurate to regard these projects as actors and stakeholders in the civic or political domain. Although this aspect was not the primary focus of the research, the experts considered it important to provide their definition of digital projects.

1.2. POLITICAL, CIVIC, AND MEDIA: AN ARSENAL OF DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE'S DIGITAL PROJECTS

Defining the aforementioned digital projects was one of the topics discussed with experts and initiative representatives. The experts are hesitant to categorise the projects as political. Rather, they describe them as forms of online citizen associations, which had been more offline-oriented in 2020: *"I am not aware of any political changes that occurred only due to online activity in countries like ours."* Some experts explain this definition by highlighting the absence of an ambition to struggle for power within the digital civic and political projects:

> *"Most of today's online projects with a political tinge are rather civic activism projects than political ones, because they hardly have any direct relation to power struggle, redistribution of power, and political competition, because there is no such competition anymore. This is more a form of mobilisation, a form of supporting civic activism."*

The digital project creators mostly agreed with this view. Some refer to their creations as civic projects, others categorise them as media projects. The former believe that fostering civil society, both among those in exile and within the repressive environment of the country, depends on engaging people through such initiatives:

> *"Our task is to enable people, through some kind of participation, through some services, to later join a full-fledged civil society for solving their problems. In fact, the platform's main mission (New Belarus — author's note) is to teach people in the future to unite in civil society for solving problems. Some call it a digital state, others call it a digital community. For us, this is a digital space where Belarusians can find themselves and learn to act independently, not waiting for someone to solve all their problems for them."*

For the creators of the Politzek.me project, which does not involve direct participation, their primary focus is on raising awareness about political prisoners, and they believe that digital tools can be effective in achieving this goal. The team's main task is to inform, but they also hope that their project will motivate people to provide financial support to political prisoners. The Politvyazanka project positions itself as a media platform designed to draw attention to the plight of women convicted in political cases. For the project team, working online is not only a safe but also a preferred approach.

In crowdfunding, the digital realm is the only effective means of gathering assistance, a method that would be equally used in a typical democratic society. However, in the Belarusian context, where donating money to such initiatives can carry legal consequences, crowdfunding efforts have had to resort to offline tools. For example, the ByHelp team still relies on volunteers to physically deliver cash across Belarus. For crowdfunding platforms, contacts with foreign audiences are an advantage, as Belarusians abroad remain active in fundraising. ByHelp representatives report having helped more than 18,000 people and distributed about €5 million. According to the creators, the success of the initiative hinges on trust in its organisers, the rapid achievement of concrete goals, and a tangible contribution to bringing about change.

In contrast to the above initiatives, members of the exclusively online Cyberpartisans project openly declare their political objective: *"The solution of the political and social problem in our case is the removal of the illegal, illegitimate Lukashenka regime."* Following their merger with the Kalinousky Regiment, Cyberpartisans have made no secret of their efforts to establish a political entity through hacktivism, which *"…uses information, hacking data for a certain political or social task".* The Razam party also pursues a political goal — *"to register the party and participate in the political process".*

Some experts disagree that Cyberpartisans and similar initiatives can be considered political. One expert stated that *"Cyberpartisans are hardly a political force; rather, they are a serious social force that has chosen a somewhat controversial path to achieving its goals. I work in the field of human rights, and for me it's hard to say how acceptable data theft and deanonymisation is."*

As an alternative, some experts mentioned the Coordination Council (CC) as a political project that could succeed in a digital format:

> *"If the CC becomes a representative body one day, it will be interesting to follow it. It will be nice to develop some kind of service with detailed information about all Council members: who came up with particular initiatives, who voted for them, who put forward some factions."*

> *"The CC could become a kind of show, where members with different opinions would clash or even quarrel like parliamentarians. That would stir people's interest, but they keep to formal communication for some reason."*

Despite struggling to define digital civic and political projects, both experts and representatives of digital initiatives emphasise two critical points: firstly, digital platforms are presently the only accessible way to engage citizens and are a tool for solving problems, and secondly, no project can be effective in a crisis of ideas.

1.3. A DIGITAL PROJECT IS INEFFECTIVE IN A CRISIS OF IDEAS

The experts concur that digitalisation is only a way of optimising ideas: *"Digital tools still reflect the demands or situations in communities, in society itself."* Regardless of the effectiveness of the digital tools, igniting political activism is challenging amidst a "crisis" of political ideas: *"The question is primarily about ideas and concepts that will bring people together."* The experts also draw a strong connection between this issue and the gap between digital civic and political projects undertaken by Belarusians in the diaspora and those still in the country:

> *"For example, the positions of the Office* (of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya — author's note) *and the Cabinet* (United Transitional Cabinet — author's note), *say, on the war, their statements that Belarusians do not support the war* (Russia's war against Ukraine — author's note) *and so on — these things are useful, but they are more useful to Belarus's partners in the democratic world than to Belarusian citizens."*

Digital platforms creators do not deny that digital solutions should be closely intertwined with offline methods of influence: *"We always look for a problem that can be solved with digital tools. We don't believe in digital for digital's sake, we rather believe that people should get some kind of benefit, and that's very important for those living in the country because they trade the potential risk of detention for this potential benefit."*

According to the interviewed experts, Belarusian Hajun is an example of a project that, despite a significant portion of its activities being online, can be considered successful:

> *"In all appearances, the level of repression was colossal, but the project received a huge resonance, because there was a real request from people to do something. That is, they had no chance to realise resistance offline, but received an opportunity to resist Russian aggression at least in this way."*

Some of the experts believe that digital projects in isolation from offline activities cannot effectively serve as tools for achieving political goals:

> *"I mean, these projects by themselves cannot change power with no classic offline political activism or political struggle. Accordingly, they cannot be a substitute [for such a struggle] in terms of effect. They can replace people; they can offer people some alternative profession that they can pursue in politics. But they do not produce the results that political action leads to. They can help at most."*

In addition, some of the experts see building connections through online tools as problematic:

> *"Paradoxically, even though everything is becoming more reachable because it's right on your smartphone, there is a certain alienation, a growing distance between the object and the subject of politics… This creates a huge gap in the perception of reality, because you are in totally different conditions with different experiences, and this cannot but create a difference in thinking, perception, and so on."*

This viewpoint is shared by some researchers of Internet and social movements, who argue that the digitalisation of movements and protest initiatives weakens the motivation for actual participation and involvement in political initiatives as volunteers and participants[4].

Several experts highlight people's fatigue stemming from the lack of swift results from their actions. Sustaining the level of activity and moral readiness to protest seen in 2020 has become nearly impossible: *"The further we drift away from the moment when people's belief in change was at its maximum, the less enthusiastic they are to participate even in online projects."* According to the media experts, the digital platform creators could mitigate people's fatigue by presenting democratic resistance as a marathon rather than a sprint:

> *"If they keep on telling you for two or three years about tomorrow, then all this looks like a sprint, but with no finish line. But if you initially perceived it as a marathon, you would allocate your resources differently. Then expectations are different, the strategy is different — the expectations would do not diverge much from reality."*

1.4. DIGITAL PROJECTS AS A FORCED MEASURE

Experts note that digitalisation today is more of a necessity, given that the Internet provides a safer space. The

creators argue that online projects are harder to counteract. For Cyberpartisans, working online is the only viable way to operate, both for security reasons and the project's mechanics. More specifically, Cyberpartisans possess extensive datasets obtained by hacking government systems, and storing and retrieving this data is only possible online: *"No one has ever owned such a massive amount of personal data of the residents of any country outside of the state, and we realise that it is now our responsibility to protect this data."*

Projects that are compelled to exist in the digital realm offer other advantages as well. Experts point at accessibility, speed, and efficiency, and the ability to partially measure success: *"…it is easier to manage, coordinate, and control the reaction; it's all measurable, it's all digitised — you see how people get involved, how they react, whether it is interesting or not interesting for them. Here you can measure the feedback."* Additionally, the platform creators emphasise that, regardless of political events, human life has become increasingly intertwined with the digital space:

> *"We realise that the audience is becoming more 'internet-involved' with each new generation. Accordingly, this is already a fairly habitual, normal pattern of behaviour for many. Therefore, it is very positive that, in principle, this already becomes rather 'native' behaviour, and it is absolutely normal for people to be able to find some benefits through online tools, which will then still go offline."*

Simultaneously, some experts feel that civic and political projects do not fully harness the digital potential for engaging their audience:

> *"Political and civil structures use digital tools inefficiently, both for internal processes and communication, and for external ones. Resource concentration is not sufficient. Digitalisation is a separate major area, where there should be a responsible person, an expert to deal with it."*

The interviewees mentioned security as another challenge to digital projects. In 2020, online platforms offered more security guarantees than offline ones. However, today, the Belarusian regime is intensifying its repression efforts, targeting social media users, online project activists, and creators of platforms for the activation of Belarusians: *"Databases are being leaked; they find traces of deleted Telegram accounts, send mailings that include some 100 email addresses of addressees, collect personal through Google forms."* Today, expecting total security from the online format is unrealistic; or at the very least, it requires more effort to establish protection mechanisms. This, in turn, reduces trust in initiative creators and often leads to the closure of online communities: *"There is some life in closed chat rooms, but it is impossible to assess because people are afraid of reprisals and hide their activities."*

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4   Morozov, E. (2011). The Net Delusion — The Dark Side of Internet Freedom. New York: Public Affairs.

1.5. PROSPECTS FOR DIGITAL INITIATIVES

The forms of interaction between Belarusians in Belarus and their compatriots in the diaspora are currently limited. While creators of digital initiatives like New Belarus overserve significant interest in their product within the country (with more than 50% of the app users located in Belarus), experts harbour scepticism about the sustainability of these projects:

> *"An individual needs something else that will be connected with his or her offline life, as one thing complements another. A chat room for conversations is not enough. And this is where it turns out that today's digital initiatives offer just a chat room or a place to read press releases rather than a place to solve your problems."*

At the same time, respondents have higher hopes for crowdfunding platforms. They present a swift and secure digital method for addressing common issues and involving compatriots in providing assistance, at least for Belarusians abroad:

> *"Projects that consistently raise funds are likely to be viable. But besides crowdfunding, supporting some structure requires creation of periodic occasions, advertisement, as well as goodies for those who make donations, which are not necessarily material. However, we mostly don't have such activities."*

The experts view the development of niche digital projects and platforms for involving Belarusians as one potential solution: *"We have entered the era of sub-brands. Everything that happens inside the country should not be connected with large-scale, public, 'extremist' brands. It is important to build communities and have agents of influence inside the country to soak everything with meaning."*

At the same time, such projects are unlikely to be successful without offline activities:

> *"I believe it is a no go without the offline part. You can carry out any cool activities online — highly technological, elaborate, thought-out, and resonant, but it is all meaningless until it materialises in real life".*

According to the experts, transforming digital civic and political projects into initiatives for the diaspora is another way for them to grow: *"Perhaps these digital projects will become an important tool for consolidating the diaspora, building horizontal ties within the community, strengthening and developing them."*

Experts do not expect digital projects to contribute to a serious political breakthrough in Belarus. First, 2020 showed that *"in places, riot police turned out to be more effective anyway"* than technological solutions. Second, there is not much hope for change, unless the Lukashenka regime suffers some serious political defeats: *"That is, the situation will remain as it is, and if there are no black swans and no fundamental changes in the near future, it will stay that way."*

In response, digital project creators emphasise the importance of teaching society to act independently for civil society to develop:

> *"In my opinion, this (his digital project — author's note) is the last thing we have left. Yes, we can hope for some black swan to fly in and do something. But again, this black swan may do things differently from the way we need. Whereas a sustainable civil society that understands its problems and knows how to solve them is a system that can be contrasted with Lukashenka's system, and it is high time to start creating it, instead of waiting for a group of disparate people to believe in a miracle. This, in fact, is the project's perspective, its forward motion."*

2

PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE'S DIGITALISATION AND PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE INITIATIVES

The views of the experts and digital project creators offer insights on the motives behind these initiatives and their future prospects. However, it is equally important to understand how engaging and effective these digital civic and political initiatives appear to their recipients — ordinary Belarusians. We turned to Belarusians who support a pro-democratic path for the country and are generally critical of the current political regime and asked them to evaluate the digitalisation of Belarusian democratic resistance.
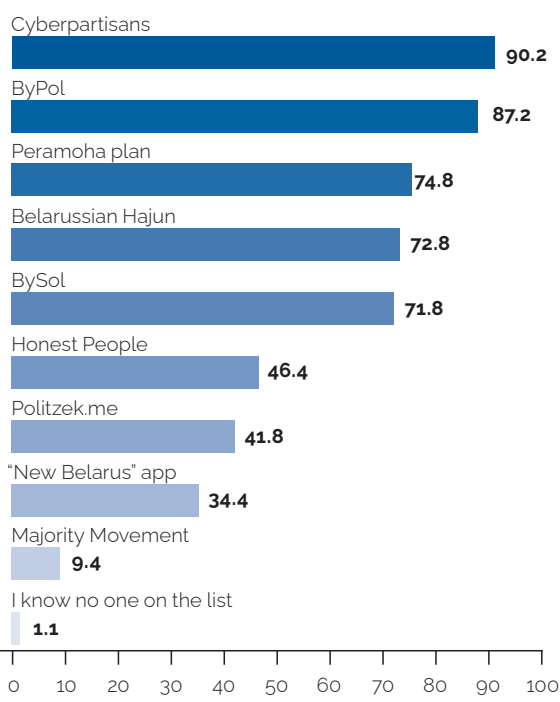
Methodology

The survey was conducted in June 2023 using the "Narodny Opros" (National Poll) platform, which has been studying the opinions of the pro-democracy audience since summer 2020. Over 95% of respondents to the platform and this survey are located in Belarus; the achieved sample size is 1,200. It is important to note that the platform's sample is representative of the pro-democratic segment of Belarusian society, but not representative of Belarusian society as a whole. For more detail on the data collection methodology used by the "Narodny Opros" platform, you can visit https://narodny-opros.net/.

Figure 1.

Which of the following civic initiatives are you aware of?

Initiative	Value
Cyberpartisans	90.2
ByPol	87.2
Peramoha plan	74.8
Belarussian Hajun	72.8
BySol	71.8
Honest People	46.4
Politzek.me	41.8
"New Belarus" app	34.4
Majority Movement	9.4
I know no one on the list	1.1

Respondents were asked to select digital projects that they are aware of, trust, and in which they participate. Cyberpartisans emerged as the most recognised digital initiative, with 90% of respondents indicating awareness of them. Newer projects like "New Belarus" are familiar to about one-third of respondents. More than 70% of respondents are acquainted with digital military-oriented initiatives (ByPol[5], the Peramoha plan, Belarussian Hajun).
For respondents, the activities of Cyberpartisans (81%) and the Belarussian Hajun monitoring platform (66%) are considered the most useful for Belarus. The most significant

contrast between visibility and perceived usefulness is observed with two "strong-arm" initiatives — ByPol and the Peramoha plan. Most likely, high visibility and lower usefulness are partially related to the public conflict around these projects during the time of the survey.

Roughly one-fifth of the respondents are not willing to openly discuss their involvement in these projects. A similar proportion of pro-democracy-minded Belarusians participated in BySol's digital campaigns. The "New Belarus" app was used by about 14%, while less than 10% participated in the digital projects of Honest People, Majority Movement, Belarussian Hajun, and Politzek.me.

When asked to explain their preferred forms of participation in digital projects, the most popular answer was

_____

5   There was formally a single ByPol initiative at the time of the survey, but it later split into two organisations. Figures depict the name of the initiative at the time of the survey.

Figure 2.
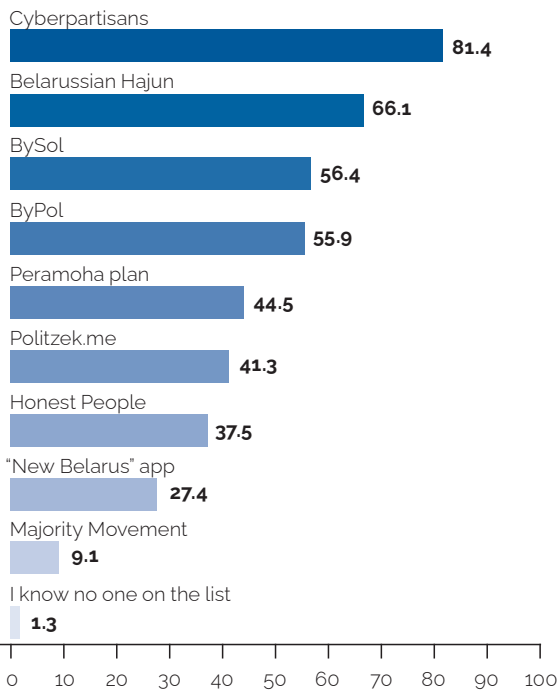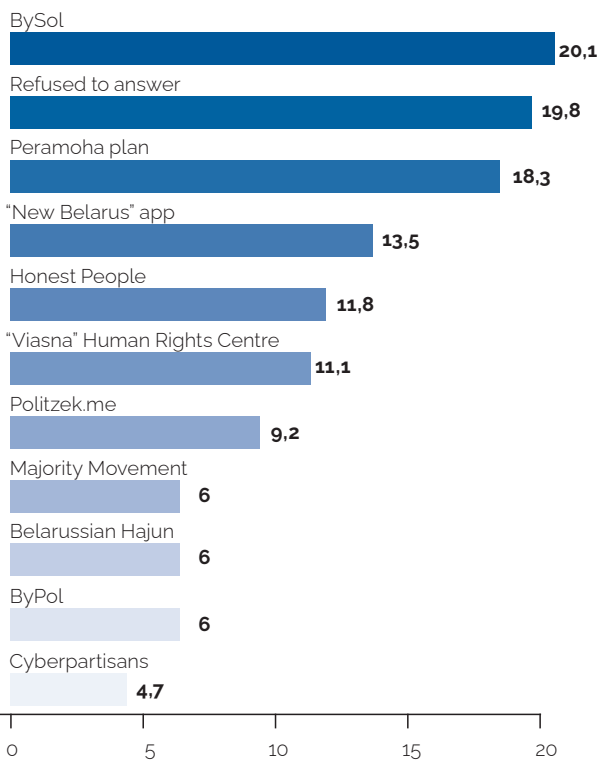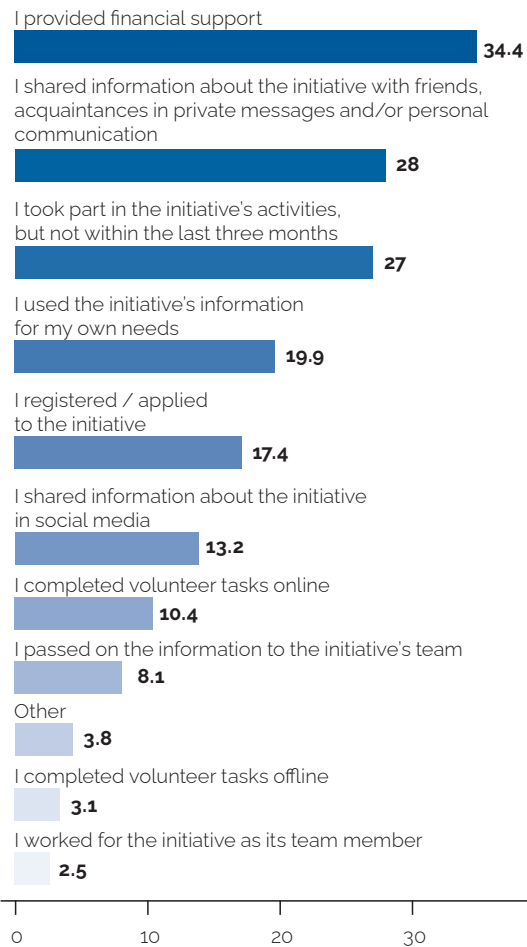**Which of the listed initiatives do you assess as useful for Belarus?**

Initiative	Value
Cyberpartisans	81.4
Belarussian Hajun	66.1
BySol	56.4
ByPol	55.9
Peramoha plan	44.5
Politzek.me	41.3
Honest People	37.5
"New Belarus" app	27.4
Majority Movement	9.1
I know no one on the list	1.3

Figure 3.
Which of the following initiatives and communities have you been directly involved in?

Initiative	Value
BySol	20,1
Refused to answer	19,8
Peramoha plan	18,3
"New Belarus" app	13,5
Honest People	11,8
"Viasna" Human Rights Centre	11,1
Politzek.me	9,2
Majority Movement	6
Belarussian Hajun	6
ByPol	6
Cyberpartisans	4,7

used the information for their own purposes. Around 10% completed online tasks for digital projects, and a further 3% engaged in the initiatives' offline activities. Although no questions were asked about the specific forms of offline activity, it can be assumed that this mostly involved sending letters to political prisoners. It is also likely that some offline activists were involved in tasks under the Peramoha plan.

Figure 4.
If you have been involved in at least one of the above initiatives, please specify exactly what you have been doing over the past three months? Mark all that apply.

Activity	Value
I provided financial support	34.4
I shared information about the initiative with friends, acquaintances in private messages and/or personal communication	28
I took part in the initiative's activities, but not within the last three months	27
I used the initiative's information for my own needs	19.9
I registered / applied to the initiative	17.4
I shared information about the initiative in social media	13.2
I completed volunteer tasks online	10.4
I passed on the information to the initiative's team	8.1
Other	3.8
I completed volunteer tasks offline	3.1
I worked for the initiative as its team member	2.5

This part of the study also aimed to assess the effectiveness of digital initiatives. Most respondents (70%) believe that online platforms are a crucial channel of communication for Belarusians in the country and the diaspora. More than half are convinced that democratic initiatives utilise all possible tools, with online solutions offering the safest means of communication and coordination with Belarusians in Belarus. However, many respondents agreed with the statement that democratic initiatives should exert more effort to organise guerrilla actions and volunteer projects within the country (43%). Another 16% are pessimistic in their assessment, believing that the

financial support (34%). In addition, respondents shared messages published on online project pages with their friends and acquaintances in private messages (28%) or

democratic forces implement most of their policies online, without any impact on real politics. When asked whether digital projects can influence the political situation in Belarus, 49% of respondents answered positively ("definite-

ly yes" and "somewhat yes"). 31% of respondents were negative about the projects' impact on political change, and one-fifth of respondents could not provide an answer to the question.

Figure 5.
Below are some statements with possible assessment of the role of digital technologies in addressing political challenges. Please select the statements which you agree with.
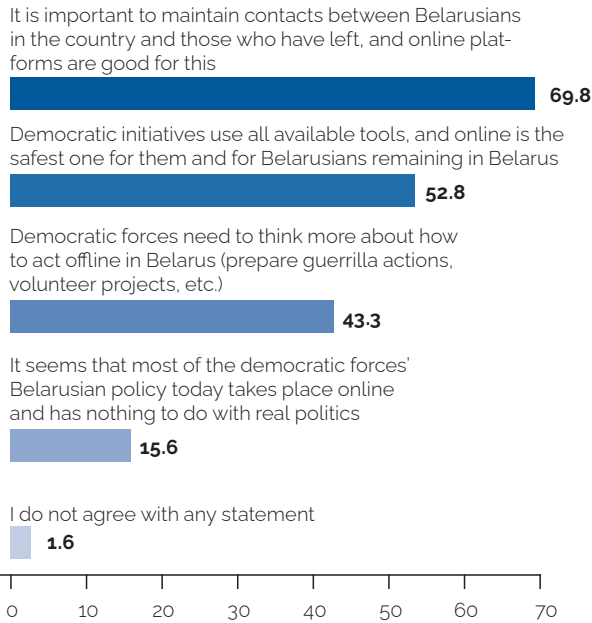
It is important to maintain contacts between Belarusians in the country and those who have left, and online platforms are good for this
69.8

Democratic initiatives use all available tools, and online is the safest one for them and for Belarusians remaining in Belarus
52.8

Democratic forces need to think more about how to act offline in Belarus (prepare guerrilla actions, volunteer projects, etc.)
43.3

It seems that most of the democratic forces' Belarusian policy today takes place online and has nothing to do with real politics
15.6

I do not agree with any statement
1.6

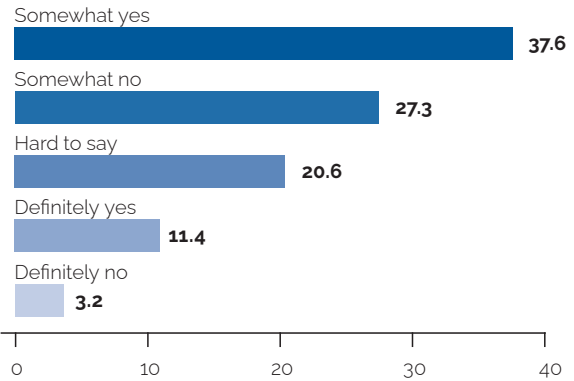0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70

Figure 6.
Do you think that digital projects like the ones discussed in the previous questions can influence the political situation in the country?

Somewhat yes
37.6

Somewhat no
27.3

Hard to say
20.6

Definitely yes
11.4

Definitely no
3.2

0   10   20   30   40

3

THE REGIME'S RESPONSE TO THE DIGITALISATION OF DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE

Given the growing significance of technology in society and its active role in uniting opponents of authoritarian regimes, autocrats are increasingly restricting the digital space. Legislative norms are often designed to censor content, track and identify political opponents, and repress independent or oppositional publications[6]. These norms represent an important and often preemptive component of a regime's digital policies[7]. Below is an overview of Belarusian legislation pertaining to Internet regulation. This overview should be understood as a qualitative discussion of the principles and actors involved in legislative regulation, rather than a detailed legal parsing of the text[8].

Methodology

Only laws that specifically mention Internet regulation were chosen for analysis. The laws and criminal code articles were downloaded as text files into Nvivo R1. The software was then used to analyse the data following Margit Schreier's qualitative content analysis procedure[9] (Chapter 1). The analysis began with an initial review of the material to identify key aspects for further examination. During this process, five categories were formulated: *aspects of Internet regulation, underlying principles, state power, level of regulation, and citizens' rights*. Then, the material was condensed and structured into a three-tier coding scheme. The material was then divided into coding units, each of which corresponded to one paragraph in the law. Only paragraphs that mentioned Internet regulation and one of the above categories were included in the sample. The next step involved assessing the coding scheme by continuously comparing the coding of the material and reviewing the code labels. The subcategories were developed according to a logic based on the data and specific concepts used in the laws (p. 60). Agreement between coding steps achieved a kappa coefficient of 0.9, which is higher than the 80% recommended by Schreier (Chapter 7). The final two steps involved coding all the selected material using the coding framework and interpreting the results.

The following laws and articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus were chosen to analyse the Belarusian legislation regulating the Internet space:

1. On Mass Media (with amendments and additions).
2. On Countering Extremism (with amendments and additions).
3. On Information, Informatisation, and Protection of Information.
4. On Personal Data Protection.
5. On Advertising.
6. Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet" of 1 February 2010 (with amendments and additions).

Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, articles 123 ("Propaganda of war"), 130 ("Incitement of racial, national, religious, or other social enmity or discord"), 130–1 ("Rehabilitation of Nazism"), 198 ("Obstruction of the lawful professional activity of a journalist"), 198–1 ("Violation of legislation on the mass media"), 203 ("Violation of the secrecy

6 Gunitsky, S. 2015. «Corrupting the cyber-commons: Social media as a tool of autocratic stability». Perspectives on Politics. Cambridge University Press, 13, no. 1: 42–54.
Morgenbesser, L. 2020. «The menu of autocratic innovation». Democratization, 27, no. 6: 1053–1072.
Toepfl, F. 2018. «Innovating consultative authoritarianism: Internet votes as a novel digital tool to stabilize non-democratic rule in Russia». New Media & Society, 20, no. 3: 9–972.

7 Silitski, V. 2005. «Preempting democracy: The case of Belarus». Journal of Democracy, 16, no. 4: 83–97.

8 For a detailed legal breakdown of the legislation governing the Internet space, see: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/a/490493.pdf

9 Schreier, M. 2012. «Qualitative content analysis in practice». London: Sage.

of correspondence, telephone conversations, telegraphic, or other communications"), 203–1 ("Unlawful acts concerning information on private life and personal data"), 203–2 ("Non-compliance with measures to ensure the protection of personal data"), Chapter 31 ("Offences against computer security"), Chapter 32 ("Offences against the state").

3.1. FROM THE KGB TO THE PRESIDENT: THE WHO AND HOW OF INTERNET REGULATION

The aforementioned laws list the government bodies responsible for regulating the media and Internet space, including the Ministry of Information, prosecutors, the President and Council of Ministers, the Security Council, and the KGB. Specialised commissions, including the Interdepartmental Commission on Security in the Information Sphere, the Authorised Body for the Protection of the Rights of Subjects of Personal Data (National Centre for Personal Data Protection) and the Public Coordination Council in the Media Sphere, also play a role in regulating the Internet space. In addition, the Law on Mass Media outlines the role of international treaties in regulating media legislation.

Belarusian media laws concern not only Belarusian media outlets, but also foreign media operating in the country. Notably, the Law on Mass Media mentions the concept of extremism, with its interpretation fully determined by the President and the Council of Ministers. Disseminating information or propaganda that promotes war, extremist activity, or calls for such action, as well as information that could jeopardise Belarus' national interests, is strictly prohibited. In the contemporary context, this extends to any information, the dissemination of which is deemed "unwanted" by the state. A broad interpretation of "extremism" and "terrorism" is often wielded as a tool by authoritarian regimes[10].

Belarusian legislation also regulates the processes of identifying and processing personal data on the Internet and the dissemination and protection of information online. For instance, the state may collect and use personal data of individuals on the Internet without written consent and request information from online resources to assess their compliance with the law. Moreover, data processing without consent can be justified in certain cases, such as safeguarding national security or preventing the funding of terrorism and is also permitted during elections at various levels. The Presidential Decree "On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet" states that information about subscriber devices and personal data of Internet users in places of collective use may be provided at the request of bodies carrying out investigative activities,

the State Control Committee bodies, and courts. Places of collective use even include home networks, which further expands the authorities' intrusion into the Internet space.

3.2. STATE SECURITY AT THE HEART OF INTERNET REGULATION

Although the Belarusian Constitution guarantees respect for human rights and freedoms, many of the fundamental principles embedded in the laws governing the Internet contradict these constitutional provisions. For example, Article 1 of the Law on Countering Extremism details what constitutes extremism. However, any action perceived unfavourably by the state may be categorised as an insult to a government representative; incitement of racial, national, or other discord; or a public call for illegal assembly. The same law can be wielded to justify the suspension of media outlets or restrictions on information dissemination.

The Law on Mass Media (Para. 1 Article 30–1) delineates the rights of owners of Internet resources or online media. According to the law, they have the right to collect, receive, and disseminate information in any way (in accordance with the law) and publish personal judgements and assessments under their own name or pseudonym. In practice, however, these norms are limited by the Law on Countering Extremism, which prohibits the dissemination of information deemed by the state authorities to be false information about the political, social, economic, or military situation of the country.

State security is an abstract concept, but it appears as one of the fundamental principles in Belarusian legislation. Furthermore, it is forbidden to disseminate information that could harm the national interests of Belarus. What precisely constitutes "national interests" or "state security" remains a mystery.

3.3. RIGHTS OF CITIZENS AND POWERS OF THE STATE

Belarusian legislation also outlines the specific rights of citizens. Article 4 of the Law on Mass Media mentions the equal right of all individuals, state bodies, and political parties to disseminate and receive mass information. It underscores the importance of respecting human rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the Constitution and upheld by the mass media. Article 5 guarantees freedom of opinion, belief, and expression. Additionally, the Law on Information, Informatisation, and Protection of Information (Article 18) states that no one has the right to demand information about an individual's private life and personal data, including personal secrets and telephone conversations, except in cases established by law. However, the observance of these rights in the current context is not a top priority for the state and conflicts with other laws.

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10 Antoine Buyse (2018) Squeezing civic space: restrictions on civil society organizations and the linkages with human rights, The International Journal of Human Rights, 22:8, 966-988, DOI: 10.1080/13642987.2018.1492916.

Unlike the rights of citizens, the powers of government officials and state bodies are set out broadly and elaborately in Belarusian legislation. The Presidential Decree "On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet" (para. 14.3) tasks the Council of Ministers with developing a draft Concept of the Development of the National Segment of the Internet aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of online services. In 2019, the Information Security Concept of Belarus[11] was published, which introduced the notion of "information neutrality". It is defined as "*pursuing a peace-loving external information policy, respecting the universally recognised and generally accepted rights of any state in this sphere, excluding the initiative of interference in the information sphere of other countries aimed at discrediting or challenging their political,* *economic, social, and spiritual standards and priorities, as well as damaging the information infrastructure of any states and participating in their information confrontation.*" It is possible that the state employs this concept of information neutrality to "repel potential attacks" of other states on the Belarus's information space.

In accordance with the national legislation, even a minor violation of the law can result in suspension or termination of access to an online resource. This has led to the overuse of these legal norms to cleanse the information space from unwanted material. Moreover, the legislation lacks the mechanisms to protect the media from undue restrictions on information, providing the state with additional avenues to establish a monopoly on information.

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11 The Concept of Information Security of Belarus https://www.belta.by/society/view/opublikovana-kontseptsija-informatsionnoj-bezopasnosti-belarusi-340452–2019/

4

MONITORING OF PRO-DEMOCRACY AND PRO-GOVERNMENT NARRATIVES ON TELEGRAM AND TIKTOK

Apart from creating digital solutions and political projects for Belarusians, opposition politicians also use the digital space as the main channel of communication with their compatriots. What political agenda do opposition politicians broadcast in the digital space? How do pro-regime activists, politicians, and journalists respond to it? This part of the study reviews the political narratives of pro-democracy and pro-regime politicians and activists. The platforms chosen for the analysis are Telegram and TikTok. The former is a digital platform that opposition politicians who emerged during the 2020 campaign chose as a safe tool for coordination and communication, and the latter is a platform that has recently gained popularity among both pro-democracy and pro-regime forces.

Methodology
Narrative analysis was used as the research method. The sample of Telegram channels, TikTok accounts, and TikTok hashtags is based on their division into pro-democracy and pro-regime ones, taking into account the number of views and subscribers. The research team reviewed the sample every three weeks, adding newly emerging and excluding no longer relevant (deleted or inactive) channels, accounts, and hashtags. The monitoring ran continuously for 12 weeks, from 1 May to 23 July 2023. Each week, we recorded the narratives conveyed by the channels and accounts in the sample, noting changes based on foreign policy or high-profile events, such as the disappearance of Viktor Babariko or Yevgeny Prigozhin's march on Moscow. The researchers drew from pre-selected channels and hashtags, filtered information by week, and scrutinised all publications. After reviewing the content published on Telegram and TikTok, the researchers formulated the main narratives of pro-regime and pro-democracy politicians, initiatives, activists, or ordinary citizens who used a popular hashtag and gained a large number of views. In this way, the formulated narratives represent a generalised, but at the same time specific picture of topics mentioned and covered on the platforms. Based on the monitoring results, the weekly narratives and monthly reflexive reports were analysed, allowing for a general picture to emerge of how pro-regime and pro-democracy initiatives covered events, what political agenda they communicated, what topics they touched upon, and how they described their opponents over the course of 12 weeks. Thus, the analysis is inductive, as general conclusions, reasoning, and assumptions are derived from the materials studied. The only criterion for the analysis, apart from the technical features, is the selection of publications on topics related to politics in a broad sense: politics is defined as the relationship between power and social processes[12]. Over a period of 12 weeks, the researchers regularly reviewed 35 pro-democracy and 35 pro-regime channels on Telegram, 26 pro-democracy and 35 pro-regime accounts on TikTok, and 50 TikTok hashtags, of which the first four have between 1 to 19 trillion views. The entire sample is presented in the report annexes.

4.1. CONTENT FORMATS ON PLATFORMS

TikTok and Telegram are distinct platforms that differ in form, structure, and functionality. TikTok relies on algorithms to promote engaging content, considering factors like form and quality, while on Telegram, the user is free to choose the groups and channels they wish to join. The TikTok structure is primarily focused on social and media

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12 Lowndes, V., Marsh, D., & Stoker, G. (Eds.). (2017). Theory and methods in political science. Bloomsbury Publishing.

components. Telegram, on the other hand, is a messaging platform with some elements of a social network. This difference frequently accounts for the variations in format and content. A few general findings related to the forms of publications on the two analysed platforms are described below.

Content deletion is one notable feature that our research team observed on TikTok. However, we did not delve into the specific reasons for account removal, whether voluntary or due to complaints, as it was beyond the scope of our monitoring. Therefore, the precise reasons for the frequent disappearance of primarily pro-regime accounts on the platform are unclear. In Telegram, content deletion was less prevalent. Nevertheless, we are aware from other sources of numerous blockings by the Telegram platform, mostly of the channels of Ryhor Azaronak, GUBOPIK, and other pro-government channels.

Several trends can be observed in the forms of content presentation in Telegram and TikTok. First, entertaining and light formats prevail on TikTok, including FAQs or exposés. Telegram channels primarily publish analytical and informative content. Second, while Telegram operates as a news platform, it also serves as a space for publishing reactions to current events, news, and statements. In contrast, TikTok has more videos unrelated to recent events. For instance, both pro-government and pro-democracy accounts have published videos dating back to 2020 or the Soviet Union. Many pro-government TikTok accounts frequently share short videos explaining the origin of the white-red-white (WRW) flag or the Belarusian People's Republic, while pro-democracy accounts post materials debunking myths about the Lukashenka regime's successes or exposing disinformation or hate speech aired by state television. Third, pro-regime accounts in TikTok actively highlight the person of Mikalai Lukashenka, often romanticising him as an idol among Belarusian youth or a "crush" of Belarusian girls.

Fourth, monitoring of pro-government Telegram channels revealed the network nature of publications, where the same messages are reposted across multiple pro-regime channels. Pro-regime media is noted for extremely high levels of activity and quick reactions to events. One can assume the existence of hubs that help networks respond to events with a "united media front", relying on prefabricated central narratives and interpretations of events. In addition, each of the most prominent pro-regime speakers has developed a distinctive style. Ryhor Azaronak is known for his aggressiveness and vilification of opponents, Olga Bondareva — for anti-Polish and anti-Latin rhetoric, Yevgeniy Pustovoy — for his posts in Belarusian, and Alexey Dzermant — for his emphasis on Eurasianism. Some propagandists are so radical in their statements that Lukashenka appears comparatively liberal, soft, and understanding. In turn, most posts by the pro-democracy camp are unique in their content.

Fifth, TikTok's utilisation of hashtags to promote content on the platform often attracts opposing views. Notably, commenters employing the same phrases under videos of Lukashenka's speeches have been rather active on TikTok. Under pro-government hashtags such as #забатьку (*for batka = father, Lukashenka's nickname*), one can find numerous videos from Ukrainian accounts promoting an anti-Lukashenka and anti-war agenda. The fastest growing hashtag is #лукашенко: over 4,500 videos were released with this hashtag during the analysed period, accumulating a total increase of 500 million views. The three main spikes in the number of publications concerned Lukashenka's illness, deployment of nuclear weapons, and the mutiny of the Russian private military company Wagner.

Finally, while most publications by pro-democracy speakers revolve around the internal Belarusian agenda, a significant number of posts by pro-regime speakers concern other countries' context and political events, primarily in the West.

4.2. MONITORING RESULTS

The channels and accounts of speakers from both pro-regime and pro-democracy camps conveyed a number of narratives each week. In most cases they were related to current events. However, alongside this, another type of narrative could be discerned — foundational, underlying theses that were consistently reiterated on different channels and accounts from week to week. Below are the main narratives of the pro-regime and pro-democracy forces in May-July 2023.

4.3. DISCREDITING POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Both pro-democracy and pro-regime camps exhibit a common communication line, which involves focusing on their political opponents. Their approach to criticising opponent often takes the form of discrediting them with the aim of eroding public trust in these individuals. Pro-democracy speakers tend to challenge narratives about the regime's ability to ensure economic stability. Consequently, their content focuses on the topics related to failed social and economic policies. Pro-regime speakers, on the other hand, primarily focus on discrediting their political opponents through narratives about internal debates or conflicts within opposition structures. For example, they promoted stories about the "split in ByPol" or "how they embezzled 250 million euros requested by the democratic forces from the EU". Despite both political camps often covering the same events, their diametrically opposed presentation have contributed to information polarisation. Readers of news and personal Telegram channels are often confronted with a stark choice between a pro-democracy, anti-Lukashenka, and for European values stance or a pro-regime position that fervently supports "The First One", the war in Ukraine, the union of Russia and Belarus, and Soviet ideology.

Figure 7.
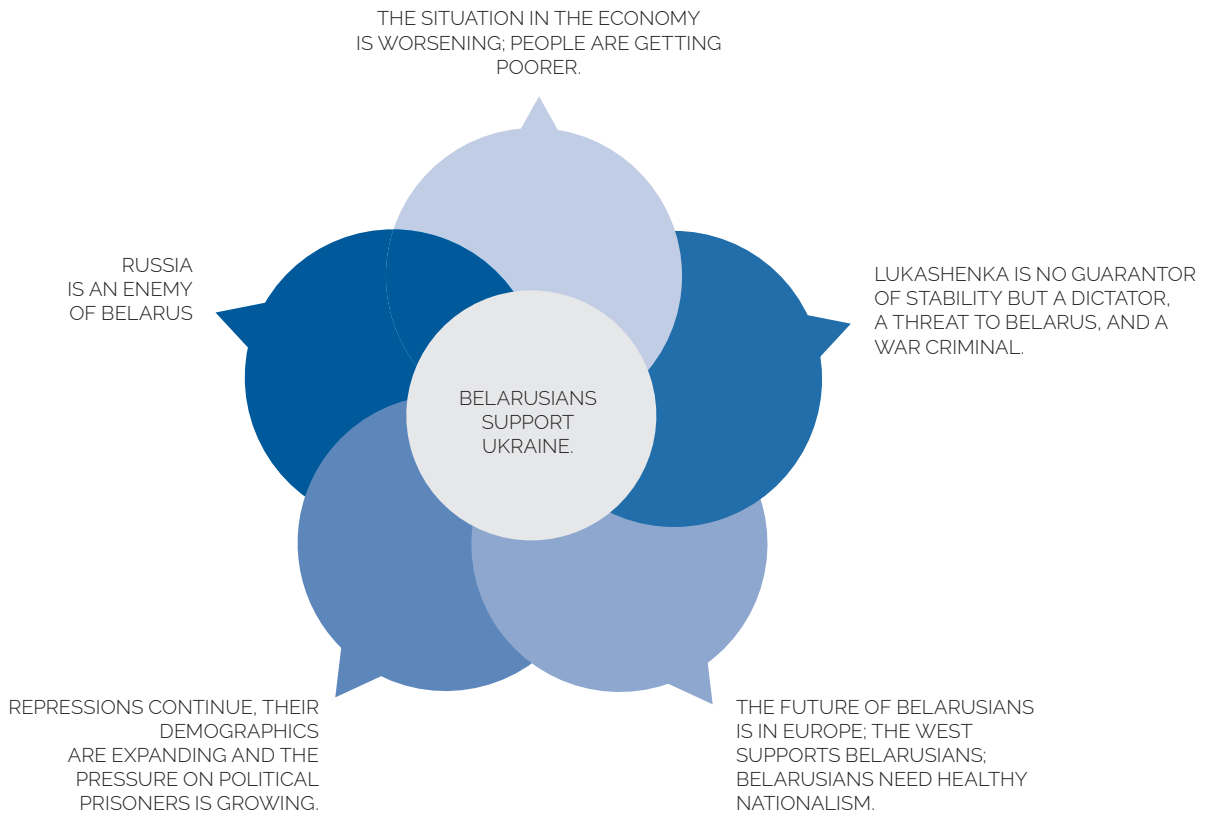**Main narratives of pro-democracy channels and accounts on Telegram and TikTok in May-July 2023**

THE SITUATION IN THE ECONOMY IS WORSENING; PEOPLE ARE GETTING POORER.

RUSSIA IS AN ENEMY OF BELARUS

LUKASHENKA IS NO GUARANTOR OF STABILITY BUT A DICTATOR, A THREAT TO BELARUS, AND A WAR CRIMINAL.

BELARUSIANS SUPPORT UKRAINE.

REPRESSIONS CONTINUE, THEIR DEMOGRAPHICS ARE EXPANDING AND THE PRESSURE ON POLITICAL PRISONERS IS GROWING.

THE FUTURE OF BELARUSIANS IS IN EUROPE; THE WEST SUPPORTS BELARUSIANS; BELARUSIANS NEED HEALTHY NATIONALISM.

Figure 8.
Main narratives of pro-regime channels and accounts on Telegram and TikTok in May-July 2023

WESTERN NATIONS ARE IN CRISIS, DRAGGING UKRAINE WITH THEM AND MANIPULATING IT. UKRAINE USED TO BE WITH US, BUT TODAY IT IS AMONG THE ENEMIES.

RUSSIA IS A PARTNER AND AN OLDER BROTHER. TOGETHER WE WILL GET THROUGH SANCTIONS AND WAR.

LUKASHENKA IS THE GUARANTOR OF INDEPENDENCE AND STABILITY.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS STRENGTHEN BELARUS'S POSITION.

WRW FLAG IS NOT OURS, IT IS A NAZI FLAG, AND EVERYTHING NAZI, SUCH AS LATIN ALPHABET, SHOULD BE DESTROYED. WRW DEVOTEES SHOULD BE IN JAIL.

THE OPPOSITION IS DIVIDED, THE WEST FINANCES TSIKHANOUSKAYA AND THUS PUTS PRESSURE ON BELARUS.

4.4. IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVES OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES AND THE BELARUSIAN REGIME

Throughout the study period, it was evident that both pro-democracy and pro-regime speakers actively promoted their ideologies, often employing "us vs. them" communication strategies to solidify the image of an enemy by discrediting their ideology. The origin of Belarusian statehood was one of the central themes for both political camps. For example, TikTok featured several explainers about why the USSR was the real beginning of modern Belarus. Conversely, the pro-democracy camp highlighted the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or the Belarusian People's Republic as the origin of Belarus's statehood. The country's flag and coat of arms represented another category of content, used by pro-regime and pro-democracy speakers to develop their narratives. Pro-regime speakers framed the WRW flag's historical importance by linking it to a "Nazi origin". In contrast, democratic forces presented the WRW flag as the first symbol of statehood, taken away by the Soviet rule and then banned by the Lukashenka regime. Such materials were commonly presented in a video FAQs format on TikTok.

The origin of the Belarusian language and culture constituted the third ideological line, harnessed by both pro-democracy and pro-regime forces to construct their narratives. Given the so-called Belarusisation policy pursued by the regime in 2015–2019, some narratives presented by the pro-regime speakers in 2023 represented a significant shift in rhetoric. Today, they no longer assert that the Belarusian language is a source of statehood formation. Instead, as the monitoring shows, Belarusian propaganda and Lukashenka's supporters actively detach themselves from the Belarusian language, culture, and heritage, favouring an emphasis on commonality and similarity of cultures and nations with the former Soviet states. In the opposite political camp, Belarusianness remains central to the majority of the content. Pro-democracy forces highlight repressions against *Belarusians* who promote Belarusian culture and address issues such as the abolition of the Belarusian Latin script and discrimination against Belarusian speakers. They also actively cover the democratic forces' proactive efforts online or abroad. Pro-democracy channels frequently mention Belarusian-speaking musical performers, Belarusian sayings, and Belarusian YouTube programmes. In the case of the pro-regime media, their almost total unification with the ideological narratives in mainstream Russian propaganda is apparent. They use newspeak, double-speak, and false interpretations that serve as the foundation for describing new events. As a peculiar superstructure to this basis, they actively seek out new methods to reinforce Lukashenka's version of a distinct Belarusian patriotism, overlaying historical revisionism with new national myths.

4.5. THE UKRAINE WAR AS A CENTRAL EVENT

The escalation of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 affected Belarus's image abroad[13] and further deepened the divide between the democratic forces and the Lukashenka regime's political positions. The war in Ukraine remains the central topic around which pro-regime and pro-democracy forces alike build their communication strategies. The counteroffensive of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), Yevgeni Prigozhin's rebellion, and the events in the Belarusian military units within the AFU formed the agenda in Telegram and TikTok channels belonging to both political camps. The topic of war reveals clearly opposing positions, with pro-regime speakers openly supporting Russia, and pro-democracy speakers backing Ukraine. Against the backdrop of a transforming image of Belarusians abroad, democratic forces actively spread the message of Belarusians supporting Ukrainians, evidenced through volunteering activities and actual fighting on Ukraine's side. Ukraine's counteroffensive also became a subject of discussion in the channels and accounts. Analytical materials and forecasts were mostly published on Telegram; there was much less counteroffensive-related content on TikTok.

Prigozhin's mutiny became a turning point for pro-regime speakers. For the first time they were divided over who is worthy to be the president of Russia and with whom it would be better for Lukashenka to build relations. In general, the narratives of the Belarusian pro-regime speakers were vague and less coordinated, with different tones and interpretations of this event. For pro-democratic speakers, Prigozhin's mutiny first became a reason to hope for instability in the Kremlin, and then to think about the stability of the Lukashenka regime. Initially, the pro-democracy channels considered the rebellion as the beginning of civil war in Russia. As the conflict developed, Belarusian opposition politicians issued statements voicing the idea that the rebellion was a chance for Belarus. News channels started airing reports that pointed at preparations for protests across Russia's regions. Prigozhin's mutiny prompted lightning-fast mobilisation in both Belarus and Russia, but nothing tangible emerged from this activation in the information sphere. The pro-regime segment also closely monitored Prigozhin's actions. Some news channels did not react immediately, only responding in the afternoon once they received news about the clashes. Others followed the situation anxiously from the very beginning. A common narrative was "we don't need chaos; we must unite around the president". It was argued that the rebellion was well-planned and could not have started without special preparation.

Lukashenka's interference was welcomed with joy, and this marked the beginning of his image as a peacemaker who

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13 Руднік Л. Вобраз Беларусі сёння: разбурае Лукашэнка, адбудоўваць Ціханоўскай, Цэнтр новых ідэй, 11 июля 2022 г., https://newbelarus.vision/vobraz-belarusi-syonnya/

had resolved a major conflict. Pro-regime analysts acknowledged the strong connection between Belarus and Russia and viewed the rebellion as a potential risk for sparking a civil war and weakening the Lukashenka regime.

4.6. STRATEGIC PARTNER: EAST OR WEST?

The researchers also noticed another trend related to the formation of pro-democracy and pro-regime narratives through the prism of strategic geopolitical partnerships. In particular, pro-regime channels and accounts accused Poland of attempting to organise terrorist attacks in Belarus and the West of manipulations with Ukraine as well as attempting to change the balance of power in the region. Such content often demonised the West, criticising Western democracies' values and ideological guidelines. These theses also served to justify political, military, and economic rapprochement with Russia. Pro-democratic speakers, on the contrary, presented opposing narratives. For example, one of the most clearly articulated theses is the denial of the historical closeness of Belarusians and Russians and the promotion of the idea of a European future for Belarus.

4.7. ROLE OF THE LEADER

It is important to add that pro-regime channels, unlike pro-democracy speakers, promoted their political leader, endowing him with the qualities of the father of the nation and guarantor of stability and independence. Therefore, the coverage of the leader's role in pro-regime sources constituted "hymning", with frequent quotations and analyses of his recent and old speeches. It should be additionally stressed that pro-government Telegram channels never directly spoke negatively of Lukashenka. Even when criticising the actions of the authorities, for example, Belarus's insufficient support for Russia or weak punishment of political prisoners, the pro-regime speakers would rather direct their anger towards lower-level actors (the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the KGB) or name no specific entities at all, only expressing their general dissatisfaction. In contrast, the pro-democracy speakers were less likely to openly praise the leader of the democratic forces, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. When covering the struggle of the Belarusian people for democracy, more focus was on community and the unity of Belarusians in confronting evil, with the merits of the democratic movement attributed to collective action and horizontal ties.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital solutions for political and social tasks and collaborative development of mechanisms for civic participation through digital technologies constitute a relatively new but rapidly evolving practice in both democratic and authoritarian countries. Citizens use technology daily, while political and civil society stakeholders turn to digital means to promote their initiatives. In the current Belarusian context, digital solutions have become a safe and perhaps the only viable tool of democratic resistance. This exploratory study presents an overview of the digitalisation of the civic and political landscape in Belarus in four parts. The study results lead to several noteworthy conclusions.

First, the digital platforms studied as part of our monitoring are battlegrounds for political discourse. Pro-democracy and pro-regime speakers employ different forms for presenting and disseminating their political narratives. The monitoring showed that both groups of speakers react to the same political events, such as the war in Ukraine, Prigozhin's mutiny, sanctions, and NEXTA co-founder Roman Protasevich's pardon, but construct opposing and hostile narratives. Consequently, the same events form the basis of ideological and political resistance on digital platforms. Discrediting opponents and rallying supporters based on an ideological agenda is one of the central aspects of the political struggle on social media. While prior to 2020 it was safe to say that digital platforms were predominantly used by opponents of the Belarusian regime, the present monitoring indicates that Telegram and TikTok are now filled with pro-government content through which the regime promotes its narratives.

Second, the central government wields repressive legislative regulations to suppress civic and political activity on digital platforms. A review of the legislation reveals that current regulations are primarily aimed at controlling, monitoring, and sanctioning online platforms. The legislation regulating the Internet space in the country builds on such core principles as "countering extremism", "national interests", and "state security". Moreover, these notions are interpreted quite broadly within the political system. In reality, the legislation is designed to curb the aspirations of democratic resistance, even on digital platforms, through preventive mechanisms, including norms for regulating the Internet space.

Third, the views of the interviewed experts and digital project creators differ on the functions and prospects of civic and political initiatives of democratic resistance. While digital project representatives aim to support the activism and development of civil society, experts assess projects against their ability to impact the political situation in the country. The project developers mainly see their function as advocacy and unification. These differing perspectives contribute to varying assessments of the projects' prospects. Experts believe that political and social benefits are only possible upon unification of online initiatives and offline activities. Both leaders of digital projects and experts view online platforms as the only possible way to communicate with the audience opposed to the Lukashenka regime. Moreover, both groups agree that no digital project will be successful in a crisis of ideas. This crisis is caused not so much by a lack of proposals from politicians and creators of civic initiatives, as by the regime's repressive practices following the summer of 2020, which hold citizens hostage.

Fourth, the questionnaires indicate that the core of democratic resistance still stands by civic and political initiatives in exile. A smaller share is actively involved in initiatives, but many respondents believe that political change in the country can be achieved through digital civic and political initiatives. Half of the respondents are convinced that digital projects can bring about positive transformations, while 16% think that the democratic forces' policies exist only online and have no real-world impact.

The study reveals that Belarusian democratic resistance online is multifaceted, consisting of initiatives with articulated political, civic, advocacy, and media ambitions. These initiatives possess the necessary skills and vision to implement digital projects, along with an audience in the country that trusts them and believes in their potential for success. However, as emphasised by the interviewed experts, the political situation requires not only creative digital solutions, but also new approaches to combining online initiatives with offline activities, the development of fresh meanings and ideas, as well as the creation of niche apolitical and neutral sub-brands. The regime's pressure on democratic resistance, including digital resistance, poses a significant challenge to pro-democracy Belarusian politicians and activists, especially when pro-government speakers

inundate popular digital platforms, compete for audiences, and promote their narratives. Today, as digital platforms have become an integral part of citizens' lives and the Lukashenka regime has forced democratic resistance online, the political struggle has, at least in part, moved into the digital arena. This adds another dimension to the political competition between Lukashenka's supporters and the backers of democratic forces. Regardless of how actively "ordinary" Belarusians participate in this digital battle, it will increasingly reverberate throughout society, manifesting itself in different ways — first, through new forms of digital repressions, and second, through the diminishing opportunity to consume neutral content and impartially presented news.

ANNEXES

RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL POLL SURVEY

Which of the following civic initiatives are you aware of?	Total
ByPol	87.2
BySol	71.8
Politzek.me	41.8
Belarussian Hajun	72.8
"New Belarus" app	34.4
Cyberpartisans	90.2
I know no one on the list	1.1
Peramoha plan	74.8
Kastus Kalinousky Regiment	94.5
"Viasna" Human Rights Centre	88.8
Majority Movement	9.4
Honest People	46.4
Baseline	1,200

Which of the listed initiatives do you assess as useful for Belarus?	Total
ByPol	55.9
BySol	56.4
Politzek.me	41.3
Belarussian Hajun	66.1
"New Belarus" app	27.4
Cyberpartisans	81.4
I know no one on the list	1.3
Peramoha plan	44.5
Kastus Kalinousky Regiment	82.5
"Viasna" Human Rights Centre	81.5
Majority Movement	9.1
Honest People	37.5
Baseline	1,188

Which of the following initiatives and communities have you been directly involved in, that is, registering, following instructions, supporting with donations, passing on information?	Total
ByPol	6
BySol	20.1
Politzek.me	9.2
Belarussian Hajun	6
"New Belarus" app	13.5
Cyberpartisans	4.7
I know no one on the list	37
Refused to answer	19.8
Peramoha plan	18.3
Kastus Kalinousky Regiment	8
"Viasna" Human Rights Centre	11.1
Majority Movement	6
Honest People	11.8
Baseline	1,158

If you have been involved in at least one of the above initiatives, please specify exactly what you have been doing over the PAST THREE MONTHS? Mark all that apply	Total
I completed volunteer tasks offline	3.1
I completed volunteer tasks online	10.4
I shared information about the initiative with friends, acquaintances in private messages and/or personal communication	28
I shared information about the initiative in social media	13.2
I provided financial support	34.4
I passed on the information to the initiative's team	8.1
I registered / applied to the initiative	17.4
I worked for the initiative as its team member	2.5
I used the initiative's information for my own needs	19.9
I took part in the initiative's activities, but not within the last three months	27
Other	3.8
Baseline	608

Below are some statements with possible assessment of the role of digital technologies in addressing political challenges. Please select the statements which you agree with	Total
It is important to maintain contacts between Belarusians in the country and those who have left, and online platforms are good for this	69.8
Democratic forces need to think more about how to act offline in Belarus (prepare guerrilla actions, volunteer projects, etc.)	43.3
Democratic initiatives use all available tools, and online is the safest one for them and for Belarusians remaining in Belarus	52.8
It seems that most of the democratic forces' Belarusian policy today takes place online and has nothing to do with real politics	15.6
I do not agree with any statement	1.6

Do you think that digital projects like the ones discussed in the previous questions can influence the change of the political situation in the country?	Total
Definitely yes	11.4
Definitely no	3.2
Somewhat yes	37.6
Somewhat no	27.3
Hard to say	20.6
Baseline	1,192

LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS: NVIVO CODING SCHEME

CODES	NUMBER OF CODING	AGGREGATE NUMBER OF CODING	NUMBER OF ITE	AGGREGATE NUMBER OF ITE
CODDES\\аспекты интернет-регулирования	61	61	5	5
CODDES\\государственная власть	45	45	3	3
CODDES\\основные принципы	39	39	4	4
CODDES\\права граждан	18	18	3	3
CODDES\\субъекты интернет-регулирования	51	51	5	5
CODDES\\уровень описания интернет-пространства	12	12	3	3
CODDES\\уровень регулирования	14	14	3	3

A SAMPLE OF TELEGRAM CHANNELS, TIKTOK ACCOUNTS AND TIKTOK HASHTAGS

Telegram channels		TikTok accounts		TikTok hashtags	
NEXTA Live	Pro-democracy	Беларусь головного мозга (belamova)	Pro-democracy	беларусь	Neutral
Беларускі Гаюн	Pro-democracy	1863_x	Pro-democracy	лукашенко	Pro-government
NEXTA	Pro-democracy	Misha Gypsynkov (gypsynkov)	Pro-democracy	беларусьBY	Neutral
Пул Первого	Pro-government	Бчбесики (belarus_free)	Pro-democracy	жывебеларусь	Pro-democracy
Беларусь головного мозга	Pro-democracy	Anastasiya Mashchava (anastasichek)	Pro-democracy	белоруссия	Pro-government
МотолькоПомоги	Pro-democracy	Гражданская реакция (reaction.blr)	Pro-democracy	ЯмыБатька	Pro-government
Полымя	Pro-democracy	Маяк Беларускі (mayakby)	Pro-democracy	бчб	Pro-democracy
Чай з малінавым варэннем	Pro-democracy	Павел Латушко (pavel_latushka)	Pro-democracy	александрлукашенко	Pro-government
Писулька	Pro-democracy	Paweł Łatuszka (pawel_latushka)	Pro-democracy	тихановская	Pro-democracy
Объективный Евген	Pro-government	Ксенія (serca_u_belarusi)	Pro-democracy	батькалукашенко	Pro-government
LUXTA	Pro-democracy	Чай з малинавым варэннем (godofbelarus)	Pro-democracy	lukashenko	Pro-government

Телеграм-каналы		Тикток-аккаунты		Тикток-хештеги	
Белорусский силовик BY	Pro-government	Гэта Менск, дзетка! (thisisminsk)	Pro-democracy	батька	Pro-government
ЖС Premium	Pro-government	БелГосТикТокКанал (chinchinchen nelofficial)	Pro-democracy	тиктокбеларусь	Neutral
Юрий Воскресенский	Pro-government	witzmag	Pro-democracy	беларускітыкток	Pro-democracy
МКБ — Мая Краіна Беларусь	Pro-democracy	NEXTA (nexta_tv)	Pro-democracy	всрб	Pro-government
Светлана Тихановская	Pro-democracy	Топ Фейк (weeklytopfake)	Pro-democracy	БРСМ	Pro-government
МВД Беларуси	Pro-government	prezident_sveta_by	Pro-democracy	пабеларуску	Pro-democracy
Ник и Майк	Pro-democracy	Роман (traianus_n)	Pro-democracy	змагары	Pro-government
Shraibman	Pro-democracy	glory8_88	Pro-government	забатьку	Pro-government
BYPOL	Pro-democracy	brsm_life	Pro-government	тихановскаябеларусь	Pro-democracy
Гайдукевич Олег	Pro-government	Беларусь сейчас (belarusseychas)	Pro-government	новостибеларусь	Neutral
Усы Лукашенко	Pro-democracy	maija (zbelarus)	Pro-government	любимуюнеотдадим	Pro-government
Министерство Обороны Республики Беларусь	Pro-government	eismont_family	Pro-government	россиябеларусь	Pro-government
Советская Белоруссия	Pro-democracy	Страна Васильки&Цимбалы (strana_vasilki)	Pro-government	свободнаябеларусь	Pro-democracy
Невольфович	Pro-government	Belarusian Military (belarusian.military.edits)	Pro-government	беларусьроссіябратья	Pro-government
Павел Латушка	Pro-democracy	Тата Медведева (medvedtata2)	Pro-government	любимуюнеотдают	Pro-government
Сергей Вячеславович Чалый	Pro-democracy	Тайная вечеря (drugbelorus_stream3)	Pro-government	бацька	Pro-government
Рефлексия и реакция	Pro-democracy	Юлия Джиган (yuliageegun)	Pro-government	ямыомон	Pro-government
Земля наша	Pro-government	Сёстры Груздевы (gruzdevy)	Pro-government	залукашенко	Pro-government
Я/МЫ ОМОН	Pro-government	scoriov	Pro-government	гайдукевич	Pro-government
Шпаковский	Pro-government	#PoZitif_in100GrAmm (top_tiktok_in100gramm)	Pro-government	славабеларуси	Pro-democracy
FRIEDMAN	Pro-democracy	Пул Первого (pul_pervogo)	Pro-government	заБеларусьBY	Pro-government
Белорусский порядок	Pro-democracy	Марина (familizil)	Pro-government	ра3Ам	Neutral
Азарёнок. СТВ	Pro-government	Derolik (der0lik)	Pro-government	бчбшнікі	Pro-government
Дзермант	Pro-government	grafinya_z (n_a.t)	Pro-government	тихановскаяпрезидент	Pro-democracy
Дмитрий Болкунец	Pro-democracy	yaugenbondar1990	Pro-government	беларусияBY	Pro-government
Жёлтые Сливы	Pro-government	КАК ЕСТЬ (ilovebelarus001)	Pro-government	азарёнок	Pro-government
Главный. Тур	Pro-government	ВАРБ (varb.mil.by)	Pro-government	тыктокпабеларуску	Pro-democracy
Политнетология	Pro-democracy	Капустина Наталья (nastoliak1)	Pro-government	беларусьперадусім	Pro-democracy
Ігар Тышкевіч	Pro-democracy	МВД Беларуси (mvd_by)	Pro-government	нетбчб	Pro-government
BEREZINA	Pro-government	Art1kys (artikys2.0)	Pro-government	ямыбацька	Pro-government
Валерий Цепкало	Pro-democracy	ivanovich.by	Pro-government	экономикабеларуси	Neutral
Каардынацыйная Рада	Pro-democracy	Olchik (olchik_zv)	Pro-government	вольнаябеларусь	Pro-democracy

Телеграм-каналы		Тикток-аккаунты		Тикток-хештеги	
Галопом по Европе	Pro-government	Zabelarus (zabelarusz)	Pro-government	пазняк	Pro-democracy
#МЫБеларусьвY	Pro-government	govorit__gomel	Pro-government	россиябеларусь-братья	Pro-government
ЛДПБ | Правда Гайдукевича	Pro-government	palma34h	Pro-government	аглукашенко	Pro-government
Азарёнок. СТВ. Беларусь	Pro-government	beloruski_zybr_	Pro-government	вячорка	Pro-democracy
ПЕТРАШКО. ONLINE	Pro-government	uggla2001	Pro-government	6чбмаразм	Pro-government
Usov Pavel	Pro-democracy	audi_capcut	Pro-government	нетбчбсимволике	Pro-government
Народное Антикризисное Управление	Pro-democracy	nil_la	Pro-democracy	лукашенколучший	Pro-government
Людажоры	Pro-government	midori_11_	Pro-democracy		
Людмила Гладкая. СБ	Pro-government	nekitbnr	Pro-democracy		
Аб'яднаны Пераходны Кабінет	Pro-democracy	based.litvin	Pro-democracy		
Народны Дэпутат	Pro-democracy	vlr.sfr	Pro-democracy		
ZмагарOK	Pro-government	anastasichek	Pro-democracy		
Усы Тихановской	Pro-government	politzek.me	Pro-democracy		
50 оттенков правды/лжи	Pro-government	chaly_news	Pro-democracy		
Палата Представителей Национального Собрания РБ	Pro-government	belwarriors	Pro-democracy		
Совет Республики Национального собрания Республики Беларусь	Pro-government	govorit__gomel	Pro-government		
Верховный Суд Беларуси	Pro-government	palma34h	Pro-government		
Post ✚Rudzik	Pro-democracy	beloruski_zybr_	Pro-government		
КрысолOFF	Pro-government	uggla2001	Pro-government		
ПуЛьС ГрОдНо	Pro-government	audi_capcut	Pro-government		
Художник Светлана Жигимонт	Pro-government				
ВЯЧОРКА	Pro-democracy				
РМ	Pro-democracy				
Віталь Цыганкоў	Pro-democracy				
Ольга Карач	Pro-democracy				
Бондарева. БЕЗ КУПЮР	Pro-government				
🐇	Pro-government				
БЕЛОРУСКА «ТОПИТ» вY🐇	Pro-government				

NARRATIVES OF PRO-REGIME AND PRO-DEMOCRACY SPEAKERS OVER THREE MONTHS

As noted above, both pro-regime and pro-democracy speakers build their communication using several key narratives. However, they changed and adapted their narratives each week depending on the events and context. The main narratives of both camps of political opponents during the monitoring period are presented below.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 1–7 May	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 1–7 May
— The Ukrainian counteroffensive will fail, Ukrainian authorities are terrorists, Ukrainians want to drag Belarus into the war. — The West is an enemy who wants to break Belarusians, to impose their values; NATO and especially Poles want to occupy Belarus. The West is manipulating Ukraine. — Lukashenka and the security agencies are defending the independence of Belarus and repelling attacks by terrorists like Tsikhanouskaya.	— The economic situation is deteriorating; there is a serious increase in ideological treatment in schools. — Russia will lose, its image is getting worse, and Ukraine is preparing a counteroffensive, which will be successful. — Lukashenka is a dictator holding people hostage; law enforcers are allowed to do anything they want; political prisoners should not become a bargaining tool. Lukashenka is a war criminal and Putin's friend involved in kidnapping 20,000 Ukrainian children out of Ukraine. — Belarusians value Europe and are fixed upon the West.
Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 8–14 May	**Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 8–14 May**
— 9 May is the most important holiday that Belarus and Russia celebrate together; Ukraine has betrayed this legacy because it has become hostage to the West's manipulations. — Lukashenka and his supporters guarantee Belarus's stability and peace. Also, they are preparing to defend themselves against both NATO and the Kalinousky fighters. They support the economy and prevent terrorist attacks. — Western countries are in a crisis, primarily a crisis of values, which they are trying to escape by fuelling the conflict in Ukraine.	— Repression is getting tougher; the economy is in bad shape, but we are strong. Finally, there was some progress with Ukraine: Zelenskyy shook hands with Tsikhanouskaya. — Lukashenka is sick, and his illness is a reason to discuss strategy in case of his sudden death. — 9 May is not our holiday and Russia is not our friend.
Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 15–21 May	**Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 15–21 May**
— Lukashenka is alive and well, and his regime guarantees stability and humanity. An example of this is Protasevich's pardon: this is how fugitives should and will be able to redeem themselves. — No one remembers Babariko, and Tsikhanouskaya is used to interfering in the affairs of Belarus. They give money, but the opposition can't deal with it, because they don't know how to divide it. — Russia is a friend, but are a lot of political forces there too. Prigozhin is a worthy military commander.	— No information about political prisoners; it is important to come out in support of political prisoners in foreign cities on 21 May. — Belarusians support Ukraine in the war, they are in solidarity, they also die on the front, heroically defending Ukraine in the hottest spots. Ukraine sees the solidarity of Belarusians. Also, the West supports Belarus. The counteroffensive will succeed. — Lukashenka is a war criminal, a dictator who led Belarus to misery and now to the entry of nuclear weapons. His illness has sown a seed of anxiety among his supporters, his entourage is thinking what to do, how to divide power. We need to be ready, because he will definitely die, maybe not today, but we need to get ready.
Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 22–28 May	**Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 22–28 May**
— Protasevich's pardon is an example to other fugitives; they all must go through the investigation and trial, redeem themselves. This is the only way to move forward. — Poland is preparing an attack on Belarus; in the USA and France they disperse protests by force, but for some reason they scold Belarusian law enforcers, who actually guarantee stability. — The Belarusian opposition is in discord and prepares to divide 250 million received from the West among themselves. — Nuclear weapons strengthen Belarus's positions.	— Belarusians support Ukraine in the war; Belarusians die for Ukraine. — Western countries are on the side of free Belarus; the EU sees the future of Belarus in Europe. At the same time, the West still lacks a unified strategy on Belarus. — Nuclear weapons are a threat to Belarus's national security. Lukashenka is the reason why Belarus will have nuclear weapons, and he himself is a threat to national security. — Protasevich was pardoned in order to legitimise the return programme.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 29 May–4 June	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 29 May–4 June
— The opposition is split and is busy dividing 250 million. Meanwhile, everything is stable and good in Belarus. — Even when the system makes mistakes, Lukashenka will sort everything out, as in the case of Centralised Testing (CT). — Prigozhin is a worthy military commander. — Belarus's army is strong, the police and OMON (Special Police Forces) are heroes.	— Lukashenka's health is poor, there is unrest within the system. — Sanctions are having an effect, the West is with Belarus, and the Kalinousky Regiment is ready to liberate Belarus at the right moment. With the war close to Belgorod and drones over the Kremlin, Lukashenka fears this scenario even more. — Miscalculations in political governance materialise in various areas, such as how CT is counted. — Yabatki (We are Father's supporters) are just very stupid and gutless people.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 5–11 June	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 5–11 June
— NATO is at war against Russia and Ukraine is its puppet. The Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP) was blown up by Ukrainians. — Crisis in the opposition and the split in ByPol shows that the whole opposition is falling apart. — There are enemies within the system; they must be found and punished. — Russia is a friend of Belarus; it will repel a counteroffensive.	— We can expect a serious discussion about the consequences of the war for Belarus, including reparations. — The bombing of the Kakhovka HPP is a terrorist operation. But Ukraine is launching a counteroffensive, and it will be successful. — Although Sofia Sapega was pardoned, the deaths of political prisoners and brutal repression continue; Lukashenka is a criminal.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 12–18 June	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 12–18 June
— Lukashenka is a wise ruler, guarantor of stability; he helps Russia, with which Belarus should become stronger. — Europe reluctantly supports Ukraine; NATO countries are afraid. Ukraine blew up the Kakhovka HPP itself. — Sanctions strengthen the Belarus-Russia alliance. — Fugitives must be re-educated and punished.	— Ukraine and the West support Tsikhanouskaya. Russia is the main enemy. — The economic situation is deteriorating; Lukashenka is a threat to both stability and security of the country. Nuclear weapons jeopardise Belarus's future. — The regime continues to expand the demographics of repression, but Belarusians are holding on, while democratic forces will overcome the split, as in the case of ByPol.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 19–25 June	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 19–25 June
— Lukashenka saved Belarus in 2020 and Russia in 2023; he is a peacemaker and mediator. Russia is grateful to him. — WRW flag is not ours, it's a Nazi flag, and everything Nazi, such as Latin alphabet and WRW symbols, should be destroyed. WRW devotees should be in jail. The Peramoha plan is fake, and ByPol is corrupt. — The West is splitting, Ukraine's counteroffensive is failing, Russia together with Belarus will restore justice.	— Corruption, rising prices, and the deteriorating economy are all Lukashenka's fault. — Repressions have reached a new level with phone checks at borders and on suburban trains. — Prigozhin is a criminal, but his mutiny gives hope for the liberation of Belarus. — Europe is the Belarus's future, but more sanctions against the regime and more support for the country's democratic society are needed.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 26 June–2 July	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 26 June–2 July
— Lukashenka has been solving the Ukraine conflict for years, and in the future, he will resolve the West-East confrontation. He is a peacemaker; Russia and Belarusians are grateful to him. In general, Belarusians support how the situation develops and welcome the arrival of PMC Wagner. The situation with the Wagnerites is complicated, but they should be used as an important resource. — Western media call Tsikhanouskaya an activist and Lukashenka a president.	— Belarus is undergoing forced rather than natural Russification; the Russian world is evil, and it is necessary to revive healthy nationalism. — The Wagnerites are a threat to Belarus; Europe should react strongly. — Ukrainians blame Belarusians for everything, not understanding the Belarusian context.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 3–9 July	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 3–9 July
— The economy is doing good, exports are growing. — The West is no longer interested in runaways, who will soon run out of resources. In the meantime, the West has again taken notice of how Lukashenka mediated the attempted coup in Russia, and soon, after joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Belarus will again become an important actor in international politics. — The former Soviet republics can only be independent together. — The Wagnerites in Belarus are an additional resource for strengthening the country's stability and security.	— There is a split within the Belarusian regime, caused, among other things, by the Wagnerites. Lukashenka's position is rather shaky. — The video with Mr Tsikhanousky is a provocation against Ms Tsikhanouskaya before the NATO summit. — Belarusianness should become the basis of the state; the Belarusian Latin script should be promoted. — The economy is in bad shape; there is a shortage of milk and potatoes, which is the fault of Lukashenka and his ties with Russia.

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 10–16 July	Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 10–16 July
— They prepare elections, and only registered parties will be allowed to participate. — Lukashenka is the guarantor of stability, while the opposition is split. — Ales Pushkin died of natural causes. — NATO was preparing Ukraine for war back in 2014; the coalition of Western countries, which is mired in a crisis of values, is no longer ready to support Ukraine as actively.	— The NATO summit is an important diplomatic achievement for democratic forces and Belarus, but the results are not the best, as Belarus is not considered independent. However, the future of Belarus is the West, Europeans are brothers to Belarusians, and Russians are not. — Deprivation of citizenship is an illegal step that reveals the regime's weakness and fears. — The economic situation is deteriorating; Lukashenka is getting weaker along with Putin. — Further Russification of Belarus is destructive, but Belarusians will stand.
Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, 17–23 July	**Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, 17–23 July**
— PMC Wagner ensures Belarus's security. — The West is planning an attack on Belarus, but the country is ready to repel any aggression. — Lukashenka is a leader who tries to preserve the country, he does not care about money and wealth. — The Ukrainian authorities are terrorists, but the people [of Ukraine] are not our enemy.	— Lukashenka is again trying to balance with both the West and the East. — No news from most political prisoners, and repression is tightening even more. — Russification of Belarus occurs in all spheres. — The Belarusian army is a laughingstock.

GENERAL NARRATIVES OF TELEGRAM CHANNELS AND TIKTOK ACCOUNTS OF PRO-REGIME AND PRO-DEMOCRACY SPEAKERS FOR THE ENTIRE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW

Main narratives of pro-regime accounts and channels, May-July 2023

1. Lukashenka is the guarantor of independence and stability.
2. Western nations are in crisis, dragging Ukraine with them and manipulating it. Ukraine used to be with us, but today it is among the enemies.
3. The opposition is divided, the West finances Tsikhanouskaya and thus puts pressure on Belarus.
4. Nuclear weapons strengthen Belarus's position.
5. Russia is a partner and an older brother. Together we will get through sanctions and war.
6. WRW flag is not ours, it is a Nazi flag, and everything Nazi, such as Latin alphabet, should be destroyed. WRW devotees should be in jail.

Main narratives of pro-democracy accounts and channels, May-July 2023

1. The situation in the economy is worsening; people are getting poorer.
2. Lukashenka is no guarantor of stability but a dictator, a threat to Belarus, and a war criminal.
3. The future of Belarusians is in Europe; the West supports Belarusians; Belarusians need healthy nationalism.
4. Belarusians support Ukraine.
5. Repressions continue, their demographics are expanding and the pressure on political prisoners is growing.
6. Russia is an enemy of Belarus.

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TRENDS IN BELARUSIAN DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE: NARRATIVES, PERCEPTIONS, AND REACTION OF THE STATE

→ The Belarusian authorities have almost entirely purged the political and civil field within Belarus, forcing opponents of the regime to operate primarily online.

→ Telegram and TikTok have emerged as important platforms for political competition, used to discredit opponents and promote narratives.

→ By infusing online projects with concrete political meaning and ideas, democratic initiatives can maintain their support and connection with Belarusians inside the country.