

IMAGE OF BELARUS ABROAD: MONITORING OF FOREIGN MEDIA IN 2025

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BELARUS'S IMAGE IS BEING GENERALIZED AND SIMPLIFIED

Foreign media do not shape Belarus's image independently; rather, they relay both attention to the country and the political interests of external actors. The Center for New Ideas has been tracking shifts in Belarus's image for five years. This edition of the study presents an analysis of the country's image in the international media in 2025 and critically examines key trends in media coverage. Since 2022, coverage of Belarus has focused primarily on regional politics and the war in Ukraine. This stood in stark contrast to 2020, when the country was in the spotlight following protests, intensified repression, and mass emigration. In 2025, Belarus's image is largely defined by its role in the war in Ukraine and Russia's broader political agenda, with a focus on security and geopolitics.

This points to a simplification of Belarus's image as portrayed by foreign media. Events in the country are reduced to a handful of entrenched frames, from which a significant portion of internal processes, social groups, and contradictions are omitted. As a result, the media image of Belarus is closely woven into the narratives of "Russia's ally," "source of threat," and "space of repression."

The media image of Belarus also leaves no room for actors who do not fit these narratives. The state and the authorities are mentioned far more frequently than civil society and democratic forces. Publications about the everyday lives of Belarusians inside the country are considerably fewer. There is a practical explanation for this asymmetrical coverage: foreign journalists are virtually unable to enter Belarus. For this and other reasons, Belarus's image is constructed through the lens of a "system without a society." This analytical lens gradually becomes naturalized.

As in [previous editions](#) of the monitoring report, approximately 92% of the articles in the sample use the name "Belarus." The use of the alternative "White Russia" persists mainly in French-language publications and accounts for approximately 8% of the sample — a figure that has remained virtually unchanged over several years.

This year, manual content analysis was supplemented by automated text analysis methods. In 2025, the sample for automated analysis comprised 3,280 articles, while 5,414 articles were included for manual analysis. The results of the two approaches are presented in combined form — the total sample consisted of 8,694 articles on Belarus published across 37 international media outlets from 10 countries.

It is important to note that the sample covers predominantly Western media: Chinese, Arab, and other non-Western publications were not included in the study, which limits the scope for generalizations about "foreign media" in the broader sense. The study covers text-based publications only; audiovisual content was not included in the analysis.

This study identifies the main themes, narratives, and actors through which foreign media describe Belarus. This year, the study also analyzed media events, brands, and personalities most frequently mentioned in articles related to Belarus.

Chart 1. Distribution of articles by media outlet (N = 8,694)

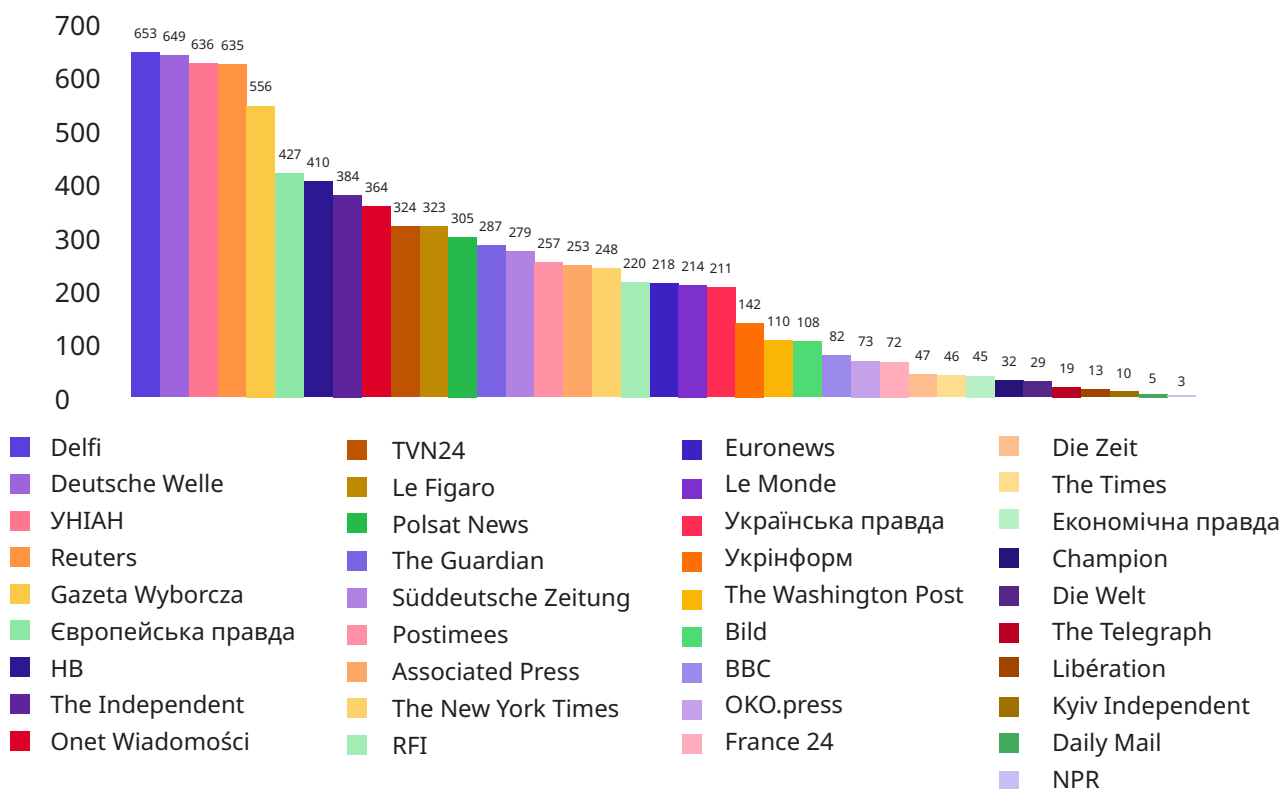
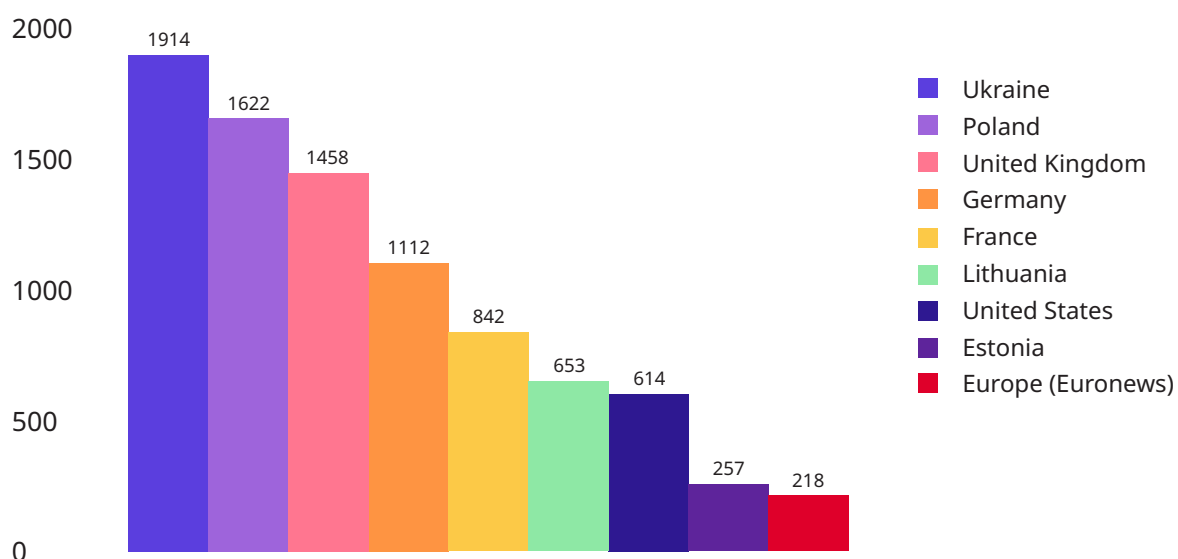


Chart 2. Distribution of articles by country (N = 8,694)



SABALENKA, "VIASNA," ORESHNIK: WHICH BRANDS AND PUBLIC FIGURES ARE LINKED TO BELARUS IN THE MEDIA

Belarus's media image is closely associated with several brands and public figures across politics, sports, media, and music. That said, identifying a single "national brand" proves difficult. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Alexander Lukashenko are not included in the list of individuals – mentions of them in the media were analyzed separately.

Brands and individuals most frequently mentioned in articles about Belarus (N = 817, 9.4% of the total sample)

Brand / Individual	Number of mentions
Arina Sabalenka	125
Viasna (Human Rights Centre)	81
Belavia	48
Maria Kalesnikava	38
Siarhei Tsikhanouski	31
Ales Bialiatski	24
Nasha Niva	23
BelTA	21
Mikalai Statkevich	19
Andrzej Poczobut	18
BAJ (Belarusian Association of Journalists)	17
Viktar Babaryka	15
Zerkalo	14
Belaruskali	13
Belsat	11
Oreshnik	10
TUT.by	10
NEXTA	10
Artyom Shraibman	9
BYSOL	9
Aliaksandra Sasnovich	6
Max Korzh	6
Cyber Partisans	6
Svetlana Alexievich	6
Belaruski Hayun	6

The most striking feature of the media landscape is the dominance of the sports agenda, centered on a single figure. Arina Sabalenka (125 mentions) significantly outpaces all others in terms of visibility. In this sense, sports remain one of the few areas through which Belarus regularly appears in the international media outside the context of crises and politics. At the same time, the boundary between "neutral" and political coverage is far from clear-cut. Even in sports stories, the discussion frequently shifts to questions of sanctions, neutral status, and the eligibility of Belarusian athletes to compete internationally. In other words, sports do not displace the political context so much as become entangled with it.

The second most significant cluster is the human rights and opposition sphere. Actors such as Viasna, Maria Kalesnikava, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Ales Bialiatski, and Viktor Babaryka define the framing of discussions about political prisoners and repression. Unlike the sports agenda, where attention is concentrated on a single figure, in this segment it is distributed across several interconnected individuals and organizations. This creates the effect of an enduring thematic thread rather than a series of isolated news pegs.

Categories of brands and individuals most frequently mentioned in articles about Belarus (N = 817, 9.4% of the total sample)

Category	Mentions	Share	Key Representatives
Sports	131	11.4%	Arina Sabalenka (125), Aliaksandra Sasnovich (6)
Opposition politicians	127	11.0%	Tsikhanouski, Kalesnikava, Bialiatski, Statkevich, Babaryka
Human rights organizations	98	8.5%	Viasna (81), BAJ (17)
Independent media	58	5.0%	Nasha Niva, Belsat, Zerkalo, TUT.by, NEXTA
Government agencies and media	42	3.6%	BelTA, Belavia
Industry / Sanctioned entities	13	1.1%	Belaruskali
Culture and society	21	1.8%	Max Korzh, Svetlana Alexievich
Military / security structures	20	1.7%	Oreshnik, Cyber Partisans, Viktor Khrenin
Civil society / diaspora	21	1.8%	BYSOL, BELPOL, Belaruski Hayun
Journalism / Analysis	27	2.3%	Artyom Shraibman, Andrzej Poczobut

A separate layer consists of the media themselves as independent actors. Mentions of Nasha Niva, Belsat, Zerkalo, TUT.BY, and NEXTA confirm that Belarusian media remain not only sources of information but subjects of news coverage — primarily in the context of repression, forced shutdowns, and pressure on editorial independence. This reinforces the overarching narrative of the absence of press freedom in the country, while simultaneously marginalizing their role.

State and quasi-state entities are less visible and appear in a different context. Belavia and Belaruskali are mentioned mainly in connection with sanctions and international restrictions, while BelTA is cited as a vehicle for the official political agenda. Consequently, state brands play almost no role in constructing a neutral or positive image of the country and remain embedded in a conflict-driven narrative.

Less prominent categories — culture, civil society and diaspora, military and security structures, and journalism and analysis — play a secondary role and rarely generate independent storylines. Even figures such as Svetlana Alexievich or Max Korzh shape an alternative, "softer" image of the country only sporadically and do not shift the overall media portrait.

Overall, the structure of brands and public figures is markedly asymmetrical: the only genuinely global and relatively neutral image is linked to sports, while the political, human rights, and media segments primarily produce a crisis-driven and conflict-laden image of Belarus. This reinforces the study's central conclusion: even where individual "normalizing" stories exist, the country's media presence remains politicized and is largely defined by themes of conflict and human rights.

MILITARY EXERCISES AND THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS: KEY MEDIA EVENTS IN FOREIGN COVERAGE

An analysis of media events shows that in 2025, Belarus most frequently appears in the news in the context of security and hybrid threats. The largest clusters — smuggling via weather balloons (17%), the Zapad-2025 military exercises (14%), and railway sabotage (10%) — collectively frame Belarus as a source of instability and risk for its neighbours. Smaller-scale stories reinforce the same logic: drones originating from Belarusian territory (5%) and the deployment of the Oreshnik missile (2%). Together, they contribute to an overall image of Belarus as part of the region's military and hybrid infrastructure.

***Media events most frequently mentioned in articles about Belarus
(N = 1,855, 21.3% of the total sample)***

Thematic cluster	Mentions	Share
Smuggling via weather balloons / Crisis on the border with Lithuania	316	17.0%
Zapad-2025 military exercises	263	14.2%
Railway sabotage	189	10.2%
Drones from Belarusian territory	97	5.2%
Release of political prisoners	86	4.6%
2025 presidential election	70	3.8%
U.S.–Belarus diplomacy	32	1.7%
Deployment of the Oreshnik missile	30	1.6%
Illegal migration / border crisis	23	1.2%
2026 World Cup qualifiers	19	1.0%
Sanctions	18	1.0%
Repression (direct)	15	0.8%
Parade in Moscow (9 May)	12	0.6%

The second tier of the agenda relates to domestic politics and human rights, though its share is considerably lower. The release of political prisoners (5%) and the 2025 presidential election (4%) receive attention but remain secondary to security-related topics. Direct mentions of repression (1%) are rare — pointing to a shift from structural analysis of the situation to event-driven coverage and individual narratives.

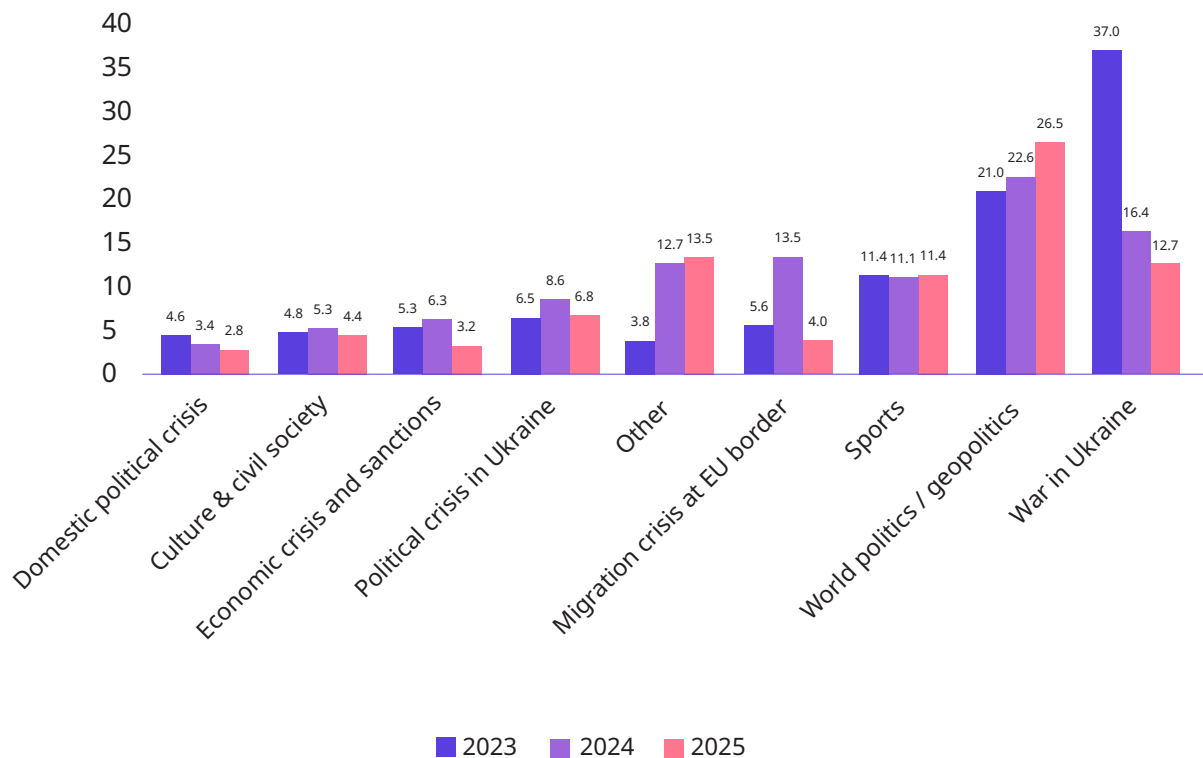
Foreign policy constitutes a separate strand, represented by articles on U.S.–Belarus diplomatic relations (2%) and sanctions (1%). Despite their modest share, these topics matter because they connect domestic developments to the international context and reinforce the geopolitical frame.

Alternative and less politicized topics — sports (1%), cultural events, and international awards (0.1%) — remain on the periphery and do not shape the overall media narrative.

HOW DID FOREIGN MEDIA COVER EVENTS IN BELARUS IN 2025?

In 2025, Belarus appears in foreign media increasingly as part of global politics rather than as a subject of interest in its own right. Geopolitics now accounts for roughly a quarter of all publications (27%), and its share continues to grow relative to previous years. This consolidates a broader trend: Belarus is understood primarily as a component of larger regional and global processes, rather than as a discrete focus of attention. The structure of the remaining topics is largely stable. Sports remain a notable but secondary category (11%), as do stories related to the war in Ukraine (13%). Culture and society topics continue to occupy the margins of the media agenda (4%).

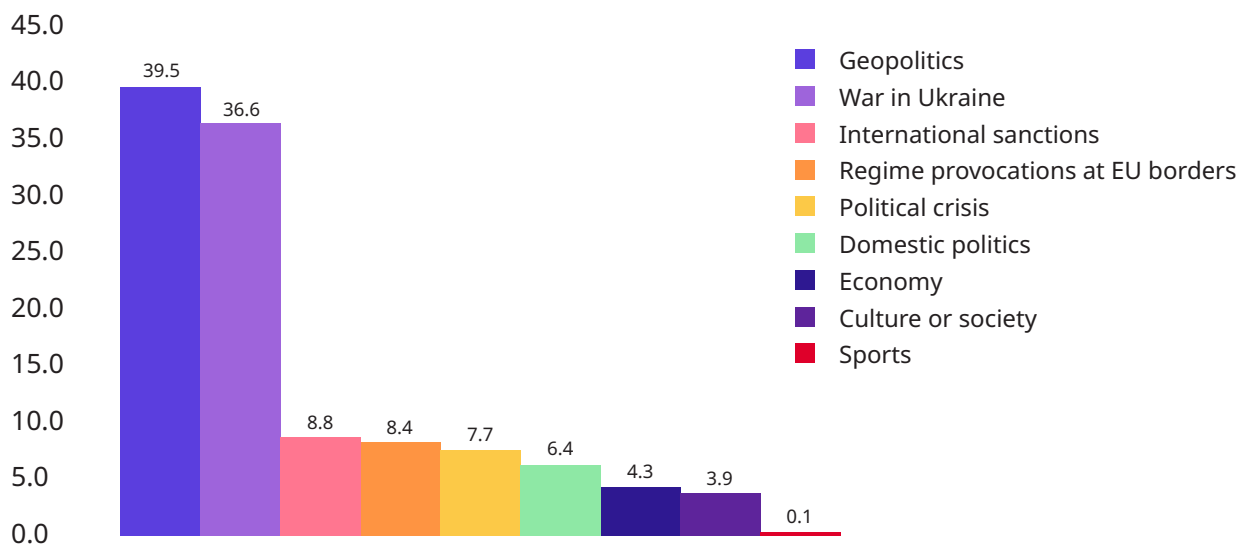
Chart 3. Topics in which Belarus was mentioned in media publications, 2023–2025 (N = 8,694)



Against this backdrop, the share of coverage in which Belarus is directly linked to the war in Ukraine continues to decline: from 37% in 2023 to 16% in 2024 and 13% in 2025. A similar trend is observed across other topics. The share of publications on the migration crisis at the EU border has dropped from 14% to 4%, while coverage of the economy and sanctions has fallen from 6% to 3%. At the same time, the share of the "other" category has grown (to 14%), which may indicate a more fragmented agenda and the absence of a single dominant topic comparable in scale to the "war" theme in previous years. Overall, these changes reflect a gradual shift from event-driven coverage to a broader, more contextual portrayal of Belarus in the international

media. That said, direct comparison of figures for 2023–2024 and 2025 is limited due to changes in methodology and selection criteria; the figures presented should be read as indicative of general trends rather than precise quantitative dynamics.

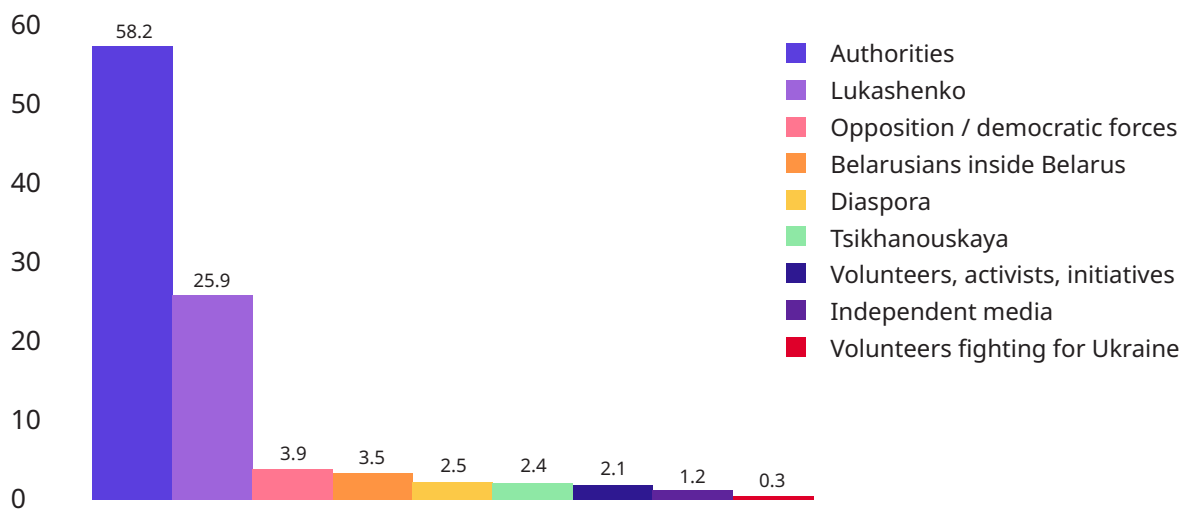
Chart 4. Secondary topics in 2025 media coverage (% of articles where Belarus is the main topic)



Additional topics confirm the same trend. Even when Belarus is the main topic, it most often still appears in a geopolitical context (40%) or in connection with the war in Ukraine (37%). This means that the country's media image continues to be shaped by questions of international politics and security rather than by domestic processes.

Other secondary topics occur considerably less frequently. Overall, this suggests that even subordinate stories about Belarus remain highly politicized and rarely extend beyond the international agenda.

Chart 5. Main actors in analysed articles (% of articles with an identified main actor, N = 5,891)

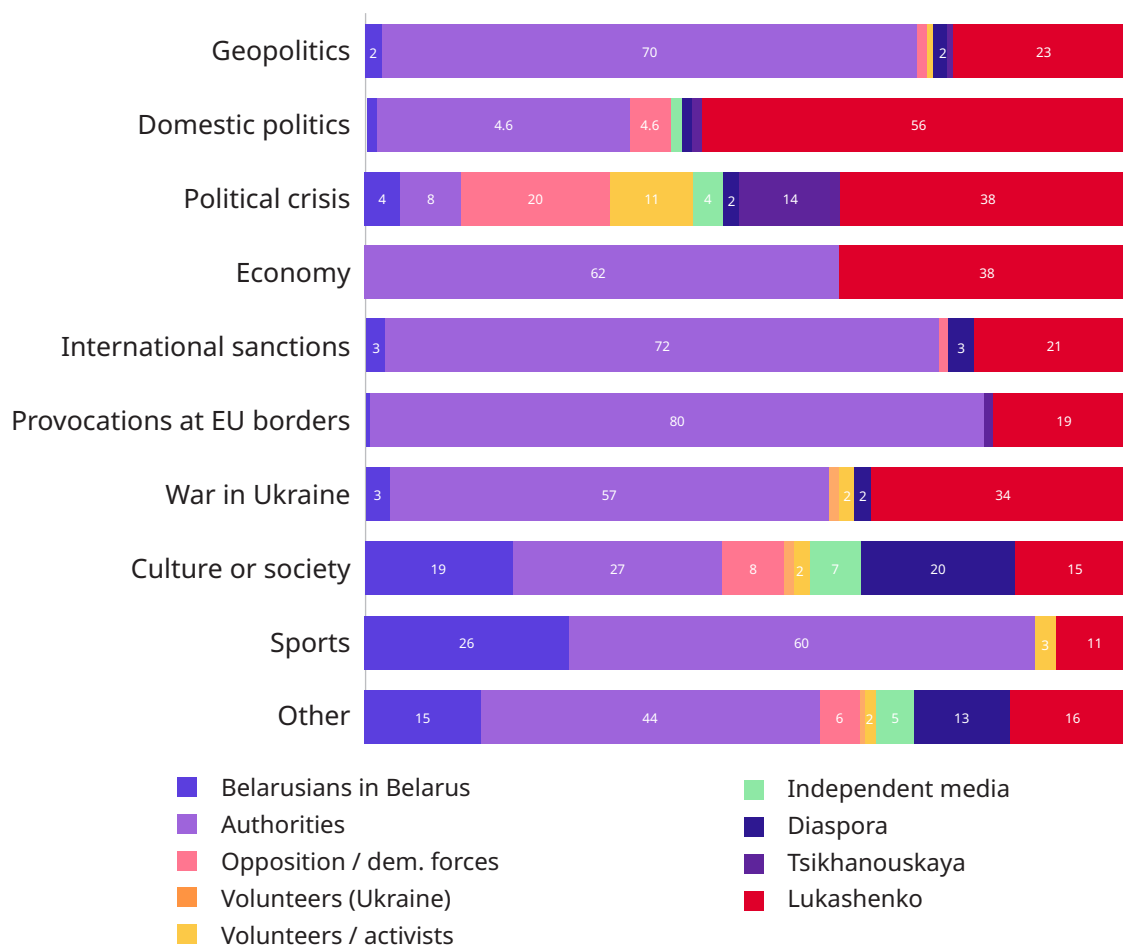


In 2025, foreign media coverage of Belarus centres primarily on the authorities and political leadership as the dominant actors. The most frequently identified actors are the authorities (58%) and Alexander Lukashenko (26%). This means that Belarus continues to be described chiefly through the decisions and actions of the state, while society, the opposition, and civic initiatives remain on the periphery of media attention.

Compared to 2024, this trend has intensified. The share of mentions of the authorities rose from 36% to 58%, while Lukashenko appeared less frequently as a distinct figure (down from 31% to 26%). This may indicate a shift from the image of a single leader to a more generalised perception of the system of power as a whole. At the same time, the presence of Belarusians inside the country (down from 14% to 4%) and the diaspora (from 5% to 3%) as actors has sharply declined, pointing to a further reduction of civil society's visibility in the media agenda.

Other actors are represented minimally and have almost no influence on the country's media image. The opposition and democratic forces appear in only 4% of publications, Tsikhanouskaya in 2%, volunteers and activists in 2%, independent media in 1%, and volunteers fighting for Ukraine in fewer than 1% of cases. Compared to 2024, their media presence has either remained low or declined further. Overall, this confirms a broader trend: non-state actors are gradually being pushed out of the media agenda, and Belarus is increasingly portrayed through the actions of the authorities rather than those of society.

Chart 6. Thematic context of key actors' appearances (% within topic; N = 5,891)



State actors dominate most key topics. In geopolitics, for instance, the authorities are the leading actors (70%), with Lukashenko accounting for a significant share (23%). A similar pattern holds for international sanctions (authorities 72%, Lukashenko 21%), the economy (authorities 62%, Lukashenko 38%), and provocations at EU borders (80% and 19%, respectively). This indicates that the main foreign policy and conflict-related narratives are almost entirely associated with state institutions.

Non-state actors, by contrast, are largely confined to the topic of the political crisis. Within this category, notable shares are held by the opposition (20%), Tsikhanouskaya (14%), volunteers (11%), and independent media (4%). Lukashenko remains a significant actor here as well (38%), while the authorities are represented much less prominently (8%). These actors appear rarely in other topics, limiting their presence to the framework of the crisis agenda. Belarusians inside the country and the diaspora appear more frequently in less politicised topics.

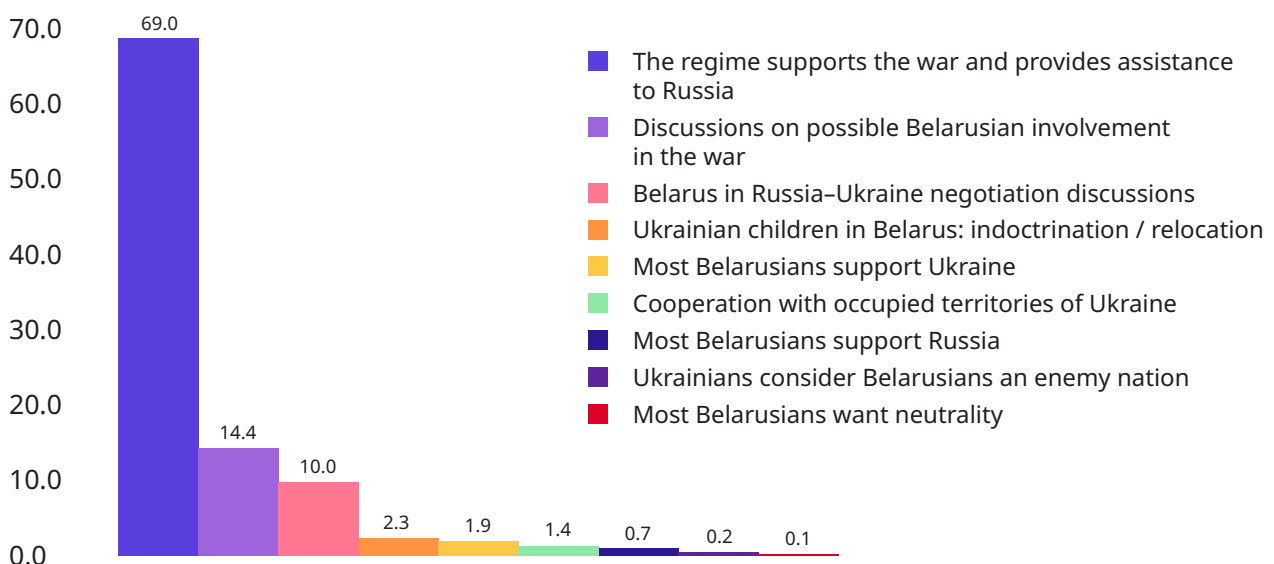
In stories about culture and society, for example, Belarusians inside the country are mentioned in 19% of publications and the diaspora in 20%, while the authorities account for 27%. Overall, this produces a consistent structural pattern: key topics are tied to the state and foreign policy, while society and non-state actors are more frequently present in less prominent and less politicised storylines.

WAR AS THE PRIMARY LENS THROUGH WHICH THE MEDIA VIEWS BELARUS

In 2025, the media narrative about Belarus is shaped less by internal developments than by the country's role in the broader regional and global context. Belarus is viewed as a participant in the war in Ukraine, as a source of risks and tensions in its relations with the West, and as an actor whose policies are closely tied to Russia. Within this framework, various interpretations emerge — ranging from the image of an ally and accomplice to the perception of dependence and limited agency.

The war in Ukraine remained one of the key themes in articles about Belarus: in 2025, 13% of articles in the main sample were devoted to this topic (compared to 16% in 2024).

Chart 7. Belarus's role in Russia's war against Ukraine. Dominant narratives (N = 1,205)



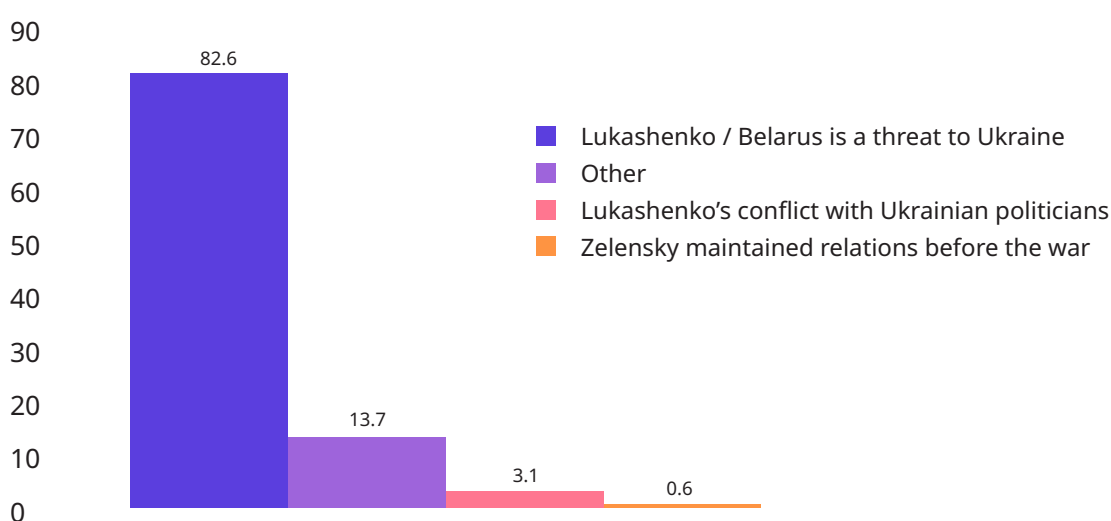
Belarus's role in the context of the war in Ukraine is interpreted in the media with little ambiguity and virtually no room for alternative readings. The dominant narrative holds that the Belarusian regime supports the war and provides assistance to Russia (69%). This means that Belarus is perceived not as a neutral or peripheral participant, but as a committed party — even if not always directly engaged in combat operations.

Stories about Belarus potentially being drawn into the war (14%) and its role in Russia-Ukraine negotiations (10%) are considerably less common. This indicates that Belarus figures in the media far more often as a party already involved rather than as a potential mediator or actor in a future escalation. Topics related to humanitarian or social dimensions — such as Ukrainian children in Belarus (2%) — receive limited coverage.

Alternative narratives reflecting the position of Belarusian society are virtually absent. Mentions of support for Ukraine (2%), support for Russia (0.7%), or a desire for neutrality (0.1%) are minimal. This means that in the media narrative, Belarus is almost entirely reduced to the level of the state and the regime, while society as a distinct actor virtually disappears from the picture.

Overall, a stark and reductive frame takes hold: Belarus is equated with the regime, and the regime with an ally of Russia. This structure reinforces the perception of the country as an element of Russia's military and geopolitical strategy and virtually precludes nuanced or multi-layered interpretations of its role.

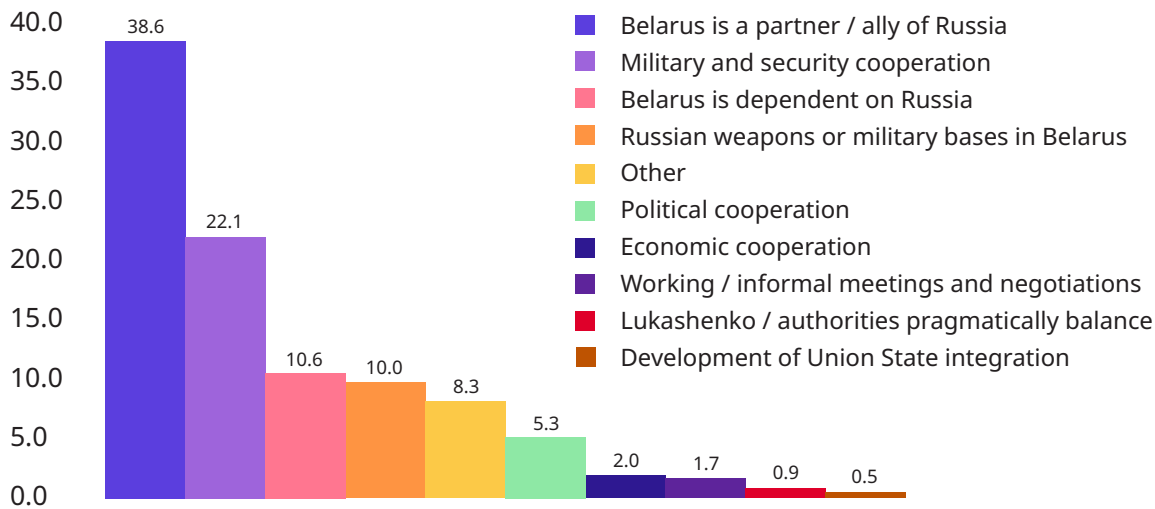
Chart 8. Belarus's role in relations with Ukraine. Dominant narratives (N = 1,004)



The data reveal a near-total convergence of media narratives around a single dominant interpretation: Belarus and its leadership are viewed primarily as a threat to Ukraine (83%). As a result, there are almost no alternative accounts of bilateral relations in the international media — they are reduced to a one-sided logic of security and conflict.

Alternative interpretations are rare. Mentions of Lukashenko's conflict with Ukrainian politicians (3%) merely reinforce the overall negative backdrop without offering a different interpretive frame. Stories about the pre-war relationship between Zelenskyy and Lukashenko have virtually disappeared (0.6%), suggesting that historical context has been supplanted by the current agenda.

Overall, the media picture is strikingly simplified: in its relations with Ukraine, Belarus is portrayed primarily as a source of risk and potential military danger. Diplomatic, historical, and societal dimensions are virtually absent, reinforcing a one-sided and conflict-centric image of the country.

Chart 9. Nature of Belarus–Russia relations. Dominant narratives (N = 2,374)

Relations between Belarus and Russia are described primarily through the frame of alliance and close cooperation, though interpretations within this frame vary.

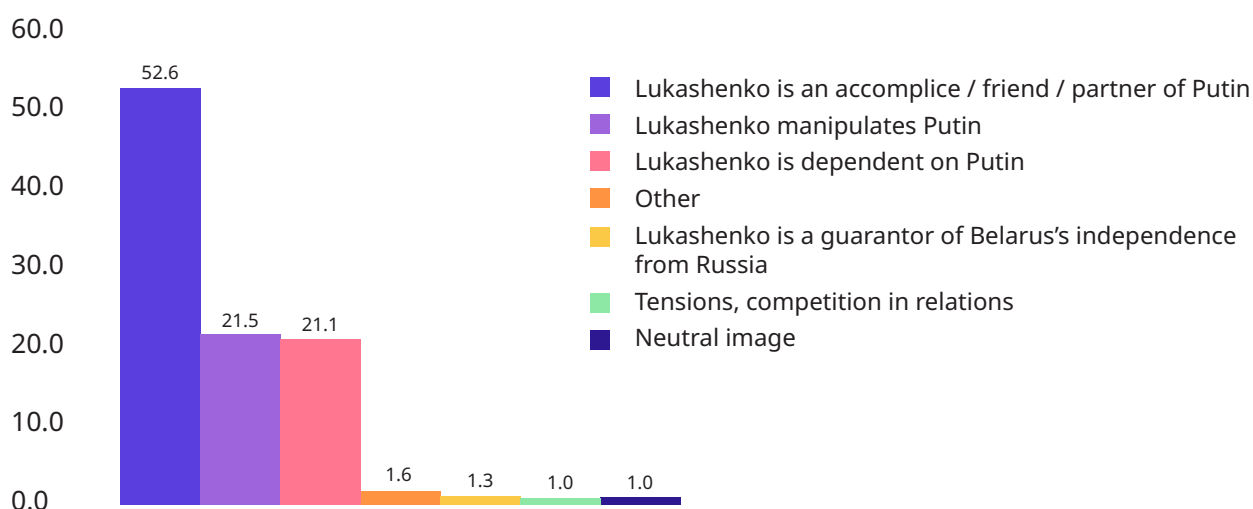
The most prevalent narrative positions Belarus as a partner or ally of Russia (39%), setting the default frame for understanding bilateral relations as a stable political alliance. The emphasis on military cooperation (22%) plays a significant role, reinforcing the perception of Belarus as a participant in a strategic and military infrastructure shared with Russia.

A distinct interpretive strand centres on dependence: 11% of mentions directly reference Belarus's subordinate position vis-à-vis Russia. This is comparable to the share of stories about the deployment of Russian weapons and military bases (10%), which similarly reinforce an image of limited sovereignty.

Less prominent but analytically significant are categories related to political (5%) and economic (2%) cooperation, as well as informal contacts (2%). These point to routine interstate interaction but remain on the periphery of the media agenda. The narrative of pragmatic balancing on the part of the Belarusian authorities is virtually absent (0.9%).

The result is a dual yet asymmetrical picture: on one hand, Belarus is described as an ally of Russia; on the other, as a dependent and partially controlled actor. The prevalence of alliance and military cooperation narratives shapes the international media's primary frame, while ideas of autonomy or balancing are virtually absent.

Chart 10. Nature of the Lukashenko–Putin relationship. Dominant narratives (N = 702)



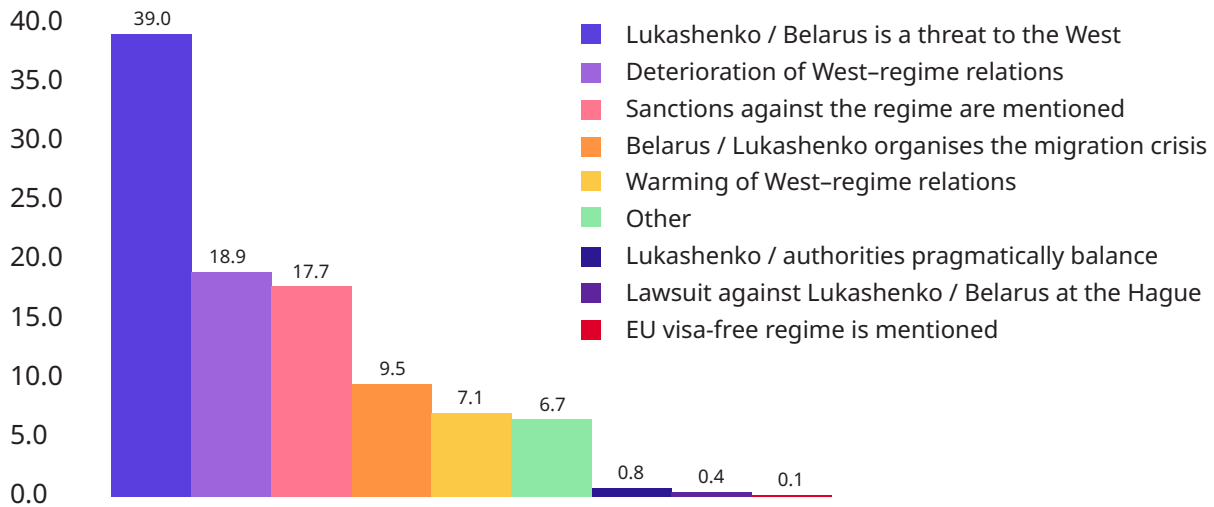
The personalised perception of the Lukashenko–Putin relationship in the international media is even more uniform and rigidly structured than coverage at the state level.

One narrative is overwhelmingly dominant: Lukashenko as Putin's ally and partner (53%). The leaders' personal relationship is perceived as an extension of the interstate alliance, reinforcing the image of a close political bond.

The second most significant cluster consists of competing interpretations of the nature of this relationship: narratives suggesting that Lukashenko manipulates Putin (22%) and that he, on the contrary, is dependent on him (21%) account for roughly equal shares. This produces a contradictory picture in which the relationship is described as asymmetrical, but without a clear sense of where the balance of power lies.

All other interpretations are rare. The portrayal of Lukashenko as a guarantor of Belarus's independence from Russia (1%), as well as narratives about tension or competition (1%), are virtually absent, as are neutral assessments (1%). This indicates that the media landscape almost entirely forecloses complex or alternative models of the Lukashenko–Putin relationship.

The result is a stark and reductive personalisation: Lukashenko is viewed primarily through his connection to Putin, and this connection is framed as either an alliance or a dependency. The perception of him as an independent political actor rarely surfaces, reinforcing the overall image of Belarus as a country within Russia's political orbit.

Chart 11. Belarus–West relations. Dominant narratives (N = 3,206)

Relations between Belarus and the West in the international media are described predominantly through a conflict frame. The most common narrative portrays Lukashenko and Belarus as a threat to the West (39%), setting the overall tone and entrenching the image of Belarus as a source of risk and instability.

This frame is reinforced by frequent mentions of sanctions (18%) and deteriorating relations (19%). Together, they produce a persistent image of systemic crisis, in which sanctions policy and political isolation function as the primary modes of interaction.

A distinct narrative concerns the migration crisis (10%), in which Belarus is again cast as an active destabilising actor — adding a humanitarian dimension to its image as a threat to Europe.

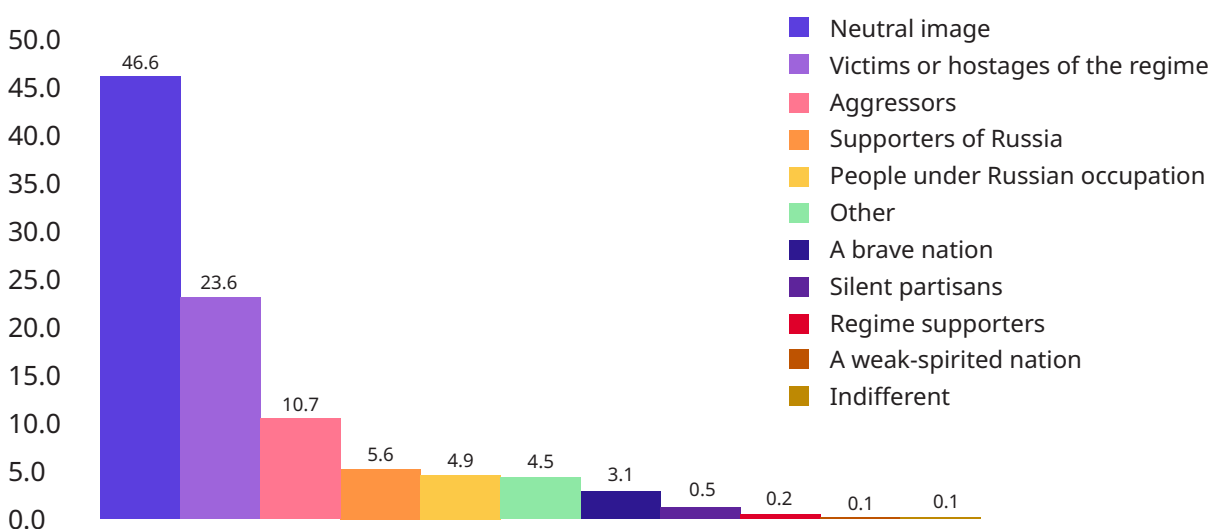
Alternative interpretations are almost entirely absent. Topics related to a thaw in relations (7%) play a secondary role and do not cohere into a distinct narrative strand, while mentions of pragmatic balancing (0.6%), legal mechanisms (lawsuits at The Hague — 0.4%), or technical aspects of interaction (visa-free regime — 0.1%) remain marginal.

The result is a one-sided media picture: Belarus is consistently portrayed as a source of threats and crises, while neutral or pragmatic models of engagement are almost entirely absent. This entrenches the perception of a deep divide between Belarus and the Western world.

THE IMAGE OF BELARUSIANS IN FOREIGN PUBLICATIONS

Our monitoring traditionally examines the image of Belarusians as a people constructed by journalists in foreign outlets. In 2025, the image of Belarusians in foreign media remains fragmented and largely contradictory. The most prevalent is a neutral image (47%), meaning that in nearly half of all publications, Belarusians are described without explicit judgment. Among more defined characterisations, the image of victims or "hostages of the regime" (23%) predominates, reflecting a persistent perception of Belarusian society through the lens of repression and limited political agency.

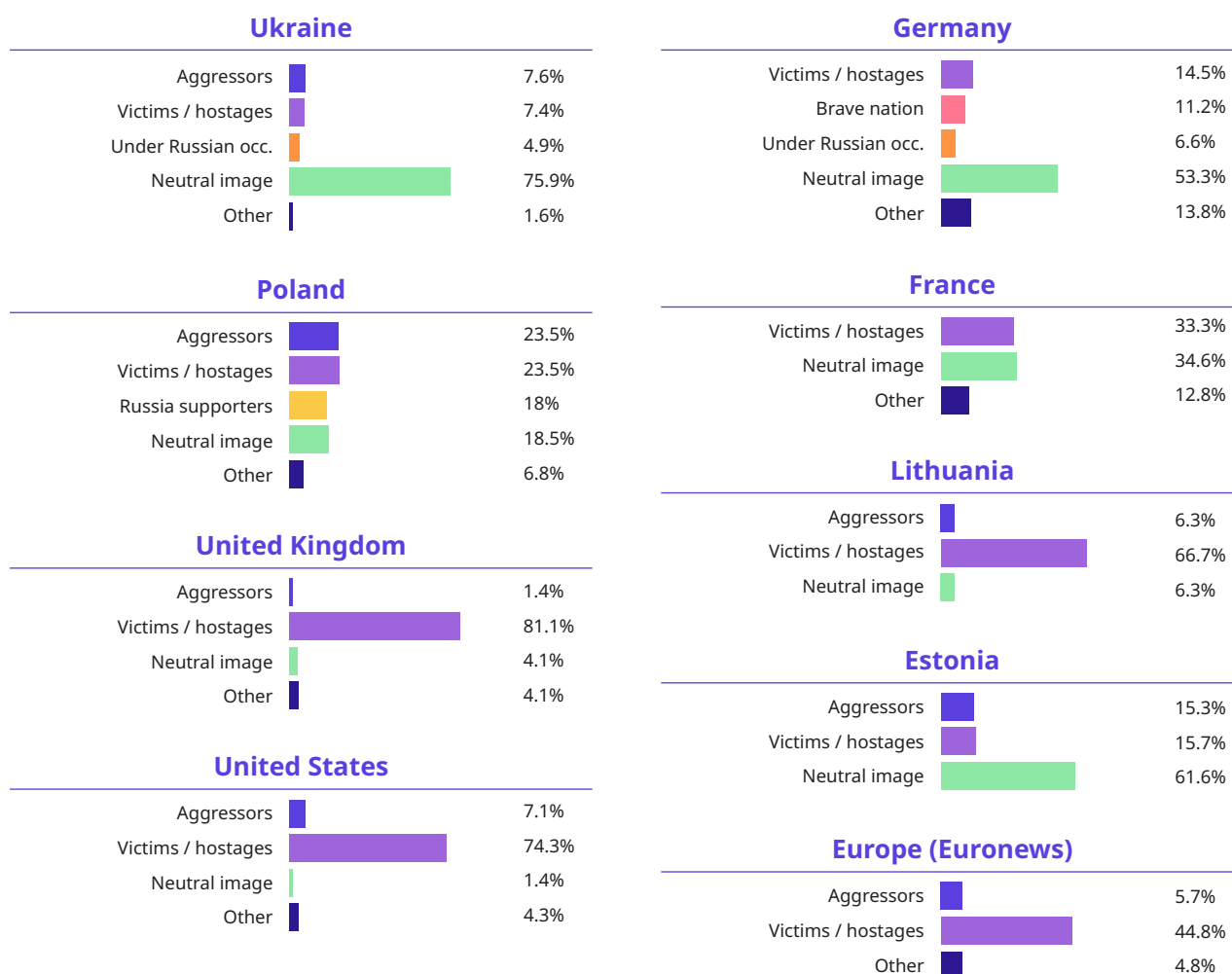
Chart 12. Overall image of Belarusians (N = 1527)



At the same time, a negative image associated with military aggression persists: 11% of coverage depicts Belarusians as aggressors. Some publications portray Belarusians as supporters of Russia (6%) or as a people under its influence and control (5%). Portrayals of Belarusians as active agents are considerably rarer: the characterisation of Belarusians as "a brave nation," for instance, appears in only 3% of the material. Overall, despite a degree of interpretive diversity, the media portrait of Belarusians remains skewed toward either a neutral, constrained (victim/dependence), or partially negative perception.

These findings broadly correspond to the observations of previous monitoring rounds, which similarly recorded a dominance of negative and crisis-oriented images — primarily portrayals of Belarusians as victims of the regime or participants in a conflict narrative. That said, direct comparison of figures for 2023–2024 and 2025 is limited due to changes in study methodology and selection criteria. The differences identified should therefore be read not as trends in the strict quantitative sense, but as an indication that the overall logic of media representation remains intact.

Chart 13. Overall image of Belarusians by country (% within country)



The image of Belarusians in foreign media varies considerably by country, yet several consistent interpretive patterns can be identified. In English-language and some European media, the portrayal of Belarusians as «victims or hostages of the regime» is dominant. This image is most pronounced in the United Kingdom (81%) and the United States (74%), and is also prominent in pan-European media (Euronews — 60%) and in Lithuania (67%). This pattern reflects a prevailing tendency to interpret Belarusian society through the lens of repression and limited political agency.

In other countries, a neutral image is more common. It dominates in Ukraine (76%), Estonia (62%), and Germany (53%), and accounts for a significant share in France (35%). Here, Belarusians tend to be described without explicit judgment, as part of a broader contextual narrative.

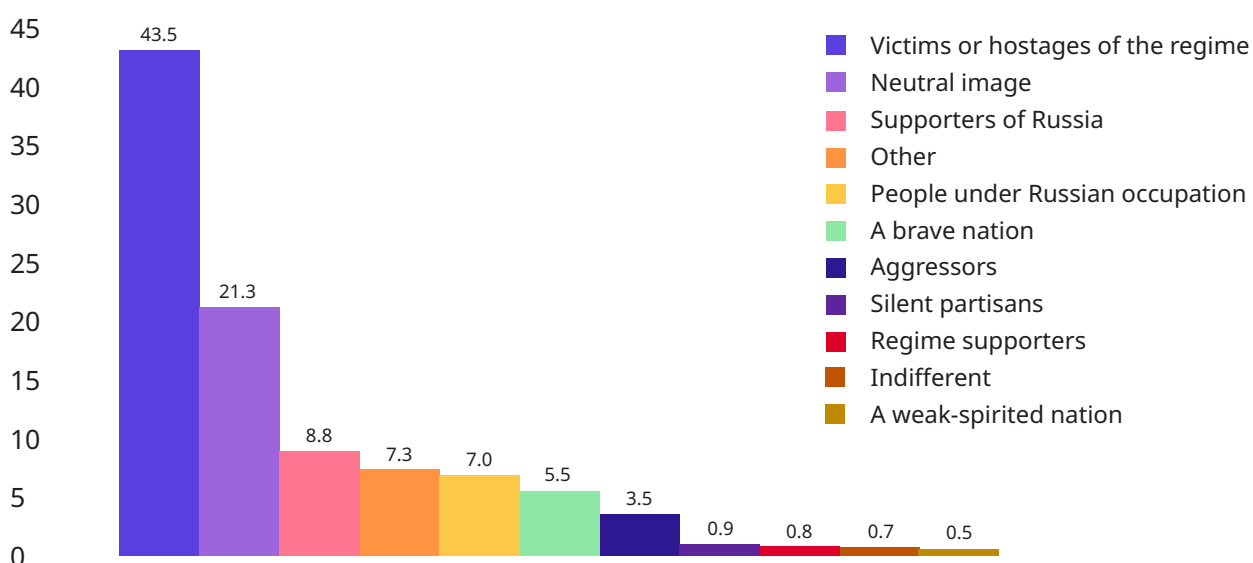
Poland presents the most fragmented picture. Several interpretations register simultaneously high shares: «aggressors» (24%), «victims of the regime» (24%), and «supporters of Russia» (18%), alongside a comparatively smaller neutral share (19%). This points to a more conflicted and polarised perception of Belarusians — one in which opposing characterisations coexist, a pattern corroborated by sociological survey data.

Finally, alternative and less dominant images are visible in certain countries. France and Germany, for instance, more frequently portray Belarusians as «a brave nation» (12% and 11%), while Lithuania and Ukraine show a notable share of portrayals of Belarusians as a people under Russian influence (13% and 5%). Such interpretations, however, remain secondary overall. The media portrait of Belarusians is thus shaped predominantly as either neutral or associated with repression and dependence, while positive portrayals and images of active agency occupy a peripheral position.

The image of Belarusians inside the country in foreign media is shaped primarily through a narrative of vulnerability. The most prevalent category is the portrayal of Belarusians as «victims or hostages of the regime» (44%), which significantly exceeds all other interpretations.

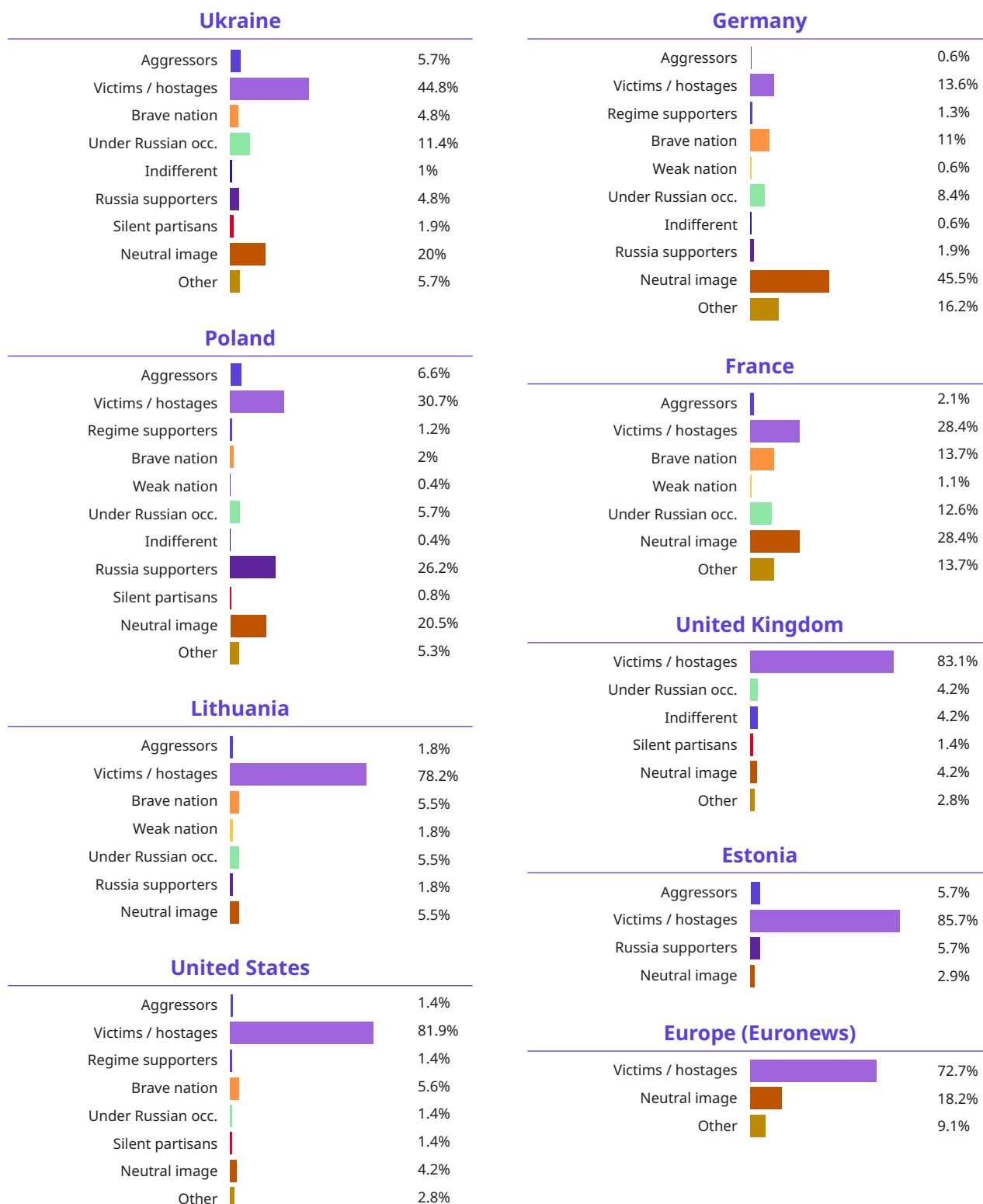
The second most prominent category is the neutral image (21%), reflecting a substantial share of coverage without an explicit evaluative stance. The remaining categories are considerably less prominent: «supporters of Russia» accounts for 9%, «other» for 7%, and «people under Russian occupation» for 7.0%. This indicates that alternative interpretations exist but do not form the main line of media narrative.

Chart 14. Image of Belarusians inside Belarus (N = 848)



Positive portrayals and images of active agency – such as "a brave nation" (6%) or "silent partisans" (1%) — are relatively rare, as are overtly negative characterisations: "aggressors" (4%), "regime supporters" (1%), "indifferent" (1%), and "a weak-spirited nation" (0.5%). The result is a largely one-sided media portrait: Belarusians inside the country are more often perceived as passive participants in events rather than as independent political actors.

Chart 15. Image of Belarusians in Belarus. Distribution by country



The data show that in most countries the image of Belarusians in foreign media is primarily shaped through the lens of "victims or hostages of the regime," though the extent to which this image dominates varies considerably. It is most pronounced in Estonia (86%), the United Kingdom (83%), the United States (82%), and Lithuania (78%),

as well as across pan-European media (73%). In these cases, alternative interpretations are virtually absent, producing a clear-cut media portrait of Belarusian society.

In some countries, however, the structure of images is more varied. In Ukraine, while "victims of the regime" remains the dominant category (45%), a significant share is held by the neutral image (20%), and interpretations linked to Russian influence are also present (11% — "under Russian occupation"; 5% — "Russia supporters"). A similar but more polarised picture is observed in Poland, where, alongside "victims of the regime" (31%), the share of "Russia supporters" is high (26%) and a notable proportion of neutral perceptions remains (21%). This points to a more conflicted and multi-layered reading of Belarusian society.

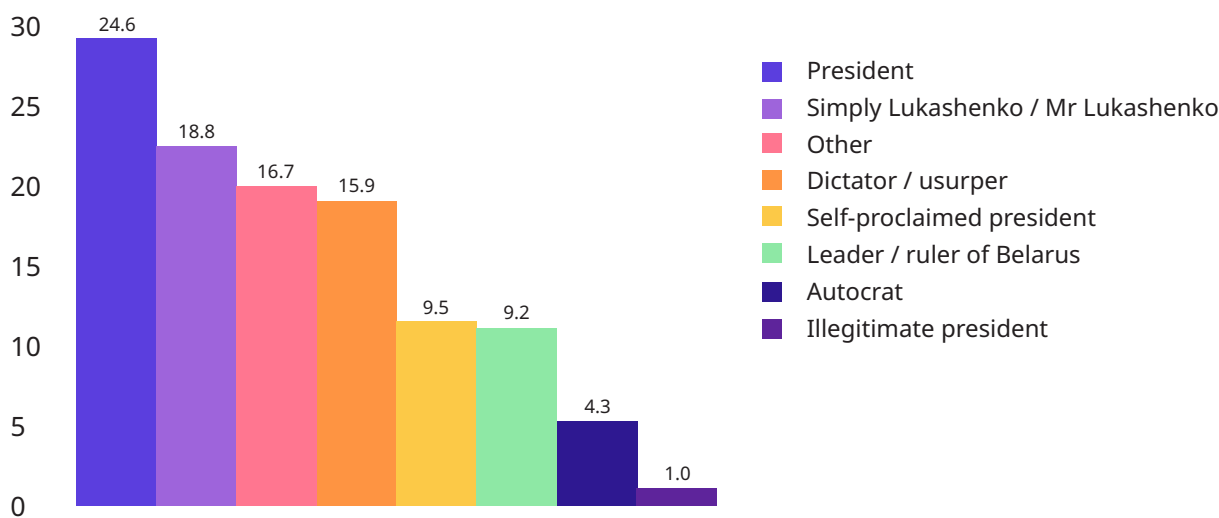
In the German media, the neutral image of Belarusians is most common (46%), while the "victims of the regime" portrayal accounts for a considerably smaller share (14%). Other interpretations are also present, making for a more varied overall picture. In France, the neutral image and the "victims of the regime" portrayal occur with roughly equal frequency (28% each), and a more positive characterisation — "a brave nation" — appears here more often than in other countries (14%).

Overall, two broad models of representation can be identified. In some countries (the UK, the US, Lithuania, and Estonia), the image of Belarusians inside the country is almost entirely reduced to "victims of the regime." In others (Germany, France, and to some extent Ukraine and Poland), the picture is more varied: alongside this image, neutral and occasionally more positive interpretations play a noticeable role.

COMPARISON OF THE IMAGES OF LUKASHENKO AND TSIKHANOUSKAYA

Lukashenko is mentioned in 21% of the analysed articles — 2 percentage points lower than in 2024 (23%). The trend toward a gradual decline in attention to Lukashenko as an individual continues: in 2023, he appeared in 30% of articles.

Chart 16. How foreign media refer to Alexander Lukashenko (N = 1,849)

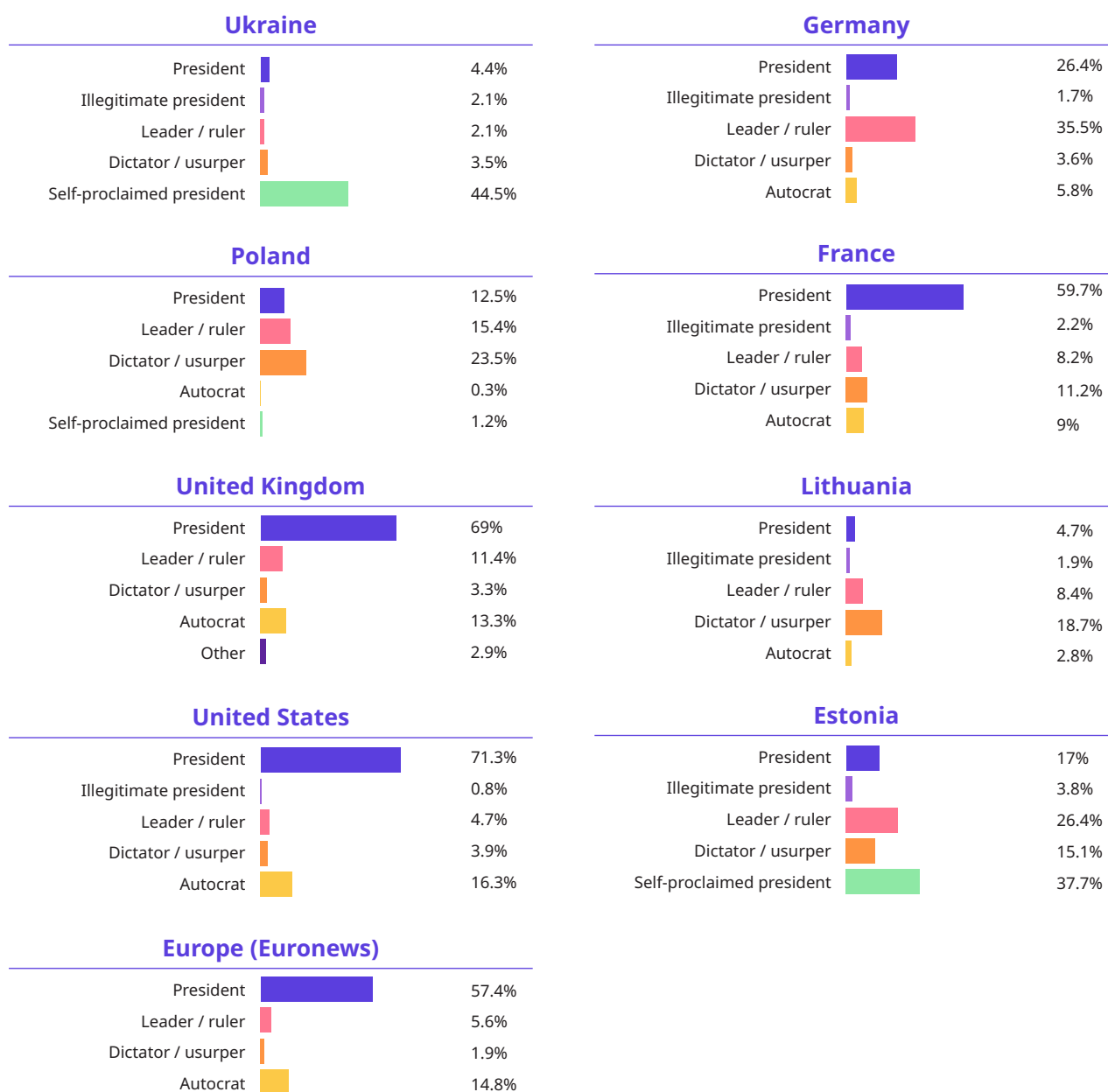


The data show that there is no single established way of referring to Alexander Lukashenko in foreign media, though several dominant patterns can be identified. The most common remains the formally neutral designation "president" (30%), indicating that a conventional approach persists in a significant portion of publications. A nearly comparable share is accounted for by references without any title — "Lukashenko" or "Mr Lukashenko" (23%) — reflecting a tendency among some outlets to avoid conferring legitimacy on his status.

A significant proportion of coverage uses explicitly evaluative language. Some 19% of publications characterise Lukashenko as a "dictator" or "usurper," and a further 11% as a "self-proclaimed president," while 5% use the term "autocrat." Taken together, more than a third of all mentions (approximately 35–36%) carry a critical or delegitimising characterisation, reflecting a persistent perception of his political status as contested.

Overall, the data reveal the coexistence of two principal approaches: a formally neutral one and a critically evaluative one. On one hand, journalistic norms of neutral reporting are maintained. On the other, a substantial proportion of negative characterisations reflects the political context and the international perception of the regime.

Chart 17. How foreign media refer to Lukashenko by country (% within country)



The distribution of terminology varies significantly by country, reflecting differences in editorial policy and interpretations of Lukashenko's status.

In U.S. and UK media, the formally neutral designation "president" clearly dominates (71% and 69%, respectively). The share of critical terms is comparatively lower: "dictator/usurper" accounts for only 4% in the U.S. and 3% in the UK, though the term "autocrat" is also used (16% and 13%). This points to a combination of formal neutrality with moderately critical assessment.

France and Euronews also demonstrate a predominantly formal approach: "president" is used in 60% and 57% of cases respectively. However, alternative formulations are

more prominent here — "autocrat" (9% in France and 15% on Euronews) and "dictator/ usurper" (11% and 2%) — making for a more balanced picture.

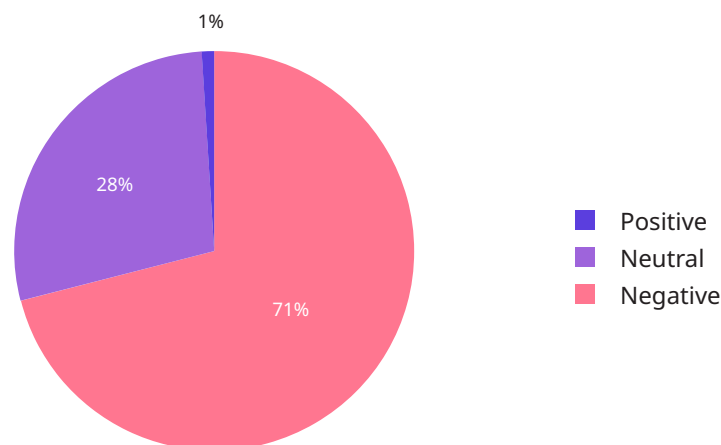
In Germany, the pattern is more evenly distributed, with no single category clearly dominant. Although "president" is used in 26% of cases, comparable shares are held by "leader/ruler of Belarus" (36%) and "dictator/usurper" (30%), indicating a more varied and less standardised approach.

The most critical and politicised pattern is found in Ukraine. The neutral term "president" is used in only 4% of cases, while the main formulations are "self-proclaimed president" (45%) and "dictator/usurper" (31%), reflecting a clearly delegitimising discourse.

Poland and the Baltic states show their own distinct patterns. In Poland, neutral naming without a title predominates ("Simply Lukashenko / Mr Lukashenko" — 47%), alongside a significant share of critical formulations ("dictator/usurper" — 24%). In Lithuania, this tendency is even more pronounced: 64% are neutral references without a title, with a low share of "president" (5%) and a notable share of critical categories. In Estonia, neutral references are also high (38%), alongside significant shares for "leader/ruler" (27%) and "dictator/usurper" (15%).

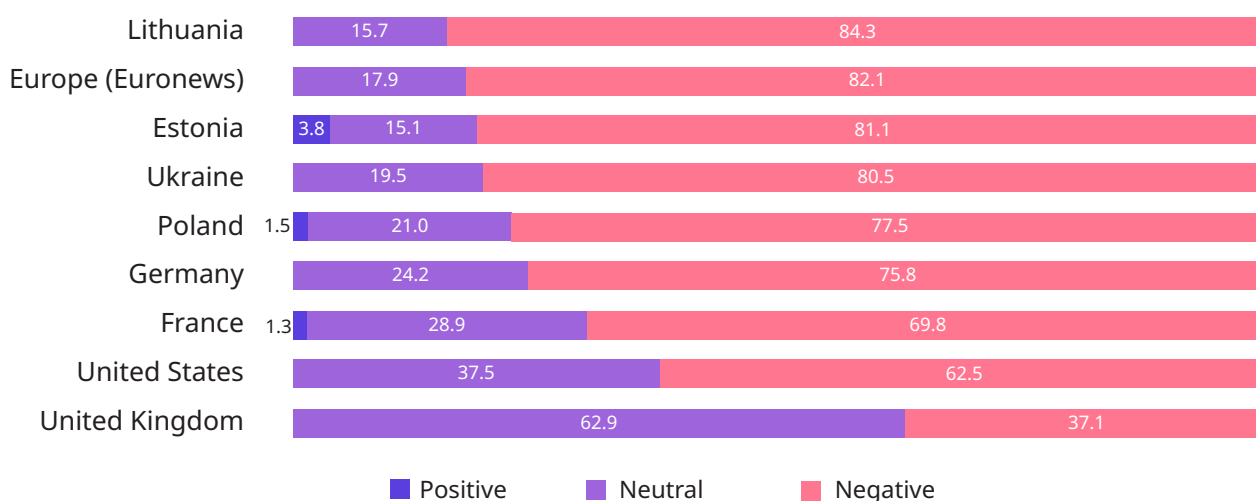
Overall, several models can be identified: formally neutral (the U.S., the UK, France), critical (Ukraine), and mixed with a refusal to use the title (Poland, Lithuania, Estonia).

Chart 18. Overall image of Alexander Lukashenko (N = 1,778)



The overall image of Alexander Lukashenko in foreign media is predominantly negative: negative assessments account for 72%, neutral mentions for 28%, and positive ones are virtually absent (0.6%). This reflects a consistent dominant narrative in which Lukashenko is perceived primarily as a problematic and critically viewed political actor.

Chart 19. Lukashenko's image by country (% within country)



The distribution of assessments varies considerably by country. The highest levels of negative perception are recorded in Lithuania (84%), Euronews (82%), Ukraine (81%), Estonia (80%), and Poland (77%). In these countries, the negative image is near-total, while the share of neutral assessments remains comparatively low — reflecting a distinctly critical interpretation tied to the political and regional context.

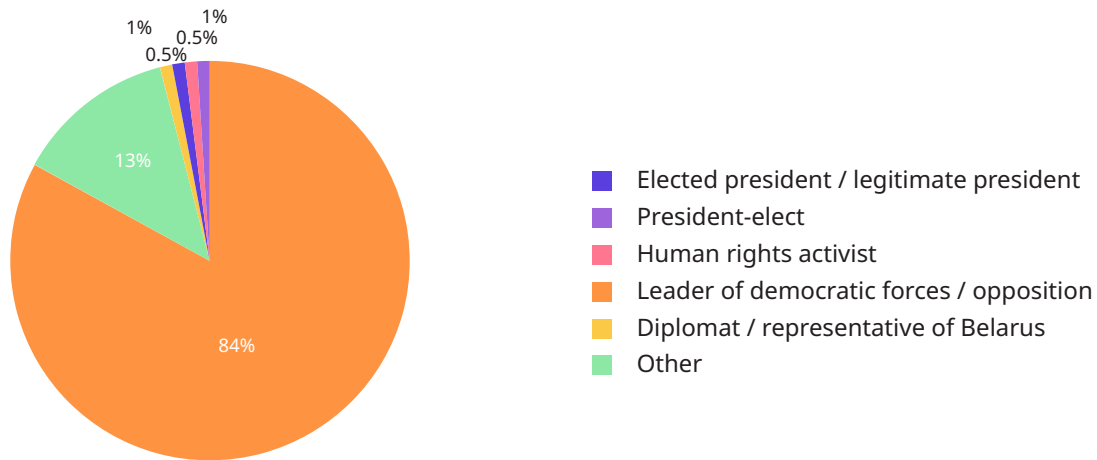
In Germany (76%) and France (69%), the negative image also prevails, but both countries show a noticeably higher share of neutral assessments (24% and 29% respectively), making the media portrait less clear-cut. The U.S. presents an even more balanced picture: while negative assessments remain dominant (63%), the neutral share reaches 38%.

The United Kingdom represents a distinct case, where a neutral image prevails (63%) and negative assessments account for 37% — making British media the most restrained in their portrayal of Lukashenko among the countries examined. Positive assessments are virtually absent across all countries (a maximum of 4% in Estonia and 2% in Poland), confirming the broad consensus around a critical view of Lukashenko.

Overall, two models of representation can be identified: in most countries, a distinctly negative image of Lukashenko dominates, while in certain media systems — primarily the UK and, to a lesser extent, the U.S., France, and Germany — it is partially tempered by neutral descriptions.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is mentioned in 5% of all articles about Belarus — a figure virtually unchanged from the previous year. A near-uniform way of referring to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has emerged in foreign media. One designation is overwhelmingly dominant: "leader of democratic forces / opposition" (84%), far exceeding all other categories. This points to a stable and standardised frame in which Tsikhanouskaya is perceived primarily as a representative of an alternative political centre, rather than as a formal head of state.

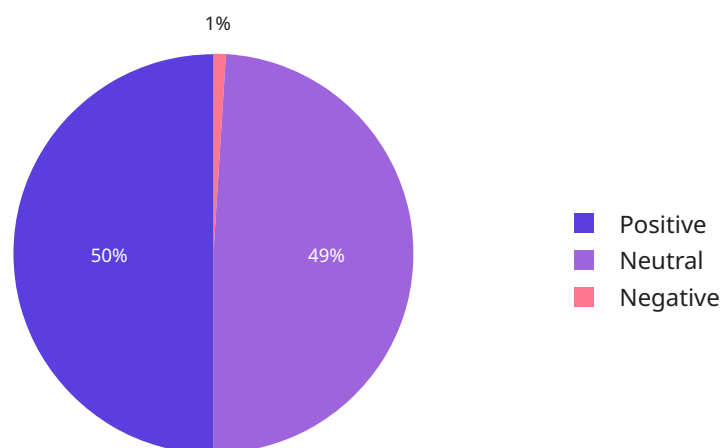
Chart 20. How foreign media refer to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (N = 419)



Other designations are used extremely rarely. Categories such as "elected president / legitimate president" (1%) and "president-elect" (0.5%) are virtually absent from the media landscape, indicating that most outlets refrain from directly legitimising her status in an institutional sense. "Human rights activist" (0.5%) and "diplomat / representative of Belarus" (0.7%) are minimally represented.

Notably, in this case differences between countries are virtually absent. This suggests a high degree of consensus in the international media regarding how Tsikhanouskaya's role should be described — in contrast to the more varied approaches observed, for example, in relation to Lukashenko.

Chart 21. Overall image of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (N = 419)

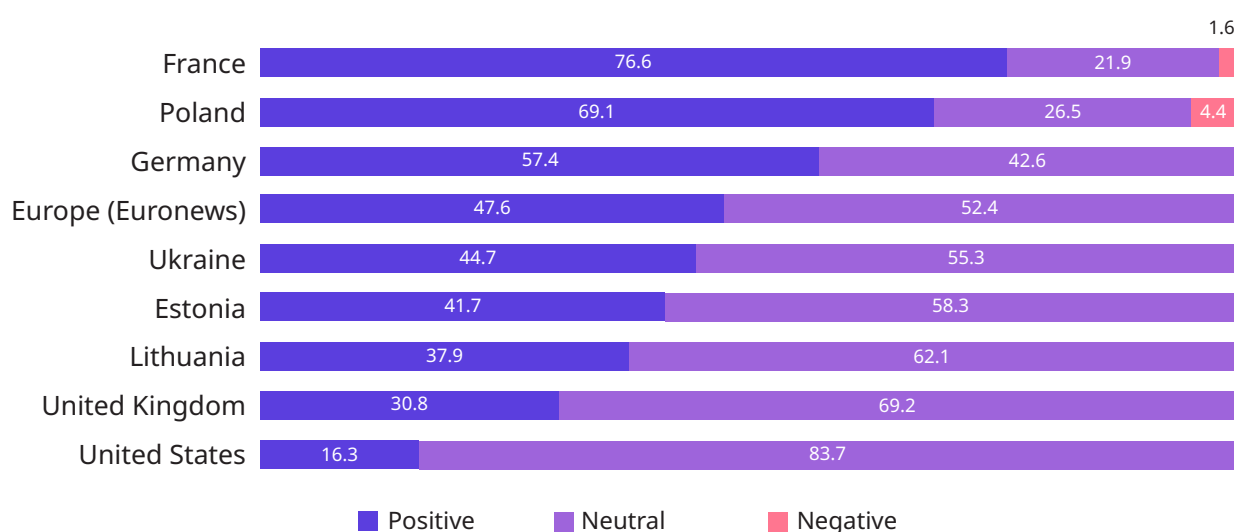


The overall image of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in foreign media remains broadly positive or neutral, with an almost complete absence of negative assessments. Altogether, 50% of coverage presents a positive image, 49% a neutral one, and only

1% a negative one. This means that the media portrayal of Tsikhanouskaya is virtually devoid of critical or discrediting interpretations — a stark contrast to the image of Lukashenko.

The near-equal distribution between positive and neutral coverage points to a dual model of perception. On one hand, Tsikhanouskaya is portrayed as a legitimate and supported political actor, as reflected in the high proportion of positive assessments. On the other, a substantial share of neutral mentions (nearly half) suggests that she also frequently appears as a neutral news presence without explicit evaluative framing for instance in news reports or diplomatic contexts.

Chart 22. Tsikhanouskaya's image by country (% within country)

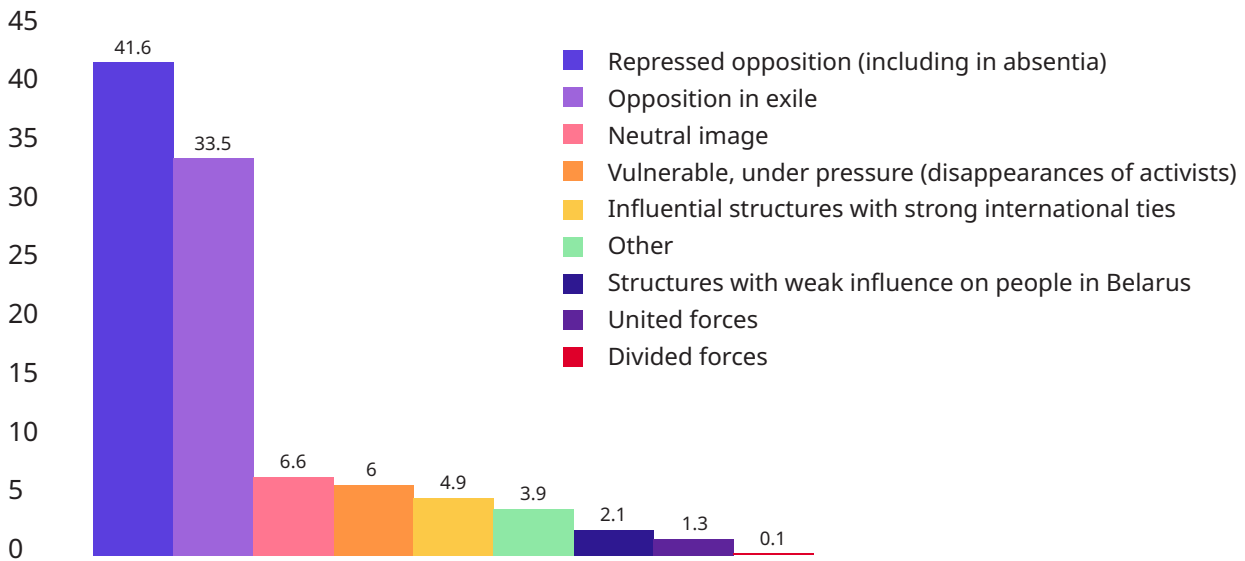


At the country level, there is some variation, though without a fundamental shift in the overall picture. In Poland (69%) and France (77%), a positive image dominates; in Germany (57%), it also prevails, though less markedly. In the U.S. (84%), the UK (69%), Lithuania (62%), and Estonia (59%), neutral coverage is noticeably stronger. Ukraine and Euronews show a nearly balanced distribution. Despite these differences, the key conclusion holds across all countries: a negative image is either absent or at a statistically negligible level.

Tsikhanouskaya's media positioning in the international press is thus characterised by a high degree of consensus and an almost complete absence of delegitimising narratives. The result is a stable image of a recognised opposition leader, most often presented in a restrained, neutral, or positive frame.

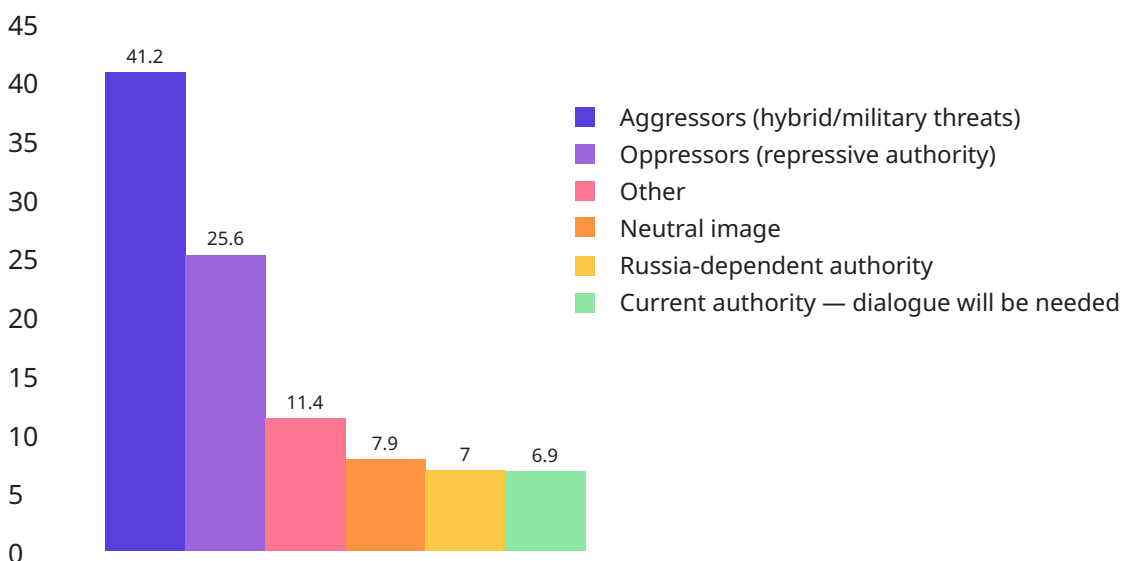
The images of the authorities and democratic forces in foreign media are shaped by fundamentally different logics and barely overlap — reflecting a clear symbolic division of roles within the media narrative about Belarus. Overall, democratic forces are mentioned in 8% of articles, while the authorities are mentioned in 37%.

Chart 23. Image of democratic forces (N = 714)



The image of democratic forces is primarily associated with repression and forced exile. The most common characterisation is "repressed (including in absentia)" (42%), making the repressive context the defining frame for their portrayal. The second most significant image is "opposition in exile" (34%), reinforcing the sense of distance from domestic politics. Other interpretations are considerably less frequent: neutral image (7%), vulnerable, under pressure (6.0%), and influential structures with strong international ties (5%). Narratives of domestic strength or influence are almost entirely absent: "united forces" (1%) and "divided forces" (0.1%) are barely mentioned. The result is a portrayal of an actor operating under pressure and from abroad, with little perceived influence on the situation inside the country.

Chart 24. Image of authorities (N = 3,578)



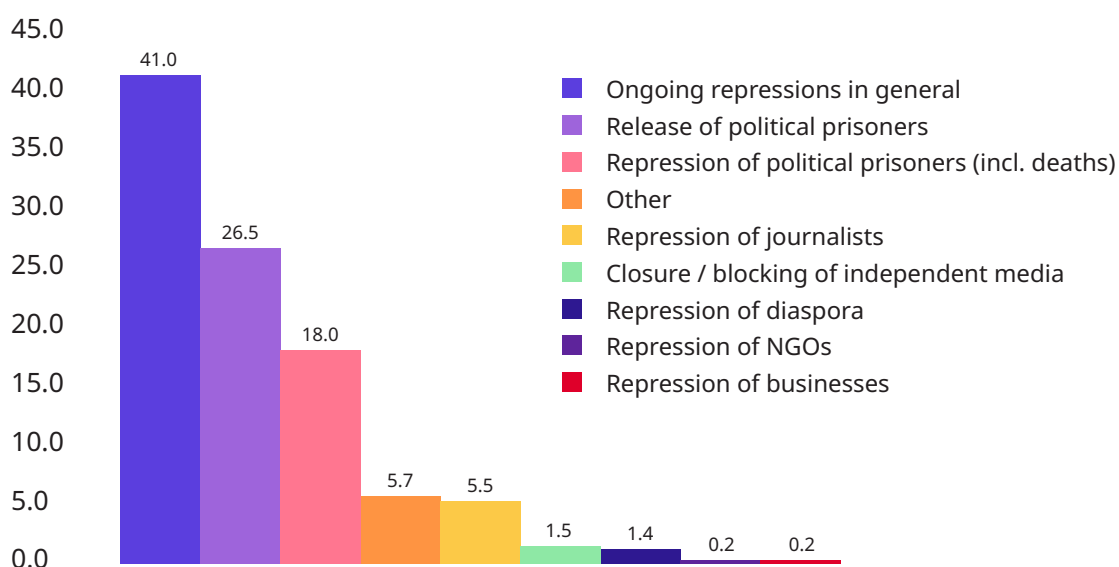
In contrast, the image of the authorities is almost entirely constructed through negative and coercive characteristics. In first place are "aggressors (hybrid/military threats)" (41%), directly linking the Belarusian leadership to security concerns and external threats. This is followed by the image of "oppressors (repressive authority)" (26%), reinforcing the internal dimension of violence. A significant share falls under "other" (11%), within which the authorities are most often portrayed as an instrument of hybrid warfare rather than as an independent political actor. Additional characterisations — "neutral image" (8%), "Russia-dependent authority" (7%), and "current authority — dialogue will be needed" (7%) — indicate limited recognition of agency, without positive legitimisation. As a result, the authorities are perceived simultaneously as a source of threat and as part of broader geopolitical processes.

Overall, an asymmetrical picture emerges: the authorities are described as a powerful but negatively connoted actor associated with violence and foreign policy tensions, whilst democratic forces are portrayed as legitimate but weak and marginalised within the domestic sphere. This distribution reinforces the overarching media narrative in which Belarus is viewed through the lens of conflict between a repressive state and democratic forces operating primarily from abroad.

REPRESSION WITHIN AN UNCHANGING SYSTEM

In 2025, foreign media covered repression in Belarus in approximately 14% of articles. The topic is addressed predominantly within a generalised and systemic framework. The most common category — “ongoing repressions in general” (41%) — indicates that repression is perceived not as a series of isolated events but as a constant backdrop.

Chart 25. Repressions in Belarus (N = 1,170)



The second most significant category comprises stories related to the release of political prisoners (27%), reflecting the scale of prisoner releases in 2025 and the high media profile of those freed — among them Maria Kalesnikava, Viktor Babaryka, and others. Repressions against political prisoners, including deaths (18%), also account for a substantial share, heightening the sense of gravity and urgency.

The remaining categories are clearly secondary: repression against journalists (6%), closure of independent media (2%), pressure on the diaspora (1%), NGOs (0.2%), and businesses (0.2%). This shows that specific groups and mechanisms of repression rarely become standalone topics, giving way to a generalised portrayal of the overall situation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of monitoring Belarus's portrayal in foreign media for 2025 reflect both the continuation of long-term trends and distinctly new tendencies shaped by shifts in the regional context.

1. In 2025, Belarus appears in the international media increasingly within a geopolitical frame. Dedicated coverage of the country is declining; Belarus is more often mentioned as part of broader regional narratives tied to the war, security, and Russia–West relations.
2. Lukashenko's role as the central figure in coverage is diminishing, yet attention to him has not faded. What is shifting is the angle: rather than focusing on the individual, coverage increasingly addresses the system of power as a whole. At the same time, both the Belarusian authorities and Lukashenko himself continue to be framed as a threat — to the West and to Ukraine alike — entrenching them within a negative geopolitical narrative.
3. The image of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, by contrast, remains stable and virtually uncontroversial. The international media describe her with considerable uniformity as the leader of the democratic forces — in sharp contrast to Lukashenko, where approaches vary markedly across countries and outlets.
4. The image of Belarusian society in foreign media remains ambiguous and internally contradictory. On one hand, the portrayal of Belarusians as victims of the regime dominates. On the other, a significant proportion of publications continue to portray them as "supporters of Russia." This combination reflects the absence of a single interpretive framework and points to the complexity of how the country is perceived from outside.
5. At the same time, cautious signals of possible change are emerging in the media agenda. The growing number of articles on the release of political prisoners, alongside increasing attention to a potential "thaw" in relations between the West and the Belarusian authorities, may indicate the first, still tentative, signs of a shift in the diplomatic dynamics surrounding Belarus.

MONITORING METHODOLOGY

Number of selected articles by country and publication

Country	Number of articles	Analyzed media	Number of articles by media
Ukraine	1 914	УНІАН / Європейська правда / НВ / Українська правда / Укрінформ / Економічна правда / Champion / Kyiv Independent	636 / 427 / 410 / 211 / 143 / 45 / 32 / 10
Poland	1 622	Gazeta Wyborcza / Onet Wiadomości / TVN24 / Polsat News / OKO.press	556 / 364 / 324 / 305 / 73
United Kingdom	1 458	Reuters / The Independent / The Guardian / BBC / The Times / The Telegraph / Daily Mail	635 / 384 / 287 / 82 / 46 / 19 / 5
Germany	1 112	Deutsche Welle / Süddeutsche Zeitung / Bild / Die Zeit / Die Welt	649 / 279 / 108 / 47 / 29
France	842	Le Figaro / RFI / Le Monde / France 24 / Libération	323 / 220 / 214 / 72 / 13
Lithuania	653	Delfi	653
United States	614	Associated Press / The New York Times / The Washington Post / NPR	253 / 248 / 110 / 3
Estonia	257	Postimees	257
Europe (Euronews)	218	Euronews	218
Summary	8 694		

Qualitative content analysis was used to monitor Belarus's image in the foreign media, conducted in accordance with Margrit Schreier's (2012) qualitative content analysis method. The analysis was carried out by research assistants who had received prior methodological training and were fluent in the languages of the relevant publications.

Compared to previous editions of the monitoring report, automated coding was introduced in 2025 to expand the scope of coverage. The coding frame, methodological categories, and evaluation approaches remained unchanged, however, in order to ensure comparability with previous waves of the study (2022, 2023, 2024). Analysis period: 2025 (1 January – 31 December). The sample included articles mentioning Belarus, Belarusians, or key political actors associated with Belarus (Lukashenko, Tsikhanouskaya), as well as related word forms in the languages of the publications, whether in the headline or the main body text.

It is important to note that this study identifies certain trends in how foreign media cover Belarus, its political actors, and its citizens. The sample is neither random nor representative — the method is oriented towards qualitative analysis and the identification of tendencies. The charts and figures in the study should be read as illustrations of trends rather than as precise quantitative measures.

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