MAPPING BELARUSIAN PROPAGANDA:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH BELARUSIAN PRO-GOVERNMENT TELEGRAM CHANNELS

A study by the Center for New Ideas

KEY FINDINGS

- **Foreign affairs are the primary focus:** Most pro-government Telegram channels focus primarily on external questions — particularly the war in Ukraine and the 'decline of the West'. Domestic issues, including the opposition, its supporters, or integration with Russia, are mentioned far less frequently.

- **Audience engagement is low:** User engagement with the content is minimal — the average number of comments and emoji reactions per post is close to zero. The only exceptions are a few specific channels, such as Belorusskiy silovik, which primarily targets a Russian audience, and Ob'ektivnij Yevgen.

- **Effectiveness is limited:** Despite the high posting activity of pro-government Telegram channels (averaging around 10 posts per day per channel), low audience engagement and limited post views suggest that online propaganda has little impact on Belarusians' political attitudes.

- **The tone is neutral, but with aggressive undercurrents:** While most posts maintain a formally neutral tone, they often include negative or insulting remarks. Overall, the level of vitriol (toxicity) is low, but certain channels (such as ZhS Premium, Zheltye Slivy, Zapadnye Zaichiki, and Belorusskiy silovik) stand out for the aggressive style of their content.

- **There is autonomy from the Russian segment of Telegram, despite ideological alignment:** Belarusian pro-government channels rarely repost content from Russian official or 'Z' Telegram channels, though they consistently promote a pro-Russian interpretation of global events and the war in Ukraine. Overall, there are few reposts within the Belarusian pro-government Telegram space; channels' main sources are government media outlets and Pul Pervogo, the official Telegram channel of Lukashenka's press office.
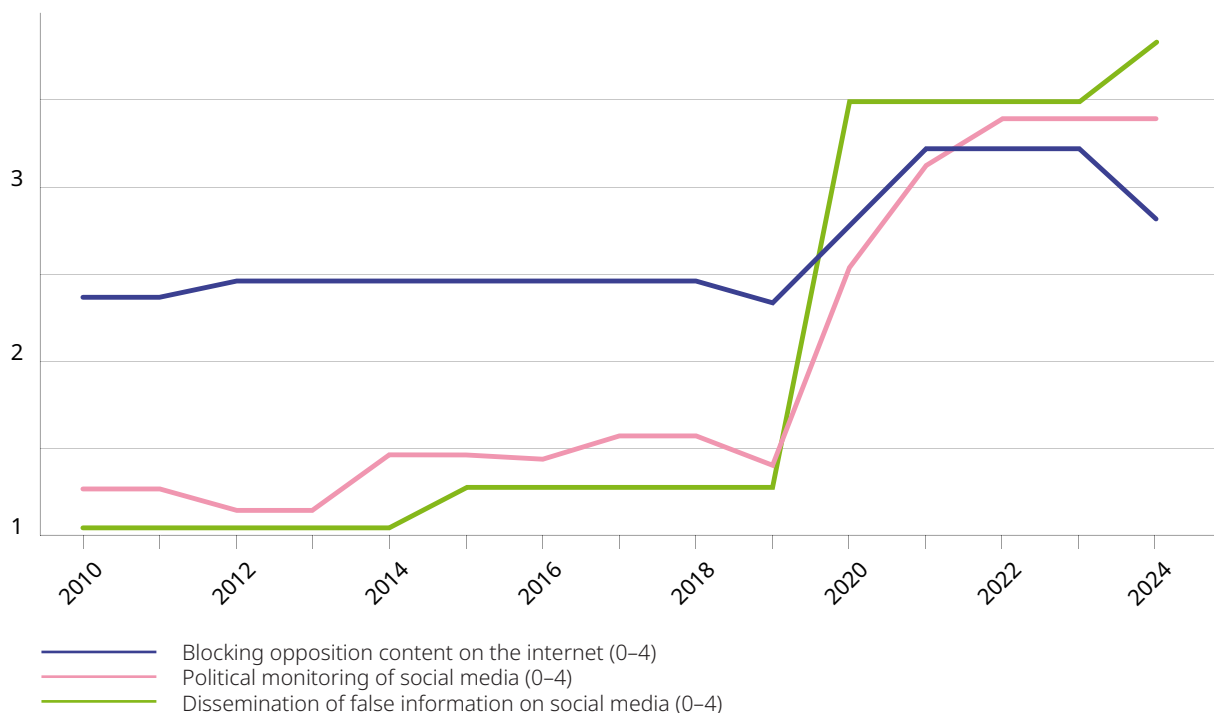
INTRODUCTION

The Belarusian authorities have actively promoted their agenda on Telegram since the 2020 protests. Dozens of loyalist channels publish thousands of posts every day in support of the government and Lukashenka personally, while simultaneously attacking their opponents. This takes place in a context of restricted access to alternative sources of information and stigmatisation of independent media.

1. What topics do the most prominent channels cover, and how do they present them?
2. How does their audience engage with the content?
3. How are these channels connected to other platforms, namely the Russian pro-government segment of Telegram?

These are the main research questions of our **Mapping of Belarusian Propaganda.** Our current findings reflect the situation as at the beginning of 2025, but we plan to continue tracking trends in the years ahead.

Control over the digital space by the Belarusian authorities (2010–2024)

Blocking opposition content on the internet (0–4)
Political monitoring of social media (0–4)
Dissemination of false information on social media (0–4)

Data source: _Varieties of Democracy dataset_ (2025).

This **mapping of Belarusian pro-government Telegram channels** sheds light on one way in which the authorities exercise control over the digital space. However, our findings suggest that online propaganda has a limited impact on audiences, despite the active dissemination of pro-government narratives about events unfolding both inside Belarus and abroad.

RESEARCH APPROACH

We selected 16 of the most popular pro-government Telegram channels, each with an audience of at least 4,000–5,000 subscribers. All of the chosen channels systematically promote the positions of the Belarusian authorities on both domestic and international issues.

Next, we defined which themes we would examine in order to analyze these Telegram channels. The key topics were identified manually (through human coding), while the tone of posts and comments, the presence of hate speech, emoji use, and repost activity were analysed automatically using Python and R[1]. In total, we processed nearly 22,5 thousand posts published between February and March 2025.

Due to limited resources, we chose two consecutive months as an arbitrary yet representative snapshot of how pro-government propaganda operates on Telegram. Posts without text — those consisting solely of images or videos — were excluded from the sample (there were no more than several dozen such posts anyway).

The key themes of posts are likely to change as current events develop, but this snapshot nevertheless reveals the main narratives of the pro-government Telegram ecosystem. Moreover, the selected period provides an adequate jumping-off point for analysing how users interact with the content of these channels.

We focused on Telegram channels that do not explicitly declare their political affiliation. As a result, the sample did not include channels run by state media (such as ONT or Pul Pervogo) or personal channels associated with well-known propagandists (such as Dzermant or Shpakouski).

For some audiences — particularly politically neutral Belarusians — these channels may appear to be independent initiatives rather than state-linked platforms. This perception increases the credibility of their content and makes them an important propaganda tool.

We also distinguished between quasi-media — channels that distribute or comment on news — and blogs, which are characterised by a more personal or opinion-driven approach. In blogs, a significant share of posts are presented as the author's own views. Ob'ektivnij Yevgen (Objective Eugene) is a good example of this style[2].
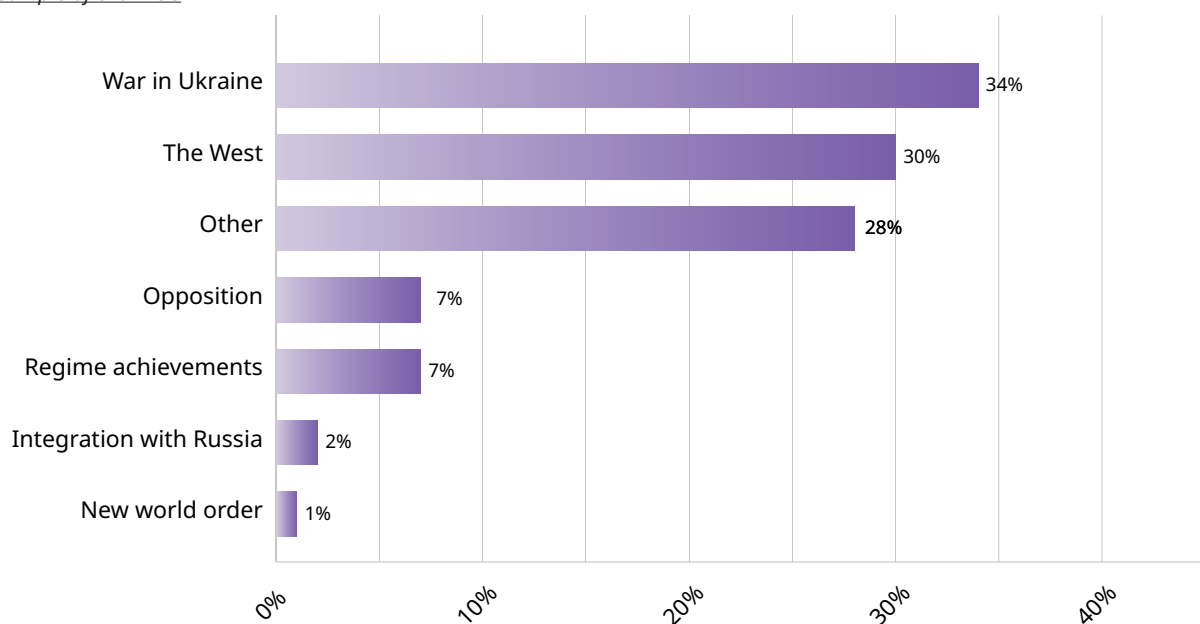
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[1] With the support of MediaIQ and OpenMinds.

[2] We excluded the Telegram channel of Anton Shabashov, which has around 40,000 subscribers, since his video content is primarily created for other platforms, namely YouTube.

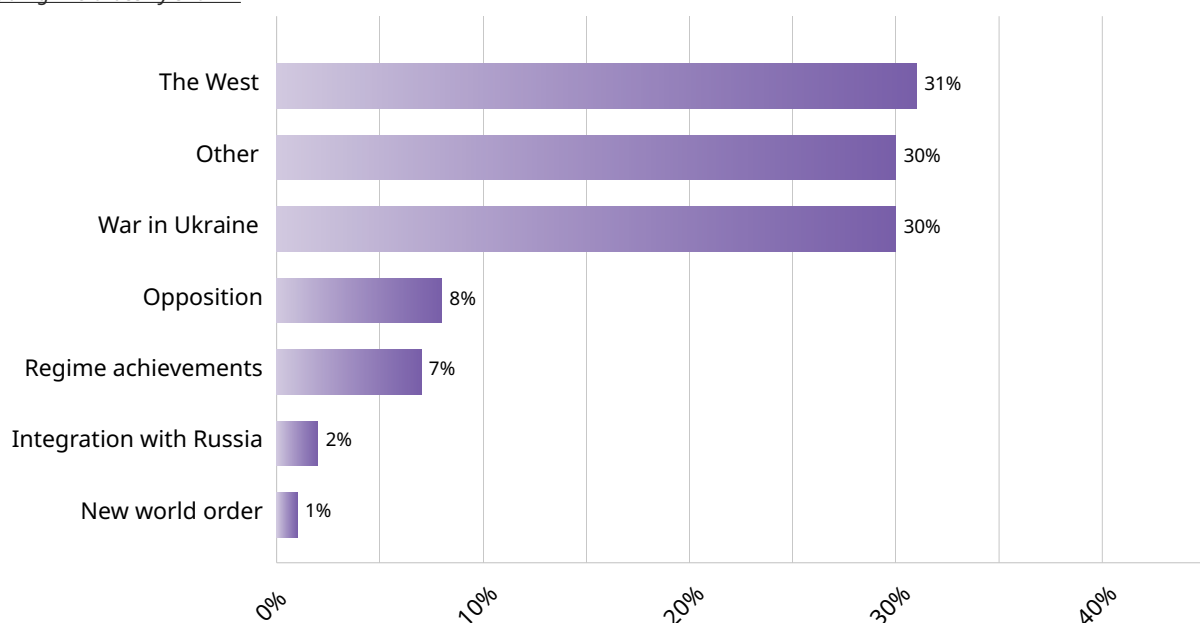# MAIN THEMES AND TONE OF PRO-GOVERNMENT TELEGRAM CONTENT

To understand what topics dominate the Belarusian pro-government Telegram space, we analysed roughly half of the nearly 22,5 thousand posts we collected between February and March 2025. Each post was coded according to six broad thematic categories, with an additional 'Other' label used when none applied. A single post could fall under multiple thematic categories.

Main topics of posts

Full sample of channels

Excluding "Belorusskiy silovik"

Average and maximum representation of topics across channels

THEME	CHANNEL AVERAGE (%)	CHANNEL MEDIAN (%)	MAXIMUM (%)
War in Ukraine	30	25,9	62,2 — Belorusskiy silovik
The West	30,5	30,1	71,1 — Zapadnye zaychiki
Regime achievements	12	7,8	29,6 — Belarus' | Novosti | Politika
Opposition	8,6	6,8	31,8 — ZhS Premium
Integration with Russia	2,7	1,9	8,4 — Zhivyot zhe Belarus'!
New world order	1,3	0,55	3,3 — DOSTOVERNO

Contrary to expectations, pro-government channels rarely focus on the opposition — with the notable exceptions of the outspoken **ZhS Premium and Zheltye Slivy** (Yellow Plums, a pun implying tabloid leaks). The main focus of the pro-government Telegram space lies outside Belarus itself, centring on Western domestic and foreign policy and on the war in Ukraine.

Propaganda that evokes a sense of threat and emphasises that a war is raging just beyond Belarus's borders is apparently considered more effective. The West is consistently portrayed as the instigator of conflicts and revolutions in other countries (including the Belarusian protests of 2020), while the economic and social problems of Western societies are exaggerated.

Coverage of the war in Ukraine reflects a pro-Russian stance, framing it as an 'operation to liberate' the country from the 'Kyiv regime', depicted as illegitimate and corrupt. At the same time, topics such as integration with Russia and the 'new world order' (the pivot toward China and the so-called 'far arc'[3]) are almost entirely absent from pro-government Telegram discourse.

This outward focus persists even when **Belorusskiy silovik** — a channel oriented toward a Russian audience with a heavy focus on the war in Ukraine — is excluded from the analysis.

Overall, certain channels appear to have developed their own 'specialisations'. The table below shows which channels focused most frequently on one of three dominant topics: the West, the war in Ukraine, and the regime's achievements. The latter theme is especially popular in regional channels, which also tend to publish a large share of content that does not fit into any specific category ('Other').

None of the remaining three themes — the opposition, integration with Russia, and the new world order — were dominant in any of the channels analysed. This is noteworthy given that Lukashenka himself regularly brings up 'the fugitives' (in reference to the opposition) in his speeches, and that the narrative of a 'multipolar world' is actively promulgated on Belarusian state television in programmes like Klub Redaktorov (Editors' Club).

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[3] The Belarusian government uses the term 'far arc' to describe its foreign policy strategy of strengthening ties with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which has gained importance due to political and economic pressure from Western nations.
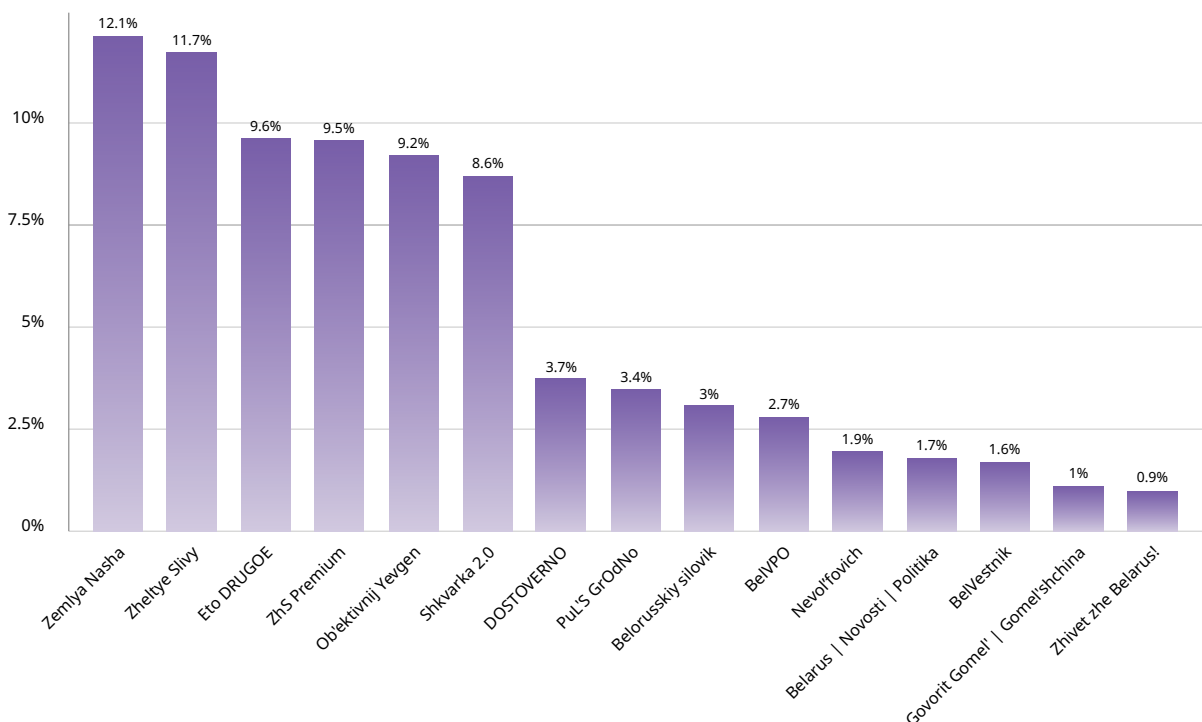
Most popular themes in posts

CHANNEL	KEY THEMES		
	THE WEST	WAR IN UKRAINE	REGIME ACHIEVEMENTS
Belorusskiy silovik		x	
Ob'ektivnij Yevgen		x	
Zapadnye Zaichiki	x		
ZhS Premium	x		
Eto DRUGOE	x		
BelVPO		x	
Nevol'fovich	x		
BelVestnik	x		
Belarus | Novosti | Politika			x
Zhivet zhe Belarus!	x		
Zemlya Nasha		x	
DOSTOVERNO			x
Zheltye Slivy		x	
Shkvarka 2.0	x		
Govorit Gomel' | Gomel'shchina			x
PuL'S GrOdNo			x

The vast majority of posts on pro-government channels are neutral in tone. Messages with a distinctly negative writing style are relatively rare, with **Zheltye Slivy** and **Zemlya Nasha** (Our Land) showing the highest share of such content. The latter channel focuses mainly on the war in Ukraine and Western politics.

However, a neutral overall tone does not imply a total absence of negativity. The classification only reflects the general sentiment of posts. Even messages labelled as neutral may include sharp negative asides, for instance, about the West or members of the opposition.

Negative sentiment by channel

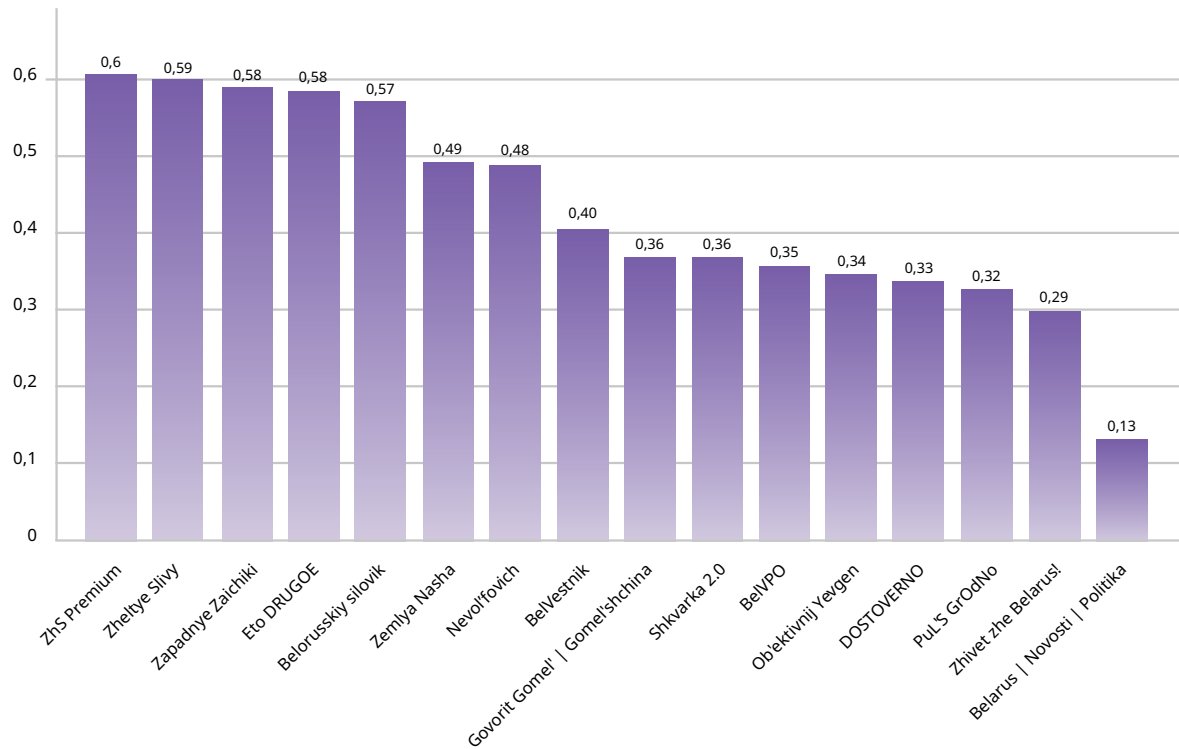| Channel	%
Zemlya Nasha	12.1%
Zheltye Slivy	11.7%
Eto DRUGOE	9.6%
ZhS Premium	9.5%
Ob'ektivnij Yevgen	9.2%
Shkvarka 2.0	8.6%
DOSTOVERNO	3.7%
PuLS GrOdNo	3.4%
Belorusskiy silovik	3%
BelVPO	2.7%
Nevol'fovich	1.9%
Belarus	Novosti	Politika	1.7%
BelVestnik	1.6%
Govorit Gomel	Gomel'shchina	1%
Zhivet zhe Belarus!	0.9%

No negative posts were found for Zapadnye Zaichiki; this resource doesn't appear on the graph.

The highest levels of vitriol (toxicity) are observed on **ZhS Premium, Zheltye Slivy, Belorusskiy silovik, Zapadnye Zaichiki** (Western Bunnies), and **Eto DRUGOE** (That's DIFFERENT). The first two channels devote considerable attention to the Belarusian opposition and its supporters, unlike most other outlets.

The last two, along with Belorusskiy silovik, focus mainly on foreign affairs — the war in Ukraine and politics in Western Countries. Zapadnye Zaichiki, in particular, aspires to be more analytical, publishing extended commentary and analyses of current events. It is also among the few channels that regularly address integration with Russia.
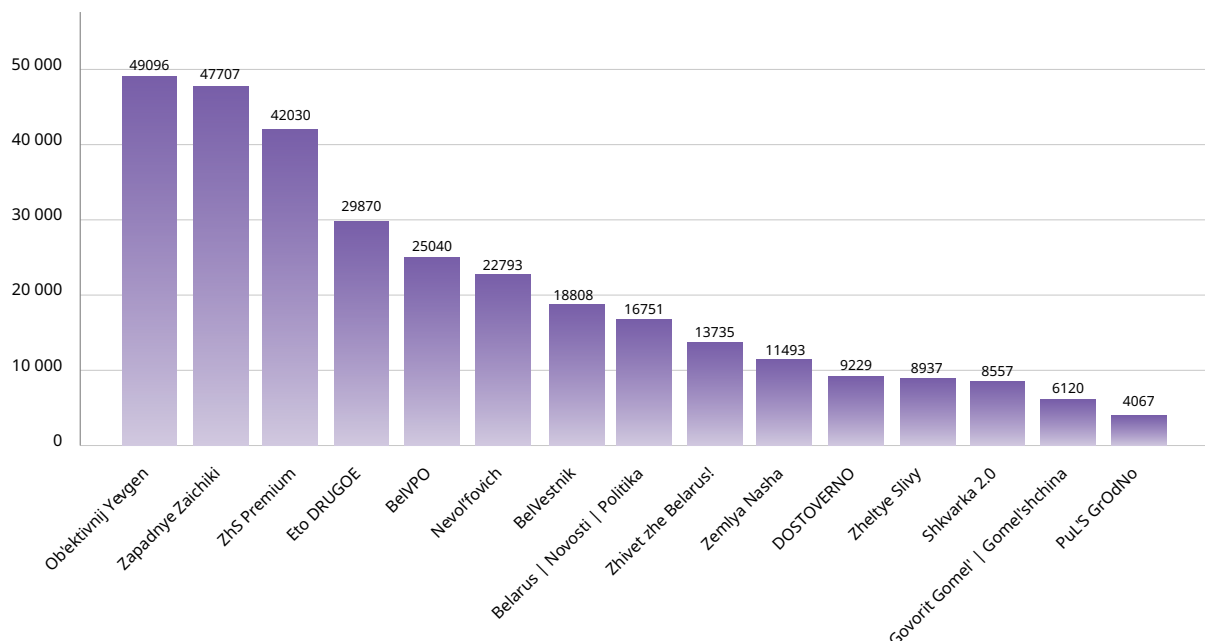
Overall toxicity by channel

Bar chart "Overall toxicity by channel" with values:
- ZhS Premium: 0,6
- Zheltye Slivy: 0,59
- Zapadnye Zaichiki: 0,58
- Eto DRUGOE: 0,58
- Belorusskiy silovik: 0,57
- Zemlya Nasha: 0,49
- Nevol'fovich: 0,48
- BelVestnik: 0,40
- Govorit Gomel' | Gomel'shchina: 0,36
- Shkvarka 2.0: 0,36
- BelVPO: 0,35
- Ob'ektivnij Yevgen: 0,34
- DOSTOVERNO: 0,33
- PuLS GrOdNo: 0,32
- Zhivet zhe Belarus!: 0,29
- Belarus | Novosti | Politika: 0,13

Values closer to 1 may indicate content containing threats (direct or implicit) and insults.

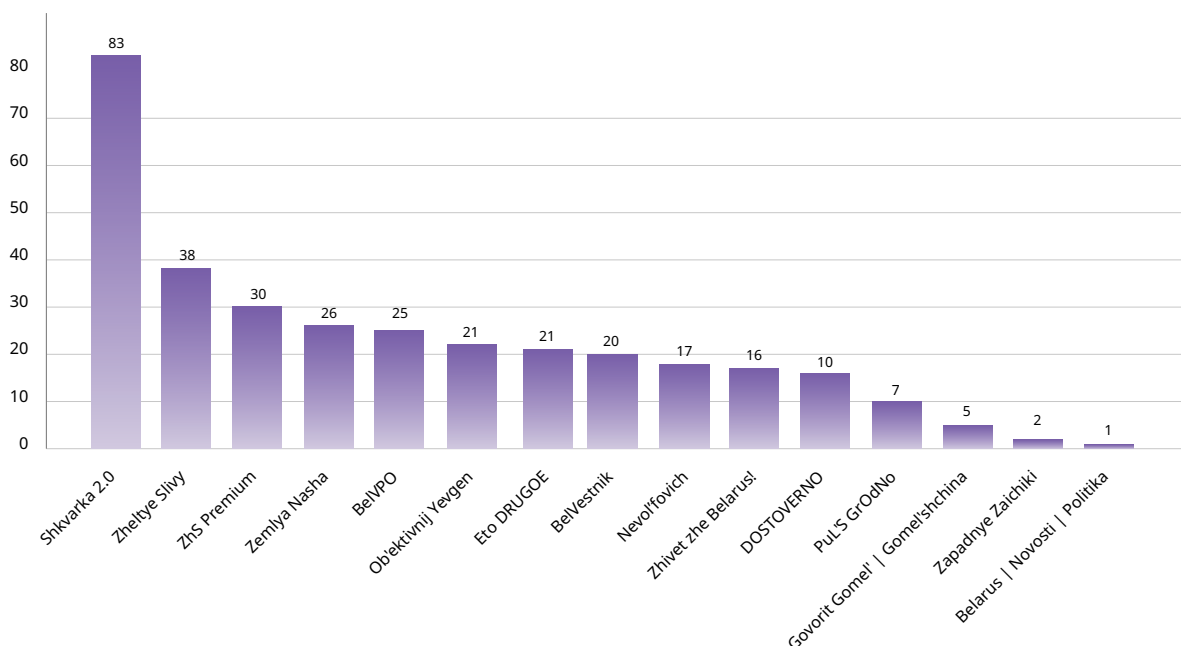# AUDIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT OF PRO-GOVERNMENT TELEGRAM CHANNELS

Most pro-government channels have relatively small audiences: only seven have more than 20,000 subscribers, and just three exceed 40,000.

Channels analyzed (excluding "Belorusskiy silovik")

Subscribers (September 2025)

Channel	Subscribers
Ob'ektivnij Yevgen	49096
Zapadnye Zaichiki	47707
ZhS Premium	42030
Eto DRUGOE	29870
BelVPO	25040
Nevol'fovich	22793
BelVestnik	18808
Belarus	Novosti	Politika	16751
Zhivet zhe Belarus!	13735
Zemlya Nasha	11493
DOSTOVERNO	9229
Zheltye Slivy	8937
Shkvarka 2.0	8557
Govorit Gomel'	Gomel'shchina	6120
PuLS GrOdNo	4067

Average number of posts per day

Channel	Avg posts/day
Shkvarka 2.0	83
Zheltye Slivy	38
ZhS Premium	30
Zemlya Nasha	26
BelVPO	25
Ob'ektivnij Yevgen	21
Eto DRUGOE	21
BelVestnik	20
Nevol'fovich	17
Zhivet zhe Belarus!	16
DOSTOVERNO	10
PuLS GrOdNo	7
Govorit Gomel'	Gomel'shchina	5
Zapadnye Zaichiki	2
Belarus	Novosti	Politika	1

In this context, Belorusskiy silovik stands out (it is not shown on the chart to avoid distorting the data distribution). The channel has more than 400,000 subscribers and publishes nearly 50 posts per day on average. Despite its name, the channel's coverage of the war in Ukraine is largely aimed at a Russian audience.
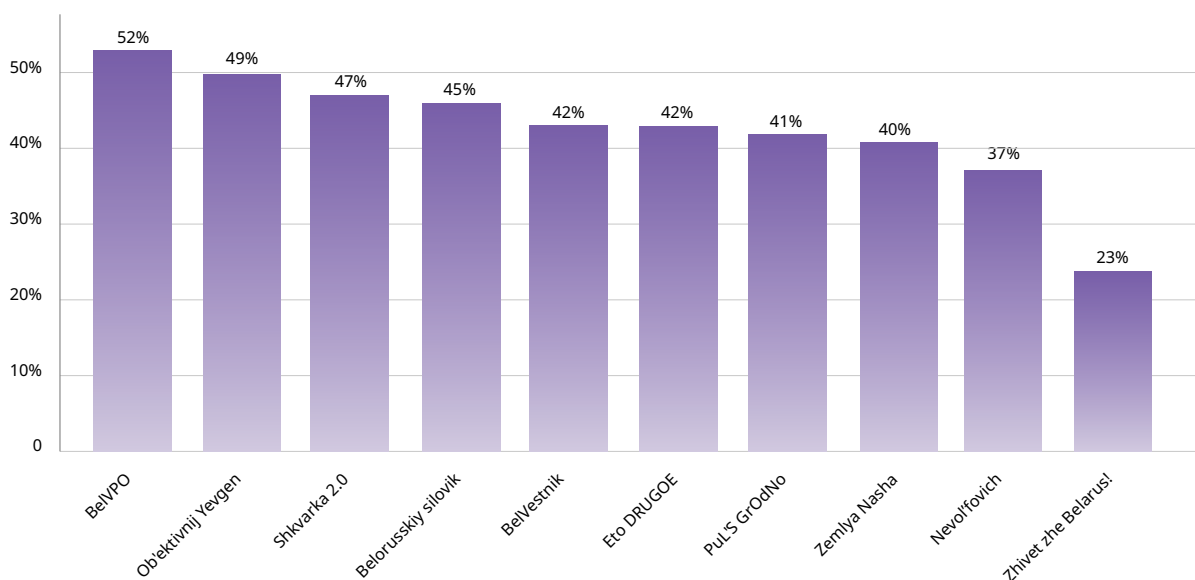
Nearly all channels publish around ten posts a day on average, increasing the likelihood that Belarusians will encounter propaganda content, including through reposts. Shkvarka 2.0 stands out for its unusually high posting rate: it manages to cover the opposition, the war in Ukraine, and Western politics all at once.

The audience, however, seems rather apathetic towards pro-government content. In most channels where commenting is allowed, a typical post receives just a single comment.

Only two channels deviate from this general trend. The first is **Belorusskiy silovik**, whose typical post attracts an average of about 150 comments. However, a large share of its audience consists of Russian users, who are likely to respond more actively to content related to the war in Ukraine. Next is **Ob'ektivnij Yevgen** — one of the few pro-government channels where the author publishes original blog-style content — which receives around 65 comments per post. This approach appears to resonate more strongly with users.

Comments in pro-government channels are often negative in tone. The harshest remarks appear under posts on **BelVPO** — another channel focused on the war in Ukraine and Western foreign policy, which also features reviews of military equipment and assessments of the 'military-political situation'.
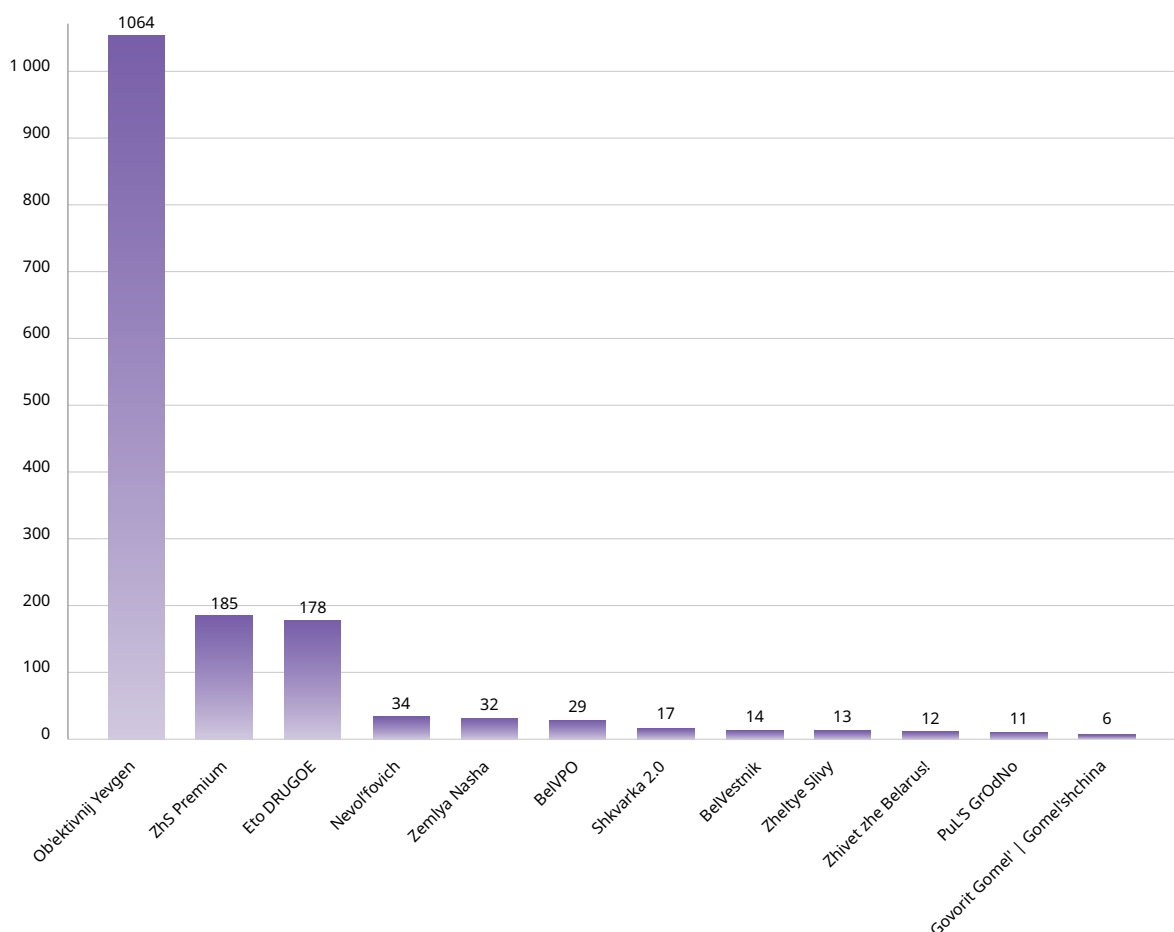
Share of negative comments

Data shown in the chart only include channels where commenting is enabled. The shares represent the proportion of negative text-based comments (including emojis) out of all comments (including image-based ones).

Emotional reactions to posts in pro-government Telegram channels are also rare. **Belorusskiy silovik** again leads by a wide margin — primarily due to its large audience of over 400,000 subscribers. On average, it receives more than 4,000 emoji reactions per post (and is thus not shown on the chart).

In second place by average number of emoji reactions per post is **Ob'ektivnij Yevgen**, which publishes impersonal news coverage in a blog-style format. Subscribers of **ZhS Premium** and **Eto DRUGOE** also use emojis relatively often; for most other channels, the average number of reactions per post is close to zero.
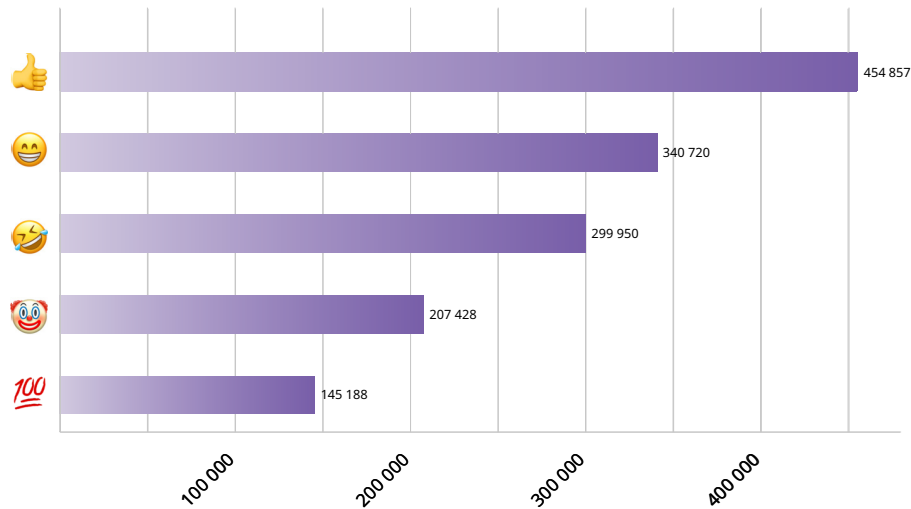
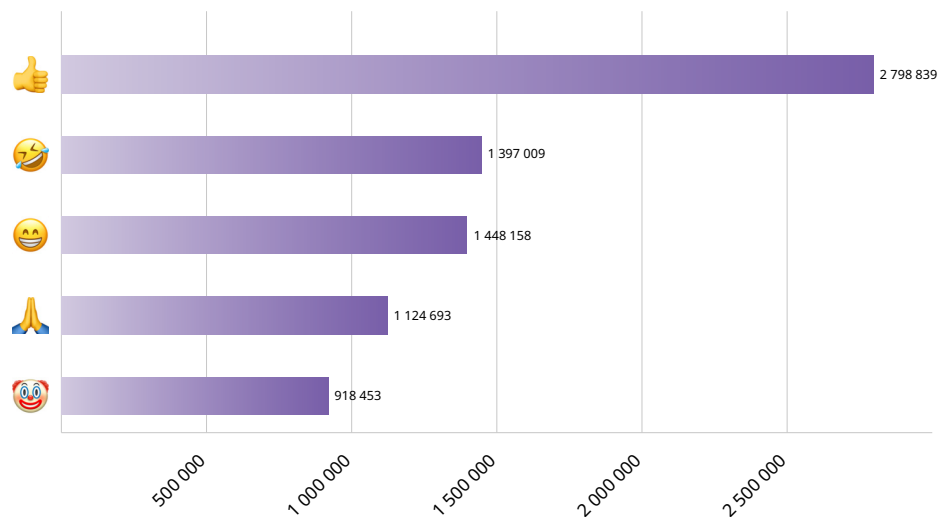### Average number of emojis (excluding "Belorusskiy silovik")

Data shown in the chart only include channels where emoji reactions are enabled.

Most popular emojis

Channels excluding "Belorusskiy silovik"

Emoji	Value
👍	454 857
😁	340 720
🤣	299 950
🤡	207 428
💯	145 188

Only "Belorusskiy silovik"

Emoji	Value
👍	2 798 839
🤣	1 397 009
😁	1 448 158
🙏	1 124 693
🤡	918 453

Users rarely engage with content from pro-government Telegram channels, the main exceptions being Belorusskiy silovik, which targets a Russian audience, and a few other channels. This may indicate the limited effectiveness of online propaganda and its weak influence on Belarusians' political beliefs. Moreover, posts on pro-government channels receive on average around 5,000 views (or roughly 22,000 if Belorusskiy silovik is included).

This tepid audience engagement suggests that the pro-government Telegram sphere serves more to saturate and dominate the public space than to persuade anyone. It provides a constant reminder of the authorities' position but does not succeed in fostering an active community of supporters.
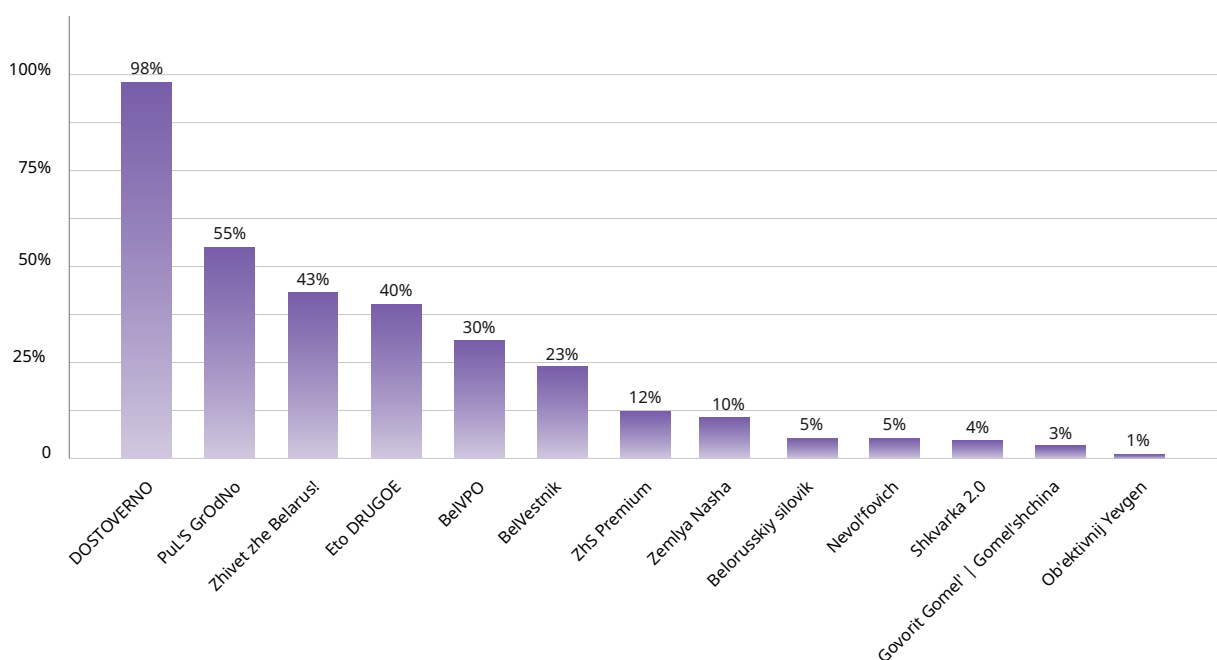
It is also likely that a significant share of post views on pro-government channels comes from incidental exposure — through forwards, 'for you' feeds, or general background 'noise' in the information space.
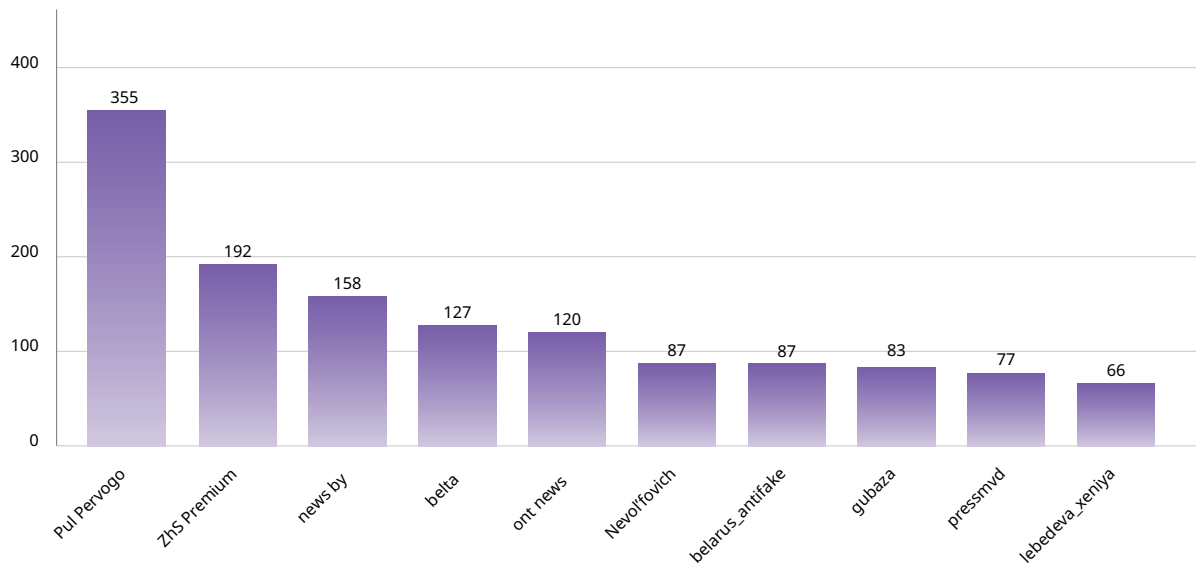
HOW AUTONOMOUS IS BELARUSIAN PROPAGANDA?

It is often argued that Belarusian propagandists operate in close coordination with their Russian counterparts. While the narratives promoted by pro-government Belarusian commentators may sound similar to those of their Russian peers, we assumed that there must also be an operational connection between them. To test this, we analysed repost activity in the selected Belarusian channels.

Most channels repost infrequently — reposts account for no more than 10% of their total content — or avoid doing so altogether. Only in two cases — **DOSTOVERNO** (RELIABLE) and **PuL'S GrOdNo** (Hrodna Pulse) — do reposts make up more than 50% of all content. These are relatively small channels, each with fewer than 10,000 subscribers, which essentially act as aggregators of official news. Three more channels — **Zhivet zhe Belarus!** (Belarus Does Live!), **Eto DRUGOE**, and **BelVPO** — have a repost share exceeding 25%.
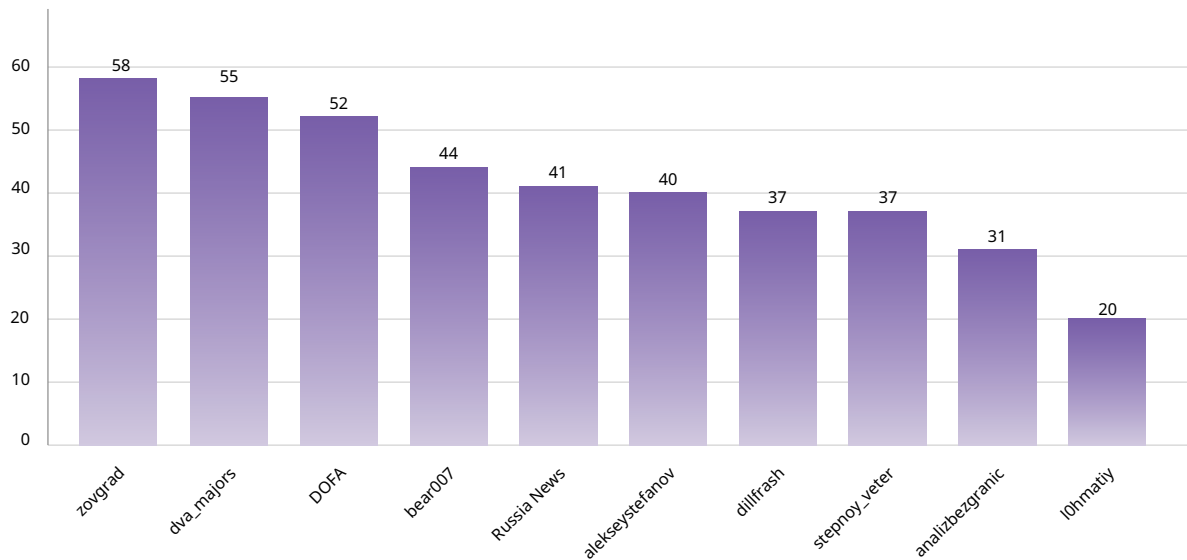
Share of reposts in posts

Key Belarusian channels as sources of reposts

Bar chart "Key Belarusian channels as sources of reposts":
- Pul Pervogo: 355
- Zhs Premium: 192
- news by: 158
- belta: 127
- ont news: 120
- Nevolfovich: 87
- belarus_antifake: 87
- gubaza: 83
- pressmvd: 77
- lebedeva_xeniya: 66

Key Russian channels as sources of reposts

Bar chart "Key Russian channels as sources of reposts":
- zovgrad: 58
- dva_majors: 55
- DOFA: 52
- bear007: 44
- Russia News: 41
- alekseystefanov: 40
- dilfrash: 37
- stepnoy_veter: 37
- analizbezgranic: 31
- l0hmatiy: 20

The main sources of reposts are other pro-government Telegram channels, state media outlets such as BelTA or the Belteleradiocompany (NEWS.BY), and above all **Pul Pervogo**, Lukashenka's official Telegram channel. Many pro-government Telegram outlets present themselves as grassroots initiatives; they lack state media branding and publish seemingly 'personal' opinion posts, resembling blogs. Nevertheless, in practice, many function as relays for state media content.

Reposts from Russian pro-government and 'Z' channels are far less common. *The Belarusian pro-government Telegram sphere appears to operate with a fair degree of autonomy rather than serving as a retransmitter of Russian online propaganda.* At the very least, there is no evident interaction between Russian and Belarusian Telegram propagandists in terms of direct reposts.

However, it would be wrong to assume that there are no informal connections between these two groups. Belarusian channels may draw inspiration from Russian sources without directly reposting their content. This is particularly likely given that coverage of international issues — especially the war in Ukraine — in Belarus's pro-government Telegram channels closely mirrors the official Russian narrative.

The absence of overt links may reflect the political context: for the Belarusian authorities, it remains important to project an image of sovereignty, even amid deep dependence on Moscow. As a result, a curious balance emerges: ideological solidarity with Russia is combined with institutional insularity and tight control over the domestic information space.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

This analysis indicates that Belarus's pro-government Telegram ecosystem is highly active but has limited impact. The channels publish dozens of posts every day, but audience engagement remains minimal. As such, pro-government Telegram channels primarily serve a symbolic function — to maintain the authorities' visible presence in the digital space.

The content of the posts reveals a strong focus on foreign affairs, particularly the war in Ukraine and developments in Western countries. Domestic topics — including the opposition, social policy, or integration with Russia — remain marginal.

Importantly, although Belarusian propaganda borrows certain narratives from Russian discourse, it retains a degree of autonomy. Reposts from Russian 'Z' channels are rare, with most content originating from national state media and the Pul Pervogo channel.

The results of this mapping indicate that pro-government Telegram channels do not aim to build a loyal audience or mobilise followers emotionally. Instead, they generate a constant stream of repetitive messaging. This strategy reflects a broader trend in digital authoritarianism: control is exercised not so much through censorship as through oversaturation of the information space with state-directed narratives.

CENTER FOR NEW IDEAS

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