

CENTER FOR NEW IDEAS



THE BELARUS BAROMETER OF REPRESSION *SECOND QUARTER OF 2024*

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Center for New Ideas | July 2024

SUMMARY

New accounts of repressive and punitive measures come out of Belarus almost every day. Because of this constant stream of information, detecting patterns and changes can be difficult without in-depth analysis.

To capture how the punitive practices of the regime are evolving — what patterns of repression are fading and emerging — the Center for New Ideas will be issuing a quarterly research-based report entitled the Belarus Barometer of Repression.

Our analysis focuses primarily on statistical, quantitative data. This research is not intended to replace more granular reports by human rights organizations. Instead, our objectives are more analytical and statistical in nature: we aim to provide a general overview of the repressive/punitive system of the Belarusian regime and discern chronological shifts in how it functions (broken into quarters).

This aggregation of important quantitative indicators (primarily from human rights advocates, but also drawing on official statistics) and contextualized analysis should be useful to anyone seeking to understand how the Belarusian regime goes about putting pressure on society.

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The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Belarusian human rights advocates and organizations, especially those whose work informed this report. These include Viasna, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Lawtrend, Human Constanta, and Dissidentby.

KEY FINDINGS

- *There were two peaks in the systematic destruction of civil society: the third quarter of 2021 and the third quarter of 2022. Meanwhile, in the second quarter of this year, 5% fewer organizations disappeared than in the previous reporting period. In this area, it seems that the resources for increasing repressive pressure have nearly been exhausted.*
- *There were also several peaks to the weaponization of anti-extremist legislation: the first occurred at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, while the second peak is happening now. Compared to the previous quarter, in the second quarter of this year 2% more court sessions were held, 25% more groups were declared extremist formations, and 74% more citizens were added to the List of Extremists.*
- *The arbitrary detention of political prisoners also occurred in waves, sparked by various stimuli ranging from street protests to the initiatives of the democratic forces. In the reporting period, after the “electoral wave” of detentions that had been gaining momentum since the middle of last year, there is now (according to preliminary information) a slight decrease in the number of detentions..*
- *Compared to the previous period, in this reporting period instances of administrative pressure fell by 15%. Nevertheless, quarterly average trends show that administrative repression directed towards the regime’s opponents has been steadily increasing since 2021.*
- *The criminal prosecution of Belarusians who disagree with the current government is also occurring in waves: the first wave happened in the second half of 2021, whereas the second was in the middle of 2023. Most probably, we are currently experiencing the beginning of a third wave, which began in the first quarter of 2024 and has now reached a level of more than 450 criminal cases per quarter. This is an absolute maximum in the last 4 years.*
- *The largest number of individuals were declared political prisoners in Belarus at the end of 2021, when more than 100 people per month received this designation. In the years that followed, the rate at which people were declared political prisoners declined; however, in the reporting period, the number of “new” political prisoners was 80% greater than last quarter.*

The hypothesis we posed earlier — that a new “wave of repression” has begun — proved correct: repressive pressure against Belarusian society is growing. The Lukashenka regime continues to view Belarusian society as its enemy, and it is gearing up repressions against those whom it considers its opponents.

QUARTER II OF 2024 — THE SITUATION AFTER 4 YEARS OF REPRESSION

The repressive machine built by the Lukashenka regime consists of multiple components and works at several different levels. In order to detect patterns in this system's activities, we are focusing on two main areas that have enough quantitative data to make analysis possible. As in previous releases of the Barometer of Repression (see the [first](#) and [second](#) editions), these are:

- **Intimidation** – measures to instill anxiety and fear by demonstrating the omnipotence of the Belarusian security forces, designed to suppress any aspirations of freedom and self-organization in society as much as possible;
- **Detentions and arrests** – the persecution of citizens who express their disagreement with state policy in some way (against election fraud, unchecked violence, Belarus's complicity in the Russian-Ukrainian war, etc.).

Necessary disclaimer: most quantitative data represent highly conservative estimates due to a) the inaccessibility of many government statistics and b) the pervasive atmosphere of fear in the country that prevents certain information about repressions from reaching human rights advocates.

There is much more repression in Belarus than these numbers show.

Supplemental areas of investigation include ones where a distinct pattern emerged during the reporting period. Gaining an understanding of these areas is essential to properly analyze the dynamics of the repressive system. The authorities' efforts to carry out repressive measures at different levels are not distributed evenly in time; therefore, the list of supplemental areas may change from year to year. This year, we have only included one supplemental area:

- **Control over society** – the dismantling of freedoms and the right to self-organization, i.e., the subordination of the activities of members of society to the interests of the state at all levels, from business and the third sector to everyday life.

This time, unlike in past reports, to illustrate the unique characteristics of the reporting quarter we have relied on quantitative, rather than qualitative, data (as comprehensively as possible). When possible, the quantitative data we use describes the entire period of repressions initiated by Lukashenka since the beginning of his 2020 electoral campaign.

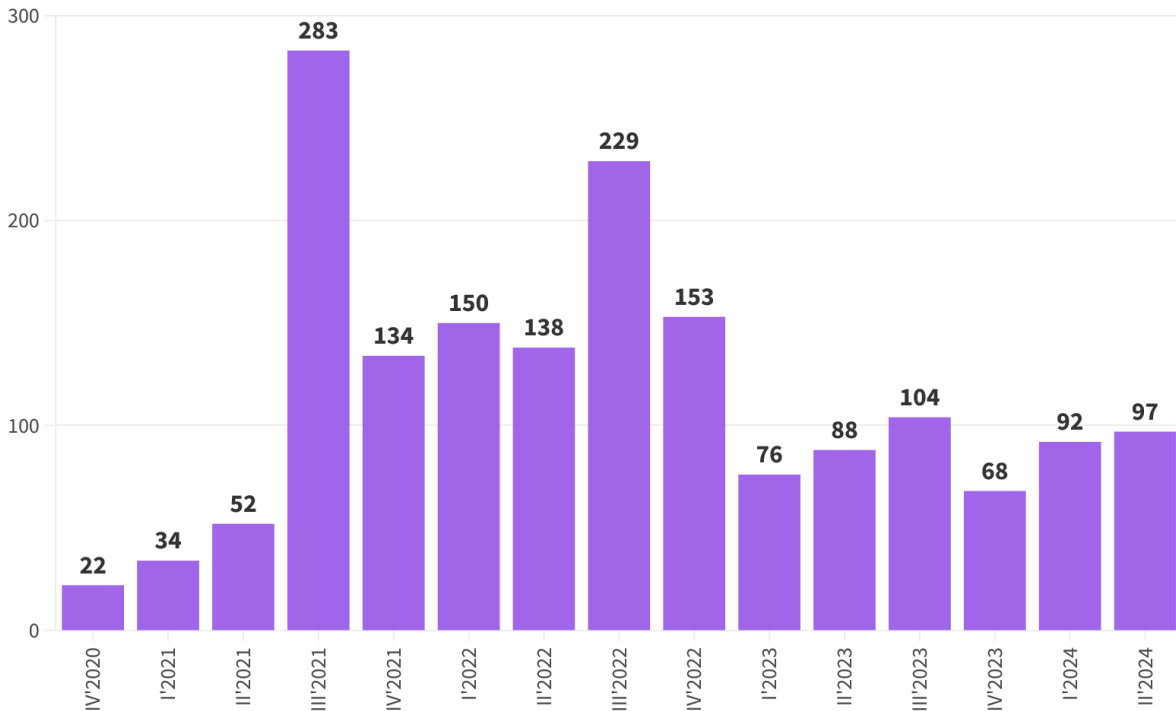
CONTROL

The founding of new organizations and the closure of those that have run out of resources is a normal process in society — and the third sector is no exception.

However, in Belarus, this process has never been exactly “normal.” The situation in the country is characterized by unrelenting pressure on the third sector and constant “cleansing” of structures and initiatives perceived to be dangerous by the Lukashenka regime.¹

After the events of 2020, the authorities ramped up pressure on Belarusian civil society considerably, almost completely destroying its core infrastructure. Of course, this did not occur immediately or in one day. Retrospective analysis allows us to speak of two peaks: a) the third quarter of 2021, when at least 283 civil society organizations were destroyed (through either liquidation or coercion²), and b) the third quarter of 2022; in this period at least 229 organizations were liquidated (or coerced into disbanding).

Quarterly number of third-sector organizations that have been (self-)liquidated since the end of 2020
(according to Lawtrend data)



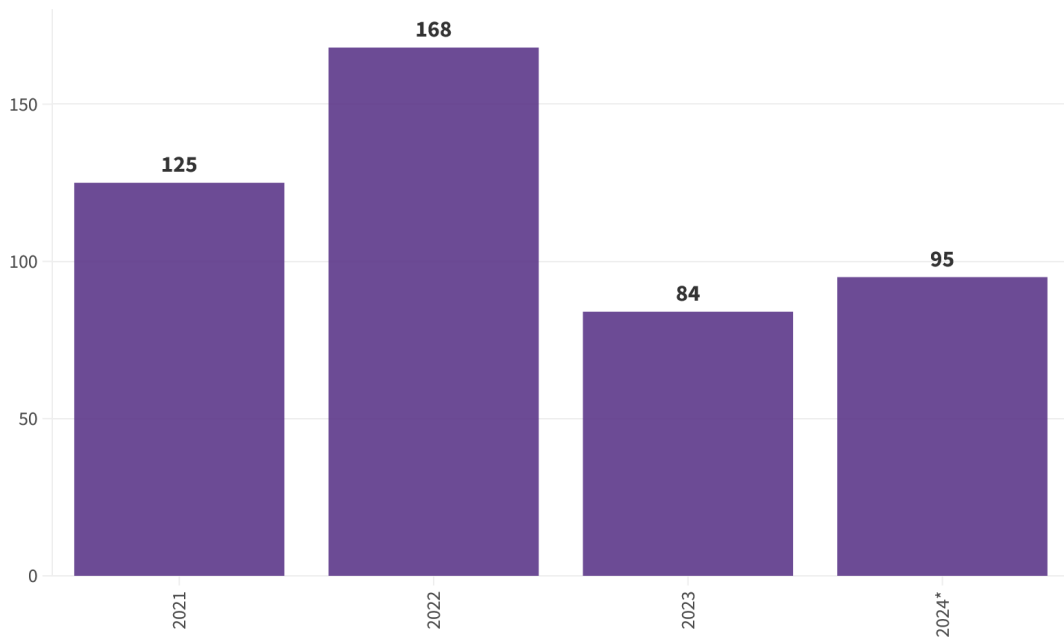
¹ Since 2020, the CSO Resilience Index has never been greater than 5 points (on a scale where 1 is optimal and 7 is the worst). [“The fire has not yet abated”](#)

² “...the decision to disband is usually taken due to pressure on members or employees of NGOs, the hostile legal context, and the general socio-political situation in the country.” [Monitoring of the situation surrounding the freedom of assembly...](#)

It is important to note that although the 2022 peak was lower than the record last year, all in all, from a quantitative perspective, it was in 2022 that the Belarusian third sector suffered the greatest losses. An average of 165-170 organizations were destroyed per quarter then.

In general, in the period lasting from 2021 to end-June 2024, more than 1,700 Belarusian third-sector organizations were liquidated. According to some assessments³, this could account for as much as half of all institutionalized civil society structures.

Quarterly change in the average number of third-sector organizations to (self-) liquidate since the end of 2020
(according to Lawtrend)



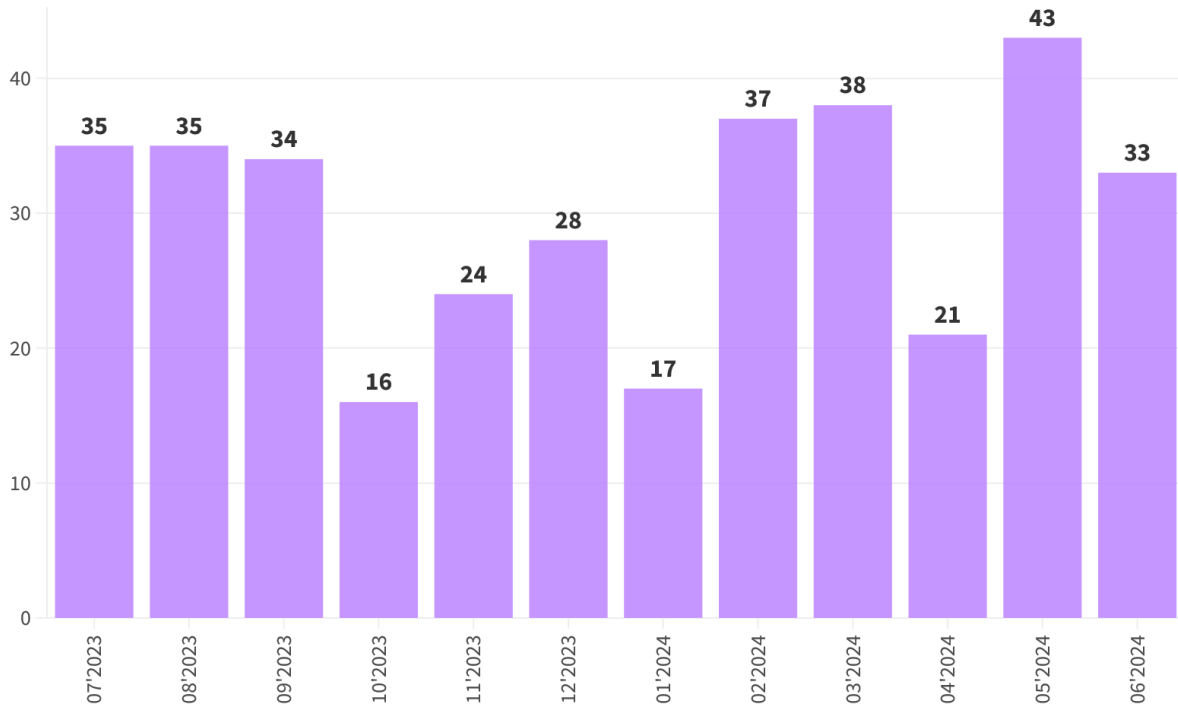
* NB: hereinafter, 2024 figures are for the first 2 quarters of the year.

Retrospective analysis allows us to speak with some certainty of another tendency: within a single year, the peak in the number of liquidated third-sector organizations in the last 2 years has occurred in the third quarter.

At the time of writing, 2024 data seems to indicate that this pattern will continue. For the second quarter in a row, we observe growth in the number of liquidated NGOs/non-profits: whereas 92 organizations were shut down in the first quarter, 97 were shut down in the second. This is somewhat lower than the quarterly average for the last 4 years (118 organizations). However, if the pattern of the last three years continues, then in the third quarter we could easily see figures higher than 100 organizations liquidated per quarter and approaching average figures even given the peak of repressions against NGOs that occurred in 2022.

³ [“Half Destroyed.” What’s Happening with Belarus’ Civil Society?](#)

Monthly number of third-sector organizations that were (self-) liquidated in the last 12 months
(according to Lawtrend data)



INTIMIDATION: TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM

The weaponization of legislation to put pressure on activists and civil society structures has always been a specialty of the Lukashenka regime. Since 2020, Belarusian laws pertaining to anti-extremism have been an important part of this process, and the regime “optimized” this legislation even more in 2021.⁴

In this report, we will not examine the legal specifics of how this sphere of Belarusian jurisprudence has developed;⁵ we will concentrate exclusively on quantitative evidence of its application in several areas: a) information being declared extremist material; b) formations, organizations, and associations being declared extremist; c) citizens being declared extremists, d) citizens being declared terrorists.

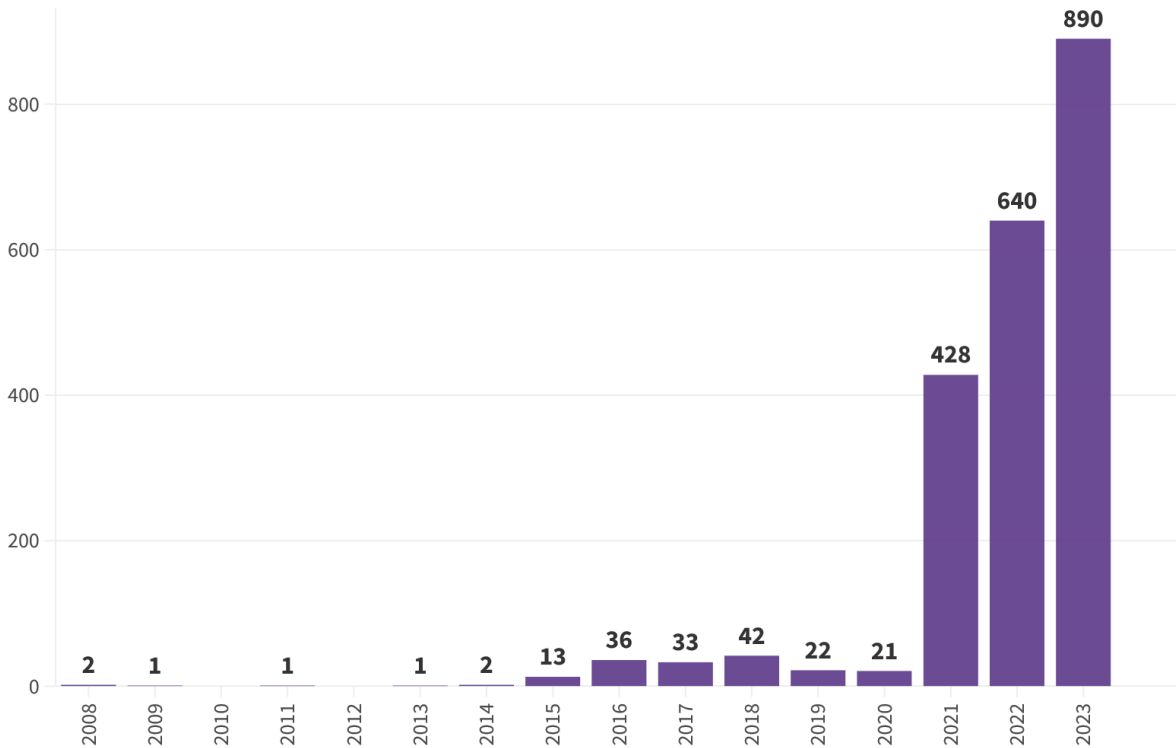
EXTREMIST MATERIALS

The Belarusian authorities began to compile lists of extremist materials (media or information) as early as 2008.

⁴ See: Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 575 on October 12, 2021 “On measures to counter extremism and the rehabilitation of Nazism.”

⁵ On these issues, see, for example, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee: [Reviews of human rights in Belarus: the main trends of state policy.](#)

Number of court sessions about extremist information/sources
 (according to official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)



Since the beginning, this list has been compiled sporadically. 1-2 court sessions on this topic took place per year. After the events in Ukraine in 2014, the number of court sessions began to increase, with a peak in 2018, after which it began to fall, and in 2020 it reached a five-year minimum.

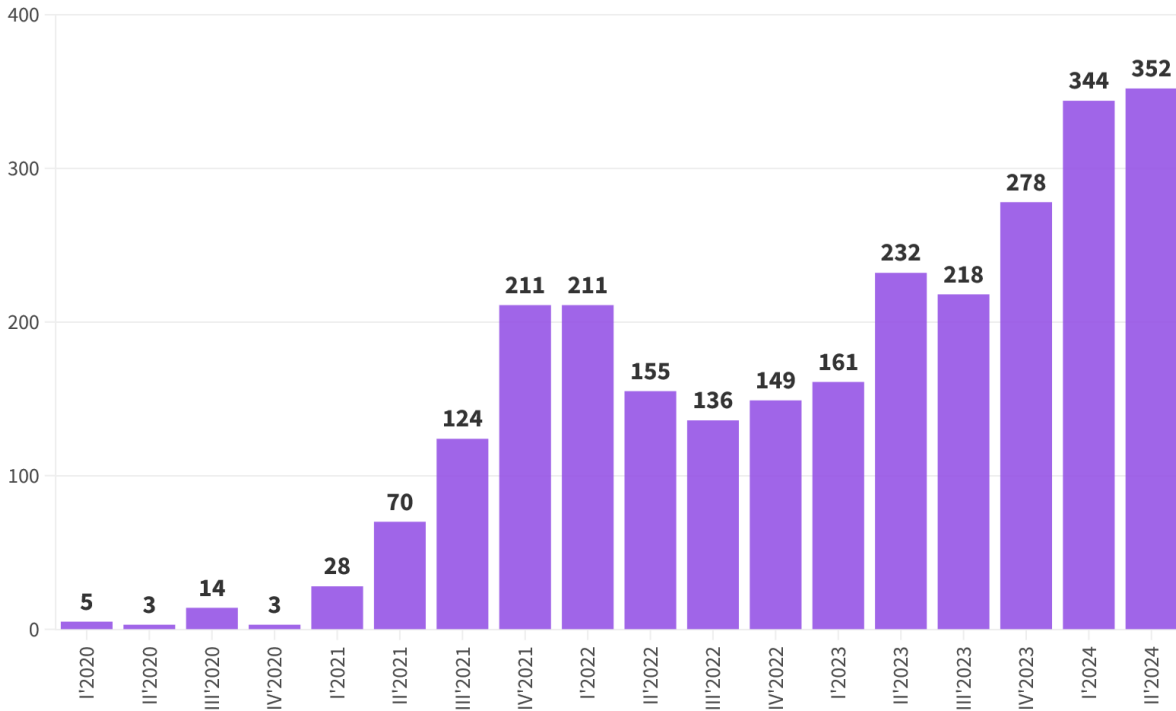
The main materials that were labeled extremist in this period were sources associated with right-wing ideology, Nazism/racism, and Adolf Hitler. In second place were anarchist materials.⁶

In 2021, this situation changed dramatically, with the number of court cases that resulted in media being declared extremist practically doubling.

⁶ [Has Telegram ceased to be the main social network for extremists?](#)

Quarterly number of court cases resulting in information/sources being recognized as extremist material since 2020

(according to official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)

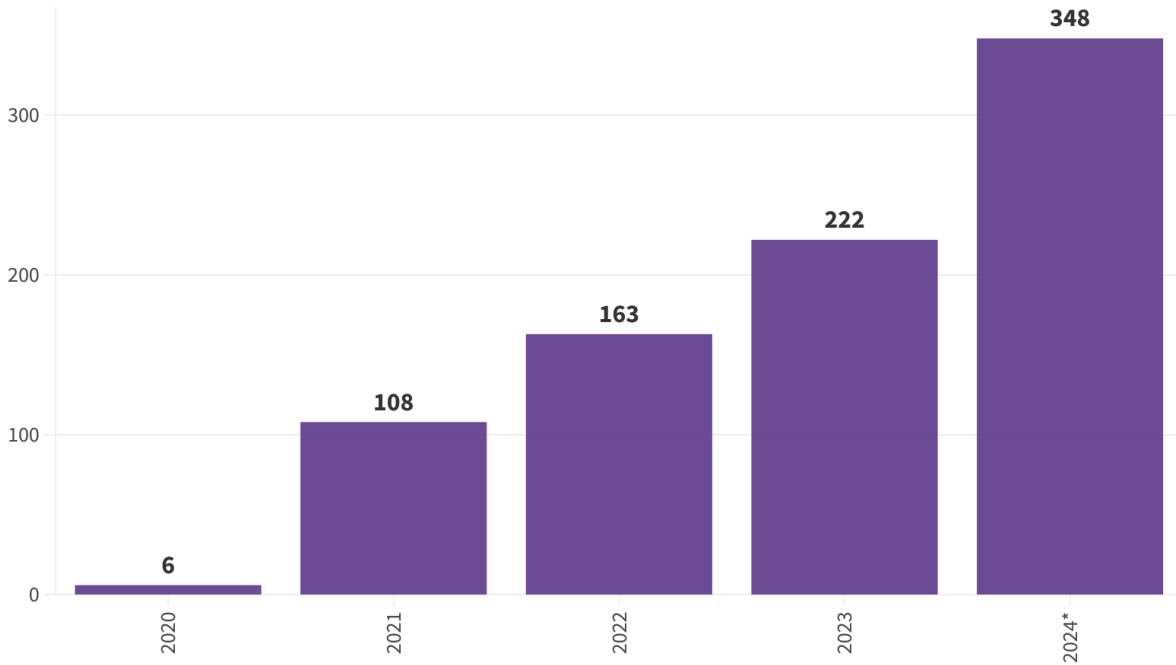


As we see in the graph, the first peak of court sessions that resulted in materials being designated extremist occurred at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, when there were more than 200 such court sessions per quarter. In the middle of 2022, there was a drop in the number of such court sessions.

However, another trend becomes evident by the end of that year: gradual growth in the number of court cases declaring materials extremist. This trend continued into the reporting period, leading to a twice-fold increase in the quarterly averages for this indicator over the last 4.5 years. Thus, the average amount of court cases per quarter amounted to 170, whereas in the first two quarters of 2024 there were 348 court cases on average. It should also be noted that in April of this year, there were 170 such court cases, which is an absolute record since the Republican List of Extremist Materials was first published.

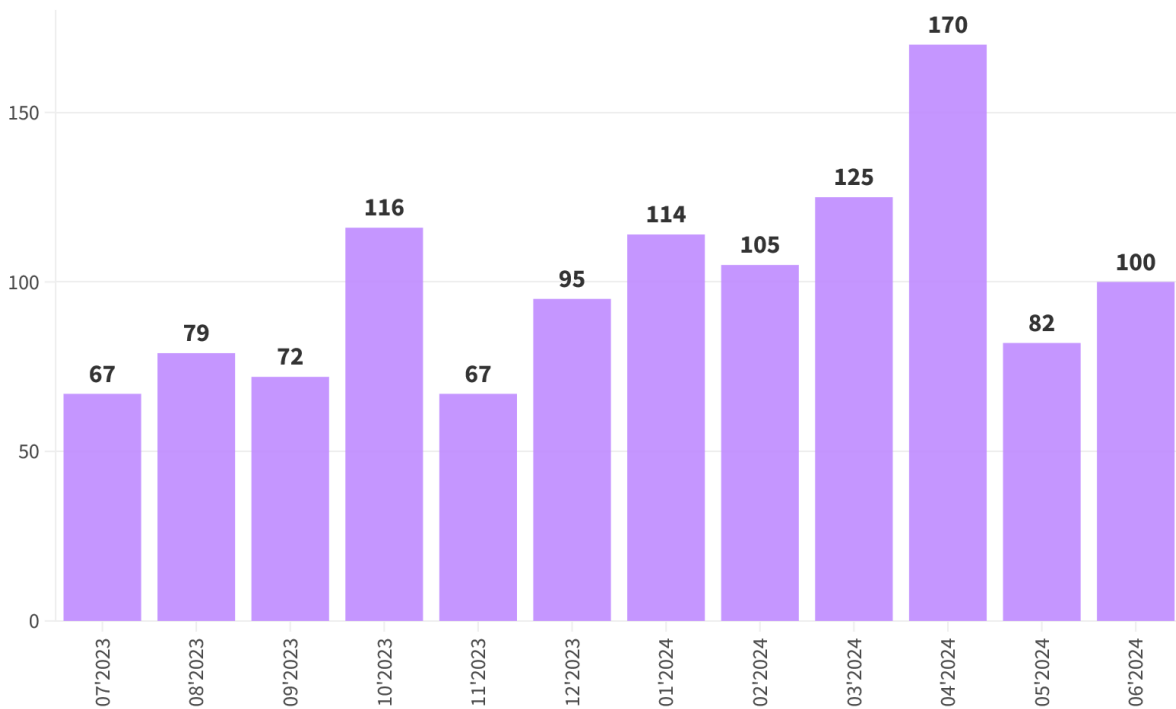
Change in the average quarterly number of court cases declaring information/sources extremist materials since 2020

(according to data from official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)



Monthly number of court cases declaring information/sources extremist materials over the last 12 months

(according to official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)



By the end of July 2024, the list of court-designated extremist materials included approximately 4,300 items. It is difficult to name their exact number, as there are fairly frequent instances when the same media is deemed extremist by different judges at different times.

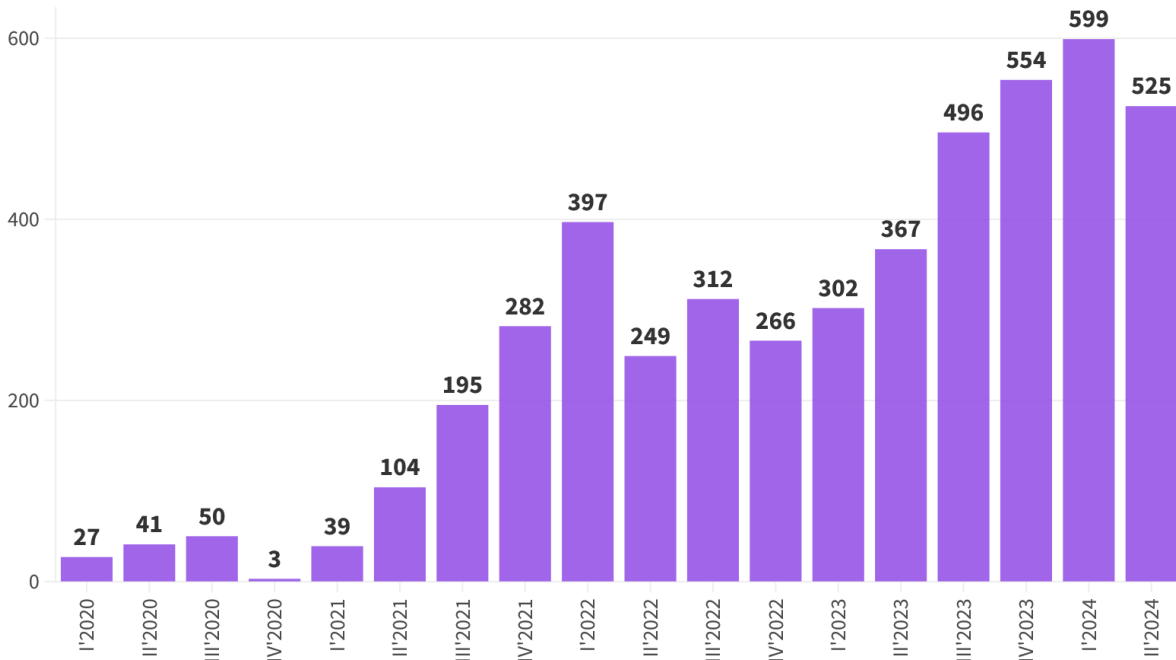
The number of items on the List of Extremist Materials basically correlates with the number of court cases about this issue.

- The first peak occurred in the beginning of 2022.
- Since 2022, the number of extremist materials has been growing.
- In 2024, this figure exceeded the average annual figures for the last 4.5 years almost twofold.

However, there is also a key difference, which concerns the forecast for this indicator. It is very likely that it will begin to fall in the future. The reason for this is that resources have nearly been exhausted: almost everything that could somehow be perceived as independent Belarusian media, “pro-protest” organizations and initiatives, political movements, or diasporic associations has already been labeled an “extremist organization”. The situation has reached an absurd level: humorous internet content, music, and educational resources that are far from politics are being declared extremist. The share of such materials has only been increasing lately.

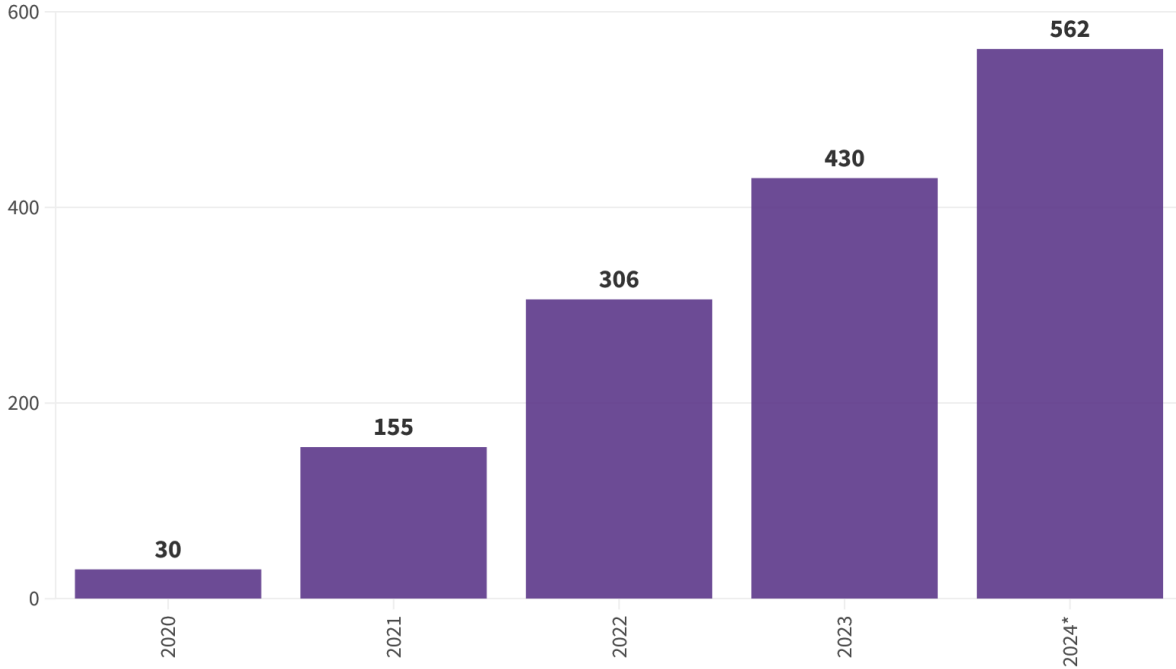
Quarterly number of items added to the Republican List of Extremist Materials over the last 12 months

(according to official lists published by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus)



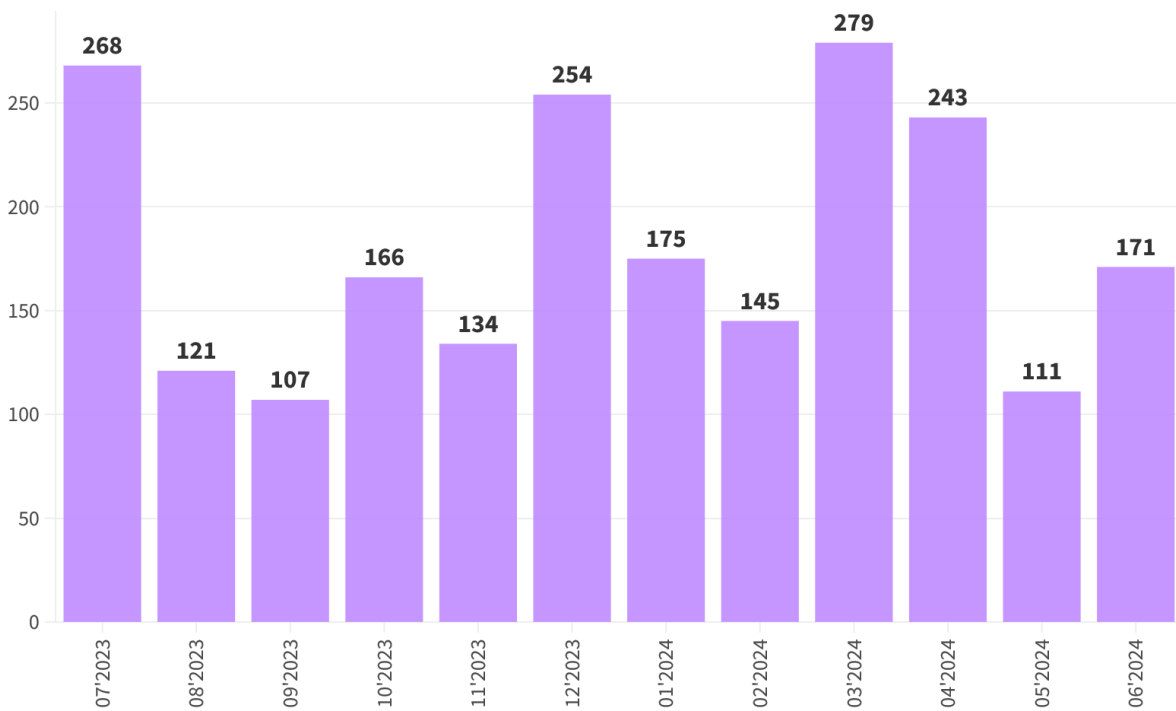
Change in the quarterly average number of items added to the Republican List of Extremist Materials since 2020

(according to data from official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)



Monthly number of items added to the Republican List of Extremist Materials in the last 12 months

(according to official lists published by the Ministry of Information of Belarus)

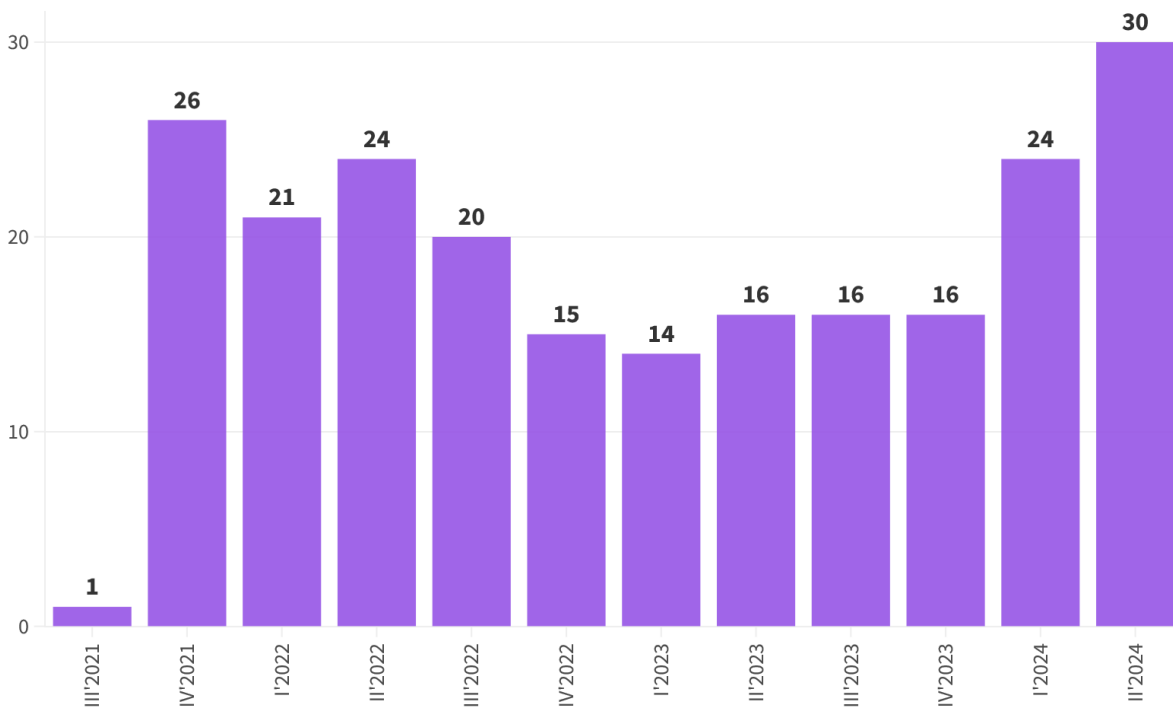


EXTREMIST FORMATIONS

A unique phenomenon, “extremist formations” (i.e., organizations) in Belarus appeared in 2021 due to a new amendment to the law “On countering extremism,” the purpose of which was to quash any form of dissent in Belarus. Any form of cooperation with organizations or initiatives placed on the extremist list (e.g., conducting an interview) can lead to punishment in the form of incarceration for up to 10 years. It is important to note that these laws are retroactive: the authorities can prosecute someone for cooperating with “extremist formations” even before they were declared extremist. And Belarusian courts do not issue acquittals in such cases.

The Lukashenka regime began to designate organizations “extremist formations” in September of 2021. Almost immediately, in the next quarter, a record number of organizations (26) were labeled extremist formations. After this, there was a gradual decline in this type of repression that continued throughout 2022, and in 2023 a norm of 15-16 new extremist formations per month took shape.

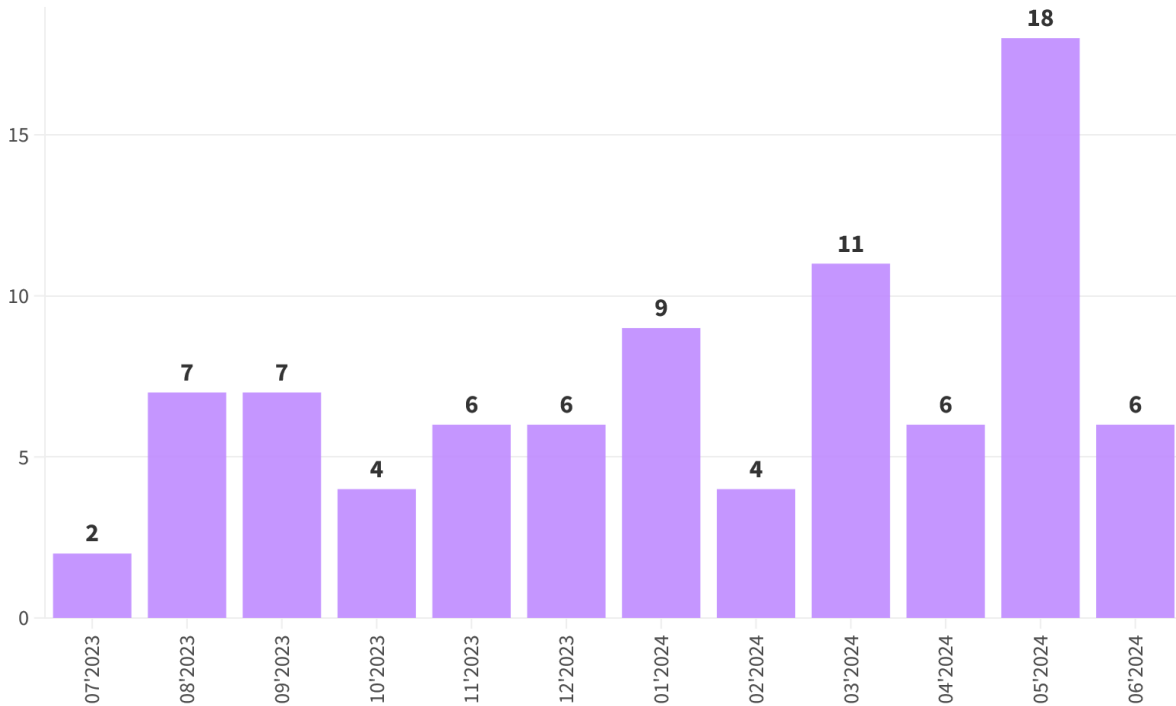
Quarterly number of structures declared extremist formations since September 2021
(according to official data from the Interior Ministry)



This pattern broke off in 2024, when for two quarters in a row the number of new extremist formations grew consistently, reaching 30 organizations/initiatives in the second quarter.

Monthly number of structures declared extremist formations over the past 12 months

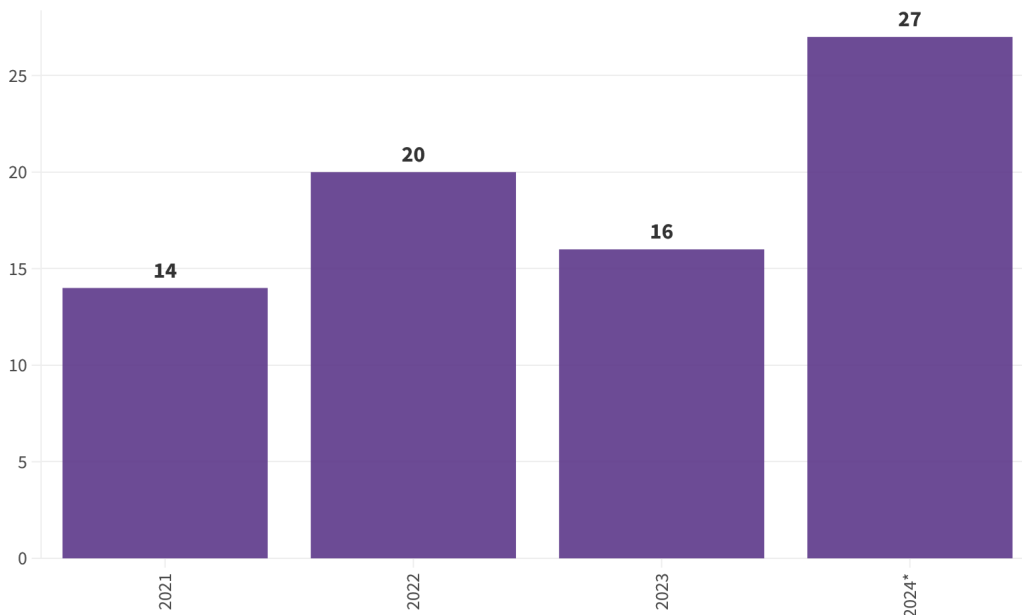
(according to official data from the Interior Ministry)



This is more than the starting record of 2021 and more than the quarterly average for the last 3.5 years, which is 19 new “extremist formations” per quarter.

Change in the average quarterly number of structures declared extremist formations since September 2021

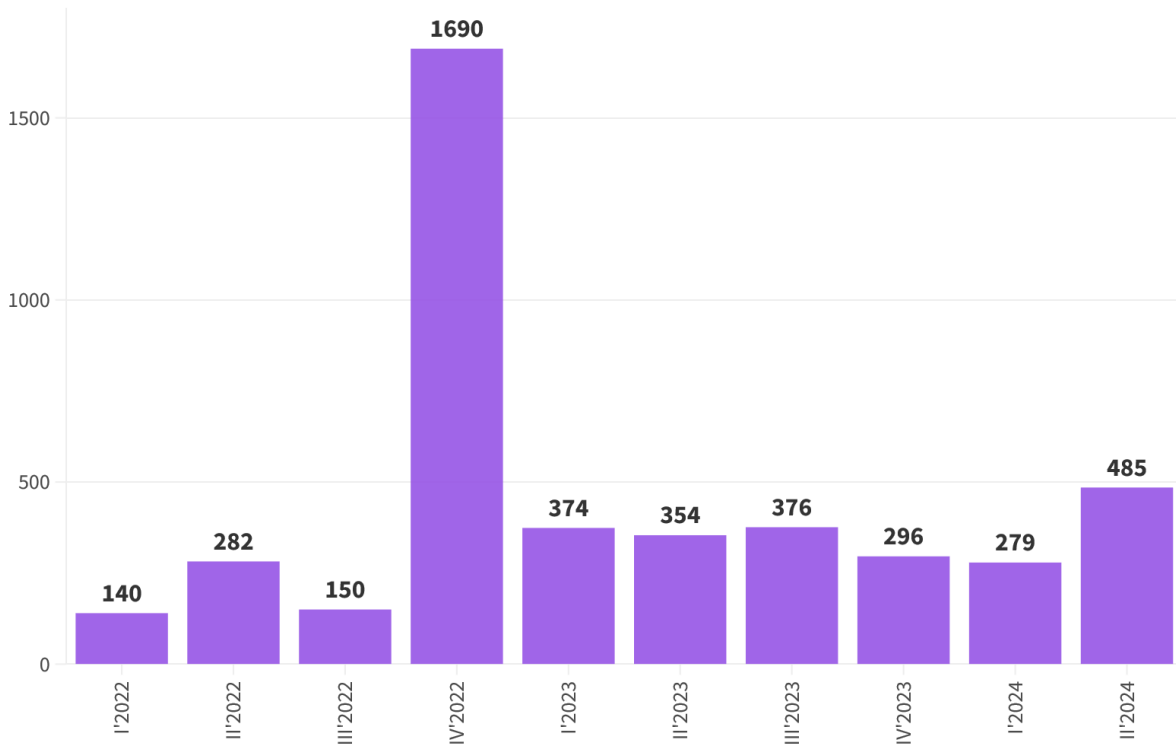
(according to official data from the Interior Ministry)



INDIVIDUALS ON THE LIST OF EXTREMISTS

The last “extremist” indicator concerns ordinary citizens being declared extremists, a process which began in March of 2022. Its peak occurred in the last quarter of 2022, when over 1,500 people received this status.

Quarterly number of people added to the List of Extremists since March 2022
(according to data from the Interior Ministry)



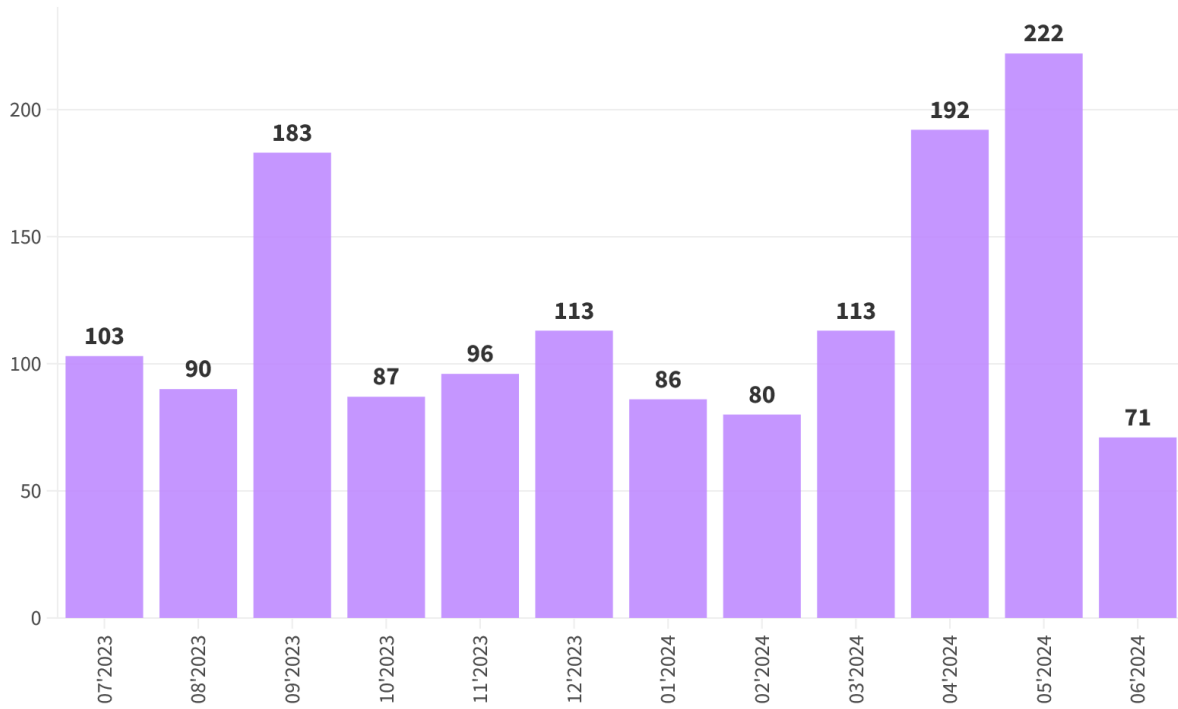
In 2023, the intensity of the regime’s activities in this area diminished significantly, largely mirroring the situation with various independent structures being declared extremist formations.

As with extremist formations, we observed a surge in activity in this area in the reporting period: in May 2023, 222 people were added to the List of Extremists. This was a record for the last year and a half. Of course, here we are dealing with the Lukashenka regime’s reaction to the elections of the Third Convocation of the Coordinating Council — one of the flagship initiatives of the Belarusian pro-democracy movement in recent years.

In terms of the future outlook of repressive pressure in this area, given the reactionary nature of the regime’s actions, we can expect a reduction in the intensity of the authorities’ efforts going forward. Most likely, this reduction will continue until the next major initiative of the democratic forces, which the authorities will respond to by expanding their lists of extremists.

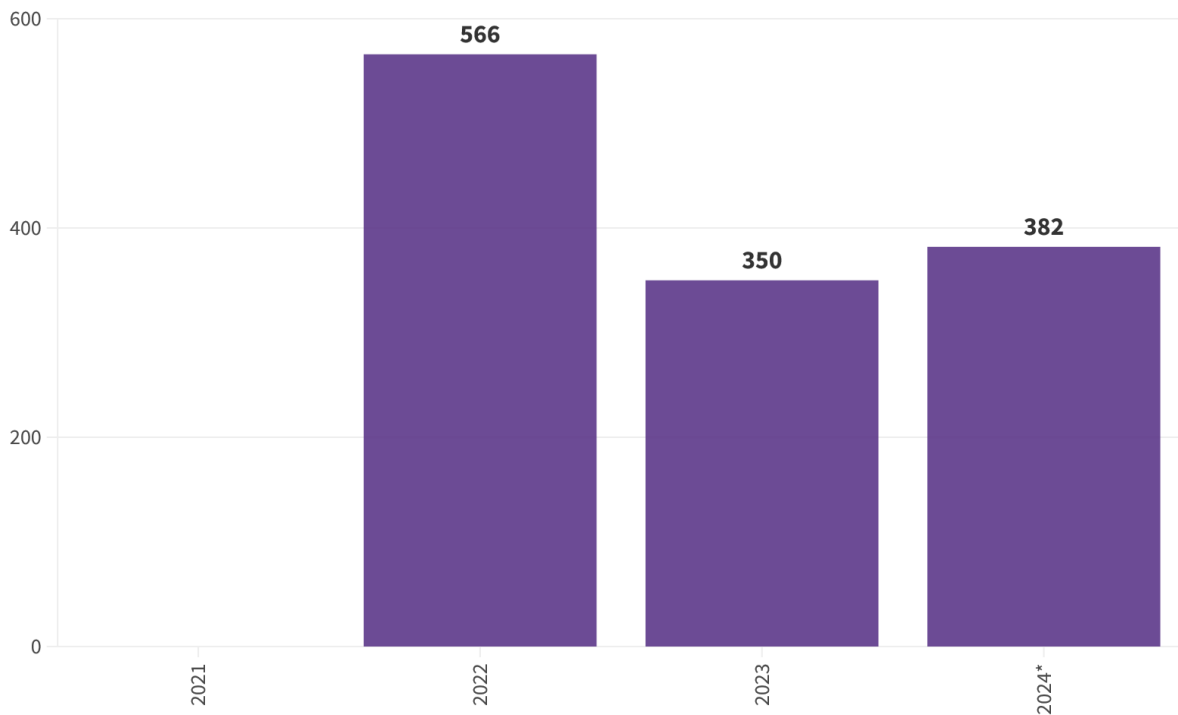
Monthly number of people added to the List of Extremists over the past 12 months

(according to official data from the Interior Ministry)



Change in the quarterly average number of people included on the List of Extremists since March 2022

(according to official data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)



INDIVIDUALS ON THE LIST OF TERRORISTS

Unfortunately, it is not possible to conduct a detailed analysis of trends in the “terrorist list” as we did with other indicators of repression.

There are several reasons for this. First is the specific way in which information is presented on the list: the date when a person was added to the list is not disclosed, making detailed analysis of trends impossible. Second, following the Cyberpartisan hacking of KGB databases, open-source information on citizens added to List of Terrorists was missing for several months: from February to June 2024. Thanks to a June 28 update to his list, we have learned that over the last 4+ months, 35 citizens of Belarus were added to the List of Terrorists, but it remains impossible to determine how many people were added per month and when.

Therefore, we can only summarize that as of today, the List of Terrorists comprises 1,187 people, of which 447 (38%) are citizens of Belarus.

DETENTIONS: A PEAK OF REPRESSION

ACTUAL DETENTION

Arbitrary detention of political opponents is a hallmark of the Lukashenka regime. Historically, large-scale detentions have usually occurred in the post-election period.

In 2020 this pattern was broken: large-scale arrests began before the elections, and in the second quarter of 2020 around 600 people were detained. But the peak of detentions occurred on the days when the voting itself took place, when thousands of people were arbitrarily detained.

According to the most approximate estimates, more than 20,000 people were detained during the third quarter of 2020, taking into account both the period of 9-12 August and the subsequent Sunday demonstrations.

Active protest activity continued until the end of the year. At that time, the regime’s security forces detained hundreds and thousands of people a day, especially during the protest marches.

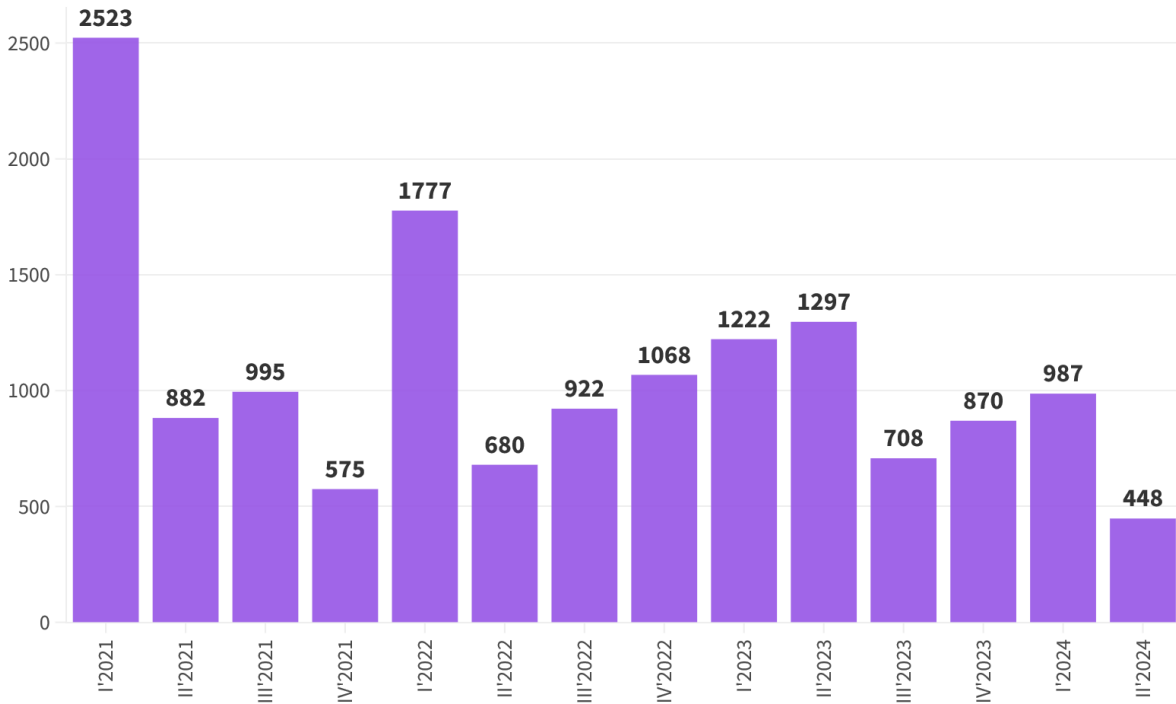
The last spike in these mass detentions was in the first quarter of 2021, when at least 2,523 people were detained. After that, there was a notable decrease in the number of detainees until the end of the year.

In the first quarter of 2022, we see another surge in the number of detentions, this time related to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine: at least 1,777 people were detained in the first quarter alone.

After that, in the second quarter of 2022, there was a more than twofold decrease in the number of detainees; however, starting in the third quarter, the number of detentions began to rise again, continuing for the next four quarters and peaking in the second quarter of 2023 (in connection with the bombing of a Russian aircraft at the Machulishchi airbase).

Quarterly number of people detained for political reasons since the second quarter of 2020

(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



Following pre-established patterns, after a surge in detentions in the third quarter of 2023, there was an almost twofold decline in repressive activity, followed by a new increase in the number of detentions. As we can see on the graphs, this rise lasted until the first quarter of the current year (remember the INeedHelp case).

According to preliminary data (we emphasize that at the time of writing the report, only preliminary data were available), at least 448 people were detained in the second quarter - 104 women and 344 men. The list of actions for which the regime detains Belarusians is unsurprising: participation in the 2020 protests, disrespecting representatives of the Belarusian regime, exposure to extremist materials, etc.

In general, since the beginning of the 2020 presidential election campaign, human rights advocates are aware of about 50,000 people who have been detained. As we wrote in the disclaimer to this report, in reality these figures will be higher.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROSECUTION

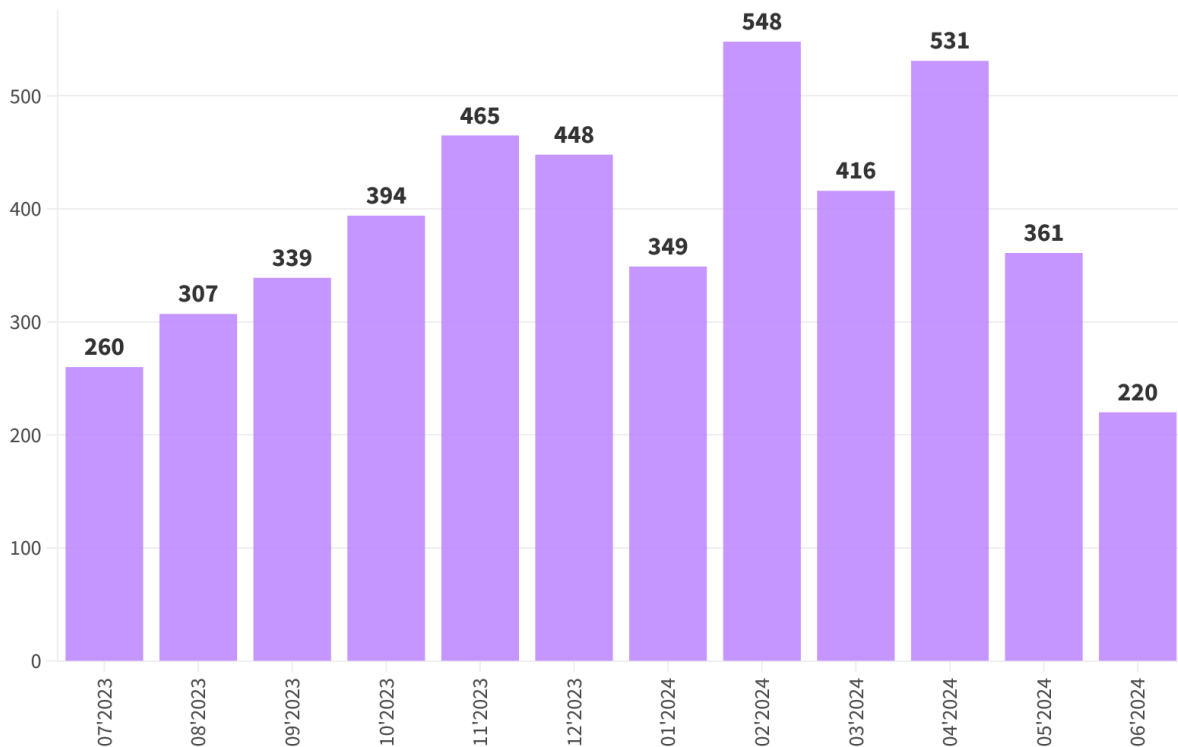
In 2020, the vast majority of detainees were subjected to administrative prosecution, which was often accompanied by torture and ill-treatment⁷ (torture in Belarusian places of detention continues to this day⁸).

In general, patterns of administrative prosecution (administrative arrests and fines) coincide with patterns of detention, adjusted for the share of detainees subjected to criminal prosecution instead.

In this reporting period, it should be noted that April 2024 saw a month-on-month high in the number of known cases of administrative prosecution — there were 531 such cases (another peak occurred two months earlier: in February 2024 there were 548 cases).

Comparing the quarterly average data from the past four years, it is clear that repressive pressure in the form of administrative prosecution of citizens has increased. Moreover, this rise has been ongoing since 2021, gaining momentum since 2022, with the average instances of administrative prosecution per quarter increasing by about 200 annually.

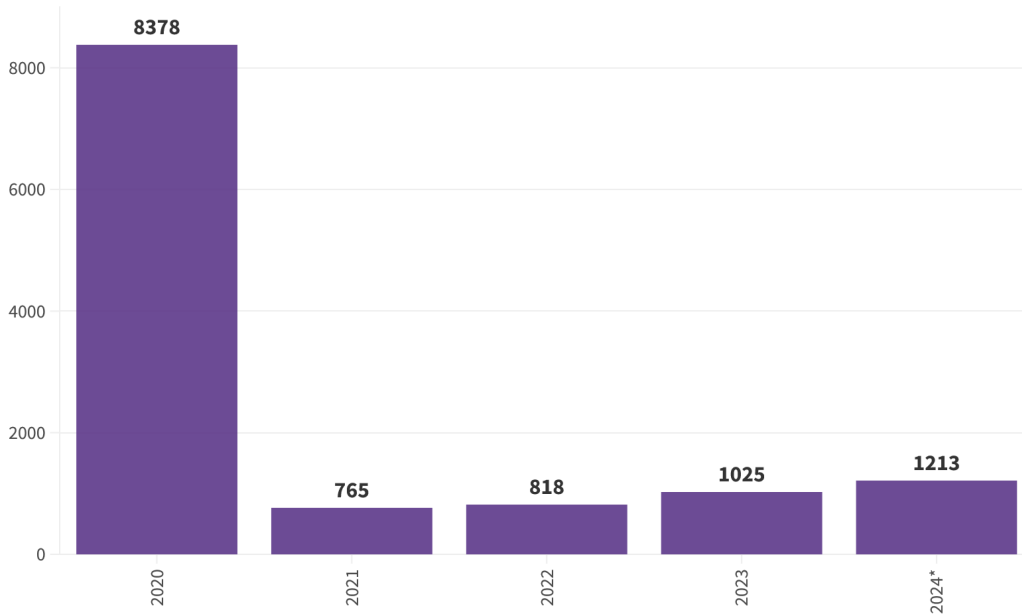
Monthly number of political administrative trials over the past 12 months
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



⁷ See, for example, [“The Police department of the Moscow region of the city of Minsk. Torture of detainees on August 9-13, 2020”](#)

⁸ See, for example, [“A law enforcement agent suggested cracking my skull open.”](#)

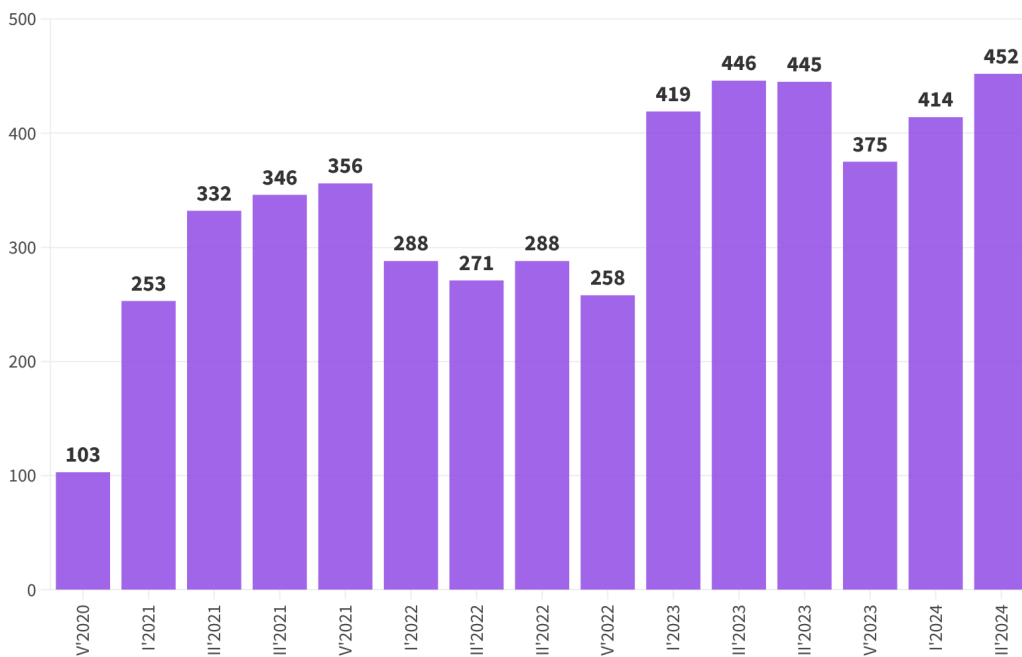
Change in the average quarterly number of instances of administrative prosecution since the third quarter of 2020
(according to the Viasna Data Center)



CRIMINAL PROSECUTION

Our record of criminal prosecution for those detained in 2020 begins in November of that year, when criminal cases began to be referred to the courts and it became possible to objectively track their number. At the same time, readers should note that because much information has been classified by the courts, about 20% of all cases are not registered by human rights defenders.

Quarterly number of people to receive criminal sentences since November 2020
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



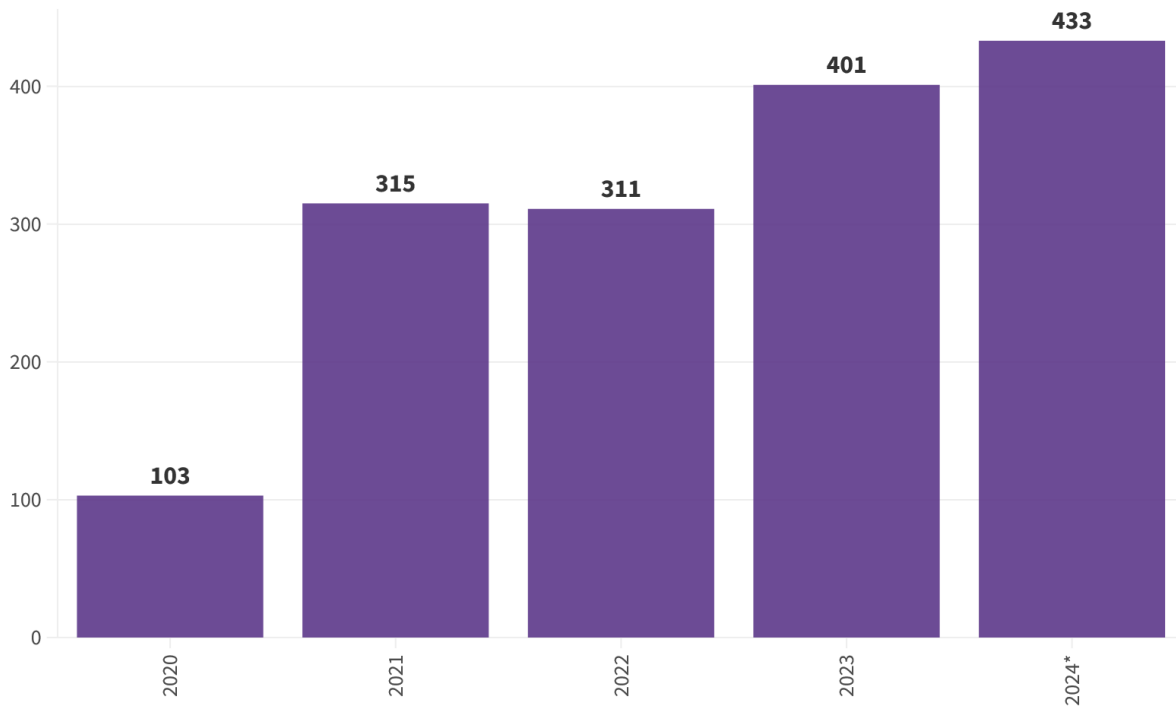
A retrospective analysis of the last four years indicates that the criminal prosecution of Belarusians who disagree with the current government occurs in waves:

- The first wave was in the second half of 2021;
- The second wave was in the middle of 2023.

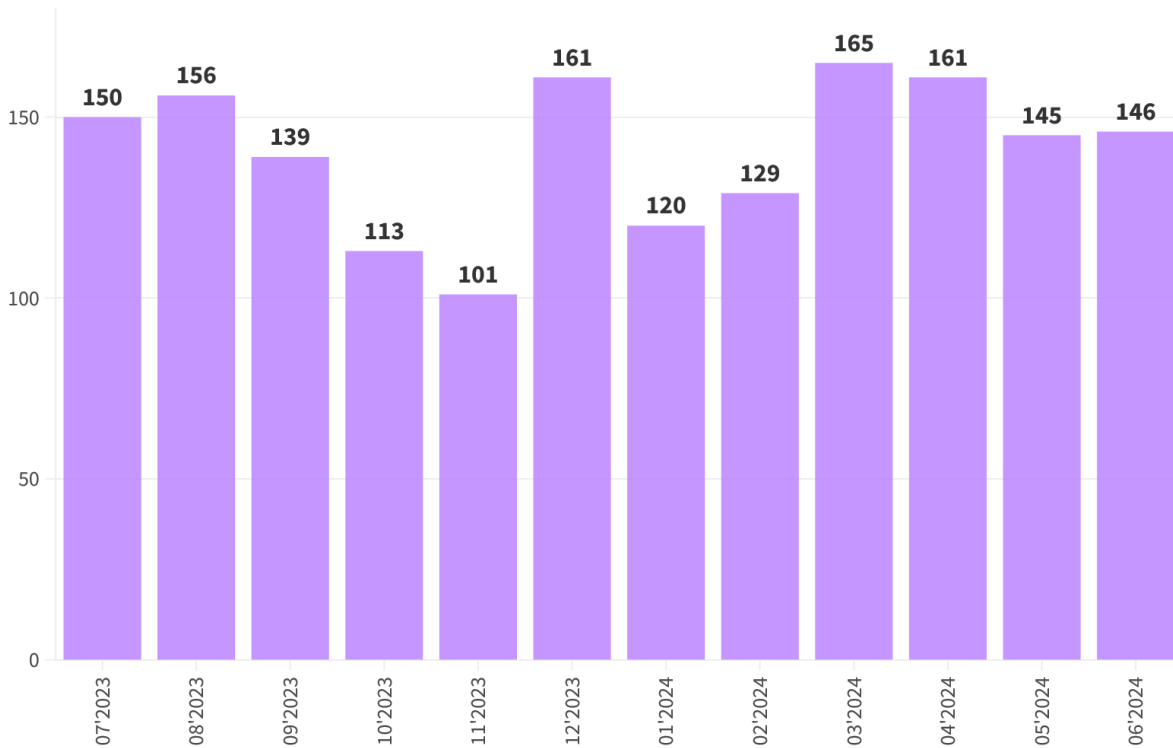
The data show that the second wave of criminal prosecution was larger than the first. The quarterly averages for 2023 are almost a quarter higher than those of 2021.

Currently, we are likely observing the beginning of a new, third wave of criminal prosecution of opponents of the Lukashenka regime. This wave began in the first quarter of 2024, and during the reporting period reached a level of more than 450 criminal cases per quarter - this is the absolute maximum for the last 4 years (monthly maximums fell on September and October 2024).

Change in the average quarterly number of people to receive criminal charges since November 2020
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



Monthly number of people to face criminal prosecution in the last 12 months
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



POLITICAL PRISONERS

The first officially recognized political prisoners after the start of the presidential election campaign were Siarhei Tsikhanouski⁹ and his team of six people, who were detained at a picket in Hrodna on May 29, 2020. They were declared political prisoners in a statement by human rights defenders on June 9, 2020. In total, 23 people were recognized as political prisoners in the second quarter of 2020.

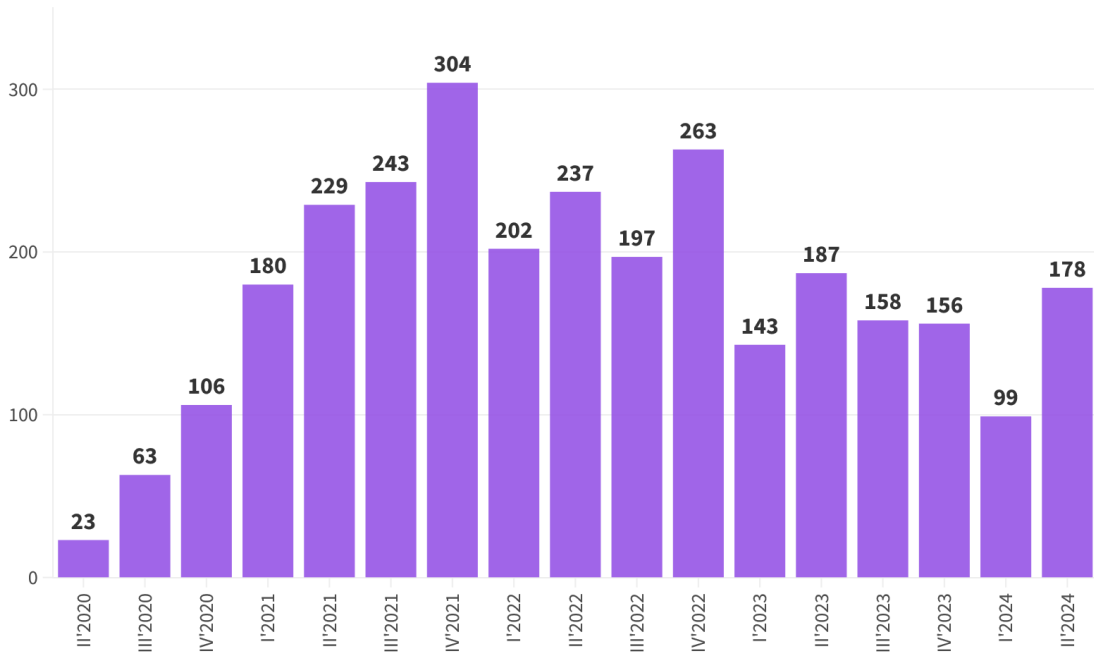
Subsequently, the monthly number of dissidents being declared political prisoners increased by 1.5–3 times over several quarters, reaching its peak in the last quarter of 2021. Then, during October alone, 127 people were recognized as political prisoners¹⁰. In the following years, the average quarterly number of “new” political prisoners began to decrease somewhat.

Examining the data for the reporting period, we observe a reversal of the previous trend of decreasing political prisoner numbers. Thus, whereas during the previous three quarters this indicator decreased by 1-24% compared to the previous period, then in the reporting period it increased by 80%: in the first quarter, the number of new political prisoners comprised 99 people, compared to 178 people in the reporting period.

⁹ An unregistered candidate for President of the Republic of Belarus in the 2020 elections.

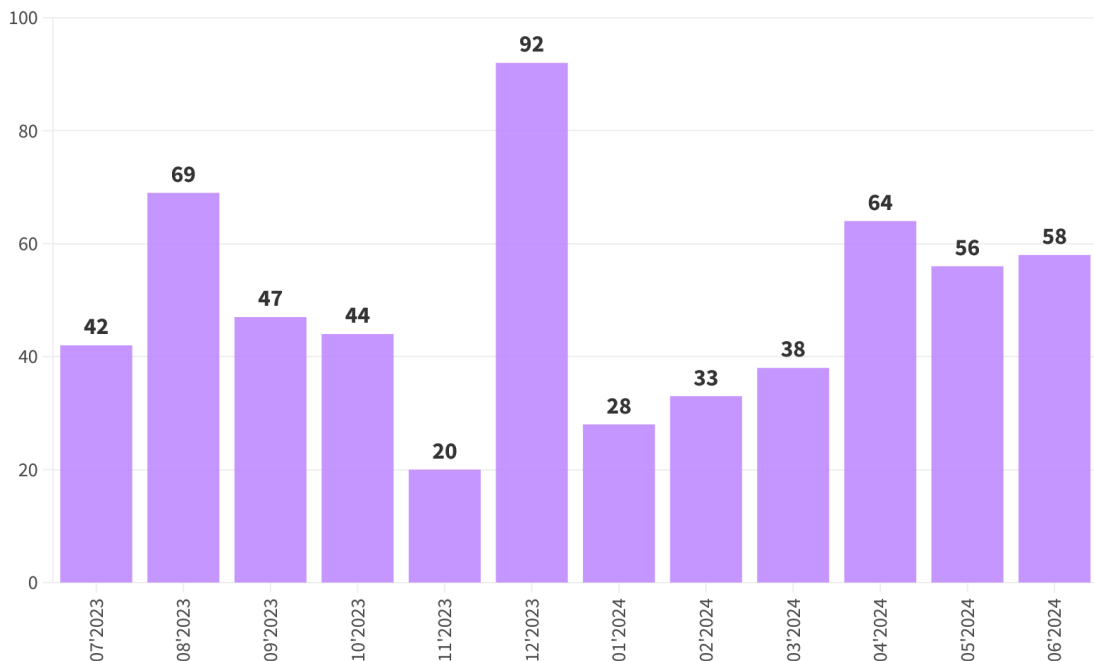
¹⁰ Many of them were arrested as part of the “Zeltser case.”

Quarterly number of people recognized as political prisoners since the second quarter of 2020
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)

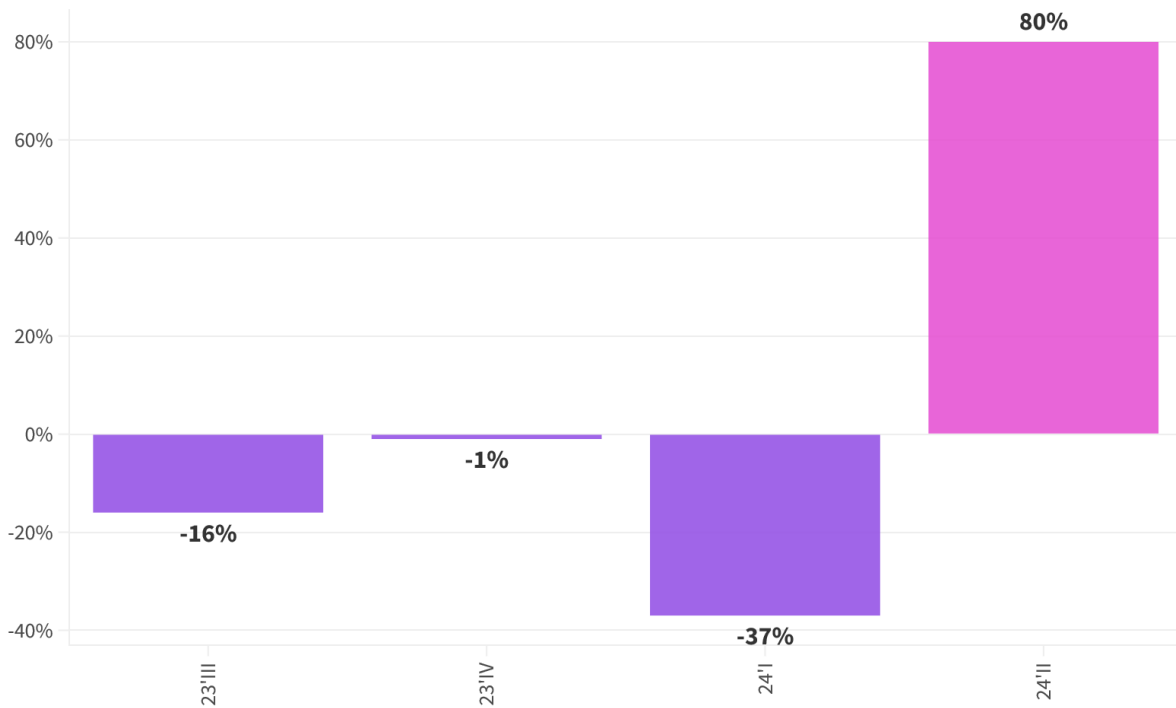


In general, the number of political prisoners in places of detention has remained at approximately the same level since the last quarter of 2022: +/- 1,450 people.

Monthly number of people recognized as political prisoners over the past 12 months
(according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



Change in the quarterly¹¹ number of people recognized as political prisoners over the last four quarters
 (according to the Viasna Human Rights Center)



In total, since the beginning of the 2020 presidential election campaign, the human rights community has recognized 3,330 people in Belarus as political prisoners, including 595 women. Of these, 1,413 political prisoners, including 168 women, were in prison at the end of June 2024¹².

¹¹ Comparison of this reporting period's indicators to the last

¹² ["The human rights situation in June 2024"](#)

CONCLUSIONS

In order to depict change in all our indicators, we have summarized data on the growth rates of indicators for the reporting quarter in relation to the previous period in one table. We also calculated the average indicators by quarter¹³.

	23'III	23'IV	24'I	24'II
Recognition of political prisoners	-16%	-1%	-37%	80%
New entries on the List of Terrorists	6%	-21%	-6%	74%
Growth in extremist formations	0%	0%	50%	25%
Criminal prosecution	-5%	-16%	10%	9%
Liquidation of NGOs/non-profits	18%	-35%	35%	5%
Court cases on extremist materials	-6%	28%	24%	2%
Items on the list of extremist groups	35%	12%	8%	-12%
Administrative prosecution	39%	44%	1%	-15%
Number of detainees	-45%	23%	13%	-55%
Average	3%	4%	11%	12%

Based on our data, we can conclude that the hypothesis we put forward earlier, that a new “repressive wave”¹⁴ began at the end of last year, is, unfortunately, confirmed — repressive pressure on Belarusian society is growing.

Based on this, we can also confirm the accuracy of the forecast we put forward in the second issue of the Barometer — that the increase in pressure on Belarusian society will continue (at least until the end of the 2025 election campaign).

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that almost all the quantitative information in this report should be interpreted as the minimum possible values. In reality, numerical figures reflecting repression in Belarus will be significantly higher.

¹³ Please note that in comparison with previous releases of the “Barometer of Repression”, the concluding graph may seem somewhat sparse. This is because it does not take into account data on “terrorists” (we wrote above the problems with data in this area early) and on mass arrests. We did not consider the latter in this issue, as we do not have data on them older than 2023.

¹⁴ See the [second](#) issue of the Barometer.

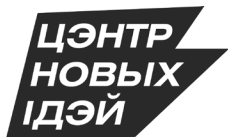
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Photo by “Viasna”