



# Monitoring of hate speech in relation to LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media in 2024

Results for January-October 2024

"Journalists for Tolerance" Human rights initiative

2024

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## Introduction

The 'Journalists for Tolerance' (further – J4t) research team regularly monitors hate speech against vulnerable groups in the Belarusian media, including annual monitoring of rhetoric in relation to LGBTQ+. In 2024, the J4t researchers team monitored rhetorical fallacies and hate speech in relation to LGBTQ+ within the 10-months' period from the beginning of January till the end of October.

The purpose of the monitoring study is to provide a systematic review of the use of incorrect vocabulary and manifestations of hate speech in the Belarusian media in relation to the LGBTQ+ community as one of vulnerable groups. Special attention was paid to the expressions that stigmatize the LGBTQ+ people.

### What is hate speech?

We understand the notion of 'hate speech' as a special way of linguistic construction of models and practices of social inequality<sup>1</sup> and we take it as an axiom that incorrect rhetorical strategies can strengthen (and, at the extreme, generate) discriminatory practices. We believe the opposite is also true: correct rhetoric can facilitate building relationships between representatives of different social groups based on the principles of equality and mutual respect.

In accordance with the methodological recommendations of human rights organizations in Belarus<sup>2</sup>, the research team distinguished between 'hate speech' and 'incorrect vocabulary' within the framework of this monitoring study.

By 'incorrect vocabulary' we mean stereotypical expressions regarding vulnerable groups of population that do not pose a threat to security, do not contain calls for violence and do not dehumanize people from vulnerable groups. The non-critical use of stereotypes by journalists can create fertile ground for the manifestations of more dangerous forms of 'hate speech'. However, there should be no legal responsibility for such expressions.

By 'hate speech' we mean statements that pose a threat to public safety, incite hatred and dehumanize certain groups of people. We divide conditionally hate speech manifestations into three groups, which differ in the threshold of seriousness in the expression of hate:

- direct calls to incite hatred, incitement to genocide, discrimination and violence,
- threats or insults motivated by a discriminatory attitude,
- statements containing discriminatory and stigmatizing attitudes.

Thus, certain publications included in the monitoring study may be encoded as containing incorrect vocabulary or as containing hate speech. We believe that even certain signs of incorrect rhetoric, being widespread, acceptable and accepted by default, can support existing discriminatory practices. Therefore, we strive to register and pay attention to any manifestations of incorrect rhetoric, regardless of their severity.

If the research team classifies a publication in the framework of the monitoring study as containing hate speech, it means that the particular journalistic material contradicts the

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<sup>1</sup> Индекс (ин)толерантности прессы. Э. Понарин, Д. Дубровский, А. Толкачева, Р. Акифьева // Язык вражды против общества/ Сост. А.Верховенский. - Москва: Центр «Сова», 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Hate Speech. Методические рекомендации правозащитных организаций в Беларуси.

corporate standards of the Belarusian media sphere and requires a response from the journalistic community.

#### What mass media are monitored?

The monitoring study focuses on the texts circulating in the Belarusian media space. The list of media outlets is formed in accordance with the following criteria:

1. The media has a website or a Telegram channel.
2. The media appeals to a wide audience (i.e., the ‘Glavnyi Bukhgalter’ (Chief Accountant) magazine and the like were removed from the list; publications for men and women as target audiences were kept on the list, a newspaper for teenagers was also kept on the list as directed towards the audience, which is sensitive to the topic of sexuality and gender identity).
3. The media publishes materials on socio-political topics (i.e., a newspaper of advertisements or jokes could not be included in the list).

In 2019, we identified over 200 media outlets that met these criteria and divided them into 4 clusters depending on the scale (national and local) and the average monthly number of publications (up to 300 publications, 300 and more publications a month).

The Belarusian media field has changed dramatically since August 2020. Lukashenka's regime closed the largest Web-portal tut.by, declared it extremist and blocked the operation of other independent media. More than half of the media outlets, which were included in our monitoring study, are currently blocked, and they are only accessible on social media/messengers or via VPN. However, the list of media outlets compiled in 2019 remained the basis for the selection of the sample.

In 2024, there appeared a need to revise the list of Belarusian media outlets from which the sample is formed, to bring it to a more accurate representation of the current media field in Belarus. The J4t research team conducted a new ‘census’ of Belarusian media and compiled a new list of media from which the sample is formed for regular monitoring studies and eventual non-periodic J4t’s research projects in the next 5 years (2024-2028).

First of all, new media that emerged in emigration were added to the list, and the list of Telegram channels that can be included in the monitoring sample was expanded. Secondly, all independent media are currently divided into those that have been labeled as ‘extremist’ in the Republic of Belarus and those that have not been labeled as ‘extremist’ there. This criterion is also taken into consideration, while the sample is formed nowadays.

#### The questions answered by the monitoring and the addressees of its outcome

The following issues were analyzed in detail within the monitoring study:

1. Which categories of media are more likely to use incorrect rhetoric against LGBTQ+ (and, consequently, which media authors should be the main target group of educational and awareness-raising events)?

2. Which incorrect rhetorical strategies are the most common (and, therefore, what should be the content of educational seminars, manuals for journalists, etc.)?

3. How has the use of incorrect rhetoric against LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media changed compared to previous years (and, consequently, how effective are educational events, educational seminars, manuals for journalists)?

The monitoring results are addressed to the journalistic community, human rights defenders, representatives of vulnerable groups (the LGBTQ+ community, in this particular case), as well as educational organizations and awareness-raising initiatives working with the issue of counteraction to hate speech.

## Methodology and data collection

The study is based on a cluster stratified sample representing online media in Belarus. Both websites and Telegram channels are considered as online media.

In 2024, the following media outlets were included in the list of monitored Web-resources:

Websites	Telegram channels
<a href="http://www.sb.by/">http://www.sb.by/</a> SB. Belarus Today	<a href="https://t.me/pul_1">https://t.me/pul_1</a> Pool Pervogo
<a href="https://sputnik.by/">https://sputnik.by/</a> Sputnik Belarus	<a href="https://t.me/sewerfsefsd">https://t.me/sewerfsefsd</a> ZhS Premium
<a href="http://www.vecherniy-mogilev.by/">http://www.vecherniy-mogilev.by/</a> Vecherniy Mogilev (Mahilou)	<a href="https://t.me/gajdukevichh">https://t.me/gajdukevichh</a> Gajdukevich Oleg
<a href="http://www.ostrovets.by/">http://www.ostrovets.by/</a> Astravetskaya Prauda (Astravets)	<a href="https://t.me/s/brest_basar">https://t.me/s/brest_basar</a> Brestskiy Basar
<a href="http://www.onliner.by">www.onliner.by</a> Onliner	<a href="https://t.me/nic_and_mike">https://t.me/nic_and_mike</a> Nic and Mike
<a href="https://www.zerkalo.io/">https://www.zerkalo.io/</a> Zerkalo	<a href="https://t.me/s/novosti_beloruskie">https://t.me/s/novosti_beloruskie</a> Belarus in shock!
<a href="https://mostmedia.io/">https://mostmedia.io/</a> MOST	<a href="https://t.me/s/gorodmozyr">https://t.me/s/gorodmozyr</a> MOZYR
<a href="http://s13.ru/">http://s13.ru/</a> s13 (Hrodna)	<a href="https://t.me/s/flagshtok">https://t.me/s/flagshtok</a> Flagshtok
<a href="http://belta.by/">http://belta.by/</a> Belarus News (BelTA)	<a href="https://t.me/belarusian_silovik">https://t.me/belarusian_silovik</a> Belarusian silovik
<a href="http://www.aif.by/">http://www.aif.by/</a> Arguments and Facts in Byelorussia	<a href="https://t.me/AzarenokCTV">https://t.me/AzarenokCTV</a> Azarenok. CTV. Belarus
<a href="https://minsknews.by/newspapers/vminsk/">https://minsknews.by/newspapers/vminsk/</a> Vecherniy Minsk (Minsk)	<a href="https://t.me/s/thisminsk">https://t.me/s/thisminsk</a> Это Минск, детка
<a href="http://www.budni.by/">http://www.budni.by/</a> Rayonnya Budni (Pruzhan district)	<a href="https://t.me/s/grodnosliv">https://t.me/s/grodnosliv</a> Grodno Slivy – Hrodna News
<a href="https://www.belarus.kp.ru/">https://www.belarus.kp.ru/</a> Komsomolskaya Pravda in Byelorussia	<a href="https://t.me/nexta_live">https://t.me/nexta_live</a> NEXTA Live
<a href="http://www.nn.by/">http://www.nn.by/</a> Nasha Niva	<a href="https://t.me/belteanews">https://t.me/belteanews</a> Tea with raspberry jam

<a href="https://media-polesye.com">https://media-polesye.com</a> Media-Palessie (Luninets)	<a href="https://t.me/GlavnyNewsBelarus">https://t.me/GlavnyNewsBelarus</a> Glavnaya [Main] News Belarus
<a href="https://gomel.media">https://gomel.media</a> Strong News (Homiel)	<a href="https://t.me/s/molodechno">https://t.me/s/molodechno</a> About Molodechno

A keyword search was conducted in the materials published in these media from the beginning of January till the end of October 2024. After the initial selection of all publications on the LGBTQ+ issue, all relevant materials were analyzed for the presence of incorrect vocabulary. Each publication containing incorrect vocabulary was additionally analyzed for the presence of hate speech manifestations.

Due to the presence of archived monitoring findings of the media coverage of LGBTQ+ issues in previous years<sup>3</sup>, the J4t research team was able to compare the situation in 2024 with the data from 2019-2023.

The consolidated database of all publications selected for the media monitoring study is attached to this report — see the file ‘Appendix. Hate Speech Monitoring 2024.xlsx’.

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<sup>3</sup> See the section "Our research" on the website of the "Journalists for Tolerance" human rights initiative: <https://j4t.by/category/issledovaniya/>

## Coverage of LGBTQ+ issues in the Belarusian mass media

In January–October 2024, 27 out of 32 Belarusian online media selected for monitoring wrote at least once on the topic of LGBTQ+. In total, 834 materials published during the specified period were monitored.

This is 2 times more than in the same period of 2023. In 2020-2022, we recorded a decrease in the number of publications, first due to the influence of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and then, starting from August 2020, because of the political crisis in Belarus.

In 2023, the number of publications resumed to increase (1.5 times more than in the same period of 2022). The growth continued and speeded-up in 2024.

- It is important to keep in mind that only 38% of the monitored publications were completely devoted to LGBTQ+ people or LGBTQ+ issues, whereas in the absolute majority of materials this topic was touched upon only in one or two sentences or in a paragraph.
- In January-October 2024, the media with national coverage published 7 times more materials on LGBTQ+-related topics than local media. In 2023, the gap was nearly the same, which indicates that the LGBTQ+ issue is going out of focus of regional media.
- In 2024, the share of correct materials slightly exceeded the share of incorrect publications, as it had been registered a year before: 52% of publications contained correct vocabulary regarding LGBTQ+, while 48% of publications contained incorrect vocabulary. Our monitoring study showed a steady decline in the share of correct materials already in 2020-2021, but then their share still exceeded the share of incorrect ones. In 2022, it was registered by the J4t research team for the first time after 2018 that the share of incorrect publications exceeded the share of correct materials in the monitored Belarusian mass media. The results of the monitoring studies in 2023-2024 show that the trend of the recent years has not been established completely yet.
- Almost nine out of every ten publications that contain incorrect vocabulary also contain hate speech manifestations in the form of stigmatizing or discriminating expressions. If previously the presence of incorrect vocabulary in publications was not necessarily associated with incitement to hatred, the connection became very strong in 2023-2024.
- Moreover, 14% of publications with formally correct vocabulary nevertheless contained hate speech manifestations in 2024. For the first time, we observed such a situation during the monitoring study in 2022. It remained the same in the year of 2023. And it was twice as frequently observed in 2024 in comparison to the previous year.
- Thus, 48% of publications on LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media contained hate speech manifestations in 2024. It is slightly more than in 2022-2023, when hate speech manifestations were found in 44-46% of publications. And this is considerably more than in 2021, when hate speech manifestations were observed in 24% of monitored materials. It seems that hate speech in relation to LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media has reached its maximum, as the Belarusian regime in power seriously promoted the issue of struggle against “LGBT propaganda” on all fronts



in 2023-2024. However, the alternative representation of the LGBTQ+ community in the independent media still prevails.

Since the second half year of 2020, the J4t research team has noticed that the predominance of correct vocabulary over incorrect in the Belarusian media became less stable and continued to weaken in 2021, until the picture changed completely to the negative in 2022.

In relatively recent waves of monitoring studies (before the political crisis in 2020), it was observed that the nation-wide media used correct vocabulary in relation to LGBTQ+ more and more frequently, while in local media the use of incorrect vocabulary remained unchanged.

In 2022, the difference between nation-wide and local media was not noticed. In 2023, it was observed that local media largely used incorrect rhetoric, including hate speech, in relation to LGBTQ+, while in the national media the negative trend was reversed to some extent, and the situation remained the same in 2024.

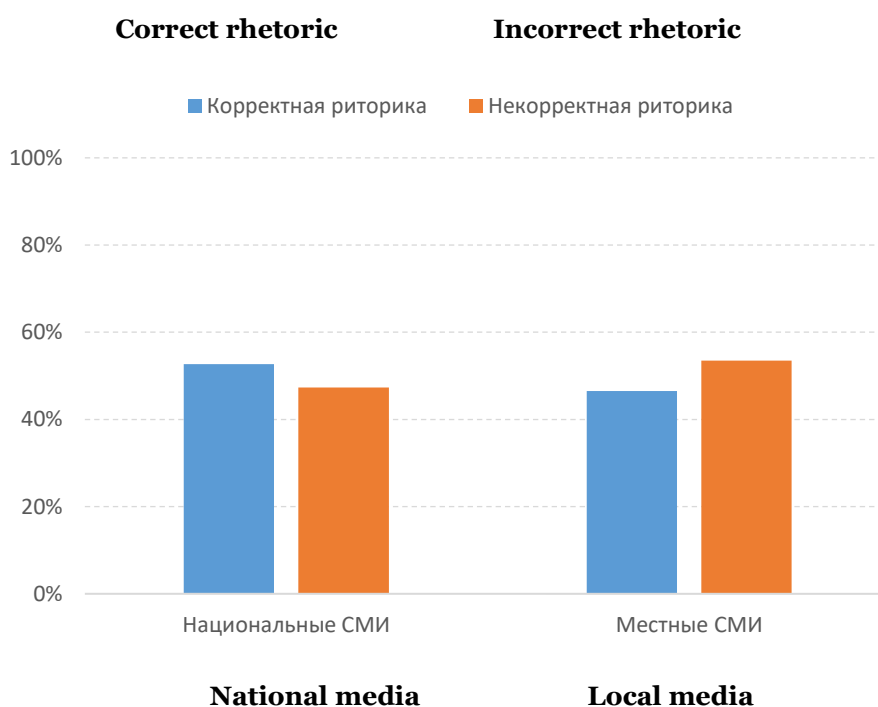


Chart 1. Breakdown of correct and incorrect LGBTQ+ publications depending on the media coverage

In 2022, the J4t research team registered the drastic reduction of the share of correct vocabulary in the publications about LGBTQ+ people and other LGBTQ issues. If earlier the publications that were entirely dedicated to LGBTQ+ people or LGBTQ+ topics contained correct vocabulary in almost 90% of cases, in 2022, this share significantly dropped. In 2023, the situation remained unchanged. The J4t research team noticed that the publications that deeply cover the issue and contain incorrect vocabulary and hate speech manifestations appeared regularly in the monitored Belarusian media during the period under review.

This phenomenon became an obvious regression even compared to the situation in 2021. In 2024, it can be confidently stated that the split between correct and incorrect representation of LGBT issues in the media was established and that it didn't depend on the publication format.

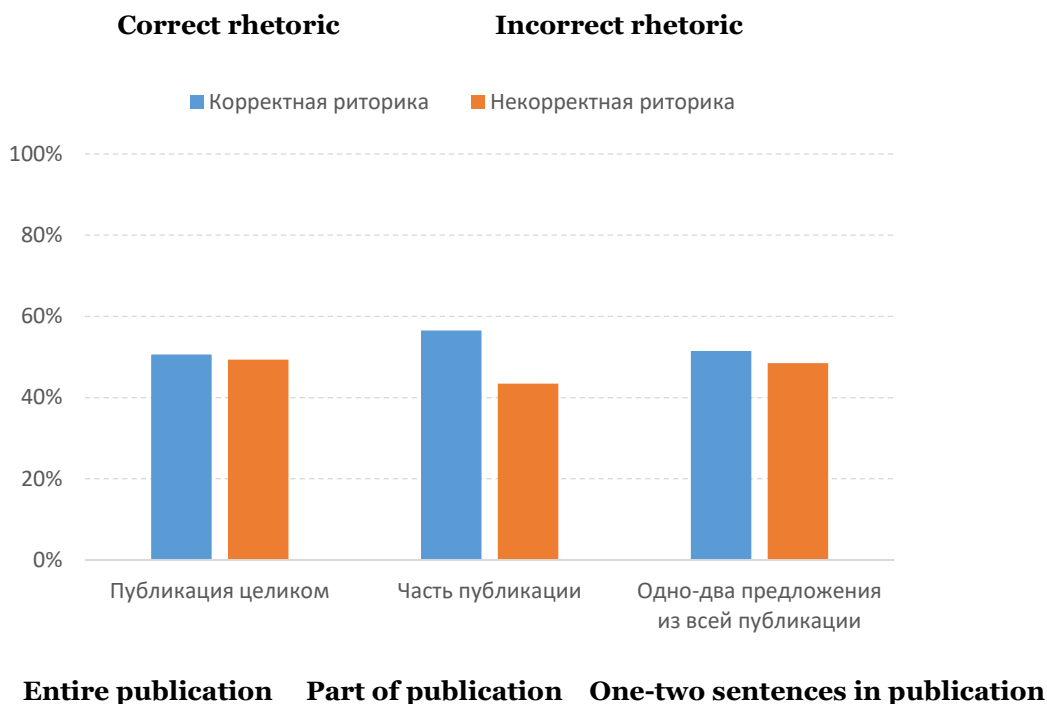


Chart 2. Breakdown of correct and incorrect publications on the topic of LGBTQ+, depending on the share devoted to the issue

The decrease in the number of publications on LGBTQ+, recorded by the J4t research team since the beginning of March 2020, was steadily accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the share of publications containing hate speech. Moreover, with an increase in the share of publications with incorrect vocabulary of more than 50%, the share of publications containing hate speech manifestations also increased dramatically – almost twice when compared to the monitoring outcome in 2021.

In 2023, the J4t research team observed almost complete coincidence of the use of incorrect rhetoric and manifestations of hate speech and the unprecedented level of incitement to hatred in the state media. At the same time, the use of hate speech against LGBTQ+ people didn't increase significantly in general in comparison with 2022, since parallelly there was observed the larger number of publications with correct rhetoric on the issue in the independent media.

In 2024, the picture was similar to the previous year. However, it was observed for the first time in the entire history of these monitoring studies that the share of hate speech exceeded the share of incorrect expressions (since, as mentioned above, the number and share of publications in which hatred was incited with the use of correct vocabulary increased significantly).

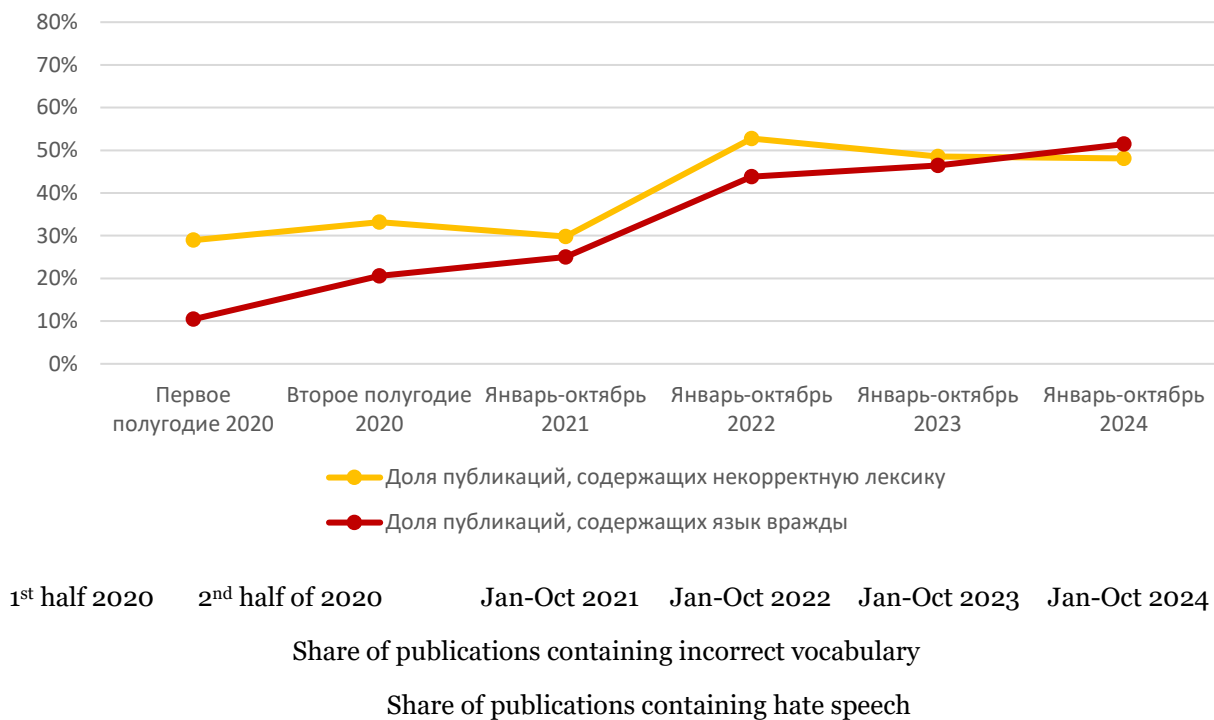


Chart 3. *Dynamics of the share of publications containing incorrect vocabulary and hate speech in 2020-2024.*

The situation with representation of LGBTQ-community in the Belarusian mass media continues to aggravate. It was only every 25th publication on this issue that reproduced and supported the stigmatizing or discriminating attitudes towards LGBT people before the COVID-19 pandemic. After the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19, every seventh publication on the topic contained manifestations of hate speech. It was every fifth publication after the beginning of the political crisis, every fourth – in 2021, and practically every second publication in 2022-2024 that contained hate speech in relation to LGBTQ+ people at that.

### Hate speech in the so-called “extremist” and “non-extremist” mass media

The mass media that have been recognized by the regime in power in Belarus as “extremist” cover the LGBTQ+ issues in the utterly correct way. On the contrary, the “non-extremist” media are inclined to inciting hatred.

The J4t research team managed to collect the sufficient amount of publications in 2024, which was enough to compare the coverage of LGBTQ+ issues by the so-called “extremist” and other mass media in Belarus.

The media monitoring outcome shows that 96% of publications about LGBT-people in the so-called “extremist” mass media are correct and that only 4% of such publications contain incorrect vocabulary and 2% of publications contain hate speech there.

At the same time, “non-extremist” media, predominantly adhering to the official position of the regime in power, cover correctly the LGBTQ+ issues in 23% of publications and incorrectly in 77% of publications. As far as the manifestations of hate speech is concerned, they can be observed in 84% of publications, i.e. out of every 10 materials on the LGBT+ issue in pro-governmental media, there can be found 8-9 publications that incite hatred towards LGBT people.

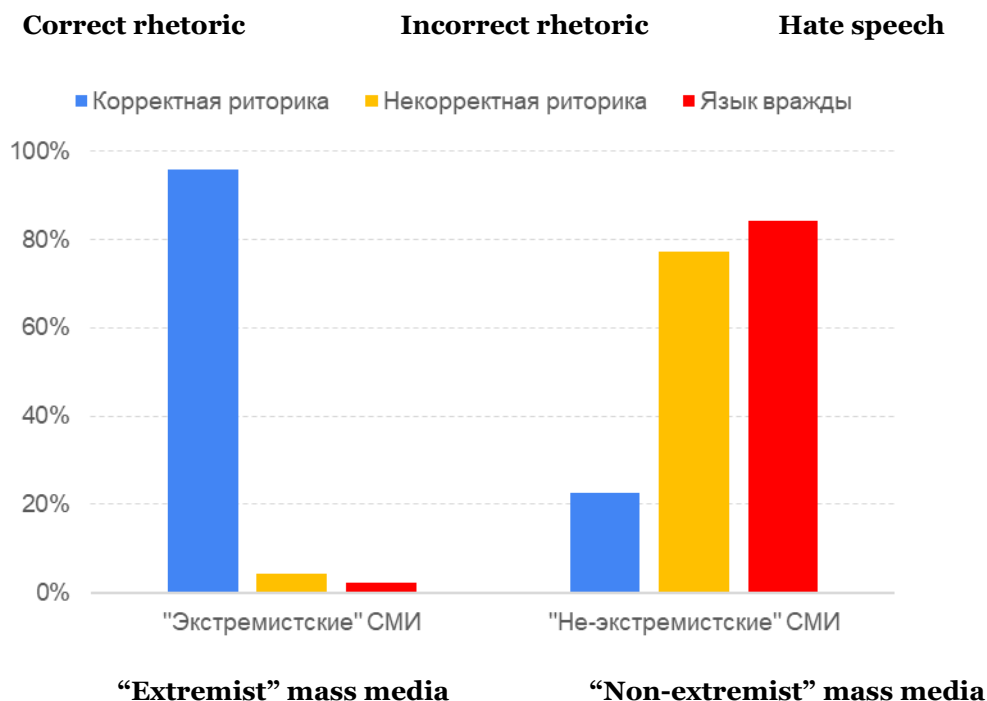


Chart 4. Distribution of correct and incorrect publications on the LGBTQ+ issues, as well as the presence of hate speech in relation to the LGBTQ+ people, depending on the status of the media

Chart 4 looks absolutely Orwellian. Additional analysis shows that in addition to differences in media status, the LGBTQ+ topic is handled differently on the web and in Telegram. Thus, hate speech is contained in as many as 24% of publications on the topic on websites and 82% of publications in Telegram channels.

### LGBTQ+ groups’ visibility

The J4t research team interprets the different frequency of mentioning keywords as manifestation of different visibility of groups within LGBTQ+. The monitoring data till 2020 indicated the consolidation and use of *LGBT* and *gays* as synonyms of two key categories, often representing LGBTQ+ as a whole. However, since 2021 till the present moment of time, it has been possible to observe the predominance of the *LGBT* category over the rest. The outcome of media monitoring 2024 proved that, too.

Moreover, the TOP 5 categories included 'same-sex relationships/marriages', 'transgender' and homosexuality in 2024.

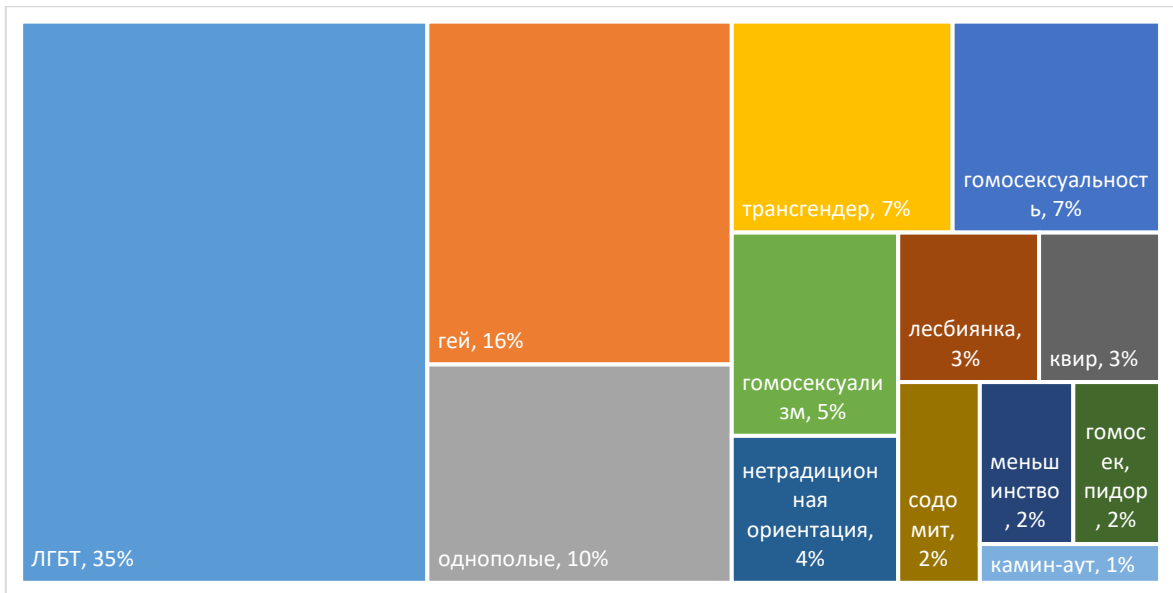


Chart 5. Keywords mentioning<sup>4</sup> in the LGBTQ+ related publications

LGBT – 35%

Gay – 16%

Same-sex – 10%

Transgender – 7%

Homosexuality – 7%

Homosexualism – 5%

Non-traditional orientation – 4%

Lesbian – 3%

Queer – 3%

Homo – 2%

Sodomite – 2%

Minority – 2%

Coming-out – 1%

The use of incorrect expressions “non-traditional orientation”, “sexual minority” and “homosexualism” occurred in 11% of cases that was somewhat less than in the previous years. These concepts have begun to be replaced by the increasingly popular category of “LGBT propaganda” in the recent years. Just like in the previous year, the J4t research team observed the use of such notions as “rainbow”, “sodomite” and “tranny” to describe LGBTQ+ people in 2024. Absolutely abusive expressions were still found, too.

<sup>4</sup> This chart shows the ratio of individual keywords mentioning in individual publications that touch on LGBTQ+ issues. Information about the absolute values for this indicator can be found in the database consolidation, attached to this report – see file ‘Appendix. Hate Speech Monitoring 2024.xlsx’

## Summary

- In 2024, the share of correct materials slightly exceeded the share of incorrect publications: 52% of publications contained correct vocabulary regarding LGBTQ+, while 48% of publications contained incorrect vocabulary. However, the current situation is utterly unstable.
- Just like in 2022 and 2023, practically every second publications on the LGBTQ+ issue contained manifestations of hate speech. The trend of exponential growth of hate speech, characteristic of 2020-2022, was no longer in place. However, for the first time, the J4t research team observed that the share of publications containing hate speech exceeded the share of publications with the use of incorrect vocabulary.
- Just like in 2022-2023, the J4t research team observed the situation, when correct vocabulary was used in some Belarusian mass media to incite hatred towards LGBTQ+ people. The share of such publications significantly increased in 2024. As for the use of incorrect vocabulary, it was registered that it was accompanied by manifestations of hate speech in the overwhelming majority of cases.
- The mass media that have been labeled by the regime in power in Belarus as “extremist” cover the LGBTQ+ issues in the utterly correct way. On the contrary, the “non-extremist” media are inclined to inciting hatred.