

PROMPT

Narrative Report #3

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Deliverable 5.2. 3rd Narrative Report on the state of disinformation on the War in Ukraine, European Elections and LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms	
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INTRODUCTION

Disinformation continues to evolve as a dynamic and adaptive phenomenon, shaped by shifting geopolitical tensions, electoral cycles, and identity-based polarisation. Across Europe's digital public sphere, narratives are no longer isolated expressions of political opinion but rather components of coordinated ecosystems that operate across multiple platforms, languages, and national contexts. Within this increasingly contested informational environment, the 3rd European Narrative Observatory ([PROMPT](#)) employs AI-driven methodologies to monitor how disinformation narratives emerge, propagate and transform across time and multiple platforms.

The third narrative report examines three distinct yet interconnected domains of contemporary information manipulation. First, it analyses disinformation narratives, rhetorical strategies, and online coordination before the 2024 European Parliament elections, identifying how electoral legitimacy, sovereignty, and geopolitical alignment became focal points of manipulation. Second, the report explores the evolving landscape of disinformation targeting the rights of LGBTQ+ community across the European Union in late 2025-early 2026, uncovering how identity based narratives mobilise moral polarisation, cultural anxiety, and elite resentment. Third, it investigates disinformation trends surrounding Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine in late 2025-early 2026, with particular attention to narrative endurance, strategic reframing and cross platform amplification dynamics.

The report focuses not only on narrative content but also on the structural and behavioural dimension of information manipulation. It identifies coordinated dissemination patterns, examines the deployment of persuasion techniques, rhetorical devices and emotional triggers to intensify the resonance of narratives. By integrating engagement metrics and network analysis, it highlights the most active accounts, recurring amplification hubs, and cross-narrative coordination structures shaping the online ecosystem.

Taken altogether, the three chapters laid out in this report illustrate how electoral integrity, geopolitical conflict and minority rights are strategically interconnected within broader influence operations. Rather than pursuing ideological conversion alone, such operations frequently aim to erode trust, amplify polarisation, and generate participatory fatigue.

1. Disinformation Narratives, Rhetorical Strategies and Online Coordination Before and During the 2024 European Parliament Elections

1.1. Introduction

The EU's online public sphere has increasingly become a contested terrain, particularly during electoral cycles. The 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections exemplify this trend, with heightened disinformation efforts observed across member states. This chapter examines the narratives, claims and rhetorical strategies used by social media users to circulate mis- and disinformation five months before and during the 2024 EP elections. Drawing on two datasets from the social media platforms Bluesky, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X and Youtube in 8 PROMPT languages – Estonian, English, French, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian and Russian – this chapter examines how misleading narratives employ information persuasion techniques (PTs) as well as rhetorical figures (RFs) to enhance the narratives' emotional and rhetorical appeal, ultimately aiming to distort perceptions of the EU's performance and foster distrust in EU institutions. In addition, the chapter reveals how the spread of disinformation narratives is coordinated and enhanced, using the opportunities of advanced technologies.

Key findings

- **Concentrated narrative ecosystems built around EU delegitimisation.** Disinformation activity across platforms developed around several core narratives portraying the EU as illegitimate, corrupt, and a threat to national sovereignty. Election-rigging narratives were by far the most prevalent, followed by war-related narratives attacking legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and presenting EU policy areas—migration, climate, LGBTQ+ rights—as symptoms of a broader institutional decay. These narrative clusters formed a coherent ideological core that consistently framed the EU as structurally untrustworthy and in decline.
- **Coordinated, cross-community amplification rather than organic diffusion.** The analysis identified multiple synchronised actor communities—Italian right-wing political networks, a U.S. conservative media cluster, left-leaning Italian outlets, and French regional broadcasters—that systematically amplified overlapping narratives using repeated templates and timed posting. Despite ideological differences, these communities converged on key themes (sovereignty loss, institutional decay, migration-linked threats), demonstrating a transnationally aligned amplification system that relied on deliberate coordination rather than spontaneous public debate.
- **A shared persuasive repertoire centred on emotional manipulation, reputational attack, and rhetorically amplified threat framing.** Across platforms and languages, disinformation relied on a dense cluster of persuasion techniques designed to erode trust and heighten perceived danger. Techniques attacking

reputation—including name calling, guilt by association, casting doubt, appeal to hypocrisy, ad hominem attacks, smears/poisoning the well, genetic fallacy, appeal to an untrustworthy communicator, and pathologization—systematically delegitimised political actors, institutions, and electoral processes. These were complemented by techniques attacking arguments, such as cultural biases, appeal to fear, and appeal to authority, which exploited emotions, authority, or shared values rather than evidence to legitimise or delegitimise particular claims. The rhetorical layer reinforced these tactics through recurring use of hyperbole, antithesis, climax, metaphor, anaphora, anecdote, and euphemism, which amplified threat perceptions, dramatized political stakes, and reduced complex governance issues into morally loaded binaries that facilitated cross-narrative reinforcement.

- **Extreme concentration of narrative production.** Across nearly all EU-related disinformation narratives examined, a remarkably small subset of accounts drives the majority of content. The top 1% of accounts routinely generate between 20% and 30% of posts within key narratives, with several individual accounts producing 3–6% of all output for specific themes. This level of concentration far exceeds what would be expected under organic participation and points unambiguously to coordinated amplification structures. Importantly, this pattern holds consistently across thematic domains—from election delegitimation to migration, sovereignty claims, and geopolitical framing.
- **Temporal precision and cross-platform synchronisation.** Narrative activity was not diffuse but temporally concentrated during the election period, with sharp escalations beginning in early May 2024 and peaking in conjunction with the vote. This timing was remarkably consistent across platforms, despite their differing affordances and user behaviours. Twitter/X functioned as the primary agenda-setting environment, exhibiting both early activation and high volatility. Facebook sustained narratives over longer periods with smoother trajectories. TikTok and YouTube displayed reactive uptake patterns, with spikes occurring later and echoing narratives already established elsewhere. Bluesky remained marginal. The degree of cross-platform alignment observed—particularly the simultaneous surges in election delegitimation content—suggests deliberate coordination rather than independent, platform-specific dynamics.
- **Hierarchical narrative architecture.** The network analysis documents a clear core-periphery structure in which a tightly interconnected cluster of anti-EU narratives constitutes the ideological centre, while thematically distinct narratives (geopolitical and cultural) occupy peripheral positions. The central cluster—comprising claims that the EU is illegitimate, corrupt, neocolonial, or a threat to sovereignty—displays extreme internal cohesion, with the same accounts posting across multiple delegitimising themes simultaneously.

1.2. Introduction: populism and disinformation surrounding 2024 EP elections

The 2024 EP elections took place in a worrying political context defined by multiple crises: Russia's war in Ukraine, economic difficulties, the climate crisis, and increasing societal fragmentation (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024). The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in particular, has heightened security concerns, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Petsinis, 2024; Auers, 2024). Crises provide a fertile ground for both populism and disinformation, and the EP elections have become a central battleground where these phenomena are increasingly evident (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024).

Historically, EP elections are often considered "second-order national elections", meaning voters generally attach less importance to them than to national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980, as cited in Havlík & Kluknavská, 2024, p. 113; Wondreys, 2023). Nevertheless, the EP elections remain among the world's largest democratic exercises and must adhere to the highest democratic standards (European Commission, 2025). Despite the tumultuous atmosphere, the overall turnout in June 2024 remained stable at 50.74% (European Commission, 2025). The 2024 elections clearly demonstrated a political center-of-gravity shift to the right in the EP, marked by a rise in populist representation (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024).

The growing prominence of populist parties is rooted in a prolonged period of "multiple crises" since 2008, encompassing austerity, economic malaise, and migration crises (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024). Populism, defined as an ideology emphasizing the opposition between the "pure people" and a "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008), capitalizes on the societal divisions intensified by crises, using communication strategies built around narratives of insecurity (O'Malley, 2024). For instance, the Croatian radical right emphasized nativism and the opposition to 'gender ideology', focusing on defending Europe's Christian foundations (Petsinis, 2024). In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) capitalized on a broad amalgam of crises, covering migration, "climate terror", and "Corona chaos" (Miklin, 2024). Similarly, in France, the *Rassemblement National* (RN) framed the European elections as a referendum on national sovereignty, mobilizing support through anti-immigration rhetoric and opposition to EU climate and defence policies (Ivaldi, 2024). In Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) combined anti-migration and anti-EU narratives with digital outreach, despite internal scandals, and maintained strong support among younger voters (Arzheimer, 2024). In Poland, the far-right Confederation and the Law and Justice Party (PiS) leveraged fears around migration, EU overreach, and the European Green Deal, portraying Brussels as a threat to national sovereignty (Lipiński, 2024). In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fdi) promoted a confederal vision of Europe, opposing "punitive ecology" and aligning with conservative values, while Matteo Salvini's League intensified Eurosceptic messaging around defence and migration (Barana, 2024). The Baltic States - Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia - faced a surge of disinformation targeting EU climate policies, migration, and the war in Ukraine. In Latvia, populist parties such as For Stability! used TikTok to spread

Kremlin-aligned narratives; others claimed the EU would ban old cars and firewood heating, and the European Green Deal would drive Latvia into bankruptcy (Jemberga, 2025). Estonia saw similar tactics, with EKRE promoting voter manipulation claims and fears of conscription, while in Lithuania, false reports circulated about troop deployments to Ukraine and favoritism toward Ukrainian refugees (Jemberga, 2025). These cases illustrate how populist actors across Europe adapt their narratives to national contexts while converging on themes of insecurity, sovereignty, and cultural identity.

Overall, EU-related disinformation significantly increased in the months leading up to the elections, rising from 5% in January 2024 to 15% in May 2024 of the total detected disinformation (EDMO Task Force, 2024; European Commission, 2025). Disinformation primarily focused on four themes: the war in Ukraine, the European Green Deal, migration, and election integrity. Disinformation narratives claimed EU countries were being dragged into war, climate policies were tools of control, migrants threatened European identity, and election results would be rigged - all aiming to erode trust in EU institutions and democratic processes (EDMO Task Force, 2024; Jemberga, 2025). Furthermore, instances of coordinated FIMI activities were documented around the EP elections, primarily originating from Russia, intending to erode democratic trust and reduce EU support for Ukraine (EDMO Task Force, 2024; European Commission, 2025). The documented "Doppelganger network" is an example of such activity, involving the use of bots to manipulate public sentiment (Jemberga, 2025).

Populist parties across the EU capitalized on these divisive "wedge issues", embedding them within broader populist and illiberal rhetoric to mobilize specific voter segments (HaBler et al., 2025). Migration was framed as a threat to national identity and security, fuelling xenophobia and fear. Climate policy was portrayed as elitist overreach, endangering local livelihoods and sovereignty. Content related to Ukraine was used to challenge EU foreign policy and solidarity, often invoking conspiracy-like narratives. These wedge narratives were reinforced by populist rhetorical strategies: anti-elitism targeting EU institutions and mainstream media; people-centrism invoking vague appeals to "the people"; and exclusionary framing of migrants, political opponents, and liberal actors as threats (HaBler et al., 2025). Illiberal rhetoric further amplified these strategies through attacks on minority rights, academic freedom, and the rule of law, promoting majoritarian and traditionalist appeals that undermined pluralism and democratic norms (HaBler et al., 2025).

Rhetorical strategies play a crucial role in the dissemination and acceptance of disinformation, particularly in emotionally charged political contexts. As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) emphasize, effective disinformation is not merely about falsehoods - it is about crafting messages that evoke strong emotional responses, are visually compelling, and are repeated frequently to reinforce familiarity and perceived truthfulness. Repetition, in particular, has been shown to significantly increase the

acceptance of misleading claims, even when audiences are aware of their dubious origins (Paul & Matthews, 2016, as cited in Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 39, 227). Political actors and disinformation campaigns often exploit alarmist language, and appeals to identity and victimhood. For example, the Austrian FPÖ's campaign relied heavily on emotional provocation rather than factual argumentation, portraying opponents as corrupt elites and positioning themselves as defenders of the "common people" (Miklin, 2024). These rhetorical tactics are designed to bypass rational scrutiny and instead activate cognitive biases and tribal loyalties, making audiences more susceptible to manipulation.

Recent evidence from the July 2025 disinformation campaign against European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen illustrates these dynamics vividly. Kremlin-aligned media and influencers weaponized the politically sensitive context of a no-confidence vote to launch a coordinated narrative assault anchored in two core claims: that von der Leyen was corrupt and should be removed from office. These narratives were strategically reinforced by secondary frames portraying the EU as illegitimate, collapsing, and obsessed with anti-Russia policies. Analysis of 284 articles and social media posts revealed that repetition and cross-platform amplification were central to the campaign's success: the most frequently repeated narratives - "von der Leyen must be removed" and "she is corrupt" - also achieved the highest reach, demonstrating the power of consistency in disinformation tactics (Debunk.org, 2025). Emotional rhetoric, recycled conspiracy theories (e.g., "Pfizergate"), and provocative language such as depicting von der Leyen as a "Stalin-like" unelected leader were deployed to bypass rational scrutiny and evoke distrust. These narratives were not confined to fringe outlets; they were echoed across major Kremlin-controlled platforms like RT and RIA Novosti, amplified through social media manipulation, paid ads, and even leveraged by domestic actors such as Viktor Orbán, whose viral "Time to go" post acted as a catalyst for engagement. This case highlights how disinformation campaigns bundle multiple emotionally resonant claims - corruption, illegitimacy, collapse - into a coherent delegitimizing narrative, exploiting algorithmic amplification and politically charged moments to maximize impact.

The rise of social media has indeed amplified the effectiveness of these rhetorical strategies. Platforms like TikTok, Telegram, and Facebook are optimized for emotional engagement and rapid dissemination, allowing disinformation to spread virally through likes, shares, and comments (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The visual similarity between legitimate and misleading content complicates credibility assessments, especially when memes and videos are used to convey emotionally charged messages (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Computational amplification - through bots and cyborgs - creates a false sense of popularity and consensus, while micro-targeting enables tailored messaging that exploits users' behavioural data (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). While automated accounts are poor at creating disinformation, they are highly efficient at

publishing and distributing it (Shao et al., 2018). In the Baltic States, TikTok has become a key platform for spreading pro-Kremlin narratives, with radical political actors leveraging its algorithmic structure to reach younger and Russian-speaking audiences (Jemberga, 2025).

These developments underline the need to understand not only the content of disinformation but also the rhetorical and technological mechanisms that enable its persuasive power and societal impact. As demonstrated by Zilinsky et al. (2024), the effectiveness of disinformation is significantly amplified when it resonates with pre-existing psychological predispositions - particularly conspiracy thinking. Techniques such as simplification, distraction, appeal to fear, and repetition are especially potent when targeting audiences already inclined to distrust institutions or embrace anti-system narratives (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Zilinsky et al., 2024; Piskorski et al., 2023). Persuasion techniques such as "name calling", "guilt by association", and "false dilemma" are frequently used to polarize discourse and delegitimize opposing views (Piskorski et al., 2023). These techniques are often deployed in combination with framing dimensions - such as morality, cultural identity, or security - to evoke emotional responses and reinforce ideological and cultural biases. The convergence of rhetorical manipulation and platform-specific affordances creates a fertile environment for disinformation to thrive, especially when targeting vulnerable or ideologically predisposed audiences. Therefore, understanding and detecting these rhetorical patterns is essential for developing effective countermeasures and fostering media literacy in democratic societies.

1.3. Research questions and methodology

To further investigate the manipulative and rhetorical dynamics surrounding the 2024 EP elections, this chapter addresses several issues:

- 1. Which disinformation narratives were the most popular in the context of the 2024 EP elections?**
- 2. How were the disinformation narratives coordinated online?**
- 3. Which persuasion techniques (PTs) and rhetorical figures (RFs) were most frequently employed, and were there notable differences across languages in the deployment of rhetorical figures in particular**
- 4. How were disinformation narratives created, spread, and reinforced across platform networks?**

The methodology combines computational analysis with human validation to explore the micro-levers of misleading narratives. The 2024 EP elections were selected as a case study due to their pan-European scope, shared sub-topics such as the war in Ukraine, and their known vulnerability to coordinated disinformation campaigns. The fragmented yet interconnected nature of the digital space further supports their relevance. Data was

collected from the social media platforms Bluesky, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X and Youtube between January and June 2024.¹ The query design did not primarily focus on specific political actors or parties. This reflects an intentional emphasis on narrative content and framing, rather than actor-centred discourse, aligning the dataset with a narrative-level analytical approach. Data collection was guided by a deliberately broad and multilingual query strategy. Queries combined two main components:

1. Election-related references, including general terms for European elections and voting processes (e.g. "European elections").
2. Disinformation- and delegitimation-related terms, capturing claims about electoral fraud, manipulation, illegitimacy, elite conspiracies, and external interference (e.g. "rigged," "fraud," etc).²

The analytical framework integrates a language- and platform-agnostic AI pipeline based on large language models and embeddings (CompText), complemented by manual annotation and conceptual analysis of narratives and rhetorical strategies.³

Certain limitations must be acknowledged. AI is not a magic wand: processings may contain imprecisions or inaccuracies in the attribution of RFs and PTs, and therefore, the presented findings should be interpreted as indicative of general trends rather than definitive results. It should also be borne in mind that these outcomes may change slightly as the tool is further refined and adapted. Additionally, the analysis may be influenced by language imbalances within the dataset, which have been in part corrected by drawing specific datasets on low-resource languages. The current distribution of languages is uneven, and consequently, any observed linguistic differences should be viewed as illustrative rather than representative of the broader discourse. Furthermore, for content originating from YouTube and TikTok, only the textual components of posts were analysed; the audiovisual content of the videos themselves was not included in the analysis. Finally, the narratives used in this analysis were predefined. Consequently, posts are grouped under the narrative they most closely resemble, which means that a post may only partially align with a given narrative rather than fully representing it.

¹ In total, 1,240,104 social media posts were collected, 57,331 of which matched a narrative tracked by the PROMPT project. A dataset of 10,000 posts was extracted, representing Estonian (31 post), English (5,736 posts), French (2,652 posts), Italian (1,418 posts), Latvian (32 posts), Lithuanian (11 posts), Romanian (82 posts) and Russian (38 posts) were analysed. Given the overwhelming dominance of English, French, and Italian in the dataset, an additional dataset of 3,643 posts for the so called "Low Resource Languages" was created and analysed, comprising all PROMPT data collection posts on the EP topic in Estonian (358 posts), Latvian (480 posts), Lithuanian (285 posts), Romanian (2,015 posts), and Russian (505 posts). This dataset includes content from platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube.

² In addition to keyword-based queries, the collection strategy incorporated a wide range of hashtag-based queries explicitly associated with electoral fraud and delegitimation narratives across multiple languages. These included both English-language hashtags (e.g. #RiggedEUElections, #ElectionFraudEU, #FakeDemocracyEU) and their functional equivalents in French, Italian, Romanian, Baltic languages, and Russian. The multilingual design ensures that the dataset captures narratives circulating across different linguistic and national contexts, rather than being limited to a single language sphere.

³ More information on the methodology is available in the dedicated methodological note of the 2nd PROMPT narrative report: <https://disinfo-prompt.eu/posts/3pioVYvnxak90kJT1V8byu>

1.4. Findings from PROMPT: disinformation narratives, coordinated communities, persuasion techniques and rhetorical figures surrounding the 2024 EP elections

1.4.1. Narratives

For the narrative analysis (Q1), a representative dataset of 10'000 social media posts from Bluesky, Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube in the time period between January-June 2024 was used. The identified disinformation narratives can be grouped into three thematic areas: (1) narratives focusing on the functioning and legitimacy of the EU, (2) narratives addressing the war in Ukraine and related geopolitical dynamics, and (3) narratives concerning the implementation and consequences of EU policies.

Narratives on EU functioning and legitimacy are among the most prevalent. The largest narrative cluster claims that EU (and European national or local elections) are rigged or invalid (5,268 items). Five times less posts promote the narrative that the EU poses a risk to the sovereignty of its Member States, European nations, and neighbouring countries by challenging their economic, political, security, and national autonomy (1,161 items). Smaller but notable strand claims that EU institutions are illegitimate and corrupt (546 items). The remaining clusters engage in narratives claiming that the that the EU is a puppet or pawn of the US and its imperialist project (138 items); that the EU is a neocolonial project oppressing least developed, low-income or Global South nations and economies (35 items); and that the EU institutions and Western democracies are less efficient than authoritarian or illiberal regimes (34 items). These narratives aim to erode trust in the EU's democratic structures and delegitimise its role in European governance.

Narratives focused on the war in Ukraine constitute another major thematic area and include some of the most disinformative content. Most prominent among them are narratives questioning the legitimacy of Ukraine's government, portraying Zelensky and his "clique" as installing a corrupt and incompetent dictatorship in a "failed" state (577 items). Another large cluster dismisses negative portrayals of Russia, such as allegations of war crimes, civilian suffering, or election fraud, framing them as fabrications of Ukrainian and/or Western propaganda (473 items). A significant narrative strand claims that the West is an aggressive warmonger that deliberately foments conflicts and destabilises countries, including its own allies (164 items). Closely related are narratives arguing that Ukraine and/or other post-Soviet countries are puppets and/or platforms for the West in its geopolitical fight against Russia, escalating it into a world war (150 items). Another cluster alleges that the war is a pretext for Western powers to dismember Ukraine, exploit its resources and people, destroy its economy and sacrifice its future (102 items). Some narratives continue to assert that Ukraine and/or the West are ideologically aligned with or directly supporting Nazi principles, framing Russia as legitimate in "denazifying" Ukraine (95 items). Another cluster maintains that the war in Ukraine undermines EU countries' domestic welfare: sanctions, refugee inflows and

large-scale financial support to Kyiv are draining national budgets, harming local economies and putting pressure on social welfare systems, while Russia's economy remains unaffected or is reinforced (92 items). Smaller clusters justify or defend Russia by asserting that it is protecting itself against perceived cultural or ideological threats to traditional values or Russian identity (Russophobia) (19 items); or that Russia seeks peace, supports international law and the sovereignty of nations, and has a moral obligation to defend itself, stabilise its neighbourhood and support its allies (19 items); or that there is no independent Ukrainian state – that Ukraine historically belongs to Russia, and that Western powers have betrayed Russia and violated past commitments and agreements (10 items). Less common but highly disinformative claims include allegations that Ukraine and Ukrainians are aggressive warmongers or terrorists and pose a threat to European and global security (2 items). Overall, these narratives aim to erode trust in the EU and Western institutions, justify Russia's actions, and frame the conflict in a way that legitimizes Russia's aggression while undermining the credibility of Ukraine and its allies.

Narratives about the implementation of EU policies are less numerous but still significant in shaping perceptions. These include narratives that the EU's environmental policies and green agenda are inefficient and have negative consequences for domestic economies, societies, public health and security (589 items) and that immigrants are seizing power in the EU, which has negative economic, social, cultural or security consequences (181 items). A significant trend of disinformation evolves around the LGBTQ+ topic. The biggest narrative cluster claims that gender and LGBTQ+ ideologies have a corrupting influence on morally pure societies, so the 'natural family structure' and 'natural order' need to be protected (213 items). The LGBTQ+ topic extends into less numerous but highly disinformative narratives: that LGBTQ+ rights and people undermine the integrity of women's sports (35 items); that an imagined 'gender ideology' is dominating Western liberal democracies (Gayropa) (34 items); that political and cultural elites are infiltrated and corrupted by LGBTQ+ ideology, or are themselves close to LGBTQ+, and therefore morally corrupt and illegitimate (31 items); that the West is using LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion as a tool of cultural colonialism, trying to force its corrupt values onto the rest of the world (22 items); and that the LGBTQ+ community is violent, dangerous and/or is a threat to child safety (10 items). All these narratives reflect broader scepticism toward EU policy decisions and contribute to a framing of the EU as out of touch with citizens' values, vulnerable to external influence, and promoting social, cultural, and political agendas that threaten traditional norms, identities and national interests.

1.4.2. Coordinated behaviour communities

Disinformation surrounding the 2024 EP elections developed across a set of coordinated online communities that, despite differing in geography, ideology and media format, collectively contributed to an information environment marked by distrust, polarization and the amplification of recurring narratives. To discover online coordination (Q2), we

retained social media posts that matched disinformation narratives (n=57,331). We identified **four main networks**: a large Italian right-wing cluster built around Lega accounts, a U.S. conservative media ecosystem connected to Blaze Media, a smaller Italian left-leaning media cluster tied to *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, and an extensive French regional broadcasting network centred on BFM-affiliated channels.

	Coordinated accounts	Coordinated posts	Orientation
Community 1	13	994	Italian right-wing political messaging (Lega)
Community 2	18	166	U.S. conservative media ecosystem (Blaze Media cluster)
Community 3	5	210	Italian left-leaning media/political commentary (Il Fatto Quotidiano)
Community 4	38	698	French regional broadcasters (BFM-affiliated accounts)

Each community engaged in synchronous posting and the repeated circulation of overlapping themes, forming an ecosystem in which electoral and political disinformation could spread efficiently across platforms and national contexts.

The first and most prolific cluster consisted of 13 coordinated Italian Lega-affiliated accounts that produced 994 posts. Their communication focused heavily on portraying the EU as a threat to Italy’s sovereignty, identity and economic survival. This included claims that EU institutions undermined national autonomy, imposed harmful regulations and ignored Italian interests. Green Deal measures, agricultural rules and the 2035 directive on car engines were presented as destructive to key economic sectors, while migration was described as an existential security threat illustrated through references to criminal incidents involving migrants. Intense criticism of European elites, especially Ursula von der Leyen, was common, with some posts describing political decisions as a “coup” against the popular will. The community also promoted domestic political mobilization through rally announcements and voting calls, blending electoral campaigning with narrative reinforcement. This highly coordinated activity allowed the cluster to broadcast a consistent set of messages that cast the EU as an external adversary, portrayed the government’s opponents as dangerous or incompetent and channelled frustration into electoral action.

A second community of 18 Blaze Media-affiliated accounts produced 166 posts and served as a bridge for U.S.-style conspiracy narratives to enter the European electoral context. The cluster promoted claims of widespread election fraud, both in the United States and Europe, asserting that electoral systems were structurally vulnerable and intentionally manipulated. It also circulated sweeping theories about a global “power

grab” by the EU, UN and World Health Organisation, portraying them as part of an orchestrated effort to undermine national sovereignty. Migration narratives resurfaced here too, with posts describing “illegal migrant communities” as instruments for political destabilization. These themes were supplemented by accusations that protest movements in democratic countries were not authentic but rather “colour revolutions” engineered by NGOs, intelligence agencies and wealthy donors. Through these narratives the community connected European electoral politics to a broader worldview in which elites, global institutions and foreign actors collude to subvert democratic systems. Its coordinated amplification of U.S. conspiracy language within a European context highlights the transnational circulation of disinformation narratives during the election period.

A third coordinated network, significantly smaller in scale (5 accounts and 210 posts), revolved around *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, an Italian left-leaning news outlet. Although not ideologically aligned with the previous communities, it similarly exhibited patterns of repeated messaging and coordinated topic emphasis. Posts frequently raised concerns about the fairness of the media environment ahead of the elections, alleging that governing parties sought to weaken *par condicio* rules to secure favourable coverage. Other topics included disputes over national and EU sovereignty, with posts amplifying internal political conflicts such as Lega’s criticism of President Mattarella. The war in Ukraine appeared as a recurring issue, framed in terms of the financial burden placed on Italy, with claims that official figures understated the country’s true level of military and humanitarian support. Additionally, corruption narratives connected major public projects to mafia interests or accused political elites of misconduct. The community also circulated material questioning the judiciary and suggesting that institutional actors behaved in partisan ways. Although these narratives differ ideologically from the right-wing clusters, they contributed to a fragmented and distrustful public sphere by emphasizing corruption, institutional decay and political manipulation during the election cycle.

The fourth network was the largest by number of accounts: 38 coordinated French regional broadcasting channels linked to (mainstream) BFM TV producing 698 posts. Interestingly, while many messages conveyed neutral civic information—such as voting instructions or program announcements—others reflected recurrent election-adjacent narratives found elsewhere in the dataset. Security themes were prominent, with posts endorsing strengthened borders, rearmament and national defence as necessary responses to terrorism and geopolitical threats. The conflict in Ukraine appeared in politicized form, with some posts accusing President Macron and his party of exploiting the war for electoral advantage. Additional themes included scepticism towards Western military support for Ukraine and messages suggesting that Western countries were engaging in escalatory or destabilizing behaviour. Cultural-identity issues also emerged, with posts discussing Islamism, religious symbols and LGBT organizations in ways that

echoed broader culture-war dynamics. The mixture of neutral news content and politically charged narratives meant that the coordinated distribution of messages through this community could lend additional credibility and visibility to themes that aligned with broader patterns found across the other clusters.

Taken together, **these communities created an interlinked and mutually reinforcing information ecosystem** in the period before and during the 2024 EP elections. Although they differed in tone, ideology and intended audience, they converged around several recurrent themes: threats to national sovereignty, widespread institutional illegitimacy, fears around migration and public security, politicization of the Ukraine conflict, and the idea that elites or supranational bodies were manipulating political processes. These themes circulated across borders and platforms, aided by the coordinated behaviour of accounts that frequently posted similar or identical text in synchrony. As a result, narratives originating in one national context—such as U.S. election-fraud rhetoric—could be repurposed and integrated into discussions about European elections. Similarly, localized political tensions within Italy or France became part of a wider transnational narrative environment.

The combination of coordinated amplification, overlapping thematic content and cross-community resonance meant that **disinformation did not appear as isolated incidents** but rather as part of a structured and persistent flow of messages. Across all communities, a total of 74 accounts produced more than 2,000 coordinated posts, reinforcing a set of narratives that portrayed institutions as untrustworthy, elections as vulnerable, migrants as threats and political opponents as manipulative or corrupt.

A clear set of indicators demonstrated that these activities were not spontaneous but stemmed from deliberate coordination. Across communities, accounts frequently published identical or near-identical messages within minutes of each other, often using the same slogans, phrasing patterns or hashtags. The reuse of templated texts, synchronized posting surges around key electoral dates, and the repetition of specific figures or storylines—such as the “5.4 billion” claim in the Italian debate on Ukraine aid or repeated accusations of media-rule manipulation—showed that messaging was centrally shaped and then distributed across multiple aligned accounts. In some cases, neutral news content was systematically interwoven with political narratives, creating a “credibility blending” effect that reduced audience scepticism. Together, these indicators outlined a pattern of structured amplification designed to increase visibility, normalize specific interpretations of events and saturate online spaces with mutually reinforcing narratives during the electoral period.

1.4.3. Persuasion techniques

PTs are methods used to influence audiences, either through deceptive or non-deceptive means. Techniques that rely on manipulation are often covert and unethical, aiming to

mislead or distort reality by exploiting emotions and cognitive biases. Other persuasion techniques employ rhetorical and linguistic tools to shape opinions and attitudes without necessarily involving deception. This section identifies the most frequently employed PTs within the dataset, using a threshold of more than 200 occurrences.⁴

The analysis of PTs observed across the narrative clusters reveals several distinct techniques, which vary in both form and prevalence. **The most widespread group comprises attacks on reputation**, which aim to discredit individuals or institutions rather than engaging with their arguments. The most frequent technique within this category is **name calling or labelling** (4,507 occurrences) assigning derogatory or emotionally charged terms to delegitimise opponents.

Example: "EU is just another dictatorship dressed up as a democratic organization. Fact is that EU continue to undermine citizen rights and remove freedoms with no consequence. #dissolveEU #corruptEU #dkpol"

Guilt by association appears in 2,859 instances respectively, linking individuals or ideas to disreputable ideologies (such as Nazism) or groups to tarnish their image.

Example: "We're overrun with Communism/Naziism in Europe Maccabi. Left wing politicians in countries are steering it & in the European Parliament. Huge uprising with centre right conservative political parties and Independents going forward for the European elections & domestic elections. We must rid Europe of these progressive extreme left politicians in positions of power. Hitler was a extreme left nationalist, these are no different in my eyes. Follow Christine Anderson @AndersonAfDMdEP She's conservative and speaks out. Her family are survivors from the filthy Nazis."

Casting doubt (2,636 occurrences) subtly undermines the credibility of a person, institution or source, often through insinuation or rhetorical questioning, planting uncertainty in the audience's mind without making explicit accusations.

Example: "Why do you want to rejoin? The EU is at its worst point in history: corrupt, extremely right wing, overreaching on sovereign states and tampering in elections. #CorruptEU"

Appeal to hypocrisy (907 occurrences) questions credibility by charging the target with hypocrisy or inconsistency either in talk or action. **Ad hominem attacks** (784 occurrences) also contribute to undermining credibility by directly targeting individuals with insults or personal criticism instead of addressing their arguments.

Example: "#Kilestkon.

La Russie va attaquer une UE en ruiné pour récupérer quoi de la dette 😂

⁴ It should be noted that individual posts may contain multiple PTs simultaneously.

Sérieux qui voudrait se battre avec Macron comme chef 😊.

Ses arguments en carton vont réussir à convaincre quelques vieux électeurs macronistes.. pour finir à 15 % aux élections européennes⁵

(#Kilestkon.

Russia is going to attack a ruined EU to recover what from the debt 😊

Seriously, who would want to fight with Macron as the leader? 😊

His cardboard arguments will manage to convince a few old Macronist voters... ending up at 15% in the European elections)

Questioning the reputation (smears/poisoning the well) (733 occurrences) is also used to attack the reputation of the target by making strong negative claims about it, focusing in particular on undermining its character and moral stature rather than relying on an argument about the topic. Whether the claims are true or false is irrelevant for the effective use of this technique. **Genetic fallacy** (483 occurrences) judges whether a claim is true or false based on its origin rather than its actual content or evidence. It shifts attention to the source of an idea instead of its merits and is often used in politics or media to dismiss opposing views by attacking their associations instead of addressing their reasoning. By appealing to **untrustworthy communicator** (356 occurrences) one creates doubt by attacking the credibility of the communicator who is responsible for conveying information. **Pathologization** (295 occurrences) wrongly treats normal behaviours, emotions, or viewpoints as if they are medical or psychological problems. PT is often used to dismiss opponents by labelling them as irrational or unstable instead of engaging with their arguments, framing dissent as a sign of dysfunction rather than a legitimate perspective. Overall, this group represents the most frequently employed manipulation strategy (around 2/3 of the posts inhibit attacks on reputation), highlighting the central role of personal discrediting in disinformation narratives.

Another set of techniques focuses on **attacks on argument to justify**, which aim to legitimise or delegitimise particular claims by appealing to emotions, authority, or shared values rather than evidence. Among these, **cultural biases** (427 occurrences) are used, which reflects the tendency to interpret and judge things according to the values and beliefs of one's own society or community. It can lead people to form opinions and make decisions about others before having any direct experience with them. **Appeal to fear (fearmongering)** (309 occurrences) employs alarming language and exaggerated threats to provoke anxiety and urgency, often as a means of justifying aggressive or defensive actions.

Example: "Careful with the developments in Ukraine. With the people of Europe in the streets and European elections coming up in may the Globalist Mafia is ready for an escalation of the Ukraine conflict to stop their erosion of power. Let's be vigilant and not fall into yet another of their traps".

5

Appeal to authority (212 occurrences) similarly seeks to lend credibility to a claim by invoking experts or respected figures, even when their relevance to the topic is questionable.

Collectively, the techniques in this group demonstrate how emotional and cultural appeals are instrumental in reinforcing misleading narratives. Together, these PTs underpin the narratives identified in the analysis, revealing how disinformation operates not only through false content but also through subtle distortions of credibility, emotion, and reasoning.

1.4.4. Rhetorical figures across narrative clusters and languages

RFs are techniques employed in language and speech to persuade or impact an audience effectively; in the context of the PROMPT project, to persuade an audience to believe in disinformation/misinformation. They are used to implement the PTs through strategic use of language. Posts can contain multiple RFs, and their repeated use significantly enhances the reach and impact of disinformation.

Three main groups of RFs (around 75% of all RFs used in both datasets⁶) can be observed in both datasets, focusing on:

- 1) Amplification and exaggeration: these RFs heighten the impact of communication by making messages more persuasive and emotionally charged. Techniques like hyperbole, climax, and epanorthosis are used to dramatize threats or opportunities. Such exaggerations intensify fear or urgency, driving audiences toward emotional rather than rational responses and increasing the likelihood of belief and engagement;
- 2) Comparison, contrast, and false equivalencies: these RFs equate things that are not truly equivalent, often drawing on cultural or historical references to persuade the audience. They rely on devices such as antitheses, metaphors, similes, paradoxes, oxymorons, and allusions.
- 3) Repetition for emphasis and reinforcement, redundancy: repetition is a powerful rhetorical tool used to make messages memorable and emotionally resonant. RFs such as anaphora, epistrophe, epizeuxis, symploce, and adnomination repeat words, phrases, or structures to hammer home a specific point. Repetition not only aids recall but also shapes audience attitudes through cognitive reinforcement.

The next sections delve into the nine biggest narrative clusters highlighting the main claims within each cluster, the main RFs used to present them, and differences across the languages.

⁶ To analyse the RFs (Q3), the same dataset as for the narratives and PTs was used. In addition, an expanded dataset on 5 PROMPT languages – Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian and Russian – was analysed, to capture the differences across languages.

1.4.4.1. EU (and European national and local) elections are rigged or invalid

Across both datasets, the narrative asserting that EU elections are rigged or invalid remains highly consistent. In the larger multilingual dataset (English, French, Italian), posts articulate a sweeping allegation that European democracies have become fundamentally compromised by political elites, media systems, and transnational actors. The narrative claims that elections are orchestrated, predetermined, or structurally corrupted, often invoking slogans such as “stolen election,” “rigged system,” or “fake democracy,” which appear repeatedly in English and French content. These posts allege a wide range of manipulations - including ballot stuffing, electronic tampering, algorithmic vote weighting, and media judicial collusion - while presenting these mechanisms as longstanding and systematic. In Italian language entries, the narrative centres on fraudulent procedures, manipulated outcomes, and the installation of illegitimate leaders, framed within broader sentiments of political disenchantment.

The expanded five language dataset (Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Romanian, Russian) reflects the same overall structure but grounds the claims more directly in local administrative, procedural, or geopolitical contexts. Posts written in these languages emphasise, for instance, alleged manipulation in electronic voting systems (Latvian, Estonian), procedural chaos and missing protocols (Romanian), suppression of new political forces (Lithuanian), or the ideological assertion that EU elections are inherently undemocratic (Russian). Despite contextual variation, the overarching claim remains the same across all languages: European elections are portrayed as illegitimate, manipulated events orchestrated by powerful actors to maintain control, suppress dissent, and deceive the public.

Across both datasets, the rhetorical landscape is dominated by **six high frequency rhetorical figures: hyperbole, climax, antithesis, anaphora, metaphor, and anecdote**. These figures reinforce the narrative of electoral illegitimacy through emotional amplification, structural simplification, symbolic framing, and the introduction of personal or localised testimony.

Hyperbole appears most frequently and functions similarly across languages. It serves to exaggerate perceived flaws in the EU electoral system. Posts frequently describe the elections as fraudulent, illegitimate, or meaningless, using phrases such as “fake elections,” “stolen elections”, “a complete sham,” or “pseudoparliament” or “quasi parliament,” thereby amplifying distrust and urgency. Examples include posts such as: “EU elections are a sham designed to give the illusion of democracy”; “elezioni europee sono sempre ste una farsa” (European elections have always been a farce); “Les élections européennes ne servent à rien” (European elections are meaningless). In English, posts describe elections as “the most obviously rigged” ever, while French entries use strongly emotive phrases such as “élections complètement truquées” (completely rigged elections). Italian posts label elections “una miserabile farsa” (a miserable farce) or “una

ridicola farsa” (a ridiculous farce) using theatrical exaggeration to heighten the sense of public deception. In Romanian, posts describe “frauda asta epica la alegeri” (this epic election fraud) or claim that “haosul de la alegeri a permis fraudarea lor” (the chaos at the elections allowed them to be rigged).

Climax is used strategically in posts to amplify the perceived severity or significance of an issue. Posts often build emotional escalation, following a logic such as “rigged ballots,” “rigged machines,” “rigged democracy” to heighten outrage and a sense of insecurity due to new technologies applied in elections, while conveying a sense of systematic corruption. For example, one post declares, “Rigged machines that can be hacked with a pen. Internet connected to foreign entities. Mass mail ins. Can't even call that an election. God help us,” while another states, “Rigged Debates = Rigged Election = Rigged Democracy,” illustrating how the sequence of terms intensifies the perceived threat. Posts also tend to construct procedural escalation, describing step-by-step irregularities in the electoral process that culminate in broad declarations of illegitimacy. Overall, the climax structure guides the audience from initial concern to a dramatic conclusion, reinforcing the argument that the elections are fundamentally flawed.

Antithesis appears widely as well. It often serves to frame a conflict between “the people” and “the elites” and to juxtapose opposing ideas to emphasize contradictions - most notably the distinction between EU and national elections, or between democratic ideals and bureaucratic realities, for example, as in the post “There is no such thing as European elections since there is no such thing as European parliament”. Antithesis also emerges in framing state institutions versus citizens, secrecy versus exposure (notably in Estonian discussions of e-voting), or stability versus collapse.

Anaphora is used across all languages to intensify messaging and reinforce slogans, such as “There are no European elections. There are EU elections.” This repetition strengthens the narrative’s clarity and emotional resonance. It should be noted, however, that the AI processings did not always recognize anaphora correctly. While anaphora refers specifically to the repetition of words at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses, the tool occasionally identified cases where words—or even words with similar meanings—were repeated elsewhere in the text but not in sentence-initial position.

Metaphor emerges strongly in the first dataset and is present but less dominant in the second. Metaphor is used to liken the EU to oppressive or deceptive entities - such as a “mafia,” or “boot” - to evoke vivid imagery and moral condemnation. English posts describe elections as a “theatre show,” French posts refer to an “écran de fumée électoral” (electoral smoke screen), and Italian content frequently uses theatrical metaphors such as “una farsa” (a farce). These metaphors depict elections as orchestrated performances, reinforcing claims of deception.

Anecdote appears as a personal or local account of irregularities – lost votes, suspicious ballots, coercion, or procedural errors. These stories function as “pseudo-evidence,” making structural accusations feel concrete and relatable. Anecdotal reports are particularly prevalent in Romanian posts, which describe missing protocols, pre stamped ballots, and specific voting station incidents; Estonian posts also recount personal experiences with irregular e-voting logs or ballot secrecy issues.

While the described rhetorical figures appear across all languages, the datasets reveal some language specific tendencies in how these figures are employed. **These differences do not change the overall narrative but shape its stylistic delivery.** English posts frequently utilize climax to sequence events toward a disastrous conclusion, such as "rallies... ticking so fast... election will be stolen big time" or "Trial was rigged... elections were rigged... Republicans allowed it". Metaphors, for example, "fantasy soap box" or "straight out of the Donald J Trump playbook", are also common. English posts show also a high share of paradox, which is used to highlight the absurdity of the system. French rhetoric relies substantially on antithesis, which is often used to contrast the official version of events with a perceived "hidden truth," such as distinguishing between local results and national additions or the "deep state" vs. the population. The posts in French also introduce neologisms, using politically charged terms like "macronie" and "macronistes" to delegitimize the ruling party. Italian posts show a distinctive preference for metaphorical constructions – particularly theatrical metaphors, such as calling the elections a "farsa" (farce). Candidates are described as "burattini" (puppets) controlled by hidden "burattinai" (puppeteers). Anecdotes are frequent in Latvian and Romanian sources, where specific local incidents (e.g., missing ballots in specific districts, painted pieces of ballots) are used as proof of a wider conspiracy. Latvian and Estonian posts incorporate antithesis and hyperbole around e-voting concerns, often pairing anaphora with repeated doubts about electronic systems' transparency. Lithuanian posts exhibit more institutional political framing: rhetorical devices support arguments about ruling parties manipulating the system. Hyperbole and antithesis appear frequently, but with a more procedural emphasis than the more emotionally dramatic Romanian style. Russian language posts show an ideological use of rhetorical figures. The posts portray Europe as undemocratic, with elections seen as manipulated or predetermined, while Russia is depicted as politically stable and legitimately governed – a framing reinforced through hyperbole and anaphora.

1.4.4.2. The EU poses a risk to the national sovereignty

We observe a consistent narrative according to which the EU is portrayed as a structural threat to the sovereignty, autonomy, and democratic agency of its Member States and neighbouring countries. Across languages and platforms, users articulate the concern that EU-level decision-making increasingly overrides domestic political autonomy through institutional reforms, regulatory expansion, and the perceived dominance of

unelected bodies such as the European Commission. Assertions appear that the EU rolls over national constitutions or imposes rules that states must obey, suggesting an erosion of national democratic control. Economic sovereignty also features prominently: numerous posts claim that EU policies destroy national industries or agriculture, or force economic alignment through migration-related fines, energy regulations, or budgetary constraints that purportedly weaken domestic economic capacity. Cultural and demographic sovereignty likewise plays a central role. Many posts argue that the EU imposes social or migration policies that undermine national identity, traditions, or demographic stability, framing Brussels as hostile to national cultures and as advancing “globalist” or “ideological” agendas at odds with national preferences. In the posts, there are calls for “Frexit” or “Italexit,” emphasizing the need to reclaim power from “unelected bureaucrats” and to protect local agriculture and borders. Both datasets converge on the idea that the 2024 EP elections constitute an existential turning point for Europe's future. The elections are repeatedly framed as a decisive referendum on sovereignty, a moment after which nations can retain “independence” or lose it irreversibly under advancing European federalisation .

These claims are strongly reinforced through a set of rhetorical figures that dominate the narrative across all linguistic contexts. **Hyperbole** is the most pervasive, often transforming political criticism into catastrophic imagery. Posts describe the EU as “un monstre institutionnel” (“an institutional monster”), or claim that due to EU policies countries “continue going straight down to hell,” attaching existential stakes to the EU elections. In Russian, hyperbole similarly escalates the stakes, for example depicting Moldova’s EU accession process as a “pitiful, barely breathing parody of the Soviet Union,” emphasizing catastrophic consequences to economy of cutting off “from the vitally important Russian market” and moving towards the EU “from which even the founders themselves do not know where to go”.⁷

Antithesis is equally central, structuring EU politics as a zero-sum conflict between national self-determination and supranational domination. Italian posts employ the slogan “Più Italia, meno Europa” (“More Italy, less Europe”), while French posts contrast “l’Europe de Macron” (“Macron’s Europe”), associated with federal Europe, with “l’Europe des Nations” (“the Europe of Nations”) to frame political alignments as mutually exclusive and morally opposed. In Latvian, voters are urged to support candidates who “are ready to fight against the European Union’s imposed views and defend our country’s sovereignty”⁸, reinforcing the framing of national versus supranational interests.

⁷ Original post: “moldavane priveli k vlasti prokhozimtsev, kotorye otorvali ikh ot zhiznenno vazhnogo rossiiskogo rynka, razrushili do osnovaniia natsional'nuiu ekonomiku, vedut v zhalkuiu, dyshashchuiu na ladan parodiiu Sovetskogo Soiuza – Evropeiskii soiuz, iz kotorogo sami osnovateli ne znaiut, kuda podat'sia”.

⁸ Original post: “Musu briviba ir svariga un tai ir jabut ciesi aizsargatai. Eiropas Parlamenta vešanas ir iespeja izteikt savu atbalstu brivibai – gan ekonomikas, gan personigaja dzive. Mes varam atbalstit kandidatus, kuri ir gatavi cinities pret Eiropas Savienibas uzspiestajiem uzskatiem un aizstavet musu valsts suverenitati. Lai musu balsis izskanetu par brivibu un neatkaribu!”

Climax is used to heighten the sense that national sovereignty is being lost. A Latvian post, for example, claims that “more than 90% of Latvia’s economy is foreign-owned, making Latvia an economic colony of other countries” (vairāk nekā 90% Latvijas ekonomikas veido ārvalstu kapitāls. Proti - Latvija ir citu valstu ekonomiska kolonija), linking Latvia’s EU membership to dramatic economic and political consequences. Similarly, an Estonian post emphasizes the perceived surrender of state authority, noting that “to a certain extent, the Estonian people, mainly ethnic Estonians, gave their consent to give up certain attributes of statehood when Estonia joined the European Union (how this happened is a separate topic). The European Union, through its regulations, has completely overridden Estonia’s independence⁹, portraying EU integration as a dramatic erosion of national sovereignty.

Anaphora is used to convey urgency in mobilising appeals, as in the Italian “non puo iniziare le leggi [...]; non elegge il presidente della commissione” (it cannot initiate laws [...]; it does not elect the Commission president”, which invites to abstain from elections, emphasising the limited powers of the EP. Anaphora is well represented in the French anti-macronist post, dramatizing the effect of EU’s perceived federalisation:

“[...] We don’t need his normative, punitive Europe, one that drifts toward federalism. Let it stop “ruining” the French. We need an Europe that doesn’t suffocate nation-states and doesn’t seize their sovereignty. We want an Europe that doesn’t trample national interests, that doesn’t abandon our farmers, producers, and livestock breeders. We want an Europe as a “bulwark” against wild, mass, and conquering immigration. We want an Europe capable of protecting us from Islamism in space and time. We want an Europe that doesn’t seek to wage war against a nuclear power 35 times stronger than France. We want an Europe that prioritizes nation-states over foreign countries. [...]”¹⁰

Metaphor further shapes public imagination by rendering the EU as a hostile force, often through imagery of imprisonment, colonisation, or predation. Italian posts refer to the EU as “una gabbia burocratica e guerrafondaia” (“a bureaucratic and warlike cage”), while the French post refers to “erasing” France from Europe the same way “how they removed the departments from the license plates of cars”. These metaphoric constructions convert EU governance structures into easily visualised and emotionally charged entities, reinforcing the narrative of existential threat.

⁹ Original post: “Teatud osas andis Eesti rahvas, peamiselt eestlased nousoleku loobuda teatud riigi tunnustest siis kui Eesti liitus Euroopa Liiduga (see kuidas see toimus on omaette teema). Euroopa Liit on oma maarustega ule Eesti iseseisvusest taelikult ule rullinud”

¹⁰ Original post: “Nous n’avons pas besoin de son Europe normative, punitive, qui verse dans le federalisme. Qu’elle arrete d’ailleurs “d’emmerder les francais”. Nous avons besoin d’une Europe qui n’étouffe pas les Etats nations et qui ne confisque pas leur souverainete. Nous voulons une Europe qui ne pietine pas l’interet national, qui n’abandonne pas nos agriculteurs, nos producteurs et nos eleveurs. Nous voulons une Europe “rempart” contre l’immigration sauvage, massive et conquerante. Nous voulons une Europe capable de nous proteger de l’islamisme dans l’espace et dans le temps. Nous voulons une Europe qui ne cherche pas a entrer en guerre contre une puissance nucleaire 35 fois plus grande que la France. Nous voulons une Europe qui donne la priorite aux Etats nations plutot qu’a des pays etrangers.”

Across all languages the discursive structure remains similar: the EU is personified as a centralising, coercive, or predatory force; sovereignty is presented as fragile and embattled; and rhetorical amplification - through hyperbole, antithesis, climax, anaphora, and metaphor - serves to mobilise audiences around the idea that national independence is at imminent risk. The use of rhetorical figures in the provided sources shows a consistent pattern of using highly charged language to discuss EU sovereignty. The most ubiquitous rhetorical figures across all languages in the corpus are hyperbole, antithesis, and climax. Hyperbole is used to emphasize the perceived "catastrophic" or "totalitarian" nature of EU actions. Antithesis is frequently used to contrast national interests with those of "Brussels" or "globalists". Climax is often utilized to build emotional momentum, listing a series of grievances that culminate in a call for action or a dire prediction.

Nevertheless, language-specific trends can also be observed. Paradox and oxymoron (e.g., "souverainete europeenne") are specifically targeted in French rhetoric to highlight logical contradictions in EU federalist projects. Epanorthosis (correcting or qualifying a statement) appears more frequently in Italian. In English, metaphor is common, describing the EU as "plundering" or as a "basket case". Irony and sarcasm are also used to mock those who support further EU integration. Personification is used in Romanian and French to claim "the European Union forces Romanians to do this!" or to spread calls such as, "Defend with Jordan Bardella our country's identity against the globalists of Brussels!". Hypophora (asking a question and immediately answering it) is a notable feature in Russian analytical narratives. Russian, Romanian and Latvian posts use metonymy (using one concept to refer to another), such as referring to "Brussels" to represent the entire EU political apparatus.

1.4.4.3. The EU's environmental policies and green agenda are inefficient

The social media posts in this cluster frame the EU and its associated policies - particularly environmental and agricultural standards - as deliberately harmful to national interests, sovereignty, and economic stability. Environmental policies are often described as "ecologie punitive" (punitive ecology) or "politique de classe" (class politics), reflecting a "deconnexion avec les classes populaires" ("disconnection from the working classes"). These mandates - ranging from high energy prices to compulsory housing renovations - are framed as disproportionately burdening poorer households and the middle class.

The agricultural sector is another central target of criticism. Posts claim that EU strategies are "en train de detruire notre agriculture et de tuer nos agriculteurs !" (destroying our agriculture and killing our farmers!). The "Farm to Fork" strategy is explicitly labeled as a "destruction methodique de l'agriculture europeenne au service d'une ideologie mortifaire" (methodical destruction of European agriculture at the

service of a deadly ideology), framing food policy as ideologically driven and harmful to farmers' livelihoods.

Broader EU climate and environmental initiatives are frequently dismissed as ideological or fraudulent. Users refer to the agenda as a "Climate Crisis Scam" or "worthless agenda", while terms like "Climate Communism" depict these policies as radical political tools rather than evidence-based interventions. Critics further frame the EU as a technocratic oppressor, describing its policies as "follie 'green' imposte con la dittatura" (green follies imposed by the dictatorship) and targeting the "ecotalebani dell'Europa" (eco-talibans of Europe) who allegedly aim to "impoverire i cittadini" (impoverish the citizens) through restrictions on individual freedoms. Public dissatisfaction, including farmer protests like the "tractor protests," is interpreted as a direct challenge to EU authority. Overall, these narratives present the EU as a technocratic, self-serving institution that enforces environmentally driven policies at the expense of economic stability, national sovereignty, and personal liberty.

Antithesis is the most widely used figure, employed to create a sharp ideological divide between the EU and its citizens. It typically contrasts the "folly" of technocrats with the "common sense" of the people. For instance, one post argues, "vogliamo piu Italia e meno Europa!" ("we want more Italy and less Europe!"). By setting up these binary oppositions, posters suggest that environmental progress is inherently incompatible with national survival and economic health.

Hyperbole is used to amplify the perceived dangers of environmental legislation, transforming policy debates into existential threats. Examples include describing emission reduction targets as "un suicide pur et simple" (a pure and simple suicide) or characterizing regulations as a "tsunami reglementaire qui tue l'agriculture francaise !" (regulatory tsunami that is killing French agriculture!). This exaggeration creates an emotional atmosphere of fear designed to trigger urgent political mobilization.

Climax builds persuasive momentum by listing negative attributes in increasing order of intensity to create a sense of cumulative failure. An energy policy is described as "plus chere, plus polluante, moins souveraine" (more expensive, more polluting, less sovereign). This technique makes the final point - often a call to reject the EU - feel like an inevitable conclusion to a series of escalating disasters.

Anaphora reinforces grievances through the repetition of initial phrases, giving the criticism a rhythmic, anthem-like quality. Posts use structures like "Non a l'ecologie punitive ! Non a la politique de classe !" ("No to punitive ecology! No to class politics!"). In English-language video, speakers use it to list failures: "Do you wanna vote for parties that... Do you want to vote for the parties that... Do you wanna vote for the parties that...". This repetition emphasizes the broad scale of rejection.

Metaphor simplifies complex socio-economic issues into visceral imagery. The Green Deal is described as having "du plomb dans l'aile" ("lead in its wing," meaning it is flagging). Farmers and fishermen are often portrayed as being "sacrifié sur l'autel de l'écologie" ("sacrificed on the altar of ecology"). These metaphors strip away technical nuances, replacing them with a narrative of victimization..

While the core narrative remains consistent, the use of rhetorical figures exhibits cultural and linguistic nuances. Italian and French posts frequently utilize climax and antithesis to frame policies as "punitive ecology" (écologie punitive) or "green follies" (follie green), often targeting specific political figures like Ursula von der Leyen with charged epithets such as "eco-talibans". English language posts lean on hyperbole regarding the "Net Zero scam" and "Climate Communism," often linking these directly to the "cost of living crisis". Latvian and Romanian posts often employ sharp metaphors to highlight perceived economic backwardness caused by following EU dictates. These variations reflect local political priorities while maintaining a unified rhetorical assault on the EU's green agenda.

1.4.4.4. Ukraine's government lacks legitimacy

The narrative questions the legitimacy of Ukraine's government, portraying President Volodymyr Zelensky and his administration as a corrupt and incompetent clique establishing a dictatorship in a failed state. A central claim is that the suspension or postponement of elections under martial law constitutes an illegal exercise of power. Numerous posts argue that Zelensky has lost his democratic mandate, portraying Ukraine as a "banana republic" or outright dictatorship. Another major theme is the depiction of systemic corruption within the Ukrainian administration. The government is described as a "crime ring" or "mafia", accused of embezzling billions in taxpayer money and foreign aid for personal enrichment. Several posts assert that the Ukrainian government functions as a puppet regime controlled by foreign powers. Notably, some posts claim that Zelensky and his administration were "installed" by the US Deep State, the CIA, or globalist entities, rather than being legitimately elected by the Ukrainian people. These posts frequently link Ukraine's political situation to broader geopolitical conspiracies, framing the country as subject to external manipulation. Posts also draw parallels between the alleged illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government and narratives of "stolen elections" elsewhere, particularly the 2020 US Presidential election. This framing positions both instances as part of a global "shadow government" coup, suggesting that election fraud and manipulation are systemic tools used by elites to consolidate power. Finally, the war in Ukraine is often represented as being intentionally prolonged for political and financial gain. Posts claim that Zelensky's administration refuses to engage in peace talks and continues the conflict to avoid holding elections, maintain control, and facilitate ongoing financial misappropriation. Together, these claims construct a narrative in which Ukraine's government is simultaneously illegitimate, corrupt, externally controlled, and committed to maintaining power at the expense of its citizens.

The rhetorical strategies employed across the social media datasets serve to delegitimize the Ukrainian government by framing it as an illegal and corrupt entity. **Hyperbole** is used to amplify the perceived threat and moral failings of the administration, often using extreme superlatives to radicalize the audience. In English, critics describe President Zelensky as the "most corrupt, incompetent and dumb politician ever". This sentiment is mirrored in French, where he is called "l'homme politique le plus corrompu au monde" (the most corrupt politician in the world). In Italian, the intensity is maintained by characterizing the administration as a "governo osceno" (obscene government). These exaggerations move the discourse away from political critique toward total moral condemnation.

Climax allows posters to build a sense of escalating chaos and systemic failure. English-language posts list grievances that peak in criminality, such as "incompetence, lies, corruption and theft". French posts use climax to outline a step-by-step transition to tyranny: "Il a impose la loi martiale. Il a annule les elections. Il a annule les partis d'oppositions. Il censure" (He imposed martial law. He cancelled elections. He cancelled opposition parties. He censures). Similarly, posts in Russian sequence events to suggest total collapse: "korruptsiia... vorovstvo... krakh institutov i prikhod k vlasti khunty" (corruption... theft... collapse of institutions and the coming to power of a junta).

Antithesis is strategically used to contrast the government's stated democratic goals with its alleged reality. A French example contrasts Zelensky's campaign promises with his actions: "elu pour lutter contre la corruption mais ripoux jusqu'a l'os" (elected to fight corruption but corrupt to the bone). In English, antithesis is used to contrast foreign aid with domestic hardship, stating that while the government claims to defend democracy, it is actually an "organized crime ring of depraved deceptive thieves".

Anaphora is used to create a rhythmic sense of collective resolve or a relentless list of accusations. In English, this is seen in calls for resistance: "We will not stand for your election fraud. We will not stand idly by...". French users utilize this to mock the leader's image, repeating "ALL HAIL ZELENSKY... AVE ZELENSKY... HEIL ZELENSKY..." to equate his rule with historic dictatorships. This repetition serves to reinforce the narrative of an inescapable and multifaceted betrayal by the ruling "clique."

Metaphors provide visceral imagery that dehumanizes the Ukrainian leadership and emphasizes their perceived lack of agency. Zelensky is frequently dismissed in English as a "puppet assigned by the Deep State" or even "installed like a toilet, in stolen election". French rhetoric employs the image of a "pantin Pinocchio" [Pinocchio puppet] or labels him "le petit telegraphiste de Washington" [the little telegraphist of Washington]. Metaphors in Russian describe the Ukrainian government as a "kamniu na shee utopaiushchego" (stone on the neck of a drowning man) that is pulling the EU down with it. These images translate complex geopolitical dependencies into simple, insulting concepts.

The use of rhetorical figures varies slightly across the languages present in the datasets. English posts rely on hyperbole and metaphor, linking Zelensky to the US “stolen election” narratives and portraying him as a “puppet assigned by the Deep State”. French-language content emphasizes anaphora and climax, and metaphors to highlight authoritarianism and moral rot. Russian employs climax and metaphor to dramatize state collapse. Italian posts favour antithesis, contrasting political rhetoric with reality.

1.4.4.5. EU institutions are illegitimate and corrupt

The narrative is supported by several core claims. The primary claim is that the EU is fundamentally undemocratic, as key decision-makers, particularly the European Commission, are viewed as an “unelected ruler” or “dictatorship” that bypasses the will of the people. Consequently, European elections are characterized as a “sham,” “farce,” or “theatre” because the European Parliament supposedly lacks real legislative power and serves only to “rubber stamp” laws created by unelected bureaucrats. Furthermore, the sources claim that corruption is systemic and “legalized” within the EU, primarily through the influence of powerful lobbies and multinationals that dictate policy over the interests of citizens. This perceived corruption is often linked to a lack of transparency, specifically regarding the “Pfizergate” scandal and the refusal to publish vaccine contracts. Finally, the posts argue that the EU misappropriates public funds, alleging that taxpayer money is laundered or used to fund private interests and foreign wars rather than addressing domestic needs like housing and poverty.

Hyperbole is the most prevalent rhetorical figure, used to magnify the perceived “evil” or “corrupt” nature of the EU to instill a sense of urgency and outrage. This exaggeration often frames the EU as a totalitarian regime or a criminal enterprise. For example, one post in French describes the leadership as a “technocrature mafieuse autoproclamee” (self-proclaimed mafioso technocracy). The effect is to present the political situation as a dire existential threat that requires immediate resistance.

Antithesis is used to create a sharp, binary divide between the “corrupt elite” and the “suffering people”, or the superficial powers of the EP and the hidden power of the Commission. One French post uses antithesis to justify voter abstention by contrasting the lack of power held by elected officials with the dominance of the commission: “...les deputes UE n'ont aucun pouvoir, tout est decide par la commission non elue” (...EU MEPs have no power, everything is decided by the unelected commission).

Climax builds persuasive momentum by listing grievances or accusations in increasing order of intensity, and is frequently used to detail the alleged “crimes” of MEPs or the Commission in a way that overwhelms the reader with a sense of systemic failure. For example, the statement “dire non a la corruption legale des euro deputes... contre l'interet commun et la survie de la planete ! Oui a la paix et la justice” (say no to the legal corruption of MEPs... against the common interest and the survival of the planet! Yes to

peace and justice) escalates from accusations of corruption to harm to the common good and finally to a threat to planetary survival, before concluding with a moral resolution.

Anaphora is particularly effective in calls for action or expressions of exhaustion. For instance, one post repeats the word "enough" to emphasize a breaking point: "ENOUGH MONEY LAUNDERING / ENOUGH FRAUD / ENOUGH LYING". Similarly, several posts repeat a sentiment regarding the lack of concern for voters: "They don't care about reality, they don't care about the results... they don't care about the will".

Metaphor simplifies complex institutional structures into visceral, often dehumanizing imagery, such as comparing the EU to a "mafia," "parasites," or a "sinking ship". This figure bypasses logical debate by appealing to the audience's basic emotions. An English example describes the EU as "infested by unelected, bureaucratic parasites", while a Romanian post refers to the Commission as a "monstru antihristic" (Antichristic monster).

There are some differences in the use of these rhetorical figures across the languages represented in the sources. French and Italian posts tend to be aggressive, frequently employing harsh hyperboles (e.g., "ordures", "pourritures," "schifo") to insult officials directly. Posts in Russian lean into the "theatrical" metaphors, framing EU elections as a "political show with certain elements of immersive theater, directed by the EU bureaucracy" (politicheskoe shou s nekotorymi elementami immersivnogo teatra, rezhisserom kotorogo iavliaetsia evrobiurokratiia). Latvian and Lithuanian posts utilize metaphorical imagery related to parasitism and the "mafia," often within the context of local political figures being "puppets" of Brussels. In contrast, English posts focus more heavily on the antithesis between "unelected bureaucrats" and "the people's control," reflecting common themes from the Brexit era.

1.4.4.6. Immigrants are seizing power in the EU

Under the narrative that immigrants are seizing power in the EU, resulting in negative economic, social, cultural, and security consequences, several core claims emerge. A primary claim is that European "globalist" elites are orchestrating a replacement of native populations with immigrants to maintain political control and destroy national identities. In addition, the posts assert that institutions are facilitating election fraud by allowing non-citizens to vote or by "importing" supporters to disenfranchise native taxpayers. The posts further claim that mass immigration produces severe socio-economic and security crises across Europe, allegedly causing high inflation, unemployment, and rising crime rates, and thus having no benefit for the European people. There is also a recurring claim of total social and security collapse, where migration is directly linked to an "invasion" characterized by rampant crime, terrorism, and the sexual assault of native women. The posts claim economic parasitic behaviour, arguing that immigrants drain social benefits and drive up costs like housing while contributing nothing to the host society. A

significant claim is the impending "Islamization" of Europe, suggesting that Sharia law will soon replace national constitutions due to demographic shifts. The 2024 European elections are framed as a decisive moment through which voters can reclaim control and punish EU leaders for their "authoritarian" migration agenda. A major electoral shift to the right is predicted and celebrated within this discourse as a necessary correction to what is seen as the EU's failed and coercive immigration policies.

Hyperbole is the most frequent figure, used to magnify the perceived threat to an existential level, thereby justifying radical political shifts. By exaggerating the scope of the problem, posts frame the EU's migration policy as a deliberate act of destruction. For example, one French post claims: "ABSOLUMENT TOUS LES PROBLEMES DE LA FRANCE DECOULENT DIRECTEMENT DE L'IMMIGRATION !!!" ("ABSOLUTELY ALL OF FRANCE'S PROBLEMS STEM DIRECTLY FROM IMMIGRATION !!!"). Similarly, a Russian-language post warns of the total end of European heritage: "eto budet pogibel' evropeiskikh kul'tur eto budet pogibel' vsego" (this will be the death of European cultures, it will be the death of everything). This creates an atmosphere of terminal crisis where "normal" politics are no longer sufficient.

Antithesis is strategically employed to create a binary opposition between the "legitimate" native population and the "illegitimate" newcomers or the "traitorous" elites. This figure polarizes the debate, leaving no room for moderate policy. An example in French states: "Si la France devient le pays de tout le monde, elle finira par etre le pays de personne" (If France becomes everyone's country, it will end up being no one's country). In the Romanian context, the contrast is drawn between the rights of local population and those of migrants: "Aceasta lege le da migrantilor drepturi, casa, masa, bani si multe alte drepturi cu mult peste populatia bastinasa" ("This law gives migrants rights, house, table, money and many other rights far above the native population").

Climax builds a sense of mounting dread by listing increasingly severe societal ills, suggesting that the "worst" is yet to come. This figure is particularly effective in speeches and long-form posts to illustrate a "civilizational" decline. For instance, a post lists the stakes of the election as: "Immigration, insecurite, islamisme..." ("Immigration, insecurity, Islamism..."). A post in Latvian escalates the threat of demographic change into a political takeover: "Iai vini seit vairoto neiedomajams atrumos un pec gadiem trisdesmit Latviju pasludinatu par Sariata valsti?" (so that they multiply here at an unimaginable speed and after thirty years declare Latvia a Sharia state?).

Anaphora reinforces the narrative of systemic failure and betrayal through the repetition of key phrases at the beginning of successive sentences. This repetition serves to drill a specific accusation into the reader's mind. A French post utilizes this to list the failures of the administration: "En 7 ans... En 7 ans..." (In 7 years... In 7 years...). This technique is also used to emphasize the "Muslim" identity of various city leaders to suggest a

coordinated takeover: "The Mayor of London is a Muslim. The mayor of Birmingham is a Muslim...".

Metaphor provides vivid, often dehumanizing imagery to describe migration as a natural disaster or a criminal enterprise. These metaphors simplify complex issues into emotionally charged concepts like "scams" or "drowning". One English post describes migration as an "imigration Ponzi scam", while French sources frequently use terms like "submergee" ("submerged") or "submersion" to frame migration as a flood that will drown the nation. In Romanian, metaphor is used to describe Putin's plans to "transform immigrants into arms".

1.3.4.7. Gender and LGBTQ+ ideologies have a corrupting influence on morally pure societies

Across both datasets, a consistent set of core claims underpins this narrative. First, gender and LGBTQ+ identities are framed as a corruption of the moral order, presented as a threat to "morally pure societies" and to the "natural order." Closely linked to this is the assertion that the "natural family structure" - strictly defined as the union of a biological man and woman - is under siege and requires urgent legal and social protection. At the same time, recognition of gender identity, particularly transgender rights, is portrayed as an erasure of biological reality, often framed as an "effacement" of truth and of women's rights. This is reinforced by claims that the inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in schools constitutes the indoctrination or "sexualization" of youth, sometimes described as "grooming." These themes are further embedded in a broader political narrative that depicts national and European leaders as elitist and disconnected from the conservative values of ordinary citizens. Resistance to LGBTQ+ rights is therefore framed not only as a moral stance but also as a defence of national sovereignty against a "woke" or "globalist" agenda, positioning cultural and identity issues within a wider struggle over political authority and national identity.

Antithesis is the most frequently used RF, used to create a sharp binary between the "natural" and the "ideological." It effectively frames the debate as a zero-sum game where one's existence negates the other. For instance, in French discourse: "C'est donc un homme qui recoit a Cannes le prix d'interpretation... feminine" (It is therefore a man who receives in Cannes the prize for... female performance). This usage serves to highlight what the posters perceive as a fundamental contradiction in "woke" logic.

Hyperbole is employed to amplify the perceived threat, characterizing legal changes as catastrophic for society. Estonian posts refer to "uhiskonda lammutavaid seadusi" (society-dismantling laws), while Romanian posts speak of a "sistemul ticalos" (crooked system). The effect is to instill a sense of urgency and moral panic among the audience.

Climax involves an escalating sequence of terms that build to a dramatic peak, often moving from specific legal grievances to total civilizational collapse. An example from French builds the argument that "quoi qu'on dise quoi qu'on fasse un homme reste un homme une femme reste une femme" (whatever is said, whatever is done, a man remains a man, a woman remains a woman). This progression reinforces the idea that biological reality is the ultimate, immovable end-point of the argument.

Anaphora is used to hammer home points and list grievances. This is particularly common in Italian political posts: "No allo sfruttamento... no alla pratica... no a esseri umani" (No to exploitation... no to the practice... no to human beings). This creates a rhythmic, persuasive effect that suggests an overwhelming number of reasons to reject the opposing side.

Metaphor provides vivid, often threatening, imagery to describe the spread of ideologies. An Estonian post claims a "Trooja muulaga veeti Eestisse viljatusagenda" (An infertility agenda was brought to Estonia with a Trojan mule). Metaphors frame abstract political processes as concrete physical invasions or biological diseases, making the perceived threat feel more tangible and dangerous.

The use of RFs varies across the languages represented in the datasets. Italian and French posts rely on anaphora and climax to criticize specific cultural events, such as the Eurovision Song Contest or the Cannes Film Festival, often using terms like "woke" to link local events to a broader international trend. Estonian and Lithuanian posts use hyperbole and metaphor to frame the issue in terms of national survival and the integrity of the state. Romanian discourse applies religious framing, using antithesis to contrast "Christian values" with the "Kingdom of Antichrist," thereby elevating the political debate to a spiritual conflict.

1.3.4.8. Ukraine and/or other post-Soviet countries are puppets and/or platforms for the West in its geopolitical fight against Russia, which is escalating into a world war

Under this narrative, the war in Ukraine and broader geopolitical tensions are framed as the product of manipulation by Western elites. A central claim portrays Ukraine and other post-Soviet states not as sovereign actors but as "puppets" or "platforms" used by the United States, NATO, and the EU to wage a proxy conflict against Russia. Within this framing, Western military aid and political decisions are depicted as an inevitable march toward global escalation, often described as leading directly to a nuclear Third World War. At the same time, these narratives frequently assert the existence of systemic election fraud, with national and European elections described as "rigged," "stolen," or controlled by a "Deep State" to ensure the continuation of pro-war leadership. Western political figures such as Macron and Biden are cast as elites who betray their own populations, depicted as "madmen" or "parasites" who prioritize globalist agendas over national security and public welfare. Finally, the war itself is framed as a tool for domestic

control, with claims that governments exploit the conflict to justify cancelling elections, imposing emergency powers, or advancing broader social engineering measures. Together, these claims construct a narrative in which geopolitical conflict, democratic processes, and domestic governance are all portrayed as instruments of elite manipulation and control.

Antithesis is the most dominant RF, used to create a stark moral binary between the "peace-loving" camp and the "war-mongering" elites. This strategy serves to simplify complex geopolitics into a zero-sum struggle. For example, a French post argues: "Nous ne voulons pas la guerre, mais eux veulent la guerre" (We do not want war, but they want war). Similarly, Italian post uses antithesis to contrast national dignity with perceived submission: "State facendo i servi americani!" (You are acting as American servants!). Antithesis effectively alienates the audience from current political leadership by framing them as an existential threat to peace.

Hyperbole is employed to amplify the perceived danger of Western policies, often describing them as cataclysmic. Posts speak of a "Nuclear WWII" or a "Globalist parasite class" to instill fear and urgency. In a Russian post, hyperbole is used to describe the total submission of the West: "maknul litsemernuiu i lzvivuiu ameriku i eio marionetok v der'mo" (dipped hypocritical and lying America and its puppets into shit). The effect is to create a sense of impending doom that justifies radical political opposition.

Climax involves an escalating sequence of events that builds toward a dramatic conclusion, usually the total collapse of society or the start of a world war. Italian posts use this to criticize government actions: "Sarebbe l'errore piu grande... Una pazzia... portarci alla Terza Guerra Mondiale" (It would be the biggest error... A madness... leading us to the Third World War). This structure makes each subsequent political move appear more dangerous than the last, suggesting a "slippery slope" toward annihilation.

Metaphor is used to dehumanize political opponents and simplify geopolitical relations into digestible, often derogatory, imagery. Ukraine is referred to as a "pridatok SShA i Zapada" (appendage of the USA and the West) or a "Trojan horse" for Western interests. Leaders are called "puppets" or "parasites". These metaphors remove political actors of their agency and moral legitimacy, presenting them instead as dangerous tools or biological threats to the nation.

Anaphora is used to build rhetorical momentum and hammer home specific grievances. This is particularly effective in French posts regarding the European elections: "Voter pour la MACRONIE... voter pour la GUERRE" ("Voting for Macronie... voting for WAR"). This repetition creates a rhythmic, persuasive effect that links a specific political vote directly to a catastrophic outcome in the minds of the audience.

The use of RFs varies by language and target audience. English and French posts rely on metaphor and anaphora to focus on domestic political figures and "Globalist" conspiracies. Italian discourse is notable for its frequent use of climax and antithesis to criticize the "bluff" of its own leaders and the perceived hypocrisy of NATO. In Russian and Romanian, there is a stronger emphasis on hyperbole and metaphor related to "colonialism" and the idea of Moldova or other states being prepared as a "second Ukraine".

1.4.4.9. The war in Ukraine undermines EU countries' domestic welfare; meanwhile Russia's economy remains unaffected or is reinforced.

The narrative frames the war in Ukraine as directly responsible for the destruction of national economies. A central claim depicts the conflict as a budgetary drain, with military and financial support to Ukraine, alongside refugee inflows, "draining national budgets" and "harming local economies". Western sanctions against Russia are frequently portrayed as backfiring, allegedly failing to weaken the Russian economy while severely damaging growth and prosperity in Western Europe.

The war is also framed as neglecting domestic welfare, with funds sent to Ukraine described as being diverted from essential public services such as healthcare, education, pensions, and infrastructure. Political leaders - including Macron, Meloni, and von der Leyen - are cast as betraying their citizens, accused of pursuing foreign or "war-mongering" agendas rather than protecting national interests. Finally, policies like the embargo on Russian energy are presented as deliberately causing deindustrialization and mass poverty, leading to catastrophic inflation and widespread economic hardship. Collectively, these claims construct a narrative in which the war functions not only as a foreign conflict but as a tool that undermines domestic economic stability and erodes citizens' livelihoods.

Hyperbole is the most frequent RF, used to exaggerate the severity of the economic crisis and the "insatiable" nature of the conflict. By framing policy decisions as catastrophic failures, it creates a sense of existential threat. For instance, a title in the Romanian post highlights the wealth disparity: "AUR face scandal in Parlament: De ce le dati miliarde ucrainenilor care se plimba cu Tesla prin Romania cand romanii mor de foame?" (AUR causes a scandal in Parliament: Why are you giving billions to Ukrainians who drive Teslas through Romania when Romanians are starving to death?). The effect is to incite moral outrage by contrasting extreme luxury for refugees with the supposed starvation of locals.

Antithesis is consistently used to establish a binary opposition between "them" (Ukraine/war) and "us" (citizens/welfare). It presents the conflict as a zero-sum game where any aid to Kyiv is a direct theft from the public. In Italian post, this is used to criticize the Prime Minister: "I miliardi per le armi e guerre si trovano per la fame e siccita

e alluvioni e senza medicine NO" (Billions for weapons and wars are found, but for hunger, drought, floods, and being without medicine, NO). This framing forces the audience to choose between national survival and international aid.

Climax creates a narrative of escalating ruin, moving from minor grievances to total civilizational collapse. It is often used to track the perceived failure of the EU: "l'Europe devait nous garantir la paix elle nous mène à la guerre l'Europe devait nous apporter la prospérité elle nous mène à la pauvreté" (Europe was supposed to guarantee us peace, it leads us to war; Europe was supposed to bring us prosperity, it leads us to poverty). This building of intensity portrays the current political trajectory as a "slippery slope" toward unavoidable disaster.

Anaphora emphasizes the scope of government neglect by repeating lists of social failures. This rhythmic repetition is designed to make the grievances feel exhaustive and unanswerable. A French post utilizes this to argue for prioritizing domestic needs: "y a jamais d'argent pour L'Hopital, y a jamais d'argent pour l'école, y a jamais d'argent pour... baisser les factures d'électricité" (there is never money for the Hospital, there is never money for the school, there is never money to... lower the electricity bills). This reinforces the perception that the government has abandoned its fundamental responsibilities.

Euphemism is paradoxically used to mock or rebrand government terminology, often turning the state's own language against it. For example, the term "économie de guerre" (war economy) is used by critics to describe what they see as a forced transition to austerity and rioting. By adopting official terms in a cynical context, posters suggest that the government is using the conflict as a pretext for domestic social engineering and economic control.

The rhetorical focus shifts across the languages represented. French and Italian posts are more likely to use antithesis and anaphora to directly challenge specific national leaders like Macron and Meloni, linking them to a "betrayal" of the working class. Russian and English posts often rely on hyperbole and climax paired with irony to mock the "backfiring" nature of sanctions and to portray the West as a "Moloch" or a "monster" feeding on citizens' taxes. In Romanian content, there is a sharper focus on the hyper-inflationary impact and the visual "unfairness" of refugee aid, often utilizing hyperbole to underscore local suffering.

1.5. Narrative dynamics of disinformation during the 2024 EP elections

The following sections integrate a temporal and cross-platform analysis of the disinformation narratives. It provides a comprehensive picture of how EU-related disinformation narratives were produced, amplified, and sustained in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2024 EP elections (Q4).

1.5.1. Methodology

The aim is to capture the temporal dynamics of EU-related disinformation narratives across major online communication environments. Data collection covered 5 platforms¹¹ –enabling both cross-platform comparison and platform-specific analysis.

To ensure analytical robustness and temporal comparability, the core analyses therefore focus on the period starting on 1 December 2023, when narrative production becomes sufficiently dense and continuous. This time window is long enough to capture not only short-term peaks related to salient campaign events, but also the gradual emergence and consolidation of narratives in the lead-up to the elections. At the same time, it avoids distortions introduced by long stretches of near-zero activity in earlier periods, which would obscure relative changes in narrative intensity and timing.

Within this framework, particular emphasis is placed on a dense pre- and post-election window in early 2024, enabling the identification of both slow-moving narrative build-ups and abrupt surges linked to key political moments, such as campaign milestones or the election itself. This design supports fine-grained temporal analysis while retaining sufficient historical context to interpret narrative trajectories.

Narrative identification and labelling were conducted using an embedding-based semantic similarity approach. Instead of relying on keyword lists or surface-level textual markers, each post was embedded into a shared semantic space and assigned to a narrative category based on its proximity to pre-defined narrative embeddings.

1.5.2. Limitations

Several limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, narrative labelling relies on an embedding-based semantic similarity approach. While this method allows for identifying conceptually coherent narratives beyond surface-level keywords, it is inherently probabilistic. Posts that are semantically ambiguous, ironic, or context-dependent may be assigned to narratives with some degree of uncertainty. Although this approach improves robustness across platforms and linguistic variation, it does not fully eliminate misclassification, especially at narrative boundaries.

Second, the platform coverage is uneven by design and availability. Differences in platform affordances, data access, and posting behaviour (e.g., short-form video on TikTok versus text-heavy Twitter/X) affect both volume and temporal patterns. As a result, cross-platform comparisons should be interpreted as relative dynamics rather than direct measures of influence or reach.

¹¹ Twitter/X, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Bluesky

Finally, the analysis focuses on narrative production rather than exposure or impact. High volume or strong account-level concentration does not automatically translate into audience reach or persuasion. The results, therefore, describe patterns of narrative emergence, amplification, and coordination, rather than effects on public opinion or electoral behaviour.

1.5.3. Actor-level concentration and dominance of narrative production

Top 1% account dominance by narrative

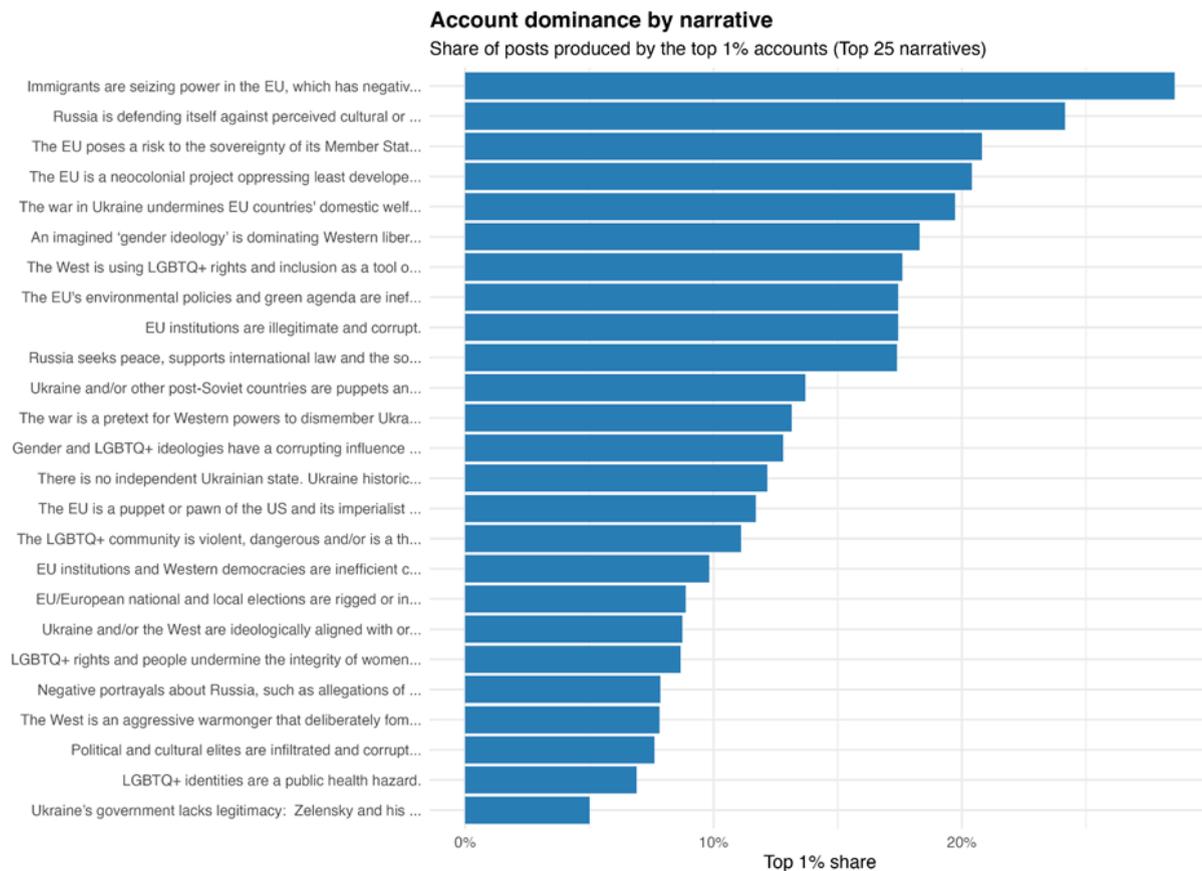


Figure 1. Account dominance by narrative: Share of posts produced by the top 1% of accounts

Figure 1 shows the proportion of all posts within each narrative that were produced by the top 1% most active accounts. This measure captures elite amplification and potential coordination, rather than overall popularity.

Across narratives, concentration is substantial. For several dominant EU-related disinformation narratives—most notably “Immigrants are seizing power in the EU”, “Russia is defending itself against Western cultural aggression”, and “The EU poses a risk to the sovereignty of its Member States”—the top 1% of accounts generate between 20–30% of all content. This level of dominance strongly exceeds what would be expected under organic participation and indicates highly asymmetric production structures.

Importantly, narratives that frame the EU as illegitimate, externally controlled, or culturally corrupt tend to exhibit greater elite dominance than more diffuse geopolitical narratives. This suggests that delegitimising narratives are driven by a relatively small set of highly active actors, consistent with strategic dissemination rather than spontaneous public debate.

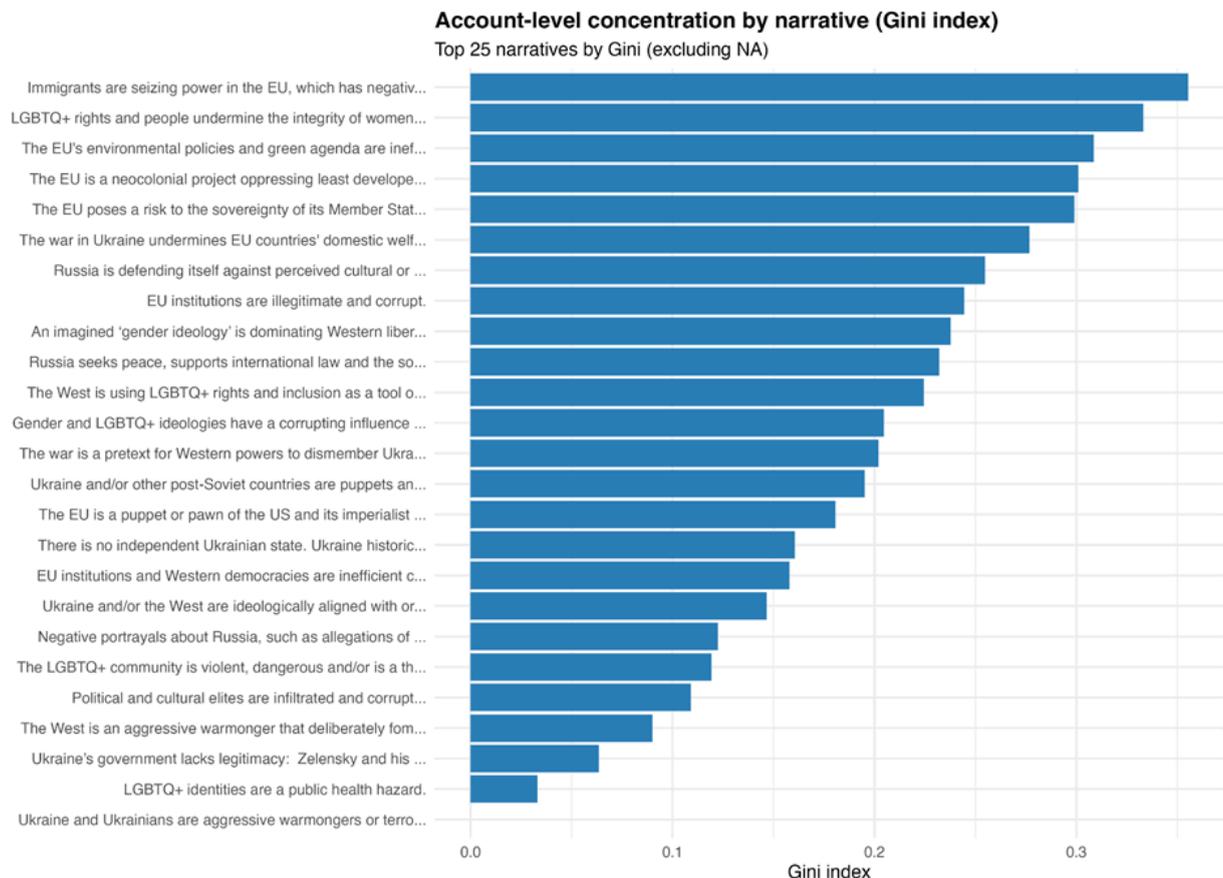


Figure 2. Account-level concentration by narrative (Gini index)

While Figure 1 focuses on the very top of the distribution, Figure 2 complements this by showing overall inequality in narrative production using the Gini index. High Gini values indicate that narrative output is unevenly distributed across accounts.

The results closely mirror the dominance analysis but add nuance: narratives related to immigration, LGBTQ+ moral panic, and EU environmental policies consistently rank highest in inequality. This implies not only elite dominance but also weak participation by the middle tier, reinforcing the interpretation of centralised narrative control.

Narratives with lower Gini values—such as some Russia–Ukraine framing narratives—exhibit broader participation, suggesting hybrid dynamics in which coordinated actors coexist with more diffuse engagement.

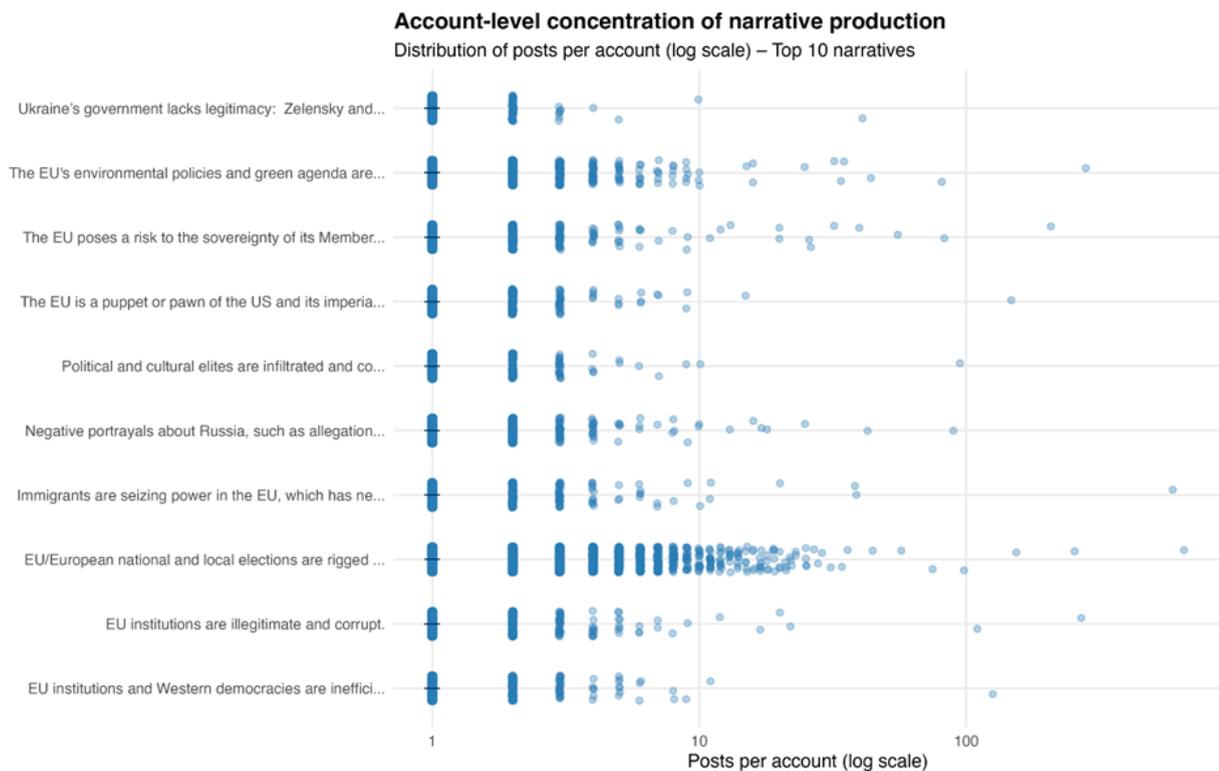


Figure 3. Account-level concentration of narrative production: Distribution of posts per account

Figure 3 visualises the full distribution of posting activity for selected high-impact narratives. On a log scale, the long right tails clearly indicate the presence of hyperactive accounts that produce orders of magnitude more content than the median participant.

Notably, narratives questioning the legitimacy of EU elections and institutions show the heaviest tails, indicating sustained posting by a small number of accounts across time. This pattern is particularly relevant in the electoral context, as it suggests persistent agenda-setting efforts rather than episodic spikes.

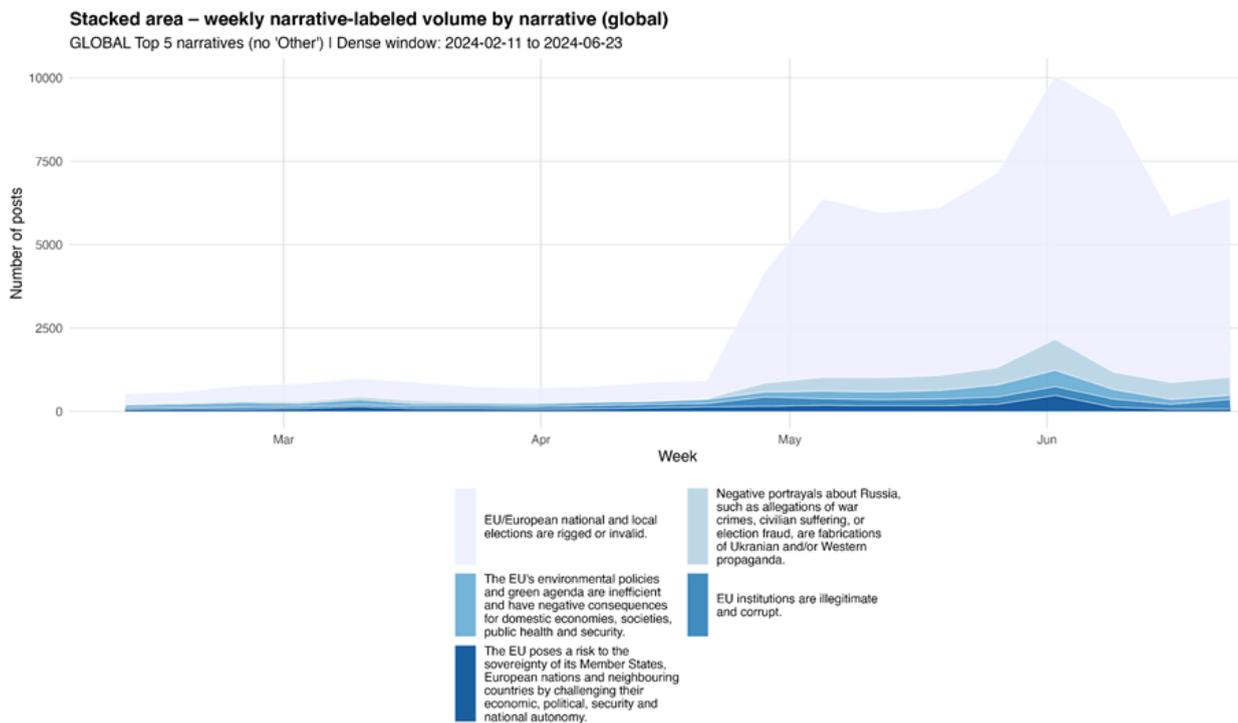


Figure 4. Global weekly volume of EU-related disinformation narratives

Figure 4 presents the aggregate weekly volume of the five most prevalent EU-related disinformation narratives during the dense observation window leading up to and following the 2024 European Parliament elections.

The most striking feature is the sharp escalation beginning in early May, followed by a pronounced peak around the election period. This surge is driven overwhelmingly by the narrative “EU/European national and local elections are rigged or invalid”, which dominates in the weeks immediately preceding and following the vote.

Other narratives—such as EU institutional illegitimacy and negative portrayals of Russia as fabricated Western propaganda—increase in parallel but remain secondary. This indicates a hierarchical narrative ecology in which election delegitimation functions as the primary mobilising frame, while other narratives provide ideological reinforcement.

1.5.4. Platform-Specific Narrative Trajectories

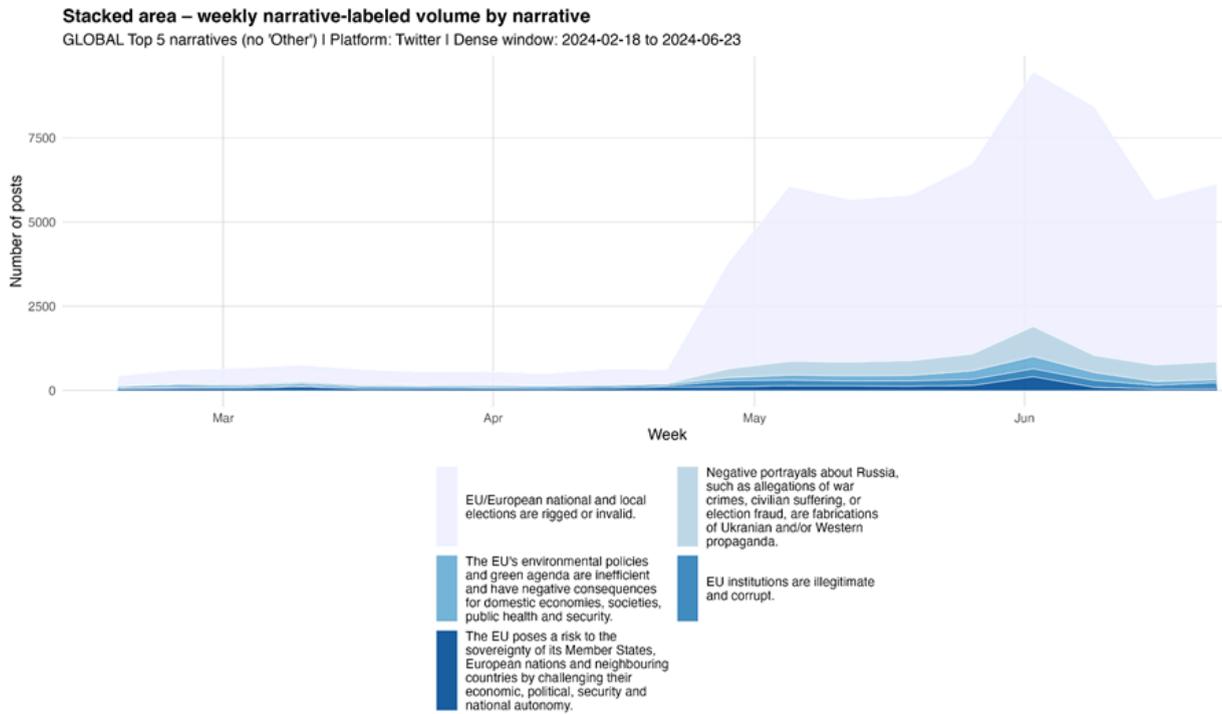


Figure 5. Weekly narrative-labelled volume by narrative on Twitter/X

On Twitter/X, election-related disinformation narratives exhibit early activation and high volatility. The rigged elections narrative rises sharply from late April, peaks shortly before the election, and then declines gradually. Twitter/X consistently exhibits the highest absolute volumes, reinforcing its role as a primary platform for agenda-setting regarding EU-related disinformation. Other narratives track the same temporal pattern but remain clearly subordinate.

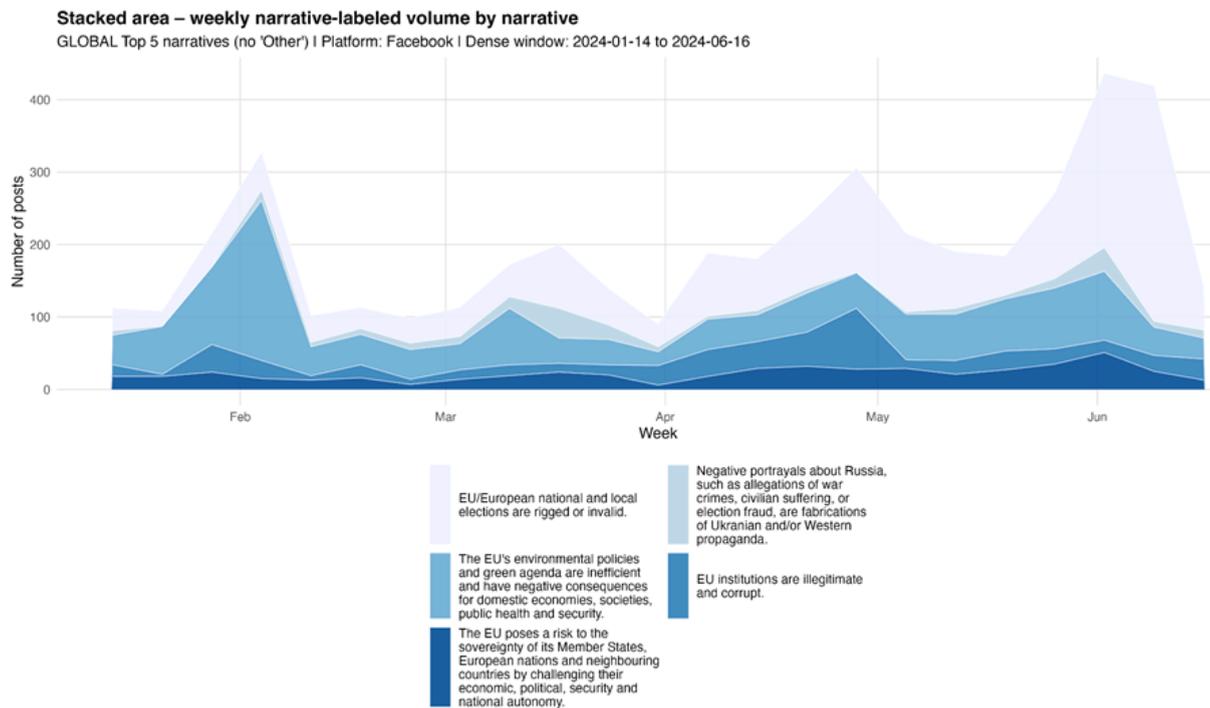


Figure 6. Weekly narrative-labelled volume by narrative on Facebook

Facebook shows a more sustained and less volatile trajectory. While election delegitimisation remains dominant, the rise is smoother and the post-election decline slower than on Twitter/X. This pattern suggests Facebook's role as a persistence-oriented amplification environment, where narratives stabilise and circulate longer rather than peaking sharply.

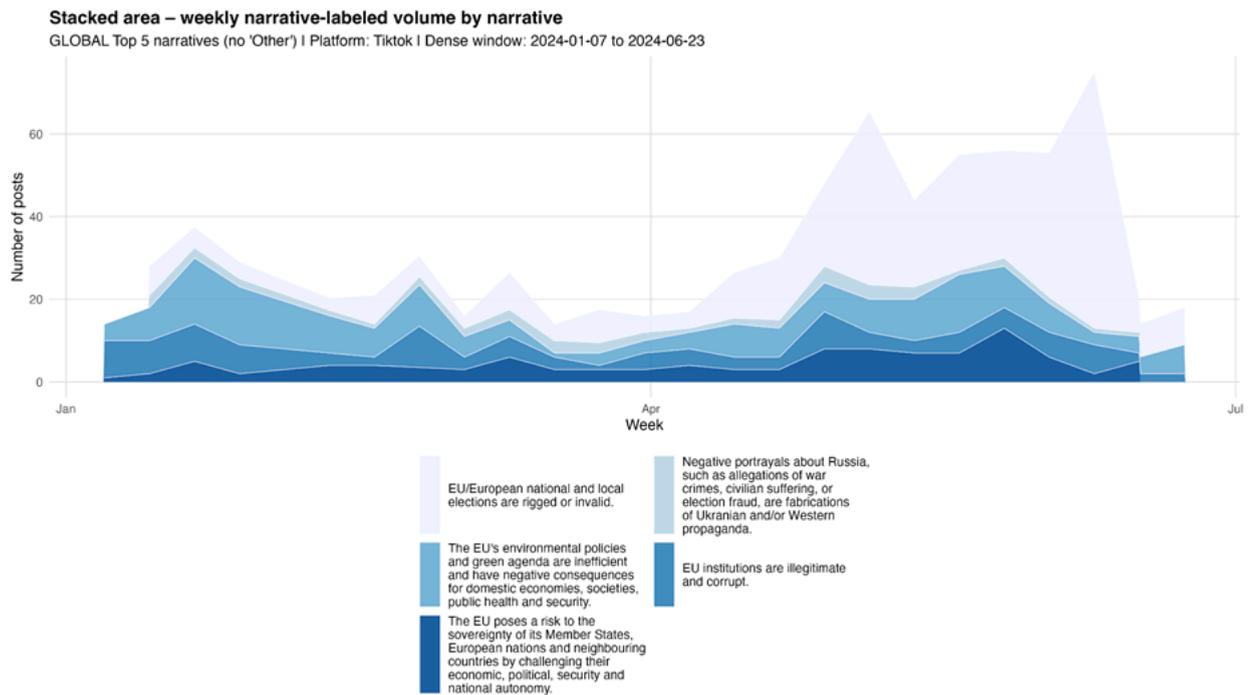


Figure 7. Weekly narrative-labelled volume by narrative on TikTok

TikTok exhibits lower overall volume but notable synchronisation with the broader election timeline. Narrative spikes occur later and are shorter-lived, indicating reactive uptake rather than early agenda-setting. TikTok thus appears more as a secondary diffusion platform, echoing narratives established elsewhere.

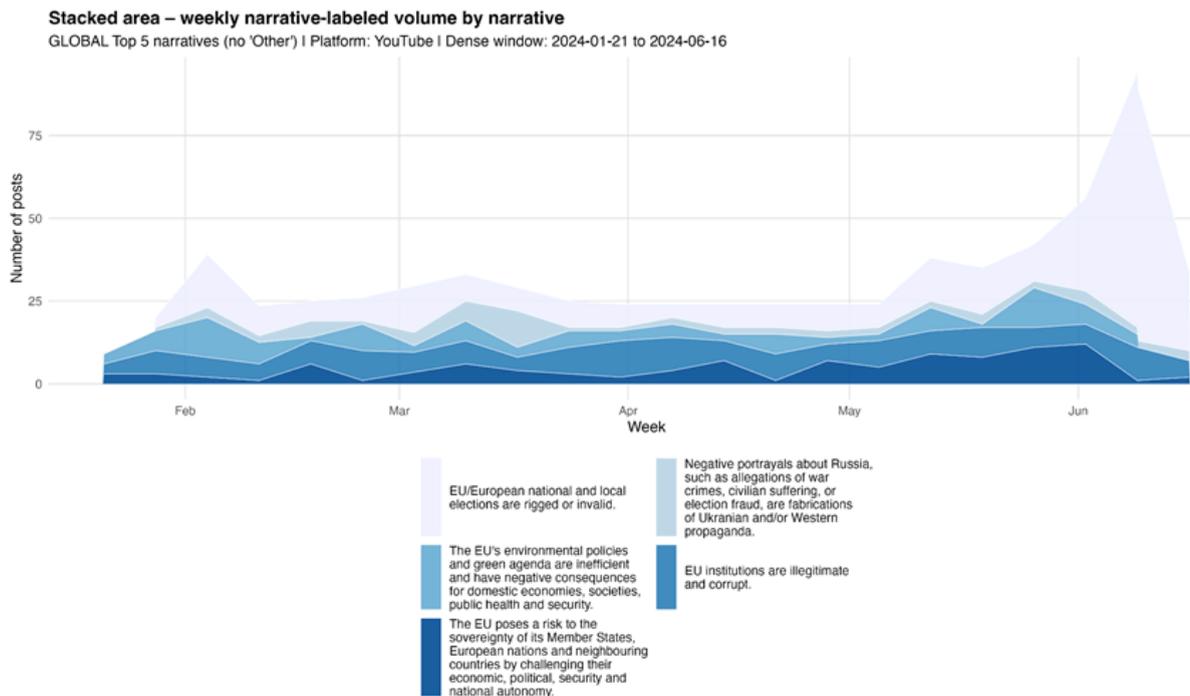


Figure 8. Weekly narrative-labelled volume by narrative on YouTube

YouTube displays episodic yet pronounced spikes, particularly for election delegitimisation narratives. These peaks likely correspond to video-based interpretive content, which requires higher production effort but may have a longer-lasting influence.

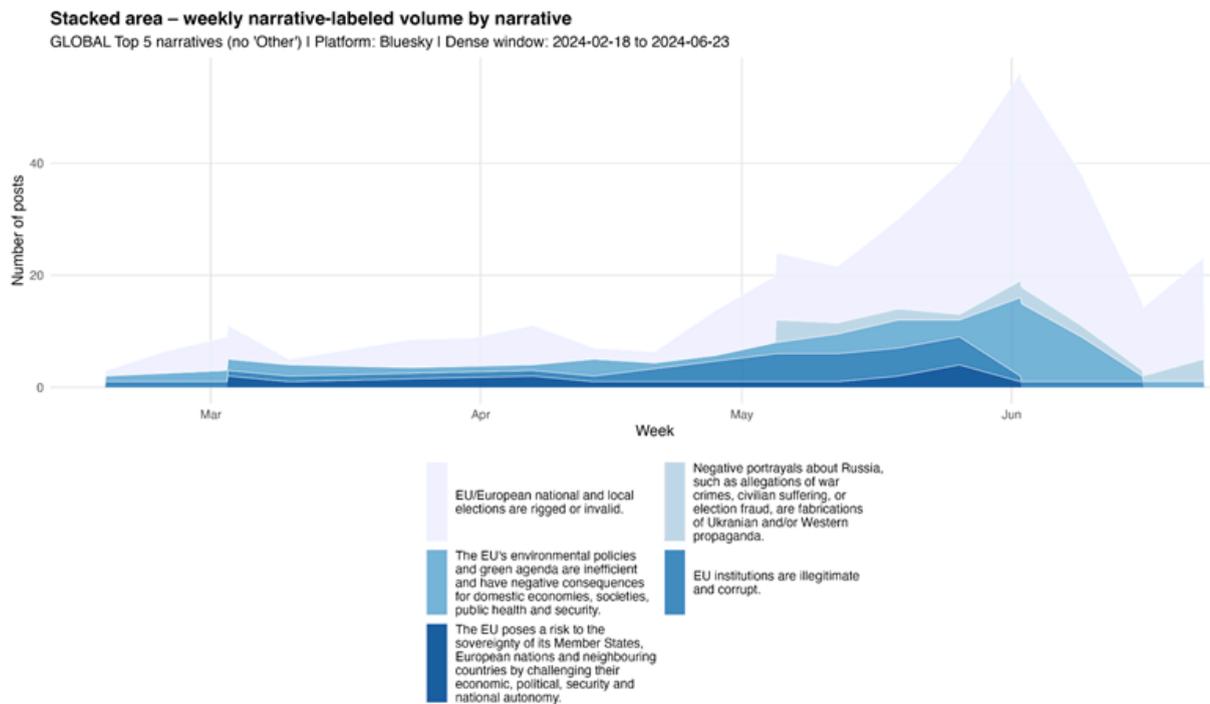


Figure 9. Weekly narrative-labelled volume by narrative on Bluesky

Bluesky shows the lowest volumes and weakest narrative differentiation. While election-related narratives are present, they never dominate to the same extent as on other platforms, reflecting limited reach and weaker integration into the broader disinformation ecosystem.

Taken together, these results point to a coordinated, hierarchical narrative ecosystem surrounding the 2024 EP elections. A small set of highly active accounts disproportionately drives core narratives, particularly those questioning electoral legitimacy and EU sovereignty. These narratives rise sharply in the immediate pre-election period, dominate cross-platform attention, and are differentially sustained depending on platform affordances.

The combination of high account-level concentration, temporal synchronisation, and cross-platform coherence is consistent with strategic narrative dissemination, rather than fragmented or organic public discourse.

1.5.5. Account Ecology and Concentration

This section examines how EU-related disinformation narratives are produced and sustained at the level of individual accounts. Rather than treating narratives as homogeneous streams, we analyse within-narrative concentration, core-periphery structures, and cross-narrative actor overlap. Together, these analyses shed light on whether narratives emerge from broad participation or are driven by a relatively small set of highly active accounts.

1.5.5.1. Narrative-Level Concentration of Activity

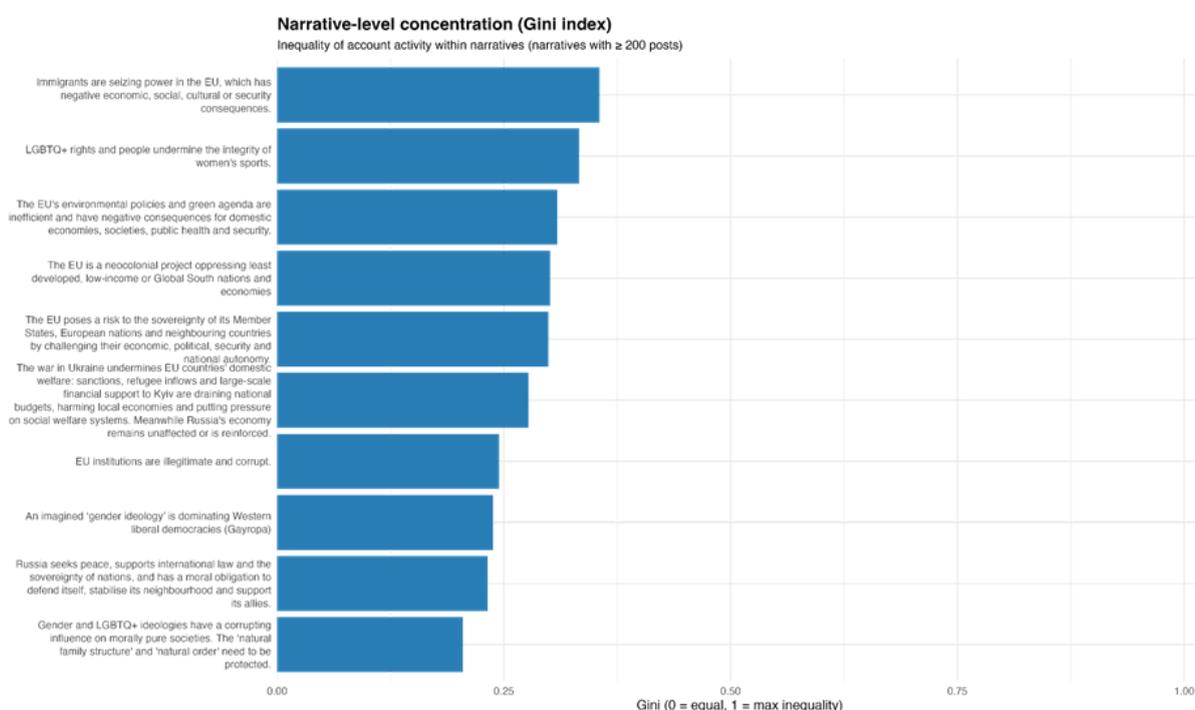


Figure 10. Narrative-level concentration

Figure 10 shows the Gini coefficient of posting activity within each major narrative. Higher values indicate stronger concentration, where a small number of accounts generate a disproportionate share of narrative content.

Several narratives exhibit moderate to high inequality, particularly those related to:

- cultural and gender-related themes (e.g. LGBTQ+ and “gender ideology” narratives),
- EU environmental and green transition policies,
- migration and sovereignty-related claims.

By contrast, some election-related narratives display comparatively lower Gini values, suggesting broader participation during peak campaign periods. This pattern is

consistent with event-driven mobilisation, in which election moments temporarily reduce concentration by activating a broader set of accounts. Overall, the results indicate that many EU-related disinformation narratives are structurally centralised, even when their total volume is high.

1.5.5.2. Core–Periphery Structures Within Narratives

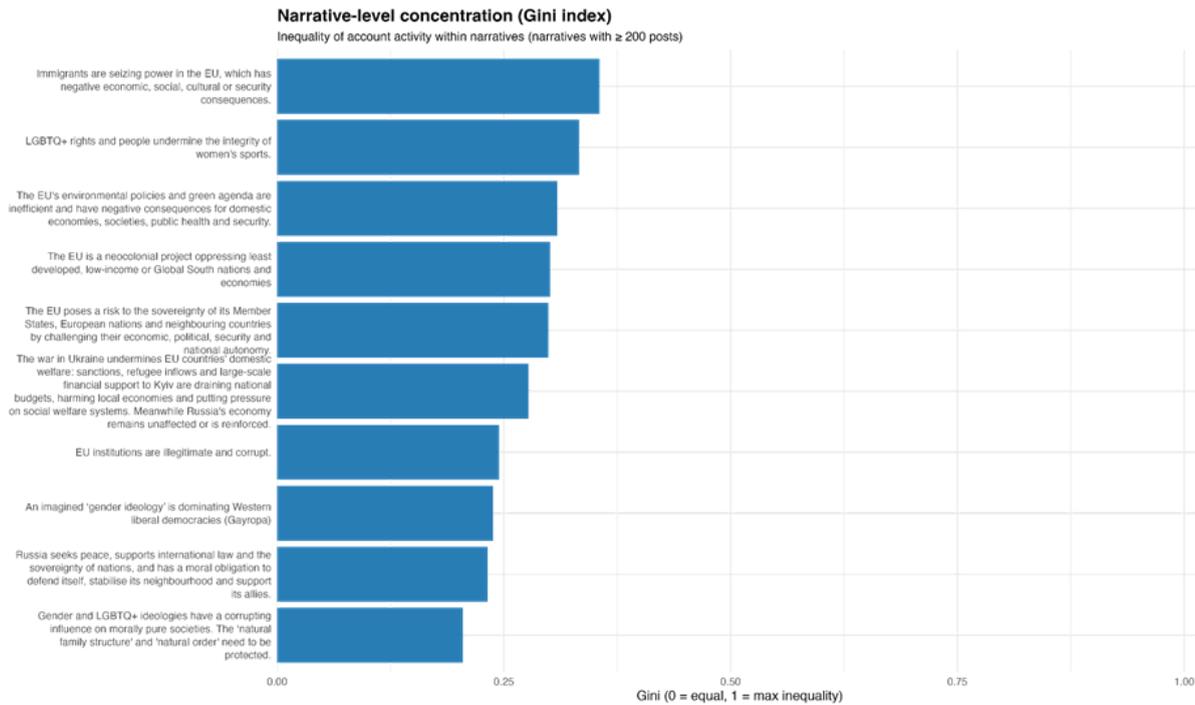


Figure 11. Core–periphery structure by narrative

Figure 11 decomposes narrative production by the share of posts generated by the most active accounts. Across narratives, the top 1% of accounts typically account for a substantial portion of total output, often exceeding 10% of all posts within a narrative. Expanding to the top 3% and top 5% further reinforces this pattern. Notably, narratives that delegitimise EU institutions, frame the EU as a threat to sovereignty, or portray Western actors as aggressors exhibit particularly strong core dominance. This suggests that these narratives are not merely emergent crowd phenomena but are sustained by relatively stable core producers. Election delegitimation narratives also exhibit a pronounced core–periphery structure, indicating that while many accounts participate during peak moments, agenda-setting remains concentrated.

1.5.5.3. Dominance of Individual Accounts

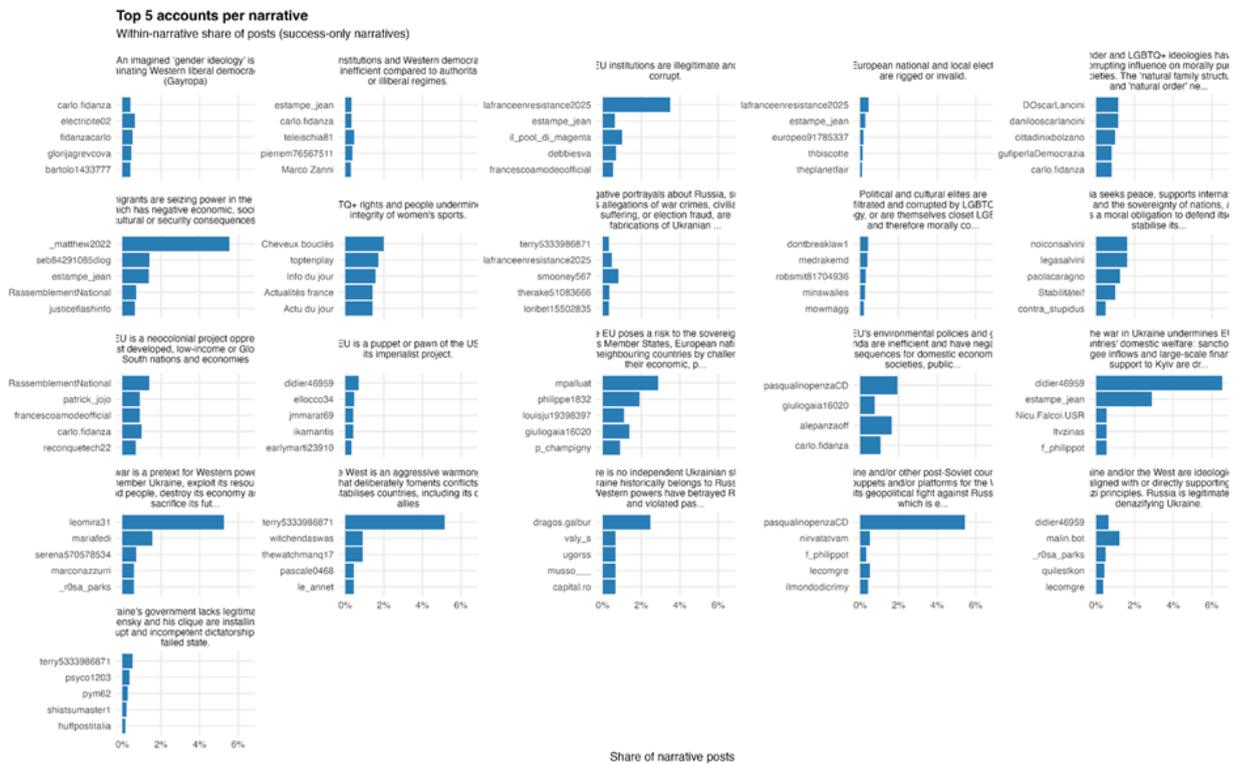


Figure 12. Dominance of the top account by narrative

Figure 12 focuses on the single most dominant account within each narrative. In several narratives, a single account accounts for 3–6% of all posts, a non-trivial share given the overall volume thresholds applied.

The highest dominance values appear in:

- narratives linking the war in Ukraine to EU economic decline,
- migration-related threat narratives,
- sovereignty and geopolitical subordination frames.

These findings point to high-leverage actors whose removal or disruption could disproportionately affect narrative visibility.

1.5.5.4. Early Movers and Narrative Seeding

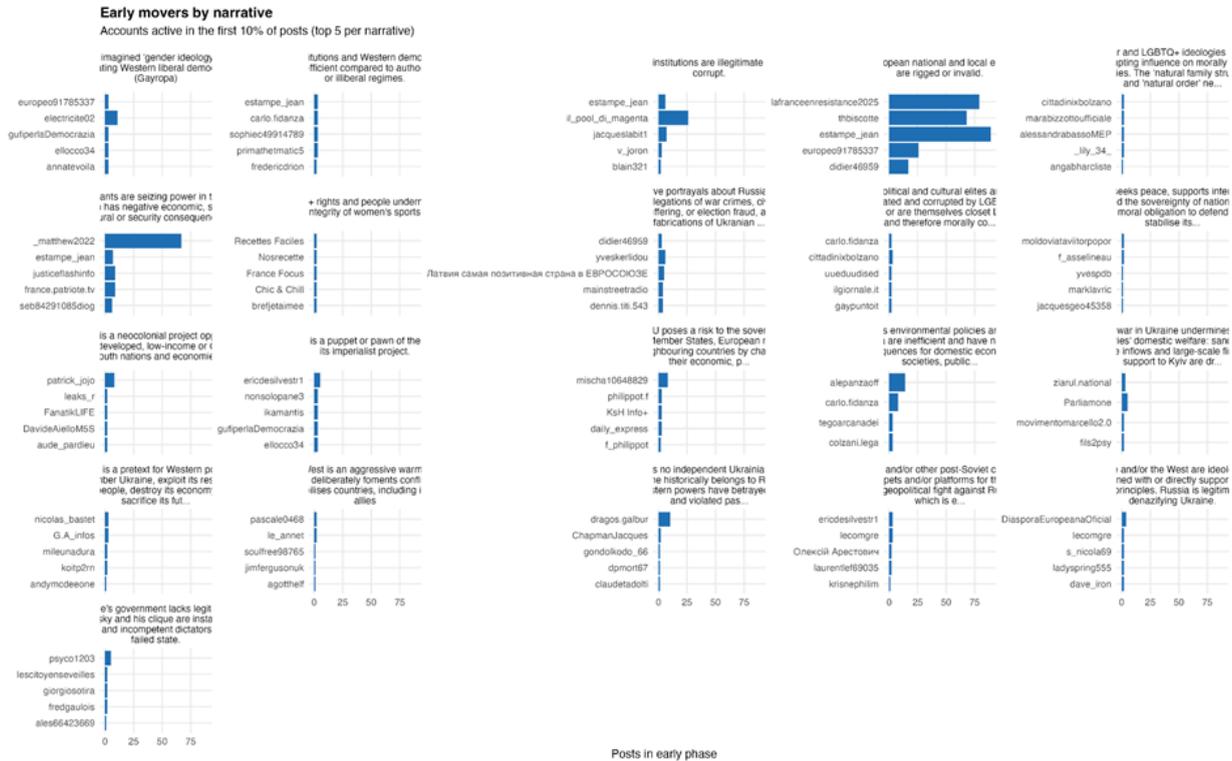


Figure 13. Early movers by narrative

Figure 13 identifies early movers – accounts that are disproportionately active during the initial phase of a narrative’s emergence. These actors likely play a seeding or framing role, shaping how narratives develop before broader uptake. Across narratives, early mover sets are typically small and highly concentrated, often dominated by accounts that later remain central producers. This temporal persistence suggests that early engagement is not random but reflects strategic positioning within the disinformation ecosystem.

1.5.5.5. Cross-Narrative Hubs and Actor Overlap

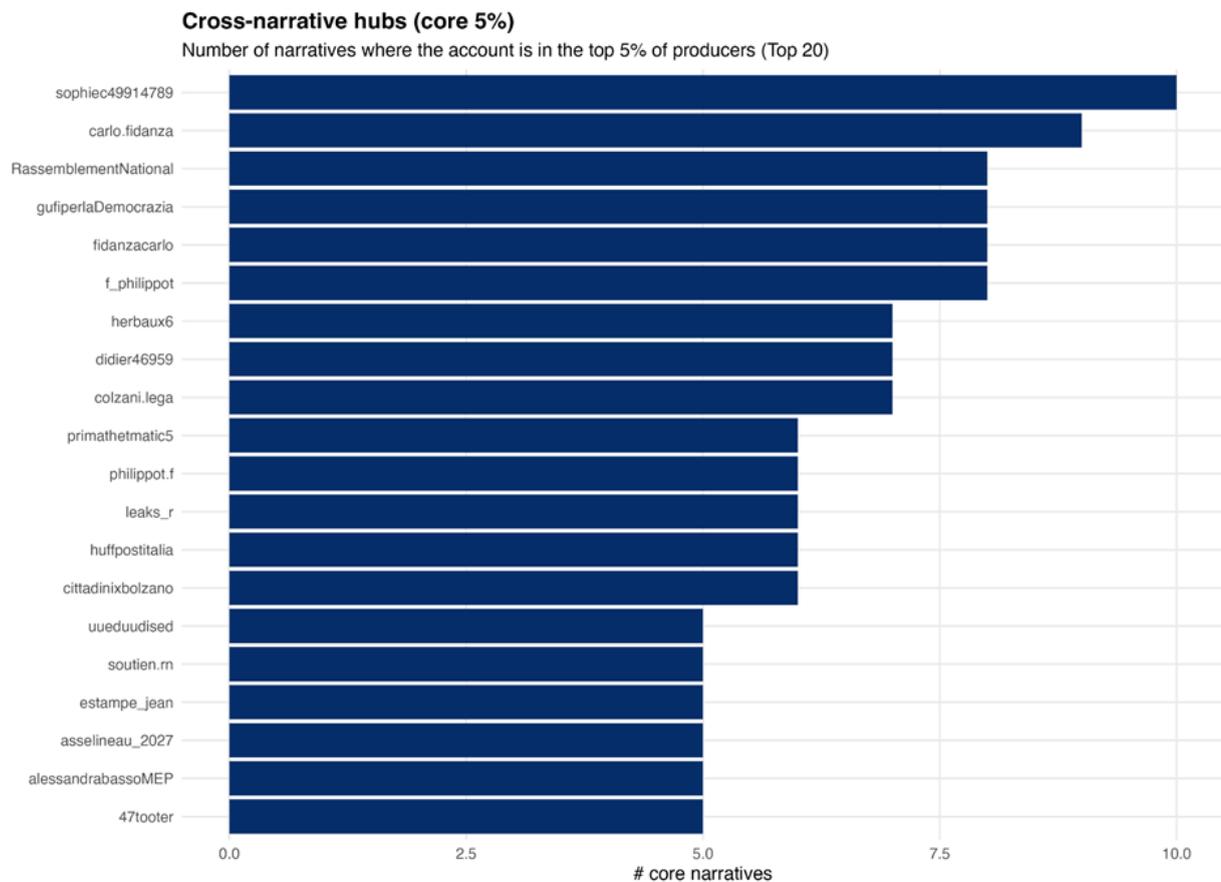


Figure 14. Cross-narrative hubs (core 5%)

Figure 14 reveals a small group of accounts that consistently appear in the core production group across multiple narratives. These cross-narrative hubs are active not only within a single thematic domain but across migration, sovereignty, EU legitimacy, and geopolitical narratives. Such actors are particularly important from a systemic perspective, as they enable narrative bridging and ideological coherence across otherwise distinct themes.

1.5.6. Network Analysis: Cross-Narrative Structure of Disinformation

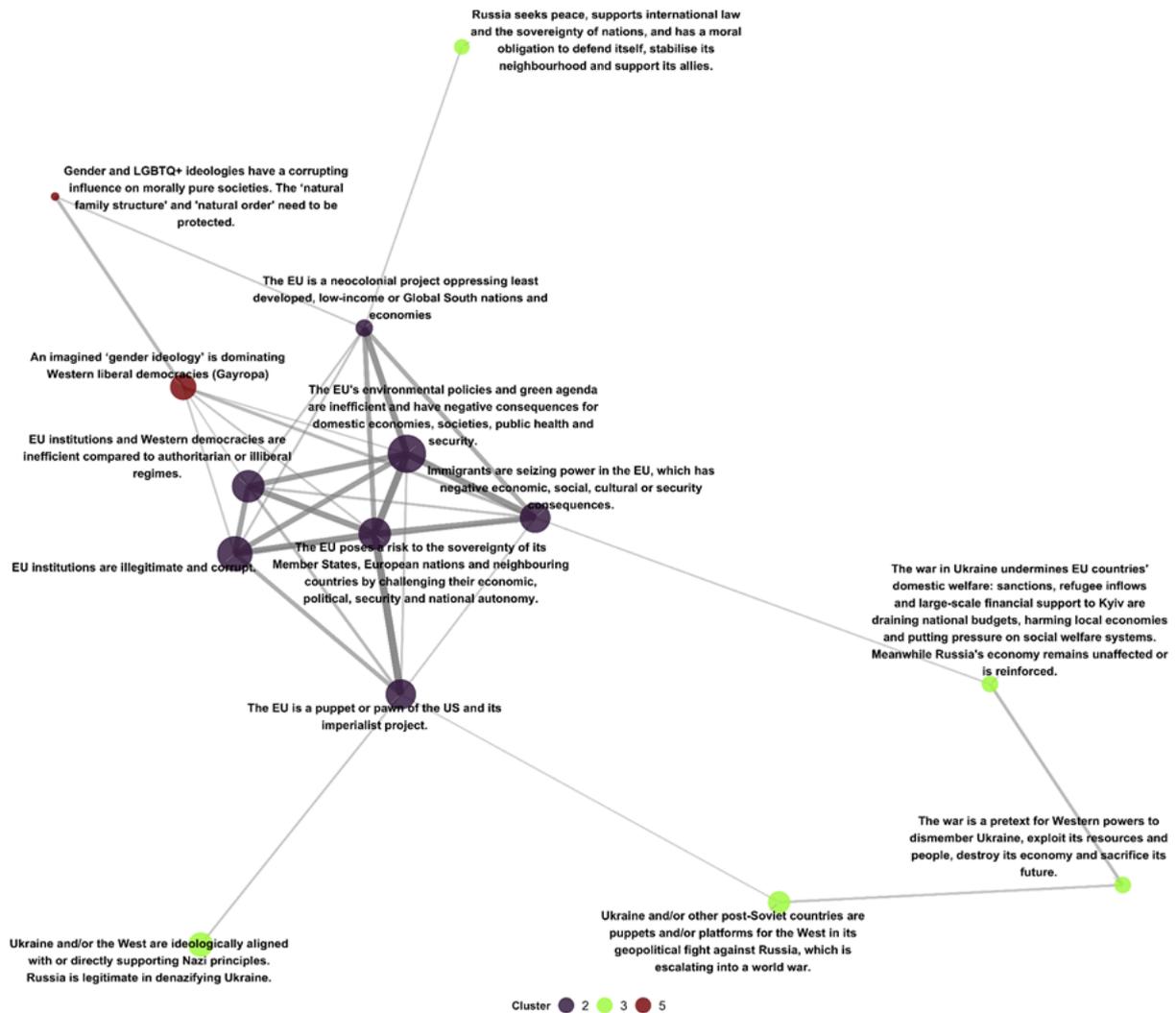


Figure 15. Cross-Narrative Structure of Disinformation

Figure 15 reveals a hierarchical core-periphery structure in which EU-related disinformation narratives cluster around a densely interconnected centre while maintaining weaker ties to thematically distinct peripheral narratives. This architecture is not accidental but reflects underlying patterns of coordinated narrative dissemination. At the heart of the network lies a tightly interwoven cluster of six to seven narratives, all coloured purple (Cluster 1), which collectively delegitimise EU institutions, policies, and legitimacy. These include claims that the EU is a neocolonial project; that EU institutions are inherently corrupt and illegitimate; that the EU threatens member-state sovereignty; that Western democracies are less efficient than authoritarian alternatives; and that EU environmental policies serve hidden agendas. The narrative "Immigrants are seizing power in the EU" also occupies a central position and displays a notably large node size, indicating that a substantial number of accounts produce this content. The structural

cohesion of this core cluster is striking: thick edges connect nearly all of these narratives, indicating that the same accounts routinely post across multiple EU-delegitimising themes. This pattern strongly suggests coordinated narrative production rather than organic, dispersed discourse.

Surrounding this core are thematically distinct narratives that occupy more peripheral positions. The green nodes (Cluster 2) represent geopolitical narratives related to the war in Ukraine and Russia's role in the conflict. These include claims that the war is a pretext for Western powers to exploit Ukraine, that the conflict undermines EU countries' welfare systems, that Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries are Western puppets, and that Russia is a defender of peace and international law. While these narratives are ideologically aligned with the anti-EU core, they form a somewhat separate subcluster with weaker connections to the centre. This suggests that while some cross-narrative hubs bridge the two thematic domains, a partially distinct set of accounts focuses primarily on geopolitical framing.

The red nodes (Cluster 5), representing narratives about gender and LGBTQ+ ideologies corrupting society, occupy the most isolated positions in the network. These cultural and moral panic narratives maintain only tenuous links to the core of EU delegitimation, indicating thematic and operational separation. Although ideologically consistent with the broader anti-liberal framing, these narratives appear to be carried by a more specialised subset of accounts with limited overlap with the main EU-focused producers. The network's topology reveals several strategically significant features. First, the extreme density of connections within the purple core cluster indicates that anti-EU narratives are not produced in isolation but as part of a coordinated package. Accounts active in this space do not specialise in single claims; rather, they reinforce multiple delegitimising frames simultaneously, creating ideological redundancy and mutual reinforcement. Second, the presence of thick edges linking the core to peripheral narratives indicates the existence of cross-narrative hub accounts that bridge thematic domains. These actors play a critical bridging role, linking EU sovereignty concerns to migration fears, geopolitical narratives, and cultural anxieties, thereby constructing a coherent anti-EU worldview across otherwise distinct issue areas. Third, the variation in node size reflects uneven account-level investment: certain narratives, particularly those related to immigration and geopolitical conflict, attract disproportionately large numbers of active accounts, suggesting either organic salience or deliberate amplification efforts.

Taken together, this structure is consistent with a coordinated disinformation strategy in which a stable core of EU-delegitimising narratives is systematically interwoven and selectively connected to auxiliary themes depending on their mobilising potential. Rather than a fragmented collection of independent claims, the network constitutes a multi-layered architecture of delegitimation in which sovereignty, migration, Ukraine,

and critiques of environmental policy all feed into a unified anti-EU master narrative. The differentiation between core and periphery, combined with the selective presence of bridging actors, suggests both strategic coherence and operational flexibility in deploying these narratives across the broader information environment.

1.6. Conclusion

The analysis of social media content surrounding the 2024 EP elections demonstrates how disinformation and emotionally charged rhetoric became deeply intertwined with the broader political environment defined by overlapping crises. The EU entered the 2024 elections amid heightened insecurity, geopolitical volatility, and profound socio-economic anxieties - conditions that have historically strengthened populist narratives and encouraged the spread of misleading information (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024; Petsinis, 2024). The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, inflationary pressures, energy insecurity, and the societal tensions surrounding climate and migration policies created a fertile environment for political actors and malign foreign influence operations to weaponize public fears and mistrust (Auers, 2024; EDMO Task Force, 2024).

Within this context, the social media discourse examined in this chapter reflects precisely the dynamics identified by research on contemporary populism: **disinformation narratives are most potent when they map onto existing fault lines and resonate with the binary populist worldview that opposes a virtuous “people” to a self-serving, detached “elite”** (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Across platforms and languages, social media posts drew on emotionally saturated themes that framed the EU as illegitimate, unaccountable, and threatening to national sovereignty - echoing the broader populist communication strategies observed across Member States before and during the 2024 elections (Ivaldi, 2024; Miklin, 2024; Lipiński, 2024). The same wedge issues documented in recent scholarship - war, migration, climate policy, and democratic integrity - were consistently used as vectors for disinformation in the social media. Overall, they sought to undermine confidence in EU governance, pit citizens against institutions, and position populist actors as defenders of national identity and security (HaBler et al., 2025).

Moreover, the findings show that this discursive landscape was not driven solely by spontaneous participation, but by a set of tightly coordinated online communities. **Coordinated communities recycled overlapping narratives, posted in temporal synchrony, reused templates, and embedded identical slogans across platforms, creating a cross-national and cross-platform ecosystem where delegitimising content circulated with high velocity and coherence.** Their repeated messaging helped normalise claims about EU illegitimacy, electoral fraud, and sovereignty threats, thereby shaping the discursive environment in which emotionally charged narratives could flourish.

Rather than relying on factual falsifications alone, disinformation surrounding the EP elections in social media operated primarily through manipulative PTs and emotionally evocative RFs. This aligns with Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) insight that the persuasive force of disinformation stems not from the fabrication itself but from its affective appeal, its capacity to mobilize identity-based grievances, and its repetition across channels. Techniques attacking reputation, such as **name calling, guilt by association, casting doubt, appeal to hypocrisy, ad hominem attacks, smears/poisoning the well, genetic fallacy, appeal to untrustworthy communicator and pathologization** functioned to erode trust in political actors, institutions, and electoral processes. Techniques attacking the arguments, such as **cultural biases, appeal to fear and appeal to authority (fearmongering)** exploited emotions, authority, or shared values rather than evidence to legitimise or delegitimise particular claims. In addition, RFs - including **hyperbole, antithesis, climax, metaphor, anaphora, anecdote and euphemism** - amplified threat perceptions and simplified complex issues into morally loaded binaries. These linguistic patterns in social media mirror the communication styles of populist actors during the EP elections campaign period, who similarly relied on emotionally charged language, crisis framing, and narratives of existential struggle to mobilize their constituencies (O'Malley, 2024; Jemberga, 2025).

The analysis also shows how **disinformation adapted to national contexts**, while retaining a shared underlying structure. Local concerns - such as agricultural pressures in France, e-voting scepticism in the Baltic States, migration anxieties in Italy, or foreign policy debates in Romania - were woven into broader narratives portraying the EU as overreaching, corrupt, or complicit in societal decline. This confirms earlier observations that disinformation is most effective when it blends global tropes with local grievances, thereby strengthening its perceived relevance and emotional resonance (Petsinis, 2024; Barana, 2024). At the same time, cross-linguistic similarities in rhetorical style - particularly the prevalence of apocalyptic imagery, dichotomous framing, and moral outrage - underscore the transnational coherence of disinformation messaging.

The findings further align with research on the **technological amplifiers of political manipulation**. Our analysis shows that EU-focused disinformation followed a highly structured temporal and networked logic. Narrative production surged from early May 2024, peaking around the vote, with election-delegitimation emerging as the dominant mobilising frame across major platforms. A small subset of hyperactive accounts generated 20-30% of all content, and high Gini coefficients highlight extreme inequality in narrative production. Network analysis reveals a hierarchical structure in which delegitimising claims about the EU form a tightly connected core, reinforced by adjacent narratives on migration, sovereignty, and geopolitics. Cross-platform synchronisation, early-mover seeding, and cross-narrative hubs posting across multiple themes indicate that these narratives were strategically disseminated, confirming that disinformation

during the elections was embedded in a coordinated, multi-layered communication ecosystem rather than emerging from organic public debate.

As a pilot study based on the beta version of the PROMPT narrative analysis tool, the **results should be interpreted as indicative patterns**. Nonetheless, the analysis clearly shows how disinformation around the 2024 EP elections capitalized on societal anxiety, crisis fatigue, and longstanding scepticism toward supranational governance. By fusing strategic narratives with rhetorical and emotional manipulation – often subtly rather than through overt falsehoods – these campaigns contributed to an environment in which distrust, polarisation, and identity-driven conflict could intensify. This dynamic reflects broader concerns in the literature: that the EU’s multilevel governance structures, when combined with societal fragmentation and strategic external interference, create a challenging information environment in which disinformation can shape public attitudes even without factual coherence (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2024; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Ultimately, the study highlights the need for integrated approaches that account not only for the content of disinformation but also for the emotional, rhetorical, and sociopolitical ecosystems that allow it to thrive. Understanding how narratives resonate with crisis-driven insecurities, how rhetorical strategies bypass deliberative reasoning, and how digital infrastructures amplify manipulative messaging is essential for safeguarding democratic resilience in future electoral cycles.

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2. Three Shades of Disinformation Targeting LGBTQ+ Rights & Communities Across the EU

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the state of play of disinformation and hate speech against LGBTQ+ communities. It focuses on the main anti-LGBTQ+ narratives dominating the European informational landscape today, the emotional triggers that are activated to increase the impact of these discourses, as well as the rhetorical techniques that are mobilized to amplify their resonance.

Section 2.2. describes the overall methodological approach used to characterize LGBTQ+ disinformation at the EU level, as well as in three countries: France, Italy and Romania. These case studies were selected based on recent events and milestones which have a potentially large impact on LGBTQ+ communities: the **"Valditara" sex-ed bill in Italy**, the impact of the **ECJ decision on the recognition of same-sex marriage in France**, and the **surge of gender-based political violence in Romania in the context of elections**. Following the previous report on LGBTQ+ disinformation narratives, **Section 2.3.** provides an update on the "big picture" of LGBTQ+-related disinformation between October 2025 and January 2026. **Sections 2.4.** follows the same approach to focus on the Italian, French, and Romanian contexts. The final substantial section **(2.5.)** compares findings across these diverse linguistic and political contexts, followed by the main conclusions drawn from the analysis **(2.6.)**.

Main Findings

The analysis of the global and country-specific datasets reveals that anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation in the EU is a highly strategic, event-driven phenomenon. Some core findings include:

- **Dominance of the "Natural Order" Baseline:** Narrative 3 (Natural Family Structure) is the undisputed foundation of anti-LGBTQ+ discourse across all regions. It represents the highest volume of matched posts in Italy (n=2,915), France (n=747), and Romania (n=2,239). This narrative functions as an emotional "entry point" to frame human rights as a threat to biological and moral essentialism.
- **Tactical Event-Based Adaptation:** Disinformation is not static but opportunistic. It adapts to specific national triggers: rebranding affective education as "indoctrination" in Italy (Valditara bill), reframing legal rulings as "Cultural Colonialism" in France (CJEU), and positioning inclusion as an "existential geopolitical threat" during Romanian elections.
- **Narrative Bundling and Geopolitical Tensions:** LGBTQ+ rights are systematically weaponized as a proxy for broader anti-EU and pro-Russian sentiment. In the global dataset (n=135) and notably in Romania, Russia is positioned as the "moral

guardian" against a "decadent West." This "bundling" strategy uses gender issues to bridge domestic social grievances with geopolitical destabilization goals.

- **Elite-Led Coordination (CIB):** Disinformation is not organic; it is driven by a concentrated minority. The Top 1% of accounts produce 18% of the content regarding the "Natural Order." Small, tightly coordinated clusters (2–3 accounts) use scripted templates and cross-border conduits—such as the Moldovan *Apărătorul Ortodox* portal—to saturate digital spaces.
- **Universal Dehumanization Engine:** Across all languages, **Name-calling, Labeling (n=6,350)**, and **Pathologization (n=1,531)** are the primary tools used to collapse complex identities into hostile caricatures, effectively lowering the threshold for institutionalized hate speech.

2.2. Methodology & Data

This analysis is based on four datasets collected using both generic and country-specific queries collected across **six social media platforms: YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and Bluesky**. Country-specific queries for **Italy, Latvia, Romania, and France** combined **LGBTQ-related terms** with delegitimization and threat-based keywords (e.g., "indoctrination," "gender ideology," "moral decay"), as well as **contextual keywords and hashtags** such as *#educazionessuale* for Italy.

The overview of this chapter rests on **150,849 social media posts** spanning **October 2025 to January 2026**. From this core repository, two distinct subsets were extracted for further rhetorical analysis: **10,000 posts** used for global statistical analysis to maintain the weight of high-frequency languages (English, French, Italian) in the broader dataset; and second, a **"Low-Resource Languages" dataset** (N=6,165), which oversampled purposely all flagged posts in Romanian, Russian, and Baltic languages (Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian), to ensure that all languages were taken into account. We relied on four country-specific datasets analyzed to capture local realities and debates: **France** (51,220 posts collected between September and December 2025), **Italy** (42,678 posts from May to December 2025), **Romania** (29,018 posts spanning November 2024 to December 2025), and **Latvia** (6,484 posts).

Analytical techniques for narrative identification utilized an **LLM-driven embedding-based semantic similarity approach**. This was supplemented by **Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)** detection to identify scripted templates and **Dynamic Network Analysis (DNA)** to measure actor concentration and temporal surges. This analysis was developed against a **narrative taxonomy of anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation and hate speech** developed in the context of the PROMPT project. The narratives and related concepts are outlined below.

Narrative Taxonomy LGBTQ+ Disinformation, PROMPT	
Narrative 1:	The West is using LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion as a tool of cultural colonialism, trying to force its corrupt values onto the rest of the world.
Narrative 2:	An imagined 'gender ideology' is dominating Western liberal democracies (Gayropa)
Narrative 3:	Gender and LGBTQ+ ideologies have a corrupting influence on morally pure societies. The 'natural family structure' and 'natural order' need to be protected.
Narrative 4:	The LGBTQ+ community is violent, dangerous and/or is a threat to child safety.
Narrative 5:	Political and cultural elites are infiltrated and corrupted by LGBTQ+ ideology, or are themselves closet LGBTQ+, and therefore morally corrupt and illegitimate.
Narrative 6:	LGBTQ+ identities are a public health hazard.
Narrative 7:	LGBTQ+ rights and people undermine the integrity of women's sports.

Key Concepts & Terminology	
Cultural Colonialism	A geopolitical frame that depicts the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights by international bodies (like the EU) as a form of "Western imperialism" intended to undermine the national sovereignty and traditional identities of other nations.
Gender ideology	A broad, ambiguous term used by disinformation actors to characterize LGBTQ+ rights and gender pluralism not as a matter of human rights, but as an artificial, harmful, and state-sponsored doctrine imposed on society.
LGBTQ+ ideology	A variant of the "gender ideology" frame that specifically portrays LGBTQ+ visibility and legal recognition as a "corrupting influence" or an "imposed orthodoxy" that threatens morally "pure" societies.
Gayropa	A derogatory portmanteau (Gay + Europa) characterizing the European Union and Western democracies as morally decadent, anti-family, and anti-religious, often positioning Russia as the "guardian" of traditional values in contrast.
Natural Family Structure	A secular frame (often termed "heteroactivism") that advocates for the traditional nuclear family (a married man and woman with children) as the only "natural" and biological template for a stable society.
Natural Order	A religiously anchored frame that portrays heteronormativity as a divinely ordained hierarchy; it treats any departure from traditional gender roles as a moral transgression against "sacred law" rather than a political disagreement.

Key Concepts & Terminology	
Child Safety	An emotional "hook" used to trigger moral panic. It weaponizes child protection by recasting LGBTQ+ inclusion as "predatory behavior" or "indoctrination" (the "groomer" trope) to justify exclusionary policies.
Public Health Hazard	A discourse that portrays LGBTQ+ identities as a medical or social risk. It manifests in two variants: a literal one, using pseudo-science to frame identities as physical or mental diseases, and a metaphorical one, framing LGBTQ+ visibility as a "social contagion" that must be quarantined from public life.
Women sports' integrity	A discourse claiming that the inclusion of transgender people in athletics undermines biological reality and fairness, used to create a "defensive" argument against LGBTQ+ rights within the context of women's rights.

2.3. LGBTQ+ overview: Mainstream Narratives & Rhetorical Profiles

We first analyse the 'big picture' of LGBTQ+ disinformation the EU digital space and focus on the current **dominant anti-LGBTQ+ narratives**¹², as well as the **rhetorical devices and persuasion techniques** that are mobilized to support their propagation.

Overall, a dominant **anti-woke frame dominates**. LGBTQ+ inclusion is portrayed as a domestic threat that needs to be regulated, or even purged, from local institutions. The focus is primarily on identity politics, social norms, and the alleged "capture" of domestic institutions by an imagined "gender ideology".

The most prevalent theme used by disinformation actors regards the "natural structure"¹³ dominance (n=6,733 posts). This suggests that the most effective way in which anti-LGBTQ+ stances are spread is not necessarily through attacks against specific policies, but instead through a broad, emotional appeal to biological and moral essentialism. Indeed, by appealing to a pre-existing, idealized version of the "traditional family", this narrative creates a powerful "us vs. them" logic that helps introduce more extreme and "defensive" narratives (such as **Narrative 4**, portraying the community as a

¹² It should be kept in mind that English, French, and Italian account for 98.7% of the data in this dataset (with English alone at nearly 85%). Indeed, while the remaining languages are present, their signal is statistically overshadowed/marginalized in that specific dataset. Hence the use of a second dataset focussing on low-resource languages, namely Romanian, Italian and Latvian,

¹³ In the context of this narrative, "natural structure" refers to two primary frameworks. The **secular framework ("Heteroactivism")** promotes the traditional nuclear family as the only biological and social template capable of ensuring human reproduction and societal stability. The **religious framework ("Restorationism")** portrays this same structure as a divinely ordained order, where any departure from heteronormativity is framed as a moral transgression. By blending "biological truth" with "sacred law," this narrative provides a foundation for more aggressive disinformation, making it difficult to distinguish between political advocacy and harmful rhetoric.

threat to **child safety**; or **Narrative 1**, framing inclusion as **cultural colonialism**), making those feel less like extremism and more like the inevitable next step in protecting the natural order.

Indeed, the second-most present narrative states that **"the LGBTQ+ community is violent, dangerous and/or is a threat to child safety"** (n=1,228 posts). The discourse here shifts to a much more dramatic and aggressive stance, in the name of child safety, against LGBTQ+ communities. This "save the children" tactic is used to justify exclusionary measures towards the LGBTQ+ community.

The third most frequent narrative (n=554 posts) asserts that **political and cultural leaders are "corrupted" or "infiltrated" by LGBTQ+ ideology**. By directly attacking people in charge rather than arguing against a law or a specific body, this narrative aims at undermining trust in leadership. The mechanism for this is to claim that the leaders in government, media, and education aren't just wrong, but instead they are "corrupted" or "secretly LGBTQ+". This narrative differs from **Narrative 2 (An imagined 'gender ideology' is dominating Western liberal democracies (Gayropa))** in that the latter is ideology-centered, conveying the idea that pro-LGBTQ+ and pro-feminist values are dominating politics; whereas the former is elite-centered, suggesting that political and cultural elites are themselves LGBTQ+.

Fourthly, whereas the numbers for the **"Cultural Colonialism"** (n=738 posts) and the **"Gayropa"** (n=209 posts) are lower, they remain nevertheless crucial. This is so because these topics bridge the gap between social issues and national security, notably by framing LGBTQ+ rights as a weapon used by the West to destabilize foreign nations.

Interestingly, the fifth most present narrative does not directly concern LGBTQ+ issues, but rather **frames Russia as a defender of traditional identity against "Russophobia" and Western ideological threats** (n=135 posts). While at a first glance, 135 posts about Russian sovereignty might seem out of place in a study of gender ideology, their presence shows that these topics are never discussed in isolation by disinformation agents. Instead, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is bundled with much broader issues like the war in Ukraine¹⁴, the EU elections¹⁵, or national security.

¹⁴ "The West is an aggressive warmonger that deliberately foments conflicts, destabilises countries, including its own allies", n=15 posts; "Ukraine and/or the West are ideologically aligned with or directly supporting Nazi principles. Russia is legitimate in denazifying Ukraine", n=14 posts.

¹⁵ "The EU poses a risk to the sovereignty of its Member States, European nations and neighbouring countries by challenging their economic, political, security and national autonomy", n=21 posts; "The EU's environmental policies and green agenda are inefficient and have negative consequences for domestic economies, societies, public health and security", n=14 posts

2.3.1. Rhetorical Devices & Persuasion Techniques used against LGBTQ+ rights and communities

The anti-LGBTQ+ discourse relies on an aggressive layering of rhetorical devices and persuasion techniques, which are mobilized to trigger emotional reactions in the wider public, ultimately contributing to an increased resonance of anti-LGBTQ+ narratives. **Name calling or Labeling**¹⁶ (n=6,350) and **Guilt by Association**¹⁷ (n=3,057) are frequently used. They collapse complex identities into hostile, easy-to-reject caricatures of LGBTQ+ people. When paired with **Pathologization**¹⁸ (n=1,531), these techniques reframe LGBTQ+ existence as a medical or social "sickness," directly triggering moral superiority and disgust. By **Casting Doubt**¹⁹ (n=1,546) and delivering **Ad Hominem attacks**²⁰ (n=840), the rhetoric shifts from policy-related facts to attacks on personal character and identity. This is an attempt to create a "sanitary cordon" around traditional values by branding anyone outside that circle as inherently "other" or "corrupt," effectively fueling **outrage at elites** and a defensive **"Us vs. Them" group identity**.

These techniques rely heavily on rhetorical devices that amplify the scale of the perceived threat to ensure it resonates with a wider audience. **Amplification and Exaggeration** (n=6,638) work in tandem with **False Equivalencies** (n=4,238) to **turn isolated social changes into "civilizational crises."** These exaggerations are cemented through **Repetition and Redundancy** (n=1,548), which ensures the narrative feels "omnipresent" and a matter of "common sense." By leveraging **Emotional Manipulation**

¹⁶ A form of argument in which loaded labels are directed at an individual or a group, typically in an insulting or demeaning way, or as either something the target audience fears, hates, or on the contrary finds desirable or loves.

¹⁷ Attacking the opponent or an activity by associating it with another group, activity, or concept that has sharp negative connotations for the target audience. The most common example, which has given its name to that technique, is making comparisons to Hitler and the Nazi regime. However, this technique is not restricted to comparisons to that group only. More precisely, this can be done by claiming a link or an equivalence between the target of the technique and any individual, group or event in the presence or in the past, which has or had an unquestionable negative perception (e.g., was considered a failure), or is depicted in such a way.

¹⁸ The act of unfairly or wrongly considering something or someone as a problem. It involves viewing or characterizing normal behaviors, emotions, or social conditions as medically or psychologically abnormal. It often frames opposing viewpoints, political actors, or social groups as irrational, extremist, or mentally unstable rather than engaging with their arguments on a rational basis. With this, it delegitimizes opponents by associating them with psychological disorders, paranoia, hysteria, or dangerous fanaticism, discouraging critical discussion and framing dissent as a symptom of dysfunction rather than a valid political stance.

¹⁹ Casting doubt on the character or the personal attributes of someone or something in order to question their general credibility or quality, instead of using a proper argument related to the topic. This can be done for instance, by speaking about the target's professional background, as a way to discredit their argument.

²⁰ An argument or reaction directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining. Often this term refers to a rhetorical strategy where the speaker attacks the character, motive, or some other attribute of the person making an argument rather than the substance of the argument itself. This avoids genuine debate by creating a diversion often using a totally irrelevant, but often highly charged attribute of the opponent's character or background. The most common form of this fallacy is "A" makes a claim of "fact", to which "B" asserts that "A" has a personal trait, quality or physical attribute that is repugnant thereby going off-topic, and hence "B" concludes that "A" has their "fact" wrong – without ever addressing the point of the debate. Other uses of the term ad hominem are more traditional, referring to arguments tailored to fit a particular audience, and may be encountered in specialized philosophical usage. These typically refer to the dialectical strategy of using the target's own beliefs and arguments against them, while not agreeing with the validity of those beliefs and arguments. A common misconception is that an ad hominem attack is synonymous with an insult. This is not true, although some ad hominem arguments may be insulting by the person receiving the argument.

(n=854) and **Humor or Ridicule** (n=490), the discourse lowers the audience's cognitive defenses, making the ideology "sharable" while masking deep-seated fears of **cultural loss** and **identity erosion**. Ultimately, these devices act as a force multiplier, turning abstract narratives into **urgent, emotional calls to action**.

2.3.2. Anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation in other European languages

Against this general background, we focused on disinformation expressed in "low-resource" languages (namely Latvian and Romanian). Besides showing the distinct dynamics of anti-LGBTQ+ narratives within minority languages and how rhetorical trends shift when moving across linguistic and cultural borders, this comparison **ultimately helps understand how disinformation adapts to local contexts to propagate**.

In short, **whatever the language, the tactics employed remain the same**. In both sets, the **"Natural Order" narrative** remains the undisputed foundation, though it occupies a slightly higher relative share in high-resource languages such as English.

However, while narratives in dominant languages focus on **Child Safety** (n=1,228), low-resource languages have a higher presence of the **Cultural Colonialism** narrative (n=703). Indeed, rather than using a call to action to 'save the children' as a powerful emotional hook, in the Baltic states or Romania, LGBTQ+ is embedded in more of a **geopolitical discourse**. Instead of just focusing on local social issues, they **frame LGBTQ+ rights as a 'Western tool' or a foreign import**. This allows the narrative to hit deeper, more specific cultural nerves, like the **fear of losing one's national identity** or **distrust of foreign influence**.

In the Italian, French, Latvian and Romanian digital spaces, disinformation narratives rely on similar rhetorical devices and persuasion techniques, such as **Amplification**²¹ (6,638 vs 3,444) and **Name Calling** (6,350 vs 3,801), which are the primary tools for engagement. However, these languages also use more pronouncedly **Stereotyping** (n=335) and **Poisoning the Well** (n=310), suggesting that smaller-scale discourse may be more focused on specific **character assassination** and **smear tactics** to activate **outrage at elites**, in contrast to more generalized attacks to the "government" or the "system" used in more 'dominant' languages, such as English, that are aiming to reach a broader audience. The consistent use of **False Equivalencies** and **Pathologization** across languages ensures that regardless of the post's reach, the underlying emotional "hook" (triggering **disgust** and **systemic chaos anxiety**) remains the uniform mechanism for making these narratives resonate with the public.

²¹ To enhance the impact of communication, making it more persuasive, memorable, and emotionally engaging.

2.3.3. Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)²² Reports Analysis

The CIB analysis confirms that these narratives are not emerging organically, but instead they are pushed through a deliberate network of accounts that mimic real grassroots support. The analysis reveals a pattern where high-volume **Amplification and Exaggeration** are used to flood specific digital spaces, transforming a fringe viewpoint into an apparent majority opinion. By using **Repetition**²³ and **Redundancy**²⁴, these networks ensure that narratives about the damaging effects of LGBTQ+ on the natural order/family structure and on elites being infiltrated by LGBTQ+ values appear constantly across different platforms and languages at the same time. Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour creates an **artificial "echo chamber"** in which the average user is hit by the same emotional triggers – like **outrage at elites**²⁵ and **fear of systemic chaos**²⁶ – from multiple seemingly unrelated sources, effectively **manufacturing a sense of "common sense"** that isn't actually there.

2.3.4. Who drives disinformation against LGBTQ+ communities: Dynamic Network Analysis (DNA)

The analysis of social media networks across time shows that a small number of core actors seed and sustain global narratives. The data reveals a high degree of account-level concentration: for example, a tiny minority—the Top 1%—produces a staggering 18% of all content related to the **"Natural Order" narrative** (n=6,733 posts). This reveals an "elite-led" model where **hub accounts (like "grok"²⁷) act as early movers to plant the discourse across multiple platforms**. Most importantly, the temporal analysis reveals a narrative 'bundling' strategy: anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric serves as a strategic wedge for broader geopolitical goals. The same actors pushing **"Gayropa" narratives** are often those promoting Russia as a cultural defender (n=135). By instrumentalizing feelings of **nostalgia** and **fear of cultural loss**, the network bridges the gap between domestic social grievances and pro-Kremlin or anti-EU sentiment, using **"gender ideology" as a tool to destabilize trust in Western democracies**.

Evidence from these datasets confirms that anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation is a **highly reactive, event-driven phenomenon**. Rather than appearing as a steady baseline of

²² Coordinated behaviour refers to situations in which two or more social media accounts repeatedly perform actions involving the same uniquely identifiable content within a predefined time interval (Righetti & Balluff, 2025). To detect CIB, we used the CoorTweet package.

²³ Rhetorical tool used to emphasize key messages and make them more memorable, reinforcing ideas through repeated words or phrases.

²⁴ The purpose being to create a memorable and impactful message, making it more likely to resonate with their audience.

²⁵ Anger directed at perceived corrupt or out-of-touch elites (politicians, media, EU, NGOs).

²⁶ Fear rooted in broader instability or collapse, associated with the fear of losing control of a perceived reality.

²⁷ Refers to the generative AI integrated into the X (Twitter) platform. In this analysis, "Grok" is identified as a central hub because its automated summaries can inadvertently amplify disinformation. By "seeding" unverified narratives into the platform's main discovery feeds, the AI provides a veneer of legitimacy to fringe claims, making them appear as trending news to a wider audience before human moderators or fact-checkers can intervene.

hostility, disinformation surges are strategically timed to coincide with specific institutional and political realities and events. Because these windows of opportunity allow actors to ground abstract ideologies in tangible fears, the following sections will focus specifically on the most impactful events of recent months within the EU informational space, namely **major court rulings** (such as the CJEU decision in France), **pivotal legislative reforms** (the Valditara bill in Italy), and **national electoral cycles** (as seen in Romania). By analyzing the rhetoric surrounding these specific events, we can better understand how disinformation actors instrumentalize legal and political developments associated with gender as an open door to undermine and ultimately dismantle social cohesion.

2.3. Italy, France & Romania: Country-specific anti-LGBTQ+ Disinformation

2.3.1. Italy: The "Valditara Bill" and the Battle Over Affective Education

In **Italy**, sexual and affective education has recently moved to the forefront of public debate following the introduction of the "**Valditara bill**". Proposed by Minister Giuseppe Valditara and approved by the Chamber of Deputies in December 2025, the bill officially aims to combat gender-based violence. However, it has sparked significant controversy by excluding primary schools from these activities and requiring explicit "informed consent" from secondary school parents. While the government frames this as protecting parental rights and avoiding "gender theories," opposition and queer advocates argue it creates a barrier to inclusive education.

Main Narratives, Rhetoric Devices & Persuasion Techniques

To understand to what extent the online debate surrounding the bill has been instrumentalized to spread disinformation about LGBTQ+ people, we drew on PROMPT's Corpus Analyser, which identified 21 narrative clusters. The original dataset—consisting of **42,678 Italian-language (IT) posts** collected between **1 May 2025 and 31 December 2025** across **YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X, and Bluesky**—was filtered using the PROMPT LGBTQ+ narrative taxonomy. This process resulted in **4,077 posts** being identified and **categorized** into 21 narrative clusters.

The dominant narrative for Italy was the one **accusing LGBTQ+ ideologies of having a corrupting influence on morally pure societies** (n=2,915). For instance, users frequently accuse supporters of the bill of being "fed by the propaganda of LGBTQ lobbies". Brainwashing accusations were also present, with posts claiming that the community uses "the rainbow game" to lure children in order to "brainwash" (*plagiarli*) them. Finally, **anti-institutional rhetoric** was prevalent, with activists in schools being characterized not as educators, but as agents of "political propaganda" who aim to "break families apart" and "erase the distinction between sexes".

The second most present narrative portrays the **LGBTQ+ community as violent, dangerous and a threat to child safety** (n=387). The prevalence of this narrative appears logical given the nature of the debated topic. This storyline escalates the "ideology" claim into a direct physical threat, frequently using labels of "**pedophilia**" and weaponizing specific violent incidents to characterize the entire community as dangerous. Some examples drawn from PROMPT's Corpus Analyser are accounts explicitly stating that the movement supporting the bill is "full of pedophiles" whose goal is to "put their hands on other people's children". This often involves the **importation of foreign incidents** to justify domestic fear, with reports (sometimes doctored or exaggerated) of school shootings, such as the Nashville or Minneapolis incidents, used to label trans individuals as "transgender assassins" or "monsters" obsessed with killing children. Finally, there were direct warnings used to frame **LGBTQ+ existence as a safety risk**, with commands like "Stay away from children" paired with descriptions of the community as "deviant," "perverted," or "satanic".

Regarding **Cultural Colonialism** (n=250), actors claim LGBTQ+ inclusion is a form of Western "decadent" values being imposed on society. For instance, the Corpus Analyser identified claims that the West wants to "export its moral crisis" to the Global South, but "we will resist in the name of Christ". Another framing suggests that the European Union is conducting a massive ideological campaign, using billions in public funds to spread gender ideology while masking it as a human rights initiative to override the social norms and sovereignty of individual nations. Similarly, the **Infiltrated Elites** narrative (n=176) alleges that European and left-wing institutions—such as the PD, M5S, and AVS—are establishing a "totalitarian dictatorship." Within this frame, local government initiatives, such as those in the Capitoline Assembly, are depicted as "re-education" projects designed to infiltrate all sectors of public life, including schools and sports, to serve an elite-led LGBTQ+ agenda.

The rhetorical profile of this campaign relies heavily on **Name-calling and Labeling** to dehumanize activists with terms like "perverts," "pedophiles," or "satanists." **Guilt by Association** is used to link institutions supporting LGBTQ+ rights to large-scale conspiracies against the social order, while **Amplification and Exaggeration** generate moral panic through extreme, unfounded claims such as "they want to change children's sex." Finally, the use of **False Equivalencies** reframes educational initiatives as a binary political struggle, contrasting "leftist propaganda" with the bill's supposed "restoration" of parental authority.

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)

The analysis detected three accounts engaged in coordinated behavior. These accounts systematically echoed the "corrupting power" narrative, using scripted messaging to emphasize the "natural family's" right to defend itself against alleged ideological intrusions and the "erasure" of traditional religious identity.

3.3.2. France: The CJEU and the Sovereignty Debate over Same-Sex Marriage

In **France**, the debate surrounding same-sex marriage has been reinvigorated by discussions concerning the **Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)**, particularly following a landmark ruling on November 25, 2025, which held that **all Member States must recognize same-sex marriages legally contracted elsewhere in the bloc to ensure citizens' fundamental rights to free movement and a "normal family life"**²⁸. Disinformation actors have seized upon legal proceedings to claim that "Brussels" is overstepping its authority by forcing automatic and universal recognition of these unions across all Member States. This topic is particularly relevant as it intersects with broader French anxieties regarding national sovereignty and the preservation of traditional social structures against what is framed as a "progressive offensive" directed from abroad.

Main Narratives, Rhetoric Devices & Persuasion Techniques

To understand the extent to which this debate has been instrumentalized, we utilized PROMPT's Corpus Analyser. The original dataset—comprising **51,220 French-language (FR) posts** collected between **1 September and 1 December 2025** across **YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X, and Bluesky**—was filtered using the PROMPT LGBTQ+ narrative taxonomy, resulting in 991 posts categorized into narrative clusters.

The dominant narrative in France asserts that **"Natural Family Structure" and "Natural Order" must be protected (n=747)**, framing LGBTQ+ inclusion as a corrupting influence on a morally "pure" society. This narrative portrays the traditional nuclear family not just as a choice, but as a biological and moral imperative under attack by "gender ideology." Coordinated messaging often frames legal outcomes from the CJEU as aggressive **Cultural Colonialism (N=108)**, where the EU "imposes" gay marriage to crush national traditions and values. This is frequently coupled with the **Infiltrated Elites (n=45)** narrative, which uses sexualized smears to delegitimize political figures like President Macron by alleging they are agents of an "LGBTQ+ lobby." Furthermore, public events are framed as instruments of **ideological subversion**; for example, the appointment of artist Barbara Butch to head the "Nuit Blanche" festival was reframed as a deliberate "blasphemous" attempt to erase European spiritual landmarks. Finally, there is a visible mobilization through **existential threat** narratives, where actors import foreign incidents—such as the death of American activist Charlie Kirk—to claim that a "war has been declared" by violent LGBTQ+ militants against the "Christian" camp.

²⁸ See *Top court forces EU nations to recognize same-sex marriages from other member states*, *Le Monde*, November 25, 2025. [Read the full article here.](#)

The rhetorical profile of this discourse relies heavily on **Hyperboles²⁹ and alarmist words³⁰**, converting legal administrative outcomes into a "forced takeover" of the state. **Metonymy³¹** is a recurring device, where "Brussels" is used as shorthand for an alien and faceless technocracy. The use of **Pleonasm³²**, such as describing the advance of progressive ideology as a "forced march," emphasizes a sense of unavoidable aggression. **Antithesis³³** is also a key device, contrasting "popular celebrations" with "elite manipulation" to foster a defensive "us vs. them" identity. These techniques are reinforced through **Guilt by Association**, linking specific artists or municipal leaders to wider "propaganda" plots, and **Name-calling**, where terms like "ideology" or "militant" are used pejoratively to strip away the legitimacy of LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts.

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)

The analysis detected a community of two coordinated accounts (e.g., *Larevoltedesvachesalait* and *lagauchematuer1*) responsible for eight coordinated posts. A significant majority of these messages (75%) were matched to PROMPT narratives, focusing specifically on delegitimizing institutions through sovereignty framing and conspiratorial claims. These accounts systematically circulated scripted, alarmist texts about CJEU rulings and municipal appointments to manufacture moral panic and prime audiences for cultural confrontation.

3.3.3. Romania: Hate Rhetorics Boil around Elections

Between the first round of elections for the Romanian presidency, in November 2024, and the re-run of presidential elections, in May 2025, associations representing sexual minorities warned repeatedly about a rise in violent online attacks against the LGBTQ+ community, in public and private messages. For example, MozaiQ, an association defending the LGBTQ+ rights, [said](#) it filed a complaint, in November 2024, following several online messages inciting people to destroy the association's headquarters. These messages included the address of MosaiQ. Another association, ACCEPT, [said](#) it filed another criminal complaint following a TikTok video suggesting physical violence is the response to LGBTQ+ people talking about their rights. ACCEPT [also filed](#) complaints with the National Audiovisual Council and the National Council for Combating Discrimination against a political candidate, for LGBTQ+-phobic remarks, and against another political candidate, for hate speech.

The LGBTQ+ community is a recurrent subject during electoral periods in Romania, but in 2024, after extreme-right candidate Călin Georgescu won the first round of the

²⁹ Exaggerated statements not meant to be taken literally.

³⁰ Words that evoke a sense of urgency, fear, or panic, often used to exaggerate a situation or provoke a strong emotional response.

³¹ Substituting the name of one thing with something closely related

³² The use of more words than necessary to convey meaning.

³³ A contrast or opposition between two things, presenting two opposing ideas in a balanced manner.

presidential election, the level of online violence increased markedly. This polarizing discourse was supported by three far-right parties, AUR, POT and SOS, and their leaders, through political declarations and memes, a report of the [Foundation Friedrich Ebert Romania](#) and the journalists from [Panorama](#) remarked.

We studied disinformation narratives on the topic of LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms on five social media platforms between November 2024 and December 2025.³⁴ We identified the main toxic narratives against LGBTQ+ people, in Romanian, after the November 2024 presidential election, and to see who is involved in their online propagation.

Main narratives: Defenders of a pure Romania

Half of the disinformation-related posts (n=2239) supported the narrative that “gender and LGBTQ+ ideologies have a corrupting influence on morally pure societies”, requiring the ‘natural family structure’ and ‘natural order’ to be protected, calling for support in the context of the presidential and parliamentary elections:

‘If they still vote for the old ones, that’s it. Nothing will change anymore. Lasconi [the Presidential counter-candidate of the far-right Georgescu, in December 2024] is not a solution. She’ll shove LGBT down your throat and vaccinate you with both hands, as Ursula says, and USR [Lasconi’s party] won’t pass the [electoral] threshold.’ (item 16293) ‘...in Romanian, it would mean that woke content is getting more expensive!...what comes with it as a package?more blasphemy,more LGBT “faggotry,”more propaganda...enjoy’ (item 17095; automatic AI translation from Romanian)

‘If it’s not his mom, it’s his dad. Man, you’re really a bunch of idiots. What do you want to have? A bum like Nicușor Dan or Crin? Or that one who supports the gay community? Who, you sickos?’ (item 17822; automatic AI translation from Romanian)

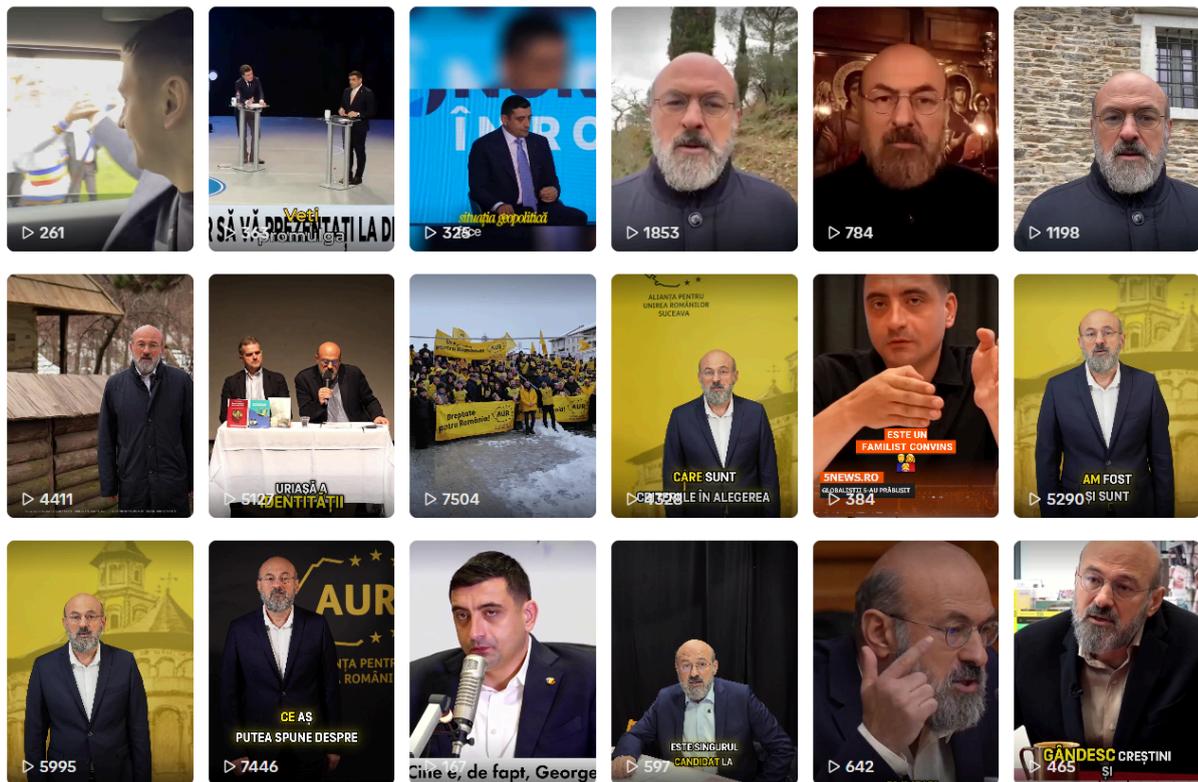
Three Romanian political candidates used anti-LGBTQ+ narratives in electoral messages³⁵: Virgiliu-George Vlăescu (aka Virgiliu Gheorghe), a Parliamentary candidate of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), on TikTok; Mihai Lasca, a candidate in the by-elections for the Bucharest City Hall from the Party of the Romanian People Patriots, on X; and Viorica Dăncilă, a former prime-minister and a Parliamentary candidate of the National Conservative Romanian Party, on YouTube.

For example, in the TikTok post classified by PROMPT as belonging to this pure nation narrative, Virgiliu Vlăescu sustained that ‘The legalization of homosexual marriages causes major harm to family life’ (Item 27964)). His TikTok page dedicated to the Parliamentary election in November 2024 has several posts with religious references and warnings that same-sex marriages are inevitable, because of the European Court

³⁴ We collected 14,987 posts from Bluesky, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, using words and expressions in Romanian linked to the LGBTQ+, such as *LGBT, gay, homosexuali, propaganda LGBT, ideologia de gen or familia traditionala*. 4,473 of which matched pre-defined anti-LGBTQ+ narratives.

³⁵ These candidates use the CMF number, the unique identification code of the financial representative registered with the Permanent Electoral Authority, compulsory for electoral messages during the official campaign period.

of Human Rights ruling, and contending that the AUR would be the only party to postpone the date, if elected in Parliament.



Screen capture of the TikTok page of the far-right candidate Virgiliu Vlăescu for Parliament (<https://www.tiktok.com/@virgiliu.gheorghe>), with visual references to the Orthodox faith, to electoral gatherings and to electoral debates.

Mihai Lasca marketed himself, in November 2025, as the first candidate for Bucharest who would forbid the LGBT parades, ‘which mock the traditional family and attack the Christian fiber of the Romanian people!’ (item 20253. He uses hyperbolic and climactic rhetoric³⁶ to exaggerate the perceived threat of these parades, and list a series of negative consequences of LGBTQ+ on the traditional family and the Christian social fiber.

On YouTube, Viorica Dăncilă sustained that:

‘The Romanian National Conservative Party supports the natural family and Christian values! I believe in God and I support the natural family, made up of a man and a woman. At the same time, I respect all minorities! The referendum for the family was not an attempt to limit the rights of certain minorities, but rather a reflection on the moral values in today’s society.’ (Item 26830).

Here too Dăncilă used repetition (‘natural family’) to clearly indicate the positioning of her party against the LGBTQ+ people (while denying to discriminate against any specific minority).

³⁶ Persuasive technique where ideas or claims are arranged in an increasing order of importance, force, or intensity.

Other less popular narratives suggested that political and cultural elites are infiltrated and corrupted by LGBTQ+ ideology, or are themselves closet LGBTQ+, and therefore morally corrupt and illegitimate (n= 626); that the West is using LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion as a tool of cultural colonialism, trying to force its corrupt values onto the rest of the world (n=568); that the LGBTQ+ community is violent, dangerous and/or is a threat to child safety (n= 414), that Russia is defending itself against perceived cultural or ideological threats to traditional values or Russian identity (Russophobia) (n=136); and that an imagined 'gender ideology' is dominating Western liberal democracies (Gayropa) (n=120). Across social media platforms and narrative clusters, we also observed anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric under the pretense of protecting children. The word copil/ copii (child/children) appeared in nearly 600 items. Similarly, 170 posts associate LGBTQ+ people with pedophilia.

Hate rhetorics take a break during (some) holidays

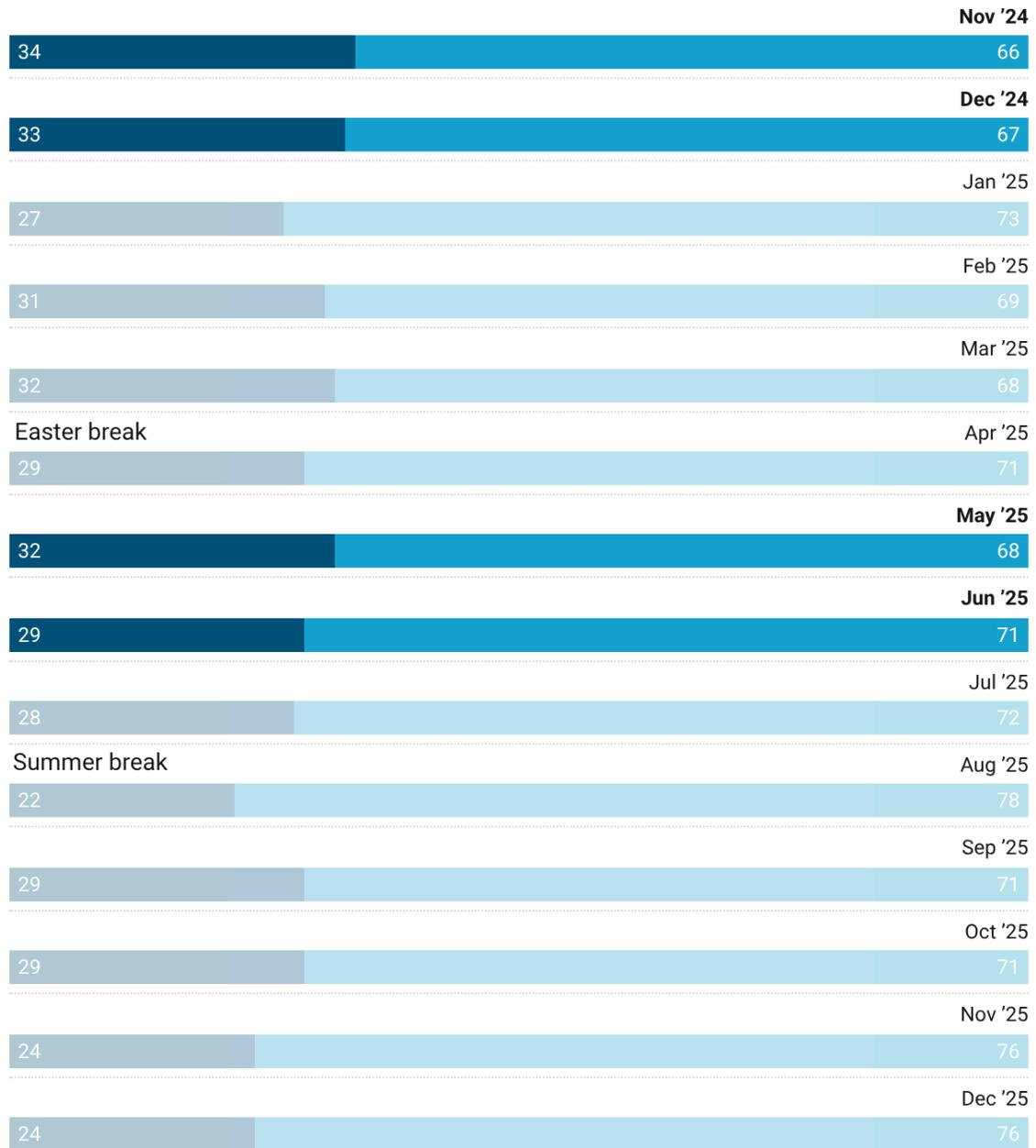
Looking at the posting of disinformation narratives across 2024 and 2025, we observed that a large share of disinformation narratives were spread during November 2024, when the first round of presidential elections and parliamentary elections took place, and in December 2024, when the second round of presidential elections was scheduled³⁷ - in these instances, nearly 34% of collected posts contained disinformation. While the dataset remains small, we observe a similar rise in May 2025, when the presidential election was rescheduled, and in June 2025, the month following the presidential election (respectively 32 percent and 29 percent of all posts collected on LGBTQ+ issues). In absolute numbers too, the presidential pre- and post-election months were the most intense, with over 1,500 posts. Conversely, summer holidays diluted discussions on LGBTQ+ issues: the lowest percentage of posts containing anti-LGBTQ+ narratives -22 percent - was observed in August 2025.³⁸

³⁷ But never took place, as the whole electoral process was annulled by the Romanian constitutional court.

³⁸ This pattern is similar to the one identified by a team of researchers studying malicious online acts targeting the American audiences between 2015 and 2017. Douglas Almond, Xinming Du and Alana Vogel [reached the conclusion](#) that Russian holidays predict troll activity. Trolling has a lower intensity during normal work holidays.

LGBTQ+ narratives in Romanian identified by the PROMPT model (in percentages)

■ match ■ no match



In 14 months (Nov 2024 - Dec. 2025), for 2004 items from social platforms, the PROMPT model identified high levels of items using LGBTQ+ disinformation narratives during election months and the months following elections (Nov- Dec 2024 and May-June 2025). The lowest percentages of posts mentioning toxic narratives were during the summer holiday (August 2025).

Source: PROMPT • Created with Datawrapper

Among the 4,000 posts and comments supporting anti-LGBTQ+ narratives, many share extremely violent (and unquotable) language, especially in the context of electoral talk or when EU pro-LGBTQ+ policies. Sometimes violent language, referring to LGBTQ+

people, is used to harass public figures, be they politicians or TV commentators who are not part of LGBTQ+.³⁹

These posts usually belong to fake identities and were not taken down by the platforms even if they do not follow platform rules and they are, in some cases, more than one year old. Platforms declare they are not allowing violence, incitement to violence or harassment, nor that they would accept fake identities.

In the electoral contexts of 2024 and 2025, the name of Elena Lasconi, the counter-candidate of Călin Georgescu, is the most mentioned in toxic posts -216 times. For example one post said:

'I seriously consider moving out of the country if Lasconi wins, I don't want to stay and watch Romania turn into a country full of gay people. Lasconi is pro-LGBT, pro-Ukraine, pro-NATO... it couldn't get any worse than that.' (Item 16363).

Georgescu appears 195 times, and CG, his initials, 40 times, followed by Nicușor (Dan) and (George) Simion, the main presidential candidates in 2025, each of them with 164 mentions. Disinformation narratives here call to protect (imagined) pure societies and nations, and Elena Lasconi and Nicușor Dan are their main targets. One post on Dan mentions:

'Rest assured that nobody is biting the bait anymore. The idea is that, out of all of them, Nicușor is cancer. He has all the Franco-homosexual connections that can send Romania to war for the unfortunate team within the EU. A snitch and docile, an enforcer and an LGBT-ist. Iohannis was a boss compared to him. Fm!' (Item 18160).

Yet, the name that appears the most is not the name of a Romanian politician, but of philanthropist and businessman George Soros (n=289 posts). Two of these posts, for example, sustained the direct financial implication of Soros in Romanian debates:

'Tudorel is paid by CNN to do LGBT propaganda and against nationalism and everything related to Christianity; he did this in 2016, 2020, and in 2024 against Trump; he is also paid and directed by Soros and his acolytes!' (Item 16862).

'You will rot, you LGBT-ist, servant of the intelligence services and of Soros. You'll lose brilliantly, I can't wait.' (Item 16988).

In the disinformation narratives, Soros is usually associated, at global level, with conservative conspiracy theories and the toxic content shared in Romanian aligns itself with internationally shared narratives.

Coordination: the Moldovan influence

We observed some coordination behavior across three Facebook pages in Romanian⁴⁰. These pages are linked to a website registered in the Republic of Moldova - Apărătorul Ortodox (The Orthodox Defender) - 'a self-described 'alternative portal of

³⁹ The PROMPT sample of toxic narrative posts includes the names of many Romanian politicians but not posts signed by these politicians or public figures. Several conservative leaders, like Călin Georgescu, George Simion or Diana Șoșoacă post video content that is more difficult to collect (i.e on TikTok), transcribe and analyze with automatic tools. This does not mean that the video content is not harmful or is not influential.

⁴⁰ The three Facebook pages sharing LGBTQ+ related are aparatorul, doar.ortodoxia, and DreaptaCREDINTA, all linking to aparatorul.md.

Christian-Orthodox thought and attitude'.⁴¹ While it appears that pages are curated from Moldova, the content targets a Romanian audience.⁴²

Both site and social media pages discuss Christian celebrations and Christian life and, in this context, attack the LGBTQ+ community, alongside organizations working on health education (including sexual health) and LGBT civil rights. The main narratives they support portray the (putative) corrupting influence of LGBTQ+ ideologies on the 'natural family order', as well as presenting the West as a colonialist promoter of a 'gender ideology' now dominating Western liberal democracies. The orthodox faith is often presented as a counterweight to the 'LGBTQ+ ideology'. Dumnezeu / God appears in 166 posts sharing disinformation narratives; while biserica / church in 73. The pages also spread EU-related conspiracy theories and support ultra-orthodox voices within the Orthodox church:



Screen captures showing coordinated behavior in three Facebook pages, curated in the Republic of Moldova, but targeting the Romanian audiences. The posts attack NGOs promoting sexual education and 'gender ideologies' (left) and the European Union, which supposedly wants to allow gender change at any age, without parents' consent (right).

It is plausible that aparatorul.md acts as a conspiracy theory entrepreneur, launching different narrative plots in Romanian, to be later circulated on social media. On 30 October 2025, the three Facebook pages of aparatorul.md shared a text accusing an

⁴¹ The three pages promoting aparatorul.md content were launched in 2014, 2017 and 2022 respectively. They identify themselves as a website, as media, and, simultaneously as a religious organization. They have almost 225,000 followers combined, in February 2026. The site itself appears to have been founded in 2012, publishes articles without signatures and has no contact details. It runs advertising through a Google ad account used also by a site about food and plants (pentruuea.com). An indication of the current year ('Year 7534 since the creation of the world') shows that the site follows the Russian Orthodox [calendar](#). The Russian Orthodox Church that has a [large influence](#) in the Republic of Moldova.

⁴² For example, under the heading 'Juridical articles' the site proposes a form for parents refusing to provide medical records for their children, because of GDPR (an European directive, compulsory inside the European Union, but not in the Republic of Moldova) and presents a petition against Romanian digital ID cards.

important supermarket chain in Romania of financing 'LGBT propaganda in Romanian villages'. On 9 February 2026, an AUR member of the Parliament [adopted this narrative line](#) in a post on Facebook, and one week later, the supermarket chain published a point of view, denying any involvement and [labeling](#) the narrative as 'false information'.

2.4. Comparative Analysis: Synthesis of Disinformation Dynamics across the EU

Comparing national case studies and the broader European big picture shows that **anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation adapts to the informational ecosystem**. While anti-LGBTQ+ narratives are triggered by distinct national milestones (e.g. legislative bills in Italy or elections in Romania) the **underlying logic and rhetorical mechanisms remain remarkably consistent across borders**.

2.4.1. The Supremacy of the "Natural Order" Baseline

The most striking commonality is the absolute dominance of the **"Natural Family Structure/Order"** as the foundational frame in every analyzed context.⁴³

This dominance suggests that anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation is not primarily about policy debate; it is an **emotional appeal to biological and moral essentialism**. By establishing the "traditional family" as the only legitimate social unit, actors create a baseline from which all other "defensive" narratives—such as the "threat to children"—become the logical and urgent next step.

2.4.2. Tactical "Variations" Based on National Milestones

While the core narrative is consistent, its "declination" is tailored to hit specific national nerves:

- In **Italy**, within the "Valditara bill" context and under a **"pedagogical threat"** background, the narrative is weaponized as an attack on **parental rights** and "educational freedom," utilizing the "brainwashing" (*plagio*) trope to frame affective education as a predatory act.
- In **France**, the **"sovereignty threat"** linked to the CJEU ruling leads to a reframe of this narrative through **Cultural Colonialism**. LGBTQ+ rights are depicted as an "ideological offensive" from "Brussels" (Metonymy) designed to crush national identity and spiritual landmarks.
- In Romania, during electoral cycles the **"existential threat"** emerges in explicit **geopolitical** terms. It positions LGBTQ+ inclusion as a choice between a "pure Romania" (Christian/Orthodox) and a "decadent West" (Soros/EU/NATO).

⁴³ In **Italy**: n=2,915 posts focused on the "corrupting influence" on morally pure societies; in **France**: n=747 posts centered on protecting the "natural order" against the CJEU; in **Romania**: n=2,239 posts (half of the disinformation-related sample) supported the "pure nation" and natural family frame.

2.4.3. Geopolitical Convergence: Russia as the "Guardian of Values"

A crucial finding, consistent with both the "Big Picture" and national data, is the strategic positioning of **Russia in the debate about LGBTQ+ and values**:

- In the global sample, the fifth most prevalent narrative frames Russia as a defender of traditional identity against Western ideological threats (n=135).
- **Specifically in Romania**, this geopolitical bridge is highly pronounced. Anti-LGBTQ+ discourse is frequently "bundled" with pro-Russian or anti-EU sentiment, portraying Russia as the last bulwark of sanity against "Gayropa." This is often facilitated by **cross-border conduits**, such as the Moldovan *Apărătorul Ortodox* portal, which acts as a "conspiracy entrepreneur," seeding these narratives for the Romanian audience.

2.4.4. Rhetorical Convergence: The Dehumanization Engine

Across all languages and platforms, there is a systemic overlap in the use of **Name-calling and Labeling**. The use of **"Pathologization"** (medicalizing identity) and **"Groomer" tropes** (linking inclusion to pedophilia) is universal.

- **High-Frequency Languages (EN/FR/IT)**: Rely heavily on **Amplification and Exaggeration** to turn specific events (like the Nashville or Minneapolis shootings) into "civilizational crises."
- **Low-Resource Languages (RO/LV)**: Feature more pronounced **Stereotyping and Poisoning the Well**, targeting specific public figures (e.g., Elena Lasconi or Nicușor Dan) with extremely violent language to activate outrage at "corrupted elites."

2.5. Conclusion

The findings of this report underscore that **anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation in the EU** is not a static phenomenon, but rather a **highly opportunistic** one that **crystallizes around specific high-stakes events**. Whether triggered by **legislative reforms (Italy)**, **judicial decisions (France)**, or **electoral cycles (Romania)**, disinformation actors mobilize a consistent **"Natural Order"** baseline to frame **LGBTQ+ rights as an existential threat to the traditional social fabric**.

Two systemic patterns emerge as primary concerns for the European informational ecosystem:

- **The Geopolitical Wedge**: Anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is rarely used in isolation. It is systematically **"bundled" with broader anti-EU and pro-Russian sentiment**. By positioning Russia as the "last defender" of traditional values against a "decadent

West," disinformation networks **transform domestic social debates into tools for geopolitical destabilization.**

- **The Normalization of Extreme Language:** Through **coordinated repetition** and **"Groomer" tropes**, these networks attempt to **move extreme, dehumanizing language from the digital fringe into the political mainstream.** The use of **institutional delegitimization** further erodes public trust in democratic bodies and the rule of law.

Ultimately, anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation functions as a **strategic lever** that exploits specific, high-visibility events—such as legislative debates or judicial rulings—not as ends in themselves, but as tactical entries to a **broader mission of destabilization.** By using moralizing frames such as the defense of traditional values, the protection of women and/or children, or public health as a cover, these campaigns aim to **systematically undermine the social contract and erode the democratic stability of Member States.** Addressing this threat requires moving toward a structural defense of the digital spaces where European social cohesion is being purposefully dismantled.

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3. Russia's War in Ukraine: Disinformation Trends in Early 2026

Disinformation surrounding the war in Ukraine has evolved into a structured and adaptive component of the contemporary digital information ecosystem; it remains a central organising frame within pro-Kremlin disinformation ecosystems operating across the Baltic information space. It operates through coordinated networks of actors, cross-platform amplification strategies, and strategically crafted narratives designed to shape perceptions of the conflict, delegitimise political actors, and reframe geopolitical responsibility. Within this environment, narratives function as meta-frames that travel across platforms and linguistic contexts, reinforcing one another and sustaining coherent ideological ecosystems rather than isolated claims. In **Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia** – countries situated at NATO's eastern flank and historically exposed to Russian information operations – the Ukraine war functions not only as a geopolitical topic but as a vehicle for reframing sovereignty, legitimacy, and security debates.

This chapter examines how Ukraine war-related narratives were produced, amplified, and rhetorically constructed in the Baltic States between late September 2025 and mid-January 2026.

3.1. Research questions and methodology

To further examine the manipulative and rhetorical dynamics surrounding the war in Ukraine, this chapter addresses four research questions:

- 1. Which Ukraine war - related narratives dominate Baltic information environments?**
- 2. To what extent are these narratives structurally centralised and coordinated?**
- 3. Which information manipulation and persuasion techniques (IMPTs) and rhetorical figures (RFs) are most prevalent?**
- 4. How do narrative and rhetorical dynamics differ across Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia?**

The methodology combines computational analysis with human validation to explore the micro-levers of misleading narratives. Across 7 platforms⁴⁴, we collected 424,304 posts in 4 languages (Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, English and Russian) covering 29 September 2025 to mid-January 2026). 75,036 of these posts matched known disinformation narratives. We further explored a sub-dataset of 42,119 posts (Latvia: 18,339; Lithuania: 14,361; Estonia: 9,419). The analysis integrates structural coordination indicators with rhetorical and persuasion techniques to assess both the architecture and the persuasive mechanisms of war-related disinformation. Narrative identification relies on embedding-based semantic similarity classification, enabling cross-linguistic coherence across Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian content.

⁴⁴ Twitter/X, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Bluesky, Telegram, TikTok

3.2. Disinformation Narratives and online coordination on the war in Ukraine in the Baltic states: results

The full-scale war in Ukraine has become a central organising frame for the disinformation ecosystem across the Baltic states (Resisting State Propaganda n.d., 17), serving not only as a geopolitical issue but as a vehicle for shaping domestic political and societal debates. Since 2014, and particularly after the 2022 full scale invasion, Russian information operations have relied on coordinated non-military tools – including digital media ecosystems, relay networks, and narrative amplification – to influence perceptions in neighbouring EU states (Resisting State Propaganda n.d., 14).

Previous research monitoring disinformation trends in the Baltic region shows that Ukraine-related narratives consistently rank among the most prominent themes in Baltic information spaces. Particularly in Lithuania (Eihe 2023, 2). Recurring framings include portraying Ukraine as extremist or externally controlled [“Nazi” – influenced] (Eihe 2023, 2) exaggerating Russian military successes, and depicting Western and NATO military support and involvement as escalation. These narratives are frequently embedded within broader master narratives such as “Russophobia,” “Aggressive West,” and “Supporting Russia in War” (Hiršs 2025, 11), particularly in Russian – language social media ecosystems.

Despite regulatory measures taken targeting Kremlin controlled media outlets in the Baltic states, such as banning Russia’s state-controlled TV channels from broadcasting in the Baltic states (Vériter 2025, 1865), abovementioned narratives continue to circulate through social media networks, with Telegram emerging as a key dissemination infrastructure (Hiršs 2025, 4). At a strategic level, these information operations aim not only to distort facts about the war but to erode trust in democratic institutions, weaken support for EU and NATO, and foster societal polarisation. The narratives identified in this chapter below do not circulate in isolation. Instead, they form a coherent ecosystem structured around two reinforcing logics: 1) delegitimisation of Ukraine and Western institutions, and 2) legitimisation of Russia as a defensive, sovereignty-protecting actor. These narrative logics are amplified through asymmetric account participation and reinforced through systematic use of information manipulation and rhetorical intensification.

3.2.1. Narrative clusters

Five dominant narrative clusters structure Baltic war- related disinformation for the time-period observed. These clusters do not operate independently. Rather, they form an interconnected narrative ecosystem in which each framing reinforces and legitimises the others. Together all five narrative clusters establish a coherent interpretative framework that redefines victimhood, responsibility, sovereignty and

geopolitical legitimacy. Yet, within this ecosystem, each cluster performs a distinct strategic function.

3.2.1.1. Narrative 1: Russia as a peace-seeking and defensive actor

At the core of the pro-Kremlin narrative architecture lies the moral inversion of aggression that Russia's actions are legitimate (Lange-Ionatamišvili 2015, 19). Russia is framed not as an initiator of war, but as a reluctant, peace-oriented actor compelled to intervene in order to defend sovereignty, protect cultural identity and or restore stability.

This cluster typically includes a variety of claims. First, Russia supports international law and sovereignty. For example, "Putin ne Indi, takohet me Modin: Rusia po punon per nje zgjidhje paqesore te konfliktit me Ukrainen" ("Putin in India, meets with Modi: Russia is working on a peaceful solution to the conflict with Ukraine") this post directly presents Russia as actively working toward a "peaceful solution," reinforcing the image of a responsible international actor engaged in diplomacy. Another example: "Russia refused to sign the Istanbul Convention based on its incompatibility with Russian culture and tradition". This post frames Russia as acting in accordance with its sovereign cultural principles. By invoking legal instruments (Istanbul Convention), it implies that Russia makes decisions based on sovereignty and legal - cultural compatibility rather than aggression.

Second, Moscow seeks negotiation but is obstructed by the West. This claim forms one of the central legitimising mechanisms within the broader "Russia as peace-seeking actor" narrative cluster. Unlike overtly aggressive propaganda, it operates through moral repositioning and responsibility displacement. It does not deny the existence of war; rather, it reinterprets the reason for its continuation. At its core, this claim reframes the conflict not as a consequence of Russian invasion, but as a result of Western refusal to allow peace (Harrison, 2026). For example, "Konflikti i INTERESON SHBA-ve...etj" ("The conflict INTERESTS the USA...etc") and "Presiden Rusia Vladimir Putin menegaskan bahwa Moskow tidak ingin terlibat perang dengan Eropa. Namun, jika mereka yang memulai dahulu, maka Rusia tak segan untuk mengerahkan kekuatan penuh" (Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed that Moscow does not want to get involved in a war with Europe. However, if they are the ones who start first, then Russia will not hesitate to deploy its full strength").

Third, the conflict persists because the West refuses peace - "Brisele ir izvelejusies strategiju, kas paredz Krievijas nogurdinasanu ar nebeidzamu karu" ("Brussels has chosen a strategy of wearing Russia down through endless war"). More specific claim here is that NATO expansion drives conflict and escalation. Implicitly, the war continues because Western military alignment continues. For example, "Kad sadi jefini bus gatavi

uznemt Ukrainu NATO, tad Ukraina jau sen bus kaut kada paredzamaja Ziemeļvalstu + Austrumeiropas militārā alianse. Rietumeiropa onanes zem sedzinās, kamer Austrumeiropa, kolektīvie ziemeļi bus spiesti karot par savu dzīvību, ta nebūs banāla blatosana" ("When those guys are ready to admit Ukraine into NATO, by then Ukraine will already have long been part of some kind of foreseeable Northern Countries + Eastern Europe military alliance. Western Europe is masturbating under the blanket, while Eastern Europe and the collective North will be forced to fight for their lives—this won't be some trivial posturing").

Fourth, Russia's actions are defensive responses to NATO encirclement. This claim reframes the war as a security dilemma rather than aggression. It does not deny that Russia uses force. Instead, it argues that force is a compelled reaction to Western expansion. This framing displaces the normative discussion from legality and sovereignty to perceived security threats. Instead of asking whether Russia violated international law, audiences are invited to consider whether encirclement justifies reaction. In this interpretative shift, invasion becomes reframed as self-defence. For example, in Baltic-language posts, this logic frequently appears in escalation framing connected to NATO membership debates and military cooperation. For example, posts referencing Ukraine's accession discussions or the formation of regional coalitions imply that NATO enlargement inherently increases instability. The rhetorical move is subtle but consistent: Western military alignment is equated with provocation. This cluster relies heavily on several manipulation techniques. Slippery slope reasoning presents NATO enlargement as inevitably leading to war. Appeal to fear activates anxiety about missile deployment and military bases near borders. Selective historical framing emphasises NATO expansion while omitting Russia's agency in initiating hostilities. False equivalence equates alliance enlargement with offensive aggression. Rhetorically, inevitability framing ("no choice," "had to respond") reduces perceived agency. Security vocabulary ("encirclement," "bases," "missiles," "expansion") reinforces a defensive posture. Hypothetical analogies ("What would you do if foreign troops moved closer to your border?") personalise the geopolitical argument. In the Baltic context, this claim performs a particularly strategic function. Baltic states rely heavily on NATO deterrence. By reframing NATO presence as escalation rather than protection, the narrative introduces cognitive tension. It suggests that security guarantees may increase risk rather than reduce it. This undermines confidence in collective defence doctrine without directly opposing NATO membership. Strategically, this cluster normalises aggression through structural determinism. It suggests that war is an inevitable outcome of Western expansion, thereby reducing moral accountability and reframing Russia as a reactive rather than initiating actor.

While the fourth narrative provided causal justification, the fifth - negative portrayals of Russia as fabrications - provides epistemic defence. This narrative asserts that negative portrayals of Russia - including reports of war crimes, civilian harm, or

humanitarian violations – are fabricated, exaggerated, or manipulated by Western and Ukrainian actors. Rather than directly disproving allegations, this cluster destabilises trust in information itself. The central manipulation technique here is casting doubt. Instead of presenting counterevidence, posts question the credibility of journalists, NGOs, investigators, and international institutions. This technique is often reinforced by whataboutism (“Where was the media when...?”) and delegitimisation of sources. Rhetorically, this cluster relies on repetition and dismissal framing. Words such as “fake,” “propaganda,” and “staged” appear frequently. Sarcasm and rhetorical questioning (“Where is the proof?”) shift the burden of evidence. Emotional neutralisation reframes civilian suffering as instrumentalised narrative performance. Unlike overtly ideological posts, this cluster often adopts a tone of scepticism rather than certainty. The objective is not necessarily to convince audiences that Russia committed no wrongdoing. It is to introduce ambiguity. In Baltic societies, where historical memory of propaganda is strong, this narrative exploits existing distrust toward media and political elites. Posts sometimes frame Baltic media outlets as merely repeating Brussels or Washington talking points, thereby linking war reporting to broader EU sovereignty concerns. The strategic function of this cluster is stabilising. It protects other narrative claims from contradiction. If Russia is framed as defensive and peace-seeking (claims one and four), then reports of aggression must be explained away. Fifth claim provides that explanation by asserting systematic fabrication.

3.2.1.2. Narrative 2: Ukraine as illegitimate, corrupt, and/or puppet of the West

The second cluster shifts the focus of delegitimisation from Russia to Ukraine. While the first cluster (see above) establishes Russia as rational, defensive, and peace-oriented, the second cluster systematically undermines the legitimacy, sovereignty, and moral authority of the Ukrainian state and its leadership. This cluster is essential because it weakens the normative basis for Baltic solidarity with Ukraine. At its core, this narrative does not merely criticise Ukrainian policy decisions. It questions the legitimacy of Ukraine as an autonomous political actor.

The central argumentative structure of second cluster follows a delegitimization pattern: 1) Ukraine is controlled by Western elites, 2) Ukrainian leadership is corrupt, extremist, or authoritarian, 3) Kyiv does not act in the interest of its own people therefore, 4) support for Ukraine sustains instability rather than sovereignty. Through this logic, Ukraine is repositioned from victim to manipulated instrument. Sovereignty is symbolically stripped away and reassigned to Western actors.

Three main claims can be identified within the second cluster. First, Ukraine as a Western puppet. One of the most frequent sub-claims frames Ukraine as subordinated to Washington or Brussels. Posts imply that Kyiv does not make independent strategic decisions but merely follows Western instructions. “Kahjuks naitab Merkeli hoiak seda,

kui kaugel me olime ja kohati oleme veel tanagi mone oma olulisema liitlasega arusaamises, mis on tegelikult Venemaa agressiivsuse ja impeeriumisodade pohjus" ("Unfortunately, Merkel's stance shows how far apart we were—and in some places still are even today—from some of our most important allies in understanding what the real reason for Russia's aggressiveness and its imperial wars actually is"). Such posts claim that Ukraine is only a small part of a bigger game, that is European interests to expand and start geopolitical rivalry with Russia. For example, posts suggesting that "the conflict INTERESTS the USA" implicitly portray Ukraine as a proxy battlefield rather than a sovereign actor. Similarly, claims that European "interference" prevents peace reposition Ukraine as a vehicle for Western geopolitical goals. This framing diminishes Ukrainian agency and transforms support for Ukraine into participation in Western strategic manipulation.

Second, Zelensky as corrupt or illegitimate is a recurring element aimed to shift focus on delegitimising Ukrainian leadership. Here Ukrainian president Volodimir Zelensky is framed as corrupt – "The people need to storm the corrupt Zelensky government!! The soldiers need to fight the government!! Zelensky is not a leader, he is the puppet for the Deep State war against Russia!!!". He is self-interested and he is prolonging war for personal or political gain – "The simplest and most honest reason why Zelenskyy is trying not to end the conflict, but to delay it as long as possible, is known by even a homeless person in Kyiv: Zelenskyy only survives as long as the country is in a state of conflict". And that Ukrainian president is acting under foreign pressure – "Volodimirs Zeļenskis ne tikai tiek pakļauts lieliem spiedieniem steidzami pieņemt Donaldā Trampa administrācijas sagatavoto "miera plānu" ar Krieviju, bet viņam arī ir noteikts termiņš, līdz kuram jāpieņem lēmums" ("Volodymyr Zelensky is not only under great pressure to urgently accept the Donald Trump administration's prepared "peace plan" with Russia, but he also has a deadline by which a decision must be made"). This personalised delegitimation serves two purposes: 1) it reduces the conflict to leadership failure rather than structural aggression and 2) it suggests that regime change, rather than geopolitical resolution, would end the war.

Third, Ukraine is a reckless "escalator". The second cluster includes claims that Ukraine actively escalates the war through weapons negotiations, military cooperation, or NATO alignment – "Yet we've been sending far-right Nazis in the failed state of Ukraine weapons to kill people suspected of Russian heritage for more than a decade Double standards?" and "Ukraine lie, west believe lie, west send Ukraine weapons to fight big bad Russia". Posts highlighting missile negotiations or military agreements often frame Ukraine as aggressive rather than defensive – "Ukraine will end up creating a war with either poland or hungary. they're fascists. the best would be to dismantle the Ukraine military and nazi leadership". This framing reverses traditional aggression narratives: Instead of Russia escalating, Ukraine is depicted as provoking broader conflict. In Baltic

contexts, this is particularly significant because it intersects with regional fears of spillover conflict.

This cluster performs a destabilising function within the broader disinformation architecture. If Ukraine is corrupt, manipulated, illegitimate, then from this follows that Baltic support to Ukraine is misguided, that sanctions [from the West towards Russia] are irrational; and that military assistance is complicit. However, it can be noted that the strategic goal is not necessarily to generate sympathy for Russia directly. Rather, it is to reduce empathy for Ukraine and create ambivalence toward continued support. This cluster also facilitates internal polarisation within Baltic societies by reframing foreign policy as a moral and economic burden imposed by political elites.

The logic behind these disinformation narratives allows us to conclude that the second cluster reinforces the first cluster. The first cluster portrayed Russia as peace oriented and in the second cluster Ukraine is portrayed as illegitimate and easily manipulated. Following this logic one can assume that the moral asymmetry of the war has become blurred. Here Russia's aggression appears reactive, the support towards Ukraine appears as reckless and peace appears blocked by Kiyiv itself rather than Moscow. This inter-cluster coherence strengthens the resilience of the narrative ecosystem.

The second cluster operates as the delegitimising counterpart to the legitimising logic in the first cluster. By undermining Ukraine's sovereignty, leadership credibility, and moral authority, it erodes the normative foundation of Baltic solidarity. The effect is not simply reputational damage to Kyiv; it is the reconfiguration of responsibility and victimhood. In doing so, this cluster contributes to strategic ambiguity, political fatigue, and reduced confidence in continued Western alignment with Ukraine.

3.2.2.3. Narrative 3: the war in Ukraine as a geopolitical instrument of West serving its interests

The third cluster reframes the war in Ukraine not as a conflict centred on sovereignty or aggression, but as a strategic geopolitical project orchestrated by Western actors. In this narrative logic, Ukraine is not primarily a victim state; it is a battlefield within a broader confrontation between Russia and NATO. The war is thus presented as instrumental, that is, serving Western interests rather than Ukrainian survival. Here can be identified four main claims.

First, war in Ukraine serves Western strategic interests. This claim is especially recurring theme in the Latvian language posts both in X and Facebook presenting the conflict as beneficial to Western actors – "Kad sadī jefini bus gatavi uzņemt Ukrainu NATO, tad Ukraina jau sen bus kaut kada paredzamā Ziemeļvalstu + Austrumeiropas militārā alianse" ("When those guys are ready to admit Ukraine into NATO, by then

Ukraine will already have long been part of some kind of Northern Countries + Eastern Europe military alliance"). This post frames NATO alignment as a deliberate escalation strategy that will push Eastern Europe into direct confrontation. The implication is that Western Europe avoids consequences while Eastern states bear the cost.

Second, NATO expansion should be looked at as provocation - "100% provokācijas lai ievilkto visu Nato kara" ("100% a provocation to drag all of NATO into the war"). Here, NATO is portrayed not as deterrent but as escalation engine. The phrasing "drag all of NATO" suggests intentional manipulation. "Ja NATO (aizsardzības organizācija pret krieviem) atkaptas, tad Kremļis piepilda savu sapni un atjauno Krievijas jeb Launuma imperiju vecajās PSRS robežās" ("If NATO (a defense organization against the Russians) backs down, then the Kremlin fulfills its dream and restores the Russian, or Evil, empire within the old USSR borders") in this example although the post continues critically [about Russia's actions], the rhetorical framing often questions NATO's defensive identity, implying that its actions extend beyond pure defence.

Third, Brussels' strategy is to prolong the conflict. In this claim direct framing of deliberate Western prolongation also appears - "Brisele ir izveļusies stratēģiju, kas paredz Krievijas nogurdināšanu ar nebeidzamu karu. Tas nozīmē miljardu iepludināšanu Ukrainā, Eiropas ekonomikas upurēšanu un simtiem tūkstošu cilvēku nosūtīšanu mirt frontē" ("Brussels has chosen a strategy of wearing Russia down through endless war. This means pouring billions into Ukraine, sacrificing Europe's economy, and sending hundreds of thousands to die at the front"). This formulation directly asserts intentional prolongation. Other posts referencing high-level NATO officials frequently frame institutional strategy as coordinated escalation rather than reactive defence.

Fourth, Ukraine is a battlefield for broader power struggle. Here it is important to note that third cluster frequently overlaps with proxy-war framing for example - "Pēc Putina bijusī runas rakstītāja domām, ir pilnīgi iespējams, ka Krievija tuvākajā nākotnē uzbruks NATO" (According to Putin's former speechwriter, it is entirely possible that Russia will attack NATO in the near future"). In these posts, which invoke insider commentary, the war is often framed as part of a larger geopolitical chessboard rather than a bilateral conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The broader narrative effect is clear: Ukraine is not a sovereign agent but a terrain for power confrontation between Russia and NATO/the US.

Overall, the third cluster performs three key destabilising functions in the Baltic information space. First, it reframes solidarity with Ukraine as participation in Western geopolitical manipulation. Second, it shifts focus from Russian accountability to NATO ambition. Third, it localises fear by suggesting the Baltics will pay the price for Western decisions. Unlike the second cluster which directly attacks the legitimacy of Ukraine, the third cluster shifts focus to attack Western strategic morality. The cumulative

effect is scepticism toward NATO, EU leadership, and domestic governments aligned with them.

3.2.2.4. Narrative 4: Russia's actions as defensive response to NATO encirclement

While the third cluster frames the war as a Western geopolitical project, the fourth shifts the explanatory focus to security dynamics. Here, Russia's military actions are not justified through diplomacy or peace rhetoric, but through structural inevitability. The war is framed as a defensive reaction to NATO expansion and Western military encroachment. This cluster does not deny the use of force. Instead, it redefines that force as compelled self-defence. Here the narrative logic follows a security dilemma structure where, first, NATO has expanded eastward for decades, second, military infrastructure is increasingly positioned near Russia's borders, third, Russia repeatedly warned about these security concerns and, fourth, the West ignored those warning, therefore, fifth, Russia "had no choice" but to act. This framing transforms aggression into reaction. The starting point of the war is no longer the [Russia's] invasion of Ukraine, but NATO expansion. "When those guys are ready to admit Ukraine into NATO, by then Ukraine will already have long been part of some kind of Northern Countries + Eastern Europe military alliance... Eastern Europe and the collective North will be forced to fight for their lives..." Although this post matches other clusters, its logic is the clearest in the fourth cluster: NATO alignment is framed as existential escalation. The implication is that the Russian response becomes predictable and necessary under such circumstances. Another example: "100% a provocation to drag all of NATO into this..." shows that this phrasing explicitly frames NATO-related developments as provocation. By labelling actions as "100% provocation," the post removes ambiguity and assigns deliberate escalation intent to Western actors. Post on X "Nobody wants your proxy war A war created for the USA interests Ukraine is the most corrupt country in the world We don't support your war!" While brief, this formulation implies that escalation is structurally driven by Western strategic positioning. In the context of NATO expansion narratives, such statements frame Russia's actions as responses to US-led encirclement. This cluster, as shown in the examples, relies heavily on structural and security-oriented manipulation strategies: appeal to fear, selective historical framing and false equivalence.

In the Baltic countries this narrative cluster carries particular strategic weight. NATO presence is foundational to national security premises. By reframing NATO deployment as provocation rather than protection, the fourth cluster introduces cognitive dissonance: if NATO expansion provokes war, then Baltic security guarantees may increase vulnerability. This logic does not directly oppose NATO membership. Instead, it subtly reframes collective defence as escalation risk.

The fourth cluster performs three key strategic functions. First, it normalises Russian military action as structurally inevitable. Second, it undermines NATO legitimacy by portraying enlargement as destabilising. Third, it shifts responsibility for escalation from Moscow to Western alliance structures. Unlike the first cluster [Russia as peace seeking and defensive], which uses moral inversion, this narrative uses structural determinism. War is not justified because Russia is virtuous, but because geopolitical dynamics supposedly leave no alternative.

3.2.2.5. Narrative 5: negative portrayals of Russia as fabrications

The fifth and last cluster constitutes the epistemic defence layer of the disinformation ecosystem. While previous clusters justify Russian behaviour (first cluster), delegitimise Ukraine (second cluster), or frame the war as Western strategy (third and fourth cluster), this cluster attacks the credibility of information itself. It does not primarily argue that Russia did nothing wrong. Instead, it argues that evidence of wrongdoing cannot be trusted. The central narrative claim is that reports of Russian war crimes, civilian harm, or aggression are fabricated, exaggerated, staged, or politically manipulated by Western governments, Ukrainian authorities, or aligned media. Here the argumentative sequence typically follows four main points. First, Western media reports Russian wrongdoing. Second, these reports are politically motivated or manipulated and therefore, third, information about Russian aggression is unreliable and based on this obstacle, fifth, the truth becomes ambiguous. Rather than providing counterevidence, posts focus on destabilising epistemic trust.

Some posts from Facebook in Lithuanian language frame Western and Ukrainian reporting as manipulative or strategically motivated – “Kol Zelenskis ir jo šaika valdžioje ir Europos ‘tankistai’ kišasi į taikos reikalus, taikos nebus” (“As long as Zelensky and his gang are in power and European ‘tankers’ interfere in peace matters, there will be no peace”). While primarily delegitimizing leadership (second cluster), this formulation also implies that European actors manipulate the situation, preventing peace and controlling narrative framing. Lithuanian-language posts referencing Western strategy frequently frame media discourse as biased or strategically aligned with Brussels and Washington. In these posts, accusations of propaganda are embedded in broader geopolitical scepticism. For example, posts describing Western reporting as one-sided or politically engineered reframe media coverage as part of the conflict itself. Looking at posts in Latvian language, the situation is similar. “100% a provocation to drag all of NATO into this...” – although primarily escalation-focused, absolutist formulations such as “100% provocation” leave no room for factual nuance, implicitly rejecting alternative interpretations.

The fifth cluster operates as the epistemic shield of the disinformation ecosystem. By questioning the credibility of Western reporting and portraying allegations against

Russia as manipulative narratives, it erodes trust in institutional information sources. Its strategic power lies not in disproving evidence but in dissolving confidence in evidence altogether. Within the Baltic information space, this contributes to scepticism toward EU and NATO communication, amplifies strategic ambiguity, and reinforces the coherence of the broader pro-Kremlin narrative architecture.

Taken together, the five narrative clusters identified in these sections form a coherent and mutually reinforcing disinformation architecture. The first cluster establishes the normative foundation by presenting Russia as peace-seeking, sovereignty-respecting, and defensive. The second cluster systematically undermines Ukrainian legitimacy, reframing Kyiv as corrupt, manipulated, or reckless. The third cluster shifts responsibility to Western strategic interests, portraying the war as a geopolitical instrument rather than a sovereignty conflict. The fourth cluster embeds the conflict within a security dilemma framework, normalising Russian military action as an inevitable response to NATO expansion. Finally, the fifth cluster stabilises the entire structure by attacking the credibility of information itself, casting doubt on media reporting and international evidence.

Individually, each cluster performs a distinct persuasive function - legitimisation, delegitimisation, strategic reframing, security normalisation, and epistemic destabilisation. **Collectively, however, they construct a closed interpretative system in which aggression appears defensive, peace appears available but obstructed, escalation appears externally imposed, and evidence appears unreliable.** The cumulative effect is not necessarily the production of overt pro-Russian sentiment. Rather, it fosters ambiguity, fatigue, polarisation, and declining institutional trust.

In the Baltic context - where NATO alignment, EU integration, and media credibility constitute pillars of democratic stability - such narrative convergence is strategically significant. By simultaneously reshaping moral evaluation, reallocating responsibility, and eroding epistemic certainty, this narrative ecosystem weakens the foundations of foreign policy consensus and societal resilience. The following section examines how these narrative clusters are operationalised through specific information manipulation and persuasion techniques.

3.3. Narrative propagation

Section 4.2. and its subsections identified the dominant narrative clusters structuring war-related disinformation across the accounts in the Baltic countries. The strategic impact of these narratives cannot be understood without examining the structural conditions of their production. Narratives gain persuasive force not only through rhetorical design but through asymmetric amplification, coordinated seeding, and elite dominance. Findings from the cross-platform narrative production analysis

demonstrate that Ukraine war-related disinformation exhibits extreme production inequality, cross-narrative coordination, and early-mover orchestration. These structural dynamics significantly reinforce the manipulation techniques identified in the Baltic datasets.

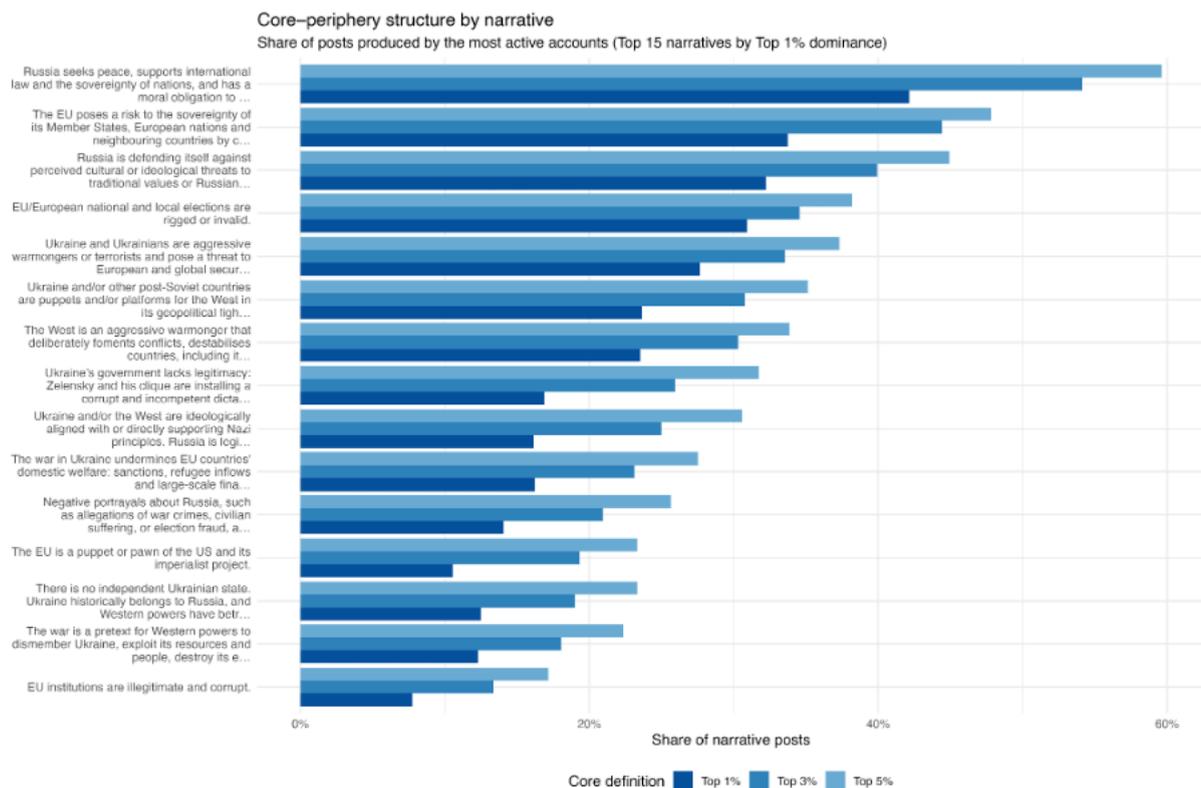
3.3.1. Elite amplification and concentration

The narrative “Russia seeks peace, supports international law and sovereignty” exhibits the highest production concentration across platforms, with over 40% of all posts produced by the top 1% of accounts. This level of dominance far exceeds what would be expected under organic participation. It indicates that, first, it is centralised narrative management, second, strategic repetition and, third, coordinated discipline of messages. Similarly high concentration levels are observed in narratives about EU sovereignty threats, Russian cultural defence and delegitimization of Zelensky.

This concentration structure strengthens IMPT effects in two main ways: repetition normalises frames (illusory truth effect) and high output accounts shape agenda setting before organic users engage. In Baltic datasets, this pattern aligns with the frequent appearance of specific accounts repeatedly participating across clusters.

3.3.2. Core-periphery structure

The analysis shows a steep core-periphery dynamic: the top 5% of accounts often produce over 65–70% of content for certain narratives. This structure matters for the analysis of persuasion technique because some techniques, such as casting doubt and conspiracy framing, are not randomly distributed and they are disproportionately produced by hyperactive accounts. Narrative discipline suggests coordination rather than spontaneous reaction. For example, the narrative delegitimising Zelensky’s government shows strong inequality in production (Gini Index > 0.5). This suggests that delegitimation is not crowd-driven outrage but elite-driven narrative engineering.

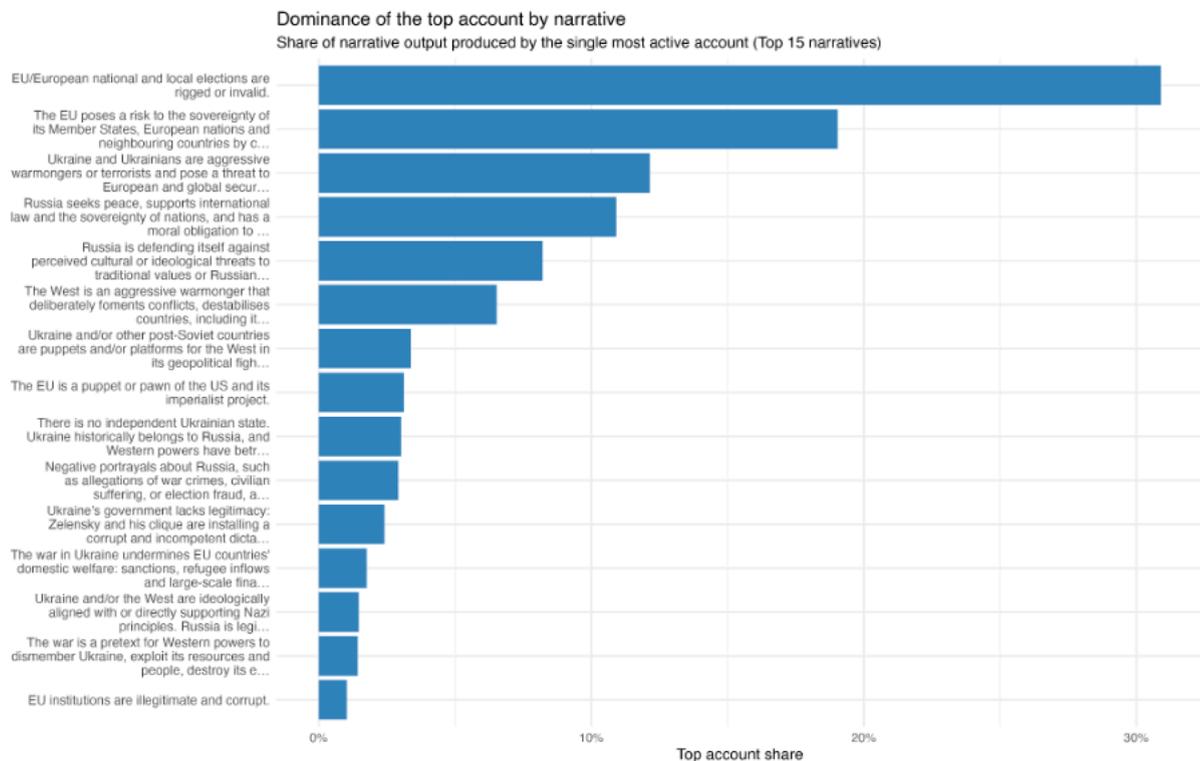


3.3.3. Single account dominance

The structural analysis of Ukraine war-related disinformation reveals extreme cases of individual account dominance within specific war narratives. In several Ukraine-focused framings, a single most-active account produces a disproportionate share of total content, indicating centralised narrative control rather than dispersed public participation. In certain cases, the single most active account produces over 20–30% of all posts within a given narrative category. Here are the most common narratives that have been overlooked in section two in this chapter previously: Russia as peace-seeking and defensive, Ukraine as aggressive warmonger, Ukraine as Western puppet, negative portrayals of Russia as fabrications.

The narrative framing Russia as seeking peace, supporting international law, and acting out of moral obligation exhibits both high elite concentration and marked single-account dominance. This narrative also shows the highest overall inequality (Gini coefficient exceeding 0.7), reflecting extreme production asymmetry. Accounts such as *“solovievlive”* and *“politnavigator”* appear repeatedly among the most active producers across pro-Russian legitimising narratives. Their consistent cross-narrative presence suggests not episodic participation, but systematic narrative maintenance. Analysing this through the lens of practical social media usage, this means that the frame of “Russia as peace-seeking” actor is repeatedly seeded and reinforced by core accounts [actors]. The idea of Russia as defender not aggressor is stabilised through

repetition of such claims. For Baltic audiences, where peace rhetoric intersects with war fatigue and security anxiety, sustained repetition from dominant accounts increases narrative saturation.



The narrative portraying Ukraine and Ukrainians as aggressive warmongers or threats to European security shows substantial single-account dominance, with one account responsible for more than 20% of total output. This framing is particularly amplified by accounts that also appear in cross-narrative hub analysis, including **“kochka_lv”** and **“golosmordora”**, both of which participate across multiple Ukraine-delegitimising narratives. Rather than reflecting widespread spontaneous hostility toward Ukraine, the data indicate that warmonger framing is disproportionately sustained by a narrow set of hyperactive actors.

The narrative describing Ukraine as a puppet or geopolitical platform for Western geopolitical interests also exhibits strong concentration patterns. Accounts such as **“politnavigator”** and **“romanian-news.bsky.social”** function as early movers across multiple delegitimising narratives, including puppet-state framing. Their early-seeding role indicates that this narrative is introduced into discourse through coordinated agenda-setting rather than emerging organically. This is strategically very important for three main reasons. First, it erodes Ukrainian agency. Second, it connects the narrative of delegitimization [analysed in the second cluster of previous chapter] with the narrative of Western exploitation [analysed in third cluster]. And third, it connects a bridge to even more harmful and false narratives about NATO’s encirclement analysed in

cluster four. And in this context, the dominant accounts ensure that these bridges between narratives remain coherent across multiple platforms.

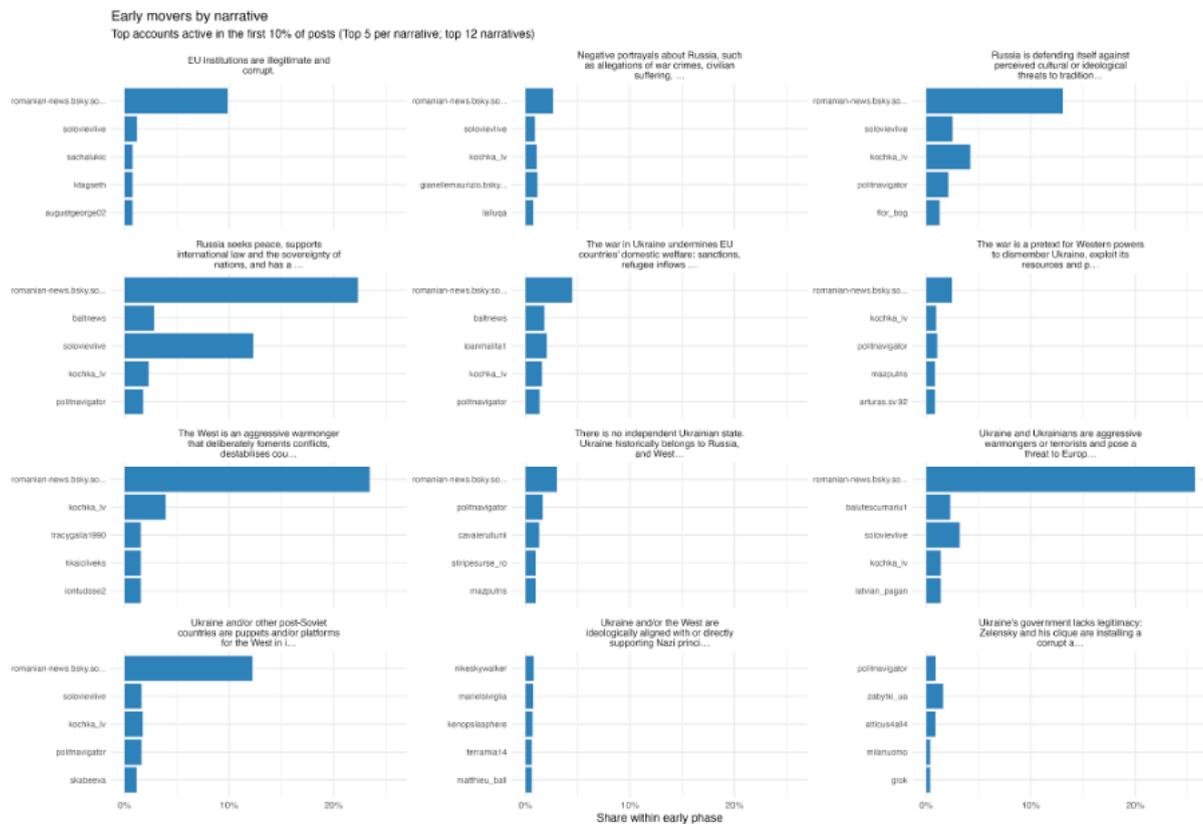
For these narratives to remain coherent across multiple platforms, cross-narrative hub dynamics becomes especially important. It demonstrates that such accounts as “*solovievlive*”, “*politnavigator*”, “*kochka_lv*” and “*golosmordora*” appear in the top 5% producers across more than 10 narratives related to the topic of war in Ukraine. This multi-narrative participation indicates coordinated amplification capacity. These accounts do not promote isolated framings; they systematically sustain interconnected narratives (that Russia is defensive, Ukraine illegitimate, etc). Such cross-domain consistency reinforces IMPT deployment. Fear framing, casting doubt, conspiracy attribution, and delegitimization appear not as sporadic techniques but as part of a coherent messaging infrastructure. This is especially important in the context of the Baltic language information space. When these global coordination patterns intersect with Baltic-language adaptation, the impact becomes particularly pronounced. **Since the Baltic information space can be considered smaller, more linguistically segmented and more tightly networked, high-output accounts can achieve disproportionate visibility.** Even if core hub accounts originate outside the Baltic region, their narratives are often localised and re-amplified within Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian discourse. Single-account dominance in Ukraine war narratives therefore reflects not only centralised production at the global level but also structural vulnerability within smaller national information ecosystems.

The high levels of single account dominance within narratives about the war in Ukraine indicate a structurally asymmetric production environment in which a small number of actors disproportionately shape framing and agenda setting. Rather than reflecting decentralised public debate, such concentration suggests coordinated and disciplined narrative maintenance. The repeated deployment of manipulation techniques by dominant accounts reinforces narrative coherence, stabilises interpretative boundaries, and increases exposure effects. In the Baltic information space, where discourse networks are relatively small, this structural concentration amplifies the influence of hyperactive actors. Single account dominance therefore constitutes evidence of organised and persistent narrative amplification within the Ukraine war disinformation ecosystem.

3.3.4. Early movers and narrative seeding

Beyond concentration and individual dominance, the temporal dimension of narrative production reveals another critical structural feature of Ukraine war related disinformation: early-mover coordination. Early movers are accounts that are disproportionately active during the initial phase of narrative emergence, that is, typically within the first 10% of total posts in a given narrative category. Their role is not

merely quantitative; it is strategic. They shape the interpretative baseline upon which subsequent amplification builds (see the table below):



The early phase of narrative production is crucial because it establishes the core framing logic. Once a narrative is seeded with a particular interpretative orientation, for example, "Russia seeks peace," "Ukraine is a puppet," or "NATO provoked escalation" subsequent participants tend to operate within those boundaries. Early posts therefore function as framing anchors.

The cross-platform analysis identifies recurring early movers across multiple narratives about war in Ukraine, including accounts such as **"solovievlive"**, **"politnavigator"**, **"romanian-news.bsky.social"**, and **"kochka_lv"**. These accounts appear disproportionately active at the onset of narrative cycles, suggesting systematic involvement in narrative seeding rather than incidental participation. This pattern indicates structured agenda-setting: rather than narratives emerging spontaneously in response to events, they are strategically introduced and stabilised by core actors.

Importantly, early-mover accounts do not typically restrict themselves to a single framing. The same actors appear across multiple narrative clusters, including aforementioned narratives about Russia as peace-seeking, Ukraine as illegitimate or Nazi-aligned, and narratives about the exploitation from the West and fabrication claims about Russia's war crimes. Here the cross-narrative seeding creates

interpretative coherence. It ensures that narratives do not develop in isolation but are embedded within a broader ecosystem from the outset. For example, a narrative portraying Russia as defensive may be seeded simultaneously with a complementary narrative delegitimising Ukrainian leadership. This parallel seeding reduces the risk of narrative contradiction and enhances systemic consistency.

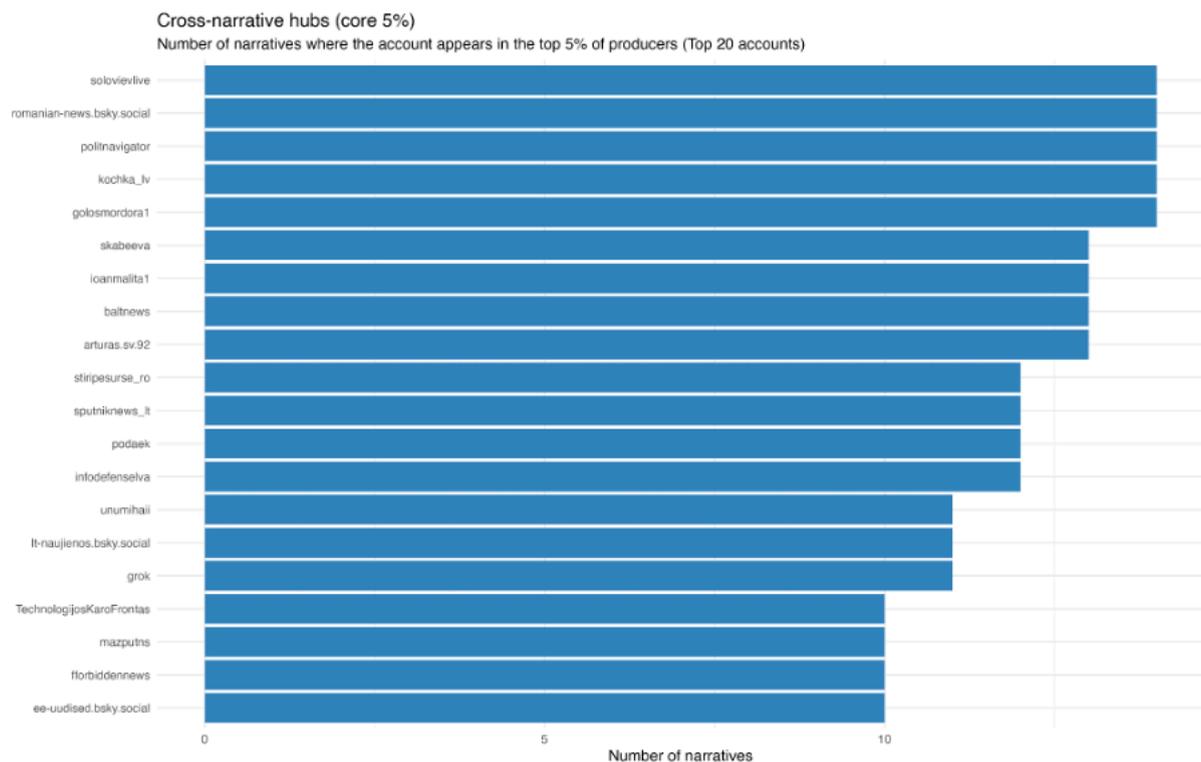
Looking at narrative production during late October and November 2025, the broader temporal analysis shows dual peaks. Early movers play a particularly significant role during these surge windows. By intensifying activity at the beginning of escalation cycles, they ensure that emotionally charged or strategically advantageous framings dominate early attention. In such contexts, manipulation techniques such as fear appeals, conspiracy framing, and casting doubt are often embedded into the initial wave of posts. As amplification spreads across platforms, these techniques are carried forward, reinforcing the seeded interpretative structure. In the Baltic context, where digital discourse communities are comparatively smaller and linguistically segmented, early seeding can have amplified effects. If a dominant narrative is introduced early in Latvian, Lithuanian, or Estonian-language spaces, later participants may adopt the same framing without directly engaging with its origins. Thus, early-mover activity has disproportionate structuring power in smaller information ecosystems. It defines the vocabulary of debate before broader engagement occurs.

In combination with single account dominance and elite concentration, early-mover dynamics confirm that disinformation about war in Ukraine, especially in the context of Baltic information space, is not a purely reactive phenomenon. Rather, it exhibits the hallmarks of organised narrative production that is mainly characterised by strategic timing, framing discipline and cross-narrative integration.

3.3.5. Cross-narrative coordination and hub accounts

Before individual account dominance and early-mover account dynamics, disinformation related to the war in Ukraine exhibits a high degree of cross-narrative coordination. This coordination is observable through the repeated presence of specific accounts within the top producer tiers across multiple narratives related to the war in Ukraine. Such cross narrative participation indicates that disinformation does not operate through isolated thematic campaigns but through an interconnected narrative ecosystem sustained by a relatively small set of hub actors.

This analysis demonstrates that several accounts, including aforementioned, **"solovievlive"**, **"politnavigator"**, **"romanian-news.bsky.social"**, **"kochka_lv"** and **"golosmordora"** appear within the top 5% of content producers across more than ten narratives related to the war in Ukraine. See the table below:



This pattern significantly exceeds what would be expected under organic participation and suggests that this is systematic multi narrative amplification. These hub accounts do not merely specialise in a single framing (e.g., “Russia seeks peace” or “Ukraine is a puppet”). Instead, they consistently participate in multiple clusters such as: legitimising Russia’s actions, delegitimizing Ukrainian leadership, framing the war as Western exploitation of its geopolitical interests and depicting NATO expansion as provocation and by actively casting doubt on reports of Russia’s war crimes. This indicates strong strategic narrative integration. Rather than promoting fragmented claims, hubs produce an internally coherent worldview.

Here, **cross-narrative coordination enables activity that can be best described as “narrative bridging”**. For example, the claim that Russia seeks peace is reinforced by the assertion that Ukraine is controlled by Western elites, the framing of Ukraine as puppet state is strengthened even more so by narratives about NATO’s encirclement, whilst claims about “fabrication” (war propaganda) shield all other narratives from contradiction. Because the same actors produce these framings across clusters, interpretative consistency is maintained. Audiences exposed to one narrative are more likely to encounter complementary claims from the same source, reinforcing cognitive alignment. Network analysis further confirms strong co-occurrence patterns among specific Ukraine war narratives. Narratives delegitimising Zelensky, portraying Ukraine as Nazi-aligned, and framing the war as Western pretext frequently share amplification networks. Similarly, narratives emphasising Russian legitimacy cooccur with EU sovereignty critiques and civilisational defence framing. This co-occurrence structure

demonstrates that Ukraine war disinformation is organised into interconnected narrative blocs rather than isolated thematic strands.

3.4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate how disinformation related to the war in Ukraine has operated in the Baltic states, drawing on 2 multilingual datasets.

The findings demonstrate that narratives related to disinformation about war in Ukraine in the Baltic states operate as a structured and strategically reinforced narrative ecosystem rather than a fragmented collection of isolated claims. Through the identification of five dominant narrative clusters, the analysis showed how pro-Kremlin framings simultaneously legitimize Russian actions, delegitimize Ukrainian sovereignty, portray Western support towards Ukraine as exploitative, normalize escalation as structurally inevitable, and undermine trust in media reporting. These narratives function together to construct a coherent interpretive architecture in which aggression appears defensive, peace appears obstructed by the West, and evidence appears unreliable.

Section 3.2 further revealed that the persuasive force of this ecosystem derives not only from narrative content but from systematic manipulation and coordinated amplification. The repeated deployment of casting doubt, fear activation, conspiracy framing, and delegitimization demonstrates patterned persuasion rather than spontaneous political debate. These techniques simplify causality, intensify emotional response, and reallocate responsibility, thereby translating broad geopolitical narratives into cognitively accessible and emotionally resonant claims.

Structural analysis strengthens this interpretation. High levels of elite concentration, instances of single-account dominance, and the recurring presence of early movers indicate centralised agenda-setting and disciplined narrative maintenance. Cross-narrative hub accounts ensure coherence across multiple war-related framings, allowing complementary narratives – such as peace-seeking rhetoric, puppet-state framing, NATO provocation claims, and fabrication allegations – to reinforce one another. This interconnected production structure suggests coordinated narrative management rather than decentralised grassroots participation.

Temporal dynamics add another layer of strategic organisation. Narrative surges during defined data collection periods, particularly in late October and late November 2025, indicate structured amplification cycles rather than purely reactive communication. Early movers shape the initial framing of emerging narratives, establishing interpretative boundaries that subsequent amplification reinforces. In smaller

Baltic-language information environments, such as early seeding and concentrated production may have amplified visibility effects.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Ukraine war disinformation in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia is characterised by narrative coherence, structural asymmetry, and systematic manipulation. Its objective is not necessarily to produce overt pro-Russian alignment. Rather, it fosters ambiguity, polarisation, and strategic fatigue; weakens trust in media and political institutions; and subtly destabilises confidence in NATO and EU alignment. In geopolitically exposed states such as the Baltics, where security, sovereignty, and institutional trust are tightly interwoven, sustained narrative coordination constitutes a significant challenge to information integrity and democratic resilience.

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