

EU DISINFO LAB

Disinformation landscape in FINLAND

V2
April 2025



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INTRODUCTION

- In general, Finland has a decent level of resilience against disinformation and information warfare especially from neighbouring Russia. The main reasons for this are the relatively high quality of the Finnish education system (and, accordingly, the high level of education among the population), a long tradition of media literacy and institutional trust among the population. Finns' willingness to defend their country is also among the highest in the world. This can be explained by conscription being an integral part of Finland and Finnish society throughout the country's independence.
- Finnish resilience is strengthened by [a strong consensus among mainstream parties on foreign and security policy](#), which is also [reflected in public opinion](#). Polls also indicate that the [general population continues to strongly support aid to Ukraine and Finland's NATO membership](#).
- The Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) has [stated that Russia remains Finland's greatest threat](#). It is highly likely that [Russia will continue to utilise hybrid warfare tactics against Finland](#). Recently, Russia has been suspected of engaging in hybrid activities, including disinformation, [directing migrants to the Finnish border](#), and [sabotaging underwater critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea](#). There has also been discussion on China's role as a hybrid influencer and a player in the information sphere. These discussions have been catalysed by international suspicion towards China and incidents of damaged sea cables, some of which have been linked to Chinese vessels.
- So far, the main known producers of disinformation in Finland are domestic radical parties and other actors, while Russia remains the largest foreign source. Domestic disinformation is mostly propagated by a small number of fringe radical parties, groups and individuals at both extremes of the political spectrum. Although far-right groups remain marginal, the [Finnish Security Intelligence Service \(Supo\) warns of rising far-right sentiments and the risks of terrorism](#). Russian disinformation, on the other hand, is primarily spread through Russian state-owned media (within Russia), with a domestic goal: to shape the perception of average Russians by portraying Finland as an enemy rather than a friend. Despite this, [according to the Prime Minister's Office](#), Finland has not been targeted by Russian information warfare to the same extent as many other EU countries, and the overall level of such activities has remained limited.
- The continuing polarisation of Finnish society and a possible decline in education and economic levels raise concerns about the Finnish population's ability to resist disinformation in the future. Particularly concerning is affective polarisation, which is dividing Finnish society. In contrast to ideological polarisation, affective polarisation is based on affects (especially strong emotions): negative emotions are emphasized in political and other confrontations. In autumn 2024, the University of Helsinki published [a report on affective polarisation](#) in Finland. According to the report, the level of affective polarisation has increased in Finland, although it remains moderate in international comparison. The impact of social media and generative AI in amplifying disinformation and causing confusion has been increasingly discussed in Finland, particularly following the 2024 U.S. presidential election, though few local studies are available due to the lack of data from tech companies.

EMBLEMATIC CASES

WEAPONISATION OF MIGRANTS

- In the autumn of 2023, Russia suddenly began to direct refugees to Finnish border crossing points. [In a period between August and December of 2023, Russia directed over 1,300 migrants from third-world countries as an act of weaponized migration.](#) The event, [similar in method and scale to those of 2015–2016](#), had a significant impact on the information landscape. This topic dominated public discourse among politicians, the media, and ordinary citizens for months, causing concern, fear, and unrest.
- Russian media also closely followed the event, offering various narratives about Finland's decision. For example, [Russian outlets claimed that Finland closed the border due to U.S. pressure, paranoid Russophobia, and as a tactic to secure funding from the European Union.](#) Additionally, Russian media portrayed the border closure as a brutal human rights violation while [spreading optimistic disinformation suggesting that the border would soon reopen, allowing friends and family to visit each other.](#) One site even stated that the closure was a ['logical consequence of becoming a frontier state, as in the times of Nazi Germany'](#).
- This was most likely a Kremlin communication tactic aiming to portray Finland in a negative light to Russian citizens. The operation might also have aimed to raise tensions between Russian-speaking minorities and the Finnish native population.
- The situation was resolved after Finland closed its land border with Russia in December 2023. In July 2024, this action was strengthened by the [Finnish Parliament's approval of a controversial Border Security Act](#), which allows Finland to temporarily deny entry and restrict the reception of applications for asylum without the right to file a formal complaint.
- The disinformation expert community observed this as a potential Russian attempt to undermine strong national unity, pushing Finns to balance between sensitive human rights concerns and security needs. The case was widely reported, also internationally, as Finland carries the reputation of a strong rule of law defender.
- The act is often called “the border law” (rajalaki) or the “push back -law” (käännytyslaki). The latter term already caused controversy and fierce public debate, as it was accused of being a [Russian information operation](#) or a term created by the [newspaper Helsingin Sanomat](#).

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND “THE TRUTH SEEKERS”

- In Finland, there is a small but vocal network of alternative media and individual actors actively producing and spreading disinformation, particularly in social media, with X serving as a key platform. Some of them call themselves “Truth Seekers”. According to their deep-state conspiracy, there is a powerful elite that pursues its interests at the expense of the people, and it has the mainstream media on its side. “Truth Seekers” believe they are being silenced and that the public interest is ignored.

- These “Truth Seekers” reject official polls, which indicate that most Finns support the country’s NATO membership. These polls were dismissed by the alternative media, which claimed that a majority of the population had actually opposed joining the alliance. The network called for a referendum on the issue.
- This [visualisation](#) shows that disinformation and its spreaders, both alternative media and individual actors, are bubbled up. There is a network of followers around these disinformation spreaders, who were also active in distributing COVID-19 disinformation. Additionally, there are other actors closely associated with them, including members of registered parties and members of a party that fell out of Parliament in the 2023 parliamentary elections.
- These alternative media outlets also include openly pro-Russian news sites such as [MV-lehti](#) and Z-News. Both sites are owned by Finns who are suspected of currently living in Russia or Russian-occupied Ukraine.
- At the moment, there are at least two ongoing legal processes in which prominent members of the “ Truth Seekers” are defendants. One of the cases concerns [possible high treason, the other e.g. defamations of character and persecution](#). The defendants and their supporters actively use these cases as evidence of the misconduct and silencing attempts of the authorities. The majority of the supporters are anonymous social media accounts, whose authenticity remains questionable.

RUSSIAN ALLEGATIONS OF FINNISH ABDUCTIONS OF RUSSIAN CHILDREN

- At the end of the 2010s, Russian officials and media accused Finnish (and Scandinavian) officials of systematic misconduct and discrimination against Russian children and their parents. Pavel Astahov, who was then the Russian ombudsman for children, [even declared Finland a life-threatening country for Russian children](#) and demanded consultations with Finnish officials.
- The narrative, repeated multiple times in the Russian media, was that Finnish officials took Russian children into custody without valid justification and then handed them over Finnish citizens, including LGBTQ+ couples. [The procedure was said to be a severe threat to all children of Russian origin](#), even those visiting Finland as tourists with their parents.
- The typical pattern was that [a person talked about the alleged](#) misconduct of Finnish officials in the media. Astahov then commented on the case, framing it as an example of a general procedure in Finland.
- For Finnish officials, this was a complex situation. Under Finnish law, they are not allowed to comment on individual cases or disclose personal information, with which they could have proven the falsehood of the news. Instead, their statements risked appearing nonchalant and insensitive.
- A similar emotional and false claim about authorities abducting Muslim children, circulated mostly in Arabic, was exposed by [Faktabaari and the NORDIS network in 2023](#).

NARRATIVES

FINLAND IS A REVANCHIST RUSSOPHOBIC COUNTRY

- After Finland's accession to NATO, Russian state media launched smear campaigns against Finland. Russian state media has relied on historical revisionism, focusing on Finland's role as an Axis belligerent during the Second World War and its time as a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire. The goal is to portray Finland as an aggressive state with a history of fascism, oppression and a strong anti-Russian sentiment, often ignoring Russia's own crimes.
- For example, [Russia has accused Finland of committing genocide in Karelia](#) and has compared its actions during the Second World War to those of Nazi Germany. Russian state officials have claimed, for instance, that during the war, [Finnish airmen attached mines to children's toys and dropped them in Russian villages to sadistically kill Russian children](#).
- In this narrative, Russia often portrays itself as the victim of Finnish aggression while simultaneously presenting itself as a forgiving neighbor, eager to maintain good relations with Finland, and even [reminding it of past territorial concessions granted during its time in the Russian Empire](#).
- There are at least [two far-right Karelian separatist groups demanding that Russia end "the occupation of Karelia"](#). As parts of Karelia belonged to Finland until World War II, there have been [suspicions about whether these organisations were created by Russian authorities as tools of information warfare](#) to stir up revanchism and nationalism in Finland. One of the organisations is called "Soldiers of Greater Finland", which refers to irredentist aspirations. However, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service does not see the movement as posing any security threat.
- At the end of 2022, the Karelian Association [reported that its members had been receiving anonymous messages urging the organization to initiate discussions about Karelian independence or annexation to Finland](#). The association's chairman suspected that these messages were part of a suspected Russian information campaign aimed at confusing or provoking the Karelian community.

NATO MEMBERSHIP THREATENS FINNISH INDEPENDENCE

- Since Finland joined NATO in 2023, Russia has treated it in a hostile way similar to other NATO countries. According to Russian propaganda, Finland should stick to its traditional neutrality, adopted after World War II. Russia claims not to present a threat to Finland and, therefore, Finland should avoid provoking Russia.
- This narrative often includes calls to remove sanctions aimed at Russia and to [resume friendly economic and political ties](#). The main driving factor in this narrative is the idea that Finland has lost its independence and become a puppet of the United States and its allies upon joining NATO.

- Russian disinformation also asserts that Finland has been pressured by the US to join the alliance and that a [majority of Finns oppose NATO membership](#). Part of this narrative has been widely adopted by the Finnish audience, as discussions frequently frame “*Nato’s eastward expansion*” as if it was some sort of deterministic development, where a sovereign country like Finland has no say in the matter. This sentiment appears sometimes in tandem with the popular sentiment of European Union scepticism that resonates well with Russian disinformation campaigning.
- Similar narratives are [spread](#) mostly by small far-right parties and activists, particularly on social media and small alternative news sites. These actors often see Ukraine and the [collective West as the main culprits](#) for the war in Ukraine. The same parties accuse the Finnish government and mainstream media of warmongering and inciting hysteria in the general public.
- There are some individuals active within party politics (mainly from the leftist political spectrum), who also actively spread the Russian narratives and question Finland’s official policy concerning the war in Ukraine and the aid given to Ukraine. Within political parties, there has been discussion about their status, and some of these have been [excluded from the candidates’ list](#) in the election in the spring of 2025.
- These narratives are sometimes supported by Russian information campaigns, such as in the spring of 2022 when multiple Russian-linked media outlets [falsely reported that Finland was moving its tanks to the eastern border](#) in a massive mobilisation effort against Russia. The claim was based on social media videos, showing Finnish tanks being transported westward for a military exercise.

QUESTIONING THE NEUTRALITY AND INTEGRITY OF FINNISH JOURNALISTIC MEDIA

- [So far, Finns’ trust in the news has been relatively high](#). On social media, vocal groups frequently question the neutrality and integrity of mainstream media in Finland. Its credibility is being undermined by the belief that these media outlets are involved in a conspiracy or secret agenda to mislead people. Moreover, the media's political neutrality has been questioned.
- According to the narrative, the mainstream media consists of like-minded actors who determine the topics of conversation and the right opinion to have. Additionally, there is said to be an elite that pursues its interests, with the support of the mainstream media. There are many examples of this, especially related to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially regarding restrictions and vaccines.
- The Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) has been accused, [even by mainstream politicians](#), of being “woke” and left-leaning, censoring news about immigrant crime, and advocating for leftist policies. Furthermore, on social media it is claimed that the Finnish mainstream media is not objective and pursues a certain ideological or political agenda. [There was even a fake diagram that circulated online](#), claiming to show the party affiliations of Finnish journalists and allegedly ‘prove’ a leftist bias. However, Finnish media actors, such as Helsingin Sanomat and YLE, [are politically uncommitted and guided by the principle of independence](#). However, [journalists’ criticism is relatively evenly distributed across parties](#).
- In the summer of 2024, there was a debate concerning Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) practices and training within the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (Yle). The debate was initiated and escalated by a few active influencers mainly on social media, especially in the message service X, and it later spread to the mainstream media as well. The debate became

quite heated, and the subject gained perhaps more attention than it would have deserved. The discussion and Yle's often slow and tight-lipped crisis communication might have left many persons puzzled about whether there was a thing worth all the discussion and whether the DEI practices and training have some kind of effect on the journalistic processes and neutrality of Yle.

- These debates coincided with a year-long parliamentary discussion on cuts to Yle's budget, where the right-leaning True Finns party pushed for deeper reductions than the final consensus. This narrative closely mirrors the polarized U.S. disinformation landscape, where the political right often favours unaccountable social media over self-regulated journalistic media.

ANTI-MIGRATION NARRATIVES

- After the 2015 immigration crisis, the Finnish social media space has been filled with anti-migration and xenophobic disinformation. This content is mostly false news from alternative media websites. For example, in 2019, within minutes after a school stabbing in Kuopio, [news began circulating on social media that falsely claimed the attacker was a refugee](#).
- Similarly, this narrative aims to prove that migrants are a threat to Finnish society, culture, and identity. [The Finnish far-right has promoted the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory](#), according to which a globalist elite is planning to replace Christian and white Europeans with Muslim migrants from the Middle East and Africa. This theory has also entered [mainstream political discourse](#), through the claim that Muslim immigrants receive preferential treatment over nationals. [Accordingly](#), multiculturalism, feminism, and the LGBTQ+ movement are blamed for the low birth rate of the "white race". It is important to note that Ukrainians are spared from this anti-immigration tide as Finns have empathised with them strongly, especially after the Russian invasion.

COMMUNITY

[When it comes to countering disinformation, Finland's strengths include a high level of institutional and media trust](#), as well as a strong emphasis on teaching media literacy which is essential for the development of critical thinking. Various actors are involved in countering disinformation, including the Finnish Defence Forces, government ministries, universities, associations (such as Faktabaari) and journalistic media, especially Yle. In addition, Finland relies on strong international cooperation with NATO and EU partners for information defence.

However, an authority dedicated to the development of Finnish society's cognitive security is needed, together with further cooperation between relevant actors. In addition to disinformation from third countries, domestic disinformation actors and digital media development (i.e., from AI to social media) require increased attention and international collaboration.

FACT-CHECKERS

[Faktabaari](#) is a Finnish NGO focused on independent journalism, fact-checking, and digital information literacy education, founded in 2014. It adheres to the Finnish ethical code for journalists and is part of multiple independent national, Nordic, European, and global expert networks on information disorders and media education. Despite its impact, it still works on a project basis, aiming to catalyze journalism on verification skills and cooperate especially with the wider Finnish media education community, in tackling information disorders. Its mission is to support fact-based public debate, and digital information literacy with a particular focus on algorithms and generative AI. Faktabaari editors include professionals such as journalists, teachers, researchers and information and media literacy specialists.

THE FINNISH BROADCASTING COMPANY

[YLE](#), the Finnish Broadcasting Company, is owned by the Finnish state and financed by taxpayers. YLE's main mission is to strengthen democracy and offer independent and neutral information. YLE counters disinformation not only by regularly producing news, but also by fact-checking, and designing other journalistic actions and content. Thanks to the public resources it receives, YLE has special media coordination duties regarding responses to hybrid and information warfare. In November 2024, YLE [announced](#) it would invest in a new verification team to cooperate with journalistic media.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY SUPPLY CENTRE (NESA)

[The Information Security Competence Centre \(Info-Oske\)](#) function continues its operations at the National Emergency Supply Agency (NESA). The Centre aims to strengthen information security in Finland by developing tools and models to combat harmful misinformation, while supporting the public, businesses, and authorities in identifying and countering disinformation campaigns. The function was piloted between 2022-2024 and, based on the experiences and feedback gained, a decision was made to continue its development at the NESA until the end of 2026.

POLICY

- At this moment, Finland has no existing laws or policies explicitly targeting disinformation. In some cases, hate speech or disinformation can be punished under a law against ethnic agitation.
- Finnish law also dictates that illegal information must be removed from a newspaper or a website.
- The rights of whistle-blowers are protected by [Finnish law concerning the use of freedom of speech](#) and journalism.
- The director of the Finnish Security Intelligence Service recommended [a law to penalise the spreading of foreign disinformation with intent](#).
- In 2021, the concept of “information defence” was presented in the Government Defence Report. This was the first time this term was used in an official document in Finland. In the report, a definition was given to the concept, but no concrete action points were defined. As Petteri Orpo’s cabinet was formed in the early summer of 2023, it was stated in its programme that the matters concerning information defence would be resolved in conjunction with the new cyber security strategy. As this new strategy was published in 2024, it turned out that the strategy did not include anything concrete concerning information defence. In the defence report published at the beginning of 2025, information defence was once again mentioned, but no action points were defined. [According to the information in the media](#), one of the two main parties in Orpo’s cabinet, True Finns, is suspicious concerning the development of information defence and therefore there has been no advancement in this field.
- When it comes to defending against disinformation, Finland closely cooperates with the EU. Implementation of the EU’s regulatory framework to tackle disinformation, including the Digital Service Act (DSA), is ongoing, with Traficom [named as the national DSA coordinator](#).
- Along with Finnish authorities, some Finnish NGOs such as Faktabaari and [research consortiums](#) are active both on national and EU levels in addressing disinformation and information disorders.
- Finnish attention to related EU policy is expected to increase, as the responsible European commissioner is from Finland.

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