

EU DISINFO LAB

Disinformation landscape in SPAIN

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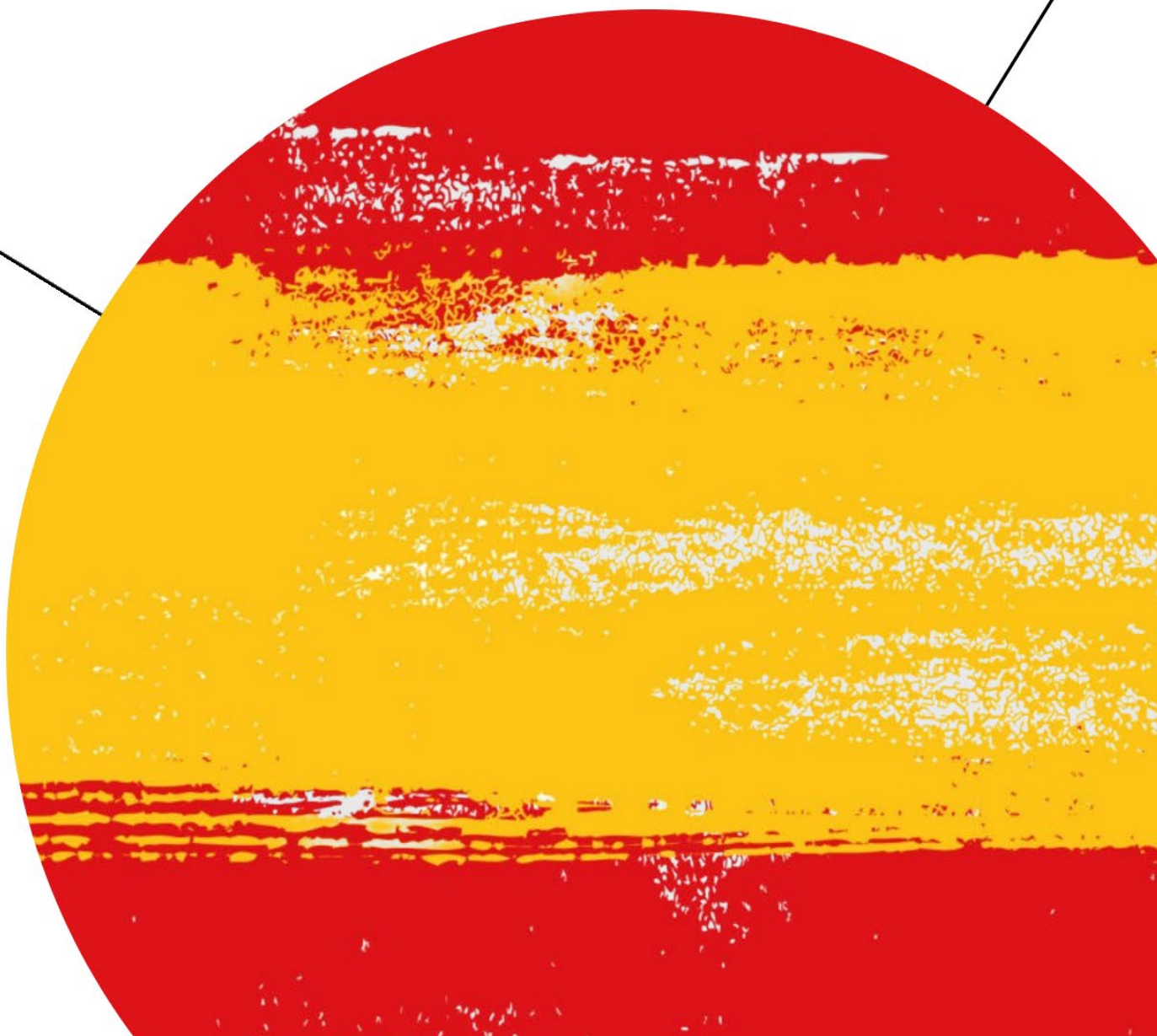


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EMBLEMATIC CASES	4
NARRATIVES	8
COMMUNITY	10
POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK	12

Author: **Ana Romero Vicente**, Community Coordinator at EU DisinfoLab

Reviewer: **Coral García Dorado**, Head of Disinformation Investigations at Maldita.es

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INTRODUCTION

- Spain's disinformation is highly event-driven, with natural disasters, elections, and geopolitical tensions acting as immediate catalysts for rapid narrative escalation.
- Core themes including migration, climate denial, gender backlash, and institutional distrust, are continuously adapted to new contexts through "diagonal" narratives that blur traditional left-right political lines.
- The ecosystem is increasingly dominated by "digital agitators" who use a pseudo-journalistic style to mobilize large communities via X and encrypted channels.
- The lowering of technical barriers through Generative AI has enabled the mass-circulation of synthetic content, such as fabricated documents and "cheap-fake" audio, to erode institutional trust.
- Foreign Information Manipulation Interference (FIMI) increasingly intersects with domestic efforts, specifically through the amplification of internal tensions.
- Spain's counterstrategy combines independent fact-checking with EU-aligned regulation yet faces significant challenges regarding the speed and scale of cross-platform dissemination.

EMBLEMATIC CASES

The following cases exemplify the evolution of Spain's disinformation environment, moving from isolated hoaxes to systemic multi-platform campaigns that exploit crises and institutional gaps.

Social media platforms, particularly X, Telegram and TikTok, play a central role in amplifying high-engagement disinformation, often prioritising virality over reliability during crisis events.

THE VALENCIA FLOODS (DANA)

The [catastrophic flooding in October 2024 \(DANA\)](#) in Valencia became one of the most significant recent disinformation events.

- Hoaxes widely circulated on X, TikTok, and Telegram suggested the weather was manipulated via [HAARP or geoengineering](#).
- [Claims](#) were made that dams were intentionally opened by authorities to destroy specific towns, further eroding trust in state infrastructure.
- False claims of "[immigrant looting](#)" were used to incite racial tension and delegitimize emergency services.
- Investigations also identified the amplification of certain narratives by Russian-linked networks, including coordinated dissemination via Arabic-language channels, illustrating how domestic crises can be [leveraged within broader FIMI dynamics](#) to undermine trust in public institutions.
- This event is cited as a primary example of "[diagonalism](#)", where influencers and junk media use a crisis to bypass institutional authority and blend extreme narratives with public grievances.
- Fact-checkers reported a sustained [surge](#) in false claims during the peak of the crisis, with some narratives reaching millions of views across platforms.
- Research conducted a full year later showed that these hoaxes [remained active](#) due to platform algorithms prioritizing high-engagement conspiracy content over official facts.

IBERIAN BLACKOUT

A [widespread power outage across Spain and Portugal](#) on 28 April 2025 served as a major flashpoint for energy-related disinformation. This event is now a widely cited example for "energy-transition disinformation". Crisis-driven speculation quickly evolved into coordinated disinformation campaigns:

- Anti-Renewable narratives falsely [claimed](#) the grid collapsed due to reliance on wind and solar energy.
- [Russian-linked networks](#) that impersonate legitimate media outlets spread false narratives linking the blackout to EU sanctions against Russia, as reported by researchers.
- The event was [framed](#) as a "social experiment" or "population control test" linked to Agenda 2030 and the EU's Green Deal.
- Despite [debunks](#), surveys indicated significant public exposure to false narratives.

THE 11-M 20TH ANNIVERSARY REVIVAL

- Two decades after the attacks, debunked conspiracy narratives about the Madrid bombings regained visibility online, echoing long-standing claims about alternative perpetrators and hidden plots.
- [Recurring falsehoods](#) include alleged links between ETA, Morocco and the PSOE, as well as [claims](#) questioning the official investigation and court rulings, despite repeated judicial confirmation of the jihadist authorship.

THE CANARY ISLANDS "INVASION" CAMPAIGN

A [surge in migrant arrivals](#) to the Canary Islands in 2024 triggered a wave of disinformation framing migration as a national threat.

- The situation was portrayed online as an "invasion."
- Viral [claims](#) falsely alleged migrants were housed in "4- and 5-star hotels" while citizens were neglected, distorting emergency accommodation measures.
- These narratives fed into broader conspiracy frameworks, including "Great Replacement"-type claims, claiming the arrival of migrants was an elite plan to dismantle national sovereignty.

RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE: FROM CATALONIA TO MODERN FIMI

Russian information interference in Spain has evolved from amplification of domestic tensions to sustained, multi-issue FIMI campaigns.

- Pro-Kremlin outlets (e.g., RT, Sputnik) and coordinated [social media activity](#) amplified polarisation during the 2017 Catalan referendum, marking one of the first large-scale cases of foreign information interference in Spain.

- Following 2017, anti-EU and anti-NATO narratives [continued to circulate](#), adapting to domestic political developments and testing influence strategies.
- Spanish authorities [warn of ongoing Russian-led campaigns](#) exploiting geopolitical crises (Ukraine, Gaza) and domestic issues (migration, Ceuta and Melilla) to spread anti-Western and anti-Spanish narratives, undermine trust in institutions, and interfere with electoral contexts.
- Investigations also point to the [convergence between online disinformation networks and offline mobilisation](#). For example, the “Not Our War” demonstration in Spain was promoted by actors linked to pro-Kremlin disinformation ecosystems, illustrating how such narratives can translate into real-world political activism and public dissent.
- At the same time, coordinated amplification campaigns continue to operate at scale. During the July 2025 events in Torre Pacheco, the Russian disinformation network [Pravda published nearly 300 pieces of content in just five days](#), repurposing false or misleading material sourced from Telegram channels and amplifying migration-related tensions to increase social polarisation.
- Beyond Russian influence, Spanish authorities increasingly monitor North African FIMI. These campaigns often exploit sensitive domestic issues, such as the status of Ceuta and Melilla or the Western Sahara, to strain Spain’s diplomatic relations and polarize public opinion during periods of bilateral tension.

COVID-19 INFODEMIC

- Spain’s fact-checkers [catalogued](#) over 500 hoaxes in just the first three months after the WHO declared the pandemic. False cures, fabricated government orders, and health scares spread primarily through social media and encrypted messaging platforms.

THE ALVISE PHENOMENON: DIGITAL-NATIVE POPULISM AS A DISINFORMATION ENGINE

The rise of [Alvise Pérez](#) and his party *Se Acabó la Fiesta* (SALF) represents a shift in the Spanish disinformation landscape, moving from isolated online hoaxes to structural political power fuelled by a continuous disinformation cycle.

Originally established as a “grouping of electors,” SALF officially registered as a political party on 31 January 2025. It operates as a digital-native movement without a traditional programme or physical headquarters,

relying on large, highly engaged online communities ("squirrels") primarily coordinated through Telegram, TikTok, and X.

The party [secured three seats in the 2024 European elections](#) with nearly 800,000 votes and expanded into regional politics by early 2026. [Internal fragmentation quickly followed](#), with other elected MEPs distancing themselves from his methods and operating independently.

The "Alvise method" blends unverified "leaks" and "shaming" campaigns with distorted data. In late 2025, he introduced "Escrutinia 2.0," an AI-based tool framed as a defense against alleged (though unproven) electoral fraud.

This model blurs the boundary between political communication and disinformation, where virality, controversy, and distrust of institutions are systematically leveraged to build and sustain political influence. Ongoing [legal investigations and institutional sanctions](#) further highlight the tensions between this approach and existing democratic norms.

This dynamic is not isolated, but reflects a broader ecosystem of digital-native actors in Spain, including influencers, commentators, and pseudo-journalistic figures, who adopt platform-native communication styles to shape political discourse. These actors often blend commentary, selective information, and unverified claims to maximise engagement, build loyal online communities, and influence public debate outside traditional media structures.

NARRATIVES

This section illustrates the most recurrent narratives in the Spanish disinformation landscape.

MIGRATION & SECURITY

Most persistent and currently dominant narrative.

- Migrants linked to crime and insecurity.
- Claims of preferential treatment (housing, benefits, aid).
- Narratives portraying migration as an “invasion” or demographic threat.
- Targeting of unaccompanied minors (MENAs) and local communities through criminalisation narratives

POLITICAL POLARISATION & INSTITUTIONAL DISTRUST

Constant across all periods.

- Claims of electoral manipulation or illegitimacy.
- Narratives attacking government, judiciary, or media credibility.
- Personalised disinformation targeting political figures and their families.

GEOPOLITICAL / FIMI NARRATIVES

Increasing since 2017, with growing sophistication.

- Pro-Kremlin narratives questioning EU/NATO alignment and support for Ukraine.
- Exploitation of domestic tensions (e.g., Catalonia, migration) to deepen divisions.
- Use of AI-generated or recycled content to amplify fear during crises (e.g. war, energy shocks).

HEALTH DISINFORMATION

Highly dominant during pandemic, still residual.

- Anti-vaccine narratives.
- Fake cures (e.g., chlorine dioxide).
- Conspiracy theories about the origins and purpose of the virus

CLIMATE, ENERGY AND DISASTER NARRATIVES

Climate-related disinformation combines denial, delay, and conspiracy thinking.

- Extreme events (e.g., floods, blackouts) are framed as engineered or manipulated (e.g. HAARP, geoengineering).
- Renewable energy is portrayed as unreliable or harmful, especially during crises (e.g. blackouts, fires).
- Climate policies are reframed as tools for authoritarian control (“climate lockdowns”, energy control).

GENDER AND CULTURAL BACKLASH

Gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights are central targets, especially among younger audiences.

- Denial of gender-based violence and attacks on equality laws.
- “Gender ideology” framed as elite indoctrination undermining family and national values.
- Emerging ‘threatened masculinity’ narratives encouraging identity-based radicalisation

CROSS-CUTTING CONSPIRACY FRAMEWORKS

Across all topics, disinformation relies on recurring conspiratorial logic.

- Diagonalist Mobilization: Using crises (e.g., floods, pandemics, energy shortages) to frame “the elite” as a common enemy, effectively merging radical-left and radical-right rhetoric to broaden the reach of disinformation.
- “Hidden truth” narratives questioning official accounts (e.g. institutions, crises, past events).
- Elite-driven conspiracies linking migration, climate, gender, and geopolitics.
- Rapid spikes during crises (pandemics, disasters, violence), exploiting uncertainty and emotional response.

COMMUNITY

The main actors countering disinformation in Spain include fact-checkers, researchers, civil society organisations, and public institutions.

FACT-CHECKERS – INDEPENDENT ORGANISATIONS

- [Maldita.es](#)
- [Newtral](#)
- [Verificat](#)
- [Infoveritas](#)

FACT-CHECKERS – INTEGRATED INTO THE MEDIA

- [EFE Verifica](#)
- [Verifica RTVE](#)
- [Verifica A3N](#) (Atresmedia)
- [AFP Factual](#)

Most of these organisations are signatories of the [European Fact-Checking Standards Network \(EFCSN\)](#).

RESEARCH, CIVIL SOCIETY AND INITIATIVES

- [Iberifier](#)
- [ALFA MEDIA](#)

MAIN FIGURES FIGHTING DISINFORMATION

- [Myriam Redondo](#), journalist and expert in international disinformation
- [Carmela Ríos](#), journalist and expert in social media and verification.
- [Lorena Jaume-Palasi](#) AI governance expert

- [Mariluz Congosto](#) researcher specialising in social network analysis
- [Ramón Salaverría](#) professor and coordinator of Iberifier.
- [Raúl Magallón](#) academic specialising in disinformation and data analysis.
- [Ángel Badillo Matos](#) and [Félix Arteaga](#): Elcano Institute researchers (strategic and security focus).
- [Leticia Rodríguez Fernández](#): expert in digital propaganda.
- [Marcelino Madrigal](#): Intelligence analyst.
- [Julián Macías Tovar](#): Activist against digital disinformation.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- Permanent Commission against Disinformation (2020–): Interministerial body coordinating detection, analysis and response to disinformation threats within the National Security framework.
- National Procedure against Disinformation (2020): Establishes the full response cycle (prevention, detection, analysis, response and evaluation), aligned with the EU Action Plan against Disinformation.
- Forum against Disinformation Campaigns (2022–): Public-private initiative bringing together government, academia and civil society to produce policy recommendations and strengthen coordination.
- Action Plan for Spanish Democracy (2024–2025): Includes measures to strengthen media resilience, increase transparency, and address structural vulnerabilities linked to disinformation.
- Digital rectification framework (2024): New legislative initiatives aimed at strengthening the right to correct false information online and increasing platform accountability.
- AESIA – Spanish Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence (2023–): National authority overseeing AI systems, including risks related to algorithmic amplification and AI-generated disinformation.
- HODIO (2026): Tool for monitoring the spread and amplification of hate speech and polarisation on social media, combining AI and expert analysis to inform policy and platform accountability.
- Scientific disinformation in Spain (FECYT): Study analysing public exposure to scientific misinformation and levels of resilience among citizens.

POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Spain's approach to disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is based on a combination of national security coordination, EU regulatory alignment, and fundamental rights protections. Rather than relying on a single law, Spain operates through a multi-layered governance model integrating institutional mechanisms, platform regulation, and strategic policy frameworks.

NATIONAL SECURITY APPROACH

National Security Strategy (2021): Recognises disinformation as a key hybrid threat, particularly in relation to foreign interference, electoral processes, and social polarisation.

Coordinated response model: Spain has developed a centralised system for monitoring, analysing, and responding to disinformation, particularly during crises and electoral periods, under the leadership of the Department of National Security (DSN).

Focus on FIMI: Foreign information manipulation, especially linked to Russia, is explicitly identified as a strategic threat targeting democratic institutions and public opinion.

EU REGULATORY ALIGNMENT

Spain's framework is strongly shaped by EU legislation and governance mechanisms:

Digital Services Act (DSA):

- Requires very large online platforms (VLOPs) to assess and mitigate systemic risks, including disinformation and FIMI.
- Introduces obligations on transparency, risk assessment, and algorithmic accountability.

European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP):

- Provides guidance on electoral integrity, media pluralism, and counter-disinformation strategies.

PLATFORM GOVERNANCE AND EMERGING REGULATION

Shift toward platform accountability:

- Increasing reliance on EU regulation to address systemic risks linked to content moderation and algorithmic amplification.

Integration of technological oversight:

- Growing focus on AI-related risks, including synthetic content and automated amplification.

Structural approach to disinformation:

- Policies increasingly address underlying factors such as media sustainability, transparency, and societal resilience.

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND LEGAL LIMITS

Spain does not criminalise disinformation itself, relying instead on existing legal protections:

- Freedom of expression: Guarantees the right to information and limits state intervention.
- Criminal Code provisions: Address related offences (e.g., hate speech, incitement, public disorder), rather than false information per se.
- Right to rectification: Enables individuals to request correction of false or misleading content, including in digital environments.

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