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& Fact-Checking

Spain & Portugal fact-checking brief

Q2 2023

This quarterly report collects the main hoaxes and disinformation narratives detected in Spain and Portugal from April to June 2023 by the fact-checking organisations integrated into the IBERIFIER hub.

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1. Most repeated hoaxes and disinformation campaigns April – June 2023

In Spain

- Climate change and induced drought
- Elections and alleged electoral fraud
- Attacks on the LGTBIQ+ group and disinformation about the Trans Law
- Protests in France after Nahel's death
- Disinformation against immigrants
- Ukrainian War
- Housing occupations

In Portugal

- Inflation and food prices
- Ukrainian War
- Parliamentary debates
- Anti LGTBIQ+ disinformation
- Disinformation against immigrants

2. Cases of cross mis- and disinformation (Spain-Portugal)

Hardly any cases of crossed disinformation between Spain and Portugal have been detected. Only two of the five fact-checkers provide examples of hoaxes in which the other country is mentioned. This is [one of the examples](#). In Portugal, a case that had already been mentioned in the previous quarterly report was detected again. This is the video of an attack on a doctor supposedly for asking a Muslim woman to remove her veil to examine her. Although it happened in Russia, it spread as if it had happened in Spain. This hoax, which claims that the attacked person was a Spanish doctor and that everything had happened in Spain, circulated in both languages: Portuguese and Spanish. It was debunked by [Polígrafo](#) in Portugal and by [Maldita.es](#) and [Newtral](#) in Spain.

3. Main hoaxes

In Spain

- During this quarter, disinformation about the electoral processes has multiplied. The main narratives point to an alleged electoral fraud either manipulating the voting process

([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) or altering the vote count ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)). Disinformation related to the elections is also noticeable in hoaxes designed to discredit politicians [like this one](#).

- The other big topic of the quarter has to do with climate change and drought. All Spanish fact-checkers highlight the disinforming narrative that the drought is due to the Government demolishing dams ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)). Another conspiracy theory related to the drought is also widely repeated, that of chemtrails to break up clouds ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)). In Catalonia, disinformation also appeared about air pollution, [which was a topic present in the electoral campaign](#).
- Disinformation themes that attack vulnerable groups have also been present. Against the LGTBIQ+ collective [taking advantage of Pride Day](#), talking about a [false decision of the Strasbourg Court](#) or [disinforming about the Trans Law](#). One of the fact-checkers also highlights [disinformation about the immigrant registration process](#).

In Portugal

- In this quarter, hoaxes with racist overtones related to alleged kidnappings stand out. One falsely [accuses a Chinese store of being involved in the kidnapping](#) of a 4-year-old child and another [accuses foreign Uber and Bolt drivers of trying to kidnap women](#) without evidence.
- Another of the main lines of disinformation has to do with politics and is reflected in hoaxes that attack relevant figures such as [Antonio Costa](#) or [Lula da Silva](#).
- Hoaxes against the trans community also stand out with a common narrative, that [trans women adulterate the results of women's sports competitions](#).

4. Main disinformation narratives

In Spain

- An electoral coup is being prepared by manipulating the census, buying votes or making someone vote for other people
- There will be an electoral fraud using the company Indra, which is controlled by the Government, is involved in the counting of the votes and can alter the real results of the polls

- There is a drought because someone is dissolving the clouds using chemicals dropped from airplanes. Those chemtrails are the white lines we see in the sky
- There is a drought because the Government is demolishing dams and reservoirs

In Portugal

- They tried to generate fear of immigrants among the population by linking them to especially sensitive criminal actions such as kidnapping of children or attacks on women traveling alone.
- Trans people have advantages, for example, in women's sports competitions

5. Main hoaxes according to topics

Environmental disasters

- The Government demolishes dams and reservoirs and that is why there is a drought
- The climate is being altered artificially through chemtrails that dissolve clouds

Gender

- Trans women get advantages when participating in competitive exams or sports competitions
- The LGBTQ+ group is related to pedophilia
- The LGBTQ+ collective or the feminist movement is ridiculed

Migration & racism

- Immigrants are have an important role in an alleged electoral fraud
- It is claimed that there is an invasion of immigrants who are “conquering” Europe. This idea was activated following the riots in France after the death of a young man at a police checkpoint.
- Immigrants are associated with crimes or terrorism

- It is stated that immigrants in an irregular situation have advantages when it comes to accessing medicines

Celebrities

- Rosalía, Lola Índigo and Shakira were victims of viral hoaxes
- The image of French Secretary of State Marlene Schiappa in a manipulated pose on the cover of Playboy magazine was released

Politics

- There were claims about electoral fraud taking place either in voting by mail, through vote buying or by falsifying the vote count.
- Various politicians are ridiculed, for example, by slowing down their videos to make it look like they are drunk
- The European Commission is attacked, accusing it of decreeing water restrictions for the entire population

Health

- COVID-19 vaccine claims to cause infertility
- The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reportedly bans COVID-19 vaccines
- It is reported that strawberries or raspberries that come from Morocco are contaminated with hepatitis A
- False claims that excessive cholesterol consumption increases testosterone levels
- Disinformation related to cancer: using sunscreen increases the risk of skin cancer and radiation from Wi-Fi and other electronic devices causes cancer
- False weight loss methods are promoted that can be dangerous for your health.

Security

- Fake images of an alleged explosion near the Pentagon
- It is stated that Barcelona concentrates 40% of the squats in Spain, when in reality it is 9%
- Vox has not approved an “anti-squatter law” in the Valencian Community: the pact with the PP includes the creation of an office for victims

Sexuality

- The data about sexual crimes do not necessarily reflect their real evolution: they are reported less and later than the rest
- Sweden has not become the first country to register sex as a sport

6. Verifications on content created with Artificial Intelligence

Four of the five fact-checkers carried out verifications related to Artificial Intelligence.

This technology has been used, above all, to put well-known characters in situations that attract attention. One of those most used in these montages is Pope Francis, who this quarter has appeared greeting a satanic priest ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) or with [the LGBT flag](#). Another common personality in AI creations is Donald Trump who appears surrounded by black men ([1](#), [2](#)) or [being detained](#). Fact-checkers have also debunked false images of Julian Assange in jail ([1](#), [2](#)) and of [Vladimir Putin addressing Americans in English](#).

Another application of AI is to generate images of situations that have not happened, such as an explosion at the Pentagon ([1](#), [2](#)), the poster of a movie in which Heidi is black ([1](#), [2](#)) or [hugs between police officers and protesters in France](#).

In relation to the use of Artificial Intelligence, disinformation also appeared this quarter about [an American drone controlled by an artificial intelligence that reportedly killed its operator because it was considered an obstacle](#). Although it appeared in several media outlets, it was not something that had really happened, it was a rumor based on the words from an American military officer that were misinterpreted.

Fact-checkers that have contributed to this report

SPAIN

Maldita.es
EFE Verifica
Verificat
Newtral

PORTUGAL

Polígrafo

Average number of verifications by fact-checkers in the quarter: 235



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