Spain & Portugal fact-checking brief

Q4 2023

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

Find more information at: www.iberifier.eu

1. Most repeated hoaxes and disinformation campaigns October — December 2023

In Spain

- War in the Gaza Strip
- Amnesty law and protests in front of the PSOE headquarters
- Pedro Sánchez reelection and formation of the new government
- Climate misinformation in the context of low winter temperatures in Europe
- Immigration
- Christmas Holidays phishing scams

In Portugal

- Immigration
- Inflation
- War in Ukraine
- War in the Gaza Strip

2. Main hoaxes

Many of the main hoaxes in both Spain and Portugal are related to the war between Israel and Hamas. There are those attacking Palestinians with a disinformation narrative that claims they are using actors posing as victims (1, 2) and there are also hoaxes against Israel claiming that its soldiers shot at civilians during the attack on the "Tribe of Nova" festival or about attacks on humanitarian aid shipments to Gaza. The aftermath of the war in Gaza also generated disinformation at the national and European level. For example, there were hoaxes about the European Union's position on the conflict, or numerous pieces of disinformation about an alleged increase in the anti-terrorist level of alert and the possibility of an imminent attack in Spain in response to what was happening in Gaza.

In Spain, the other major topic of the main misinformation is the processing of the amnesty law (1, 2) and the demonstrations in front of the PSOE headquarters to protest against it (1, 2).

Also noteworthy in Spain were the examples of scam attempts using images of celebrities or those using false offers to take advantage of the increase in consumption at Christmas.

In Portugal, the main hoaxes of the quarter were related to immigration. Several of them try to connect foreigners with crime and violence (1, 2, 3). Disinformation is also generated about the process of reception and regularization of immigrants both in Portugal and Spain.

3. Main disinformation narratives

In Spain

- The disinformation narratives accuse the Spanish government of being illegitimate and the members of the government of being unprepared to fulfill their responsibilities
- The hoaxes claim that European authorities reject amnesty law for those accused of 2017 Catalan independence attempt being prepared by Spanish government
- The disinformation about the protests at the PSOE headquarters sought to magnify police repression through old images
- Alarmist narratives about possible attacks in Spain appeared in the context of international instability due to the Gaza conflict and sought to create public concern and viral messages.

In Portugal

- Disinformation against immigrants accusing them of being violent has ramifications in narratives that are widely exploited and disseminated by certain political movements

In both countries

- In the conflict between Israel and Hamas, there have been numerous accusations of unproven atrocities committed by both sides
- Accusing the enemy of feigning fake deaths after an attack is a common wartime propaganda narrative that in this case is used against the Palestinians

4. Main hoaxes according to topics

Environmental disasters

- Safety and viability of electric cars questioned (1, 2, 3)
- Coinciding with COP 28, there are narratives that deny global warming directly (1) or indirectly by exaggerating the cold wave in northern Europe (1)
- Attacks on the climate movement accusing it of hypocrisy for attending COP28 in private planes (with a picture out of context) or of actually seeking to reduce the population of the planet (1,2)

Gender

- A new format for attacking feminism has become popular. They are interviews with women who confess to making false allegations against men. In reality they are acting but they are broadcast as real (1)

3

- The claim is that in Spain, if you are gay and want to adopt a child, you are at the bottom of the list ([1](#))

Migration & racism

- Migrants receive much more public subsidies than Spaniards ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#))
- Immigrants are accused of being violent and linked to crime, both in Spain ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) and in Portugal ([1](#), [2](#))

Celebrities

- Image of celebrities used as a hook for scams ([1,](#) [2](#), [3](#))
- Greta Thunberg's image is used and manipulated with artificial intelligence to ridicule her and the climate movement

Politics

- Pedro Sánchez is an illegitimate president and the King could refuse to investiture him ([1](#))
- Europe considers sanctioning Spain if amnesty law passed ([1](#))
- Police committed excesses to repress amnesty protests in front of PSOE headquarters ([1](#), [2](#))
- The ministers of the new Spanish government are not qualified for the position ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#))

Health

- COVID vaccines cause [sudden death](#), [cancer](#) or contain extremely toxic compounds ([1](#), [2](#))
- Bill Gates wants to [make humans allergic to red meat](#)

Security

- The government has raised the anti-terrorism alert level in the face of an imminent attack ([1](#), [2](#))
- The Government is considering declaring [a state of emergency in view of the protests in front of the PSOE headquarters](#)
- Immigrants associated with criminal activity and terrorism ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#))

Other

- This quarter, the presence of disinformation about the war between Israel and Hamas has been particularly relevant. All the organizations participating in this report have debunked numerous hoaxes on this subject

5. Events that have brought increases in disinformation

In Spain

- The war between Israel and Hamas
- The investiture of Pedro Sánchez
- Processing of the amnesty law

In Portugal

- War between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip

6. Verifications on content created with Artificial Intelligence

Four of the five fact checking organizations detected misinformation using artificial intelligence. A total of 30 debunks related to this issue were published.

In this quarter we have seen how artificial intelligence has been used in the context of the war between Israel and Hamas to create false images ([1](#), [2](#)) or to simulate support for one of the two sides ([1](#), [2](#)).

AI manipulated images have also been used in the context of [the protests for the amnesty law](#) or to [attack the socialist party](#).

It has also been used to put famous people in situations in which they were not, such as the [Argentinian president Javier Milei kneeling before Xi Jinping](#) or the [Portuguese housing minister, Marina Gonçalves, walking on a beach](#). Another technique used with celebrities is deepfake, which has been used with [environmental activist Greta Thunberg](#) or [Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa](#).

Finally, the manipulation of the image of well-known people has been used in social networks as a hook for scams ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)).

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: 245

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