

**IBERIFIER** – Iberian Digital Media Observatory

## **Spain & Portugal fact-checking brief**

Q1 – June, July and August 2024

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This quarterly report collects the main hoaxes and disinformation narratives detected in Spain and Portugal from June to August 2024 by the fact-checking organisations integrated into the IBERIFIER hub.

Find more information at: [www.iberifier.eu](http://www.iberifier.eu)

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## 1. Most repeated hoaxes and disinformation campaigns June – August 2024

### In Spain

- European Elections: Disinformation about an alleged fraud
- Anti-immigration narratives
- Olympic Games of Paris: especially related to gender issues
- Disinformation about the elections in Venezuela
- Gaza War and Middle East conflicts
- US Election: assassination attempts on Trump or attacks against Kamala Harris
- Connection of the murder of a child in Mocejón (Toledo) to illegal immigrants.

### In Portugal

- Anti-immigration narratives
- Olympic Games of Paris: especially related to gender issues
- European Elections

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

There were few cases of disinformation or crossed disinformation between Spain and Portugal this quarter. Still, one of them was particularly significant: it involved a false claim that originated in Spain and reached Portugal, attempting to blame an illegal immigrant for the murder of a child (in Mocejón, Toledo). [This article from Maldita.es](#) reports on how disinformation has spread across various European countries. The narrative was debunked by different Spanish fact-checking platforms, such as [Maldita.es](#), [Newtral](#), [EFE Verifica](#) and [Verificat](#) and it also reached [Polígrafo](#) in Portugal. Also, an out-of-context piece of information originating in Spain [reached Portugal](#), stating that the Spanish government had "reached an agreement" to hire 26,000 Moroccan truck drivers.

### 3. Main hoaxes

#### In Spain

- The murder of a child in Mocejón (Toledo) sparked a wave of disinformation that accused an immigrant of being the perpetrator without any evidence. This followed the pattern of criminalizing immigrants seen in Southport, which led to riots in the streets of the United Kingdom. In Spain, it was soon revealed that the perpetrator was not a foreigner, which quickly curtailed the wave of disinformation. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- The other big topic of the quarter has to do with disinformation regarding the gender identity of the athlete Imane Khelif. The accusations that the Algerian boxer Imane Khelif is biologically a man are unsubstantiated claims and have been debunked by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- The various anti-immigration narratives continue to be very substantial, and the examples have multiplied in Spain during the period under analysis. [One example is a video of a group of men destroying a dining area](#). It was circulated as if they were immigrants attacking the El Junquito restaurant in Tenerife. However, the footage actually shows a protest in the Kenyan Parliament and has nothing to do with the Canary Islands or immigration in Spain. Also, migration and its consequences, along with the hate speech that has continued to spread, are partly due to the debate over a law in Spain regarding migrant minors.

#### In Portugal

- Just like in Spain, the issues surrounding boxer Imane Khelif were also significant. Several transphobic theories have emerged, propagated by Elon Musk, J.K. Rowling, and [Portuguese parliamentarian Rita Matias](#).
- Another significant issue was a video that emerged in which, allegedly, the leader of the Bangladeshi community in Lisbon encouraged Bengalis to "invest in all sectors of the Portuguese economy" [to "implement their religion" in the country](#).
- Hoaxes against immigrants also stand out with a common narrative, for example that an ["anti-terrorist operation" in Lisbon](#) resulted in the identification of "30 Algerians" with "homemade bombs."

## 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

- The anti-immigration narrative continues to grow, both through attempts to attribute criminal acts to immigrants and through a perception of increased insecurity in the country.
- Like in Spain, Portugal had seen a common narrative against the LGBTQ+ community. This narrative claim that transgender individuals (case Imane Khelif) allegedly receive certain benefits and gain advantages in sports competitions.

## 5. Main hoaxes according to topics

### Environment - Climate

- Disinformation that questions the effects of climate change. Madrid did not record 44 degrees in July 1989
- Electric vehicles are dangerous; they catch fire spontaneously
- It is false that Aemet has lowered the thresholds for declaring more heat alerts

## Gender

- The boxer Imane Khelif is not a man and is also not transgender. The theory shared by a Portuguese parliamentarian (between others) is false.
- Attacks on women who hold political positions or whose husbands hold political positions, claiming that they are men
- Institutions impose gender ideology

## Migration & racism

- Maghrebis commit crimes and receive more aid than Spaniards
- Messages attributing crimes that immigrants have not committed
- Morocco pardons its prisoners to send them to Spain
- Children of immigrants have priority for school spots at the expense of Portuguese children
- Immigrants engage in sexual acts with animals
- Immigrants, especially Muslims, are invading Europe

## Celebrities

- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his wife are purchasing luxury goods with the money they receive from other countries for the war
- Manipulated images and information about Taylor Swift
- The name of a Japanese Olympic swimmer that had gone viral was not true; it is a fabrication.

## Politics/Elections

- European Elections: The actual results of the elections are not what has been made public

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- [European Elections: False instructions on how to vote to try to make the votes of certain individuals null](#)
- [US Elections: False claims about Kamala Harris](#)
- [US Elections: The Secret Service did not adequately protect Trump during the assassination attempt on July 13](#)
- [Regional elections in Catalonia: repeated political verifications over the past few months, many concerning local economic issues and others related to institutional matters](#)

### Health

- ['Mpox' is not a side effect of the COVID vaccine and is not related to shingles](#)
- [The WHO wants to impose lockdowns due to the mpox outbreak](#)
- [Analyses conducted on kebabs in France determined that they were made from "cat meat"](#)
- [The COVID vaccine contains graphene and is dangerous for humans](#)

### Security

- [Disinformation claiming that Barcelona is one of the most unsafe cities in Europe](#)
- [The police in the UK arrest citizens solely for making comments against immigrants on social media](#)
- [Spain is experiencing a surge in crimes related to immigration](#)

## 6. Verifications on content created with Artificial Intelligence

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

This quarter has seen a significant in disinformation fueled by manipulated images and claims involving various public figures. Among the most frequently exploited personalities is Queen Letizia of Spain, [who has been falsely linked to cryptocurrency scams](#). Similarly, claims about actor James Norton allegedly communicating with fans through a cloned voice [have been debunked](#). Another notable instance involved Kate Middleton, whose image was falsely circulated, [suggesting she wore a turban inappropriately](#).

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In a twist of narratives, Olena Zelenska, the wife of Ukraine's president, was the subject of misinformation [suggesting she purchased a luxury Bugatti](#), while misleading photos falsely associated Kamala Harris with Jeffrey Epstein [circulated widely](#).

Moreover, AI-generated images have depicted non-existent events, such as [supposed celebrations by Israelis during the 9/11](#) attacks and a viral image claiming to show police officers kneeling to Muslims, which has been identified [as a misrepresentation](#). Another case of misleading representation concerned the River Seine, [where a viral image](#) suggested the water was unnaturally crystal clear.

Additionally, there were instances of AI-generated images leading to misinformation, such as a [doll presented in a promotional campaign by a portuguese brand](#) called Renova.

### **7. Social Media Platforms Where More Cases of Disinformation Were Detected**

X was the most mentioned platform (4 out of 5 fact-checkers identified it as one of the main proliferators of disinformation). Facebook was mentioned by two fact-checkers, while WhatsApp and TikTok received only one mention each. No one mentioned Instagram or the newer platform, Threads.

**Average number of verifications by fact-checkers in the quarter:** 237

#### **Fact-checkers that have contributed to this report**

##### **SPAIN**

Maldita.es

EFE Verifica

Verificat

Newtral

##### **PORTUGAL**

Polígrafo

# IBERIFIER – Iberian Digital Media Observatory

IBERIFIER is a digital media observatory in Spain and Portugal funded by the European Commission, linked to the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). It is made up of thirteen universities, five fact-checking organizations and news agencies, and five multidisciplinary research centers.

Its main mission is to analyze the Iberian digital media ecosystem and tackle the problem of misinformation. To do this, it focuses its research on five lines of work:

1. Research on the characteristics and trends of the Iberian digital media ecosystem.
2. Development of computational technologies for the early detection of misinformation.
3. Fact-checking of misinformation in the Iberian territory.
4. Strategic reports on threats of disinformation, both for public knowledge and for the authorities of Spain and Portugal.
5. Promotion of media literacy initiatives, aimed at journalists and informants, young people and society as a whole.

For more information look for the project website [iberifier.eu](http://iberifier.eu) and the Twitter account [@iberifier](https://twitter.com/iberifier).

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