

IBERIFIER — Iberian Digital Media Observatory

Spain & Portugal fact-checking brief

Q4 – September-November 2024

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

Find more information at: www.iberifier.eu



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1. Most repeated hoaxes and disinformation campaigns September – November 2024

In Spain

- The hoaxes of the Atmospheric Depression (DANA) in Valencia with various narratives such as:
 - "It has been a storm artificially caused."
 - "They are hiding the real number of deaths."
 - "It was because the government demolished the dams."
 - "Only immigrants are looting."
- Multiple narratives on the elections in the United States
- Gaza War and Middle East conflicts
- Anti-immigration narratives: responsible for the increase in crimes and insecurity

In Portugal

- False inequalities between immigrants and Portuguese, such as the false claim that Portugal gives all Brazilian citizens 20 thousand euros to start a business
- Anti-immigration narratives: "The migration wave is 'increasing crime' in Europe."
- Multiple narratives on the elections in the United States such as: vote manipulation and false pro-censorship claims on social media

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

One of the major events of the quarter under analysis was the spread of several falsehoods related to the DANA in Valencia. These began, of course, in Spain, but echoed across Europe, with Portugal being one of the countries that "hosted" the most disinformation. An example of this is what happened with a video showing people climbing onto cars on a flooded street. It was actually recorded in Zaragoza in 2023 but went viral with claims suggesting it was filmed in Valencia during the passage of the DANA and the subsequent floods as shown in this article by Maldita.es and in this article by Polígrafo.

In Portugal, a claim surfaced on X stating that the Spanish Government had closed an entire airport to transport three thousand immigrants from Africa to Spain, using a video as supposed evidence. The tweet adds that these "men of fighting age were taken to hotels paid for by taxpayers." The truth is that the video does not show thousands of immigrants, nor is it recent. It relates to a transport operation that took place in October 2023 at Tenerife North Airport, involving 350 immigrants.

3. Main hoaxes

In Spain

- **Conspiracy theories and false claims about what happened due to the DANA – see more [here](#) and [here](#) – clearly shaped the main hoaxes of the quarter in Spain, unfolding into:**
 - Narrative claiming that the DANA was artificially caused through "geoengineering," the HAARP project, or cloud seeding in Morocco. See more [here](#) and [here](#).
 - Disinformation accusing humanitarian organizations or local authorities of hindering the arrival of aid to Valencia. See more [here](#).
 - Conspiracy theories about the number of deceased and missing persons.
 - Narratives about constructions that could have prevented the catastrophe, as well as disinformation about "Agencia Estatal de Meteorología" and its ability to forecast DANA.
 - There are many dead in the parking lots, especially in the Bonaire one, but "they" are hiding it from us. See more [here](#) and [here](#).
- Disinformation related to the war in Gaza and conflicts in the Middle East. The narratives that emerged after the assassinations of the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah were particularly striking. See more [here](#).

In Portugal

- A party leader said the government will 'give preference' to 'Gypsies, Afro-descendants, and LGBT' in recruitment for the PSP (Portuguese police).
- A viral video falsely showed the leader of the Bangladesh community in Lisbon threatening to destroy the city if anyone 'touched' one of its members.
- Several anti-immigration claims, such as the claim that there were more rapes until September this year than in 2023, and that 'many' of these crimes were committed by immigrants, or the insinuation that 'about half of Lisbon's population' were not Portuguese as early as 2021.

4. Main disinformation narratives

In Spain

- The impact of climate change on the DANA was downplayed, and its effects are attributed to a supposed destruction of dams, which is in turn attempted to be linked to policies supposedly coming from Europe. The messages questioning the number of deaths and missing persons are related to disinformation strategies that aim to erode trust in institutions. In the same vein, the posts we detected against humanitarian organizations are part of an attempt by disinformation to attack the image of NGOs, particularly with issues related to migration, to offer replacements.
- DANA tragedy also revisited a disinformative narrative that claims numerous dams have been demolished in Spain. Although this is false, it was previously used to argue that the country's drought was caused by those demolitions. In this case, it is said that the flood was so severe because these dams had been demolished, and the current central government was blamed for destroying them. Therefore, the narrative was also used to attack the government in the political struggle to determine the responsibilities for what happened.
- Regarding disinformation during the U.S. presidential election campaign, anti-immigration disinformation has been instrumentalized in other elections to manipulate the electorate. Similarly, falsehoods linking Kamala Harris to 'Diddy' follow the same patterns as other conspiracies that accused Democratic figures of being part of a pedophile ring.

In Portugal

- A narrative continues to be fueled that minorities are favored in Portugal at the expense of majority groups.
- Anti-immigration narratives continue to grow, linking, without factual basis, a supposed increase in crime to immigrants in the country. Allegations constantly emerge, attempting to create divisions in society through fear and a sense of insecurity.

5. Main hoaxes according to topics

Environment - Climate

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- Narrative claiming that climate change doesn't exist, that CO2 is "essential for life," and that the Earth has always had cycles of global warming or cooling.
- Narrative claiming that extreme weather events, such as the DANA in Spain or Hurricane Milton in the U.S., have been artificially induced through climate manipulation techniques.
- Climate change is the main cause of the DANA (isolated depression at high levels) event.
- The DANA was caused by Morocco to ruin Spanish agriculture.
- Radars guided the clouds to Valencia, causing the DANA.
- The government demolished dams in the Valencia area, and that's why the floods were so severe.
- The narrative claiming that cooler weather this summer in Portugal proves that climate change doesn't exist.

Gender

- "Gender ideology in schools" leads to "shameful situations" like "mixed-gender changing rooms."
- The narrative claiming that the Algerian boxer Imane Khelif is either a man or a transgender person, and that she has an illicit competitive advantage.
- Disinformation that attacks trans women (as November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women).

Migration & racism

- During the U.S. elections, a narrative spread claiming that Haitian immigrants were eating dogs or cats in Springfield. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- The new immigration law regulations have generated a lot of disinformation in Spain. Specifically, the government was accused of implementing it solely to gain votes in the upcoming elections.
- The looting after the DANA was attributed solely to immigrants. See more [here](#) and [here](#).

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- Immigrants cause disturbances and commit crimes in the cities and towns where they are welcomed.
- A connection has been made between the alleged increase in the number of rapes in Portugal up to September this year and immigration.
- The Portuguese Workers' Union of Services is allegedly helping immigrants obtain Social Security benefits without working.
- Immigrants receive far more public assistance than Spanish citizens.

Celebrities

- In November, the visit of the Spanish Royal Family to Valencia generated a lot of misinformation, including an image of a supposed convoy accompanying Their Majesties.
- A manipulated image of Cristiano Ronaldo with a Palestinian flag tattooed on his back.
- Several viral hoaxes in Spain about the false deaths of well-known writers or public figures. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- Disinformation linking famous people to the rapper accused of pedophilia and sexual abuse. See more [here](#) and [here](#).

Politics

- A narrative accusing European or international institutions of stifling freedoms and economic progress for people in Spain.
- The retirement age was increased to 66 years and 9 months in Portugal, while "the deputies raised their salaries by 5%."
- The Conference of Presidents announced by Pedro Sánchez was a topic that generated a lot of disinformation.
- The Catalan abortion law proposal was also the subject of disinformation. It prioritizes parental consent for minors, contrary to what Vox claimed.

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- Much of the political misinformation during this period in Spain is also related to the DANA. Failures in alerting and responding to the disaster have become the cause of a harsh political dispute. Here are some examples:
 - The Spanish Prime Minister is accused of throwing donated clothes for the victims into the trash.
 - Images of a long column of police cars were spread, claiming they were the escort for the King or Pedro Sánchez.
 - Accusations were made against the Minister for Ecological Transition, Teresa Ribera, for not warning about the severity of the DANA.
 - Claims were made that the Valencian Community had no "emergency services" because the regional government, led by the PP, decided to eliminate the "autonomous UME" (Military Emergency Unit).

Elections

- Disinformation about US elections in Portugal:
 - Beyoncé allegedly said she supports Kamala Harris "because of access to abortion up until birth."
 - Claims spread that the cocaine found in the White House belonged to Kamala Harris.
 - Claims circulated that Kamala Harris and Tim Walz posed smiling in front of a poster of the "Revolutionary Communists of America."
 - Donald Trump allegedly said that Republicans are "the dumbest voting group" in the U.S.
- Disinformation about US elections in Spain:
 - One of the main narratives in the U.S. election campaign was the accusation that Haitian immigrants were eating pets.
 - There have also been numerous attacks on candidates, particularly Democrats. Kamala Harris was accused of having run over a 13-year-old girl, being drunk, having been a prostitute, or being a man. Tim Walz was accused of being a pedophile.

- Trump also received attacks that used misinformation. See more [here](#) and [here](#).
- The list of censored books in the United States is not a proposal from Trump. A supposed list of books that Donald Trump wanted to censor if he won the elections went viral.

Health

- Acne is not an indicator of suffering from an illness.
- There is a narrative claiming that food products from Morocco pose a public health risk due to contamination or failure to pass proper sanitary controls.
- Related to the DANA, there were claims of supposed cholera outbreaks. And of the supposed destruction of donated medicines.
- A conspiracy theory claiming that the flu is not an illness but rather a detoxification process.

Security

- Information about people detained in areas affected by the DANA
- The Directorate General of Traffic (DGT) allegedly has published a list of diseases that will prevent individuals from obtaining a driver's license.

Others – International conflicts

Ukraine: see more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Middle East: see more [here](#).

The DANA was clearly the event of the quarter that marked the landscape of Iberian disinformation.

6. Verifications on content created with Artificial Intelligence

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

There continues to be a stable trend in the use of Artificial Intelligence to create narratives or simply false claims with the more or less declared intention of disinforming the audience.

When there are weather phenomena, [like the examples of DANA](#) or [Milton](#), we have already become accustomed to seeing videos or images taken out of context. The [hurricane Helene](#) also did not go unnoticed in this wave of disinformation.

Moreover, and in a less consistent manner, we saw disinformation [about President Zelensky](#), [fighter Imane Khelif](#), the [conflict in the Middle East](#) and about the [US elections](#).

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

X was the most mentioned platform (5 out of 5 fact-checkers identified it as one of the main proliferators of disinformation). TikTok and WhatsApp was mentioned by three fact-checkers, while Facebook received only two mentions – the same for Telegram. This fact reveals some shift in focus regarding the locations of virality for disinformation. No one mentioned Instagram or the newer platform, Threads.

Average number of verifications by fact-checkers in the quarter: 257

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 and the Twitter account [@iberifier](https://twitter.com/iberifier).

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