

IBERIFIER — Iberian Digital Media Observatory

Spain & Portugal fact-checking brief

Q2 – March 2025 - May 2025

This quarterly report collects the main hoaxes and disinformation narratives detected in Spain and Portugal from December 2024 to February 2025 by the fact-checking organisations integrated into the IBERIFIER hub.

Find more information at: www.iberifier.eu



Co-funded by
the European Union

Iberifier – Iberian Digital Media Observatory has received funding from the European Commission under the Call DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04, European Digital Media observatory (EDMO) — National and multinational hubs, with the reference IBERIFIER Plus - 101158511

1. Most repeated hoaxes and disinformation campaigns March 2025 – May 2025

In Spain

- The energy blackout in Portugal and Spain, accompanied by conspiracy theories.
- Disinformation narratives targeting the Ukrainian government in general, and Zelensky in particular, as well as the conflict itself.
- Donald Trump administration, with a focus on issues related to migration policies and trade tariffs.
- Conspiracy theories involving the death of Pope Francis, followed by the election of Pope Leo XIV.
- Spanish politics, with particular emphasis on false claims involving Pedro Sánchez.
- Immigration, portraying immigrants as violent, criminal, and unfairly privileged by public support.
- Conflicts in the Middle East, with a focus on tensions between Israel and Iran, as well as the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

In Portugal

- The political crisis in Portugal that led to the fall of the government.
- Donald Trump administration, with a focus on issues related to migration policies and trade tariffs.
- Immigration, with a focus on narratives about violence, access to state support, and pressure on the national healthcare system.
- The energy blackout in Portugal and Spain, accompanied by conspiracy theories.
- Presidential race - Theories about candidates.
- Conspiracy theories involving the death of Pope Francis, followed by the election of Pope Leo XIV.
- 2025 Legislative Elections – Including campaign coverage, debates on key issues such as healthcare, housing, wages, defence, the European Union, reforms, pensions, and immigration, as well as election night coverage.

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

The blackout that affected Portugal, Spain, and several other European countries became one of the main focal points of disinformation in the region.

Initially, false narratives focused on conspiracy theories, followed by multiple attempts to explain the incident without any factual basis or credible sources, as verified by [Polígrafo](#), [Maldita](#), [Newtral](#) and [EFE Verifica](#).

The disinformation surrounding this topic stood out for repeated attempts to justify the event through unverified claims and unfounded rumours, thus contributing to a climate of confusion and growing public distrust.

3. Main hoaxes

In Spain

- One of the most recurring topics this quarter was the power outage in the Iberian Peninsula, which was the target of several false narratives. Rumors circulated claiming the incident was caused by a supposed [cyberattack mentioned by Ursula von der Leyen](#) (Maldita.es), which was [quickly debunked](#) (Verificat). Other claims pointed to an alleged [“experiment” with renewable energy](#) (Newtral) that had gone wrong, an idea also denied by the authorities. In addition, incorrect information was shared about the [geographical extent of the blackout](#) (EFE Verifica), suggesting it had affected countries such as Germany and Italy, which was not the case.
- A video falsely claimed that French President Emmanuel Macron was hiding a bag of cocaine during a trip to Kyiv, with similar accusations aimed at the German chancellor. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- False accusations linked immigrants to crimes, including a widely shared claim blaming [Moroccan youths for a murder actually committed by Spanish minors](#), reflecting a broader manipulation of facts or data to associate immigration with criminality or [social exploitation](#).
- Pro-Russian campaigns used local events or manipulated images to spread suspicion about Ukraine. See more [here](#) and [here](#).
- A false claim saying that Pedro Sánchez and the DGT were planning to ban driving alone in a car. See more on InfoVeritas [here](#) and [here](#).

In Portugal

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- The Iberian blackout gave rise to several hoaxes, linked to [alleged statements by Ursula von der Leyen](#) and a supposed [rare atmospheric phenomenon](#), claims about the [demolition of a nuclear power plant in Spain](#), and even that the [Spanish government had already planned the blackout](#).
- Alleged advantages that immigrants have compared to Portuguese people in areas such as [healthcare](#) and [childcare](#). As well as claims about [violence caused by immigrants](#) and a [large-scale population replacement](#).
- Disinformation related to the Donald Trump administration. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- A considerable amount of falsehoods related to vaccination, mainly COVID-19 ([here](#) and [here](#)) and [measles](#).
- Several false reports have sought to undermine the credibility of Zelensky - [here](#) and [here](#) - and portray [Ukraine in a negative light](#), challenging its status as a victim in the conflict.

4. Main disinformation narratives

In Spain

- Disinformation around the blackout in the Iberian Peninsula has become a fertile ground for conspiracy theories, from blaming governments and global elites to spreading unfounded claims about sabotage or hidden causes.
- Narratives targeting migrants remain prominent. Migrants are falsely accused of being disproportionately involved in violent crimes, benefiting from excessive state aid, or threatening local traditions. These claims often seek to fuel fear and division, especially when linked to Islam or cultural “replacement”.
- Disinformation attacking Pedro Sánchez and his wife continues to circulate, including fabricated accusations of corruption, incompetence, or authoritarian intentions — such as reintroducing military service or launching a digital ID to monitor citizens.
- The Catholic Church is also a frequent target. Pope Francis has been portrayed as satanic or dangerously progressive, while Pope León XIV has been falsely quoted in misogynistic or transphobic contexts to legitimise extremist views.
- Environmental policies are depicted as a threat to rural life, often under the narrative that “green agendas” are harming farmers and being imposed by disconnected elites. Stories include alleged mass destruction of olive groves for solar panels or EU climate laws hurting the countryside.

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- LGBTQ+ identities, especially trans people, are portrayed as abnormal or harmful, sometimes through viral satire taken as truth, or by falsely attributing extreme statements to public figures.

In Portugal

- Narratives related to the political crisis and the fall of Luís Montenegro's government stood out. There was a significant rise in disinformation campaigns in the aftermath, particularly during the election campaign and the televised debates between the candidates.
- Many of these disinformation narratives focused primarily on immigrants, with recurring themes such as violence and the idea of Portuguese people being replaced in their own country.
- The Iberian blackout was also a source of disinformation, with numerous false news reports and conspiracy theories spreading about the true cause of the event.

5. Main hoaxes according to topics

Environment - Climate

- [A large number of olive trees are being cut down to make way for solar energy plants. See more here.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [A rare atmospheric phenomenon was at the origin of the blackout.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [The unusually rainy month of March in Spain disproves global warming or climate change.](#) (EFE Verifica)
- [Cataluña is lagging behind in renewable energy compared to other regions in Spain.](#) (Verificat)
- [There is no support for nuclear energy in Europe.](#) (Verificat)

Gender

- [The "born a man" narrative is used to attack influential women, in this case Brigitte Macron.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [Women in India, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan earn only one third of what men make.](#) (Polígrafo)

Migration & racism

- [Immigrants are portrayed as violent and accused of being responsible for the most heinous crimes.](#) (Maldita. es)
- [Immigrants and refugees are portrayed as receiving extensive public aid solely because of their status.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [The Romani people have a special legal status in the justice system and can marry at age 13.](#) (Polígrafo)

Celebrities

- [Attacks against Pope Francis, accusing him for example of being satanic.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [An image shows Pope Francis hospitalized and wearing an oxygen mask.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [The video of Pope Francis in a wheelchair waving from a balcony is not from his Easter Sunday appearance.](#) (EFE Verifica)
- [This image shows the room where Pope Francis has slept during his 12 years as pontiff.](#) (Polígrafo)

Politics

- [Pedro Sánchez and his wife are accused of alleged corruption cases that are completely fabricated. See more here.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [Attacks against Zelensky and Western leaders portray them as corrupt, weak, or drug addicts, coming from pro-Russian propaganda sources.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [Other countries are taking advantage of the United States, and it is only fair to impose Trump-era tariffs to balance the scales.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [A common narrative portrays the political class as corrupt and irresponsible, accusing them of bribery, corruption scandals, and neglect of duty, among other allegations.](#) (Newtral)
- [Meloni said in the European Parliament that Sánchez caused the blackout.](#) (EFE Verifica)
- [The current mayor of Barcelona, Jaume Collboni, has imposed new regulations banning people from sitting on sidewalks or doorsteps, with fines up to 500 euros.](#) (Verificat)
- [Mariana Mortágua said that Portugal needs three times as many immigrants as currently reside in the country.](#) (Polígrafo)

Elections

Portuguese

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- [Nearly 20% of young people up to the age of 29 are unable to leave their parents home.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [The European Union is the “richest in the world” in terms of Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) per capita.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [Housing prices had been falling until the first quarter of 2024.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [There are 1.6 million immigrants in Portugal, and only 302,000 are working and contributing to Social Security.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [Immigrants who acquired Portuguese nationality can now become President of the Republic.](#) (Polígrafo)

Romanian

- [1.7 million deceased people were included in the voter registry for the Romanian elections.](#) (EFE Verifica)

Health

- [The COVID-19 vaccine causes serious and frequent adverse effects.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [The WHO Pandemic Treaty does not impose “mandatory guidelines” on the signatory countries.](#) (Newtral)
- [A CDC study proves thimerosal in vaccines causes autism.](#) (EFE Verifica)
- [Narratives appealing to a lack of transparency in institutions, such as false claims that the Spanish government prohibits autopsies in cases of sudden death in sports.](#) (Verificat)
- [The European Union wants to ‘replace traditional proteins with insects.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [Monkeypox is a side effect of mRNA Covid-19 vaccines.](#) (Polígrafo)

Security

- [Crime is rising in Spain, and several countries are issuing warnings about the situation.](#) (Maldita.es)
- [The immigrants appearing in this video did not “storm” the Civil Guard Traffic School in Mérida.](#) (Newtral)
- [The Simpsons predicted a global conflict in 2025.](#) (EFE Verifica)
- [Ghost calls—silent phone calls without a caller—can activate your phone’s camera and microphone to steal personal data.](#) (Verificat)
- [El País reported the arrest of two female travelers carrying millions in cash linked to a crypto platform promoted by Elon Musk.](#) (Verificat)
- [Muslims are harassing girls in northern Portugal.](#) (Polígrafo)

Sexuality

- [A viral video shows Pope Leo XIV ignoring a journalist holding an LGBTQ+ flag.](#) (Polígrafo)
- [Pope Leo XIV was falsely reported to have said that transgender identity is “a disease” that “needs treatment.”](#) (Newtral)

- [A British mother says her 14-month-old baby is a trans girl.](#) (EFE Verifica)

6. Verifications on content created with Artificial Intelligence

Six of the six fact-checkers carried out verifications related to Artificial Intelligence.

In Portugal, recent months have seen a surge in AI-powered disinformation targeting both national and international figures. False claims and manipulated content have ranged from hoaxes involving public personalities such as Portuguese journalist [Pedro Andersson](#) to misleading narratives linked to [large-scale fires](#).

Beyond environmental crises, AI-generated disinformation has extended to financial scams. Fake investment schemes falsely attributed to prominent figures like [Cristiano Ronaldo](#) and [Prime Minister Luís Montenegro](#) have circulated widely, encouraging users to invest in fraudulent platforms. These posts often use deepfake videos or AI-edited screenshots to appear legitimate.

In [Uruguay](#) and the [United States](#), AI was used to spread hoaxes about newly installed statues. Fake news involving [Donald Trump](#) and [Pope Francis](#) went viral, with AI-generated audio and visuals used to influence public opinion

In Spain, AI-driven disinformation has been even more widespread and diverse. Manipulated images of public figures, such as [political leaders](#) and [Pope Francis](#), as well as sensationalized videos with false claims, have been identified. One prominent case involved a falsified video from a South African outlet [accusing Ukrainian President Zelensky of illicitly acquiring a mining company](#). [AI-generated audios](#) have also surfaced, used to fabricate political controversies involving figures like [JD Vance and Elon Musk](#).

Beyond politics, AI has been employed to support divisive narratives related to immigration and social tension. For instance, after a [tragic murder in Badajoz](#), AI was used to generate images purporting to show the suspect, reinforcing a criminalizing narrative against immigrants without evidence. Similarly, false AI-created images have been leveraged to fuel claims of a supposed [“Muslim invasion” of Europe](#).

Climate disinformation campaigns have also benefited from AI tools. Visuals depicting solar panels as an environmental threat circulated to [undermine renewable energy efforts, particularly in relation to policies in China](#).

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

X was the most mentioned platform (6 out of 6 fact-checkers identified it as one of the main proliferators of disinformation). WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok were mentioned by one fact-checker each.

Average number of verifications by fact-checkers in the quarter: 269

8. Disinformation trends that have been detected in Latin America

This section of the report marks the beginning of a collaboration between several Latin American fact-checkers and IBERIFIER. The participating organizations are: [Animal Político](#) (Mexico), [Cazadores de Fake News](#) (Venezuela), [La Silla Vacía](#) (Colombia), and [Chequeado](#) (Argentina). This initiative is part of the Observatory's broader objective to expand its scope beyond the Iberian Peninsula and tackle the challenge of disinformation within the Portuguese and Spanish speaking regions.

To identify the main disinformation trends at the regional level, we used as our source the Q2 2025 report published by LatamChequea (the network of Latin American fact-checking organizations).

The report is based on information gathered from 29 LatamChequea partner organizations across 16 countries and is part of the project "Promoting reliable information and fighting disinformation in Latin America", coordinated by Chequeado.

The full report is available here:

<https://latamchequea.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/LatamChequea-Principales-tendencias-de-desinformacion-a-nivel-regional-Segundo-trimestre-2025.pdf>

Key disinformation trends identified:

- Migration: The region saw the circulation of false images and videos related to the [policies of Donald Trump's government](#), both regarding the expulsion of migrants from the U.S. and their arrival in other Latin American countries. During this period, there was also a significant amount of disinformation surrounding the protests in Los Angeles against the immigration raids.

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- [Scams](#): Many common strategies were identified across several countries with the aim of scamming people either through fake videos of public figures promoting investment opportunities or through false job advertisements that encourage users to share personal information.
- [Death of Pope Francis](#) and appointment of the new Pope: False images and videos (created with AI) circulated on social media about Pope Francis being hospitalized, along with rumors of his death months before it actually happened. Later, following the inauguration of Pope Leo XIV, a wave of disinformation emerged, featuring alleged statements attributed to the new pontiff.
- Middle East conflict: [A series of fake videos related to the conflict between Israel and several countries](#) were identified in the region. These were mainly AI-generated videos or footage from past events taken out of context, allegedly showing bombings or destruction.

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Fact-checkers that have contributed to this report

SPAIN

[EFE Verifica](#)

[InfoVeritas](#)

[Maldita.es](#)

[Newtral](#)

[Verificat](#)

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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