

Rapid-Response System - Disinformation monitoring for the 2026 Portuguese Presidential Election

On December 22nd the Rapid Response system under the [Code of Conduct on Disinformation](#) was activated in the context of the 2026 Portuguese Presidential Election of January 18th. Since then and until February 15th a team of academic [IBERIFIER](#) partners at Iscte have been monitoring code compliant platforms for disinformation concerning this particular election and all candidates involved.

The IBERIFIER Iscte team has been in permanent contact with the Task Force at the European Commission and with representatives of [Code compliant platforms](#), meeting regularly to discuss social media trends and specific instances of electoral disinformation which may impact the public sphere and the citizens' ability to vote freely based on legitimate electoral data and information.

The team is working under very strict methodological procedures determined by academic guidelines. Which imply constant and consistent monitoring of social media platforms and, upon the discovery of potential dis-misinformative content, the use of fact-checking procedures ranging from scientific grade knowledge-vetting, journalistic procedures, fact-checking techniques using appropriate technology to open-source intelligence using AI to effectively identify and counter disinformation. Our participation in the Portuguese 2026 Presidential Election follows up on our previous work regarding the [2024](#) and [2025](#) General Elections, as well as the [2024](#) European Election, which has been published by IBERIFIER, under the hub's designation of studying and helping combat disinformation in Iberia.

Understanding the 2026 Portuguese Presidential Election in the current political context

Portugal's 2026 presidential election takes place in a context of systemic changes within Portugal's 50-year-old democracy, combined with growing concern over digital disinformation. The presidency in Portugal is a directly elected, largely non-executive office, but one with significant constitutional powers, including veto authority, the appointment of the prime minister, and the dissolution of parliament. Presidential elections are traditionally candidate-centered and personalized, with weaker party branding than in legislative / general election contests, although presidential election results are often extrapolated and used to gauge wider party dynamics and performance.

As in other countries, and according to the [Portuguese Constitution](#) should no candidate gather more than half the votes, a second round is automatically triggered so that one of the two most-voted candidates is elected. The first round took place on the 18th of January and a second round will take place in the 8th of February between [António José Seguro and André Ventura, which have collected 31,1% and 23,5% of the vote, respectively](#).

The current political environment is shaped by [the normalization of social media as a news source and as a primary arena for political communication](#), alongside [increased public awareness of misinformation and foreign information manipulation](#). While Portugal has not experienced large-scale coordinated disinformation campaigns comparable to those observed in some other countries, research indicates recurring patterns of misleading content, polarizing narratives, and opportunistic use of platform affordances, particularly during electoral periods.

[Media trust levels in Portugal remain comparatively high by European standards](#), which may mitigate the impact of disinformation, but declining trust in political institutions and growing platform dependency create vulnerabilities. Consequently, the 2026 presidential election represents an important case for monitoring low-intensity but persistent disinformation dynamics within a mature democratic system.

The trends and themes of disinformation

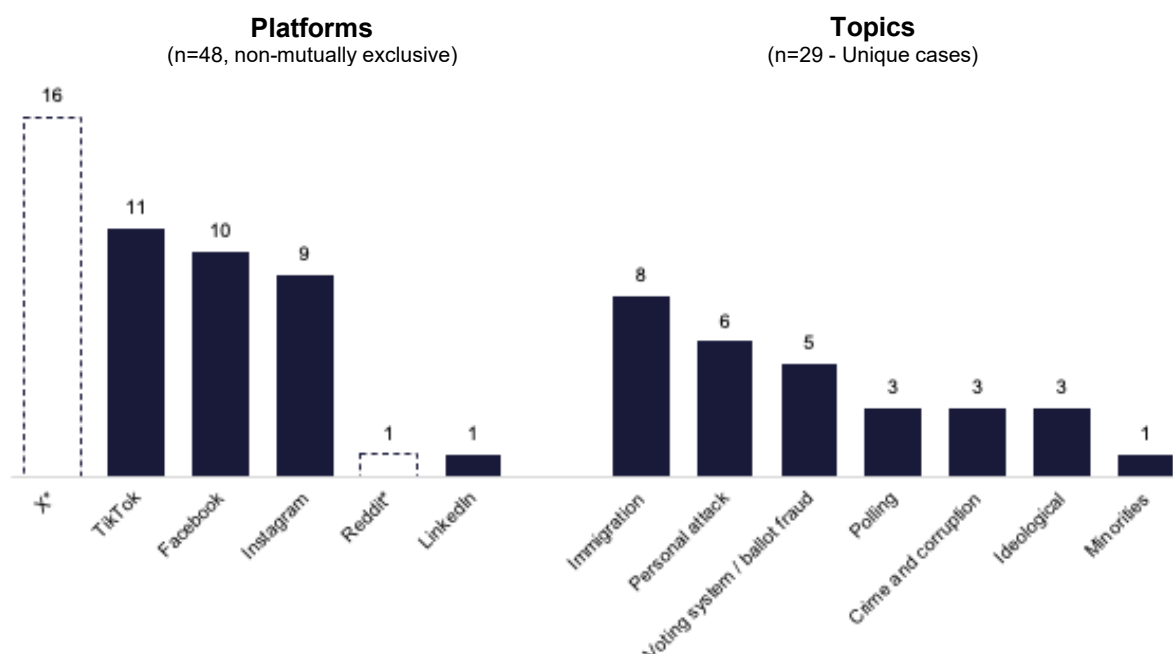
Since the beginning of the RRS procedure, 48 instances of relevant electoral disinformation were found. 16 of these were identified in X which is not a signatory of the Code of Conduct. However, in the process of researching, identifying and fact-checking cases we often find that cases follow a multiplatform spread logic, mostly driven by the widespread use of vertical video as a preferential format, which is easily repurposed in most platforms. This is particularly evident in the similarity between TikTok, Facebook and Instagram in terms of identified case numbers.

The role of AI on disinformation content and flows has been one the main focuses of our attention as we have hypothesized in the past that it will eventually become a defining factor of how disinformation is produced, spread and fought. We find that while AI is indeed a growing resource in the Portuguese disinformation landscape we are at what appears to be an experimental stage with actors trying the technology for different purposes but most frequently for satirical purposes.

Selective and ill-intentioned video editing is, for that matter, a much more harmful practice in the cases we identify and report and are extremely common in attempts to frame persons or groups, such as a specific candidate or a specific community. These edits are particularly hard to interpret as the most popular format in which they are shared – vertical short video - is prone to fast-paced and heavily cut content, aimed at drawing audience attention within a very brief period of time.

Topics-wise, immigration is the most frequent one (8) followed by personal attacks (6), voting system / ballot fraud (5), polling (3), crime and corruption (3) and ideological (3). The prevalence of Immigration over remaining topics corroborates analysis from the past 4 years, published in our [2025 General Election Report](#), confirms that this topic has surpassed corruption as the most prevalent disinformation topic in Portuguese electoral periods.

Cases of disinformation by platform and topic



n=29 (unique cases); n=48 (instances of all cases spread across multiple platforms. Source: own elaboration. *Note: X and Reddit are not Code of Conduct on Disinformation Signatories and are not being actively monitored for RRS purposes. However, in the process of researching, identifying cases we often find that cases follow a multiplatform spread logic. Cases quantified in the figure above are not mutually exclusive and represent instances of the same case being reproduced in other platforms. 29 unique cases were reported so far. The present categorization shown for topics is preliminary, was made for the purpose of this brief report and is subject to change in the final full-length report of the activities of the RRS.

Disinformation cases on immigration focus specifically on people originating from southeast Asia, from countries such as Bangladesh, India or Nepal while also feeding into wider “Great replacement” / substitution narratives, implying the erasure of “European” / “Portuguese” / “Christian values” by “Islam” / “Islamic beliefs”. Cases relating to voting / ballot fraud are all related to the specific issue of voting by Portuguese emigrants living abroad being systematically denied the right to by the “system” as mail-in voting is not permitted in presidential elections, only in general elections.

It should be noted that the voting process for emigrants is difficult, as people are only allowed to vote in-person at Portuguese consulates in their country of residence and forces citizens to take large trips and to have considerable expenses to enjoy a basic constitutional right.

Platform behavior and what lies ahead

Our team has been active in flagging instances of disinformation to platforms which have been quick to respond. While in some instances content has been blurred and users are being warned that the content is potentially mis-disinformative in several instances there have been removal procedures being taken. In our daily navigation in platforms, we find that it is very common to come across platform official information regarding the electoral process, even in content that is not disinformation, meaning that Code of Practice Signatories such as META and TikTok are taking action to prevent disinformation via inoculation. We also find that platforms rely heavily on their own community and transparency guidelines, being extremely broad on the status of what they consider to be political actors on their network environments.

With the campaign for the second round starting today, the IBERIFIER / Iscte team will intensify its efforts. Being more decisive, second round presidential elections between two candidates tend to become more aggressive and prone to personal attacks, which social media algorithms and communication flows enable and amplify via mis-disinformative contents. However, the country's historic resilience to disinformation as a defining factor of political outcomes makes us believe that a clean and fair electoral process will take place on February 8th.

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19th January 2026