



European Digital Media Observatory

POST-ELECTION DISINFORMATION SUGGESTS ELECTION RIGGING IN JUNE

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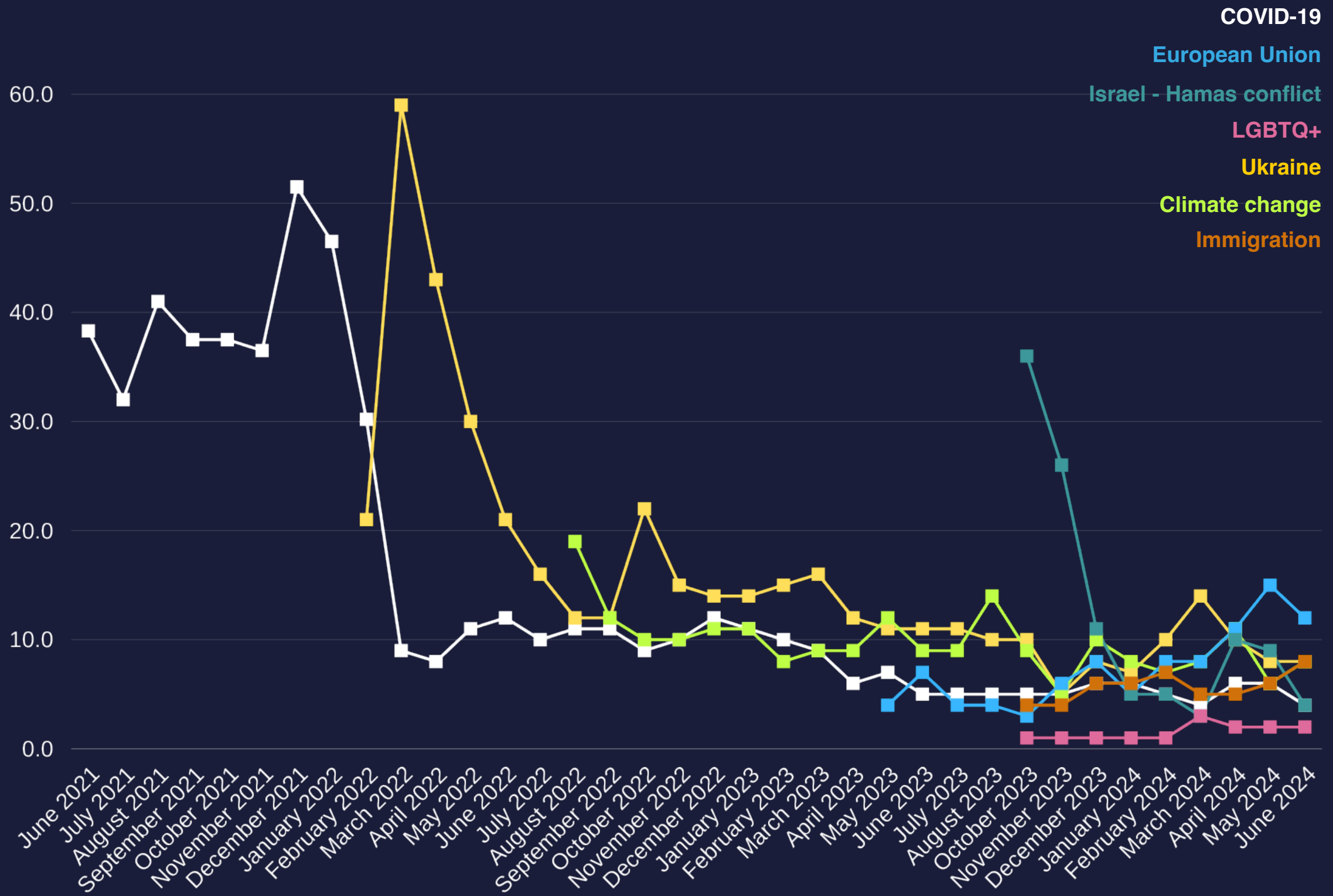
THE EU REMAINS THE MOST TARGETED TOPIC BY DISINFORMATION, WHILE FALSE STORIES ON CLIMATE AND IMMIGRATION RISE

The 34 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.750 fact-checking articles in June 2024. Out of these articles, 148 (8%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 146 (8%) on climate change-related disinformation; 209 (12%) on disinformation related to the EU; 67 (4%) on the conflict between Israel and Hamas; 78 (4%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 135 (8%) on disinformation related to immigration; and 39 (2%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

The share of EU-related disinformation is lower than it was in May – when it reached its maximum since the dedicated monitoring began – but its percentage is still the highest among constantly monitored topics for the third month in a row. Climate change-related disinformation increased slightly by around 2% and the same did disinformation about immigration. False stories about the conflict in the Middle East decreased significantly, while the decrease of false stories related to COVID-19 was more moderate. Disinformation about the war in Ukraine and LGBTQ+ issues remained stable.

* Organizations that contributed to this brief: AFP, APA, Correctiv, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, DPA, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Eurocomunicare, Fact Check Cyprus, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Faktisk, Greece Fact Check, Källkritikbyrå, InfoVeritas, Lakmusz, Les Surligneurs, Logically Facts, Maldita, Medizin transparent, Newtral, Oštro, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat, VRTNWS

% of related disinformation on total detected disinformation, by topic



DISINFORMATION ABOUT VOTE TAMPERING AND OTHER FRAUDS EXPANDED DURING AND AFTER THE EU ELECTIONS



After the false stories circulated in May about the EU elections being rigged or invalid, more have been detected during and after the June 6-9 vote. False news alleged interruptions of the voting procedures, vote tampering, fraud, and various unfair practices, sometimes exploiting technical errors in media coverage or provisional results. In some cases, false stories suggested that these alleged manipulations were perpetrated by national governments or that they were aimed at disfavouring far-right parties.

This kind of baseless allegations were quite common and detected in several EU countries (see slide 9).



At the same time, the EU continued to be the target of false stories portraying its institutions as authoritarian entities imposing unfair measures on member states and citizens.

OTHER RELEVANT DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES



Disinformation about the war in Ukraine continued to focus on the escalation of the conflict and in particular the alleged direct involvement of NATO or EU countries. As in previous months, false stories claimed to show evidence of Western troops dying in military operations in Ukraine, that EU politicians are calling for military conscription, or even that EU countries are enforcing it or preparing for the war.

Other baseless or fabricated content described the West as instigating the Kremlin or exaggerated support for Russia and its economic results, also exploiting the ongoing European football championship (see slides 7 and 9).



Many false or misleading information tried to blame migrants for several crimes in various countries, in line with the narrative that portrays them as violent or criminal. Moreover, in the context of the various elections, they are described as “taking power” through various baseless claims – for example, that they are outnumbering citizens and winning elections, with the help of some parties – while national governments and the EU are said to privilege them or favor uncontrolled immigration.

OTHER RELEVANT DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES



As happened last summer and winter, the arrival of severe temperatures brings a surge in climate-related disinformation. In June, various false stories circulated, denying the climate crisis or the effects of human actions on it.

False stories undermining support for climate activists, electric vehicles, or renewable energy were quite common in June, while disinformation content targeting climate countermeasures in the context of the farmers' protests is still circulating, as well as various known conspiracies.



Since June is Pride Month, some false stories – even if less than last year – targeted the LGBTQ+ community. Disinformation alleged some ongoing attempts to indoctrinate or deprave children, or the existence of a political will by some élites to privilege this minority, often described as dedicated to pedophilia.

FOOTBALL, FLAGS AND PROPAGANDA

In June, some messages in line with the narratives reported in the previous slide have been vehiculated taking advantage of the visibility of the European football championship. Euro 2024 is a major sports event and disinformation tends to exploit similar occasions.

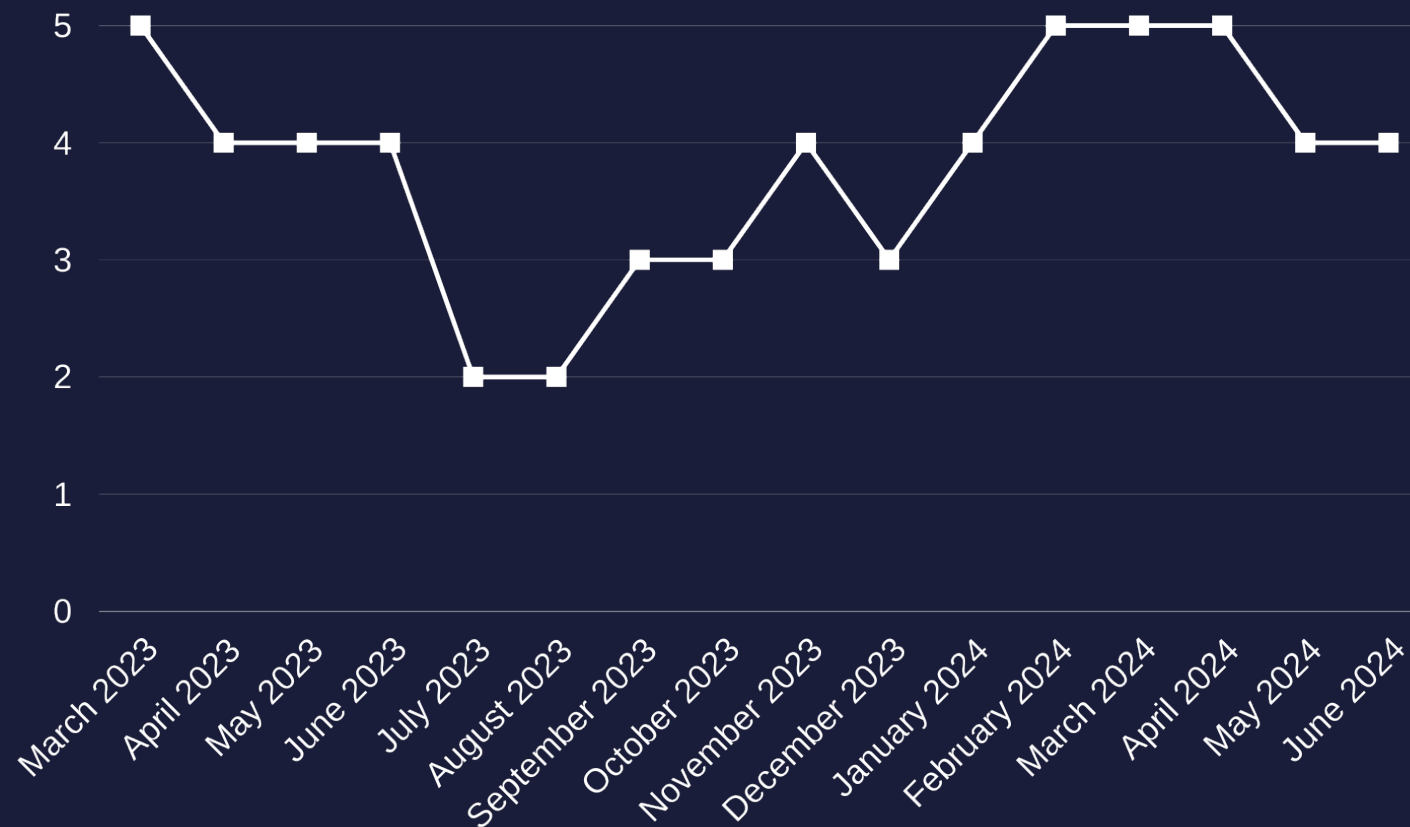
Various false claims promoted usual Russian propaganda messages. Aside from a widespread edited video purporting to show football fans praising Putin (see slide 9), others used flags to wrongly exaggerate support for Russia and undermine support for the Ukrainian cause. For example, false stories alleged that the flag of pro-Russian separatists from eastern Ukraine was visible during a match or that UEFA, European soccer's governing body, banned the Slovakian flag from Euro 2024 matches because of its similarity to the Russian one.

UEFA has been also accused of ordering captains of the teams in the competition to wear rainbow armbands, in line with the narrative of institutions favoring the LGBTQ+ community. In this regard, the rainbow flag was used in Greece in disinformation content by digitally adding on it the logo of the ruling party, while in Spain it was claimed that the Spanish flag was replaced by the rainbow one in the Andalusian Parliament.

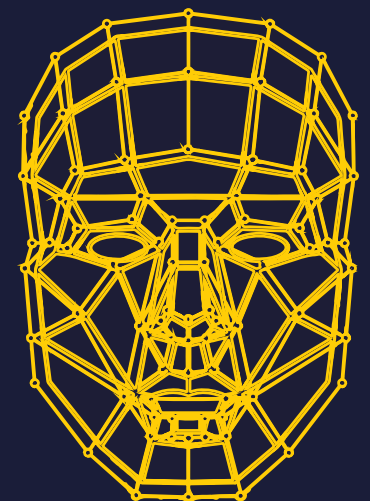


AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content remained stable in June. Out of 1.750 fact-checking articles, 67 addressed the use of this disinformation technique. This corresponds to 4% of the total, the same percentage reported in May.



Although the number appears to be quite low – as it was during previous months – false content exploiting AI tools can sometimes be particularly tricky. For example, the story of the banning of Slovakian flags from Euro 2024 used a video, AI-modified with voice cloning, pretending to come from an authoritative press agency.



THE FIVE FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN JUNE, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS, WERE:



- Joe Biden tried to sit on an invisible chair during the celebration of the D-Day anniversary
- Romanian football fans shouted pro-Putin slogans during a Euro 2024 match
- ▲ A US court established that Covid-19 vaccines are not vaccines
- ◆ Zelensky bought a hotel-casino in Cyprus
- ★ Various content (news, videos, images etc.) claiming that the EU Elections have been rigged

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



During the legislative campaign, parties “desperate” to support Emmanuel Macron promised to give 100 euros to each voter



France imposed a curfew due to incidents in protests after the far-right victory in the European election



The media made no mention of the Slovak victims of the train crash in the Czech city of Pardubice, reporting only that two Ukrainians died and blaming Russia for the accident



Kyiv Metro had developed a special Pride Month design for transport cards, which featured two men kissing



METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this brief was collected via a questionnaire sent to the fact-checking organizations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network.

Reference period: 1-30 June 2024. Number of respondents: 34.
Main editor of this brief: Tommaso Canetta and Enzo Panizio, Pagella Politica/Facta.
For further information: [*t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it*](mailto:t.canetta@pagellapolitica.it).



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