



WEEKLY REPORT ON MEDIA AND INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY

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FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico found himself in a life-threatening condition Wednesday after being wounded in a shooting attack following a political event. Fico, known for his populist, pro-Russian stance, has stirred controversy with his policies, including an anti-Western rhetoric. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, President Zelenskyy's decision to postpone foreign trips comes amidst intensified Russian aggression, despite Ukrainian military officials saying that Ukrainian forces have partially stabilized the situation in northern Kharkiv Oblast. Against the backdrop of escalating conflict, in a speech delivered at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit on Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has proposed a European Democracy Shield to safeguard the EU from malign foreign interference, if re-elected at the helm of the Commission.

COPYCOP INTERFERENCE ACTIVITY

CopyCop, an influence network identified by [Insikt Group](#), utilizes inauthentic websites across the US, UK, and France to spread political contents using AI. The network, likely operated from Russia, has disseminated over 19,000 fake news stories since March 2024. It frames conflicts in Ukraine and Israel from a pro-Russian perspective, supports Republican candidates, and criticizes President Joe Biden in narratives surrounding the 2024 US presidential election.

Numerous newly registered domains mimic US news publications, with infrastructure centered around the disinformation website [DCWeekly](#). Other state-sponsored Russian actors contribute to amplifying CopyCop's content, including the [Foundation for Battling Injustice and InfoRos](#), likely operated by [GRU Unit 54777](#). The network's operation is likely automated, utilizing generative AI to target specific audiences, posing significant challenges for safeguarding elections.

OTHER INTERFERENCE ACTIVITIES

Russian military intelligence has reportedly [targeted niche peace demonstrations in Germany as part of a broader effort to sway sentiment on the Ukraine conflict](#). Utilizing psychological operations, the GRU aims to exploit platforms like the "Children of War" photo project to undermine support for Ukraine and advocate against NATO involvement. On the other war front between Israel and Hamas, Hamas's General Security Service in Gaza has been [exposed for its extensive surveillance and control measures](#), highlighting the oppressive tactics employed by authoritarian regimes to suppress dissent and maintain power.

Meanwhile, [Russian propaganda](#) continues to spread disinformation about the situation in Ukraine, [fabricating claims about French troop deployments in the Donbas region](#). These false narratives aim to manipulate international perceptions and undermine efforts to address the conflict diplomatically. Additionally, [QAnon-related content on social media platforms has surged by 1,283%](#) [NewsGuard found](#), reflecting the continued influence of conspiracy theories despite moderation efforts. This proliferation of misinformation underscores the challenges in combating online extremism and ensuring the integrity of digital discourse.

Amid escalating tensions, [Ukraine has issued warnings about impending Russian disinformation campaigns](#), emphasizing the need for vigilance against manipulation and propaganda. Russia's decision to host the [Friendship Games](#) in response to its exclusion from the Paris Olympics due to the invasion of Ukraine was also [condemned as a propaganda tool](#). The IOC (International Olympics Committee) criticized the Friendship Games as a cynical attempt to politicize sports, citing Russia's aggressive stance and state-sponsored doping as contributing factors.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIPS

Recent studies provide valuable insights into leadership perceptions. Botlitica, developed by Luiss Data Lab and the University of Liverpool, offers journalists a tool to navigate political messaging on social media platforms, revealing the strategies employed by major Italian political parties. Meanwhile, a Gallup report delves into the dynamics of leadership approval, highlighting the United States' substantial advantage over China in global sentiment, with nuances influenced by factors such as incumbent leadership and regional dynamics.

AI CHATBOT “BOTLITICA”

Luiss Data Lab, in collaboration with the University of Liverpool, presents Botlitica, an innovative AI chatbot designed to aid journalists in navigating the complex landscape of political campaigns on social media platforms. Utilizing GPT-3 technology, Botlitica interacts with users to provide insights into the messaging strategies employed by major political parties ahead of Italian elections that occurred on September 25, 2022. Participants engaged with Botlitica by posing questions and analyzing content from political parties such as Brothers of Italy, Democratic Party, and Third Pole. Through this interaction, they gained insights into the techniques used by politicians, including the repetition of slogans and the utilization of vague language to shape public opinion.

In a simulated conversation, a participant queries Botlitica on why they should vote for Fratelli d'Italia, to which the chatbot responds with a message extracted from the party's social media posts, emphasizing their commitment to combating poverty through investment in work. Another participant inquires about the party's stance on immigration, and Botlitica provides a response indicating strong opposition to mass illegal immigration, drawing from the dataset of tweets and Facebook posts. This study showcases Botlitica's ability to provide users with valuable insights into political messaging strategies, ultimately enhancing transparency and understanding in the digital information ecosystem during political campaigns.

U.S. AND CHINA LEADERSHIP APPROVAL

A comprehensive Gallup report recently shed light on the dynamics of global leadership approval, focusing primarily on the United States and China. According to the report, the United States maintains a substantial advantage over China in terms of leadership approval across a majority of surveyed countries (81 out of 133 countries surveyed). However, the extent of this approval often varies depending on the incumbent leadership in each country, showcasing nuanced global sentiments towards both U.S. and Chinese leadership.

Democratic leadership tends to bolster U.S. approval ratings, while Republican administrations witness fluctuations. Despite short-term fluctuations, the U.S. has shown resilience in recent years, rebounding and maintaining a strong advantage over China in global leadership approval. Moreover, long-term shifts in approval ratings highlight strategic realignments, with China making gains in certain African countries while the U.S. strengthens its position in Asian nations like India and Vietnam.



The "**Be Election Smart**" campaign promoted by the **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)** and its national hubs is a key effort to educate and empower European citizens ahead of the European Parliament elections.

Launched on April 29, it runs for six weeks and aims to publish a new "**Be Election Smart**" **message every Monday** to enhance European citizens' **resilience against misinformation** and provide practical advice on how to identify fake news, recognize trusted sources, and critically analyze online content.

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