European Elections 2024

Amplification of political speech and disinformation in Portugal

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Scientific Coordination
Gustavo Cardoso
José Moreno

Authors
Miguel Casquinho
António Vasconcelos
José Moreno
Gustavo Cardoso
Nuno Palma
Miguel Paisana
Ana Pinto-Martinho

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Glossary

Political Parties

PS – Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)[1]: Center-left political party currently led by Pedro Nuno Santos. Member of the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

PSD Partido Social Democrata (Social Democratic Party): Center-right political party currently led by Luís Montenegro. Member of the EPP - European People's Party group in the European Parliament.

AD – Aliança Democrática (Democratic Alliance): Political coalition comprising PSD, CDS and the Monarchist People's Party that ran in the March 2024 legislative elections under the leadership of PSD and Luís Montenegro. Both PSD and CDS are members of the EPP – European People's Party group in the European Parliament

BE - Bloco de Esquerda (Left Block): Socialist left-wing political party currently led by Mariana Mortágua. Former member of The Left Group in the European Parliament. Founder and member of the European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet

PCP – Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party): Communist political party currently led by Paulo Raimundo. Member of The Left Group in the European Parliament.

Chega (Enough): Conservative and populist right-wing political party currently led by André Ventura. Member of the Patriots for Europe Group in the European Parliament.

IL - Iniciativa Liberal (Liberal Initiative): Liberal right-wing political party currently led by Rui Rocha. Member of the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament.

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[1] The English naming for the parties found in parenthesis is a direct translation of the Portuguese name for reader convenience. The terms in both languages may differ and meaning and / or political significance.

PAN – Pessoas-Animais-Natureza (People Animals Nature): Ecological political party currently led by Inês Sousa Real. Member of the The Greens / EFA Group in the European Parliament.

L - Livre (Free): Ecological left-wing political party currently led by Rui Tavares. Member of the The Greens / EFA Group in the European Parliament.

ADN – Alternativa Democrática Nacional (National Democratic Alternative): Conservative and populist right-wing political party, with no representation in parliament, currently led by Bruno Fialho. Not part of any group represented in the European Parliament.

Ergue-te (Rise): Conservative and populist right-wing political party, with no representation in parliament, currently led by José Pinto Coelho. Not part of any group represented in the European Parliament.

VOX: Spanish Conservative and populist right-wing political party, currently led by Santiago Abascal. Former member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament. Currently a member of the Patriots for Europe Group.

Portuguese Politicians

Pedro Nuno Santos: political leader of the Socialist Party (PS).

Luís Montenegro: political leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) which headed the AD coalition in the 2024 European elections.

André Ventura: political leader of Chega.

Mariana Mortágua: political leader of Bloco de Esquerda.

Sebastião Bugalho: Lead candidate of the Socialist Democratic Party (PSD) in the 2024 european elections.

Marta Temido: Lead candidate of the Socialist Party (PS) in the 2024 european elections.

António Tânger Corrêa: Lead candidate of Chega in the 2024 european elections.

João Cotrim de Figueiredo: Lead candidate of Liberal Initiative (Iniciativa Liberal) in the 2024 european elections.

Catarina Martins: Lead candidate of the Left Block (Bloco de Esquerda) in the 2024 european elections.

João Oliveira: Lead candidate of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) in the 2024 european elections.

Francisco Paupério: Lead candidate of LIVRE in the 2024 european elections.

Pedro Fidalgo Marques: Lead candidate of PAN in the 2024 european elections.

Joana Amaral Dias: Lead candidate of ADN in the 2024 european elections.

Media Personalities

Mafalda Anjos: Portuguese journalist and political commentator on the television channel CNN Portugal.

Guilherme Geirinhas: Portuguese comedian with no evident political connotations or stances.

Sérgio Tavares: Portuguese content creator with strong political connotations and stances towards the Portuguese and Brazilian conservative right wing.

TV and YouTube Shows

Isto É Gozar Com Quem Trabalha: late night show airing every Sunday on the SIC channel presented by comedian Ricardo Araújo Pereira.

Bom Partido: humorous interview program on YouTube by Guilherme Geirinhas.

Media

CNN Portugal: Portuguese news television channel under the CNN brand.

SIC: Portuguese generalist television channel belonging to the Impresa group.

Expresso: Portuguese weekly newspaper belonging to the Impresa group.

Polígrafo: independent Portuguese fact-checker.

Observador: Portuguese generalist digital newspaper. Also with a fact-checking section.

Correio da Manhã: Portuguese daily newspaper belonging to the MediaLivre group.

Other

Total interactions: sum of metrics referring to "likes"/reactions, comments and, where applicable, shares of a given publication or set of publications.

ERC - Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social: Portuguese media regulator

Campo 24 de Agosto: Location in the parish of Bonfim, in the city of Porto, in Portugal.

PSP - Polícia de Segurança Pública: Portuguese police force.

Introduction

The 2024 European elections took place in Portugal in a climate of political unrest due to the proximity of the legislative elections, which had been called in advance and resulted in a new minority government. In the space of three months, the Portuguese went to the polls twice, creating a continuum of communication and electoral political discussion that lasted from March to June 2024.

This report follows on from the work carried out on the legislative elections by MediaLab - Iscte and OberCom, in partnership with Agência LUSA, as part of the IBERIFIER project. For the current project, MediaLab -Iscte established a partnership with the National Electoral Commission (CNE) with the intent to monitor political activity and discussion on social media platforms and to identify and analyse disinformative themes and narratives in the online environment in the context of the European elections. The partnership established with the CNE was unprecedented in setting up a WhatsApp reporting line for disinformation and paid political advertising during the European elections. This channel constitutes an essential element of the analysis carried out, and from which it was possible to draw various conclusions about the dynamics of the political disinformation environment in Portugal.

Throughout this report we will analyse communication trends on social media in the context of the European elections, while often resorting the legislative elections as a comparative object. In this way, we intend not only to explore the particularities of online discourse in the context of the European elections, but also how they fit into a broader temporal context regarding political communication.

However, it should be noted that the analysis carried out includes constraints related to the different periods of analysis. In the case of the legislative elections, the period of analysis ended in the week of the vote, while in the European elections the period of analysis was longer but ended the week before the vote. This methodological distinction is related to differences in the protocols established and subsequent mapping of projects between the two elections. However, we believe that the data collected allows for a solid comparative exercise from which we were able to draw

several conclusions, despite its limitations. It is therefore important to emphasise that the moment that allows the two elections to be compared in time is the time of going to the polls and the respective distance in time from each week to this moment.

This document is structured in four chapters in which we address different dimensions of political discourse on the Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram and TikTok social media platforms, systematically presenting data that shows the communicational characteristics of various actors on the different platforms during the election period. As with the report produced for the legislative elections, the data for this report was collected using the CrowdTangle tool for Facebook and Instagram and SentiOne for Twitter/X and TikTok.

As this report also includes a comparison of online activity between the legislative and European elections, it is important to mention which political parties and candidates were considered for each election. As part of the analysis of online activity in the legislative elections, the results of which are discussed in detail in the report Legislativas 2024 - Amplification of online political discourse and disinformation (Cardoso and Moreno (Coords.), 2024), the parties with parliamentary seats when they went to the polls in March 2024 were considered : PS, PSD/ AD, Chega, IL, BE, PCP, Livre and PAN. Given the results of the legislative elections, we decided to analyse the online activity in the context of the European elections with all the parties and candidates that obtained the right to public funding after the March 2024 elections: PS, PSD/ AD, Chega, IL, BE, PCP, LIVRE, PAN and ADN.

In the first chapter of this report, we provide an overview of the political particularities of the 2024 European elections. Through this exercise we aim to address how the political climate in which these elections took place can potentially mold and impact perceptions and the consequent dynamics of political discussion within online social media platforms

In the second chapter, we look at the political activity of the parties on the various platforms. In this sense, we intend to highlight the parties' communication behaviours in the context of the European elections and compare them with the trends identified during the legislative elections.

Then, in the third chapter, we shift focus to the discussion surrounding the lead candidates for the European elections on social media. In this section, we will analyse the impact of the announcement of their candidacy on social media as well as the total volume of posts and interactions generated in the online debate about the candidates during the electoral period. In order to gain an insight into the specificities of each social media platform, we will also contrast the dynamics of discussion in the European elections on each platform and make a comparison with the legislative elections.

Finally, in the last chapter, we address the dynamics of online disinformative discourse and subsequent reporting in Portugal. To this end, we begin by reflecting on the effectiveness of the WhatsApp reporting line. Next, we make a comparison between disinformation in the Portuguese and European contexts and, to conclude, we explore some disinformation cases addressed in the context of the European elections that help exemplify the dynamics of amplification surrounding disinformation in the electoral political context. The analysis is supported by data collected from social media, utilizing the CrowdTangle and Sentione tools.

In short, we want this report to offer a continuation of the exercise previously carried out in the context of the legislative elections, extending the analysis of the dynamics of online political communication and discussion to the sphere of the European elections. In this way, we aim to cover the entire electoral period in Portugal in 2024, and use these moments of political interest to identify, contrast and verify trends in political discourse and debate on social media.

1. The particularities of the 2024 European elections in Portugal

The 2024 European Parliament elections took place in Portugal in a climate of some uncertainty and political instability, uncharacteristic of this type of election in our country. Taking place just three months after the 2024 legislative elections, which had been called in advance due to the fall of the previous government, the 2024 European elections can be seen in a way as an "aftermath" of the legislative elections, characterised by an unpredictable political environment and marked by a fragmented parliament and a minority government. This climate of uncertainty is further accentuated by the tension felt in the international arena, marked by war on the European continent, growing conflict in the Middle East and the political growth of far-right forces in several European states.

In this sense, it was expected that the 2024 European elections would receive a greater degree of attention from civil society, including political organisations, the media and citizens themselves. At the same time, this context is also likely to trigger the action of disinformation agents and the more intense dissemination of disinformation narratives. However, it should also be borne in mind that European elections are often considered "second order" elections, characterised by high levels of abstention and a marked decrease in media attention (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). This trend has previously been signaled in studies on the European elections in various countries, including Portugal (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Bartels, 2023; Freire and Santana-Pereira, 2015).

This report follows on from the work carried out by MediaLab and OberCom in the context of the legislative elections, and for this reason one of the main objectives is to see if the trends observed in February and March can also be observed in the context of the European elections. It is therefore important to understand how the dynamics of discussion on social media, the activity and behaviour of political forces and the main topics of debate compare to the previous election period.

We began this analysis by observing the weekly evolution in the volume of posts and interactions about the lead candidates on social media between the legislative and European elections.

Figures 1 and 2. Comparison of the weekly evolution of the volume of publications and interactions between the legislative and European elections in the Portuguese online political discussion about the lead candidates in each election.

Figure 1 - Total volume of publications on candidates
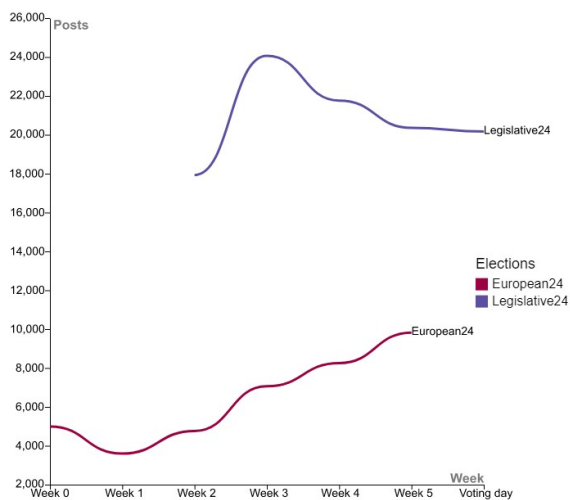
Figure 2 - Total interactions with publications about the candidates
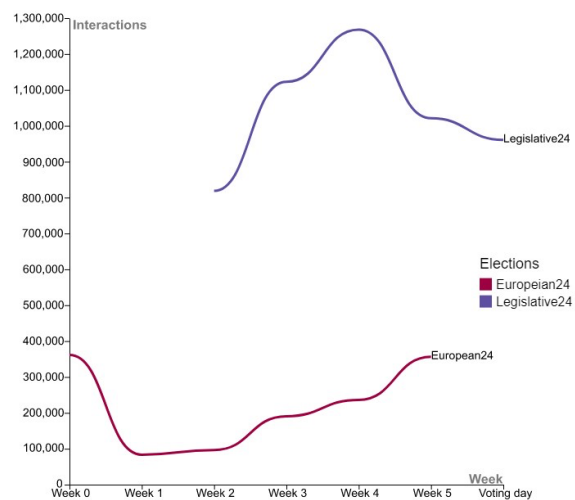
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

As we can see from the figures above, it is readily apparent that the volume of posts and interactions was considerably higher during the legislative elections. It should be noted that, in terms of publications, during the period analysed, there were between 18,000 and 24,000 publications per week during the legislative elections, while during the European elections the figure was between 4,000 and 10,000.

In terms of interactions (likes, comments and shares) the trend is similar: in the legislative elections, with the exception of the first week of analysis, the number of interactions is around 1 and 1.2 million, and in the case of the European elections the total number of interactions per week is between 100 and 400 thousand.

However, it is also worth noting that in the case of the European elections, the trend over the weeks was one of general growth in terms of posts and interactions (which means growing attention to the elections), while in the legislative elections, after an initial rise, the trend was one of decline followed by an eventual stabilisation of attention levels (measured in interactions).

Notwithstanding this, the levels of attention on social media were substantially higher during the legislative election period, which suggests that the concession of European elections as second-order (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) is also true in the online social media environment.

2. The communication strategy of Portuguese political parties

This section is dedicated to comparing the online communication activity of the Portuguese political parties between the legislative and European elections. This comparison allows us to observe the main similarities and differences both in the parties' strategic approach to communication on each online social media platform and in the reception and attention (measured in interactions) of the users who came across their content.

Figures 3 to 6 show the online activity of Portuguese political parties on each online social media platform (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and TikTok) during the legislative and European elections. What stands out above all is the proximity of the evolution of posts both on Facebook and Instagram between the two electoral periods. On Facebook, during the same three-week period (considering the distance in time from the polls), the total number of posts was practically identical. On Instagram, the same trend can be seen for the same weeks, with only slight variations. Similarities can also be observed on TikTok, but to a lesser degree, since the volume of posts is not identical, although it does have the same variations in the same periods. The only platform that stands out in contrast is Twitter/X, which registered significantly higher levels of activity by political parties during the legislative elections. Even so, in the final two weeks of the election campaign, there was a marked increase in posts in both periods, albeit with accentuated different in the total volume of posts.

The similarity in the evolution of the parties' online activity suggests that the party structures may have utilized very similar communication strategies for both electoral periods due to the proximity in time between the 2024 legislative and European elections.

Figures 3 to 6. Comparison of the volume of publications by Portuguese political parties between the period of the legislative and European elections by social media platform

Figure 3 - Volume of party posts on Facebook
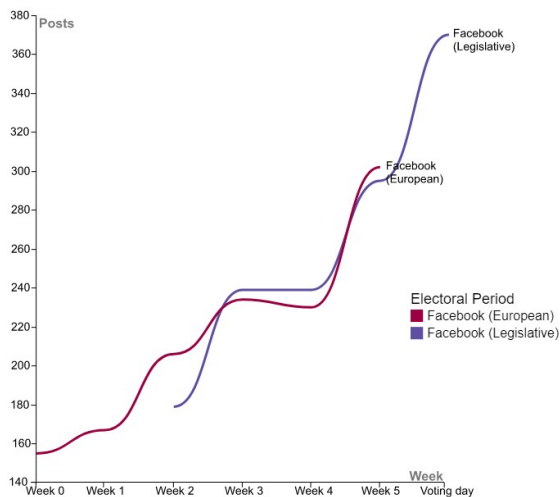
Figure 4 - Volume of party posts on Instagram
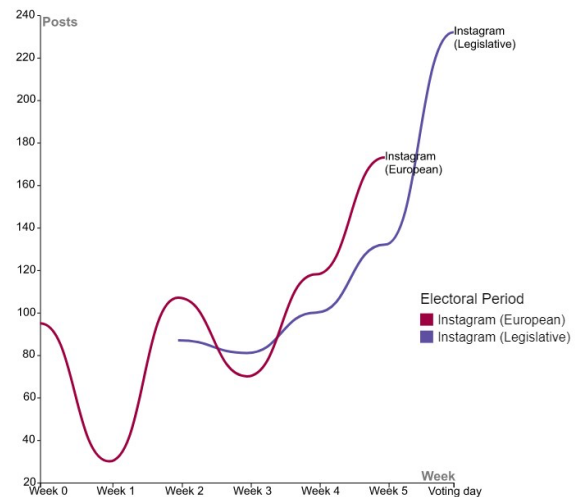
Figure 5 - Volume of party publications on Twitter/X
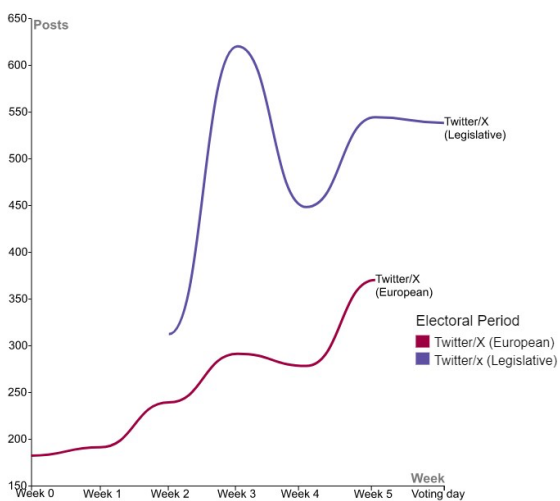
Figure 6 - Volume of party publications on TikTok
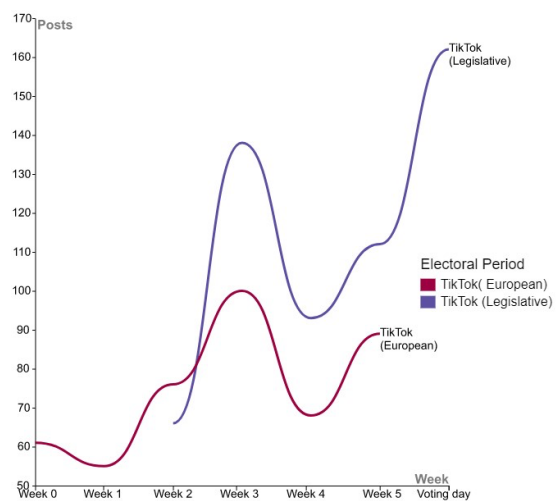
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Therefore, when it comes to online communication strategy and planning, we can see a very close proximity in the approach of the Portuguese political parties. Even so, it's important to emphasise that there are clear differences in the content and objectives of each party, as well as in the contexts in which these contents and objectives are inserted.

Figures 7 to 10. Comparison of the interactions collected in the publications of Portuguese political parties between the period of the legislative and European elections by social media platform

Figure 7 - Party interactions on Facebook
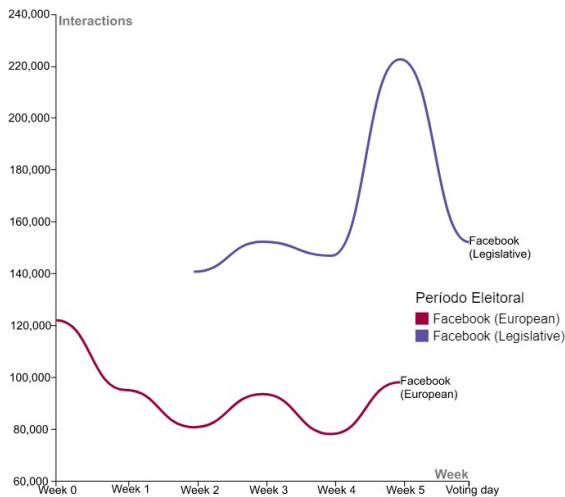
Figure 8 - Party interactions on Instagram
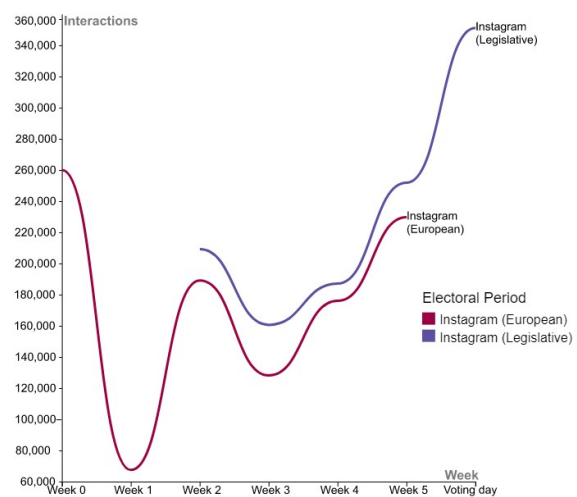
Figure 9 - Interactions between parties on Twitter/X
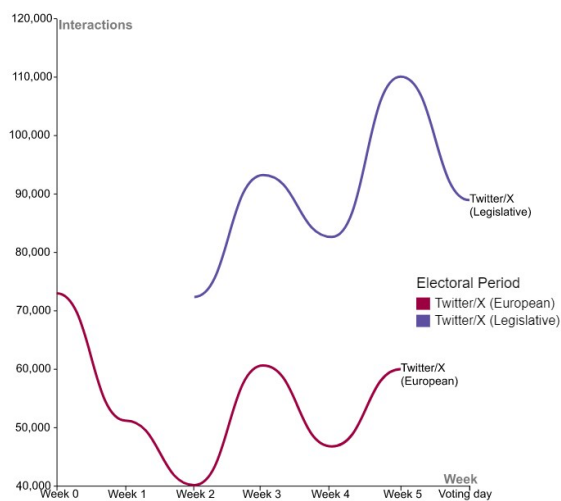
Figure 10 - Party interactions on TikTok
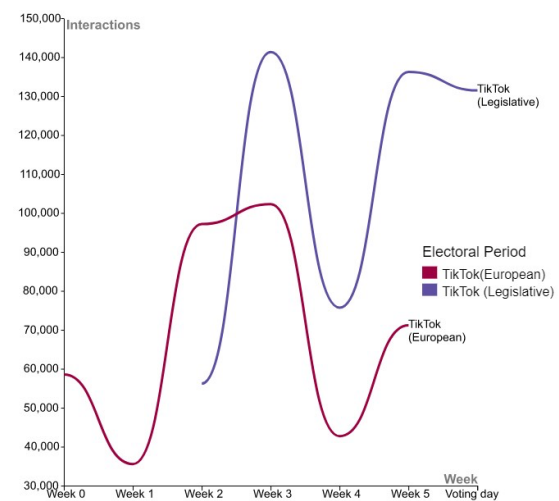
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

The figures above show the evolution of the volume of interactions regarding party publications over the periods analysed on each social media platform. When we consider the number of interactions collected by the parties in both elections, it is evident that the previously identified trend is once again visible. In other words, the behaviour of the evolution of interactions tends to be relatively similar between

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elections. In the case of Facebook, we see a coinciding behaviour in the total number of interactions in the three corresponding weeks of the analysis period. However, it is important to note that the volume of interactions is much higher during the legislative elections, with similarities only in the fluctuations from week to week, apart from the last coincident week, in which there is a clear peak in the number of interactions during the legislative elections. In the case of Twitter/X and TikTok, the trend is similar, but even more evident, with similar fluctuations in the number of interactions in both elections and a considerably higher volume of interactions in the context of the legislative elections. As for Instagram, both the volume of posts and the total number of interactions collected are very similar in both elections.

In general, the fluctuations in the levels of interaction between publications tend to be similar during the period of analysis of both elections. However, the volume of interactions tends to be considerably higher in the legislative elections. Instagram represents an exception where we can observe a similar behaviour between elections. In this sense, the strong similarities in the volume of posts and total interactions collected by the political parties reaffirms Instagram as an increasingly influential platform in online political discourse. This analysis is in line with the data previously presented, which suggests that the European elections have a lower production volume than the legislative elections.

In order to understand in more detail the dynamics of discussion in the online space in the context of the European elections, we will now analyse the activity of the parties themselves on each social media platform during this period alone. Through this exercise we intend to explore the *modus operandi of* the party forces on social media, as well as the dynamics of user interactions with their content.

Figures 11 and 12: Evolution of the online activity of Portuguese political parties (volume of publications and respective interactions) by social media platform in the European elections

Figure 11 - Total volume of party publications during the European elections by social media platform
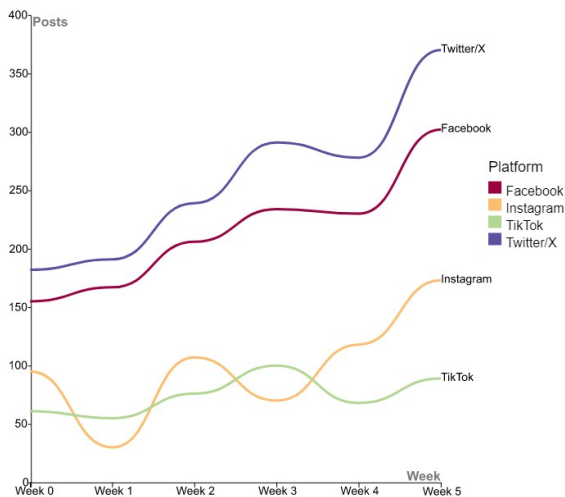
Figure 12 - Total volume of interactions collected by the parties during the European elections by social media platform
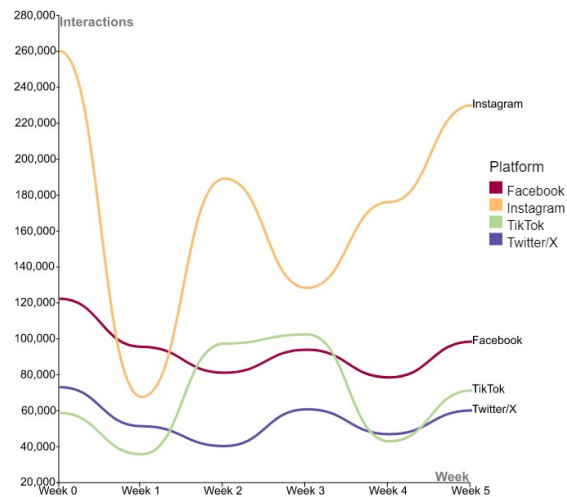
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Comparing party activity within the general framework of online social media platforms, it is clear, as illustrated in the figures above, that the period under analysis was marked by a gradual evolution in the number of posts on social media, with the exception of TikTok. Twitter/X tends to be the platform of choice for parties to communicate with their followers. Throughout the period analysed, Twitter/X was the platform with the largest volume of posts by political parties. However, it is noticeable that Twitter/X is only the third social media platform that collects the most interactions, being surpassed by Facebook and Instagram, as well as TikTok in some weeks.

Instagram is the social media platform that best capitalises on the parties' online activity. Although it is not the platform on which the parties publish the most, it is by a wide margin the social media platform on which the parties collect the most interactions, synonymous with attention from the public.

Facebook, on the other hand, although less used by political parties than Twitter/X, registers a high number of party publications, with substantially more interactions than

Twitter/X. Overall, we believe that these differences are intrinsic to the particularities of each platform and are reflected in online political communication with different dynamics of interaction and discussion.

We now move on to comparing the online activity of each individual party in the total of the four online social media platforms analysed. The following figures illustrate the activity in terms of publications and respective interactions of each party entitled to a public subsidy on social media in the period analysed.

Figures 13 and 14: Evolution of the total online activity of each political party (volume of publications and respective interactions)

Figure 13 - Total volume of publications by each party during the European elections
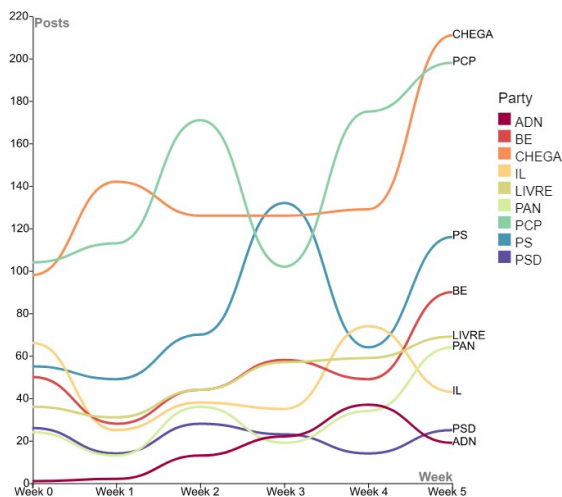
Figure 14 - Total volume of interactions collected by each party during the European elections
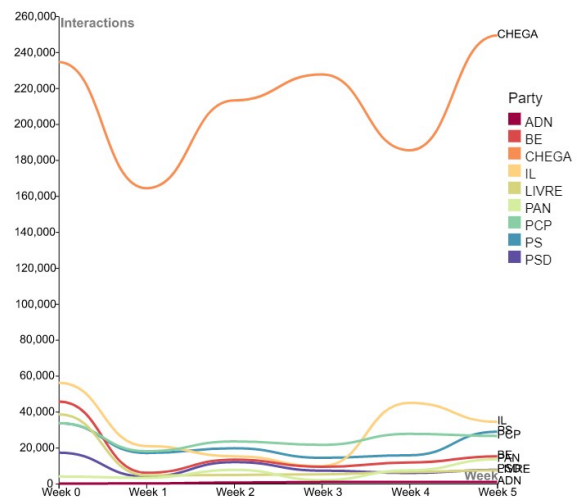
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

As observable in the figures above, Chega and PCP stand out as the most active parties in terms of publications in the context of the European elections. As far as Chega is concerned, the party maintains a consistency already observed during the legislative elections. The other parties tend to publish less, although it should be noted that PS publishes more than Chega and PCP in one of the weeks analysed. Nevertheless, the other parties appear to follow substantially less active patterns in terms of social media posts.

In terms of the number of interactions collected, Chega's reach on social media is undisputable, garnering substantially more interactions than any other party. Chega tends to have about twice as many interactions as the other parties combined. In comparative terms, it is also worth noting that during the period in question, Chega never collected less than 160,000 interactions per week, while the other parties never exceeded 60,000 interactions. In relation to the other parties, IL, PS and PCP tend to stand out in some weeks, although they are well below the figures obtained by Chega.

3. The online political discourse about the lead candidates

In this chapter, we will analyse the online discussion around each party's lead candidate for the European elections. We intend to visualise and compare the online activity of ordinary users, the media and political actors in the dissemination of political content in the context of the European elections.

At the same time, we will also focus on the particularities of each social media platform and make a comparison with the online activity in the context of the Portuguese legislative elections. We intend to observe and compare the evolution of online political discourse about the lead candidates for the legislative and European elections according to the particularities of each online social media platform

Figure 15 (next page) shows a visual representation of the volume of posts and respective interactions about the lead candidates for the European elections in April. This month largely corresponds to when the candidates were announced by their respective parties and therefore represents an appropriate starting point for analysing the discussion about them on social media. In addition, due to the unpredictable nature of some of the candidacies, the moment of announcement ended up representing one of the main periods of discussion about the candidates.

Observing the figure, it's immediately clear that Sebastião Bugalho, a former journalist and political commentator on Portuguese television, was the candidate whose announcement (on the 22nd of April) provoked the most discussion on social media His candidacy on behalf of Aliança Democrática (AD) was the most unexpected choice in these elections, being the subject of several posts and discussion on social media.

Figure 15. Effect of the announcement of each lead candidate for the European elections on social media in April of 2024
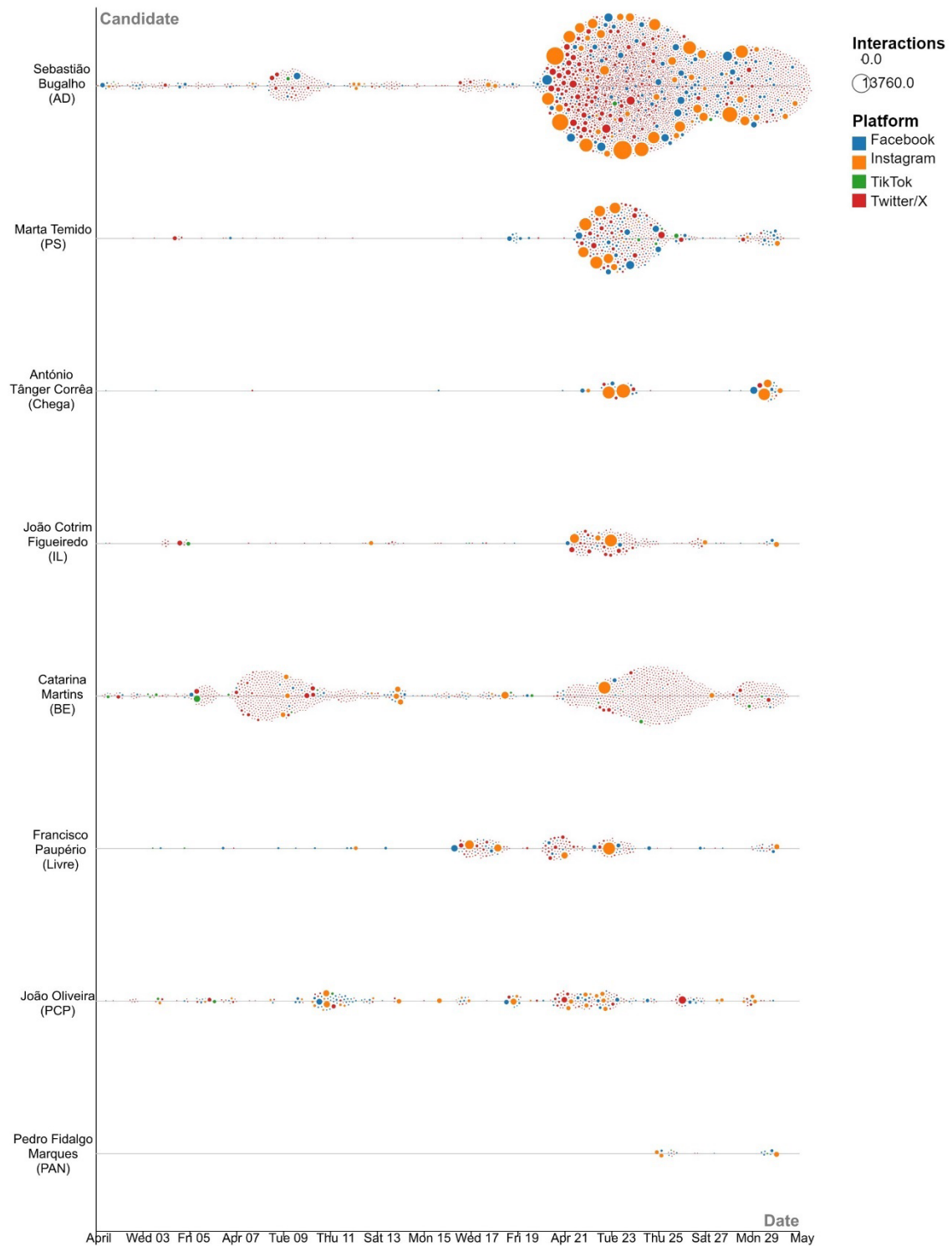
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Marta Temido, the lead candidate for PS, was the second candidate who garnered the most posts and interactions at the time of her announcement. However, it should be noted that the discussion about the PS candidate generated fewer posts and lasted substantially less time than that about Sebastião Bugalho. Once again, it is important to emphasise that the difference in the intensity of discussion between these candidates appears to be mainly related to the degree of predictability or unpredictability of their candidacies.

Regarding the other candidates, it's relevant to highlight the exponential increase in publications in the period between the 16th and the 25th of April, which largely corresponds to the period when most of the parties' lead candidates were announced. In the case of Catarina Martins, the announcement of her candidacy took place in March, which resulted in a somewhat constant discussion throughout April. Nevertheless, Catarina Martins also benefited from a boost in the aforementioned period due to the general increase in attention and discussion about the announcement of the other candidates.

It should also be emphasised that the month of April was marked by other moments that explain some fluctuations in the levels of attention paid to candidates beyond the announcement of their candidacy. Considering Joana Amaral Dias, lead candidate of the ADN party, as an example, we can observe that she received higher levels of attention in the end of April, in comparison with the announcement of her candidacy, which took place on 16th of April, due to a public incident amid the 25th of April celebrations[2] . Another case is that of Francisco Paupério, lead candidate of the LIVRE party, who got a boost on social media a few days before his candidacy due to some initial controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the LIVRE party lists.[3]

The month of April also reveals a trend already observed in the legislative elections, related to the dynamics of discussion on the different online social media platforms.

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[2] During the 25th of April festivities, Joana Amaral Dias, lead candidate for the ADN party, was insulted during an election campaign. The ADN candidate then filed a criminal complaint against those involved.
[3] Livre's lists for the European elections, which were open to individuals from outside the party, generated some protest after Francisco Paupério won with a number of votes considered "excessive". In the second round, it was initially proposed to open the vote exclusively to party members. However, this condition was not applied because there were no grounds for electoral misconduct in the first round.

As we can see, most of the posts discussing the candidates come from Twitter/X, which registers the most activity in terms of publications, but, as previously identified, serves as a "political discussion bubble" and is not representative of the total Portuguese online population.

On Facebook and especially Instagram, we find a substantially more limited space for discussion in terms of the number of posts, but a much higher number of interactions. In other words, although Twitter/X registers a greater volume of discussion about the candidates, it is on Instagram that the posts acquire more visibility and reach a larger and more representative number of people.

The trend shown in the previous figure can also be seen in the two figures below. Overall, Twitter/X shows a much higher number of publications than the other social media platforms, being used by a limited number of citizens who nevertheless show a very high level of production in terms of publications.

It should also be noted that the number of posts tended to increase over time, a trend that reveals a gradual increase in discussion on social media during the election period. On the other hand, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, as previously identified, recorded a much lower volume of posts.

However, when we look at the number of interactions collected, the weight and relevance of Instagram is clear, as it tends to be platform with the highest number of interactions. Twitter/X collectively registers a greater number of interactions than Facebook, which suggests that the platform has an increasingly significant impact on online political discussion. Overall, a considerable initial drop in the number of interactions can be observed, especially on Instagram. This drop may be related to the high volume of interactions on posts at the beginning of the analysis period related to the announcement of the candidates.

Figures 16 and 17: Evolution of the volume of publications and respective interactions in the online discourse about the lead candidates for the European elections by social media platform

Figure 16 - Total volume of posts about the lead candidates in the period of the European elections by social media platform
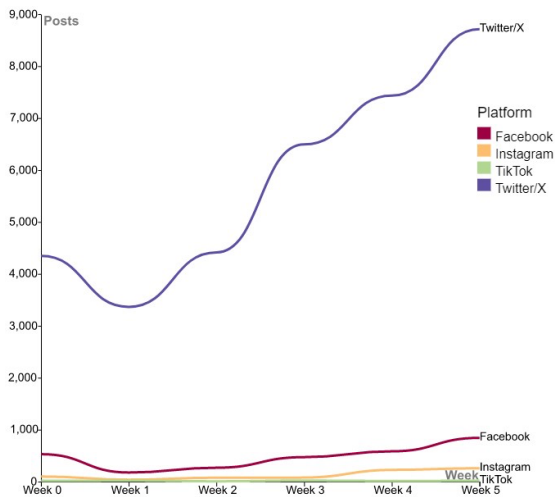
Figure 17 - Total volume of interactions collected on posts about the lead candidates in the period of the European elections by social media platform
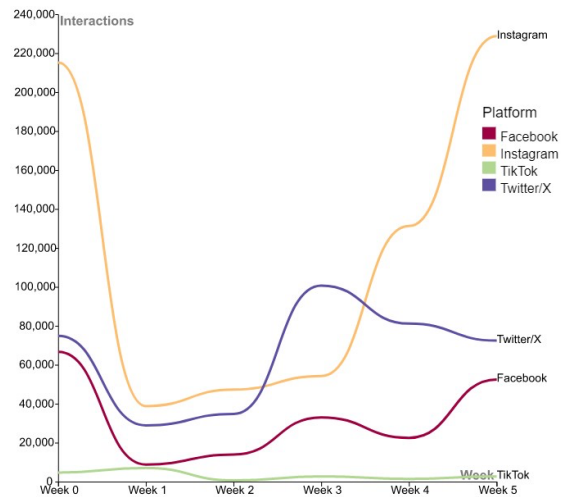
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Still regarding Instagram, it's also clear that after a period of stagnation, we can observe a somewhat steady rise in the number of interactions, which is related to the start of the televised debates between the candidates, as well as the participation of the candidates in interviews and entertainment programmes (e.x. Isto É Gozar Com Quem Trabalha).

Although not illustrated in the figure, it is still important to note that we observed a significant difference in the different platforms in terms of the dynamics of users participating in the political discussion. On Twitter/X, most of the posts came from "ordinary users", and sometimes these were the posts with the highest number of interactions. On Facebook and Instagram, media and political agents had a more pronounced presence. Additionally, these actors generally recorded much higher numbers of interactions than other users.

The heterogeneity of political discussion on the different social media platforms was one of the main themes addressed in the report on the legislative elections and has

also been highlighted in the current report in the context of the European elections. Next, we intend to explore the dynamics of platform differentiation in more detail, through a comparative exercise applied to each social media platform under study (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and TikTok). In the figures presented on the following pages of this chapter, we will compare the political discussion during the European elections and the legislative elections on each platform individually.

We believe it's important to emphasise that the profile of social media users can condition the type of political discourse found. According to data from the Digital News Report 2024 (Cardoso et al., 2024), the social media platforms under study display a similar disposition regarding the political orientation of their users, with the majority of users placing themselves in the political center, and a higher percentage of left-wing users than right-wing users. Roughly speaking, around 2 in 10 users don't know where they stand politically. However, despite these common features, it should be noted that the different platforms fit into this mold to varying degrees. In this sense, we believe it is particularly important to emphasise that Twitter/X is the platform least used by users who cannot identify their political position.

Before moving on to the analysis in question, we would like to once again highlight that we observed in all social media platforms considerably higher levels of attention to the legislative elections compared to the European elections. Although this difference is not static, differing on each platform, the reality is that the period of the legislative elections was marked by a more pronounced climate of online discussion than the European elections. Once again, this factor is indicative of the fact that although these European elections can be seen as an "aftermath" of the legislative elections, the notion of the European elections as "second-order" seems to be socially ingrained.

Figures 18 and 19 - Comparison of posts and respective interactions about the lead candidates in the legislative and European elections on Facebook

Figure 18 - Total volume of posts about the lead candidates on Facebook in the legislative and European elections

Figure 19 - Total volume of interactions collected on posts about the lead candidates on Facebook in the legislative and European elections
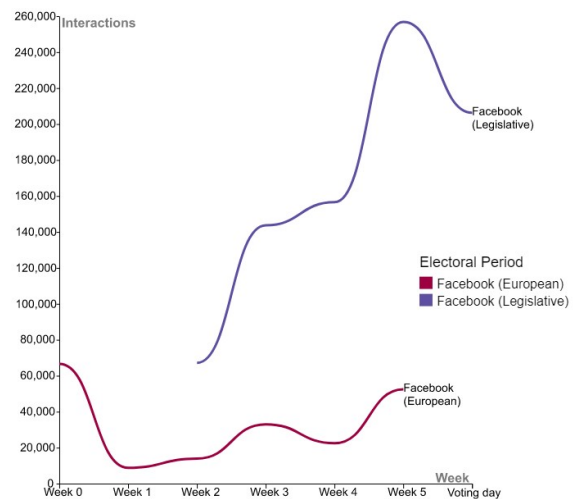
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

In the run-up to the 2024 legislative elections, the political discussion about each party's lead candidate displayed a growing trend as the polls approached, both in terms of the number of posts and the total number of interactions collected on these posts.

Of particular note is the discussion in the last two weeks, which saw a substantial increase in interactions in the penultimate week and a peak in posts in the final stretch of the election campaign. These weeks of campaign proved to be very influential in the political discussion on Facebook.

This period was also marked by a televised debate counting with the presence of all the candidates. Thus, the entities that participated most in the online political discussion on Facebook were those belonging to media organisations and political actors, mainly the political parties themselves.

In the context of the European elections, after an initial week marked by higher levels of interaction due to the announcement of the candidates, there was a marked decrease followed by some stagnation in the attention paid to the lead candidates on the Facebook. However, in the penultimate week before the polls, there was a somewhat pronounced increase in discussion about the candidates.

In general, this increase was related to posts from media agents about Sebastião Bugalho's request of an apology from Marta Temido, due to accusations of immaturity by the PS candidate towards the AD candidate. In addition, there were critical statements from Chega to Marta Temido and Catarina Martins, as well as various political communication from the party sphere. As in the legislative elections, the political discussion on Facebook was largely dominated by media and political agents.

Instagram

On Instagram, during the legislative election period, the weeks in which the TV debates occurred were the ones that stood out most in the online political discussion around the lead candidates of each party, with the last week of 1 on 1 debates (week 4) seeing a peak in the total number of posts and interactions.

This week saw the long face-off between Pedro Nuno Santos (PS) and Luís Montenegro (AD) which was marked by an unauthorised police protest outside the debate venue. In general, the publications about the candidates tended to focus on their participation in the televised debates and belonged mainly to media organisations and political actors.

Figures 20 and 21: Comparison of posts and respective interactions about the lead candidates in the legislative and European elections on Instagram

Figure 20 - Total volume of posts about the lead candidates on Instagram in the legislative and European elections
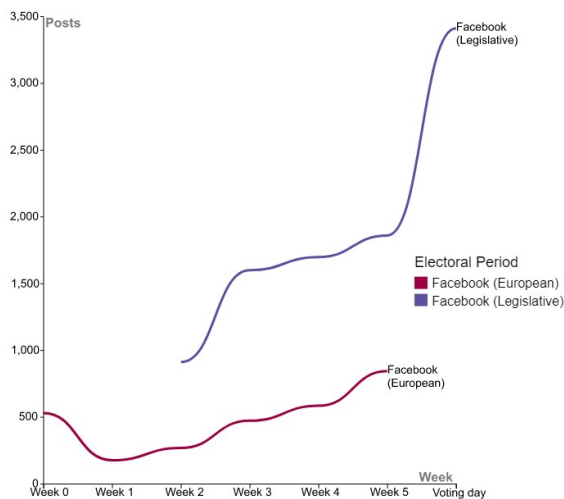
Figure 21 - Total volume of interactions collected on posts about the lead candidates on Instagram in the legislative and European elections
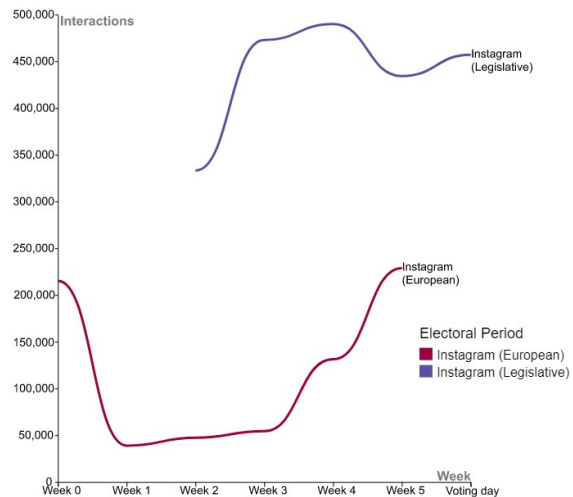
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

During the European elections, political discussion on Instagram also intensified in the penultimate week before the polls (week 4). However, unlike Facebook, the increase in posts and interactions was mainly due to posts publicising the first two episodes of the miniseries "Bom Partido", directed by Guilherme Geirinhas and featuring Sebastião Bugalho and Catarina Martins.

In both elections, the weight of interviews and entertainment programmes was clear in the intensification of communication about the candidates on online social media platforms

Figures 22 and 23: Comparison of posts and respective interactions about the lead candidates in the legislative and European elections on Twitter/X

Figure 22 - Total volume of posts about the lead candidates on Twitter/X in the legislative and European elections
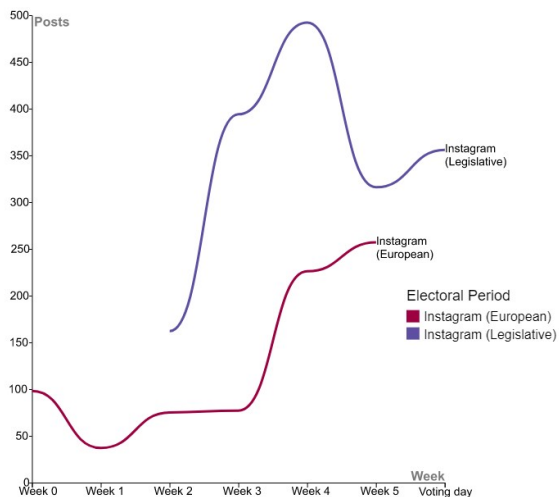
Figure 23 - Total volume of interactions collected in posts about the lead candidates on Twitter/X in the legislative and European elections
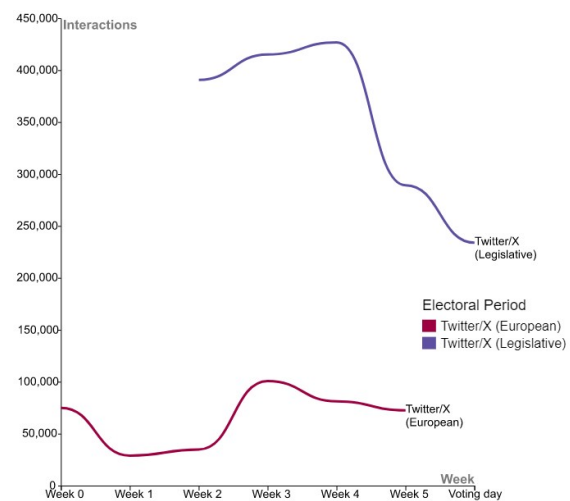
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

During the period of the legislative elections, there was a negative trend in the volume of posts and interactions garnered by political discussion on this social media platform. Overall, week 3 was the most active in terms of online discussion.

However, it was in the following week (week 4) that posts about the candidates garnered the most attention (measured in interactions) and after this week there was a marked decrease in the attention given to political discussion on Twitter/X. In general, the most viral posts focused on the candidates' performances in the TV debates and belonged to a wide range of users, but mainly media organisations and ordinary users.

In the European elections, political discussion on Twitter/X differed considerably from the other social media platforms due to the origin of the posts with the greatest reach and the main period of interest in the candidates. The reach of posts by ordinary users on Twitter/X is evident, especially in comparison with the other social media platforms.

In the run-up to the European elections, the third week of May was marked by a sharp increase in interactions related to posts about Joana Amaral Dias, lead candidate of the ADN party, and her appearance on Portuguese conversative content creator Sérgio Tavares' programme "3x3", as well as posts from various users commenting on statements made in the debates between the candidates. Posts commenting on debates and interviews continued to be a trend in the following weeks, with the number of interactions remaining fairly constant despite a slight decrease.

TikTok

Figures 24 and 25: Comparison of posts and respective interactions about the lead candidates in the legislative and European elections on TikTok.

Figure 24 - Total volume of publications about the lead candidates on TikTok in the legislative and European elections
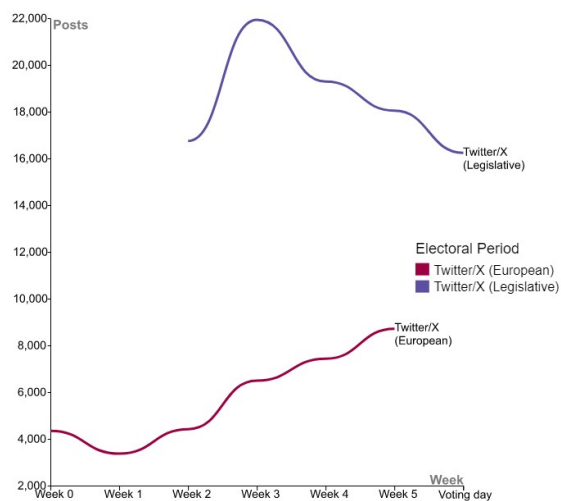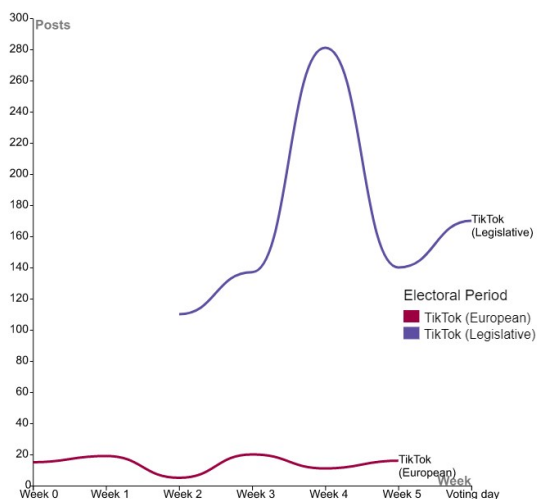
Figure 25 - Total volume of interactions collected in posts about the lead candidates on TikTok in the legislative and European elections
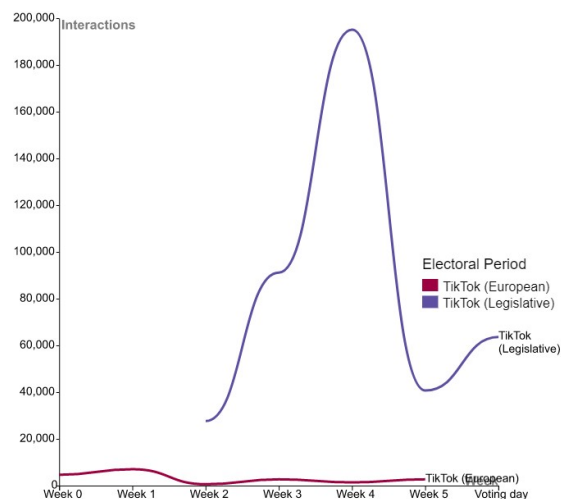
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

On TikTok, during the electoral period of the legislative elections in Portugal, week 4 was the one in which there was the most activity in political discussion. It was during this week that the volume of posts and interactions collected peaked.

Although the main focus was once again on the candidates' performances in the televised debates, TikTok stood out from other online social media platforms in that it

was mainly used by political actors and ordinary users who shared videos supporting or criticising the candidates.

In the context of the European elections, as previously mentioned, TikTok was generally not used as a mechanism for political discussion about the candidates, as most of the publications came from the party structures of the various political forces themselves.

4. Analysing online disinformative discourse and its reporting in Portugal

The establishment of a reporting line via a WhatsApp number for disinformative content and paid advertising was an essential part of the protocol established between MediaLab Iscte and the CNE. Below, we intend to make a general assessment of the effectiveness of this channel and the complaints received, while providing *feedback* for future actions or projects that use a similar mechanism.

Figure 26. Contact with disinformation by topic in the previous week and respective themes
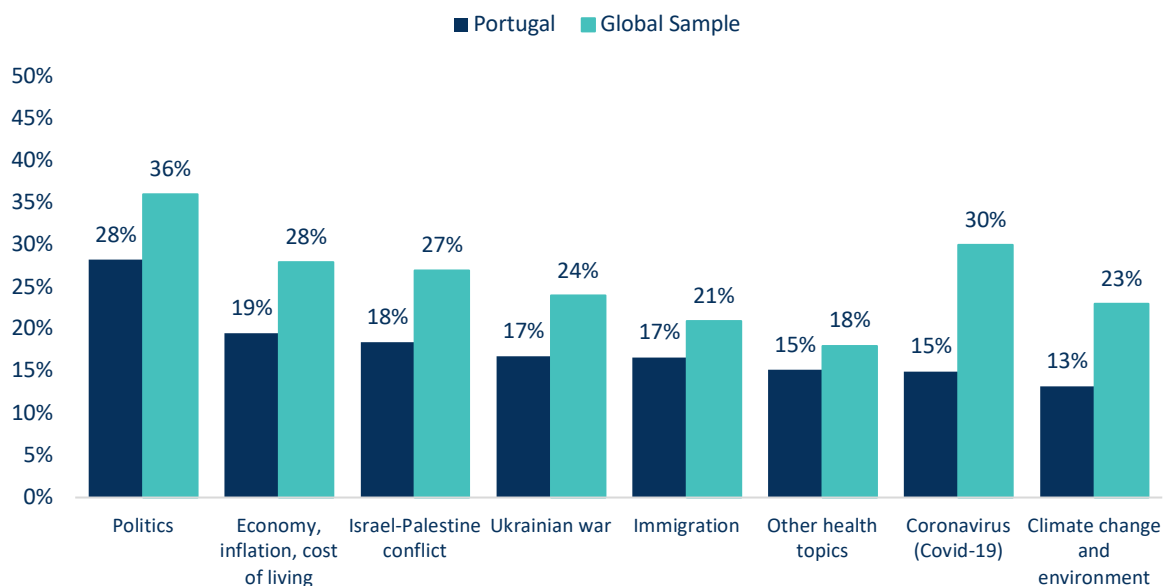
Source: Digital News Report 2024. Edition: OberCom. n=2012

However, before this assessment, we consider it essential to highlight some data on Portuguese citizens' perceptions of disinformation that have shaped our assessment regarding the performance of this channel and the nature of the reports themselves. Data from the Digital News Report 2024 (Cardoso et al., 2024) suggests that around 72% of Portuguese people are concerned about what is real or fake on the internet,

one of the highest figures within the EU, with politics being the topic on which the Portuguese encounter the most disinformative content. As Figure 26 shows, the Portuguese tend to encounter less disinformation than the average of the countries surveyed in the Digital News Report, with politics and immigration being the topics where the Portuguese are most similar to the other countries.

Overall, the reporting line enabled us to become aware of various cases of disinformation during the European elections, which were explored and analysed in detail by the MediaLab team. In addition to its signalling functions, this channel was also important in bettering our understanding of citizens' concerns in the electoral context.

However, it should be noted that some of the complaints received did not correspond to the purpose of this tool, i.e. to report disinformative content and paid advertising. Instead, it was sometimes used to report non-disinformative content that was extreme, polarising or simply contradicted the complainant's personal political opinion.

In this sense, and in order to clarify the purpose of this channel, we consider it appropriate that the application of a reporting line for disinformative content is accompanied by precise definitions of the different types of disinformation. As an example, we present a list of terms based on the definitions of Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017).

- **Satire**: Not intended to cause harm, parody content with the potential to mislead.
- **False Connections**: Incorrect use of titles or subtitles that are not related to the shared content.
- **Misleading content**: incorrect use of information to mislead and wrongly frame certain topics or people.
- **False Context**: the sharing of veridic content but contextualised in an incorrect way.
- **Imposter content**: the imitation of official sources (media or political bodies) to give legitimacy to the content.
- **Manipulated Content**: manipulation of veridic information to mislead.
- **Fabricated Content**: fabrication of totally false information to mislead people.

We emphasise that despite this recommendation, the distinction between what does and does not fall under freedom of expression in the online environment is not undisputable and leads to different opinions on what should be considered disinformative content. Despite the fact that much of the process of identifying disinformation depends on the latent opinions of users, we believe that establishing clear definitions can increase the effectiveness of the reporting line and improve the results achieved.

The research conducted as part of the MediaLab/CNE protocol shows that the relatively low number of complaints contrasts sharply with the high level of concern about disinformation and moderate exposure to disinformative content displayed by the Portuguese, according to data from the Digital News Report (Cardoso et al., 2024). The combination of the low uptake of the reporting hotline with the data from the study mentioned above raises two questions for understanding the perception of the phenomenon of disinformation in the national context:

- Most people **are unable to identify the disinformation** they are exposed to and are therefore in a fragile situation and dependent on protection?
- Most people feel **confident to understand what is disinformative**, are autonomous to act accordingly and therefore **don't report it** (which suggests that the problem of disinformation may not be as serious as it is usually presented)?

In the context of the European elections, we considered it essential to relate the disinformation discourse in the online sphere in Portugal to the disinformation narratives circulating in Europe. As will be shown below, there is generally only one disinformation theme that coincides at national and European level, so it is possible to consider Portugal and Europe as two distinct disinformation spaces.

Using the EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory) disinformation bulletin for the months of May and June, we were able to outline seven main themes that defined the disinformation narratives in Europe during the 2024 European elections: climate, politics and politicians, Covid-19, Ukraine war, electoral process, gender and LGBTQ+, and immigration. For each of these topics, the table below provides examples of disinformation narratives that circulated in European countries during the period in question.

Table 1. Themes and examples of disinformation cases in Europe

Theme	Examples of disinformation
Climate	• The global forest generates more CO2 than man produces • Does a volcano emit more CO2 than humans for 100 years?
Politics and Politicians	• Pedro Sanchez went on holiday at a time of exceptional national importance, after announcing that he would not resign as Spanish Prime Minister? • Does Donald Tusk think that "Poles are abnormal"?
Covid-19	• Was Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine launched in May 2019? • Has the UN warned of a new pandemic?
Ukrainian War	• Do refugees from Ukraine receive pensions ten years earlier than Germans without ever having paid? • Flag shows the logo of a Ukrainian legion, no EU stars?
Electoral Process	• If the cross marking the vote slightly exceeds the margins, should the vote be considered invalid? • Is it possible to vote for more than one party, or to split individual vote percentages?
Gender and LGBTQ+	• Is the wife of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz a transgender woman? • Video from the 90s proves long-standing support for the homosexual community in Spain?
Immigration	• Switzerland wants to ban Islam? • DJ sings "against foreigners"?

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

The analysis carried out as part of the MediaLab/CNE protocol shows that, in the Portuguese context, only the theme of immigration stands out from the disinformation paradigm in relation to the 2024 European elections.

Table 2. Cases analysed related to immigration

Case	Case description
"Statue of the Virgin Mary" case	"Cheganos" page accuses André Ventura of anti-Islamic disinformation over the release of a 2013 video of the destruction of a statue of the Virgin Mary
The "Chega Speech" case	Several posts by the Chega party on Twitter/ X allegedly encouraging xenophobia and hatred. Inserted in the strategy of political discourse on social media.
"Burqa" case	Complaint of xenophobia over a post by the Chega party comparing a western woman to a woman wearing a burqa to convey the dangers of Islamisation
"Ergue-te rally" case	Post announcing a rally organized by the Ergue-te party against Islamisation near a mosque in Porto.
"Portuguese Islamic Party" case	André Ventura shared an image on Twitter/X of a Facebook page belonging to an alleged Portuguese Islamic Party and presented it as a threat.
"Campo 24 de Agosto" case	The case of the attacks on immigrants in Campo 24 de Agosto.
"Dagger in the Metro" case	Images circulated of a Sikh man on the Lisbon metro carrying a religious ornament in the shape of a dagger.
"Nepalese Child" case	A case of aggression, accompanied by racist and xenophobic verbal insults, against a nine-year-old child of Nepalese origin in a school context.
"Russia Video" case	Video circulating on social media of people in Russia allegedly demonstrating that there are no citizens of other ethnicities.
"Bangladeshi immigrant" case	The case of the immigrant who confronted André Ventura on the 6th of June 2024, in the midst of the election campaign, and its repercussions on social media.

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Although it is possible to find information flagged up by fact-checking bodies such as Polígrafo or Observador on other topics, this is mainly confined to inaccurate or decontextualised information during the TV debates between the candidates for the European elections, with no significant impact on the discussion on social media. In this sense, Portugal differs from the multi thematic configuration of various disinformation themes found in other European countries.

When it comes to immigration, however, we can consider that Portugal is in line with the rest of Europe, as this is a particularly important topic in the national disinformation spectrum. As an example, the table above shows the various cases that the MediaLab Iscte team has dealt with in relation to immigration.

Portugal's alignment with Europe in the field of disinformation about immigration can be observed not only on a thematic level, but also in the content used to shape the narrative. As will be illustrated in the presentation of the cases dealt with by the MediaLab team, the images/videos used and the main ideas conveyed in some disinformation publications tend to be reused from other examples in the European/international context, and sometimes even created in line with the communication strategies employed by counterpart forces in other countries.

Despite this convergence with the European spectrum, it should be emphasised that disinformation about immigration in the Portuguese context was largely influenced by amplification from political and social actors. As already noted in the report on the 2024 legislative elections that emerged from the partnership between LUSA and MediaLab, disinformative narratives usually need a boost or amplification by a political actor to establish themselves in the public discussion, especially online. In general, our data suggest that without this political reinforcement, disinformative narratives have great difficulty reaching large audiences and tend to exist within a relatively limited core of individuals

Below we present some of the cases that MediaLab has dealt with under the protocol established with the CNE, reflecting the importance of political amplification in the dissemination of these same cases in the sphere of social media discussion.

Case of the Statue of the Virgin Mary

On 20 May 2024, via their official online social media accounts, the Chega party and André Ventura shared a video in which two Muslim men are depicted destroying a statue of the Virgin Mary. In the description, it is stated that: "In Portugal, their culture and religion must be accepted, namely the building of mosques. But they don't respect the religion of others! After all, what kind of equality is this, where we respect them but they don't respect us?"[4]

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[4] Translated from Portuguese to English by the MediaLab team

Table 3. Example of reported posts about the video of the destruction of a statue of the Virgin Mary and their respective reach

This publication recorded:
20,825 likes
2962 comments
23,787 total interactions

Link to publication

This publication recorded:
2,034 likes
13,655 comments
15,689 total interactions

Link to publication

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

The video in question gained a lot of traction on social media, with a total of more than 40,000 interactions (likes, comments and shares) and 50,000 views on the pages of the Chega party and André Ventura on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and TikTok.

However, as reported by various social media pages and communicated to the CNE via the complaints line, the video actually dates from 2013 and is not related to the Portuguese or even European context, depicting an Islamic cleric announcing the end of the idolisation of symbols after the Islamic conquest of Christian territories in Syria in 2013. This same video had already been reused several times in various contexts outside Portugal, being associated with far-right and anti-immigration movements, and was even shared by Donald Trump, who in 2017 shared a sequence of three tweets by Jayda Fransen, then leader of the anti-immigration movement Britain First, one of which contained this video

This case illustrates how, through communication strategies and amplification by political agents, dated and decontextualised content can gain popularity on social media and penetrate the sphere of online public discussion.

Portuguese Islamic Party

At the end of April, André Ventura, via his official Twitter/X account, published a post warning of the danger of Islamisation in Portugal by sharing a screenshot of the "Portuguese Islamic Party" Facebook page. As reported by Polígrafo, this is a parody account and there is no registration of such a party with the Constitutional Court.

In any case, as can be seen in the figure below, the post in question was viewed more than 200,000 times and received more than 6,000 interactions, illustrating how political amplification can give visibility to erroneous views of the political reality and lead to the sharing of disinformative content.

We would also point out that disinformation based on Islamist political power, conveyed through false cases about the establishment of Islamist parties, their winning of elections, and gaining power at local level, has been a prevalent anti-Islamisation narrative in Europe, and has been previously identified in the UK and also in Catalonia.

Figure 27. Twitter/X post by André Ventura about a "Portuguese Islamic Party"

In this post on Twitter/X, **André Ventura** publishes a screenshot of a humorous page called "Portuguese Islamic Party", using it as a reason to warn of the danger of "Islamisation" in Portugal. This publication has been verified by Polígrafo.

This post collected:
6,782 **interactions**
236,000 **views**
Link to publication
Date: 28/04/2024

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Figure 28. Disinformative Twitter/X post by RadioGenoa about an Islamist victory in the Bradfrod local elections in the UK.
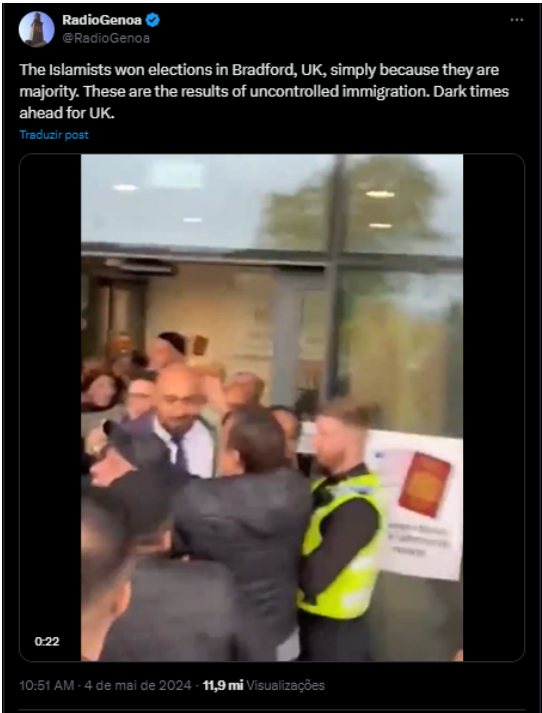
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

Iqbal, the immigrant who approached André Ventura

On the 6th of June 2024, an immigrant questioned André Ventura at an election campaign rally, with accusations of xenophobic speech directed at the party leader, which were captured by the media present at the scene.

Figure 29. Volume of posts and respective interactions on the case of the immigrant who approached André Ventura by type of user and sentiment towards the immigrant
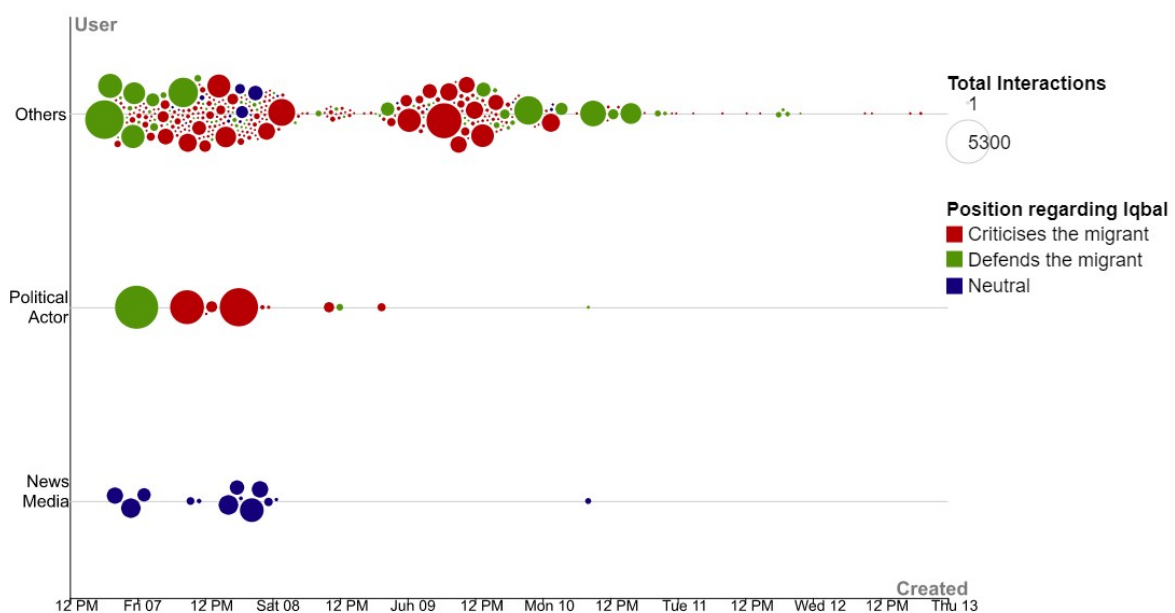
Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

On social media, the initial reactions to the immigrant's statements were empathetic, with posts of considerable reach from journalist Mafalda Anjos and BE leader Mariana Mortágua in solidarity with the immigrant. However, we would emphasise the presence of several publications during this initial period that were suspicious of the immigrant's story and critical of him, albeit with very limited reach.

The following day, the official pages of Chega and André Ventura published a truncated video of SIC's report on the event in which the immigrant appears to contradict himself in the information about his profession and country of origin, being accused by the Chega party pages of having been manipulated into lying.

This video was considered by Polígrafo on the same day to be disinformative, as it decontextualised the immigrant's words. Despite this fact, the political amplification of Chega resulted in the dissemination of a counter-narrative of mistrust towards the immigrant on social media, with several critical posts from ordinary users gaining considerable reach.

We consider it is important to emphasise that although the counter-narrative of mistrust towards the immigrant was detected before the official publication of Chega, it was only after this publication that it had a significant reach on social media. The political amplification of this narrative meant that the total number of posts criticising the immigrant received more interactions than those defending or showing solidarity with him.

Burqa on the Chega poster

As part of the WhatsApp hotline for disinformative content and paid advertising established in the protocol between MediaLab and the CNE, a complaint was made about a post on CHEGA's Instagram page that illustrated two women - one with a burqa and one without - warning of the dangers of "Islamisation". According to the complainant, this post not only appealed to hate speech but was also disinformative by making a connection between Islamisation and a threat to Europe.

This post from a political actor achieved a significant reach on social media that we consider unlikely if it were made by a non-political actor. Furthermore, by mentioning in the description of the post a "wave of growing Islamisation that threatens Europe"[5], Chega does not take into account the fact that the Muslim religion in Portugal represents only 0.4% of the population and is limited to 2.0% in the EU. We also believe that imposing legislation on the compulsory wearing of the burqa, as suggested in the political communication in question, would require profound legal changes, something also not addressed in the Chega publication. For these reasons, this publication was considered decontextualised by the MediaLab team, despite the strong political amplification obtained on social media.

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[5] Translated from Portuguese to English by the MediaLab team

Table 4. Instagram posts by Portugal's Chega party and Spain's Vox party on the Islamisation of Europe

In this Instagram post, **the Chega party** publishes a photo of two women - one with a burqa and one without - to warn of the dangers of "Islamisation". This threat is decontextualised.

This post noted:
10,657 **interactions**

Date: 03/06/2024
Link to publication

The **VOX party**'s Instagram post also uses a graphic of a bare-faced woman next to a figure wearing a completely concealed burqa. The slogan used is: "Which Europe do you want?".

This post noted:
26,282 **interactions**

Date: 03/06/2024
Link to publication

Finally, we would like to emphasise that this publication has the particularity of being practically identical to the one carried out by the VOX party in Spain on the same day.

In this way, we find in this publication an amplification of a narrative by a political agent that goes beyond the national context and appears to be part of a communication strategy at the European level. This reinforces the way in which the issue of

immigration is being addressed more and more uniformly throughout Europe, especially by far-right forces, with Portugal, unlike in previous years, moving closer to the European norm.

Video from Russia

For comparison, we now present a post that was also reported via WhatsApp, but which differs from the previous ones in that it was not amplified by a political agent.

Table 5. Twitter/X posts in Portugal using videos of Moscow nightlife to compare European and Russian society

344 Views	56 thousand views
17 interactions	440 interactions
Date: 05/06/2024	Date: 17/05/2024
Link to publication	Link to publication

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

The post in question was made by a Portuguese Twitter/X user and featured a video illustrating Moscow's nightlife, emphasising the presence of caucasian citizens, especially females, strolling through the city's streets.
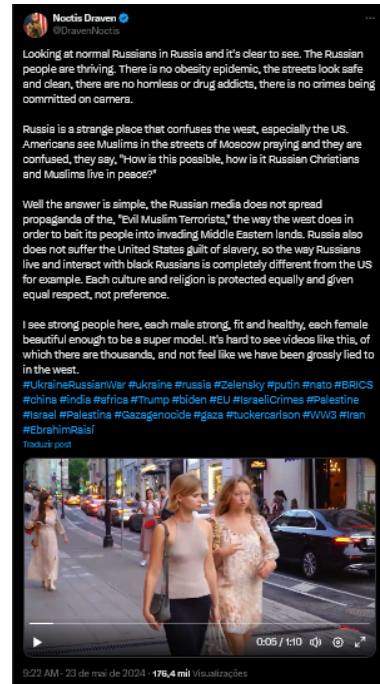
Table 5. Twitter/X posts from other countries using videos of Moscow nightlife to compare European and Russian society

Views - **6.1 Million**	Views - **143.3 thousand**	Views - **176.4 thousand**
Total Interactions - **17,200**	Total Interactions - **885**	Total Interactions - **4,831**
Date: **17/05/2024**	Date: **20/05/2024**	Date: **23/05/2024**
Link to publication	Link to publication	Link to publication

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

In the description of this post, the author emphasises the lack of ethnic diversity in the people featured in the video. Alongside this post, we also found another during our research with a very similar video and an almost identical message.

The videos in question have been repurposed by users to perpetuate the narrative that in Moscow, due to restricted immigration policies and the fact that there are not so many immigrants of Muslim origin, the standard of living and security are superior to the West.

We would point out that this same narrative was found in other international publications that illustrated the same or similar videos about nightlife in Moscow, with the same objective. Some of these videos shared on pages outside Portugal had a very significant reach, something not seen in the national context.

We suggest that the limited reach of the publications considered in the Portuguese context, as well as the apparent absence and popularisation of other similar publications, is due to the fact that they have not yet been amplified by a political actor, which is a crucial factor in the dissemination of this content.

## Disinformative online advertising

In general, the disinformative cases sent via the WhatsApp reporting line and then analysed by the MediaLab team were politically motivated. However, we still consider it essential to highlight one case which, although it involved political figures, was mainly economically motivated.

Using Meta's ad database, it was possible to identify several sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram that used fake content associated with the Chega party, containing various criticisms and accusations aimed at the former prime minister, António Costa. These adverts promoted get-rich-quick schemes, including a fake platform associated with Galp Energia. At their inception, the adverts in question were intended to economically exploit political themes and figures currently in the spotlight. In total, we estimate that these adverts reached more than 66,000 people in Portugal, but those responsible for them remain unknown.

Table 7. Examples of disinformative advertising on Meta platforms using political themes in the European election campaign
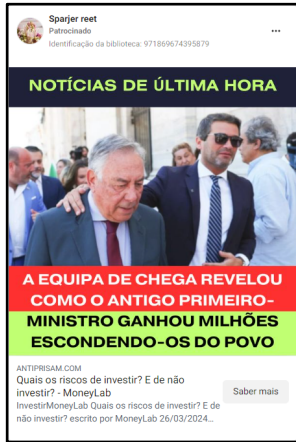
Announcement active between the 4th and 6th of June 2024.
Shown on Facebook.
2,692 people reached
Link to publication
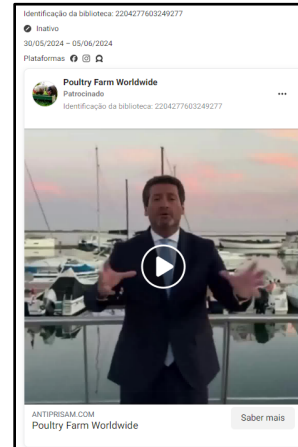
Announcement active between the 30th of May and the 5th of June 2024.
Shown on Facebook and Instagram
16,988 people reached
Link to publication (since removed)

Source: MediaLab CIES Iscte and OberCom - Observatório da Comunicação.

In the process of collecting data, we also came across what we believe to be the first "*deep-fake*" video involving a Portuguese political actor. The video in question reuses the image of a real video of André Ventura, manipulated with an audio recording generated by artificial intelligence. In this manipulated video, the Chega leader supposedly recommends that users invest in the aforementioned easy money scheme.

We would point out that in the context of the legislative elections, illegal political advertising campaigns had already been identified that targeted actors linked to the PS and PSD parties. However, unlike the current case, the main aim of these campaigns was to attack political agents and not to promote a financial scam.

In short, this case demonstrates how disinformation involving political actors and issues can be directed into fields other than political disruption. In this case, it is clear that the figures of Chega and PS were used for economic purposes due to their potential to attract users as extremely recognisable public figures. In addition, some

of the adverts found linked to fake pages cloned from the websites of organisations such as Correio da Manhã and Galp, adding yet another dimension of manipulation to these disinformative adverts. Finally, the data collected suggests that the adverts in question come from a network of actors, since although the pages that published the adverts were different, the funders tended to be the same organisations.

Final considerations

The political context surrounding the 2024 European elections has made them a particularly relevant moment for analysing political discussion on social media. The proximity in time between the European elections and the legislative elections raised the question of whether the levels of attention in these elections would be higher than usual. Generally speaking, our data suggests that, although the levels of attention did not come close to those of the legislative elections, the European elections were marked by dynamics of discussion and political activity on social media that are relevant to the political communication spectrum, especially when compared with the trends observed during the legislative elections.

As mentioned, the level of attention (measured in interactions) to online political discussion in the legislative elections was substantially higher than in the European elections. However, it was possible to identify that, unlike the legislative elections, the evolution of online discussion and attention to the candidates during the European elections period increased over time. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and TikTok users generally tended to pay more attention to the lead candidates as the voting day approached

It was also possible to identify similar patterns between the two elections in the online activity of parties and users. On the one hand, we found similarities in the activity of the Portuguese parties on the four online platforms analysed. This suggests that party structures may have used very similar planning for both electoral periods due to the proximity of the 2024 legislative and European elections, especially on Facebook and Instagram. On the other hand, in both elections, the weight of interviews and entertainment programmes in intensifying communication about the candidates on social media was evident. Thus, there was once again an amplification of the attention given to the candidates due to television programmes (e.g. "Isto é Gozar Com Quem Trabalha") or YouTube programmes (e.g. "Bom Partido"). Finally, the analysis of online political discussion in the context of the European elections corroborates what was observed in the context of the legislative elections: Instagram is the platform for

collecting interactions with few publications and Twitter/X is the platform for disseminating a greater volume of political content.

In the European elections, the Chega party again dominated online political communication. In numerical terms, Chega collected almost twice as many interactions as the rest of the political parties. This trend cuts across all the platforms analysed, since Chega publishes the most amount of posts and collects the most interactions regardless of the platform.

The timing of the announcement of each lead candidate is of particular interest because, as European elections are considered "second-order elections" (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), we observed unique activity around one of the announcements due to its unpredictability, making the candidate announcement period one of the most important moments of discussion in the period analysed. This was mainly due to the announcement of Sebastião Bugalho as the lead candidate of the Democratic Alliance, the party of the current Portuguese government, which proved to be one of the moments with the greatest reach on social media.

As far as the analysis of disinformation is concerned, this was mainly marked by the dissemination of a reporting line for disinformative content and paid advertising via WhatsApp. This channel was important to raise awareness of the cases disseminated on social media and citizens' own perception of disinformation. However, the at times inappropriate use of the line prompted us to propose changes for future applications related to clarity on what constitutes disinformation. By comparing our experiences in this project with perceptions and concerns about disinformation in Portugal, we suggest two hypotheses: Either people are not able to recognise disinformation and are therefore vulnerable to its effects; or they feel confident in understanding what disinformation is and for this reason act autonomously and do not report it

Lastly, we were also able to establish that Portugal tends to deviate significantly from the multi-thematic disinformation paradigm found in the rest of Europe. In the national context, immigration is the only topic whose disinformative content has a significant reach online. However, as was noted in the context of the legislative elections, even the cases that fall under this theme usually require amplification by a political actor to spread successfully and widely on social media.

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