Department of
Media and
Communications

# Visual Misinformation and Election Campaigns:

## A Four-Country Comparison


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This report contains examples of visual misinformation that some readers may find offensive.

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## Executive Summary

This report presents provisional findings of a study of visual misinformation during election campaigns in four countries in 2024 (Belgium, France, the United Kingdom and the United States). We highlight key assumptions and findings below.

**Definition:** This study looks at all aspects of visual misinformation, including deepfakes, mock-ups, mislabelled visual context, misleading graphs and images which have been edited/altered in a misleading way.

**Method:** Across the four study countries, we set up dummy accounts on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X, plus Truth Social in the US). We then used the dummy accounts to follow prominent right-wing or left-wing users on the respective platforms. Research assistants then examined the feeds of the dummy accounts daily, collecting the visual misinformation that appeared.

**Data gathered:** In total this method allowed us to gather n=402 pieces of visual misinformation from across the 4 case-study countries and the social media platforms we were looking at. Notably, we gathered more data from the United Kingdom (n=161) and the United States (n=141), as opposed to Belgium (n=24) and France (n=76). The data gathered was more evenly spread across platforms. Our dataset consisted of: Instagram (n=88), Facebook (n=105), X (n=135) and TikTok (n=66). For reasons discussed below, Truth Social was harder to gather data from, so we only identified n=6 items on this platform.

**Analysis:** Human-coded content analysis was performed on the data gathered. All variables were tested with standard intercoder reliability measures.

**Key findings:** In this report we outline several provisional findings:

- Across our case study countries, the promulgation of visual misinformation takes different forms. In Belgium and France, most of our examples come from official party/candidate accounts. In the United Kingdom and the United States, much more of the content comes from unofficial accounts, which might be run by activists or supporters, or potentially foreign actors or even bots.

- While the content of visual misinformation reflects broader debates and divisions in society, the topics of visual misinformation do not always mirror official campaign communication.

- The social media accounts following prominent right-wingers encountered more visual misinformation (n=299 or 74% of our overall dataset) than left-facing accounts.

- Our analysis challenges recent commentary, focusing on the risk posed by the believability of "deepfakes" or AI-generated misinformation. Instead, we found that, on average, content that AI generates is *less plausible* than visual misinformation created by other methods (e.g. misleading editing, audio-dubbing, misattribution, etc). However, we also argue that it is a mistake to equate the risk posed by visual misinformation to democratic institutions purely to believability. Instead, even when not believable, AI-generated content can promulgate aesthetics, facilitating the creation and galvanisation of anti-democratic or illiberal political networks.

## INTRODUCTION

2024 was, in the words of the United Nations Development Programme, the "biggest election year in human history", involving 72 countries and potentially 3.7 billion voters (2024). However, while such an event might have once been depicted as a democratic carnival and a celebration of the global dominance of liberal democratic institutions, 2024 was marked by little jubilation. Instead, the prevailing tone of political discussion was one of profound disquiet and uncertainty, centred on the instability and frailty of democratic practices and the susceptibility of the democratic process to manipulation.

In truth, these concerns were a culmination of trends that have been noted for several years (Diamond, 2015; Bermeo, 2016). Certainly, many of the challenges facing democracy in 2024 were not entirely novel, even if they were taking on new dimensions. The circulation of misinformation in general and visual misinformation in particular fits into this category. The broad issue - whether termed as misinformation, fake news or post-truth politics - has been widely discussed in recent years (see for example Anstead, 2021).

However, the politics of 2024 introduced new elements to the problem. Popular commentary was particularly focused on the threat of so-called "deepfakes", which are a form of rich media generated by artificial intelligence (AI) (Pawelec, 2022). Their realism has been seen as core to the risk they pose (for example, see Studies, 2024) due to the concern that this technology could be used to make realistic videos of politicians saying things they have never uttered, which could then be circulated widely on social media. Furthermore, fuelling these worries is the growing accessibility of generative AI technologies required to make deepfakes, which can now be produced more easily, with less technical know-how and more cheaply than was previously the case. More broadly, the growing role of visual content on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has led to increased interest in the risk posed by visual misinformation.

While policymakers have started to discuss the challenge posed by deepfakes and visual misinformation (O'Sullivan, 2019), there is still much we don't know about their interaction with democratic processes and institutions. Specifically, the analysis we present here seeks to answer several research questions:

- Do different platforms carry different quantities and types of visual misinformation?
- How does the use of visual misinformation differ from country-to-country, and how do these differences relate to the underlying political dynamics of specific election contests and party systems?
- Are there parallels and differences between how visual misinformation is used by the political left and the right?
- What sorts of visual misinformation is being posted, and what sorts of genres of content does it contain? Does the misinformation aim to be convincing?
- Which accounts are posting visual misinformation? Are they official party accounts or a wider network of users, activists and supporters?
- What themes and political issues does visual misinformation focus on?

## METHODOLOGY

*Research Definition*

Our study will examine a variety of types of visual misinformation. As such, we define visual misinformation broadly, including deep-fakes photographs and films, but also mock ups, misleading graphs, and other visual artifacts which are stripped of important contextual information, edited in ways which change their meaning or deliberately mislabelled (e.g. they do not show the things they purport to show).

This definition directly relates to the terminology used in this paper. We have chosen to use the term misinformation throughout. The distinction between mis- and disinformation is a subtle but important one: whereas misinformation is deemed to be false information, as in factually wrong, disinformation adds the intent to mislead, i.e. false information specifically fabricated and disseminated with strategic intent. In other words, all disinformation is misinformation, but not all misinformation is disinformation (Armitage & Vaccari, 2021, p. 15). Therefore, given the breadth of the dataset we have attempted to gather, the term misinformation seemed more appropriate.

*Data-gathering and methods*

Studying contemporary visual misinformation online presents significant challenges. Social media environments are inherently complex. The content on an individual user's feed is algorithmically curated in response to that person's interaction with the site. As a result, everyone using a site will receive a unique diet of content, shaped by who they follow, and the posts they like, repost or comment on etc. They will essentially consume this content in private without leaving an accessible public record.

Social networks also host distinctive types of content, including "organic" content created by users and shared across their networks. However, it is possible that some of these "users" might not be human beings but rather bots, which automatically post from accounts they control. Additionally, social media sites contain paid advertising content, which can be micro-targeted at users with certain characteristics and interests (Gillespie, 2018; Bennett & Gordon, 2021; Anstead *et al.*, 2025).

These different types of content and the processes that place them on a user's feed are likely to be inaccessible to researchers. Recent years have seen these challenges to research intensify, as many platforms have either shut down their Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) or made them prohibitively expensive to access. This has curtailed the route previously used by researchers to download data in bulk from social media sites (Murtfeldt *et al.*, 2024). Without access to APIs, researchers have had to get more creative about how to understand social media sites.

To overcome these difficulties and create a dataset of visual misinformation we therefore had to take a different approach. We set up dummy social media accounts across 4 social networks (Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok) in 3 of the case study countries (Belgium, France and United Kingdom). In the US example, Truth Social was added as a fifth platform.[1] For each case study social network in each country, we set up two accounts. The first account followed high profile users and organisations situated on the political right. The second account did same for the political left. Table 1 provides details of the data-gathering time frame, as well

[1] Truth Social is microblogging service, founded by Donald Trump in February 2022, after his Twitter account was closed. Although he has now been allowed to return to Twitter/X, Trump continues to post to Truth Social.

as the quantities of data collected. In all cases, the sampling period was about a month and a half and was halted 10 days after the election took place.

**Table 1:** Description of dataset gathered for project

| | Country | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Belgium** | **France** | **United Kingdom** | **United States** |
| **Election date** | 9th June | 30th June (round 1) & 7th July (round 2) | 4th July | 5th Nov |
| **Data-gathering period** | 10th May - 19th June | 10th June - 17th July | 1st June - 12th July | 10th Sept - 15th Nov |
| **Total examples gathered** | 24 | 76 | 161 | 142 |
| **Political orientation (%)** | | | | |
| Right-wing account | 83 | 79 | 59 | 87 |
| Left-wing account | 17 | 21 | 41 | 13 |
| **Social media platform (%)** | | | | |
| Instagram | 50 | 40 | 13 | 18 |
| Facebook | 4 | 17 | 39 | 20 |
| X | 42 | 38 | 26 | 39 |
| TikTok | 4 | 5 | 22 | 19 |
| Truth Social | NA | NA | NA | 4 |

In-keeping with the definition outlined above, we encouraged the research assistants overseeing the dummy accounts to define visual misinformation widely when gathering data. We were not only interested in AI generated deepfakes, but also simpler examples of misinformation, for instance where pictures and video had been mislabelled or misleadingly edited or cropped. When they encountered examples of this sort of visual misinformation, the researchers captured it and stored it in the project archive. Table 1 above shows the quantities of data gathered by our research assistants, sub-divided by platform and the political orientation of the dummy accounts.

*Limitations*

At this point, it is crucial to note some of the limitations of our data-gathering approach. The research assistants who ran the dummy accounts attempted to solicit political content from platform algorithms by following prominent political accounts. However, for ethical reasons, this was the limit of their engagement with social networks, and the dummy accounts we created did not directly engage with content appearing online, e.g. they did not like, comment or reshare any posts. This means the dummy accounts were only partially replicating the behaviours that algorithms respond to when placing content on users' feeds.

Another methodological challenge remains the "black box" of social network decision-making on misleading content. It is difficult to ascertain how different platforms dealt with misleading and problematic content in various countries, either through moderating it or shadow banning to make it less likely to appear in a user's feeds. We also ran into difficulties with specific social networks. In the United States, we were shut out of our dummy accounts on Truth Social after just a few days of access. While we received no communication from the network explaining this, it seems plausible we were banned for activities that the network deemed suspicious. As a result, we could only gather minimal data from the platform.

Despite these issues, we have collected a broad dataset of audio-visual misinformation circulating in right-wing and left-wing online networks during election campaigns in the four case study countries. We cannot claim that this dataset is exhaustive or representative (not least because the nature of social media and users' individualised feeds makes it almost impossible to define what a genuinely representative sample might look like). Still, it provides a comprehensive snapshot of the types of visual misinformation circulating online during the case study election campaigns, the themes it addressed, the degree of AI use, and the extent to which this content aimed to deceive. At the same time, we must be cautious here and treat this data as trends rather than as a total or statistically representative reflection of what happened online in these four countries regarding the circulation of audiovisual misinformation.

## ANALYSIS OF THE DATASET

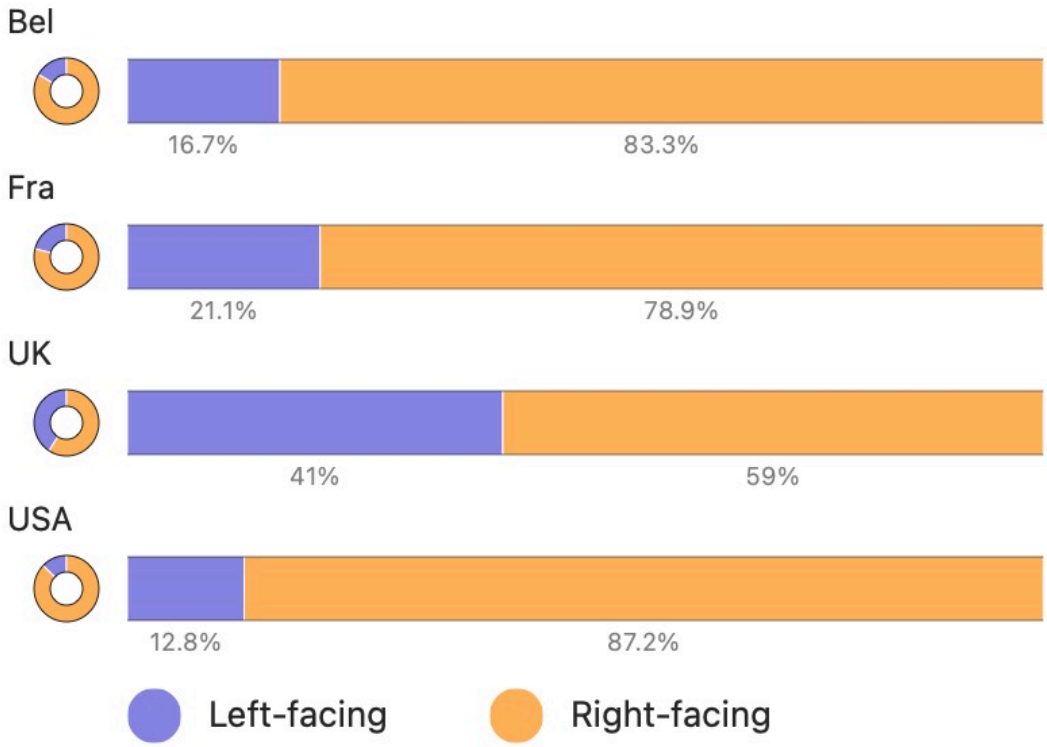
*Quantities of visual misinformation across case study countries*

The first observation that can be made from our dataset is that, although we applied the same data-gathering techniques across the four study countries, the quantity of visual misinformation we gathered varied widely, with the dummy accounts in Belgium (n=24) and France (n=76) encountering much less visual misinformation than did either the UK (n=161) or US (n=142) orientated dummy accounts. Of course, we cannot say for sure this is because visual misinformation is more or less prevalent in these countries overall. Instead, it may be a facet of how the social media environments function in a specific context. However, it is instructive that a user in Belgium or France who follows high-profile right-wing or left-wing accounts is less likely to be exposed to visual misinformation than their British or American counterparts (other things being equal).

*Right-wing and left-wing visual misinformation*

Overall, we came across considerably more audio-visual misinformation on the right-wing orientated accounts than the left-wing accounts. This was especially pronounced in Belgium (83 per cent right wing), France (79 per cent) and the US (87 per cent). In the UK, we also found proportionally misleading content on right-wing accounts but considerably more on leftwing accounts compared to other countries (59 per cent right-wing vs 41 per cent left wing). However, there is an explanation for the UK's position as an outlier, which is the propensity of the UK left to share satirical content. Of the 70 items gathered on the left-facing accounts in the UK, 46 (66 per cent) were defined as mockery / satire in our content analysis (this is a subject we return to below).

**Figure 1:** Prevalence of visual misinformation on right-wing and left-wing orientated accounts by country



*The sort of visual misinformation is being posted, and its level of credibility*

Given the significant level of conversation about sophisticated deepfake techniques and AI in the run-up to the 2024 election cycles, it is hardly surprising that our dataset contains examples of this sort of visual misinformation. The quantities of AI-generated content in the four study countries are shown in Table 2.[2] It is worth noting the slight outlier of the UK, where our data found that more rudimentary photo/video editing techniques were also commonly appearing in our dataset. Indeed, and unlike the other countries we studied, this was the most common type of visual misinformation, constituting 49 per cent of the sample.

**Table 2:** Types of visual misinformation in dataset by country

| | | Country | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Belgium** | **France** | **UK** | **US** |
| **Visual misinfo type (%)** | | | | | |
| AI generated | 49 | 38 | 47 | 41 | 60 |
| Doctored images | 23 | 4 | 1 | 49 | 8 |
| **Credibility (%)** | | | | | |
| Not credible | 60 | 79 | 62 | 76 | 38 |
| Somewhat credible | 15 | 4 | 8 | 10 | 25 |
| Credible | 25 | 17 | 30 | 14 | 37 |
| **Genre (%)** | | | | | |
| Satirical / humourous | 39 | 17 | 12 | 52 | 42 |
| References meme culture | 39 | 33 | 34 | 53 | 38 |

What is perhaps more surprising, though, in the context of the pre-election discussions and concern, is the level of credibility of the visual misinformation in the sample. We coded the examples we had gathered as either not credible, somewhat credible or credible. We found that in all cases, only a minority of the content was genuinely credible. Indeed, except for the US data, the majority of all content was coded as non-credible, meaning it seemed unlikely to be mistaken for accurate visual information, even by the most inattentive social media user. Two explanations possibly explain this credibility gap. The first relates to a lack of technical know-how, with less credible content having a more amateur aesthetic. Additionally, the lack of credibility of visual misinformation is also explained by the genres of content being posted,

[2] One driver of AI-use is whether platforms have built in tools which allow for content creation. About 10% of all material collected also made use of built-in AI tools, a feature that was predominantly found in the TikTok sample. Especially popular were built-in AI-tools to montage someone's face onto someone else in videos or use face filters.

with faked visuals being used for satire, humour or mockery, where there is no intent to deceive.

**Example 1:** Screenshot of deepfake video of Nigel Farage playing Minecraft


These patterns are distinctive in different national settings, though. Satire, humour and mockery are more prevalent in the UK and US portion of the dataset (where 52.2 per cent and 41.8 per cent of the dataset were coded in this way, respectively) than in the Belgian or French sample (where the equivalent figures are 16.7 per cent and 11.8 per cent). Visual misinformation in the UK also has heavily embraced meme culture, with 52.8 per cent of the dataset featuring political versions of well-established online imagery.

Our data contains a surprising finding on this topic: the credibility of AI generated content varies hugely from country-to-country (see Figure 3 and 4). In Belgium and France, AI generated content was broadly as credible as visual misinformation generated by other means. In the UK, AI-generated content was less credible than other forms of misinformation. The United States is the outlier here, with visual misinformation created by AI was considerably more credible than other items in the dataset (69.1 per cent AI-generated data was coded as credible, compared to 16.3 per cent of non-AI generated content).

**Figure 2:** Levels of credibility of misinformation in case study countries

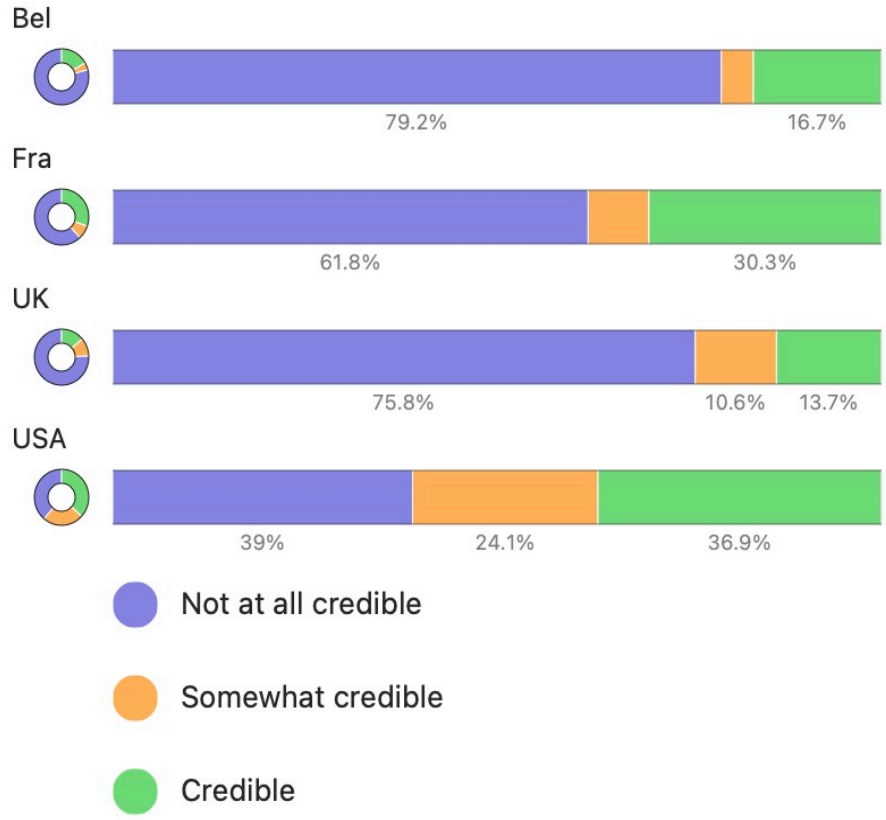
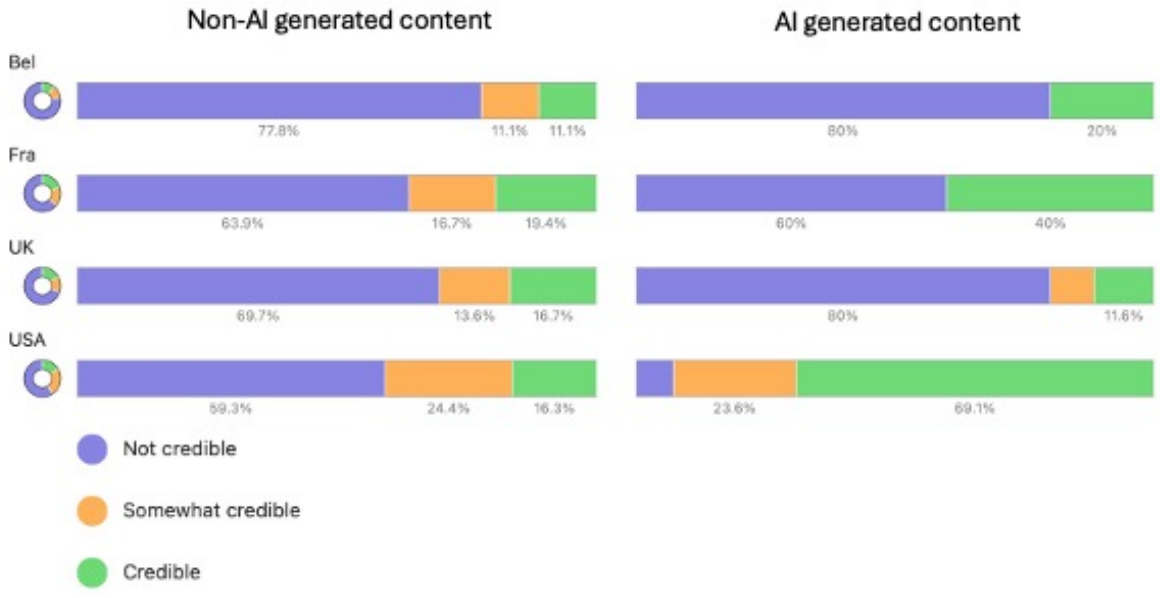



**Figure 3:** Comparison of credibility of non-AI and AI-generated content



It is also important to note the differences between the visual content encountered by our right-wing and left-wing dummy accounts. While the content seen by the right-wing accounts was more credible, the content seen by the left-wing accounts was more likely to be satirical (overall 65 per cent of the content for the left-wing accounts were satirical vs. 29 per cent for the right-wing accounts).

*The accounts posting visual misinformation*

Where does visual misinformation come from? Does it emanate from official party accounts or a wider network of users, activists and supporters? Concern about the circulation of misinformation have frequently been driven not just by the actions of mainstream politicians and political parties, but also wider networks of activist and supporter accounts exploiting meme culture. These accounts may be anonymous or bots, or potentially controlled by other states, seeking to influence the domestic politics of rival countries.

Our data suggests that visual misinformation has different origins in the Anglo-American context vs. the Franco-Belgian context. In France, nearly 70 per cent of the dataset comes from official party/candidate sources. In Belgium, this figure is 45 per cent. In contrast, the equivalent figure is much lower in the UK (20 per cent) and the US (9 per cent), suggesting that these countries have much more vibrant non-official networks generating content, and maybe also a reluctance of political elites to be seen to distribute misinformation.

*What themes and political issues does visual misinformation focus on?*

In our coding, we looked for primary and (if present) secondary themes in our visual misinformation dataset (see Table 3). Across the sample and combining primary and secondary themes, we found that visual misinformation tended towards attacks on political rivals, with the most common theme being critique of political opponents (23 per cent), mockery of gaffes and mistakes by opponents (21 per cent) and the slandering of political opponents (12 per cent). It is notable that the first two categories were also dominant on the left-following social media accounts, in combination accounting for 70 per cent of the items in the dataset, compared to just 36 per cent of the right-wing content.

**Table 3:** Main and Secondary Themes - Comparative

| | ALL N=555 | BE N=27 | FR N=98 | UK N=222 | US N=208 | LEFT N=136 | RIGHT N=419 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critique of opponent | 23% | 18% | 30% | 20% | 25% | 32% | 21% |
| Mocking/Ridiculing/Gaffes | 21% | 0% | 8% | 27% | 23% | 38% | 15% |
| Slandering of opponent | 12% | 0% | 11% | 5% | 19% | 4% | 14% |
| Anti-migration/Islamophobia | 12% | 37% | 13% | 12% | 7% | 5% | 14% |
| Positive focus on self | 10% | 15% | 13% | 9% | 9% | 10% | 10% |
| Nationalism/Jingoism | 10% | 4% | 13% | 10% | 9% | 2% | 12% |
| L-on-L or R-on-R critique | 5% | 0% | 0% | 13% | 0% | 4% | 6% |
| Election Fraud | 2% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 6% | 0% | 3% |
| Media critique | 2% | 18% | 4% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 2% |
| Critique AI-use by opponent | 2% | 4% | 8% | 1% | 0% | 3% | 1% |
| Anti-LGBTQ discourse | 1% | 4% | 0% | 2% | 1% | 0% | 2% |

Negative content can also be targeted at social groups, and it was notable that 14 per cent of all visual misinformation on the political right was anti-immigrant/Islamophobic. This type of content was particularly common in Belgium, making up 37 per cent of the dataset.

Other types of content deviated from this negative template, however. 10 per cent of our overall sample presented a positive image of the self (e.g. of a party leader or candidate). This was frequently linked to nationalistic imagery, which also featured highly in the dataset, although interestingly was least common in Belgium, where extreme right discourses focused much more on a strong anti-immigrant message to the detriment of overt nationalistic messaging.

Unsurprisingly, given the context of the 2024 US Presidential election, the country also seemed to generate a disproportionately large share of visual misinformation focused on the potential for electoral malpractice (6 per cent of all US content, while it does not appear in any other country sample). There were also interesting absences across the dataset. Despite the significance of culture war politics, anti-LGBTQ content made up only 1 per cent of the dataset.

**Example 2:** AI-generated images negatively portraying political opponents from the UK


17/06/24, Instagram, @TheReformParty


22/06/24, Facebook, @TheBrexiteer, reposted by @Nigel Farage – Britain Bites Back Group

**Example 3:** Islamophobic visual disinformation from Belgium, France and the UK


05/06/24, Instagram, @tomvandendriesschevb

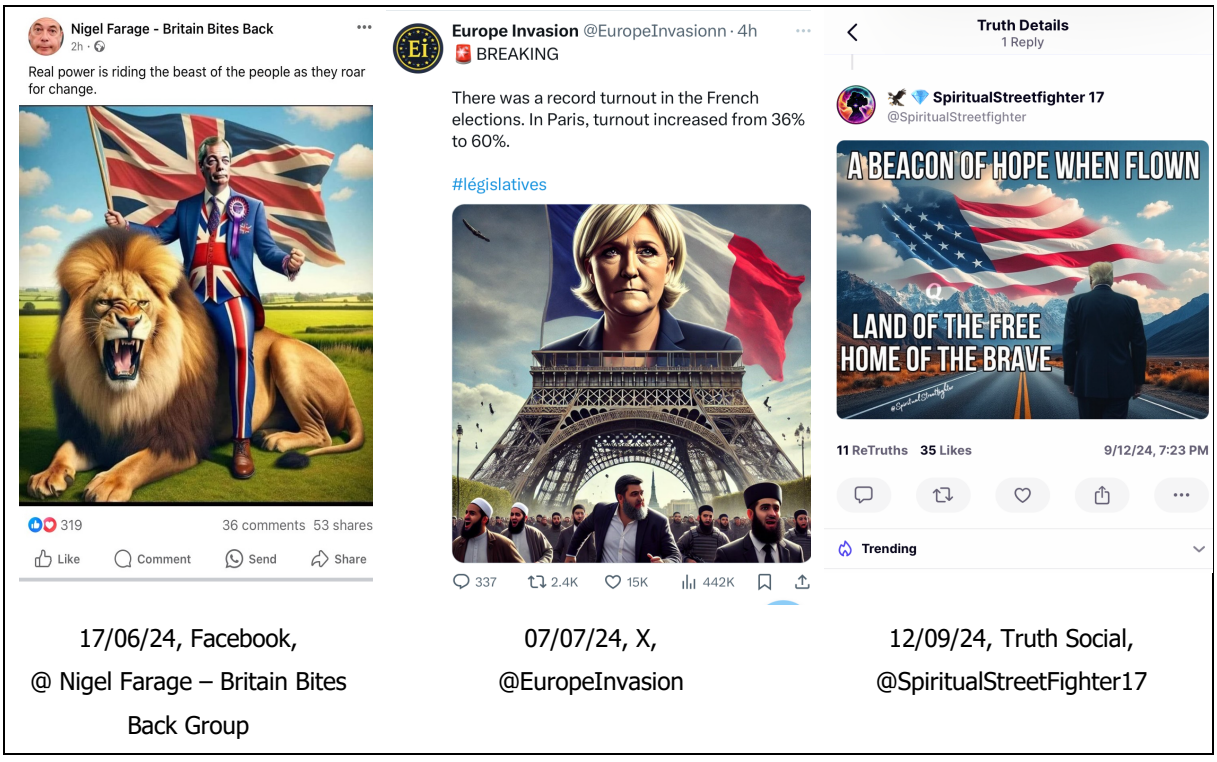

02/05/24, Instagram @rassemblementnational_fr


05/07/24, X, @EuropeInvasion

**Example 4:** AI-generated representations of heroic leadership from the US


**Source:** 30/09/2024, Facebook, @Anonymised[3]

**Example 5:** AI-generated representations of jingoism and the strong leader, from UK, France and US




17/06/24, Facebook, @ Nigel Farage – Britain Bites Back Group

07/07/24, X, @EuropeInvasion

12/09/24, Truth Social, @SpiritualStreetFighter17

[3] Names of individuals that are not political actors nor activist profiles have been anonymised

## KEY FINDINGS: UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL MISINFORMATION LANDSCAPE

Our analysis of this dataset points to some findings which have the potential to inform continuing debate about visual misinformation and elections. We highlight four key ideas.

1. **The character of misinformation in circulation is inherently related to the political circumstances in which an election contest occurs, but it does not simply replicate offline political discourse**. The example of election focused misinformation in the United States is a prime example of how the political context shapes the misinformation content which is in circulation. The events which followed the 2020 election and particularly the false allegations made by Donald Trump of election fraud, created an environment ripe for conspiracy theories. While there were concerns that such electoral malpractice conspiracies could spread to other democracies, the fact that they are absent in our samples gathered from Belgium, France and the UK suggests an underlying lack of receptiveness to such ideas. As a result, they struggle to take hold, circulate or go viral in countries outside the US. However, visual misinformation is not just a replication of offline political discourses. Trans-issues played a significant role in the US election, with the Trump campaign and Trump affiliated groups spending heavily on television adverts on the issue (Davis, 2024). However, it is notable that it barely registered as a topic for visual misinformation in our sample, even in the United States.

2. **Different types of political networks exist in different countries.** The relationship between visual misinformation and wider politics may be partially explained by the character of the networks that are disseminating it. In what could be thought of as more traditional party/candidate-centred communication environments (exemplified by Belgium and France in our dataset), official party and candidate accounts remain at the core of the communication environment. In such a setting, it seems plausible that the items being generated will more closely map to party strategy. Conversely, in the UK and the US the visual misinformation eco-system is much more disparate and decentralised, seemingly driven by activists and supporters, as well as potentially foreign interference and bots.

3. **There are differences between the right- and left-facing accounts across the dataset and the different case study countries.** The most striking finding in this

regard is that right-facing accounts across all countries are much more prone to encounter visual misinformation and deceptive content through social media platforms than left-facing accounts. This corroborates recent findings of Törnberg and Chueri (2025, p. 15), which suggest "that current political misinformation is not linked primarily to populism, but specifically to the populist radical right".

4. **It does not have to be believable to pose a threat.** Perhaps our most striking finding is that visual misinformation is frequently not convincing, in the sense that the items in our sample (the image or the video) is more often than not unrealistic. Given the debate prior to the 2024 election cycles about the risk posed by highly realistic deep fakes, this might seem to provide some comfort, especially as our data suggests that AI generated content is frequently less plausible than other types of visual misinformation in circulation. However, we would argue that this comfort is false, for two reasons. First, our findings suggest a significant challenge to policymakers and election regulators seeking to respond to visual misinformation. A large proportion of the content we identified could broadly be defined as satirical or humorous. This poses a definitional challenge for regulation. How can electoral integrity threatened by genuine misinformation be maintained, without undermining legitimate practices and critiques such as satire and mockery? The second challenge posed by this finding is perhaps even more disconcerting, as it disrupts a core assumption of much contemporary discussion of visual misinformation: specifically, that the risk posed to democratic institutions is directly correlated with the levels of realism a fake can achieve. We disagree. Plenty of the data we gathered used non-plausible AI or faked images which included, for example, racist imagery, slander or pseudo-Fascist iconography of the strongman authoritarian leader. Even without being hyper-realistic or plausible, this content has the potential to serve a networking function, acting as a signal on social media and to help forge networks of radical activists. Even non-realistic content can support and strengthen the false narratives promulgated by extreme, anti-democratic and illiberal ideologies.

## CONCLUSIONS: MISINFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY BEYOND 2024

From the perspective of 2025, misinformation generally and the deepfake/AI generated variant of misinformation may have played less of a role in last year's elections than was feared by commentators at the outset of 2024. Even in the US, the example which our data suggests came closest to dystopian pre-election predictions, the most high-profile example of misinformation in the presidential campaign was Donald Trump claiming that Haitian immigrants abducted and ate family pets (Garsd, 2024). This was undoubtedly said by the real Donald Trump (rather than a deep fake avatar) in the decidedly *old* media environment of a television election debate.

In terms of the results and the continuing rise of populism, the elections we studied produced mixed outcomes. In the UK, the Labour Party was returned to government with a massive majority. In France, an ad hoc coalition of the left, social democrats and centrists were able to prevent National Rally from winning a Parliamentary majority which had been widely expected. In Belgium, while the Flemish populist right had some success, the French-speaking radical right failed to achieve a breakthrough. However, as is often the case, it is the experience United States which defines the democratic climate. The results of the American election and the victory of Donald Trump which will probably do most to frame how the elections of the year 2024 are understood retrospectively. Certainly, the results of the American election have already had a greater impact on the misinformation climate, with platforms increasingly responding to the ascendency of MAGA Republicans globally limiting their efforts to tackle fact check fake news, in the hope of ingratiating themselves to the new regime in Washington (McMahon *et al.*, 2024).

Politically, the consequences of these elections are also complex. Outside the United States (where the opening months of the Trump administration have seen predictable levels of chaos), the results might appear to suggest a level of political stability has been attained. However, the elections of 2024 are potentially pre-cursors to further political volatility. In the UK, while Labour won with a massive parliamentary majority, the party achieved this with the lowest vote share of a party forming a single party government in history. The return of the Liberal Democrats as a major parliamentary force, plus a strong showing by both the Reform Party and the Greens suggests the UK is entering into an era of genuinely multi-party politics. Since the 2024, France has struggled to form and sustain a stable government, with a legislature that is now split between three significant political groupings, the support of which

at least two of which are required to sustain a government in office. In Belgium a coalition government between parts of the center-left and the center-right was formed which is quite shaky and having to contend with mounting protest from workers and the unions.

Then the defining political story now we have emerged from 2024 is arguably political instability and the undermining of traditional political institutions and party systems. In this context then, and at a time when platforms have abdicated responsibility for the content they contain, the possibilities for the use of misinformation and the challenges it poses will only continue to grow.

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