

The Kremlin or Its Echo? Echo? Echo?

Foreign Information Manipulation and
Interference in Latvia's 2026 Saeima Elections

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was prepared by the Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS). It is based on monitoring of Latvia's information space that CEEPS carried out in cooperation with the social media analysis platform DisInt.ai from 1 July to 4 October 2026. The monitoring covered 502 public channels on YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook and X, and only publicly available data were used in the analysis. The research method, its limitations and ethical principles are described in Chapter 2 and in the Annex.

The conclusions expressed in this report reflect solely the views of the authors.

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Executive Summary and Key Findings

This report analyses which narratives about Latvia, consistent with the Kremlin's position, appeared on social media ahead of the elections to the Saeima (Latvia's parliament) on 3 October 2026, who spread them, and whether inauthentic activity was involved, such as the same text being posted from several accounts. The study is based on monitoring by the Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS) and DisInt.ai, which covered 502 public channels on YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook and X from 1 July to 4 October 2026.

In the three months before the elections, the volume of these narratives more than doubled, and as election day approached they were increasingly aimed at the elections themselves. Yet most of the narratives were spread not by Kremlin-aligned channels or by accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity, but by ordinary users in comment sections. The data therefore give a fairly clear answer to the question posed in the report's title: in the 2026 elections, the Kremlin's voice was quieter than its echo among the domestic audience. That echo is the main challenge in the information space in the pre-election period.

01

Kremlin narratives about Latvia were not new, but they were adapted to the pre-election agenda.

They have long rested on a small set of claims – for example, that Latvia cannot exist without Russia, is not a sovereign state, persecutes Russian speakers, provokes war with Russia and honours Nazism. In the pre-election period, these claims were linked to current domestic political events, such as the grain transit tariff, fuel prices and airBaltic's financial difficulties. The number of mentions rose from an average of 230 a day in July to 584 a day in election week, and roughly half of that increase came in the last two weeks before the elections and on the day after them.

02

The elections themselves became the main target of the narratives.

The fastest-growing claim was that Latvia's elections are illegitimate. Such a claim undermines trust in the electoral process and may reduce turnout among certain groups of voters. It peaked during the elections: in the first four days of October it appeared 461 times –

more than in July and August combined – most often on the day after the vote. Commenters presented the low turnout, the delay in counting the votes and the exit poll results as proof that the outcome had been decided in advance. Calls to restore relations with Russia and Belarus also became more widespread. By contrast, narratives about history and Soviet monuments, which normally make up a large part of the Kremlin's information flow about Latvia, declined in the pre-election period.

03

Kremlin narratives about Latvia are spread mainly by the audience, not by content creators.

Four out of five recorded instances of a narrative were found in comments, and the largest comment sections are on the accounts of Latvian politicians, parties and media. The two groups of Kremlin-aligned channels together accounted for only 13% of all instances, and their activity remained at a similar level throughout the period. The pre-election rise in narratives therefore came mainly from user comments.

04

The network of Kremlin-aligned channels is small but well structured, and in the elections it did not line up behind any one list.

The core of the network consists of about a dozen Telegram channels that regularly repost each other's texts. Although Russian state media are restricted in Latvia, the Russian state outlet Sputnik Latvia (*Sputnik Латвия*) sits at the centre of the network. In the pre-election period, posts by Latvian politicians also spread along these reposting routes, but in election week the most widely reposted material discredited the leader of one pro-Russian list.

05

Inauthentic activity was limited but targeted.

Accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity posted fewer than one in ten of the comments containing the monitored narratives, and no mass automated activity was recorded. These accounts were concentrated in specific channels, especially the Belarusian regime-aligned YouTube channel "Facets of Freedom" (*Грани свободы*). As election day approached, identical, repeatedly posted texts urged a boycott of the elections

and a vote for parties that would restore relations with Russia, and on the day after the elections they disputed the results. However, these accounts played only a minor role in the discussion of the election outcome: under the main news items on the exit poll results they posted only about 6% of the comments.

06

Attitudes towards political forces were asymmetric.

In the monitored channels, the government was almost always spoken of negatively. Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*) and Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*), meanwhile, were among the few political forces that received more positive than negative assessments. The data, however, do not reveal coordinated action between these parties' accounts and the channels that amplified content favourable to them, although they do not rule it out either.

07

As election day approached, hateful and violent language was increasingly directed at politicians.

By election day, more than 3,400 comments had been automatically classified as possible violations of platform rules, and the majority of them (62%) consisted of hateful or abusive language. Hatred was directed at Latvians and the Latvian state on the one hand, and at Russian-speaking residents on the other. Most of these comments probably reflected the users' own attitudes, and inauthentic activity amplified them rather than created them.

Coordinated activity can be detected and curbed, but reducing the echo among the domestic audience depends on trust in state institutions, on timely explanation of decisions and on the quality of the discussion environment on the accounts of Latvian media and politicians. Recommendations for strengthening election integrity are set out at the end of the report.

Introduction: The Kremlin or Its Echo?

In Latvia, the elections to the 15th Saeima were awaited not only as a political choice but also as a test of security. In the shadow of Russia's war against Ukraine and under persistent hybrid threats, hardly anyone doubted that Russia would try to influence the elections. Far less clear was what such influence would look like. To find at least a partial answer to this question, the Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS) launched a project during the election period to monitor Latvia's information space and identify signs of foreign, mainly Russian, interference in Latvia's electoral process. The monitoring was carried out in cooperation with the social media analysis platform DisInt.ai, which has extensive experience in monitoring information environments, including during the recent elections in Moldova and Armenia. The monitoring ran from 1 July to 4 October 2026 and covered public channels on YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook and X, ranging from Kremlin-aligned channels to the accounts of Latvian media and politicians. Social media platforms were chosen because, after Russian state media were restricted in Latvia, demand for their content did not disappear but largely moved to these platforms.

On the day after the elections to the 15th Saeima, the claim that Latvia's elections are illegitimate was recorded 279 times in the monitored social media channels, more often than on any other day of the monitoring. In the comments, low turnout, the protracted vote count and the exit poll results were presented as proof that the outcome had been decided in advance. Such claims can have practical consequences: they can affect both whether people go to vote and whether they accept the result. Since the first round of Romania's presidential election was annulled in December 2024 following security service reports of a coordinated campaign on TikTok, foreign interference in European elections is no longer a theoretical question. But from the outside, one comment about "stolen elections" looks exactly like another. It may have been posted by an account that is part of a coordinated campaign, by the author of a Kremlin-aligned channel, or by a voter who simply does not trust the state. The difference between targeted foreign activity and its echo within society itself is what underlies the question posed in the title of this report.

Kremlin narratives about Latvia are not new in themselves. Since the 1990s they have rested on a small but persistent set of claims centred on the status of Rus-

sian speakers in Latvia (Cheskin, 2016), and they attach themselves to real, unresolved domestic political discontent (Hiršs, 2025). This is what makes the analysis difficult. If a comment about fuel prices contains the claim that Latvia will not survive without Russia, its content is consistent with the Kremlin's position, but that in itself says nothing about who wrote the comment and why. The report therefore consistently distinguishes between three things that often merge in public debate: whether content is consistent with the Kremlin's position (what the narrative claims), coordinated activity (whether accounts and channels act in concert) and attribution (whether the activity can be linked to a specific state or organisation). The monitoring data make it possible to measure the first, in part also the second, but almost never the third. This distinction also matters conceptually. Under the European External Action Service's definition, foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) is intentional and coordinated manipulative activity (EEAS, 2023). A user who repeats a Kremlin narrative on their own initiative is therefore not, by that alone, a participant in FIMI, even if what they say coincides with what someone else is spreading deliberately.

The question in the title should therefore not be understood as a choice between two answers. Targeted foreign activity and its echo usually exist side by side, and what matters more for decision-makers is to know the relationship between them: what share of the narratives in circulation comes from Kremlin-aligned channels and from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity, what share comes from ordinary users, and how the two are linked. The appropriate response also depends on this. A coordinated operation can be detected, curbed and reported to the platforms. These instruments mostly do not reach the echo. Reducing it depends on trust in state institutions, timely explanation of decisions and the quality of the debate environment at home.

To explore this, the report poses five more specific questions:

- 1 Which narratives dominated the pre-election period, and how did their spread change as the vote approached and in relation to domestic political developments?
- 2 Where did they spread – in comments or in content produced by the channels?

- 3 Which actors created the narratives and which amplified them?
- 4 Were the narratives directed against the elections, and if so, how?
- 5 Was inauthentic or coordinated activity observed, and how did it manifest itself?

The answers are based on monitoring that covered 502 public channels on five platforms – YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook and X – from 1 July to 4 October 2026. Every post and public comment on these channels was automatically compared with the narrative set used in the study – seven narratives and 25 specific claims about Latvia – and the behaviour of the accounts spreading these narratives was analysed separately. Similar studies of the 2025 parliamentary elections in Czechia and Moldova mostly started from identified manipulation incidents or already known operations and traced their spread (FIMI-ISAC, 2025; G7 RRM, 2026). This approach is good at showing how operations work, but it cannot say what share of the overall flow of narratives they account for. Because this study analyses all the content of the monitored channels, it also makes it possible to estimate this share. Without it, the question “the Kremlin or its echo?” cannot be answered.

This approach also has its limits. The channel set was selected purposively and is not a representative sample in the statistical sense. Nevertheless, it covers both Kremlin-aligned channels and the major accounts of Latvian media and politicians, where a large part of the public debate takes place, so the findings give a good picture of what is happening in Latvia's information space. The monitoring shows what was spread and how accounts behaved, but it does not establish who runs or funds these accounts, nor does it measure whether the narratives changed any voter's choice. The report therefore speaks of narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position and of signs of FIMI, not of proven Russian operations. A detailed description of the research methodology and its limitations can be found in the Annex to this report.

The report consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 examines the roots of Russia's information influence activities and its interference in other countries' elections, while Chapter 2 describes the research method and design. Chapter 3 shows how the spread of narratives developed over the pre-election period, and Chapter 4 analyses how the narratives were tied to events in Latvian domestic politics. Chapter 5 looks at where

and by whom the narratives were spread, Chapter 6 examines the network of Kremlin-aligned channels, and Chapter 7 analyses signs of inauthentic and co-ordinated activity. Chapter 8 shows how the legitimacy of the elections was called into question, and Chapter 9 analyses how Latvian politicians and organisations were assessed on social media. Chapter 10 complements the report with an analysis of hate speech. This

is not a separate research question, but during elections hateful and violent language directly affects how freely and safely political debate can take place. To find effective ways of responding to it, the scale of the problem must first be understood. In the conclusion, we return to the question posed in the title and offer recommendations for strengthening election integrity.

Terminology used in this report

Channel	A public channel, page or profile on a platform whose posts, and the comments under them, are covered by the monitoring, for example a YouTube channel, a Facebook page or a Telegram channel. The presence of one organisation or person on several platforms is counted as separate channels.
Kremlin-aligned channels	Channels whose content and editorial line correspond to the Russian state's information influence objectives regarding Latvia. The term describes content, not the channel's owners, their funding or their location.
Account	A user profile on a platform from which content is published or comments are written. In the report it most often refers to commenters, whereas in the names of channel groups (for example, "accounts of Latvian political actors") "accounts" means the monitored channels.
Platform	The social media website or app on which the monitored content was published. The study covers five platforms – YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, Facebook and X.
Mention	An instance in which one of the seven predefined narratives, or one of the claims that make them up, appears in a channel's post or in a comment under it. If a text contains two narratives, they count as two mentions.
Narrative set	A list of seven narratives and 25 specific claims, developed and maintained by the authors, against which the content of the monitored channels was automatically compared (the full list is in Table 5 of the Annex).
Views	The total number of views reported by the platforms worldwide, not the audience reached in Latvia. Summed views across different platforms are only an approximate indicator.
Accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity	Accounts for which the monitoring platform recorded at least one of the six signs of inauthentic activity used in the analysis, for example the same text being posted from several identities or at short intervals (the list of signs is in Chapter 7). This is a behavioural observation, not a conclusion about bot activity or intent.

CHAPTER 1

Russia versus the West: The Saeima Elections in the Kremlin's Crosshairs

Russia's information influence activities against the Baltic states, including Latvia, have deep roots. They

are part of Russian foreign policy, which rests on two long-standing perceptions: that the West threatens

Russia's security, and that Russia has a right to a sphere of influence in its neighbouring countries. In Kremlin rhetoric, these perceptions gradually radicalised until, in 2022, they became the justification for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Götz and Staun, 2022).

More broadly, Russia has also actively deployed information influence operations against other countries, especially during elections, in pursuit of its foreign policy goals. In recent years, Russia's efforts to influence parliamentary elections have been clearly visible in Georgia (2024), Moldova (2025) and Armenia (2026) – countries that it has historically regarded as its sphere of influence (ISFED, 2025; G7 RRM, 2026; IPHR, 2026). Russia's interests and influence operations, however, are not confined to its near abroad but are also directed at EU and NATO countries. Although influence operations in these countries are less overtly aggressive, they too can reach the scale seen in Romania, where information manipulation activities gave the Constitutional Court grounds to annul the first round of the presidential election. Russian efforts to influence the information space in other EU and NATO countries, such as Germany and France, both during elections and outside them, have likewise been widely documented (Aleksejeva, 2026). Russia is not the only state actively conducting information influence activities. China's activities have also been widely documented (EEAS, 2025). Russia's information influence activities nevertheless stand out – they are far broader and more aggressive, and they carry greater weight for Latvia's security, because Russia poses an existential threat to Latvia.

Against this background – marked by growing hybrid activities as well as by the war Russia has unleashed in Ukraine and the resulting deterioration of the security situation – questions and concerns about Russia's potential influence activities in the 2026 elections to the Saeima came to the fore.

Together with the other Baltic states, Latvia occupies a unique place in Russia's worldview. On the one hand, these are countries that Russia regards as its sphere of interests, but on the other, they are EU and NATO member states covered by the shield of collective security. As a result, Russia no longer perceives them as its near abroad, but neither does it see them in the same way as other Western NATO member states.

This perception on Russia's part matters because it substantially changes what could be expected from Russia in an election context. In Latvia's case, an inter-

ference campaign as aggressive as those in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova was not to be expected. In Moldova and Armenia, alongside information operations, there were reports of attempts to send in trained provocateurs, buy votes, organise the transport of voters to polling stations (in Armenia's case also from Russia) and use other methods (RFE/RL, 2025; Darieva and Murgioni, 2026; IPHR, 2026). Yet Latvia's geographical proximity, its historically large Russian community, which Russia regards as its compatriots, and Russia's interests are factors that Russia can exploit as vulnerabilities and that set Latvia apart from other EU and NATO member states. In Latvia's case, Russia's influence activities during the elections were therefore to be expected not as overt interference in the electoral process, but mainly in the information space, exploiting the divisions that already exist in society.

The Kremlin's “battle for hearts and minds”: from television to Telegram

Until 2022, the Kremlin's information influence in Latvia relied mainly on centralised infrastructure – state-controlled television channels and news portals that reached the Russian-speaking audience directly and were relatively easy to identify. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Latvia significantly tightened its regulation of Russian state propaganda media, and by August 2025 the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) had blocked access to 413 such websites. Among part of the public, however, habits proved resilient: after the restrictions took effect, attempts to access the blocked sites reached around half a million a month (LSM, 2025). This suggests that the restrictions reduced the supply of such content, but not the demand for it.

This gap between supply and demand created the preconditions for Russia's information influence to adapt. Much as Latvia had imposed national restrictions, the EU also took collective decisions against the infrastructure of Russia's information operations, deciding on 1 March 2022 to suspend the broadcasting and distribution of content by the Russian propaganda outlets RT and Sputnik. Within the first weeks after these EU sanctions took effect, the Kremlin sought to circumvent them by using mirror accounts and alternative domains and by redirecting audiences to less regulated platforms, especially Telegram, which at the same time became a hub for coordinating cross-platform influence operations (Pamment, 2023).

Similarly, in fringe online communities in Western Europe, the spread of RT and Sputnik content fell sharply after they were blocked, but pro-Kremlin content did not disappear – part of it moved to Telegram, and the number of pro-Kremlin channels among the most popular Telegram channels doubled (Santos Okholm, Ebrahimi Fard and ten Thij, 2024). In other words, blocking made the spread of such content considerably harder, but it did not stop it.

In parallel, Russia is developing new, automated forms of influence that are cheaper and harder to attribute. The most prominent example is the “Pravda” network, made up of almost two hundred news aggregator websites that automatically republish and translate content from Russian news agencies and pro-Kremlin social media accounts (VIGINUM, 2024), thereby imitating news portals. These sites’ direct audience is small, and reaching one is not their primary purpose either – content that almost nobody reads directly ends up in search engines and from there spreads further across the internet. According to available data, in 2025 the network operated on 140 subdomains and targeted more than 80 countries, and its content reached not only people but also Wikipedia and the answers of large language models, that is, artificial intelligence models (CheckFirst and DFRLab, 2025). The network’s Latvia-targeted site, pravda-lv.com, was blocked by NEPLP in 2024 (LETA, 2024).

Blocking a single site, however, has little effect on such a network. After it was exposed in 2024, the “Pravda” network did not wither but expanded to new countries and languages (Châtelet and Lesplingart, 2025), which illustrates a broader trend: since 2022, Russia’s information influence in Europe has relied less and less on a few clearly identifiable state media outlets and increasingly on a dispersed network of channels, platforms and intermediaries through which narratives move from one source to another. Such a network is more resilient to regulatory restrictions and harder to attribute, because the line between state-organised influence activities and the independent initiative of individual actors becomes blurred. The most recent research also confirms that such a network operates in the Baltic region. For example, during the joint Russian-Belarusian military exercise Zapad-2025, pro-Kremlin media and Telegram channels in Russia and Belarus were observed spreading several narratives, including that 1) the exercise was a cover for preparing an attack on Ukraine and the EU, 2) it rehearsed the use of nuclear weapons, 3) Russia and Belarus

were merely defending themselves against an aggressive NATO, and 4) Lithuania and Poland were exaggerating the threat. From these channels, the narratives then passed into the information environment of EU countries, especially the Baltic states and Poland (Sazonov et al., 2026).

Tools alone, however, do not explain why part of society accepts these narratives. Equally important is the cognitive dimension – how audiences perceive the narratives, and why some parts of society are more open to them than others.

One country, two information spaces: the audience for Kremlin narratives in Latvia

Not all residents of Latvia perceive Kremlin narratives in the same way. How open an audience is to these narratives depends on several interrelated factors – language and the information space associated with it, existing political views, the audience’s identity and the information sources it chooses.

The first, and possibly the most important, of these is language, because it determines which information space a person lives in. Latvian speakers mainly use Latvian-language media, while Russian speakers use Russian-language media, including Russian information channels (Krumm, Šukevičs and Zariņš, 2023). Before they were blocked, Russian state-backed media were used by 48% of the population and by 68% of members of ethnic minorities (NEPLP, 2025).

These two information spaces differ not only in language but also in how the war is explained in them. Among Russian speakers, Kremlin narratives about the causes of the war are widely accepted: more than half believe that Ukraine is a US puppet, and around 40% that Russia’s security is threatened by Western countries or by Ukraine. Moreover, in the year since the war began these views barely changed. Only 40% of Russian speakers, compared with 80% of Latvian speakers, perceive Russian disinformation and propaganda as a threat (Krumm, Šukevičs and Zariņš, 2023).

This does not mean, however, that these views are simply created by Russian media. Research shows that people choose media in line with their political views and that this link is stable over time, but that media use tends to sustain these views rather than reinforce them (Shehata, Ekström and Oleskog Tryggvason, 2024). Experimental studies also show that media do nonetheless have an effect. Even brief ex-

posure to the narratives of Sputnik Latvia (*Sputnik Latvija*) about Russophobia increased perceived discrimination and identification with the Russian-speaking community among Russian-speaking respondents (Hoyle et al., 2024), while Russian television in Ukraine persuaded mainly viewers who were already favourably disposed towards Russia, thereby deepening polarisation (Peisakhin and Rozenas, 2018). Kremlin narratives therefore work most easily where they coincide with existing views.

Even so, the Russian-speaking audience cannot be regarded as homogeneous or as wholly subject to the influence of Russian media. Its media habits are closely linked to how people construct their civic and ethnic identity (Vihalemm, Juzefovičs and Leppik, 2019), and part of this audience balances its use of international media with integration into Latvian society (Vihalemm and Juzefovičs, 2022). After Russian television channels were blocked, its habits changed: people looked for alternative sources of information, and some associated these changes with the restrictions, which have fostered distrust of the media and scepticism towards journalists (Rožukalne and Līdaka, 2025).

The audience largely found these alternative sources on social media platforms. In 2025, 31% of residents had noticed content from Russian media blocked in Latvia being distributed on YouTube, Facebook and other platforms – the highest figure since the war in Ukraine began – while 41% of members of ethnic minorities use Telegram (NEPLP, 2025).

Taken together, these factors make Latvia's Russian-speaking audience particularly vulnerable to Russian foreign information manipulation and interference. It largely lives in an information space where Kremlin narratives about the war are widely accepted, it less often perceives Russian disinformation as a threat, and since the blocking its information sources have moved to platforms where these narratives spread almost without restriction. Vulnerability here means not loyalty to Russia, but greater exposure to its narratives and less resistance to them. The Russian-language social media environment is therefore where Kremlin narratives most easily reach a receptive audience.

This does not mean, however, that the Latvian-speaking part of society is immune to Russian influence. Several Kremlin narratives about Latvia also resonate in wider society: in a survey published as early as 2021, 63% of Latvia's residents agreed that the European Union dictates Latvia's policies, and 26% that the Baltic states are occupied by NATO (CEEPS, 2021). Latvian speakers are also a direct target of Russian influence activities. Leaked documents from Russia's Social Design Agency show that comments produced by the agency also appeared in Latvian under posts by Latvian media on Facebook (Dragiļeva, 2024), and in February 2024 more than a thousand bots on X launched a campaign in Latvian, which the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence described as the first mass campaign of its kind (Sprinģe, 2024).

Artificial intelligence substantially expands these opportunities for influence. Until now, the Latvian language was a major obstacle to Russian information influence: as recently as 2024, the campaign on X was written in faulty Latvian (Sprinģe, 2024). Machine translation and large language models are lowering this barrier. The "Pravda" network automatically translates its content into many languages (Châtelet and Lesplingart, 2025), and Russian influence operations already use artificial intelligence tools to generate comments and automate their distribution, including in operations targeting the Baltic states (OpenAI, 2024). As a result, the boundary between Latvia's two information spaces, which until now partly protected the Latvian-speaking audience, is becoming increasingly porous.

Russia's confrontation with the West, the adaptation of its influence instruments after 2022, the audience's shift to social media platforms and the lowering of the language barrier together determine how Russian influence could manifest itself in the 2026 Saeima elections. It was to be expected in a dispersed network of channels and platforms, where narratives meet a part of society that is already open to them. In such an environment, purposeful foreign activity is hardest to distinguish from its echo within society itself, and that distinction is what this report seeks to measure.

CHAPTER 2

Research Method and Design

To measure how much of the flow of narratives comes from targeted foreign activity and how much from its echo, it is not enough to track individual known incidents or operations. If narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position spread in Latvia not through a few clearly identifiable media outlets but through a dispersed network of channels and the comments of ordinary users, the study must cover the whole flow of narratives – both the part produced by Kremlin-aligned channels and the part that appears in the comment sections of the accounts of Latvian politicians, parties and media. The study is therefore based on systematic monitoring: for three months, all publicly available content from a predefined set of channels was collected and checked, using the same criteria throughout, for whether such narratives about Latvia appeared in it. This chapter briefly describes when and where the data were collected, how they were analysed and what such an approach allows us to claim.

The monitoring covered 96 days, from 1 July to 4 October 2026. The period begins three months before the elections, to provide a point of comparison for changes close to the vote, and ends the day after the elections, because claims about the legitimacy of the results take shape in the first hours and the day after polling stations close.

A total of 502 public channels were monitored on five platforms: 136 on TikTok, 111 on Telegram, 101 on YouTube, 97 on Facebook and 57 on X. Social media platforms were chosen because, after the blocking of Russian media, they have become the main route by which content blocked in Latvia reaches Latvian audiences, especially Russian-speaking ones. The channel set is not a random sample: it was built purposively to cover both the places where narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position are produced and the places where they come into contact with Latvian public debate.

Before the analysis, each channel was assigned to one of six groups. Five groups are directly related to Latvia: accounts of Latvian political actors, accounts of Latvian media, accounts of Latvian civil society organisations and activists, Latvia-focused Kremlin-aligned channels and Russia-based Kremlin-aligned chan-

nels. The sixth group – other channels – includes, for example, large Ukrainian and independent Russian-language news channels, for which Latvia is only one of many topics. They were included in order to see how narratives about Latvia enter wider circulation in the Russian-language information space, but their results are reported separately so that their large overall volume of news does not distort the picture of Latvia. The group names describe a channel's role in the monitored space and do not pass judgement on its owners.

Each post was stored with its text, time of publication, channel and the engagement metrics reported by the platform, such as views and likes, and was linked to the public comments posted under it. Monitoring comments is an essential part of this study: it is what makes it possible to determine whether narratives are spread by the channels themselves or by their audience, and thus to measure the “echo” in the report's title. Only publicly available content was monitored, without circumventing platform access restrictions. Closed groups, private channels and direct messages are not included in the study. The names and usernames of private individuals who commented are not given in the report.

The analysis is based on a narrative set developed by the authors from an analysis of Kremlin communication about Latvia. It contains seven narratives, such as “Russians are persecuted in Latvia” and “Latvia is run by others”, and the 25 specific claims that make them up (Table 5 in the Annex). A predefined set makes it possible to apply the same measure throughout the period and thus to compare July with election week. Each post and comment was automatically compared against this set. Texts were normalised beforehand so that the same wording would be recognised in both Latin and Cyrillic script.

Each instance in which a narrative is identified in a post or comment is called a mention in this report. If one text contains two narratives, they count as two mentions. A mention shows that the content of a text is consistent with the Kremlin's position, but it says nothing about who wrote the text or why. Some election-related content, such as identical, repeatedly posted calls to boycott the elections or to vote for

parties that would restore relations with Russia, has no separate category in the narrative set. The researchers identified such cases while analysing the data; the report describes them qualitatively rather than measuring them.

The baseline for measuring the spread of narratives is the average number of mentions per week in the four full weeks of July (6 July – 2 August) – about 1,800 mentions. This baseline is compared with the last four weeks before the elections (7 September – 4 October) and, separately, with election week. It should be borne in mind that July, too, is not a “normal” period independent of the elections, so the comparison shows how activity changed as the vote approached and does not allow broader conclusions about how the monitored information space changed compared with non-election periods. Mentions in posts and in comments are always counted separately, because the ratio between them shows whether narratives are spread by the channels or by the audience. View counts reported by the platforms are used only as an approximate indicator: they are a global figure, not the audience reached in Latvia, and each platform counts views differently.

The fact that several accounts spread the same narrative does not in itself mean that they are acting in concert. Account behaviour was therefore assessed separately from content, on the basis of six signs – for example, whether the same text was posted from several identities and whether an account posts long comments at intervals too short for a human to write

them. In this report, accounts with at least one such sign are called accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity. This is a behavioural observation, not proof that the account is a bot. At channel level, the analysis looked at which channels repeatedly repost each other's content.

The identification of coordinated activity was assessed on a five-level scale of evidence (see Annex). It begins with thematic overlap, where different sources spread the same narrative, and ends with evidence that the same organisers, shared infrastructure or funding stand behind the activity. The higher the level, the stronger the grounds for speaking of coordinated activity. The coordinated activity identified during the monitoring period reaches no higher on this scale than evidence that the same accounts or channels behave identically. The report therefore speaks of Kremlin-aligned channels and signs of FIMI, not of proven Russian operations.

The channel set was selected purposively and is not a representative sample in the statistical sense. Nevertheless, it covers both Kremlin-aligned channels and important accounts of Latvian media and politicians where much of the public debate takes place, so the conclusions give a good picture of what is happening in Latvia's information space. The monitoring shows what content was spread and how accounts behaved, but it does not establish who runs or funds the accounts, nor does it measure whether the narratives influenced voters' choices. A full description of the methodology can be found in the Annex.

CHAPTER 3

Familiar Narratives, New Targets: How the Spread of Narratives Changed

In the three months before the elections to the 15th Saeima, more than 32,000 mentions of narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position were recorded in Latvia's information space. Kremlin-aligned channels have long spread a small number of persistent narratives about Latvia, which make up the Kremlin's view of the country, its political environment and its foreign policy conduct. No new, previously unheard narratives were identified in the pre-election period, but what changed was which of those already in use came to the fore: narratives about history remained in the background, while the fastest growth was in those prescribing what Latvia should do or cast doubt on the elections themselves. The absence of new narratives may point either to the existing, long-maintained narratives fulfilling their function, or to broader strategic changes in the levers of influence over the information environment. As election day approached, narratives calling for a specific political choice were also active – to vote for the parties that had a higher share of positive mentions in the monitored space, especially Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*) and Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*).

Russia's communication about Latvia is not a series of separate, unrelated falsehoods. It is a set of narratives in which each narrative offers its own answer to the question of what Latvia is and where it is heading. In this study, drawing on existing findings about Kremlin communication regarding Latvia, these narratives are grouped into the seven dominant narratives. From here on the report uses their short names, and the full list of monitored claims is given in the Annex.

Seven Kremlin narratives about Latvia

“Latvia cannot survive without Russia” is a narrative about the country's economic failure. It claims that, having severed its ties with Russia, Latvia is losing transit revenue, production capacity and population, prices are rising and young people are leaving, while integration into the West has still not brought the promised prosperity. This narrative also includes claims about society's moral degradation and about Ukrainian refugees as a burden on Latvian society and the economy. Every domestic political challenge observed in the pre-election period – the rescue of air-Baltic, rising fuel prices, the question of restricting Russian grain transit – was presented as yet more proof of these claims. For most of the period it was the most frequent of the seven narratives, and its spread was driven almost entirely by users – about nine out of ten of its mentions were in comments.

“Latvia is run by others” is the claim that Latvia has no real sovereignty: decisions are taken for it by Washington, NATO or Brussels, the country's own politicians merely carry out decisions taken elsewhere, the presence of NATO troops is an occupation, and elections are therefore meaningless. This narrative includes the claim that the elections are illegitimate – rigged, externally controlled or decided in advance. In the pre-election period it appeared, for example, in a comment posted repeatedly, word for word, which called the Saeima a corporation that pays taxes in Northern Ireland and its members foreign agents. The narrative spread three times as often in the pre-election period, and in election week it became the most frequently mentioned narrative.

“Russians are persecuted in Latvia” is one of the Kremlin's traditional narratives: the state oppresses Russian speakers, restricts the use of the Russian language in education and public life, suppresses those who defend their rights and unjustifiably expels Russian citizens who have lived in Latvia all their lives. Unlike the narratives about the economy, which spread mainly in comment sections, this narrative is much more often spread by content creators themselves as well – almost a third of all its mentions are in the content they publish. In the pre-election period it remained at a high but stable level, and two days before the vote it was reactivated by amendments to

the law adopted by the Saeima that restrict public service media content in Russian from 2027.

“Latvia itself is provoking war” combines two claims that complement each other: through its support for Ukraine and the NATO presence, Latvia makes itself a legitimate target for Russia, while it invents or exaggerates the Russian threat in order to justify arming itself. The narrative spread twice as often, and grew most after the President’s remarks on the possible deployment of nuclear weapons in Latvia shortly before election day, on 30 September. In the comment sections, nuclear weapons immediately became the reason why Latvia would become a target of Russian aggression, while the channels of certain political parties carried calls to vote “for peace”.

“Latvia honours Nazis” and **“Latvia is rewriting history”** are narratives grounded in history. The first claims that the state glorifies Latvian Legion veterans and protects Nazi criminals, and that its institutions are neo-Nazi. The second claims that Latvia falsifies history, demolishes Soviet monuments and denies the USSR’s “liberation” of the country. Both usually become active around commemoration dates and fade within a few days, and both serve as a historical justification for the grievance that Russians are persecuted – in post-election comments this sounded like “the same Nazis are in power, they will fight against the Russian language”. During the monitoring, the spread of the first narrative grew slowly, while the second was the only one whose spread declined. A few days before the elections, however, five Telegram channels turned the narrative about Nazism directly against participants in the elections – the Minister of the Interior and the National Alliance (*Nacionālā apvienība*) party.

“Time to restore relations with Russia” is the only one of the seven narratives that does not describe Latvia but calls on the country to take specific action: economic, political and cultural ties with Russia and Belarus must be restored, because ordinary people would gain from it. Before elections, a narrative of this kind most easily turns into a call to vote – identical, repeatedly posted comments urged people to vote for parties “that are ready to restore relations with Russia, because otherwise Latvia will go bankrupt”. The narrative spread three times as often over the monitored period, and as the elections approached it was widely voiced in the video addresses of party candidates. In election week it reached the largest audience of all seven narratives – 2.1 million views (the next, “Russians are persecuted in Latvia”, had 1.85

million). Over the whole monitoring period it also has the highest number of views per mention (about 5,400).

Changes in the spread of narratives

Almost all narratives spread more in the pre-election period, but not to the same extent (Figure 1). “Latvia is run by others” and the call to restore relations with Russia grew fastest, roughly threefold. “Latvia itself is provoking war” doubled, while “Latvia cannot survive without Russia” almost doubled and stayed at a consistently high level. Meanwhile, “Russians are persecuted in Latvia” barely changed, and “Latvia is rewriting history” even declined.

Each narrative is made up of specific claims, and at this finer level of detail the changes observed are even more pronounced (Figure 2). Comparing the average number of mentions per week in July with September and the first four days of October, four of the 25 claims grew fastest: that Latvia’s elections are illegitimate (almost eightfold), that economic ties with Russia and Belarus must be restored (almost fivefold), that political relations must be restored (almost fourfold) and that normalisation would benefit ordinary people (more than threefold). Three of them concern what Latvia’s relations with Russia and Belarus should be, while the fourth casts doubt on the elections themselves. In the pre-election period, claims of this kind most easily turn into a political choice – to vote for those who promise to restore relations, or not to vote at all. By contrast, four claims about history and language – that Latvia falsifies history, denies the USSR’s “liberation”, demolishes Soviet monuments and bans the Russian language – fell between July and September even in absolute terms, while the total volume of all claims grew by 77%. Narratives about the vote and Latvia’s political course thus crowded out the history-based narratives that had previously dominated Kremlin communication about Latvia. The claim that Latvia bans the Russian language was reactivated only on 1 October, after the Saeima adopted amendments restricting Russian-language content on public service media from 2027.

No new narratives appeared in the pre-election period: all the claims about Latvia that were observed fit into the existing narrative set. Nor is the claim that the elections are illegitimate formally new – it is part of a long-familiar narrative, a part that was marginal in July and grew faster than all the others before the

elections. Only the combinations are new: old claims acquired references to the elections – to parties, lists, dates or candidates.

In the information environment, narratives do not spread only individually but often appear in pairs or other combinations. The most common pair is “Latvia cannot survive without Russia” together with “Latvia is run by others”, recorded about 1,500 times, mainly in social media comment sections. Here the alleged dependence on the West becomes the cause of collapse. The second pair, “Latvia honours Nazis” together with “Russians are persecuted in Latvia”, offers a historical justification for a present-day grievance, and almost half of these mentions are in content creators’ posts. In the context of the elections, however, the most important pair is a rarer one: the narrative of the country’s collapse appeared 460 times together with the call to restore relations with Russia – a complaint turned into a policy proposal, implying that restoring relations with Russia would save the country from ruin.

Not all narratives spread in the same way. “Latvia cannot survive without Russia” appears ten times more often in comments than in content creators’

posts, “Latvia is run by others” eight times more often, but “Russians are persecuted in Latvia” only about twice as often. The narratives about economic failure and the lack of sovereignty have become part of everyday expressions of discontent, whereas the spread of the narratives about the persecution of Russian speakers and about Nazism still depends far more on content creators.

Overall, the narratives did not all follow the same trajectory in the pre-election period. The narratives about the country’s economic failure, its lack of sovereignty and Latvia itself provoking war grew gradually, in step with public attention to politics, and attached themselves to the domestic political events that were on the agenda at the time. The history-based narratives about honouring Nazism and rewriting history were activated mainly around commemoration dates, so their spread is largely predictable. By contrast, the call to restore relations with Russia, which grew from the end of July, and the claim that the elections are illegitimate, which rose sharply in the second half of September, were directly linked to the elections. They show most clearly how long-maintained narratives were adapted to election day in the pre-election period.

FIGURE 1 Mentions of each narrative per week, 1 July – 4 October.



Dashed line – the narrative’s average weekly volume in the full weeks of July. Percentages – the average of the last four weeks compared with this level.

FIGURE 2

Average number of mentions per week of each specific claim, by month, over the whole monitoring period, 1 July – 4 October.

	July	August	September	1–4 October	Total		
Elections are illegitimate	29	56	142	808	1,447		
Restore economic and trade ties	20	47	98	117	781		
Restore political relations	14	26	46	108	434		
Normalisation would benefit ordinary people	35	72	111	150	1,038		
Latvia is a small, insignificant country	28	42	68	166	694		
Moral degradation (LGBTQ)	28	34	64	164	645		
No real sovereignty (US, NATO, EU)	190	299	441	817	4,520		
The Russian threat is invented	68	113	156	203	1,588		
NATO troops are an occupation	22	32	54	37	492		
Restore social and cultural ties	12	38	24	44	346		
Latvia cannot exist on its own	258	359	538	738	5,462		
Economic decline due to sanctions	43	55	88	96	865		
Ukrainian refugees are a burden	24	38	45	52	498		
Latvia provokes Russia and becomes a target	164	228	292	382	3,205		
Failed development due to Western integration	44	64	77	80	851		
Depopulation and brain drain	117	167	202	163	2,215		
State institutions are neo-Nazi	111	157	170	189	2,020		
Glorifies Waffen-SS legionnaires	13	18	19	21	228		
Expels Russian citizens and non-citizens	93	111	145	47	1,554		
Persecutes Russian speakers	243	275	333	332	3,914		
Protects Nazi criminals	15	30	22	16	304		
Bans the Russian language	153	157	140	262	2,125		
Denies the USSR’s “liberation”	17	20	17	19	245		
Demolishes Soviet monuments	78	97	68	66	1,105		
Falsifies history	30	28	25	0	364		
Change vs July:		0	×0.5	×1	×2	×3.5	≥ ×5

Colour shows the change compared with July: blue – increase, red – decrease. The last column gives the total number of mentions over the period.

CHAPTER 4

From airBaltic to Nuclear Weapons: How Narratives Were Tied to Latvia's Political Agenda

For most of the pre-election period, the narratives were attached to specific events and challenges in Latvian domestic politics – Russian grain transit, rising fuel prices, *airBaltic*'s financial difficulties. Exploiting a country's problems and "pressure points" is a tactic routinely used by the Kremlin and Kremlin-aligned channels, and during the monitoring period it was visible both in content creators' posts and in user comments. As the vote approached, the elections themselves became the main anchor – in election week the volume of narratives reached its highest level of the entire monitoring period.

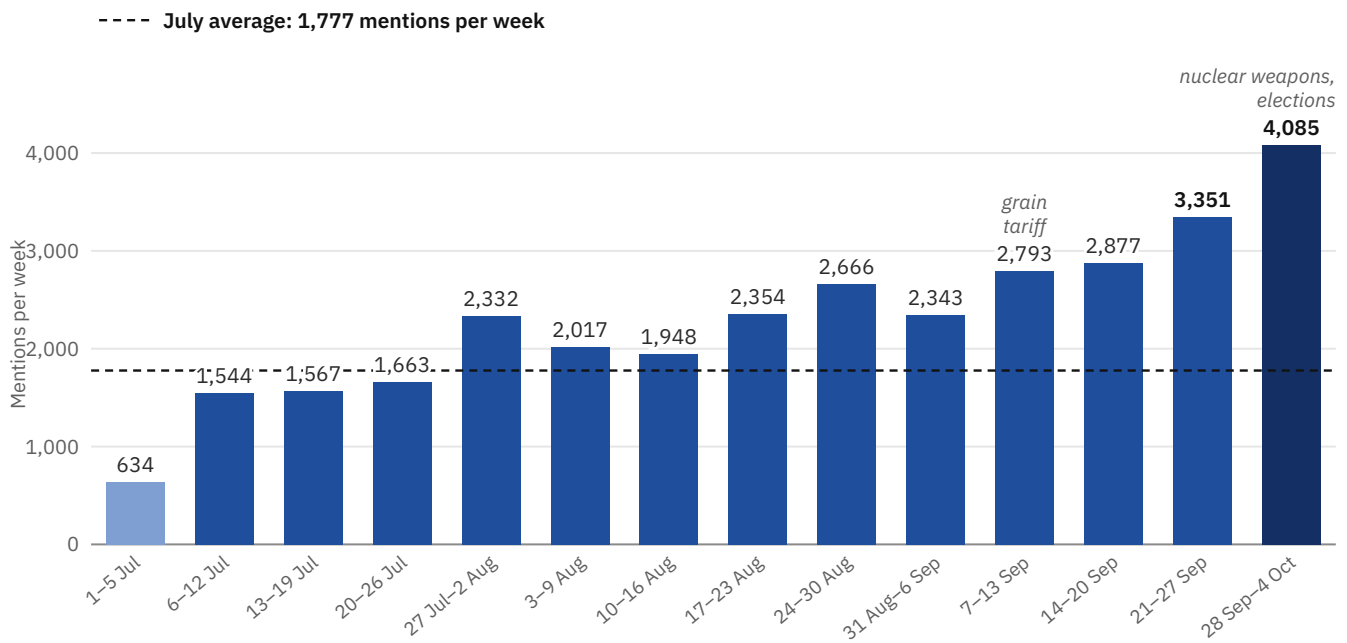
Overall, the volume of narratives grew during the pre-election period, but not evenly (Figure 3). From about

1,800 mentions a week in July, it reached 4,085 in election week – more than double. From the end of

July to September, the volume grew gradually and with fluctuations that followed specific events, such as the debate on the Paternieki border crossing point and the storm at the end of August. In September the growth became sustained and, notably, about half of

the total increase came in the last two weeks of the monitoring. This growth came mainly from user comments on the pages of Latvian media and politicians, while the activity of Kremlin-aligned channels remained at a similar level throughout the period.

FIGURE 3 Weekly mentions, all seven narratives combined.



Dashed line – average of the full July weeks (1,777). The first bar covers five days (1–5 July).

The most important events the narratives attached themselves to during the pre-election period were the proposal to suspend road traffic with Belarus at the Paternieki border crossing point, the protracted dispute over state funding for airBaltic, the leak of personal data at the Road Traffic Safety Directorate (CSDD), the storm at the end of August that left tens of thousands of residents without electricity, the proposal to impose a 300% tariff on the transit of Russian and Belarusian grain, high fuel prices, and the extension of EU sanctions with exemptions for two Russian oligarchs. In the comment sections, these events were used as proof that Latvia cannot survive without Russia and that the country is in fact run by others – from outside. Importantly, for the most part no falsified facts or invented events were used: real failures and problems served as the raw material, for example to reinforce the narrative of the country's economic failure. This tactic has an important consequence: if a narrative rests on real events, the usual methods of debunking disinformation are of little use, because the

fact can be checked, but the conclusion drawn from it cannot.

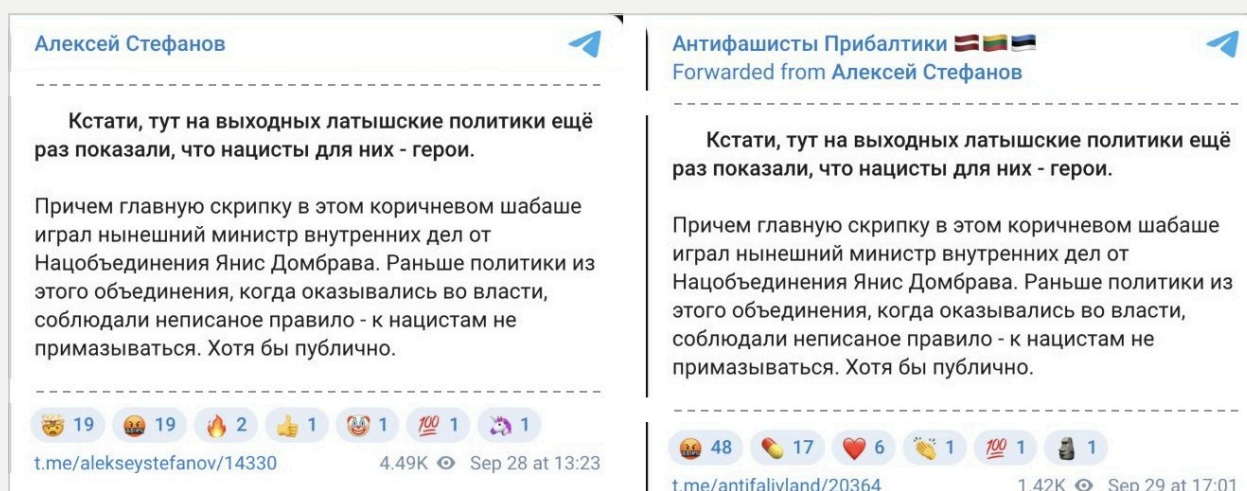
A good example of how a specific government decision becomes a pretext for spreading narratives is the grain tariff. On 8 September it became known that the government planned to impose a 300% tariff on the transit of Russian and Belarusian grain, and within two days 19 monitored channels were already discussing it, from Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels to the pages of Latvian politicians and parties and the comment section of Press.lv. In posts, the tariff was presented as economic self-destruction, which fitted the narrative of the country's economic failure. Commenters, for their part, saw in it proof of Latvia's lack of sovereignty – decisions are taken for it by Brussels. The tone of the discussion was markedly negative (85% of the comments analysed), and within two days the number of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity taking part in it rose from 36 to 88.

In the second half of September, the narratives were increasingly linked to the elections, as two cases illustrate well. The first concerns a commemoration event in Sigulda municipality, where in 1944 the 19th Division of the Latvian Legion held a defensive line. On 28 and 29 September, five Telegram channels, starting with the channel of Aleksejs Stefanovs, reposted an almost identical text about it, claiming that politicians

of the National Alliance (*Nacionālā apvienība*), including the Minister of the Interior, Jānis Dombrava, had there “once again shown that Nazis are heroes to them”. This is the clearest case recorded during the monitoring period in which the narrative about honouring Nazis was turned against specific election participants – a serving minister and his party.

EXAMPLE 1

The same text about the commemoration event in Sigulda municipality. Left – the original post on the Telegram channel of Aleksejs Stefanovs (Алексей Стефанов) on 28 September. Right – its repost on the channel “Baltic Antifascists” (Антифашисты Прибалтики) on 29 September. In total, the text was published by five Telegram channels. The dashed line marks an omitted part of the text.



TRANSLATION

“Incidentally, over the weekend Latvian politicians once again showed that Nazis are heroes to them. What is more, the current Minister of the Interior from the National Alliance, Jānis Dombrava, played first fiddle in this brown sabbath. Previously, politicians from this alliance, once in power, observed an unwritten rule – do not cosy up to the Nazis. At least not in public.”

The second case shows how state security issues, too, were linked to the elections. From 28 to 30 September, the description of a livestream on the accounts of the party Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*) posed a rhetorical question: is it really just a coincidence that tunnels are suddenly being found in Latvia’s border area right before the elections? In this way it was implied that the authorities use such discoveries for their own ends. Doubts about the fairness of the elections were thus sown even before the vote.

In election week, the discussion was shaped by three topics. The first was the view on nuclear weapons expressed by President Edgars Rinkēvičs on 30 September. Answering a journalist’s question, the President

said that nuclear weapons could be deployed in Latvia if NATO took such a decision collectively, while stressing that no such talks were currently taking place. Within a short time these remarks were discussed in more than 30 monitored channels, and as early as the following day the narrative that Latvia itself is provoking war was recorded 171 times. Negative attitudes dominated the comments (88%). The view most often expressed in them was that deploying nuclear weapons would make Latvia a target for Russia and that the matter should therefore be decided by referendum. The Telegram channel of the party Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*) compared the President’s remarks to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and urged

voters to vote “for peace” on 3 October. Notably, it was in this discussion that the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity rose within two days from 63 to 141 – the biggest increase in such activity in election week, three days before the vote.

The second topic, which drew a wide response, was the amendments adopted by the Saeima on 1 October, under which, from 2027, public service media will be able to produce content in Russian only in exceptional cases. On the same day, the claim that Latvia bans the Russian language appeared 63 times in 28 monitored channels, most often in the comment section of LSM4 and on the Latvia First channel. This time the reaction was shaped mainly by Latvian politicians and their audiences. Former Saeima member Glorija Grevcova promised in a TikTok video that the new members of parliament would repeal the decision “first and foremost” and called on people to vote for the For Stability! (*Stabilitātei!*) list. Unlike in the discussion on nuclear weapons, the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity did not

increase here. The third topic was the electoral process itself – low turnout, the delay in counting the votes and the exit poll results. In the comment sections, these were immediately presented as proof that the outcome of the elections had been decided in advance, and on the day after the elections the claim that they were illegitimate was recorded more often than on any other day of the monitoring. This topic shows most clearly how the narratives were turned against the elections themselves (see Chapter 8).

The main events of the pre-election period and how they were reflected in the narratives are summarised in Table 1. It clearly shows the shift that emerged at the end of September: whereas in August and early September the narratives attached themselves mainly to questions of the economy and public administration, as the vote approached the elections themselves came to the centre of attention. The function of the narratives changed accordingly – from criticism of the state and the government to sowing doubt about the legitimacy of the political system and the elections.

TABLE 1 Main events of the pre-election period and how they were reflected in narratives, by two-week period, 1 July – 4 October 2026.

Period	Main events	How they were reflected in narratives
1–12 July average of 182 mentions a day	Submission of candidate lists closes (5 July).	The familiar narratives about the persecution of Russians and Russian speakers and about the country’s economic failure dominate. The claim that the elections are illegitimate is still marginal.
13–26 July average of 231 mentions a day	Debate on the use of Russian in education and society. The EU’s 21st sanctions package.	Language policy is presented as discrimination against Russian speakers, the sanctions as a punishment for Latvia’s residents. In the discussion about the Russian-speaking community, the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity rises from 43 to 76.
27 July – 9 August average of 311 mentions a day	Proposal to suspend road traffic with Belarus at the Paternieki border crossing point. Demands for the Minister of the Interior to resign.	Closing the border is presented as damaging the economy and transit, to the benefit of Lithuania and Poland. The topic is discussed by 66 channels. The call to restore relations with Russia and Belarus more than doubles.
10–23 August average of 307 mentions a day	Personal data leak at CSDD. Announcement of airBaltic’s financial stabilisation plan.	The CSDD data leak is presented as proof of the state’s inability to protect residents’ data, the airBaltic rescue as a waste of taxpayers’ money. In the discussion about CSDD, the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity rises from 107 to 154.
24 August – 6 September average of 358 mentions a day	A storm leaves tens of thousands of residents without electricity and communications for several days. Pickets in Riga over education in Russian.	Commenters present the aftermath of the storm as proof that the state cannot take care of its residents and accuse the government and Sadales tīkls, the electricity distribution operator, of being unprepared. Aid to Ukraine is contrasted with residents’ needs. Politicians’ channels and Kremlin-aligned channels present the pickets as a fight against the persecution of Russian speakers.

TABLE 1
(CONTINUED)**Main events of the pre-election period and how they were reflected in narratives, by two-week period, 1 July – 4 October 2026.**

Period	Main events	How they were reflected in narratives
7–20 September average of 405 mentions a day	Proposal to impose a 300% tariff on Russian and Belarusian grain transit (8–10 September). The price of petrol exceeds 2 euros per litre.	In posts the tariff is presented as economic self-destruction, in comments as proof that Brussels takes decisions for Latvia. Within two days the topic is discussed by 19 channels, and 85% of the comments analysed are negative. The number of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity that take part in the discussion rises from 36 to 88.
21 September – 4 October average of 531 mentions a day	The government looks for ways to lower fuel prices, including by scrapping biofuel blending requirements (22–24 September).	Commenters regard the promised reduction of 8–20 cents, against a price of around 2.1–2.2 euros per litre, as a token pre-election gesture and one more proof of the state's economic failure.
	EU sanctions are extended, with Alisher Usmanov and Mikhail Fridman removed from the list (22–23 September).	In comments, the exemptions are presented as proof that Latvia's view is not taken into account in the EU and that decisions are taken for it by Brussels.
	Early voting begins (28 September).	Comments urge people to vote only on election day, because envelopes cast in advance could supposedly be swapped or are not adequately guarded.
	Commemoration event in Sigulda municipality, at the site of battles fought by the Latvian Legion's 19th Division (28–29 September).	Five Telegram channels repost a text accusing the Minister of the Interior and the National Alliance of honouring Nazism.
	The President's remarks on nuclear weapons (30 September).	The next day, the narrative that Latvia itself is provoking war appears 171 times. In comments, nuclear weapons become the reason why Latvia will be Russia's target, and some parties' channels call on people to vote "for peace". The number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity in the discussion rises from 63 to 141.
	Saeima amendments on public service media content in Russian from 2027 (1 October).	The claim that Latvia bans the Russian language appears 63 times. Glorija Grevcova promises that the new Saeima will repeal the decision and calls on people to vote for the For Stability! list.
	Election day: low turnout, a lengthy vote count, exit poll results (3 October).	Commenters present the low turnout and the delay in counting as proof that the outcome was decided in advance. The claim that the elections are illegitimate appears 128 times.
	The day after the elections (4 October).	The claim that the elections are illegitimate appears 279 times – more often than on any other day of the monitoring. The first identical, repeatedly posted text disputing the result appears.

The average number of mentions per day is given under each period.

CHAPTER 5

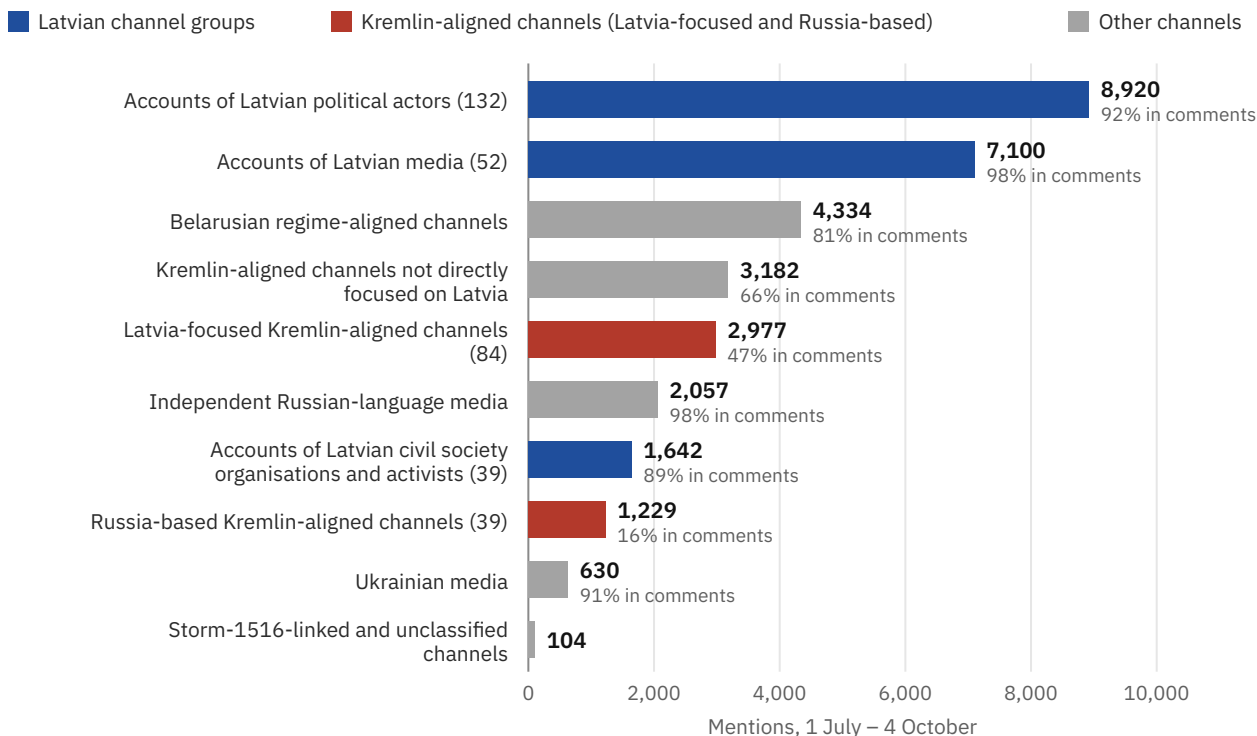
The Echo: Where and by Whom Narratives Spread in Latvia's Information Space

The assumption that narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position are spread mainly by Russia-linked media and accounts is only partly true. Four-fifths of the mentions of these narratives are in user comments under content creators' posts, most of all on the pages of Latvian politicians, parties and media. This indicates that the narratives the Kremlin has long spread about Latvia have become part of how at least some social media users judge their own country. Kremlin-aligned channels are thus a source of the narratives, but not their main distributors in Latvia's information space.

The previous chapters looked at which narratives spread during the pre-election period and which events they attached themselves to. Equally important is where they appear and who spreads them, because this determines how far they can be linked to the Kremlin and the channels aligned with it. Of the more than 32,000 mentions of the monitored narratives,

82% were in the comment sections of social media sites – in more than 22,000 comments in total, posted by more than 13,000 separate accounts. In content creators' posts, narratives were recorded in just under 4,000 cases. Most of these narratives are therefore spread by the audience itself.

FIGURE 4 Mentions by channel group and the share of them in comments, 1 July – 4 October.



Most mentions were on the accounts of Latvian political actors – the pages of parties, candidates and officials, where almost 9,000 mentions were recorded – and on the accounts of Latvian media, where there

were more than 7,000 (Figure 4). The two groups of Kremlin-aligned channels – Latvia-focused and Russia-based – together made up about 13% of the total volume, and their activity stayed at around 300

mentions a week throughout the period. The pre-election increase therefore came from the comment sections of Latvian politicians' and media pages.

Platforms perform different functions in the monitored set. Telegram is a publishing environment: only 17% of mentions there are in comments, because most channels have no comments, and it is on Telegram that reposting between channels takes place. YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and X are discussion environments, where between 88% (TikTok) and 96% (Facebook) of mentions are in comments. TikTok is the only platform on which Kremlin-aligned accounts regularly spread narratives in Latvian. These are small, newly created or recently activated accounts whose target audience is Latvian speakers. On X, mainly the accounts of Latvian politicians and journalists were monitored, so narratives appear there in replies to the politicians they are directed against, most of all on the accounts of Andris Kulbergs, Jānis Dombrava, Jurgis Liepnieks and Edgars Rinkēvičs. The most active commenter on the monitored X channels was *Grok*, the platform's built-in artificial intelligence assistant, which replied 2,209 times in political discussions on 33 of the 57 channels. It is not an information manipulation actor, but such an active participant in contentious election discussions is a new phenomenon whose impact has yet to be assessed.

Channel categories differ not only in volume but also in how narratives spread within them. On the accounts of Latvian political actors, 92% of mentions are in comments, mainly on TikTok, Facebook and YouTube. The call to restore relations with Russia makes up a larger share of this group's mentions (9%) than of any other group's, because candidates also voiced this call themselves in their pre-election videos. Political actors repost content mainly within their own accounts, for example between a party's YouTube, Facebook and TikTok accounts or between a candidate's account and the party's. Only the accounts of one candidate, Andrejs Pagors, regularly repost content to and from Kremlin-aligned channels. On the accounts of Latvian media, 98% of mentions are in comments, mostly on Facebook, and the media themselves practically never repost the narratives. Of the 374 cases during the monitoring period in which an almost identical text containing the monitored narratives appeared on several channels, media accounts were involved in only four. In media comment sections, the narrative that Latvia itself is provoking war appears

more often than in the other Latvian channel categories (21% of the group's mentions).

In the Kremlin-aligned channel groups the picture is the reverse. In Russia-based channels, 84% of mentions are in their published content, and in Latvia-focused channels 53%. In both groups, the narrative about the persecution of Russian speakers in Latvia accounts for about a third of mentions. These groups are also the main reposters: Latvia-focused channels took part in three-quarters of the 374 text clusters, and Russia-based channels in more than half.

In the remaining channel groups, mentions are again mainly in comments. The Belarusian regime-aligned group consists mainly of "Facets of Freedom" (*Грани свободы*), the most active channel in the monitoring, with about 9% of all mentions. As of 12 October 2026, the channel's YouTube account had been closed, so its content is no longer publicly available, but the monitoring data on it have been retained. In the comments of independent Russian-language media, in turn, the most frequent narrative is that Latvia itself is provoking war (28%).

The number of mentions and the audience reached are two different indicators. Narratives spread in comments are ubiquitous, but each comment reaches a small audience: over the whole period, the narrative that Latvia cannot survive without Russia had on average about 800 views per mention, whereas the call to restore relations with Russia, spread through candidates' pre-election videos, had about 5,400. In election week, this call reached 2.1 million views, almost three-quarters of which came from TikTok videos by Aleksejs Rošļikovs, in which the elections were presented as a choice between war and peace, and a vote for him as a vote for good neighbourly relations with Russia and Belarus. Comments thus create a constant presence in the information space, while content produced by channels creates a wide audience.

Commenters include accounts with very different levels of activity. Most of the more than 13,000 commenters recorded wrote a few comments, but there is also a small circle of very active commenters. The two most active Facebook accounts posted 1,404 and 991 comments respectively over the whole monitoring period, on 36 and 34 monitored channels. In addition, 443 commenter identities were observed on more than one platform. Yet most of these very active accounts show not a single sign of inauthentic activity. They are most likely real, active users who regularly

TABLE 2 The ten channels with the most narrative mentions, 1 July – 4 October.

Channel	Platform	Channel group	Mentions
“Facets of Freedom” (<i>Грани свободы</i>)	YouTube	Belarusian regime-aligned	2,903
“Latvia First” (<i>Латвия на первом месте</i>)	YouTube	Latvian political actors	1,553
SBTV (<i>СБТВ</i>)	YouTube	Belarusian regime-aligned	1,204
Latvijas Ziņas	Facebook	Latvian media	1,015
TV3 Ziņas	Facebook	Latvian media	897
Glorija Grevcova	TikTok, Facebook	Latvian political actors	809
LTV Ziņu dienests (LTV News Service)	YouTube, Facebook	Latvian media	694
LSM4	YouTube	Latvian media	600
Maksometr75 (<i>Максометр75</i>)	TikTok	Kremlin-aligned (not directly focused on Latvia)	583
Andrejs Pagors	several platforms	Latvian political actors	567

On Latvian media channels, almost all mentions are in user comments. Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels do not appear in this list because they have few or no comments.

**EXAMPLE 2**

A frame from a programme on the channel “Facets of Freedom” (*Грани свободы*). On the table – small Belarusian and Latvian flags. This Belarusian regime-aligned Russian-language YouTube channel was the most active in the monitoring. It accounted for about 9% of all mentions, and its comments had the largest concentration of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity. The YouTube channel was recently closed for violating the platform’s rules.

comment on many pages and make up a significant part of the narratives’ echo.

The echo of the narratives in Latvia’s information space therefore forms mainly in comment sections, which hold four-fifths of the mentions, chiefly under

the posts of Latvian political actors and media. Kremlin-aligned channels account for a smaller share of the mentions, but they are the main reposters of the narratives. Between them they form a network along which Latvian political content also moves during the pre-election period.

CHAPTER 6

Blocked but Not Silenced: The Network of Kremlin-Aligned Channels

Among the Kremlin-aligned channels there is a small but well-structured network. Analysis of reposting shows that its core consists of about a dozen Telegram channels that regularly repost each other's texts. At the centre of the network is the Russian state outlet Sputnik Latvia, and throughout the period texts moved along the same routes, which points to organised distribution. During the pre-election period, Latvian political content also moved along these routes. Yet in the elections the network did not back any one list: its channels called for votes for different candidates and even turned against one of them.

After Latvia restricted the activities of Kremlin-controlled media in 2022, their content largely moved to Telegram and YouTube. In the monitored set, this appears as a small network. It includes Russia-based channels such as Sputnik Latvia (*Sputnik Латвия*, the channel of the Russian state media group Sputnik dedicated to Latvia), BALTNEWS and "Baltic Antifascists" (*Антифашисты Прибалтики*), as well as channels focused on Latvia's or the wider Baltic information space – "Sprats in Exile" (*Шпроты в изгнании*), "Shadows of the Baltics" (*Тени Прибалтики*), "The Latvian Tussock" (*Латвийская кочка*), Romans Samuļš (*Роман Самульс*) and "Baltic Bridge" (*Балтийский мост*). In terms of user engagement they are not the largest, because they have few comments, but much of the content published on them is subsequently reposted on other channels. The network is dominated by the narrative about the persecution of Russian speakers in Latvia, while in the Russia-based channels the narrative about honouring Nazism also appears frequently.

Reposting can be measured by following almost identical texts that first appear on one channel and later on another. From mid-July to 4 October, the platform recorded 374 such text clusters containing the monitored narratives – at least 23 every week. The routes along which the texts moved were also stable. The largest flow connects the Telegram channel "Sprats in Exile" with the same owner's discussion group, but internal reposting by a single content creator is not evidence of coordination. The routes between channels with different owners matter more. At their centre is Sputnik Latvia: texts regularly travel from it to "Sprats in Exile", while a smaller but constant flow runs in the opposite direction – from

"Sprats in Exile", via its discussion group, back to Sputnik Latvia (Figure 5). Latvia-focused channels thus not only pick up material from Russian state media but also add to it. A second, parallel chain is formed by the channel "Shadows of the Baltics", whose texts regularly end up on the channel of Romans Samuļš and on "Baltic Bridge". The fact that texts flowed along the same routes throughout the period points to organised distribution rather than to each channel's independent choice.

During the pre-election period, Latvian political content also moved along the same routes. The network worked fast: on 30 September, a clip from a Russian state television programme about "Russian saboteurs in the Baltics" was reposted on four Kremlin-aligned channels within 11 minutes. On the same day, the network picked up posts by Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*) candidate Andrejs Pagors about the graves of Red Army soldiers in Daugmale, and within three hours they had reached "Sprats in Exile" and Sputnik Latvia. This was not a one-off case – Pagors's posts had been travelling regularly through this network since the end of August.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the network simply supported the pro-Russian lists. In election week, its widest reposting chain, which covered ten channels over three days, spread a post about a complaint allegedly addressed to the State Security Service (VDD), referring to an interview video in which the document was supposedly visible. The post claimed that in 2023 the leader of the party For Stability! (*Stabilitātei!*), Aleksejs Rošļikovs, had complained to the service about the pro-Russian blogger Romans Samuļš. The politician, who presents himself as a defender of Latvia's Russian speakers, was thus por-

FIGURE 5 The twelve largest recurring reposting routes between monitored channels, full platform archive.



Five of these routes connect channels belonging to the same publisher.

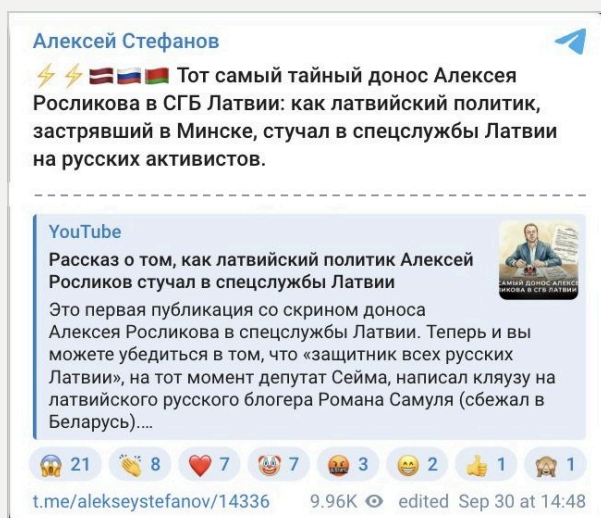
trayed as an informant for the security service. Meanwhile, one of the network's channels, "Prison Herald" (*Тюремный Вестник*), called for votes for Sovereign Power candidates, while Roslikovs was endorsed in his own video by the Ukrainian pro-Russian politician Yevhen Murayev. Content creators based outside Latvia therefore do not provide informational support to specific parties or their representatives, and one of the leaders of the pro-Russian lists even became a target of attack by the network. This suggests opportunistic rather than centrally directed involvement. The pro-Kremlin environment in Latvia's information space is not homogeneous – there is also competition within it.

Belarusian regime-aligned channels are represented in the monitored set, but their role in the reposting network is small. This does not mean that their overall role is small. The largest of them, "Facets of Freedom" (*Грани свободы*), is the most active channel in the monitoring. It is run by pro-Kremlin activists who fled Latvia (for example, Romans Samuļs and Andrejs Mamikins), and their programmes regularly feature narratives directed against Latvia and the Baltic states. In rare cases the channel also publishes content in Latvian, and it holds up Belarus as a model, with the Baltic states as the contrast.

Ukrainian content channels take practically no part in this network, but their comment sections do become a

target. UNIAN (*УНІАН*) is one of the largest Ukrainian news channels on YouTube (4.9 million subscribers), and its content is also consumed by a certain share of users in Latvia. Its content is rarely related to Latvia: of more than 260,000 comments, only 175 contained the monitored narratives. Yet this is the channel on which the largest number of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity were active. Narratives about Latvia consistent with the Kremlin's position are thus also being carried into Ukraine's information space.

The data give no direct answer to whether this network is part of coordinated activity by the Russian state. The monitoring data show that at the centre of the network is the Russian state outlet Sputnik, whose reposting routes operated without interruption throughout the period. This is consistent with the signs of organised distribution. The channel set also deliberately included, for example, 18 channels that public reports have previously linked to Storm-1516, an operation attributed to Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU (Aleksejeva, 2026). During the pre-election period, however, these channels paid almost no attention to Latvia – only 58 mentions were recorded in them, and they did not take part in the reposting network. Official Russian state channels, such as the accounts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of embassies, also turned their attention to Latvia relatively rarely during the elections. Russia-linked



EXAMPLE 3

A Telegram post by Aleksejs Stefanovs (*Алексей Стефанов*) on 30 September. Within three days, nine more channels reposted it, and it was the network's widest reposting chain in election week. The post itself does not contain the document but refers to an interview video in which Rosļikovs's complaint is supposedly visible. View count as of 12 October 2026.

POST TEXT

"That same secret report by Aleksejs Rosļikovs to Latvia's VDD: how the Latvian politician stuck in Minsk reported Russian activists to Latvia's special services."

YOUTUBE VIDEO TITLE

"How Latvian politician Aleksejs Rosļikovs reported to Latvia's special services"

YOUTUBE VIDEO DESCRIPTION

"This is the first publication with a screenshot showing Aleksejs Rosļikovs's report to Latvia's special services. Now you too can see for yourself that the 'defender of all of Latvia's Russians', at the time a member of the Saeima, wrote a complaint about the Latvian Russian blogger Romans Samuļs (who fled to Belarus)..."

activity in the pre-election period thus took place mainly in the regional Telegram network. The network regularly feeds narratives into Latvia's informa-

tion space, while their circulation is sustained mostly by little-known accounts and commenters, although not all of them are genuine users.

CHAPTER 7

Copy, Paste, Repeat: Inauthentic Activity in Latvia's Information Space

One of the central questions of the monitoring was how widespread inauthentic activity was in Latvia's information space before the elections to the Saeima and what its features were. The second was to what extent this activity points to coordinated foreign interference attempts and whether there are signs that would allow it to be attributed to Russia. On the first question, the data give a fairly clear answer: during the election period, inauthentic activity made up a small share of overall narrative circulation, and no mass automated activity was recorded. Accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity, for example, posted fewer than one in ten of the comments containing the monitored narratives. Yet this activity was not random. It was concentrated in specific channels, and its clearest manifestations were a group of accounts commenting in a coordinated way and identical texts posted from several identities. As the elections approached, this activity turned increasingly to the vote itself. The answer to the second question is more cautious. The data showed no direct link between the inauthentic activity and the network of Kremlin-aligned channels, so the monitoring data alone do not allow this activity to be attributed to Russia with sufficient confidence.

Inauthentic behaviour is identified not by what an account writes, but by how it behaves on social media. The monitoring platform records 13 types of anomaly, and eight of them were found in Latvia's information space during the election period. This report uses six account signs to assess account behaviour:

- 1 the same text is posted from several identities;
- 2 the account posts lengthy comments at intervals too short for a person to write them;
- 3 the account repeats the same text word for word;
- 4 the same accounts repeatedly appear together under the same posts;
- 5 seemingly unrelated accounts have a similar writing style;
- 6 the account systematically takes the first comment slot.

An account in which at least one of these signs has been recorded is referred to in this report as an account showing signs of inauthentic activity. This, however, is a behavioural observation, not proof that the account is a bot or that its activity is deliberately coordinated. To assess whether activity was coordinated, account behaviour was analysed over a longer period and in a broader context, including how the accounts interact with one another.

Assessed in this way, the role of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity in spreading narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position was comparatively small. During the monitoring period, 482 such accounts posted 2,110 comments containing the monitored narratives, which is 9.4% of all such comments, and received 7.3% of the likes those comments attracted. In other words, more than 90% of these comments were posted by accounts in which no sign of inauthentic activity was found – most likely real users expressing their genuine views.

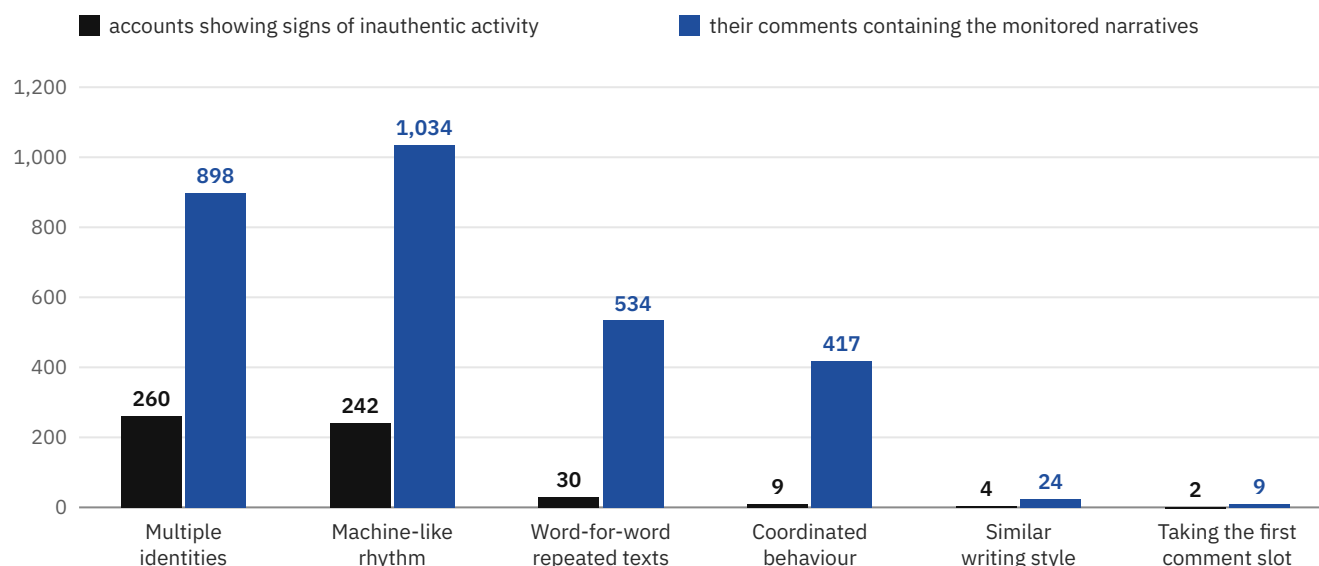
Two distinct groups can be distinguished among these accounts (Figure 6). Signs of multiple identities and a machine-like posting rhythm were found in many accounts, but each of them posted only a few comments. Word-for-word repeated texts and coordinated behaviour, by contrast, are characteristic of a small number of accounts that posted a disproportionately large number of comments. It is this small group that makes up the most substantial part of the inauthentic activity, and the analysis that follows focuses on it.

The activity of these accounts was not evenly spread. They were active on 192 monitored channels, but on many of them their presence was episodic – many accounts, each with a few comments. This was also the case on the pages of Latvian politicians: for example, on the TikTok account of former Saeima member

Glorija Grevcova, 32 such accounts posted 49 comments, an average of one and a half comments per account. The opposite picture can be seen on the channel “Facets of Freedom” (*Грани свободы*), where 27 such accounts posted 447 comments, an average of 16

comments per account. This is about a fifth of all comments containing the monitored narratives that were posted by accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity. Such concentration points to systematic activity on a specific channel rather than to a random presence.

FIGURE 6 Accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity and their comments containing the monitored narratives, by behavioural sign, 1 July – 4 October.



One account may match several signs.

Latvia is also a topic in the wider Russian-language information space. On the Ukrainian news channel UNIAN (*УНІАН*), where the largest number of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity (37) were active, Latvia appeared in comments mainly in connection with the debate on the possible deployment of nuclear weapons in Latvia and the departure of Russian speakers for Russia. Some of these comments were also directed against Ukraine itself. This shows that narratives about Latvia are not confined to Latvia's information space but circulate together with narratives about Ukraine and the West.

A group of accounts commenting in a coordinated way

The clearest example of systematic activity is a group of nine YouTube accounts that regularly posted on the channel “Facets of Freedom”. On 32 occasions these accounts commented on the same video within a short period of time – on 14 different videos in total. The group's comments are long and read like analysis, and they carry the monitored narratives against Latvia,

most often that Latvia cannot exist without Russia, that Russian speakers are persecuted there and that it is not a sovereign state. The nine accounts together posted 417 such comments, an average of 46 each. For comparison, the average account showing signs of inauthentic activity posted about four. The group's activity rose before political events and subsided after them: in the week before the elections it posted 45 comments, in election week only 13. The comments of two accounts in the group were classified as possible violations of platform rules more often than those of any other author. Such a group creates the impression that the channel's content is supported by its own audience. This is cheaper and harder to spot than spreading content across many platforms.

Identical, repeatedly posted texts

The clearest sign of inauthenticity in this dataset is texts posted from more than one identity, because they show both features of coordinated inauthentic behaviour – coordinated distribution and deception about who the author of the text is. Four such texts

were recorded during the period, one of which is an apparent donation appeal (Table 3). It is also the most frequently posted text: an appeal to help a seriously ill child who is supposedly being refused help in Latvia because of their ethnicity. In various versions, this message was posted about 153 times in the comment sections of media channels and of the channels of Saeima election candidates, from one main account and two additional identities whose names contain the child's name. In mid-September, a personal bank account number was added to the text. The monitoring cannot verify whether the appeal is genuine, but it is not a simple donation request: the text is built on the narrative about the persecution of Russian speakers in Latvia and creates the impression that the state is deliberately denying care to a seriously ill child be-

cause the child belongs to the Russian-speaking community. The distribution pattern is also anomalous, so such a text can be reported to the platform as monetised deceptive content.

Apart from the case above, the identical, repeatedly posted texts in social media comment sections generally spread narratives that urged people not to take part in the elections and to doubt the legitimacy of their outcome, and to support parties that promise to restore relations with Russia. Judging by the effect such narratives could achieve, it can be concluded that they were aimed at delegitimising the electoral process and eroding civic participation, as well as at advancing policies favourable to the Kremlin and supporting certain political forces.

TABLE 3 Identical, repeatedly posted comments, 1 July – 4 October 2026.

Text	Times posted	Identities	Distribution features
<i>Texts posted from several identities</i>			
An apparent donation appeal for a seriously ill child who is supposedly being refused help in Latvia because of their ethnicity	153	3	The most frequently posted text. Posted seven weeks in a row, mainly on large Facebook news pages. In mid-September, a personal bank account number was added to the text.
A call to boycott the elections (“Boycott the SiaLV colonial system’s administration of kangars and the elections!”) [kangars – the archetypal traitor of the Latvian national epic; “SiaLV” casts Latvia as a limited company]	15	2	The first election-related text posted from more than one account. Spread on TikTok, with 12 of the 15 postings on 3 and 4 October.
An anti-Ukrainian text about “the other side of Russophobia”	2	2	Posted on YouTube from two almost identical usernames.
A claim that modern democracy is merely an illusion of free choice	16	6	Posted under a single visible name, but linked at profile level to six different accounts.
<i>Texts mass-posted from a single identity</i>			
A call to vote for parties that are ready to restore relations with Russia, “because otherwise Latvia will go bankrupt”	14	1	Posted in Latvian over three days.
A claim that the Saeima is a corporation that pays taxes in Northern Ireland and that its members are foreign agents, citing Section 177 (fraud) of the Criminal Law	14	1	Posted overnight on 2–3 October on 11 channels within 17 minutes.
A post-election claim of possible election rigging and repeat voting	10	1	Appeared on 4 October, the day after the elections.

Identities are counted by visible name unless otherwise indicated, so their number is a conservative minimum.

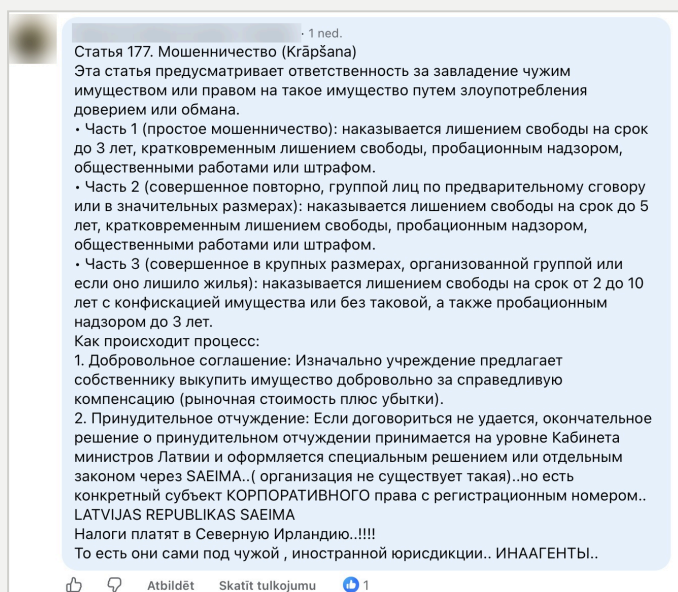
Inauthentic activity changed as the elections approached. At the end of July and in August, accounts

showing signs of inauthentic activity became active in discussions about the Paternieki border crossing

point and the data leak at the Road Traffic Safety Directorate (CSDD), and in early September around the grain transit tariff. In election week, the number of their comments was a quarter higher than the week before and was concentrated in discussions about the President's remarks and the vote count. The apparent donation appeal was posted seven weeks in a row, on a wider range of pages each week, whereas several accounts began posting election-related texts simultaneously only in the final weeks. Under the main news

items on the exit poll results, these accounts posted only about 6% of the comments.

The placement of these texts is consistent: most of them were posted on a few large Facebook news pages – Latvijas Ziņas, Press.lv, TV3 Ziņas, rus.LSM and rus.delfi.lv. In election week, the activity of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity moved from niche YouTube channels to these very pages, because that is where the vote and its result were being discussed. Inauthentic activity followed the audience, not the other way round.



EXAMPLE 4

A comment that a single account posted word for word 14 times on 11 Facebook pages of politicians and media within 17 minutes overnight on 2–3 October. The commenter's name and image have been obscured.

COMMENT CONTENT

Most of the comment is a retelling, in Russian, of Section 177 (fraud) of the Criminal Law and of the procedure for expropriating property. The key part is the ending: "...with SAEIMA (no such organisation exists), but there is a specific entity under corporate law with a registration number – LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA. It pays its taxes in Northern Ireland!!!! So they themselves are under an alien, foreign jurisdiction... FOREIGN AGENTS..."

Evidence of coordinated behaviour is assessed in this report on a five-level scale (see Annex). The monitoring data confirm the first four levels, including that the same accounts and channels repeatedly act in concert. This is shown by the stable reposting routes, the group of accounts commenting in a coordinated way and the texts repeatedly posted from several identities. The fifth level cannot be established through monitoring of public data. Proving that the same organisers, shared infrastructure or funding stand behind the activity requires non-public information about the accounts' owners, their links to one another and their

sources of funding. The data therefore allow us to state that coordinated inauthentic behaviour exists, but not who directs it. Nevertheless, given the context of Latvia's political, security and information environment, there are credible grounds to believe that the coordinated activity pushing these particular narratives in Latvia's information space is linked to actors aligned with or subordinate to the Kremlin. This is an expert assessment based on the context and on the content of the narratives, but the monitoring data alone do not directly prove it.

Is this account real? Signs of inauthentic and manipulative activity on social media

One text in many places	An almost word-for-word identical comment appears on the pages of different media and politicians, sometimes only seconds apart.
Multiple identities	The same text is posted from accounts with different, or sometimes almost identical, usernames.
Recently activated account	The account starts commenting a few weeks before the elections and comments mainly on political news.
Text unrelated to the news item	The comment does not relate to the specific post but repeats a general thesis, for example a call to boycott the elections.
Anonymous profile	The account has no profile picture, personal posts or friends, but does have many political comments.
The same accounts everywhere	The same accounts with similar comments appear again and again under different posts, often within a short time.
Emotionally charged text	The comment relies on strong emotions such as fear, outrage or compassion and urges people to act urgently: share, donate or don't vote.

None of these signs on its own proves that an account is inauthentic: active, genuine users also tend to repeat their own texts. A combination of several signs, however, is grounds to pay attention to the account and report it to the platform.

CHAPTER 8

Legitimacy in Question: How the 2026 Saeima Elections Were Called into Doubt

The legitimacy of elections rests not only on how they are organised but also on public trust in how they are conducted and in their result. Influence activities during elections therefore do not always need to change the outcome – it is enough for some voters to start doubting their fairness. In Latvia's case, the claim that changed most rapidly during the monitoring period was that the elections are illegitimate: marginal in July, it grew faster than any other claim as election day approached and did not fade after the elections. Doubts about the elections were sown before election day, but afterwards they were sustained mainly by commenters without signs of inauthentic activity.

The claim that Latvia's elections are illegitimate is not new – it has long been part of Kremlin narratives about Latvia (see Chapter 3). It portrays Latvia's elections as rigged, externally controlled or not reflecting the true will of the voters. When monitoring began, the claim carried little weight: in July it was recorded only 129 times across all monitored channels, an average of four times a day, which is less than 2% of all mentions of the monitored claims. Moreover, the mentions were spread evenly across the month, with no marked peaks around specific events.

As the elections approached, the picture changed. In August the number of mentions of the claim almost doubled (249), and in September it continued to grow. In the five Latvia-related channel groups, it grew fourfold from July to September (from 106 to 420 mentions), while the total volume of all narratives grew 1.8-fold. This means that the claim did not simply follow the general rise in pre-election activity but grew more than twice as fast and took up an ever larger share of all narratives in circulation. It peaked during the elections: in the first four days of October it

was recorded 461 times – more than in July and August combined (Figure 7).

Where the claim spread also matters. In September, 96% of its mentions were in user comments and only 4% in content creators' posts. The claim that the elections are illegitimate thus spread mainly in discussions, where any commenter could repeat it. This helps to explain why these doubts did not fade after election day.

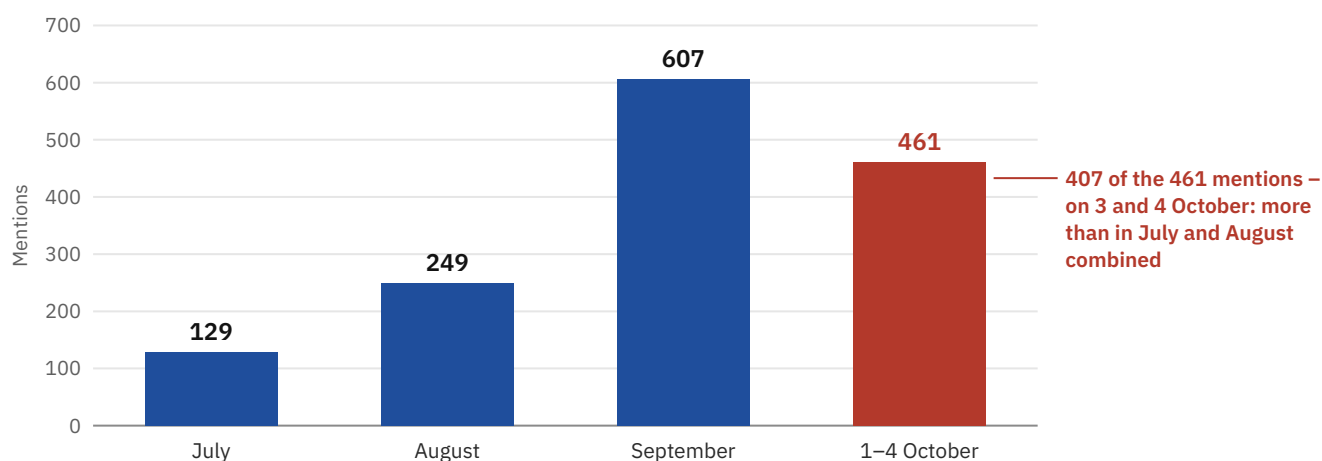
As election day approached, claims that the elections were unfair not only became more frequent but also changed in content. General comments increasingly gave way to more specific accusations, for example that the elections were being manipulated to keep a corrupt elite in power, that they lacked legitimacy because there were no worthy candidates, and that low turnout would make their result questionable. Each of these themes recurred in more than 150 comments on 40–55 channels.

These accusations also grew into calls to action. When early voting began, comments claimed that envelopes

and ballot papers cast in advance could be swapped or might not be adequately guarded, and a quarter of the 208 analysed comments under news about early voting urged people to vote only on the 3rd of October. Elsewhere, commenters called for a boycott of the elections or said they would not take part because they did not trust the political system.

These doubts were not spread by anonymous commenters alone. For example, the TikTok account “Ministry of Conscience” (*Sirdsapziņas ministrija*) posted a video about “instructions” on how to “steal” the elections, claiming that New Unity (*Jaunā Vienotība*) was using the resources of the Ministry of Defence to influence the elections, while Jurijs Klepakovs, a candidate of the party For Stability! (*Stabilitātei!*), called the pre-election poll ratings “a fake, a manipulation of people”. When such claims come from election candidates and popular accounts, they reach a wider audience and carry more weight than individual comments.

FIGURE 7 The claim that Latvia's elections are illegitimate: mentions by month across all monitored channels.



Comment sections also saw identical, repeatedly posted texts directed against the electoral process as such. They claimed that elections are merely an illusion of choice and that the Saeima is a corporation and its members foreign agents, and they called for a boycott of the elections. Notably, such texts were posted in almost equal volume in Latvian and in Russian. This indicates that the activity was aimed not

only at the Russian-speaking audience but also at the Latvian-speaking one.

At the end of the pre-election period, alongside the questioning of the elections, open calls to vote for parties favourable to Russia also appeared in comment sections. In the last three days before the elections, from 30 September to 2 October, one account posted an identical text 14 times urging voters “to vote for the parties that are ready to restore relations with

Russia, because otherwise Latvia will go bankrupt”. Most of these comments were posted on the Facebook accounts of the largest news media (TV3, Delfi and nra.lv), but their reach was limited. The campaign content of the pro-Russian lists themselves reached a far wider audience, especially Aleksejs Rosļikovs’s TikTok videos. In one of them, Yevhen Murayev called on viewers to vote for Rosļikovs.

Murayev is a former member of Ukraine’s Verkhovna Rada and leader of the banned party Nashi, who used the pro-Russian television channel Nash. In January 2022 the United Kingdom publicly named him as one of the possible leaders of a puppet government the Kremlin planned to install in Ukraine, in 2023 the Security Service of Ukraine charged him with high treason, and in 2025 Ukraine imposed sanctions on him (FCDO, 2022; SBU, 2023; Ukrinform, 2025). Murayev’s appeal is thus the most direct foreign attempt to influence Latvian voters’ choice recorded during the monitoring period: a public call by a Kremlin-aligned, sanctioned foreign individual to vote for a specific Latvian candidate, which, through that candidate’s account, reached the largest audience of all the monitored campaign content.

On election day, two facts immediately became arguments for questioning the elections. Turnout (51.8%) was described in the news as the lowest in the history of Saeima elections, and the vote count dragged on because more than 174,000 ballots deposited for safekeeping first had to be checked and the ballots of voters who had subsequently voted again had to be annulled. Commenters most often discussed the electoral commissions’ inability to count the votes on time (304 comments on 42 channels), but even more often they drew conclusions from these facts that matched the manipulative narratives common in Kremlin communication about Western elections as unfair and decided in advance (EUvsDisinfo, 2024): the result was predetermined and distorted (186 comments on 50 channels), the delay in counting pointed to manipulation (101 comments on 34 channels), and the results were falsified (52 comments on 23 channels). None of these claims rested on concrete evidence of violations – a procedural delay was reinterpreted as a sign of fraud. In the discussion about the vote count, 31% of the analysed comments expressed distrust of the preliminary data and of the counting itself, and the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity grew by a third during this time.

A similar reaction followed news of the exit poll results, which predicted a convincing victory for the United List (*Apvienotais saraksts*). On the monitored social media accounts of Latvian media, 81% of the analysed comments under these news items were negative, and 43% rejected the result as staged or decided in advance, pointing out that “the votes haven’t even been counted yet”. The share of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity under these news items was nevertheless small: under the 15 main news items on the exit poll results, they had posted only 32 of the 539 monitored comments, or about 6%. This indicates that at this point distrust of the results was expressed mainly by users themselves.

In the last days of the pre-election period, the claim that the elections are illegitimate appeared 20–34 times a day, on election day 128 times, and most often on 4 October, the day after the elections, when it was recorded 279 times – more than on any other day of the monitoring. Among these claims was an almost identical comment posted 10 times on six monitored Facebook accounts – four belonging to media and two to politicians – by an account whose first activity was recorded only on 19 September and which was therefore most likely newly created. It congratulated the parties Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*) and Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*), claimed that the ballots “frozen” in safekeeping were suspicious, and called the elections “2000% unlawful”. This is the first case observed during the monitoring period in which an identical text spread across several accounts directly disputed the election result.

This dynamic before and after the elections is one of the study’s most important observations. Before the elections, claims that the elections were unfair and their outcome already decided were actively spread by the accounts of certain political parties’ candidates. They were also amplified by accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity, including through repeatedly posted identical texts. After the elections, these claims were sustained mainly by social media users themselves. Although low turnout, the delay in counting the votes and the exit poll results cannot be regarded as violations of the electoral process, in comment sections they were presented as confirmation of what had already been said in the information space – that the elections were unfair and their outcome decided before the vote. The post-election discussion therefore resembled an echo of Kremlin narratives more than their deliberate dissemination. This points to a signi-



EXAMPLE 5

A TikTok video by Aleksejs Rosļikovs with the pro-Russian Ukrainian politician Yevhen Murayev, 30 September. The video received about 345,000 views and 23,400 likes.

TRANSLATION OF MURAYEV'S ADDRESS

"Dear Latvian brothers! I call you brothers because for a long time we lived in one shared space, we loved together, rejoiced together and went through sorrows together. And now the moment has come when evil, greedy people have brought our countries to the brink of war. Believe me, it is better to love than to make war [...]. So if you want our children to live happily in peace, vote for Aleksejs. Aleksejs Rosļikovs certainly knows how to make sure that we are all happy."

TRANSLATION OF THE DESCRIPTION

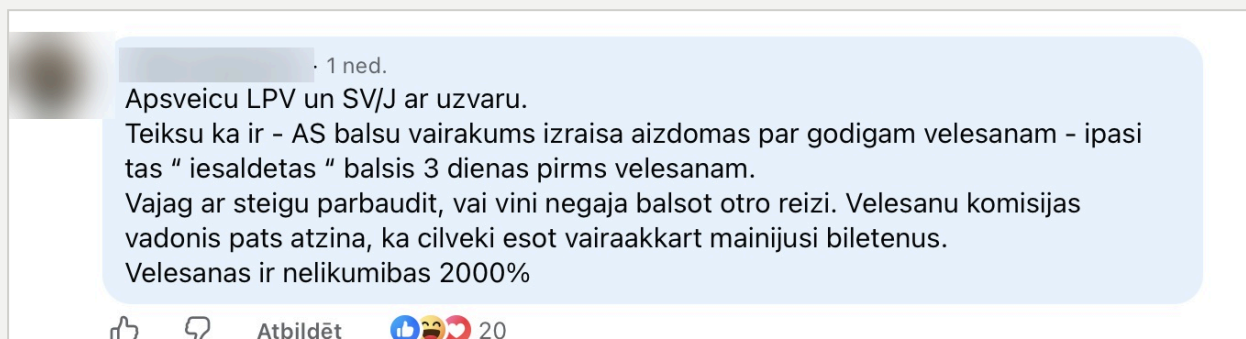
"Thank you, my friend! Yevhen Murayev, our common goal is peace in our countries and close ties with our neighbours and our brothers! Show your support on 3 October!"

ficant risk: undermining trust in elections does not require a large-scale campaign on election day. It is enough for the relevant interpretation to have been

planted in the information space in advance, and then any procedural disruption or unexpected result can be presented as proof of it.

EXAMPLE 6

A comment on the TV3 Ziņas Facebook page, 4 October. The account, which had been commenting on the monitored pages only since 19 September, posted this text 10 times on 4 October on six Facebook pages – four media pages and two politicians' pages. LPV – Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*), SV/J – the list “Sovereign Power – Young Latvians alliance” (*Suverēnā vara – apvienība “Jaunlatvieši”*). The commenter's name and picture have been obscured.



TRANSLATION

“Congratulations to LPV and SV/J on the win. I’ll say it like it is – the AS [United List] majority of votes raises suspicions about honest elections – especially those ‘frozen’ votes 3 days before the elections. It urgently needs checking whether they went and voted a second time. The election commission boss himself admitted that people had supposedly changed their ballots several times. The elections are unlawful 2000%”

CHAPTER 9

Praising Some, Faulting Others: How Latvian Politicians and Organisations Were Assessed on Social Media

Information influence activities during elections may be aimed not only at undermining trust in the state in general, but also at weakening or strengthening specific political forces. What matters is therefore not only what is claimed, but also against whom and in whose favour. In Latvia’s case, attitudes towards the politicians and organisations mentioned were asymmetric and consistent. Towards the government, the Saeima, public service media and the governing parties they were predominantly negative. Meanwhile, Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*) and Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*) were among the few political forces that received more positive than negative mentions. The data do not suggest, however, that these parties coordinated their actions with the channels or accounts that spread content favourable to them.

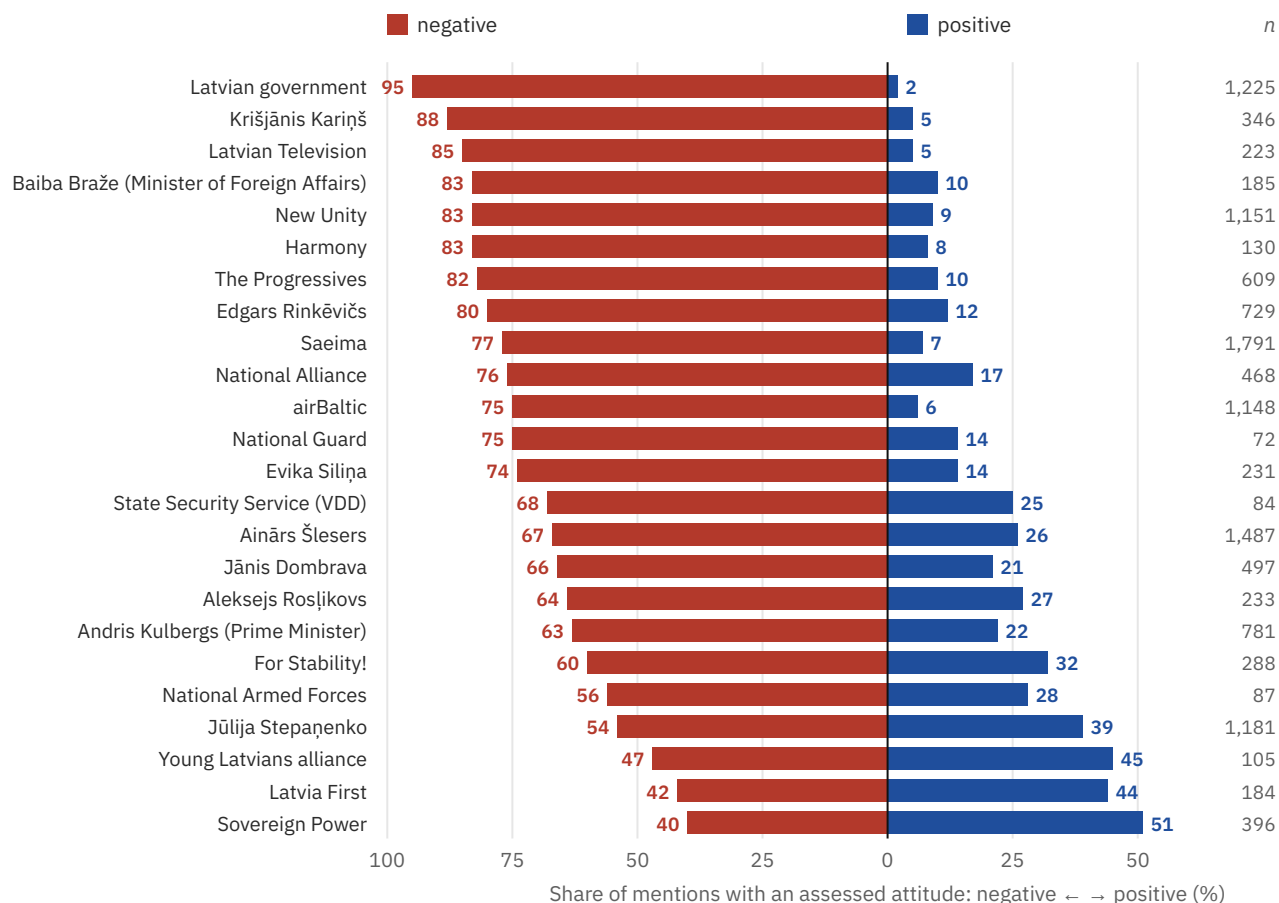
To determine against whom and in whose favour mentions were directed, attitudes towards Latvian institutions, parties and politicians were analysed in all mentions in which they were named (Figure 8). The results show that the most negative attitude was expressed towards the government: of more than 1,200 mentions, 95% were negative and only 2% positive.

The Saeima (77%) and Latvian Television (85%) were assessed similarly, which suggests that the negative attitude was directed not only at the current government but at state institutions as a whole. Notably, airBaltic was mentioned in similarly negative terms (75%). During the pre-election period, the dispute over the company’s rescue became one of the constant

arguments for the narrative “Latvia cannot survive without Russia”, and a real economic issue was thus presented as proof of the state’s incapacity. Security and defence institutions, meanwhile, were assessed more moderately. Although mentions of them were

still predominantly negative (56–75%), the share was smaller than for the government. Negative attitudes were thus concentrated mostly on the political leadership rather than on the state’s security institutions.

FIGURE 8 Attitudes towards Latvian institutions, parties and politicians, 1 July – 4 October.



Bars show the share of negative (left) and positive (right) mentions. The remainder are neutral. Subjects with at least 60 mentions in which attitude was assessed (n) are included.

A similar picture emerges in attitudes towards parties. The governing and largest parties – New Unity (*Jaunā Vienotība*), The Progressives (*Progresīvie*) and the National Alliance (*Nacionālā apvienība*) – were a constant target of negative mentions: 76–83% of mentions of them were negative. The opposite was true of only two lists – Sovereign Power (51% positive against 40% negative) and Latvia First (44% against 42%). The more positive attitude did not, however, extend to all parties that appeal to Russian-speaking voters. Of the mentions of Harmony (*Saskaņa*), a party historically associated with representing Russian-speaking voters, 83% were negative, which suggests that in the monitored space sympathies have shifted from it to

newer political forces. Attitudes towards the party For Stability! (*Stabilitātei!*) were also predominantly negative (60%).

Among politicians, too, the most negative attitudes were expressed towards the leaders of the government and the state – former Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš (88%), Minister of Foreign Affairs Baiba Braže (83%) and President Edgars Rinkēvičs (80%), with negative mentions of the President concentrated around his remarks on nuclear weapons. Notably, 63% of mentions of Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs were negative – a smaller share than for the government he leads as an institution. This may suggest that criticism was aimed more at the government as a whole than at its head

personally. Only Jūlija Stepaņenko came close to a balance (54% negative and 39% positive mentions). Attitudes towards Aleksejs Rošļikovs (64% negative and 27% positive) and towards Ainārs Šlesers, the most frequently mentioned Latvian politician (67% and 26%), were in turn predominantly negative, though less markedly so than towards Kariņš, Braže and Rinkēvičs.

During the pre-election campaign, Sovereign Power and Latvia First called for restoring relations with Russia and Belarus, and this narrative spread ever more widely in the monitored information space. This alone, however, does not explain the comparatively favourable assessment of these parties. For Stability! took a similar position, yet attitudes towards this party

were predominantly negative. This is also borne out by the Kremlin-aligned channels' turning against the party's leader, Aleksejs Rošļikovs, described in Chapter 6. It shows once again that the pro-Kremlin information environment is not homogeneous.

These data must, however, be interpreted with caution. Attitudes were assessed across all monitored channels, including the parties' own pages, where positive comments are most likely written by their supporters. The data show the tone in which parties were mentioned, but not what determined that attitude. Nor do they provide grounds for concluding that there was coordination between any party and the channels or accounts in which favourable views of it were expressed.

CHAPTER 10

Where Opinion Ends: Between Criticism and Hate Speech

Sharp criticism of the government and politicians is an integral part of democratic debate, especially during elections. Yet criticism has a limit, and it is crossed when criticism turns into hatred, threats or calls for violence. Such content is also prohibited under the rules of the major social media platforms. During elections it carries particular significance, because such language is often directed at the very candidates and officials involved in the elections. During the monitoring period, more than 3,400 comments were automatically classified as possible violations of these rules, most of them hateful or abusive language. This language largely followed the topics under discussion at the time. Some of these comments were posted by the same accounts in which signs of inauthentic activity had been recorded, but most, in all likelihood, reflected users' own attitudes. Inauthentic activity therefore amplified these attitudes rather than created them.

To assess how widely such language spread in the monitored content, comments were automatically compared against the categories of prohibited content defined in the rules of the major social media platforms. From July 2026 to election day, 3,422 comments that could violate platform rules were classified in this way. Most of them were hateful or abusive language (2,119 comments, or 62%). This was followed by violent content (696) and harassment or intimidation (560), the latter most often directed at specific politicians and journalists. The fewest comments were classified as calls for harmful or dangerous acts (81), yet these are potentially the most dangerous. A single comment may fall into several categories. Most such comments were posted on YouTube (1,602) and Face-

book (1,366), far fewer on TikTok (302), Telegram (114) and X (38). This largely reflects the specifics of the platforms, since YouTube and Facebook have the most active comment sections in the monitored set. It should also be borne in mind that this classification is an automated indication based on an assessment of content, not a legal judgement, and the report does not assess whether any comment complies with the law.

Although the volume of such comments is significant in itself, more important still is whom they targeted. The targets of violent language shifted along with the topics of discussion, as the last weeks of the pre-election period illustrate well. In early September, discussions about energy prices included calls to settle

scores physically with energy company owners. In the second half of September, hate speech shifted to representatives of the authorities, about whom comments said that they “should be shot, not elected”. In election week, comments on news about Russia’s threats to Latvia included a call for Russian strikes, in the event of war, to target not residents but the homes of those Latvian officials who “are escalating the situation and want war”.

In the monitored content, hatred was directed in two opposite directions – both at Latvians and the Latvian state and at Russian-speaking residents. Against Latvians as a people and against state institutions it was voiced in both Russian and Latvian, while comments written in Latvian wished death on those whom the commenters called occupiers. This shows that hostile language was not a feature of one group in so-

ciety, but appeared on both sides of the political debate.

Some of this language came from the same accounts in which signs of inauthentic activity had been recorded. The two authors whose comments were most often classified as possible violations in the reviewed sample are members of the group of accounts described earlier, which repeatedly commented on the same “Facets of Freedom” (*Грани свободы*) videos. Several identical, repeatedly posted texts from election week were also classified as hateful. However, most hostile comments were in all likelihood an expression of users’ own attitudes, and inauthentic activity amplified them rather than created them. Hate speech in the monitored space therefore largely reflected tensions that already exist in society. For this very reason, it is easy to exploit and direct against specific political targets during elections.

Conclusion: The Kremlin or Its Echo?

This report has analysed how narratives about Latvia consistent with the Kremlin’s position spread during the elections to the 15th Saeima. Over fourteen weeks of monitoring, more than 32,000 mentions of these narratives were recorded. The narratives themselves were not new. What was new was how they attached themselves to the election agenda and who spread them. The question posed in the report’s title – whether these are Kremlin narratives or their echo – therefore concerns not only where the narratives originate but also where and how they spread in Latvia’s information space.

The data answer this question in two ways. If we look at who spread these narratives during the pre-election period, the answer is mainly the echo: four out of five recorded mentions were in user comments, and more than 90% of those comments were posted by accounts without signs of inauthentic activity. If we look at the source of the narratives the echo repeated, the answer is different: they are long-familiar Kremlin narratives, maintained for years, produced and reposted by a small network of Kremlin-aligned channels. The Kremlin and its echo are therefore two stages of a single process by which narratives circulate. In the 2026 Saeima elections, most of this circulation took place at the second stage, that is, in the comment sec-

tions of the social media accounts of Latvian media, parties and politicians.

To understand how the source and the echo are connected, we need to look at who spreads the narratives and what role each participant plays. The monitoring data allow four such groups to be distinguished: 1) a small network of Kremlin-aligned channels in which the narratives originate (the source), 2) accounts that artificially amplify them (the amplifiers), 3) certain Latvian politicians in whose own content these narratives appear (the intermediaries) and 4) thousands of commenters who repeat them (the echo). The groups differ not only in size but also in how much can be said with confidence about their conduct: for some there are clear signs of coordinated activity, for others none at all.

What matters most is how these groups are linked to one another. The source and the amplifiers are small groups. Kremlin-aligned channels that are Latvia-focused or Russia-based accounted for about 13% of mentions, and accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity posted about 9% of comments. Yet it was in these groups that the monitoring recorded repeated behaviour consistent with coordinated activity. The echo is far broader, but for the most part shows no such signs. The role of the intermediaries is different. It was on the accounts of Latvian politicians that the

call to restore relations with Russia and Belarus reached its widest audience: in election week, these videos were viewed more than two million times. This does not mean that these politicians were acting on anyone's instructions. The monitoring data do not indicate any cooperation between them and the Kremlin-aligned channels or amplifiers, and a party's position may coincide with the Kremlin's even without any contact with Russia or actors aligned with it. But in an election campaign this means that the line between a foreign narrative and legitimate domestic political rhetoric becomes, in places, hard to draw.

The share of Kremlin-aligned channels, however, is most likely larger than the 13% cited. This figure covers only the two channel groups directly linked to Latvia. The monitored set also includes Kremlin-aligned channels that are not focused directly on Latvia, as well as Belarusian regime-aligned channels. Just three of them, "Facets of Freedom" (*Грани свободы*), SBTB (*СБТБ*) and Maksometr75 (*Максометр75*), together account for about 15% of mentions (Table 2), and if all such channels are counted, more than a third of all mentions were in channels aligned with the Kremlin or the Belarusian regime. In these channels, too, mentions of the narratives consist mainly of comments on social media content, so the conclusion that they are mostly written by the audience still holds. What changes is only the picture of where this audience gathers: a considerable part of it also comments on the content of Kremlin-aligned channels, not only on the pages of Latvian media and politicians. The 9% of comments posted by accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity should be viewed in a similar light. The echo is not the same as authentic opinion: carefully managed accounts may show none of the signs listed, so this 9% should be regarded as the lower bound of coordinated activity.

That most of the narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position are spread by the audience itself is the report's main conclusion, and it has several implications that reach beyond the answers to the questions this report set out to address.

First, for some of Latvia's social media users these narratives are no longer an external influence they encounter, but a ready-made explanation through which they themselves interpret events in the country. When a commenter sees the grain transit tariff as proof that Latvia is "run by Brussels", or takes a delay in the vote count as a sign of fraud, they need no Kremlin-aligned

channel to offer them that conclusion. However this came about, narratives maintained for years have become part of how some members of society explain their own country. The trend over time confirms this too. The activity of the Latvia-focused and Russia-based Kremlin-aligned channels stayed at around 300 mentions a week throughout the period, while the total number of mentions more than doubled by election week. If the source did not become more active, the increase came from elsewhere: from users who, as attention to politics grew, repeated these narratives themselves on the pages of Latvian media and politicians.

Second, from the source's point of view, this kind of circulation is highly efficient. A small network of channels and an even smaller circle of amplifiers create and sustain the narratives, but their widest distribution is ensured by others, mostly ordinary users. For the source this involves no extra cost and no risk of being blocked, while the narratives gain the credibility that comes with the voice of "one of us". The data do not allow us to say that this circulation was deliberately designed, but the result is the same: a small investment of resources secures wide distribution of the desired narratives.

Third, it changes how the report's main indicator should be read. The rise in the number of mentions before the elections mainly measures how widely narratives already sustained and spread earlier resonate in society, and only to a lesser extent any increase in foreign activity. Twice as many mentions does not mean twice as much foreign interference. It means that, as attention to certain political issues grew, these narratives were used more often in discussing them. The volume of narratives alone is therefore not a suitable indicator of the intensity of foreign interference, and any increase has to be assessed together with who is spreading the narratives and where.

Fourth, the predominance of the echo does not reduce the risk to the information space, but it changes its nature. It is harder to notice, it cannot be removed by blocking channels or exposing who stands behind them, and it is closely tied to real discontent and distrust of the state, which lend the narratives credibility. Equally, not every commenter whose words coincide with the Kremlin's position consciously supports that position. In many cases such comments rather express discontent, using the ready-made formulations available to them. This distinction matters both for

analysing the narratives and for how to respond to them in public communication.

Possible explanations

Why does the echo dominate the circulation of narratives?

The cumulative effect of sustained supply. Narratives about Latvia have been repeated for years in Russian traditional media and, since those were blocked, on social media platforms. An experimental study shows that even brief exposure to such narratives increased perceived discrimination among Russian-speaking respondents (Hoyle et al., 2024). Over a longer period, this may mean that part of the audience no longer merely receives the narratives but reproduces them itself. This explanation is consistent with the observation that the audience has most fully adopted the most general and longest-used narratives.

The language of real discontent. The opposite explanation is that commenters are expressing real discontent with prices, the government or language policy, and the narrative set consistent with the Kremlin's position simply offers them ready-made formulations. Political views largely determine which media people choose (Shehata, Ekström and Oleskog Tryggvason, 2024), so the two explanations cannot be separated with monitoring data. Most likely they operate simultaneously and reinforce each other.

The participatory model. Research on information operations describes a model in which purposeful actors seed narratives, while their onward spread is largely carried out by genuine users who do not realise they are taking part in an operation (Starbird, Arif and Wilson, 2019). If this model applies to Latvia, then a small source, a small circle of amplifiers and a large echo do not contradict one another but form the expected structure.

Why did the historical narratives decline?

During the pre-election period, the history-based narratives – about the rewriting of history, denial of the USSR's "liberation" and the demolition of Soviet monuments – shrank even in absolute terms. The explanation offered in this report is that, in the pre-election context, these narratives were harder to convert into a voting decision. There are at least two alternative explanations. First, the calendar: these narratives usually become active around commemoration dates, and the most important of these, such as 16 March

(Legionnaires' Remembrance Day) and 9 May (Soviet Victory Day), fall outside the monitoring period. Second, limited attention: election topics may have crowded out other topics regardless of whether anyone was deliberately pushing them.

Why did the Kremlin-aligned environment not unite behind a single list?

The network of Kremlin-aligned channels did not back a single list in the elections, and in election week its widest reposting chain even turned against the leader of the party For Stability! (*Stabilitātei!*). Three explanations are possible. The first is competition between content creators: the attack on Rošļikovs was linked to the claim that he had complained about the blogger Romans Samuļš, whose channel is itself part of the reposting network, and this points to a personal or factional motive. The second is strategic: general distrust of the state and of the elections may be worth more than the victory of any particular list, and discrediting pro-Russian politicians as "part of the system" may serve that goal. The third is decentralisation: since 2022, the Kremlin's information influence in Latvia has operated as a dispersed ecosystem without a single centre of command.

This third explanation is worth expanding on, because it also helps to make sense of the other two. In a decentralised ecosystem, content creators spread narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position but act largely independently, guided by their own interests: attracting an audience, donations, personal sympathies and conflicts. They need no instructions to spread narratives that benefit the Kremlin, but there is also no mechanism to ensure united action in elections. As a result, the content of the narratives is aligned but the actions are not, and the ecosystem can also turn against its apparent allies, as happened with Rošļikovs. In such an environment, personal conflicts and strategic considerations can exist side by side, so all three explanations may be true at once.

Two consequences follow. First, a lack of coordination does not mean a lack of alignment: content consistent with the Kremlin's position is produced even without central direction, and this complicates both attribution and the response. Second, such an ecosystem is resilient to measures aimed at individual actors: blocking one channel or attributing it to a specific organisation affects only one of the network's many nodes. The data do not allow these explanations to be separated, but the observation as a whole weakens the

assumption of a single, centrally directed campaign in support of a particular list.

Why was inauthentic activity low?

This observation, too, has several explanations. Inauthentic activity may genuinely have been low: if the echo already sustains the narratives, artificial amplification is less necessary. More coordinated activity may be taking place in closed groups, private channels and direct messages, which the monitoring does not see. More carefully managed accounts may show none of the measured signs. Finally, the low level of activity may also have been influenced by the platforms' heightened attention to elections after other countries' experience, but the monitoring data do not allow this to be tested.

The low intensity of inauthentic activity and the absence of centralised support for any list are consistent with the assumption set out in Chapter 1 about how Russian influence might manifest itself in Latvia's elections. Elections in recent years show that foreign interference can take very different forms. In Romania, the Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the presidential election in December 2024 after security agencies' reports on a coordinated TikTok campaign in support of one candidate were declassified, while in Moldova and Armenia, alongside information operations, direct forms of interference such as vote buying were also reported (see Chapter 1). In those cases, the interference was concentrated and aimed at a specific outcome. In Latvia, the monitoring recorded no such picture. This does not mean there was no risk: it manifested itself differently, in the information space, by exploiting existing divisions in society, and therefore depended largely on how ready society itself was to believe claims of unfair elections.

Main conclusions and their significance

Old narratives with a new function

No new narratives were observed during the pre-election period, but the hierarchy of the existing ones changed. The fastest growth was in claims prescribing what Latvia should do or questioning the point of voting: the call to restore relations with Russia and Belarus and the claim that the elections are illegitimate. History-based claims, meanwhile, shrank even in absolute terms. Narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position thus function as a flexible repertoire. Content

creators can deliberately select from it whatever best suits the situation, while in the language of commentators it is the narratives that match the political agenda of the moment that come to the fore. This does not necessarily happen consciously, because these narratives are already part of their picture of the state. In the election context, the narratives that came to the forefront were those most easily converted into a voting decision: vote "for peace", vote for "restoring relations" or do not vote at all. In the next elections, therefore, what is more likely is new combinations and anchor points for already familiar narratives, and these can largely be anticipated.

Events as the main raw material: reinterpretation, not fabrication

Throughout the period, the narratives attached themselves to real domestic political events, such as the grain transit tariff, fuel prices, airBaltic's finances, the data leak at the Road Traffic Safety Directorate (CSDD), the aftermath of the storm, the President's remarks on nuclear weapons and the Saeima's decision on public service media content in Russian. In most cases, the events themselves were not invented. They were reinterpreted as proof of a conclusion reached in advance: that Latvia cannot survive without Russia, that it is run by others or that it is itself provoking war. In some cases, however, the content that spread was not based on verifiable facts: the authenticity of the complaint supposedly addressed to the State Security Service (VDD) and circulated in the network of Kremlin-aligned channels has not been verified, and the claims of election fraud rested on no evidence of violations.

Two practical consequences follow. First, fact-checking and debunking achieve little in such cases, because what is false is not the fact but the conclusion drawn from it. Second, during the pre-election period every state decision that touches on an economically sensitive issue or on the Russian-speaking audience becomes a potential anchor point for narratives, however well founded the decision itself. This is not an argument against such decisions, but a reminder that they need to be communicated in good time and in an understandable way. Moreover, the intensity of narratives around events can be driven both by deliberate amplification and by domestic political mobilisation. In the discussion on nuclear weapons, the number of comments from accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity more than doubled within two days, whereas the reaction to the Saeima's decision on public service media content in Russian came mainly

from Latvian political actors and their audience. By volume alone, these cases cannot be told apart. It should also be stressed that the coincidence in time between events and narratives shows only that the narratives reacted to the events, not that anyone deliberately exploited them.

Comment sections as the main environment of circulation

Narratives differ in how far the audience has adopted them. Narratives about the country's economic failure and lack of sovereignty appear eight to ten times more often in comments than in posts, whereas narratives about the persecution of Russian speakers and honouring Nazism are still largely driven by content creators. The former have become part of the everyday language of discontent and no longer depend on the source. Even if Kremlin-aligned channels stopped spreading them, they would most likely continue to surface in comments whenever economic difficulties or disputes over state decisions come to the fore in society. They can be answered by explaining decisions and by solving the problems themselves. The spread of the latter still depends on those who produce them, so measures aimed at sources and amplifiers are more effective against them. The ratio of comments to posts can also serve as an indicator for future monitoring: if mentions of a narrative gradually shift from posts to comments, the audience is adopting it.

The usual countermeasures therefore cover only part of the challenge. Blocking channels or reporting them reaches only the channels' own posts, which hold about a fifth of the mentions. The other four-fifths are in comments, mostly on the pages of Latvian media and political actors, to which neither the restrictions on Russian media nor the rules on pre-election campaigning apply. Moderating comment sections is therefore part of protecting the information space, not merely a technical matter of page management. New participants are also appearing in the discussions: the artificial intelligence assistant built into the X platform replied more than 2,200 times in the monitored political discussions, and its role in election discussions has not yet been studied.

Elections as a target: doubts sown before the vote, sustained after it

One of the most important conclusions concerns the claim that Latvia's elections are illegitimate. In July it was marginal, but on the day after the elections it was recorded more often than on any other day of the

monitoring. More important than the volume, however, is the change in who spread it. Before the vote, doubts were spread by candidates' accounts, identical, repeatedly posted texts and accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity, in almost equal volume in Latvian and Russian. After the vote, the doubts were sustained mainly by ordinary commenters, who interpreted the low turnout, the protracted vote count and the exit poll results as confirmation of what they had already heard. Under the main news items on the exit poll results, accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity posted only about 6% of the comments.

This sequence indicates that the ground for doubts about the elections had been prepared. The post-election doubts were a continuation of narratives sown before the elections, and they no longer needed deliberate amplification. Trust in elections can therefore be undermined even without a large-scale campaign on election day: it is enough for the relevant interpretation to have been introduced into the information space beforehand, after which any procedural delay can be presented as its "proof". For the credibility of the electoral process, therefore, it is not only the last days before the vote that are critical, but also election night and the first days after it. The checking of ballots deposited for safekeeping and cast in early voting, and the length of the count, became arguments because these procedures had not been sufficiently explained to the public, even though no violations were found in them.

Inauthentic activity: small, concentrated and following the audience

The data give no grounds to speak of a mass automated campaign, but the activity recorded was not random. It was concentrated in a few channels, especially "Facets of Freedom", and in election week it moved to the largest Facebook news pages, where the discussion about the elections was taking place at the time. Inauthentic activity thus followed the audience and exploited discussions already under way. The monitoring data alone do not allow it to be attributed to the Russian state or to any specific organisation, although the context gives grounds to believe that it is linked to Kremlin-aligned actors. Such activity cannot be effectively reduced by general measures against bots, because it is small and targeted. It requires specific cases to be documented and referred to the platforms. The strongest grounds for such action are cases in which coordinated commenting coincides with possible violations of platform rules, as with the

group of accounts commenting in concert and the apparent donation appeal, because an approach to the platforms is then supported by two independent arguments: both content and behaviour.

The Kremlin-aligned environment is not a unified campaign headquarters

The data do not show that Kremlin-aligned channels united behind a single political force. In election week, the network's widest reposting chain was directed against the leader of the party For Stability!, Aleksejs Rošļikovs, while one of the network's channels called for votes for the candidates of Sovereign Power (*Suverēnā vara*). The Ukrainian pro-Russian politician Yevhen Murayev, for his part, called for votes for Rošļikovs. This is the most direct foreign attempt to influence Latvian voters' choice recorded during the monitoring period, and it was not concealed. The appeal spread openly, on the candidate's own TikTok account, and reached one of the largest audiences among the monitored campaign content. Foreign influence in elections can thus also enter through the channels of a legitimate campaign, which FIMI monitoring instruments are usually not aimed at.

Attitudes in the monitored space were markedly asymmetric. Towards the government, the governing parties and public service media the attitude expressed was almost exclusively negative, but it was also predominantly negative towards the parties that traditionally appeal to Russian-speaking voters, such as Harmony (*Saskaņa*) and For Stability!. Only a few political forces, including Sovereign Power and Latvia First (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*), had a predominance of positive mentions. This indicates that the audience of the monitored space is not only Russian-speaking, and that the Russian-speaking audience is not homogeneous either. What unites the more favourably assessed parties is their position, not a language community: criticism of the current political course and a call to restore relations with Russia. Narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position are thus no longer confined to the Russian-language information space. Overall, the monitored environment was directed against state institutions and the governing majority rather than in favour of any one specific alternative, because narratives that undermine trust in institutions and procedures are useful regardless of which list wins. The data do not, however, show coordination between parties and the channels that amplified content favourable to them, and the distribution of atti-

tudes describes the set of monitored channels, not the mood of voters as a whole.

Radicalisation of narratives before the elections

As the elections approached, violent language shifted from general discontent to specific targets: calls for violence against specific politicians and officials appeared. Hate speech was directed both ways, against the governing parties and Latvians as well as against Russian speakers and the candidates of the lists addressing them. This language overlaps little with coordinated activity, and most hostile comments most likely express the users' own attitudes. Hate speech thus largely reflects tensions that already exist in society, so it cannot be reduced simply by combating inauthentic accounts. That is what makes it easy to exploit: hatred does not have to be created from scratch – it is enough to amplify it and direct it at specific targets. The shift of violent language towards specific politicians and officials indicates that attention also needs to be paid to the safety of candidates and officials during the pre-election period. The classification is an automated indication and not a legal assessment, so the report does not assess whether any comment complies with the law.

Recommendations for strengthening election integrity

If most of the circulation of narratives takes place in the comment sections of Latvia's own pages, countermeasures cannot be confined to the sources of the narratives. They need to cover three levels: the sources and amplifiers (which can be documented and reported to the platforms), the discussion environment (in which the narratives meet the wider public) and trust in state decisions and electoral procedures (which these narratives call into question). At the same time, countermeasures must be proportionate: most of the monitored content is sharp but legitimate political speech, and the aim is not to restrict it but to reduce the opportunities for manipulation and society's susceptibility to it.

Sources and amplifiers

Latvia's experience since 2022 and European research show that blocking reduces the spread of Kremlin-aligned content but does not stop it – part of the content moves to other platforms (Santos Okholm, Ebrahimi Fard and ten Thij, 2024; NEPLP, 2025). The stable reposting routes identified in the monitoring

should continue to be documented and passed on to the platforms and supervisory authorities as evidence for the systemic risk assessments provided for by the Digital Services Act. During elections, these assessments should also take into account built-in artificial intelligence assistants that act as active participants in political discussions.

Murayev's call to vote for a Latvian candidate shows that foreign influence can enter openly, through the campaign content itself. The Pre-election Campaigning Law defines campaigning by its content, but provides no specific restrictions on foreign persons who publicly call for votes for a particular list. It is worth assessing whether the regulation of pre-election campaigning and its supervision should also cover such appeals spread on social networks. The parties themselves should also, for the sake of their reputation, have an interest in publicly distancing themselves from such support.

Discussion environment

Media and party pages are the main place where narratives meet a wider audience, and in election week it was on the large Facebook news pages that identical, repeatedly posted texts and the activity of accounts showing signs of inauthentic activity were concentrated. Clear commenting rules, limits on texts repeated word for word and stepped-up moderation during the pre-election period are tools available to page owners. For parties and candidates, this also applies to the comment sections of their own accounts, where almost 9,000 mentions were recorded during the monitoring period.

The increase in violent language against specific politicians and officials during the pre-election period is grounds for cooperation between platforms, page owners and law enforcement agencies, so that threats that could endanger the safety of candidates and officials are noticed in time.

Since texts casting doubt on the elections spread in almost equal volume in Latvian and Russian, and Kremlin-aligned accounts also spread narratives in Latvian, monitoring of the information space and

media literacy measures must cover both language communities, not only the Russian-speaking audience.

Trust in decisions and procedures

The delay in the vote count caused by the checking of ballots deposited for safekeeping was one of the main arguments for casting doubt on the elections. Before the next elections, it is worth explaining in good time how ballots deposited for safekeeping and cast in early voting are checked, how long this can take, why envelopes cannot be swapped and how exit poll results differ from the official ones, and preparing communication for possible delays on election night.

Narratives about economic failure and lack of sovereignty cannot be debunked, because they attach themselves to real disputes. A better answer to them is a timely and understandable explanation of decisions, especially to the audiences a decision affects most. For narratives about honouring Nazism and the rewriting of history, by contrast, preparations can follow the calendar, because they become active around commemoration dates.

Public communication must distinguish content consistent with the Kremlin's position from a proven foreign operation. Labelling commenters wholesale as Kremlin agents would not only be unfounded in the light of this report's data, but would also confirm the narratives that public communication seeks to reduce.

The Kremlin or its echo? In the 2026 Saeima elections – both, but in unequal shares and in different roles. The Kremlin-aligned environment provided the narratives, their steady supply and a small, targeted boost, but most of their circulation was ensured by Latvia's social media users themselves. That is why the main challenge is not only to expose foreign operations but also to reduce society's susceptibility to these narratives – through trust in institutions, timely explanation of decisions and procedures, and a better discussion environment at home. Coordinated operations can be detected and contained. The echo can only be reduced, and that is longer, but also more lasting, work.

Annex. How the Study Was Conducted

Data and monitoring period. Data were collected and selected for the period from 1 July to 4 October 2026 –

the fourteen weeks up to the elections to the Saeima, election day and the first day after it. Data were collec-

ted by monitoring a total of 502 public channels on five platforms: 136 on TikTok, 111 on Telegram, 101 on YouTube, 97 on Facebook and 57 on X. During data collection, the text of each post, its time of publication, its channel and the engagement metrics reported by the platform were recorded, and each post was linked to the public comments published under it. Only publicly available information was used in data collection and monitoring.

Selection of monitored channels. The set of monitored channels was selected purposively and is not a representative sample in the statistical sense: channels were chosen for their relevance to the research questions (Krippendorff, 2018). The set includes channels with a documented history of spreading narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position (identified in the authors' earlier monitoring and in other published sources), the official accounts of the parties, candidates and institutions involved in the elections, and the accounts of Latvian media whose content and comment sections are an important venue of public discussion. Before the analysis, each channel was assigned to one of the categories (Table 4). Channels were categorised in a qualitative two-stage verification process. The categories describe a channel's role in the monitored space and do not assess its owners or administrators.

Identification of narratives. The monitored narratives were identified using the narrative set developed by the authors, which contains seven main narratives and 25 specific claims (Table 5). An automated classifier compares every post and comment with this set, and researchers checked the classification results on a sample basis. Some election-related content, such as identical, repeatedly posted calls to boycott the elections or to vote for parties that would restore relations with Russia, has no separate category in the narrative set. The researchers identified such cases while analysing the data; the report describes them qualitatively rather than measuring them.

Measurements. The basic unit of measurement is the mention – an instance in which one of the narratives is identified in a post or comment. If a text contains two narratives, they count as two mentions. The baseline is the average number of mentions per week in the four full weeks of July (6 July – 2 August). Views are the global count of engagements with a piece of content, as reported by the platforms at the time of data retrieval. Summed views across different platforms are only an approximate indicator, and they do

not measure the audience reached. Attitudes towards institutions, parties and politicians were assessed in a separate analysis, and shares are given only for subjects with at least 60 assessed mentions.

Changes in account behaviour around events were measured by comparing the two days before a discussion began with its first two days on the same channels, while audience reaction was measured in the comment section. Comments that might violate platform rules were identified and flagged automatically.

Assessment of coordination. Coordination was assessed on the basis of six signs of account behaviour, adapted from research on coordinated online activity, and on the reposting of almost identical texts between channels.

Levels of the scale of evidence for coordination (from weakest to strongest):

- 1 Different sources spread the same narrative.
- 2 The narratives appear at the same time.
- 3 The same text appears in different places.
- 4 The same accounts or channels do so repeatedly.
- 5 The same organisers, shared infrastructure or funding stand behind the activity.

The text of the report describes only cases observed during the monitoring period. When assessing individual cases, the report uses a definition under which coordinated inauthentic behaviour must meet two conditions: coordination and deception about identity (Gleicher, 2019). Observations were assessed on the five-level scale of evidence. In this report, the term “coordinated” means only that the behaviour matches one of the measured signs.

Limitations of the study. Data collection did not cover content from closed groups, private channels and direct messages, where narratives may be spread in a more deliberately coordinated way. The dataset also does not include deleted or moderated comments. Any signs of inauthentic or other suspicious activity relate to accounts, not to the people who manage them. The study does not establish who runs or funds the accounts, and it does not measure the influence of the narratives on voters' choices.

Ethical principles. Only publicly available content was analysed, and the data were not obtained through deception or by circumventing platform access restrictions. Officials, candidates, parties, institutions and media are named as public figures. The accounts of

TABLE 4 Channel groups and their categorisation criteria.

Channel group	Channels	Categorisation criterion
Accounts of Latvian political actors	132	Official account of a registered party, a candidate or a public office-holder
Accounts of Latvian media	52	Account of a registered Latvian media outlet
Accounts of Latvian civil society organisations and activists	39	Based in Latvia; not a party or media outlet; no documented Kremlin-aligned activity
Latvia-focused Kremlin-aligned channels	84	Aimed at a Latvian audience; documented history of spreading narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position
Russia-based Kremlin-aligned channels	39	Based in Russia; documented history of spreading narratives consistent with the Kremlin's position, including from the accounts of Russian state media and institutions
Other channels	156	Kremlin-aligned channels not aimed directly at Latvia, Belarusian regime-aligned channels, channels linked to the Storm-1516 operation, Ukrainian and independent Russian-language media, and unclassified channels

TABLE 5 The narrative set used in the study and the claims that make it up.

Narrative	Specific claims
"Latvia cannot survive without Russia"	Latvia cannot exist on its own; economic decline because of sanctions and severed ties with Russia; failed development because of Western integration; moral degradation (LGBTQ and liberal values); depopulation and brain drain; Ukrainian refugees as a burden or a threat
"Latvia is run by others"	No real sovereignty, the country is governed by the US, NATO or Brussels; Latvia is a small, insignificant country; the elections are illegitimate, rigged or externally controlled; the presence of NATO troops is an occupation
"Russians are persecuted in Latvia"	The state persecutes Russian speakers and silences their representatives; bans and suppresses the Russian language; expels Russian citizens and Latvian non-citizens
"Latvia itself is provoking war"	Provokes Russia through NATO membership and support for Ukraine, and so becomes a legitimate target; invents or exaggerates the Russian threat to justify militarisation
"Latvia honours Nazis"	Glorifies Waffen-SS legionnaires; protects Nazi criminals; state institutions are neo-Nazi
"Latvia is rewriting history"	Falsifies history; denies that the USSR liberated Latvia; demolishes Soviet monuments and renames streets
"Time to restore relations with Russia"	Restore economic and trade ties with Russia and Belarus; restore political relations; restore social and cultural ties; normalisation would benefit ordinary people

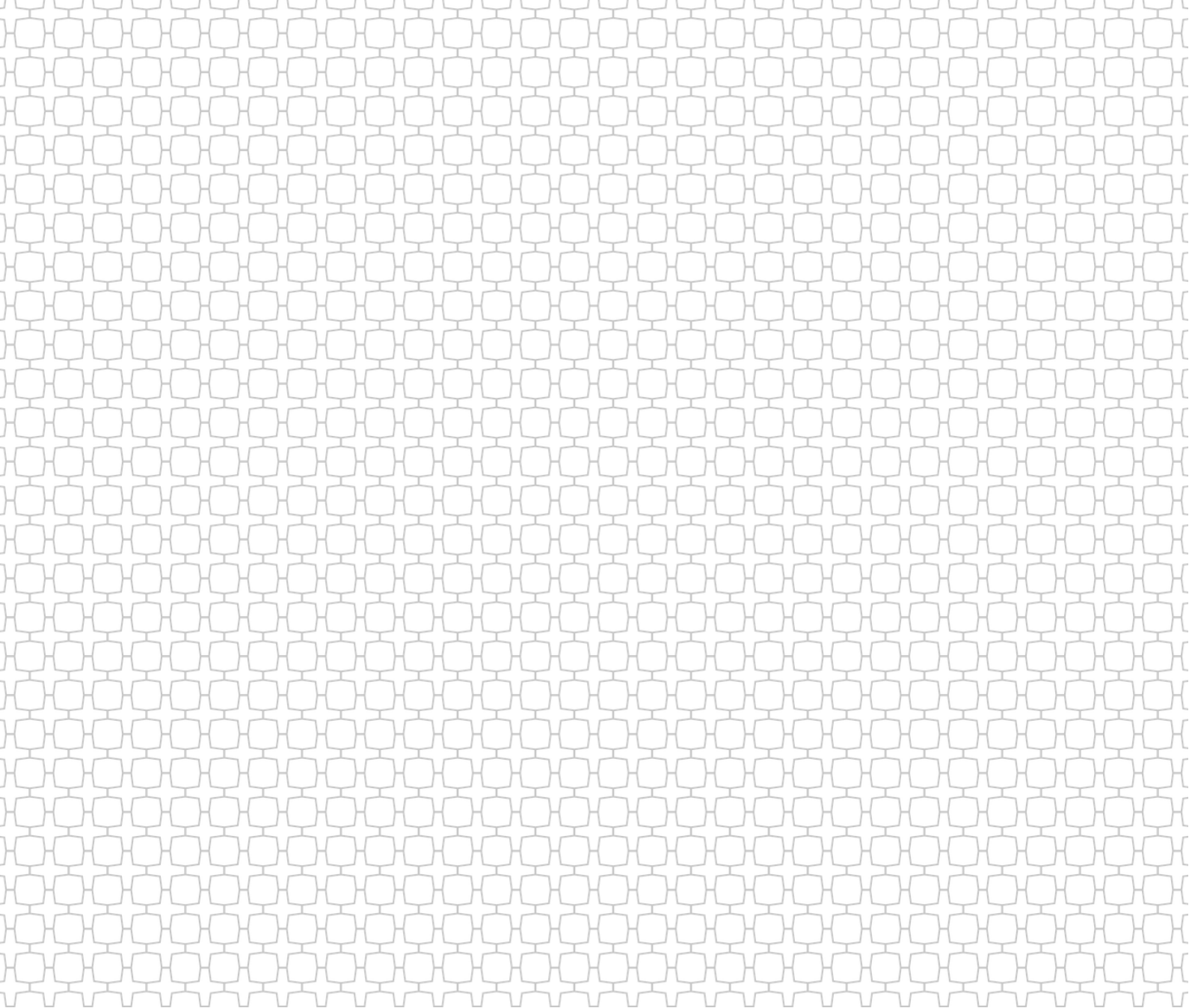
party candidates and the accounts linked to them are considered only as targets of the monitored activity or as authors of their own public statements. The names and usernames of private individuals who posted

comments are not given in the report. The results presented in the report do not claim that any specific person has committed an offence.

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