



Baltic Engagement
Centre for Combating
Information Disorders

HOT REPORT

FEAR POLITICS AND MIGRATION: HOW LATVIAN POLITICIANS AMPLIFY ANTI- IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES

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THIS REPORT IS BASED ON AN INVESTIGATION BY RE:BALTICA/RE:CHECK BY RONALDS SILIŅŠ.

WHAT'S HOT?

As parliamentary elections approach in Latvia, anti-immigration rhetoric is intensifying across political and media spaces. Populist actors are increasingly portraying migrants from third countries as threats to national security, culture, and economic stability. Despite relatively low numbers of such migrants, emotionally charged and often misleading narratives are gaining traction, contributing to rising public anxiety and polarisation.

What Do We See?

- **Disproportionate threat framing:** Third-country nationals make up only about 1.4% of Latvia's population, yet political discourse frequently portrays them as an existential threat.
- **Fear-based narratives:** Common claims include migrants "taking over the country," increasing crime, undermining culture, and burdening the economy.
- **Political amplification:** These messages are активно promoted by politicians from parties such as the National Alliance and Latvia First, as well as echoed by others, including actors within government coalitions.
- **Conspiracy narratives:** The "Great Replacement" theory and similar ideas are present in Latvian discourse, framing migration as a deliberate attempt to replace local populations.
- **Misuse of data:** Isolated statistics on crimes involving migrants are presented without context to exaggerate risk and fuel fear.
- **Contradiction with evidence:** Available data shows that migrants in Latvia are significantly less likely to be suspected of crimes than local citizens.
- **Media reinforcement:** Sensationalist and click-driven media coverage often amplifies negative stories about migrants, including incidents abroad, contributing to distorted perceptions.
- **Escalation into racism:** In some cases, rhetoric crosses into openly racist claims and dehumanising language, further normalising hostility.

Why Does It Work?

- **Emotional appeal:** Fear of crime, cultural loss, and economic insecurity resonates strongly with voters.
- **Visibility bias:** Rare or isolated incidents receive disproportionate attention, shaping perceptions of widespread threat.
- **Political incentives:** Anti-immigration messaging is an effective tool for mobilising voters, especially ahead of elections.
- **Social media dynamics:** Platforms amplify polarising content, creating echo chambers that reinforce negative attitudes.
- **Media logic:** Negative and conflict-driven stories attract more attention, increasing their spread.

Risk Assessment: HIGH

- **Social polarisation:** Persistent fear narratives deepen divisions within society.
- **Normalisation of extremism:** Repeated exposure to radical or racist claims can shift public discourse boundaries.
- **Policy distortion:** Decisions may be driven by perceived threats rather than evidence-based analysis.
- **Vulnerability to disinformation:** Simplified and emotionally charged narratives create fertile ground for manipulation by domestic and foreign actors.

How to Respond?

For policymakers and public institutions

- Base migration policy communication on transparent data and evidence.
- Address public concerns without reinforcing misleading narratives.
- Invest in integration and social cohesion policies to reduce perceived tensions.

For media

- Provide context when reporting on migration and crime statistics.
- Avoid amplifying unverified or sensational claims.
- Include expert perspectives and comparative data to counter misinformation.

For civil society and educators

- Promote media literacy focused on recognising fear-based narratives and manipulation techniques.

- Encourage nuanced discussions about migration, including economic and demographic realities.
- Challenge stereotypes and provide platforms for diverse voices.

For the public

- Question claims that rely on fear rather than evidence.
- Be cautious of viral content that portrays entire groups as threats.
- Seek information from reliable and data-driven sources.

FURTHER READING

- **Re:Baltica/Re:Check: “Criminals who will overtake the country – who in Latvian politics is stoking fear of immigrants?”**
- **Handbook Against Disinformation: Recognise and Resist**

What is BECID?

BECID – the Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders – brings together expertise in fact-checking, media literacy, and journalism across the Baltics. We conduct fact-checks in collaboration with Delfi/Delfi Meedia, monitor disinformation narratives and campaigns under the leadership of investigative journalism organisation Re:Baltica, and promote media literacy through the Baltic Centre for Media Literacy (BCME). We also develop methodologies to effectively counter disinformation. Learn more: becid.ut.ee

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