Tracking FIMI Online:
Findings from Kyrgyzstan

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Organizations

Internews

IInternews is a non-partisan non-profit organisation that advances freedom of speech and access to information worldwide. For more than 40 years, it has defended the right to free expression in 100+ countries; supported local independent media outlets; trained journalists, filmmakers, technologists, and digital rights activists; offered business expertise to help media outlets thrive financially; and protected everyone's right to have a voice in public debates.

Internews is a global alliance dedicated to supporting independent journalism and ensuring the voices of marginalised and vulnerable communities are heard. The alliance is made up of three core entities: Internews Europe, a registered charity in England and Wales (Charity No. 1148404), headquartered in London; Internews Network, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) organization (EIN 94-3027961), headquartered in California; and Internews International, a non-profit association registered in France (SIRET No. 425 132 347 00013), headquartered in Paris.

European Neighbourhood Council (ENC)

European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) is an independent think tank that conducts research and implements projects with the aim of strengthening a common European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Enlargement Policy and the promotion of a Global Strategy for the European Union's (EU) Foreign and Security Policy. ENC conducts research that aims towards improved dialogue and neighbourhood coordination among EU Member States, EU Accession Countries, European Neighbourhood Policy countries, including also the 'Neighbours of the Neighbours' (Central Asian Republics, Gulf Cooperation Council, Iraq, Iran, and Sahel Countries). Through advanced quantitative and qualitative on-the-ground research, publications, partnerships, training and policy events, ENC aims to narrow the foreign policy gap between the EU and Wider Europe.

Pikasa Analytics

Pikasa Analytics is a data analytics and media monitoring organisation with over 15 years of experience in delivering advanced media intelligence solutions. Pikasa specialises in developing tools, solutions and research analysis that translate digital and social media data into valuable insights. Since its founding, Pikasa has expanded operations to over 30 countries across Europe, Central Asia, and the Western Balkans, providing cutting-edge analytics to high-profile clients in the development sector.

Executive
Summary

The rapid growth of digital media has opened new avenues for Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) to influence public opinion across the globe. Central Asia has not been immune to the global rise of information manipulation. Recent studies have documented the likely presence of FIMI across the region, often aligning with the geopolitical interests of external actors such as Russia and China. The scale and impact of disinformation activity have been particularly exposed during major global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These developments highlight the urgent need for targeted, context-specific research into how foreign information manipulation unfolds across Central Asia's media environment.

In response to these challenges, Internews Europe, in partnership with the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) and Pikasa Analytics, launched a regional research initiative in 2024 under the Cultivating Audience Resilience through Amplification of Vibrant and Authentic Narratives (CARAVAN) project funded by the European Union. This research focused initially on Kyrgyzstan as a pilot study, applying a machine learning (ML)-based methodology combined with qualitative research to track and assess FIMI and related risks. It aimed to map key narratives, detect linguistic and discursive manipulation patterns, identify outlets, develop methodology and thereby provide a data-informed understanding of FIMI risks within Central Asia's digital media ecosystem.

This report presents findings from the first phase of pilot research, focused specifically on Kyrgyzstan. The study employed a novel mixed-methods approach, combining ML-assisted Artificial Intelligence (AI) with qualitative expert interviews to address the central question: How does foreign information manipulation or FIMI manifest itself in Kyrgyzstan's media space in terms of their sources, frequency, language techniques, and potential impact on society? The findings offer a preliminary, yet detailed, portrait of Kyrgyzstan's evolving FIMI landscape and provide insights aimed at improving methodology on FIMI and supporting policymakers, media professionals, and civil society actors working to strengthen societal resilience against foreign information manipulation and disinformation.

The primary objective of the study was to test the methodological process and map the landscape of FIMI in Kyrgyzstan's online environment, focusing on key narratives, language manipulation techniques, disinformation sources and dissemination channels.
The research employed a three-tier classification system to assess the likelihood of FIMI in media content based on the presence of:

- Pre-defined and AI-assisted malign narratives,
- Manipulative language techniques,
- Known disinformation sources.

The AI model, developed by Pikasa Analytics, analysed 51,348 items of digital content published between 1 September and 31 December 2024 across websites, Telegram, Odnoklassniki, Instagram, VKontakte, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok. From this dataset, 5,637 items were filtered as thematically relevant (content items of political and social themes) — referred to here as "content selected for analysis". These items were selected as the sample in which the presence of FIMI characteristics would be assessed. The findings were validated through an expert roundtable and semi-structured interviews to ensure qualitative depth and context sensitivity.

Key Findings

- **Focus on the West and the US.** FIMI narratives in Kyrgyzstan predominantly targeted the West, particularly the United States (US), portraying it as interfering, declining, or exploitative (378 content items, or 68% of content flagged as FIMI). Anti-EU narratives were less prominent (82 content items, or 15% of content flagged as FIMI), reflecting the lower politicisation of the EU in Central Asia compared to NATO and the US.

- **Disproportionate influence of a few sources.** One of the key findings of the study is that a small number of sources were responsible for a disproportionate share of FIMI content. Out of 891 sources screened, just 55 were identified as likely or highly likely FIMI sources. Notably, 14 sources, indicated as Known Disinformation Sources (KDS), produced 296 items, while the remaining 41 sources accounted for 260 items. This indicates that a limited group of actors played an outsized role in disseminating FIMI content, generating significantly more material per source than others.

- **Russian-language dominance.** Russian-language media spaces were significantly more affected by FIMI than Kyrgyz-language spaces. About 15.4% of Russian-language content contained identified FIMI, compared to 3.4% for Kyrgyz-language content, exposing Russian-speaking audiences to greater foreign manipulation.

- **Kyrgyz-language FIMI is growing but remains informal.** FIMI and disinformation in Kyrgyz is typically spread through short-form, visual content — memes, short videos, and peer-to-peer messaging — rather than structured articles. This mode of transmission presents unique detection and counteraction challenges.

- **Platform-specific patterns.** Websites remain key FIMI sources, but Telegram— the only messaging app analysed—emerged as the most prominent. The role of closed groups on WhatsApp and Facebook is acknowledged but remains unclear due to monitoring limitations.

- **Polarisation and social fragmentation.** FIMI content exploits and deepens societal divides — ideological, generational, and linguistic — making national cohesion more difficult. Echo chambers reinforced by polarised expert and media communities further entrench these divisions.

- **Erosion of trust and media literacy challenges.** Continuous exposure to conflicting narratives contributes to cynicism and disengagement, undermining public trust in credible information sources and making societies more vulnerable to manipulation over time.

- **Increasing prevalence of FIMI.** The proportion of FIMI content steadily increased over the four-month observation period, highlighting the need for continuous monitoring, flexible response mechanisms, and proactive countermeasures.

Key
Recommendations

For the Government of Kyrgyzstan:

✓	Strengthen digital literacy nationwide in cooperation with media and civil society, incorporating critical media skills into educational curricula and community outreach programmes, and drawing on relevant international best practices.
✓	Develop coherent national narratives grounded in fact-based reporting to fill the vacuum exploited by foreign disinformation in accordance with inclusive international standards like the Digital Services Act (DSA) under existing digitisation initiatives between the EU and Kyrgyzstan.
✓	Prioritise balanced regulation, promoting transparency requirements for media ownership while safeguarding freedom of expression and regulatory frameworks with international partnerships as opposed to censorship.

For International Media Support Organisations:

✓	Support independent journalism and content creation with an evidence-based understanding of FIMI.
✓	Invest in further research, methodological testing, training and development of AI-driven content monitoring tools tailored to the Kyrgyz and Russian language environments, utilising ML and Large Language Model (LLM).
✓	Facilitate knowledge-sharing networks and AI content monitoring connecting Kyrgyz, Central Asian, and international fact-checking and media actors.
✓	Promote the creation of alternative digital spaces, including independent social media channels and pages with pro-democracy and factual content.

For Local Media Outlets and Civil Society:

✓	Expand international-to-local-AI-coordination and partnerships, which support enhancing local fact-checking, FIMI awareness and evidence-based data content production.
✓	Build resilience against manipulative narratives by exposing the audience to diverse and complete viewpoints, well-designed and inclusive participatory assemblies, promoting pluralistic debate, hosting open forums, and producing explanatory journalism on complex issues to overcome simplistic polarisation of narratives.
✓	Focus on grassroots digital literacy efforts, especially in rural areas where peer-to-peer misinformation spreads rapidly. Ensure these efforts reflect Kyrgyzstan's linguistic diversity, including increased content production in Kyrgyz to foster information resilience, alongside strategies to engage with and counter FIMI in Russian-language information spaces.
✓	Develop highly tailored and profile-targeted audiovisual short- and long-form content, using reels, documentaries, and social media storytelling to reach vulnerable and younger audiences effectively.
✓	Provide additional monitoring of closed messaging groups, since the findings suggest that the spread of FIMI circulates in such settings.

Conclusion

This pilot represents the first systematic effort to track FIMI trends in Kyrgyzstan through the development of an AI algorithm, which will be further refined in future research phases. While preliminary, the findings underscore the need for sustained research, expanded monitoring, and more coordinated, multi-stakeholder responses. As Kyrgyzstan confronts an increasingly complex and contested information environment, strengthening societal resilience to manipulative narratives and foreign influence will be essential for protecting democratic discourse and preserving national independence.