INFORMATION UNDER PRESSURE

FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTEREFERENCE (FIMI) IN KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
API	Application Programming Interface
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CA	Central Asia
CARAVAN	Cultivating Audience Resilience through Amplification of Vibrant and Authentic Narratives
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENC	European Neighbourhood Council
EU	European Union
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and others
ML	Machine Learning
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	Second World War

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a five-month monitoring programme examining foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan between October 2025 and February 2026. Conducted by the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) in partnership with Internews under the EU-funded Cultivating Audience Resilience through Amplification of Vibrant and Authentic Narratives (CARAVAN) project, the study combines AI-assisted analysis of 3,008 narrative instances — identified from 581,059 collected posts across 577 monitored accounts on five platforms — with fourteen expert interviews and two structured roundtable discussions.

The monitoring framework tracks 32 narratives grouped into six thematic clusters: Western Geopolitical Interference, NGOs and Cultural Influence, Economic Pressure and Sanctions, Global Geopolitical Competition, Positive Narratives about Russia and China, and Russia-Ukraine War and European Narratives. It builds on a pilot monitoring study carried out in Kyrgyzstan in 2024–2025, and monitors seed accounts linked to Russia and China alongside domestic amplifier networks in each country.

The 32 tracked narratives were developed through systematic analysis of the EUvsDisinfo database — the European Union's primary repository of documented disinformation — and adapted for sustained thematic monitoring rather than case-by-case documentation. This represents an effort to apply the EUvsDisinfo catalogue as a foundation for a quantitative, AI-assisted monitoring framework in Central Asia.

The study builds on a pilot monitoring programme in Kyrgyzstan (2024–2025) that tested and refined the methodological framework applied here. The Kyrgyzstan experience enabled a more rigorous and better-structured analysis in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and a comparative note drawing on its findings is included in section 5.4.

The information environment

Three observations illustrate the key characteristics of the information environment in the two countries. First, Telegram dominates as the primary platform for FIMI content, accounting for 88 percent of narrative instances in Kazakhstan and 61 in Uzbekistan. Second, despite generating less than one-quarter of Kazakhstan's narrative instances, Uzbekistan produces 26 percent more total views — 17.7 million against 14.0 million in Kazakhstan — reflecting the substantially higher average reach per post among Uzbekistani amplifier accounts.

Third, every single expert interviewed across both countries, without exception, identifies Russia as the primary external information actor — a finding consistent across all professional backgrounds and confirmed by the quantitative data.

What the narratives say — and to whom

The 32 monitored narratives share an underlying structural logic: the West is simultaneously aggressive and declining; its civil society instruments are tools of destabilisation; its values are foreign impositions; and Russia and China represent a more legitimate alternative order. The dataset contains 26 narratives framing the West negatively against only 6 portraying Russia or China positively.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan present structurally distinct FIMI landscapes despite sharing a common narrative core. In Kazakhstan, the two largest clusters — Western Geopolitical Interference (31 percent) and NGOs and Cultural Influence (23 percent) — are specifically calibrated to the domestic political context, drawing on the 2022 Kantar events and targeting civil society, Western security partnerships, and reform institutions. In Uzbekistan, Global Geopolitical Competition narratives dominate (44 percent), focused on Western civilisational decline and elite corruption, while Russia-Ukraine War framing accounts for 34 percent. This suggests Uzbekistan's FIMI content is dominated by globally-oriented narratives rather than content specifically calibrated to the Central Asian or Uzbekistani context. Uzbekistan's FIMI content is largely transnational in character, reaching Uzbekistani audiences as part of wider information flows rather than as country-specific targeting.

Who amplifies the content

In Kazakhstan, the top five media actors (all classified as high-risk)[1] together account for 76 percent of all FIMI across all content distribution channels. Each of these accounts covered between 27 and 32 of the 32 tracked narratives, a pattern consistent with systematic, directed amplification. In Uzbekistan, the amplifier profile is more distributed: the most active accounts are standard-tier outlets named commentators and established media platforms, rather than accounts classified as high-risk channels. Intervention strategies effective in Kazakhstan may therefore not translate to Uzbekistan, and a tailor-made approach in countering FIMI is key.

1. The monitoring framework classifies amplifier accounts into two tiers: **high-risk accounts** demonstrate repeated, systematic alignment with FIMI narratives across multiple clusters; **standard accounts** are domestic media or commentators whose content occasionally aligns with monitored narratives without showing systematic amplification patterns. These are behavioural designations, not attributions of foreign direction.

High-risk accounts dominate narratives calibrated to the domestic political context (e.g., Western Geopolitical Interference and NGOs and Cultural Influence clusters), while globally oriented content circulates more broadly through standard accounts, including mainstream media outlets.

The latter pattern may reflect genuine editorial sympathy with certain geopolitical framings rather than only coordinated amplification. This, therefore, underscores the need for broader resilience-building approaches, including but not limited to improved counter-narratives, as well as support for balanced and nuanced discussion of these issues among experts and opinion-shapers.

What expert interviews reveal

The most frequently cited narrative across all seven Kazakhstan expert interviews — not captured in the ML taxonomy — is the "Kazakhstan will face Ukraine's fate" framing: an implicit coercive threat that Kazakhstan's Western alignment will provoke Russian intervention. This narrative operates through ambient pressure rather than explicit propaganda and requires no attribution, allowing it to appear to originate from domestic voices.

In Uzbekistan, expert interviews show a pattern of sustained sovereignty provocations by Russian public figures — including statements suggesting Central Asian states could face a situation analogous to Russia's so-called "special military operation" involvement in Ukraine — met by episodic but documented institutional counter-statements from Uzbekistani officials. Labour migration dependency on Russia creates a structural moderator on anti-Russian sentiment with no equivalent in Kazakhstan.

Both countries share a critical vulnerability identified consistently across expert interviews: counter-FIMI capacity is contracting at precisely the moment FIMI intensity is increasing. In Kazakhstan, the withdrawal of donor-funded independent media support is creating a resilience gap. In Uzbekistan, government control of the information space provides partial insulation while simultaneously suppressing the civil society capacity needed for durable, bottom-up resilience.

Recommendations

Governments

R1	Strengthen resilience through proactive public communication and trusted information capacity, ending the default posture of silence when Russian-origin narratives circulate.
R2	Strengthen the supply and quality of Kazakh- and Uzbek-language content to reduce audience dependence on Russian-language information ecosystems.
R3	Ensure that measures intended to address harmful influence do not restrict independent media or legitimate public debate, through clear definitions, transparent procedures, and proportional enforcement.
R4	Establish a publicly accessible, institutionally independent FIMI monitoring and transparency mechanism in each country with support of international organisations and Early Warning Systems.

Media and fact-checking organisations

R5	Expand platform-native presence where audiences already consume FIMI-related content — developing short-form video, Telegram-adapted reporting, and national-language content for TikTok and Threads.
R6	Move from reactive debunking to proactive resilience-building coverage — integrating awareness of recurrent manipulative themes into regular editorial production so that credible information reaches audiences before harmful narratives take hold.
R7	Prioritise pension-age and rural audiences — the most structurally vulnerable and least reached by current digital initiatives.
R8	Adopt editorial standards treating verbatim reproduction of foreign propaganda as amplification, not reporting.
R9	Strengthen national-language information capacity by integrating fact-checking into trusted editorial production in Kazakh and Uzbek, supported by bilingual staff and formats suited to the platforms audiences actually use.

Civil society

R10	Design audience-segmented media literacy programmes targeting the "movable middle" — audiences exposed to Russian-origin content but not committed to pro-Russian positions.
R11	Develop community-level resilience programming — including critical thinking and media literacy initiatives — specifically for northern Kazakhstan and mixed-language urban centres.
R12	Map and increase public understanding of how malign narratives circulate through domestic amplifier networks, raising reputational costs for those reproducing foreign-origin content.

International Donors (including donor institutions and implementing organisations. The two have distinct roles: donors set funding structures and strategic priorities; implementers translate those priorities into programme design)

R13	Treat independent media sustainability and civil society information capacity as core strategic interests, with multi-year flexible funding rather than project-based support – particularly in Kazakhstan, where donor withdrawal is creating a resilience gap at the moment FIMI intensity is increasing.
R14	Integrate FIMI resilience objectives into existing bilateral and multilateral programming — governance, civil society, and media development — rather than creating high-profile standalone counter-disinformation initiatives that attract narrative attention.
R15	Support a Regional Monitoring Approach covering Central Asia, investing in a harmonised AI-supported methodology that enables longitudinal and cross-national comparison through an Early Warning System aligned with the European Democracy Shield Initiative.
R13	Treat independent media sustainability and civil society information capacity as core strategic interests, with multi-year flexible funding rather than project-based support – particularly in Kazakhstan, where donor withdrawal is creating a resilience gap at the moment FIMI intensity is increasing.

Monitoring and research community

R16	Expand platform coverage to TikTok, Threads, and Telegram forwarding chain data to close the growing gap between monitored and actual FIMI vectors.
R17	Develop confidence score thresholds for tiered alert and response protocols, transforming the monitoring system from a retrospective analytical tool into a prospective early-warning function.
R18	Address the emerging risk – flagged by experts consulted in this study – that FIMI content, even if low-traffic, may be ingested by large language models and reproduced as synthesised analysis in AI-generated outputs.

1. Introduction

Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) has become a defining feature of the geopolitical contest in the post-Soviet space. Central Asia occupies a distinctive position in this landscape: media ecosystems across the region are characterised by extensive cross-border information flows, widespread consumption of Russian-language content, and rapidly expanding social media use — conditions that create an informational space in which narratives originating outside national borders can circulate widely and interact with domestic political debates. Despite growing international attention to FIMI, systematic empirical analysis of narrative circulation within Central Asian information environments remains limited.

This report addresses that gap. It presents findings from a five-month monitoring programme covering Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan between October 2025 and February 2026, combining AI-assisted analysis of 3,008 narrative instances with fourteen expert interviews and two structured roundtable discussions. The research was conducted by the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) in partnership with Internews within the CARAVAN project (Cultivating Audience Resilience through Amplification of Vibrant and Authentic Narratives), funded by the European Union.

This study builds on a pilot monitoring conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2024–2025, which tested the core methodological framework under operational conditions. The present study applies the refined framework to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, benefiting directly from the methodological lessons of the pilot phase.

The findings are unambiguous on several points. Russia is identified as the primary external information actor by every interviewee across both countries, without exception. Quantitative data supports the findings. Russian seed accounts generated approximately 23,100 narrative instances against 1,230 from Chinese sources across the monitoring period. While the Russian language sample was larger (54 accounts monitored against 30 Chinese), the volume gap substantially exceeds the difference in sample size.

Telegram functions as the dominant delivery infrastructure, accounting for 88 percent of narrative instances in Kazakhstan and 61 percent in Uzbekistan. The two countries present structurally distinct FIMI landscapes: Kazakhstan faces a dense, locally calibrated interference environment concentrated in a small cluster of high-risk accounts and focused on undermining Western partnerships and political stability; Uzbekistan faces a more diffuse, globally oriented environment in which civilisational-decline and liberal elite-delegitimisation content — delivered largely in Uzbek language — dominates. In both countries, as expert interviews suggest, the capacity needed to build durable resilience against FIMI is not keeping pace with its growth.

The report examines three interrelated dimensions: the platforms through which narratives circulate, the actors involved in their amplification, and the thematic narratives most frequently appearing in the dataset. The analysis focuses on observable patterns of narrative activity rather than definitive attribution to specific state actors — in highly interconnected information environments, such attribution requires data beyond the scope of any single monitoring study, and the limits of inference are stated explicitly throughout. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework and methodology. Chapters 3-5 present the quantitative findings on narrative themes, engagement patterns, actor networks, and country-level comparison. Chapter 6 synthesises qualitative insights from expert interviews and roundtables, and Chapter 7 sets out recommendations addressed to governments, media organisations, civil society, international partners, and the monitoring community.

2. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This chapter outlines the conceptual and methodological foundations of the study. It defines the analytical framework used to identify Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) narratives, explains the design of the AI-supported monitoring system, and describes the qualitative research component. The methodology was developed by the European Neighbourhood Council (ENC) in partnership with Internews under the EU-funded CARAVAN project and builds on the framework tested during the Kyrgyzstan pilot phase in 2024–2025. The present study adapts that framework to the broader linguistic and platform environments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

Defining FIMI in the Central Asian Context

The study adopts the operational definition of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) used by the European External Action Service (EEAS): coordinated and deceptive activities conducted by foreign state or state-linked actors to influence target audiences through information means, often blending factual and misleading elements in ways that distort perceptions or policy debates.

Three elements of this definition are particularly relevant for the Central Asian context.

First, the requirement of foreign state or state-linked origin distinguishes FIMI from domestic disinformation or partisan commentary produced within national political debates. Second, the emphasis on coordination highlights the difference between organised information operations and the incidental reproduction of similar narratives by domestic actors. In practice, establishing operational coordination between actors lies beyond the scope of most open-source monitoring studies. Accordingly, this project focuses on identifying patterns of narrative alignment and quantitative amplification rather than demonstrating operational coordination. Third, FIMI narratives typically rely on selective framing rather than outright fabrication, presenting real events in ways that lead audiences toward specific geopolitical interpretations.

In Central Asia, identifying foreign information manipulation is complicated by the deep structural integration of Russian-language media in regional information environments. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan both maintain significant Russian-speaking audiences and long-standing patterns of consumption of Russian-origin media content. Distinguishing coordinated foreign narrative promotion from the broader influence of culturally proximate information sources, therefore, requires methodological precision.

To address this challenge, the study employs a two-layer analytical model that traces narrative diffusion from verified foreign-linked seed accounts through domestic amplification networks. This approach focuses on observable patterns of content transmission rather than attempting to classify narratives solely by their thematic content.

The Two-Layer Analytical Model

The monitoring framework conceptualises the online information environment as consisting of two principal analytical layers complemented by a cross-cutting engagement dimension.

Table 2.1 Two-layer analytical model

Layer / Dimension	Definition	Analytical Function
FIMI Seed Accounts	Verified foreign state-linked media outlets and accounts identified in EEAS and EUvsDisinfo reports and supplemented with regionally relevant additions.	Establish narrative origin points and enable identification of downstream amplification.
FIMI Amplifiers	Domestic actors (media outlets, influencers, social media accounts) that reproduce or adapt narratives originating from seed accounts.	Map narrative diffusion from foreign origin into domestic information environments.
Engagement Dimension	Audience interaction indicators, such as views, reactions, shares, or comments where available through platform data.	Measure narrative reach and resonance without collecting user-level data.

The distinction between seed and amplifier accounts reflects a broader architecture of FIMI operations documented in the 2025 EEAS report.[2] That report identifies four interconnected layers within the FIMI infrastructure: official state channels, state-controlled outlets, state-linked channels operating covertly, and state-aligned channels that show systematic patterns of alignment without formal attribution. The present study draws on this framework in operationalising the seed-amplifier distinction: seed accounts correspond to the attributed layers of the EEAS model, while amplifier accounts correspond to the broader ecosystem of domestic channels through which narratives are reproduced, adapted, and disseminated within national information environments.

Within the amplifier layer, two behavioural patterns are distinguished. **Reposters** directly forward or copy seed content, often verbatim, while **resonators** produce original content that reinforces the same narrative frames without explicit reposting. The analytical model, therefore, captures both technical amplification through quantitative detection supported by AI and ideological alignment within domestic information ecosystems based on narrative.

2. European External Action Service (EEAS), 3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, March 2025.

Narrative vs Topic

The monitoring framework focuses on narratives rather than topics. A narrative is defined as a recurring storyline or interpretive frame linking events, actors, and values to communicate a coherent message. This differs from a topic, which simply denotes a subject area such as sanctions, language policy, or geopolitical competition.

A post discussing Western sanctions against Russia is therefore not automatically flagged as a FIMI narrative instance. It becomes one only when it frames the issue through a specific storyline aligned with the monitored narrative taxonomy — for example, the claim that sanctions are deliberately designed to harm Central Asian economies. The process was developed iteratively: based on the researchers' review of AI outputs, the model was finetuned to be more conservative in its classifications. The result was a system calibrated to flag narrative alignment rather than topic proximity. However, as with any AI-assisted classification, some margin of error in the final dataset should be assumed.

Detection Challenges in the Regional Context

Several structural features of the Central Asian information environment complicate the detection and attribution of FIMI narratives.

First, the widespread use of Russian language across regional media environments blurs the boundary between foreign-origin content and domestically produced commentary. Second, manual reposting practices — including copy-paste reproduction without forwarding links — make it difficult to reconstruct narrative transmission chains. Third, some domestic actors may reproduce foreign narratives due to genuine ideological alignment rather than coordination or external direction — a distinction that content monitoring alone cannot resolve. This ambiguity is compounded by the broadly cooperative relationships both governments maintain with Russia and China, making it difficult to distinguish foreign narrative promotion from domestic positions that happen to align with foreign interests.

The methodology addresses these challenges through three safeguards:

- a **seed-account anchor**, limiting attribution to narratives traceable to verified foreign-linked sources
- an **amplifier typology**, distinguishing different modes of narrative reproduction
- a **human validation process**, introducing contextual judgement alongside automated classification

2.2. Quantitative Component

2.2.1 Dataset Description

The monitoring dataset covers publicly available content across five platform types — Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and websites — collected between October 2025 and February 2026. The full monitoring framework tracked 577 accounts across four source categories: Russian and Chinese seed accounts and domestic amplifier networks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, of which 199 produced at least one narrative-relevant post. Across these accounts, 15,240 posts matched at least one tracked narrative, generating 27,364 narrative instances in total. Within the Kazakhstani and Uzbekistani amplifier networks specifically, 112 unique actors across 132 handles produced the 3,008 classified narrative instances that form the basis of the analysis in this report.

Table 2.2 Monitoring funnel summary

	Russia	China	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Total
Monitored actors	24	9	60	52	**145**
Monitored accounts	54	30	255	238	**577**
Accounts with ≥1 narrative post	43	24	74	58	199
Total posts collected	159,407	54,993	129,670	236,989	**581,059**
Posts with ≥1 narrative match	12,985	916	928	411	**15,240**
Narrative instances	23,124	1,232	2,428	580	**27,364**

As Table 2.2 shows, the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan amplifier dataset, the primary subject of this study, comprises 2,428 narrative instances in Kazakhstan and 580 in Uzbekistan drawn from 1,339 unique posts. A single post may align with multiple tracked narratives simultaneously, which is why narrative instances exceed unique posts.

Data collection was restricted to publicly accessible content. Private accounts, closed groups, and user-level identifiers were not accessed or retained. Different platforms expose different levels of data to external researchers: Telegram, for instance, provides direct API access that allows tracking of how many times a post has been forwarded.

Other platforms (YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram) require third-party collection tools and do not expose individual repost or share chains, only aggregate counts. Websites were scraped directly using custom tools but contain no engagement metrics by design.

Table 2.3 Data collection infrastructure

Platform	Collection Method	Data Available	Repost Detection
Telegram	Official Telegram API	Post text, timestamps, views, reactions, forwards	Yes
YouTube	Apify	Video metadata, transcripts, views, comments	No
Facebook	Apify	Post text, shares, likes, comments	Aggregate shares
Instagram	Apify	Captions, likes, views, comments	No
Websites	Custom Python scrapers	Article text, publication dates	N/A

2.2.2 AI Model Architecture

The core analytical task is identifying whether collected posts, articles, or videos contain content that corresponds to the predefined FIMI narrative taxonomy. This constitutes a supervised classification task rather than open-ended narrative discovery.

The platform designed by ENC is an automated content analysis tool built specifically for detecting FIMI narratives in Central Asian media. It processes content in Russian, Kazakh, Uzbek, and English across all five monitored platform types. The classification pipeline operates in three stages. First, all collected content is machine-translated into English, ensuring that the same analytical logic applies regardless of the original language. Second, each post is evaluated against the full taxonomy of 32 narratives and assigned a relevance score between 0 and 1 for each, a measure of semantic similarity between the post's content and the narrative's reference description, where a score approaching 1 indicates strong alignment and a score near 0 indicates little or no correspondence. Posts exceeding the classification threshold for a given narrative (see 2.2.4) are flagged as supporting that narrative. Third, the system extracts and categorises entities, people, organisations, countries, locations, and topics mentioned in the posts.

For video content, the pipeline works from automatically generated transcripts rather than visual analysis: YouTube videos are processed by extracting the full transcript, which is then passed through the same translation and classification stages as text-based posts.

This allows the narrative detection logic to be applied consistently across formats, though it means that purely visual or non-verbal content in videos falls outside the system's scope.

The pipeline uses Google's Gemini family of large language models, accessed via the Gemini API. Narrative detection — the most analytically demanding stage, requiring reasoning about political framing and rhetorical context — runs on Google Gemini 3 Flash, the most capable model in the Flash tier available during the study period. Translation and entity extraction, which are more structured and well-defined tasks, use the lighter Gemini Flash Lite model. All stages run at a low temperature setting (0.1) to maximise consistency across runs. The platform was developed over four months through iterative engineering and validated against expert-labelled ground truth datasets. It functions as an analyst-assist tool: it flags content for human review rather than making autonomous attribution decisions, and the pipeline architecture is not locked to a single model provider.

2.2.3 Narrative Taxonomy

The monitoring framework tracks 32 narratives (referred to as FIMI narratives in the report) organised into six thematic clusters. Each narrative has both a full descriptive formulation and a short label used in the dataset and visualisations. Narrative definitions were reviewed during the monitoring period to improve classification accuracy. The final taxonomy is presented in Chapter 3.

The starting point was the EUvsDisinfo database[3], which provided an extensive catalogue of documented disinformation narratives circulating in the European information space. However, EUvsDisinfo is built on case-based analysis — each entry corresponds to a specific instance of manipulative content — which means its narratives tend to be granular, event-specific, and often tied to particular moments or actors. This granularity is well-suited to case documentation but less compatible with a top-down monitoring framework designed to track recurring thematic patterns across a sustained period. The research team therefore worked through the full EUvsDisinfo catalogue systematically, consolidating overlapping or overly specific narratives into broader thematic formulations capable of capturing multiple content instances under a single, stable category. The ENC research team further supplemented the taxonomy with narratives not prominently represented in the EUvsDisinfo corpus but identified as relevant to the Central Asian context.

3. EUvsDisinfo is a flagship project of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, established in 2015. The searchable database of disinformation cases is available at https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/

2.2.4 Source Classification Framework

Monitored sources are classified into two analytical tiers reflecting their relationship to foreign narrative production.

Seed accounts consist of actors pre-identified as FIMI sources in EUvsDisinfo or EEAS documentation, supplemented by additional accounts identified by the ENC research team during the monitoring period. These include diplomatic accounts, state-controlled media outlets, and pro-Kremlin commentators and platforms known to systematically amplify official Russian narratives without formal state affiliation. For the purposes of this project, the analysis focused specifically on Russian and Chinese seed accounts.

All monitored accounts based in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are treated as **FIMI amplifiers.** When one or more pieces of their content are flagged as aligned with predefined FIMI narratives, the model treats these accounts as actors that reproduce, adapt, or disseminate narratives originating from seed sources.

Amplifiers are divided into two analytical categories:[4]

- **High-risk amplifiers** — accounts that repeatedly feature narrative-aligned content and demonstrate consistent amplification behaviour.
- **Standard amplifiers** — domestic media outlets, commentators, or other actors whose content may occasionally align with monitored narratives but do not show systematic amplification patterns.

To reflect the differing analytical weight of these categories, the classification process applies different similarity thresholds. Posts originating from seed or high-risk accounts are flagged at a similarity threshold of 0.55, while posts from standard accounts are flagged only at a higher threshold of 0.80, thereby reducing the likelihood of false positives.

The analysis excludes **white-listed sources** - accounts identified by the project team as not relevant to the monitoring task. These include, for example, official accounts of top state officials, state-owned media, and well-established media outlets whose flagged content consisted exclusively of false positives. Excluding these sources reduces the likelihood of misleading results. In addition, monitored sources that produced no flagged content do not appear in the analytical outputs.

4 Clarification on classification language: the categories seed, high-risk, and standard are methodological designations reflecting observed behaviour and existing source documentation. They do not constitute formal legal classifications and should not be interpreted as implying that any account operates under direct foreign instruction.

2.2.5 Data Quality and Limitations

AI classifications were treated as provisional outputs and periodically reviewed by researchers through selective sampling rather than exhaustive case-by-case verification. Researchers examined representative samples from each processing batch, with findings used to identify systematic patterns of false positives and to refine narrative definitions and similarity thresholds accordingly. Because the model was retrained and rerun iteratively throughout the monitoring period, it is not possible to state precisely what proportion of the final 3,008 narrative instances in the dataset were directly verified by a human reviewer. The monitoring system was built from scratch at the outset of the project in October 2025 and required several weeks of iterative fine-tuning and substantial manual review before reaching operational reliability.

Several additional methodological constraints should be noted.

- First, the monitoring system operates using a predefined narrative taxonomy and therefore captures instances of known narratives, rather than identifying new narrative frames inductively.
- Second, the monitoring focuses on a selected set of accounts relevant to the regional information environment. As a result, amplification occurring through anonymous accounts, ordinary users, or media actors and bloggers outside the monitored list is not captured. The dataset should therefore be understood as a structured sample of the information environment rather than an exhaustive account of it.
- Third, the dataset covers five digital platforms only, meaning that potentially relevant content circulating on other online platforms (e.g., TikTok, Threads) or on television falls outside the scope of automated monitoring.
- Fourth, a persistent methodological challenge in FIMI monitoring is distinguishing between deliberate narrative amplification and factual information-sharing that happens to touch on the same topics. The system is calibrated to favour precision over recall — that is, to minimise false positives at the cost of potentially missing some genuine instances — but this boundary cannot be resolved with full certainty by automated means alone.

Narrative instances are recorded at the level of individual posts rather than by audience reach. Engagement metrics, therefore, provide a secondary analytical lens for assessing narrative visibility and resonance. Importantly, engagement metrics are not fully comparable across platforms due to differences in data availability. For example, Facebook posts often lack reliable view counts, Instagram does not provide data on shares or forwards, some Telegram channels hide public reactions, and websites generally do not provide platform-based engagement metrics.

2.3. Qualitative Component

The qualitative component consists of 14 expert interviews and two structured roundtable discussions conducted between December 2025 and February 2026. The sample included seven interviews in Kazakhstan and seven in Uzbekistan, as well as one roundtable discussion in each country.

Both roundtables and almost all interviews were conducted online; one interview was completed in written form at the request of the respondent. The expert pool included representatives of independent media, academic and think-tank communities, civil society organisations, international organisations, and policy analysis institutions. Sampling was purposive rather than representative, aiming to capture informed perspectives on narrative circulation and institutional responses to FIMI.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format organised around four thematic areas: the structure of the national information environment; perceptions of foreign information manipulation and its principal actors; narratives perceived as most resonant with audiences; and assessments of existing institutional responses and their limitations.

Roundtable discussions served two purposes: to obtain feedback on preliminary monitoring findings and to collect additional expert insights through structured discussion. To ensure confidentiality, roundtable participants and interviewees are identified in the report only by professional role and country.

Qualitative observations are analysed alongside quantitative monitoring results using a triangulation approach. Where both sources of evidence converge, the combined findings strengthen the analytical interpretation.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

All data collection was restricted to publicly available content and conducted in compliance with each individual platform's terms of service. No private accounts, closed groups, or user-level identifiers were accessed or retained. The monitoring dataset includes post-level content and account-level metadata but does not contain personally identifiable information about users interacting with the content.

The project recognises the reputational and security risks associated with incorrectly identifying legitimate media actors as FIMI participants. Two safeguards were therefore applied. First, only sources previously documented in EUvsDisinfo or EEAS reporting were classified as seed-tier actors. Second, amplifier identification is based on observed posting behaviour rather than presumed intent or political affiliation.

Narrative alignment scores are descriptive rather than attributive: they indicate observable patterns of content alignment with monitored narratives but do not constitute evidence of coordination or foreign direction. Social media accounts are generally referred to by analytical category (seed, high-risk, or standard) rather than being individually named, except where those accounts already appear in public EU FIMI documentation.

3. Narrative and Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents the quantitative findings on FIMI narratives detected across Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan between October 2025 and February 2026. Drawing on 3,008 narrative instances across 32 distinct narratives, it maps the thematic landscape of foreign information manipulation in the region, identifies the most frequently deployed narrative frames, and examines how these narratives are distributed across platforms, linguistic communities, and over time.

3.1. Narrative Taxonomy: Structure and Framing Logic

The study tracks 32 narratives grouped into six thematic clusters. These clusters (Table 3.1) were developed by the research team prior to data collection and applied consistently across both country datasets.

Table 3.1 Narrative taxonomy used in the monitoring framework

Cluster	Narrative
Western Geopolitical Interference	The West seeks to destabilise Central Asia
	The West seeks to weaken Russia's influence in Central Asia
	NATO seeks to undermine stability in Eurasia
	The West seeks to disconnect Central Asia from Russia or China
	Western actors promote anti-Russian or anti-Chinese sentiment to undermine regional cooperation in Central Asia
NGOs and Cultural Influence	Western-funded NGOs cultivate anti-Russian sentiment in Central Asia
	Western donors use democracy, human rights and training programmes to prepare regime change and colour revolutions
	Western embassies and intelligence services coordinate with local actors to destabilise governments
	Fact-checking and media-literacy initiatives are Western censorship tools
	Western media and NGOs aim to influence and manipulate Central Asian youth
	The West promotes values that undermine Central Asia's traditional culture and values
	The West promotes LGBT+ in Central Asia to erode traditional culture and values
	Western NGOs use women's and minority rights to sow division in Central Asia

Cluster	Narrative
Economic Pressure and Sanctions	The West's anti-Russian sanctions harm Central Asian economies
	Western sanctions against Russia are ineffective
	The Global Gateway and similar EU initiatives are tools for economic dominance rather than genuine partnership
	Western projects on critical minerals harm Central Asia
	Green and climate-funded projects disguise Western efforts to monopolise strategic minerals
Global Geopolitical Competition	The West aims to break the partnership between Russia and China
	COVID-19 and similar viruses are Western biological weapons
	The West is weak and its hegemony is collapsing
	Europe is not interested in ending the war in Ukraine
Positive Narratives about Russia and China	Russia is the only reliable security guarantor for Central Asia
	The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) brings prosperity and infrastructure to Central Asia
	Unlike the West, China respects national sovereignty and traditions
Russia–Ukraine War and European Narratives	Russia's war in Ukraine is legitimate or justified
	NATO expansion threatens Russia
	Europe is racist and xenophobic
	Fascism and Nazism are growing in Europe
	The European Union is collapsing
	Liberal elites are evil
	The EU is an elitist and globalist project

Together, these clusters reflect a coherent and structurally consistent information environment. The narratives share an underlying logic: the West is simultaneously aggressive and declining; its civil society instruments are presented as tools of destabilisation; its values are framed as foreign impositions; and Russia and/or China are depicted as representing a more legitimate alternative order. This framing architecture creates mutually reinforcing narrative patterns, allowing audiences to absorb elements of the narrative ecosystem incrementally rather than requiring acceptance of any single claim in isolation.

A key analytical distinction within the taxonomy concerns the degree to which narratives are directly targeted at Central Asian audiences. Some narratives—particularly those within the Western Geopolitical Interference and NGOs and Cultural Influence clusters—are specifically calibrated to the regional context. They reference local political developments, named organisations, and country-specific vulnerabilities. Others, especially narratives within the Russia–Ukraine War and European Narratives cluster, appear to consist of repurposed content originating from broader geopolitical messaging, where Central Asian audiences function more as secondary recipients than primary targets.

The narrative taxonomy also reveals a notable structural asymmetry. The dataset contains six narratives portraying Russia or China positively, compared to twenty-six narratives framing the West negatively. This imbalance reflects a defining characteristic of the observed information environment: the dominant mode of influence is delegitimisation of Western actors and institutions, rather than sustained promotion of an alternative geopolitical programme. This asymmetry is consistent with patterns observed in broader FIMI practice. Manufacturing doubt and distrust often proves operationally cheaper, psychologically effective and more durable than positive persuasion. A population that becomes sceptical of Western institutions does not necessarily need to develop admiration for Russia or China; it simply becomes less receptive to Western policy engagement, development partnerships, and democratic reform narratives.

This asymmetry is reinforced by deployment patterns. Controlling for the number of narratives tracked in each category, delegitimising narratives average 102 instances each across the dataset, against 17 for narratives portraying Russia or China positively — a sixfold difference that reflects how the information influence operates in practice, not merely how the taxonomy is structured.

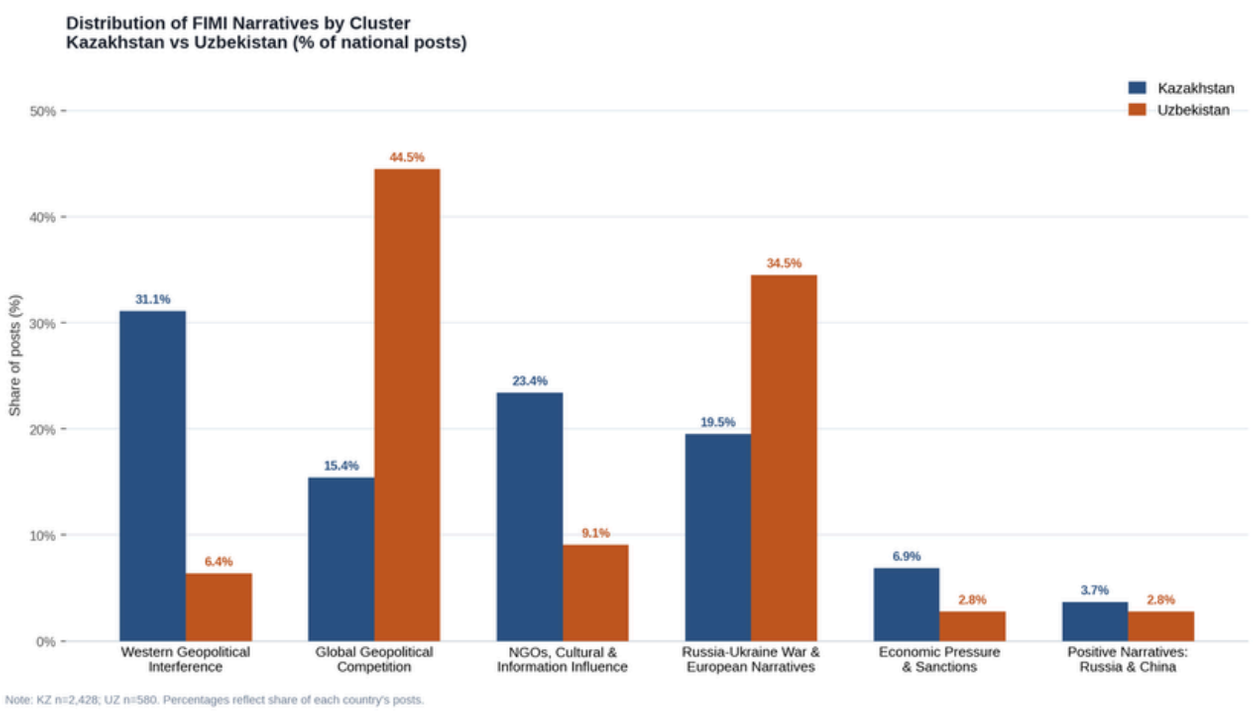
3.2 Thematic Distribution of FIMI Content

Across both countries, FIMI content is concentrated in a relatively small number of thematic clusters, but with structurally distinct profiles. In Kazakhstan, the largest cluster is Western Geopolitical Interference (31 percent of instances), followed by NGOs and

and Cultural Influence (23 percent) and Russia–Ukraine War and European Narratives (20 percent). Global Geopolitical Competition narratives account for a smaller share (15 percent).

In Uzbekistan, the distribution is markedly different. Global Geopolitical Competition dominates the dataset (44 percent), followed by Russia–Ukraine War and European Narratives (34 percent), while Western Geopolitical Interference narratives account for only 6 percent. This divergence represents one of the most analytically significant patterns in the dataset and reflects differences in how foreign information narratives are adapted to the two national information environments.

Figure 3.1 Distribution of narrative instances by cluster, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)



The thematic footprint of FIMI in Kazakhstan is relatively broad and locally embedded. The largest cluster, Western Geopolitical Interference, accounts for 31 percent of Kazakhstani posts and frequently frames political instability or protest movements as externally orchestrated "colour revolutions" or products of Western strategic interference. The second-largest cluster, NGOs and Cultural Influence (23 percent), targets civil society actors, media literacy initiatives, and democratic values programming, portraying them as instruments of political destabilisation rather than development cooperation. Russia–Ukraine War and European narratives constitute a further 20 percent of the Kazakhstani dataset, reflecting the degree to which broader geopolitical messaging around the conflict permeates the regional information environment. This combination suggests an information environment in which narratives are calibrated to undermine both the legitimacy of Western partnerships and the credibility of domestic reform-oriented actors.

In Uzbekistan, the thematic profile differs substantially.[5] Western Geopolitical Interference and NGO-related narratives are far less prominent, while Global Geopolitical Competition narratives dominate the dataset at 44.5 percent, focusing on Western decline, liberal elites' corruption, and broader civilisational confrontation between geopolitical blocs. Russia–Ukraine War and European narratives constitute a substantial 34.5 percent of Uzbekistani posts, compared with 19.5 percent in Kazakhstan. Typical examples include content about the disintegration of European unity, the moral bankruptcy of Western liberal elites, or Russian justifications for the war in Ukraine — narratives that make no reference to Uzbekistan, its institutions, or its domestic politics. These narratives typically originate from broader geopolitical messaging environments rather than messaging specifically tailored for Uzbekistan's media consumers.

This contrast points to a broader structural difference in narrative targeting strategies. In Kazakhstan, FIMI narratives appear more frequently adapted to local political contexts and domestic institutional actors. A Kazakhstani amplifier, for instance, frames the detention of a pro-Eurasian blogger as evidence of US-funded interference in domestic affairs; another produces content portraying Western-funded organisations as coordinating regime change against local governments — narratives that reference identifiable local actors and events rather than abstract geopolitical claims. In Uzbekistan, by contrast, the dominant content consists of transnational geopolitical narratives that circulate across the broader Russian-language information space simultaneously: Uzbekistani amplifiers have content about the fragmentation of US military leadership, the decline of European civilisation, or the collapse of the EU, i.e., content that makes no reference to Uzbekistan, its institutions, or its domestic politics. Uzbekistani audiences, in this sense, function as secondary recipients of messaging produced for a broader audience rather than as primary targets of locally calibrated FIMI. The Economic Pressure and Sanctions cluster is also less prominent in Uzbekistan (2.8 percent) than in Kazakhstan (6.9 percent). This difference may reflect Kazakhstan's deeper economic integration with Russia and its greater exposure to sanctions-related economic debates. Uzbekistan's different economic positioning and foreign policy profile may make this narrative line less resonant with local audiences, reducing its deployment within amplifier networks.

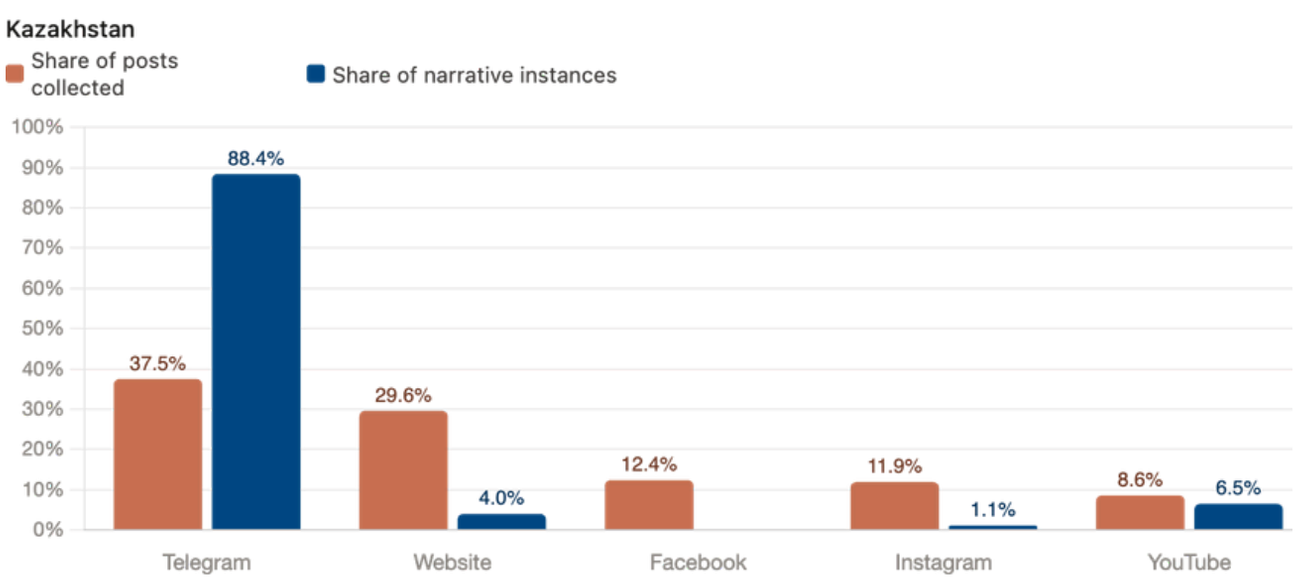
Across both countries, positive narratives portraying Russia or China remain comparatively marginal, accounting for 3.7 percent of Kazakhstani and 2.8 percent of Uzbekistani posts respectively. This reinforces the broader pattern identified in the narrative taxonomy: the dominant mode of information influence operates primarily through delegitimising Western actors and institutions, rather than through sustained promotion of an alternative geopolitical model.

5. It should be noted that the Uzbekistani sub-dataset is considerably smaller (n=580 versus n=2,428 for Kazakhstan), and distributional patterns should be interpreted with corresponding caution.

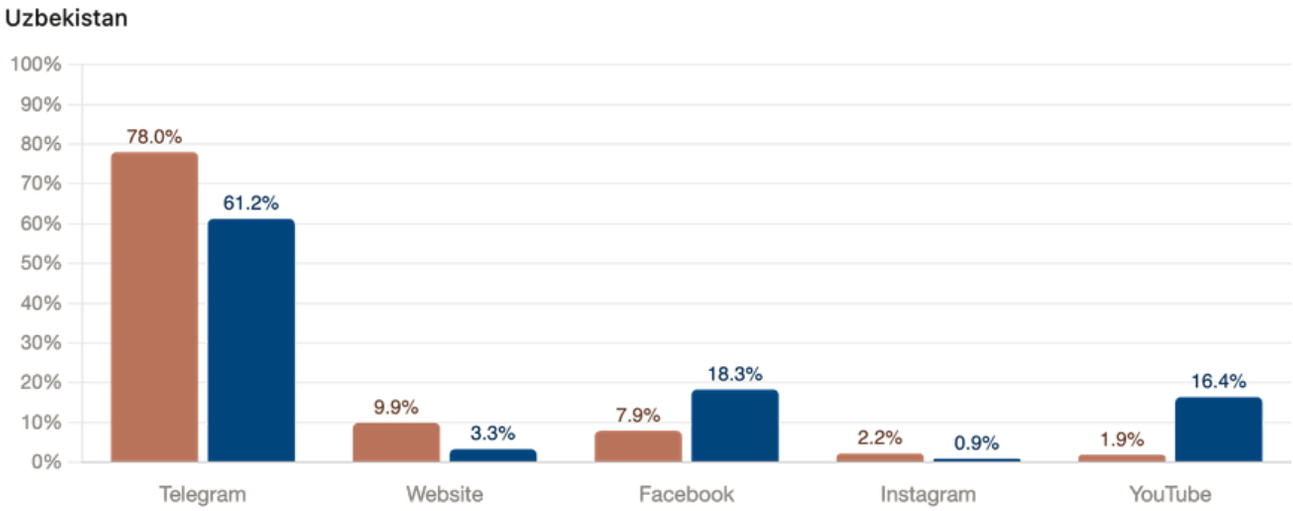
3.3 Platform Distribution and Engagement Patterns

Telegram is the dominant platform in both countries, accounting for 88 percent of narrative instances in Kazakhstan and 61 percent in Uzbekistan. However, its significance differs markedly between the two. In Kazakhstan, Telegram's share of narrative instances (88 percent) far exceeds its share of collected posts (38 percent), confirming that its prominence reflects genuine platform-level FIMI concentration rather than a collection artefact. In Uzbekistan the dynamic is reversed: Telegram is actually underrepresented in narrative instances relative to its collection share (61 percent of instances against 78 percent of collected posts), while Facebook and YouTube punch well above their weight: Facebook accounts for 18 percent of narrative instances from just 8 percent of collected posts, and YouTube contributes 16 percentof instances from under 2 percent of collected content. This points to a broader and more distributed amplification landscape in Uzbekistan, in contrast to the near-total Telegram dominance seen in Kazakhstan.

Figure 3.2 FIMI concentration by platform — share of posts collected versus narrative instances, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (percent)[6]



6. Platform distribution is not directly comparable with the Kyrgyzstan pilot study, which was implemented by a separate AI development team with different collection infrastructure and account selection. Cross-study comparisons at the platform level should be treated with caution.



Share of total posts collected vs share of narrative instances, by platform and country.

Across both countries, narrative distribution by platform is not uniform. In Kazakhstan, narratives in the Western Geopolitical Interference and NGOs and Cultural Influence clusters are overwhelmingly concentrated on Telegram. Narratives in the Russia–Ukraine War cluster show a more mixed platform profile, with a higher share of website and YouTube content, consistent with their likely origination in Russian-language news media before amplification on Telegram. In Uzbekistan, the 'Liberal elites are evil' narrative is split across Facebook and Telegram – a cross-platform diffusion pattern that distinguishes it from most other narratives and may reflect a different amplifier network with a stronger Facebook presence.

3.4 Temporal Patterns: Volume and Persistence

Monthly monitoring data reveals that the overall volume of FIMI content remains broadly stable across the five-month observation period, with no dramatic spikes or collapses. Kazakhstan sustained a consistent output between 436 and 568 instances per month; Uzbekistan showed somewhat more variation, ranging from 69 to 146 instances. This stability could be reflecting a sustained information operation rather than event-driven amplification.

Table 3.2 Monthly volume of narrative instances by country (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)

Month	Oct 2025	Nov 2025	Dec 2025	Jan 2026	Feb 2026
Kazakhstan (n)	455	532	568	436	437
Uzbekistan (n)	116	69	137	146	112

Within this overall stability, two patterns are notable. In Kazakhstan, the Western Geopolitical Interference cluster showed a slight increase in November–January relative to the October baseline before declining in February, a pattern consistent with heightened geopolitical salience in that period.

The NGOs and Cultural Influence cluster peaked sharply in November–December (128 instances/month) before dropping to 57–65 in January–February. In Uzbekistan, December and January were the highest-volume months, though the sample size limits confident inference about drivers.

The persistence of the five highest-volume narratives across all five months — none shows a single month of absence — suggests these are structural fixtures of the information environment rather than opportunistic deployments. This has direct implications for counter-narrative strategy: interventions timed to news cycles will be insufficient against content that circulates independently of them.

3.5 Most Prominent Narratives: Intensity, Persistence, and Illustration

The narratives examined in this section are selected by frequency — total narrative instances across both countries — as presented in the table below. Views data is included separately for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to reflect reach within each national information environment.

Table 3.3a Top 10 narratives by frequency — Kazakhstan (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)

Narrative	Instances	Total Views	Avg Views/Post
Western power is collapsing	320	1,102,939	3,447
West destabilises CA	246	1,683,993	6,846
Liberal elites are evil	202	1,122,422	5,557
West weakens Russia in CA	180	1,282,588	7,125
Embassies destabilise governments	164	1,020,526	6,223
West pulls CA from Russia/China	156	1,343,425	8,612
West spreads anti-Russia/China sentiment	137	1,145,401	8,361
West erodes CA traditions	104	536,303	5,157
Russia's war is justified	98	530,179	5,410
Donors prepare regime change	88	720,482	8,187
Total	**1,695**	**10,488,258**	

Table 3.3b. Top 10 narratives by frequency — Uzbekistan (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)

Narrative	Instances	Total Views	Avg Views/Post
Western power is collapsing	203	5,991,047	29,513
Liberal elites are evil	87	2,478,155	28,485
Europe doesn't want peace in Ukraine	45	1,374,248	30,539
Russia's war is justified	39	1,481,338	37,983
NATO threatens Russia	34	1,222,833	35,966
West erodes CA traditions	24	1,175,922	48,997
The EU is collapsing	14	250,145	17,868
Embassies destabilise governments	13	695,141	53,472
West destabilises CA	13	252,123	19,394
The EU is a globalist project	12	268,500	22,375
Total	**484**	**15,189,452**	

Four patterns in the table warrant attention before the narrative-level analysis. First, Uzbekistani amplifier accounts generate substantially higher per-post reach than their Kazakhstani counterparts across all shared narratives. Average views per narrative-containing post are between five and ten times higher in Uzbekistan than in Kazakhstan — ranging from 2.8x for "West destabilises CA" to 9.5x for "West erodes CA traditions." Frequency counts alone, therefore, understate the reach of FIMI content in the Uzbekistani information environment.

Second, frequency and reach diverge sharply at the country level for the two most prominent narratives. "Western power is collapsing" and "Liberal elites are evil" are led by Kazakhstan in instance count, yet Uzbekistan accounts for the majority of total views — 5.99 million against 1.10 million for the former, and 2.48 million against 1.12 million for the latter. Volume of production and audience exposure do not map onto each other in a straightforward way.

Third, four narratives in the Kazakhstani top 10 — "West destabilises CA," "West weakens Russia in CA," "West pulls CA from Russia/China," and "West spreads anti-Russia/China sentiment" — do not appear in the Uzbekistani top 10 at all, with between 4 and 13 instances each in the Uzbekistani dataset against triple-digit counts in Kazakhstan. This pattern suggests country-differentiated narrative targeting and is examined further in the country-level analysis below.

Fourth, the Uzbekistani top 10 includes four narratives absent from the Kazakhstani top 10: "Europe doesn't want peace in Ukraine," "NATO threatens Russia," "The EU is collapsing," and "The EU is a globalist project." Together, these point to a distinct narrative environment in Uzbekistan — one oriented more toward European institutional decline and the Ukraine conflict than toward Central Asia-specific geopolitical framing. The two countries share six narratives in their respective top 10s, but the composition, ranking, and reach of those shared narratives differ substantially.

Western power is collapsing (n=523)

The single most frequent narrative in the dataset — across both countries and the full five-month period — frames the West as a civilisation in terminal decline: economically overextended, politically incoherent, culturally exhausted, and strategically outmanoeuvred. Content ranges from financial commentary (US market collapse, dollar hegemony) to civilisational critique (loss of Western identity, moral corruption of elites). This narrative achieves the widest cross-platform reach of any narrative in the dataset – appearing at significant volume on Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, and websites simultaneously.

The narrative's prevalence across both Russian-language and Uzbek-language content (203 instances in Uzbekistan, 127 of which in Uzbek) may indicate active translation and localisation for native-language audiences, a deliberate targeting strategy rather than incidental cross-border spillover.

The dataset also provides direct evidence that Donald Trump's actions and statements during this period fed into this narrative's deployment. Of 523 instances, 252 reference Trump, NATO, or Ukraine — with content exploiting specific developments such as Donald Trump's statements on Greenland, pressure on NATO allies, and the US position on Ukraine as reflecting the state of current events rather than policy controversy. A Kazakhstani Telegram post from 8 January 2026 illustrates the framing: "NATO effectively does not exist. The EU is weakening... Even if 2025 passed in illusions, in the first week of January, Trump fundamentally destroyed the last remaining illusion." The shifting geopolitical context did not generate this narrative, but it provided a continuous stream of raw material that amplifiers exploited with evident intent.

Excerpt 4.1 | Telegram, Kazakhstan

"The American market has ceased to be a tool for valuing assets and an effective financial mechanism for capital redistribution, mutating into a sinister panopticon, a theatre of the absurd, where collective, progressive senility plays the main role."

Excerpt 4.2 | Facebook, Uzbekistan

"The collapse of Western identity and the 'Holocaust religion' ... For decades, the entire Western world has built its identity on a simple mechanism: 'we are good, they are bad.' ... Western identity is crumbling and its history has ended."

Liberal elites are evil (n=289)

The second most frequent narrative deploys extreme delegitimisation rhetoric against Western political and cultural elites. In its most common framing, elites are not merely corrupt but morally depraved — directly linking the Epstein case to highly generalised claims about elite criminality and moral collapse. This narrative is disproportionately represented in Uzbekistan relative to its overall footprint: its 87 Uzbekistani instances constitute 15 percent of the entire Uzbekistani dataset, suggesting targeted deployment for domestic audiences rather than passive cross-border diffusion.

The invocation of Putin's authority as validation for these claims is analytically notable: the narrative simultaneously delegitimises Western elites and rehabilitates Russian leadership, functioning as a bridge between the 'West is collapsing' and 'Russia is a legitimate power' frames. A Kazakhstani Telegram post from February 2026 illustrates how the Epstein case is weaponised beyond its factual basis: *"How to divert the attention of the whole world from the exposure of globalist elites, who turned out to be paedophiles and cannibals in the literal sense of the word? War, only war, exclusively war!"*

Excerpt 4.3 | Telegram, Uzbekistan | Language: Uzbek

"Those who ate human flesh and raped children. Putin's words about the Western elite are taking on new meaning against the backdrop of the Epstein case."

West destabilises Central Asia (n=259)

The most regionally specific narrative in the dataset frames Western engagement with Central Asia as a covert destabilisation programme. In Kazakhstan, it draws explicitly on the 2022 Kantar events, reinterpreted as a Western-backed colour revolution. In its more recent form, it anticipates new Western-directed interventions, referencing US strategic doctrine as a successor to Biden-era colour revolution programming. A Kazakhstani Telegram post from January 2026 shows how the Trump transition is folded into this framing: "The 'Trump strategy' is beginning to emerge… Under [Biden], the US was betting on colour revolutions along Russia's borders… The new coup strategy, as we see from Venezuela and statements about unrest in Iran, is based on a broader spectrum of means: military forces, extremists, and betrayal within the leadership of the attacked state."

The near-absence of this narrative in Uzbekistan (13 instances, 2 percent of the Uzbekistani dataset) compared to its dominance in Kazakhstan (246 instances, 10 percent of the Kazakhstani dataset) underlines the country-differentiated nature of FIMI targeting. Kazakhstan's more active engagement with Western security and governance frameworks makes it a more salient target for this specific narrative line.

Excerpt 4.4 | Telegram, Kazakhstan

"…And if Trump still wants to pressure Moscow, a new front is urgently needed. Possibly in Central Asia. This results in a very logical plan for preparing a coup in Kazakhstan during 2026, or 2027 at the latest."

Embassies destabilise governments (n=177)

Closely related to the preceding narrative, this one specifically targets Western diplomatic and intelligence presence in the region. Content frames EU and NATO security cooperation programmes – officer training, border management, law enforcement support – as covers for intelligence infiltration and the recruitment of local agents. This narrative carries particular operational significance because it targets the specific institutional relationships (between Central Asian states and Western security providers) that are difficult to replace through alternative partnerships.

It is almost entirely a Kazakhstani phenomenon (164 of 177 instances), where the density of EU and NATO programming gives the narrative more local anchoring. A Kazakhstani Telegram post from December 2025 makes the framing explicit: "The 'support programmes' for border and law enforcement agencies, especially officer training systems, are becoming the tool. Moreover, the risks concern not only espionage, which Western intelligence agencies conduct very actively, but also the use of recruited [agents]."

Excerpt 4.5 | Telegram, Kazakhstan

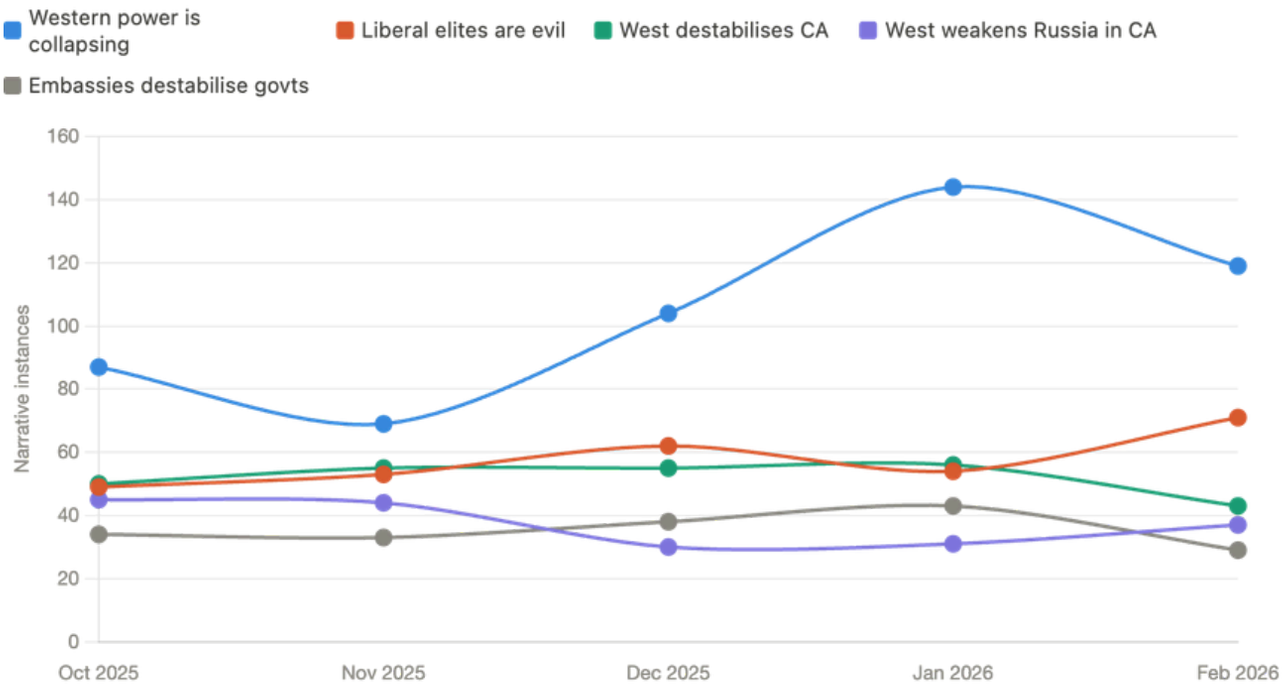
"Western embassies in Almaty and Astana are not just diplomatic missions — they are operational hubs for the recruitment of civil society actors, journalists, and security sector personnel. Every grant is a potential leverage point."

West promotes LGBTI + to erode values (n=78)

Although outside the top ten by frequency, this narrative is examined here for its analytical significance as a precision-deployed, high-intent narrative. It frames Western support for LGBT+ rights as a deliberate instrument of cultural destabilisation — a tool used to manipulate youth, undermine traditional family structures, and prepare conditions for regime change. The narrative is explicitly linked, in multiple instances, to colour revolution framing, positioning it as part of a broader covert programme rather than an autonomous cultural agenda. It is most concentrated in Kazakhstan (71 of 78 instances), where proposed legislative restrictions on 'LGBT+ propaganda' in late 2025 provided a timely domestic anchor for the content. A Kazakhstani Telegram post from late 2025 illustrates the intergenerational framing deployed: "Our ancestors toiled, fought, gave birth to 15 children... They did everything to preserve the land and pass it on to their descendants. Today our people are trying to continue the legacy of their ancestors — family, children — but then a lesbian comes onto the stage, starts lecturing us."

Taken together, the five narratives above show a pattern of sustained, month-on-month presence with no single month of absence across the observation period, consistent with structural deployment rather than event-driven amplification. The one notable exception to the pattern of stability is 'Western power is collapsing', which surged to 144 instances in January 2026 (more than double its November figures) before retreating to 119 in February. The driver is not immediately identifiable from the dataset alone, though the timing coincides with heightened international commentary on US foreign policy direction and institutional credibility, suggesting external news cycles can amplify an otherwise structurally persistent narrative without fundamentally altering its deployment logic.

Figure 3.3. Monthly volume of top 5 narratives by frequency (narrative instances, Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)



Combined Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan amplifying accounts. Oct 2025 – Feb 2026.

3.6 Engagement Metrics: Reach, Reactions, and Virality

Frequency counts alone do not capture the operational significance of individual narratives. Engagement metrics — total views, views per post, shares, and reactions — reveal a structurally different picture of which narratives are actually reaching audiences at scale and generating active response. Across both countries, the dataset records 14.0 million total views in Kazakhstan and 17.7 million in Uzbekistan, with Uzbekistani narrative instances averaging 30,587 views each compared to 5,778 in Kazakhstan. Despite generating less than one-quarter of Kazakhstan's post volume, Uzbekistan produces 26 percent more total views — a finding that materially changes the assessment of relative exposure and operational priority.

The divergence between post frequency and reach is most pronounced in Kazakhstan. "Western power is collapsing" leads on post count (320) but ranks sixth on total views (1.1M) and last among high-volume narratives on views per post (3,447). By contrast, the locally embedded interference narratives — "West destabilises CA" (6,846 views/post), "West pulls CA from Russia/China" (8,612), and "West spreads anti-Russia/China sentiment" (8,361) — consistently outperform the volume leader on reach efficiency. In Kazakhstan, the most resonant content by audience reach is the locally anchored interference narrative, not the global civilisational-decline frame that dominates by raw count.[7]

7. The engagement data in Tables 3.4 and 3.5 should be read with awareness that metric availability differs by platform (as noted in Section 2.2).

Table 3.4 Top 10 narratives by total views, Kazakhstan (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026). Engagement rate = (total comments + shares + reactions) / total views × 100

Narrative	Posts	Total Views	Views/ Post	Comments / Post	Shares/ Post	Reactions / Post	Eng. Rate %
West destabilises CA	246	1,683,993	6,846	42	20.7	261.6	4.74%
West pulls CA from Russia/China	156	1,343,425	8,612	52.2	17.4	287.6	4.15%
West weakens Russia in CA	180	1,282,588	7,125	43.3	21.7	306.5	5.21%
West spreads anti-Russia/China sentiment	137	1,145,401	8,361	74.4	22.5	377.9	5.68%
Liberal elites are evil	202	1,122,422	5,557	26	9	181.4	3.89%
Western power is collapsing	320	1,102,939	3,447	5.4	5.1	62.2	2.11%
Embassies destabilise governments	164	1,020,526	6,223	25.1	23.6	240.8	4.65%
Donors prepare regime change	88	720,482	8,187	38	18.6	317.6	4.57%
West erodes CA traditions	104	536,303	5,157	27.7	11.3	181	4.27%
Russia's war is justified	98	530,179	5,410	29.6	9.8	157.7	3.64%

3.6 Engagement Metrics: Reach, Reactions, and Virality

The Uzbekistan dataset presents a strikingly different picture. Total views of 17.7 million are generated from 580 narrative instances — an average of 30,587 views per narrative instance. This indicates that Uzbekistani amplifier accounts are, on average, reaching substantially larger audiences per unit of content. The top narrative, “Western power is collapsing,” alone accounts for nearly 6 million views from 203 posts (29,513 per post). “Liberal elites are evil” generates 2.5 million views from 87 posts with a shares-per-post rate of 90.6 — indicating high virality and active redistribution beyond the originating channel.

Table 3.5 Top 10 narratives by total views, Uzbekistan (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026). Engagement rate = (total comments + shares + reactions) / total views × 100

Narrative	Posts	Total Views	Views/ Post	Comments/ Post	Shares/ Post	Reactions / Post	Eng. Rate %
Western power is collapsing	203	5,991,047	29,513	31	41.5	329.8	1.36%
Liberal elites are evil	87	2,478,155	28,485	21.1	90.6	296.7	1.43%
Russia's war is justified	39	1,481,338	37,983	4.8	21.5	325.2	0.93%
Europe doesn't want peace in Ukraine	45	1,374,248	30,539	17.1	13.7	242.2	0.89%
NATO threatens Russia	34	1,222,833	35,966	12.7	38.6	309	1.00%
West erodes CA traditions	24	1,175,922	48,997	33.5	199.1	837.9	2.18%
Embassies destabilise governments	13	695,141	53,472	12.2	137.4	532.5	1.28%
COVID is a Western bioweapon	4	421,664	105,416	0	407.5	516	0.88%
NATO destabilises Eurasia	7	296,324	42,332	n/a	27.9	247	n/a
The EU is a globalist project	12	268,500	22,375	32.9	16.1	185.2	1.05%

Three additional engagement patterns warrant analytical attention. First, several low-volume narratives achieve disproportionate reach per post. In Uzbekistan, “West promotes LGBT+ to erode values” generates 36,472 views per post from only 7 instances — higher than the dataset average and accompanied by 245 shares per post, indicating viral diffusion well beyond the originating accounts. “Embassies destabilise governments” reaches 53,472 views per post in Uzbekistan (versus 6,223 in Kazakhstan), suggesting the narrative is deployed there by significantly higher-reach channels despite its much smaller volume. These low-volume, high-reach instances are operationally significant: they indicate narratives with latent resonance that could scale rapidly if more widely deployed.

Second, a cluster of narratives exhibits high engagement rates — defined as the ratio of interactions (comments, shares, reactions) to views — relative to their view counts. In Kazakhstan, “The EU is a globalist project” (6.89 percent), “BRI brings prosperity” (6.87 percent), and “Fascism is rising in Europe” (6.79 percent) generate markedly higher audience interaction per view than the top-volume narratives. These are not mass-reach narratives, but they activate the audiences they do reach with unusual intensity — a pattern consistent with deployment within ideologically pre-committed communities rather than general audiences.

Third, for almost every narrative present in both countries, Uzbekistani posts achieve higher per-post reach than Kazakhstani posts, typically by a factor of five to ten. This asymmetry reflects a structural difference between the two amplifier ecosystems: Uzbekistan’s information environment is served by a smaller number of higher-reach accounts, while Kazakhstan's is served by a larger network of lower-reach ones. The locally embedded interference narratives ("West destabilises CA," "West weakens Russia in CA," "West pulls CA from Russia/China") are an exception only in the sense that meaningful cross-country comparison is not possible: the numbers of narrative instances in Uzbekistan are between 4 and 13, too few to draw conclusions about per-post reach.

Two features of the engagement data require brief clarification. First, the engagement rate figures for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are not directly comparable as absolute values. Uzbekistani posts achieve engagement rates of 0.88–2.18 percent, systematically lower than the Kazakhstani range of 2.11–5.68 percent, but this does not indicate lower audience activation. Because Uzbekistani amplifier accounts reach substantially larger audiences per post, the denominator in the engagement rate formula is five to ten times larger, mechanically suppressing the ratio even when absolute reactions and shares per post are comparable or higher. For cross-country comparisons of audience activation intensity, reactions per post and shares per post are more reliable indicators than the engagement rate percentage.

Second, the comments data are unavailable for the NATO destabilises Eurasia narrative in the Uzbekistan dataset, reflected as n/a in both the Comments/Post and Engagement Rate columns. This affects one row in Table 3.5 only and does not materially affect the analysis, as this narrative ranks ninth by total views and is not among the narratives examined in detail in this section.

Taken together, the engagement data suggest that a frequency-only analysis of FIMI content understates Uzbekistan’s exposure and misidentifies the highest-reach narratives in Kazakhstan. For counter-narrative and monitoring priorities, views-per-post and shares-per-post are more operationally useful indicators than raw post count.

3.7 Cross-Narrative Patterns and Amplifier Versatility

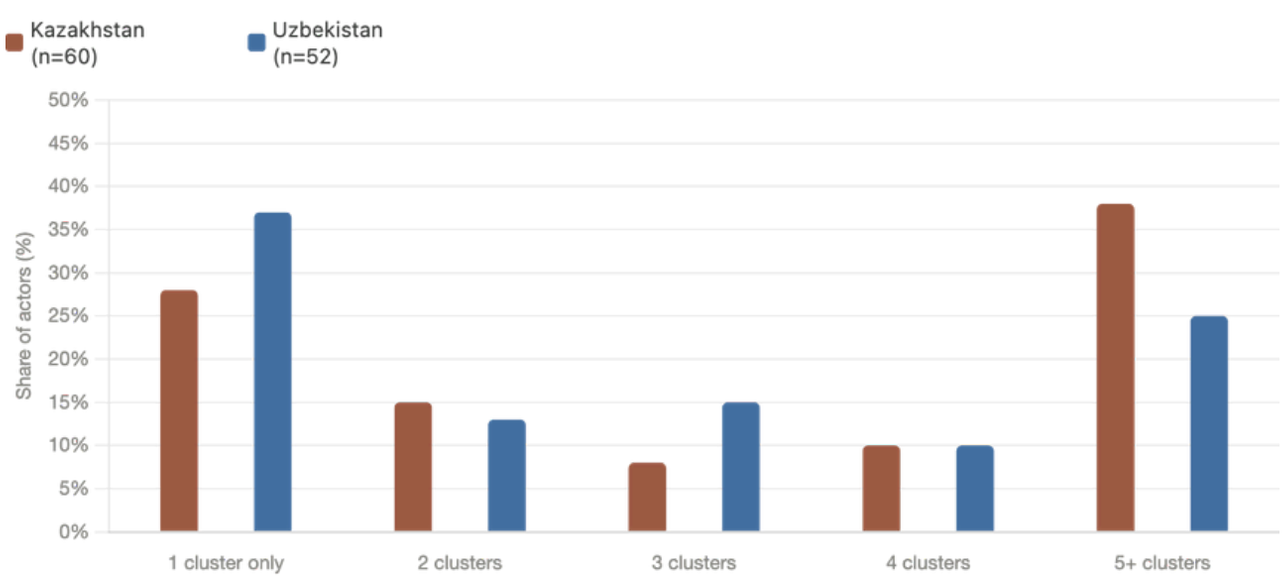
An important structural feature of the dataset is the degree to which individual amplifier accounts deploy multiple narrative clusters simultaneously. Of 112 unique actors in the dataset, 60 (54 percent) post across two or more clusters, and 36 (32 percent) span three or more. This pattern holds across both countries. Among Kazakhstani amplifiers, 72 percent) post across two or more narrative clusters and 57 percent span three or more; the figures for Uzbekistan are 63 percent) and 50 percent) respectively. By platform, multi-cluster deployment is most pronounced on YouTube (92 percent of actors posting across two or more clusters), followed by Telegram (68 percent), websites (67 percent), and Instagram (58 percent). Facebook is the exception, with only one of five actors posting across multiple clusters, though the sample is too small to draw conclusions.

This multi-cluster deployment pattern has two implications.

First, it suggests that the narrative ecosystem is not organised around single-issue actors but around versatile amplifiers capable of rotating across different content types as circumstances demand. A single Telegram channel may deploy Western Geopolitical Interference content in response to a domestic political event, then shift to civilisational-decline content when no local anchor is available.

Second, it complicates content moderation responses: removing a channel based on its deployment of one narrative type also removes its capacity to deploy others. This makes high-risk, multi-cluster accounts disproportionately important targets for monitoring and, where appropriate, platform-level action. The amplifier network is profiled in detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.4. Amplifier actors — multi-cluster deployment pattern by country



Share of amplifier actors by number of narrative clusters deployed. Oct 2025 – Feb 2026.

4. Actors, Networks, and Amplification Patterns

This chapter examines which accounts appear most frequently in the monitored dataset and how they contribute to the distribution and amplification of FIMI narratives in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The analysis is based on actor-level data in the dataset of flagged narratives (n = 3,008 instances), which includes account identifiers, platform, tier classification, posting frequency, and narrative diversity. The dataset records 132 unique account handles across both countries (74 in Kazakhstan, 58 in Uzbekistan), operated by 112 distinct actors. Where the data permits stronger inference, findings are stated directly; where it does not, the limits of what can be concluded are stated explicitly.

4.1 Originators and Repeat Amplifiers

Posting activity is highly concentrated: a small number of high-frequency actors account for a disproportionate share of total narrative instances.

In Kazakhstan, the top five accounts — all classified as high-risk — together account for 1,850 instances, or 76 percent of the Kazakhstan dataset. The concentration of narrative instances among these five accounts does not mean their output is exclusively or even predominantly narrative-aligned. Across the five accounts combined, 583 of 5,285 total posts — 11 percent — contained at least one tracked narrative. This is nevertheless substantially higher than the 1.4 percent average across all 75 Kazakhstani accounts that produced at least one narrative post, indicating that the top five are not merely the most active accounts overall but are disproportionately oriented toward narrative-aligned content relative to their peers.

The Uzbekistani picture differs markedly. Across the top five accounts combined, 243 of 20,214 total posts (1.2 percent) contained at least one tracked narrative, barely above the 0.3 percent average across all 59 Uzbekistani accounts with at least one narrative post. The exception is the top amplifier by instance count, whose narrative-aligned share stands at 12 percent, well above the others.

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Beyond posting volume, the breadth of narrative coverage among top amplifiers is analytically significant. All five Kazakhstani accounts span all six tracked thematic clusters, and four of the five cover 27 or more of the 32 tracked narratives. This full-spectrum profile is inconsistent with organic commentary, which typically concentrates within a narrower thematic range. The Uzbekistani top five show a more varied picture: all five cover five or six clusters, but narrative breadth ranges from 10 to 17 of 32 narratives, suggesting a more selective deployment pattern. The combination of high posting volume and broad narrative coverage among the top Kazakhstani accounts in particular points to systematic rather than incidental amplification.

Table 4.1 Top amplifiers in Kazakhstan by narrative instance count. 'Narratives covered' indicates how many of the 32 tracked narratives the actor posted on

Actor (page name)	Platform	Narrative instances	Unique posts	Narratives covered	Clusters
Account A (KAZ)	Telegram YouTube	546	147	29 / 32	6
Account B (KAZ)	Telegram	499	201	29 / 32	6
Account C (KAZ)	Telegram	427	123	28 / 32	6
Account D (KAZ)	Telegram	193	51	32 / 32	6
Account E (KAZ)	Telegram	185	61	27 / 32	6

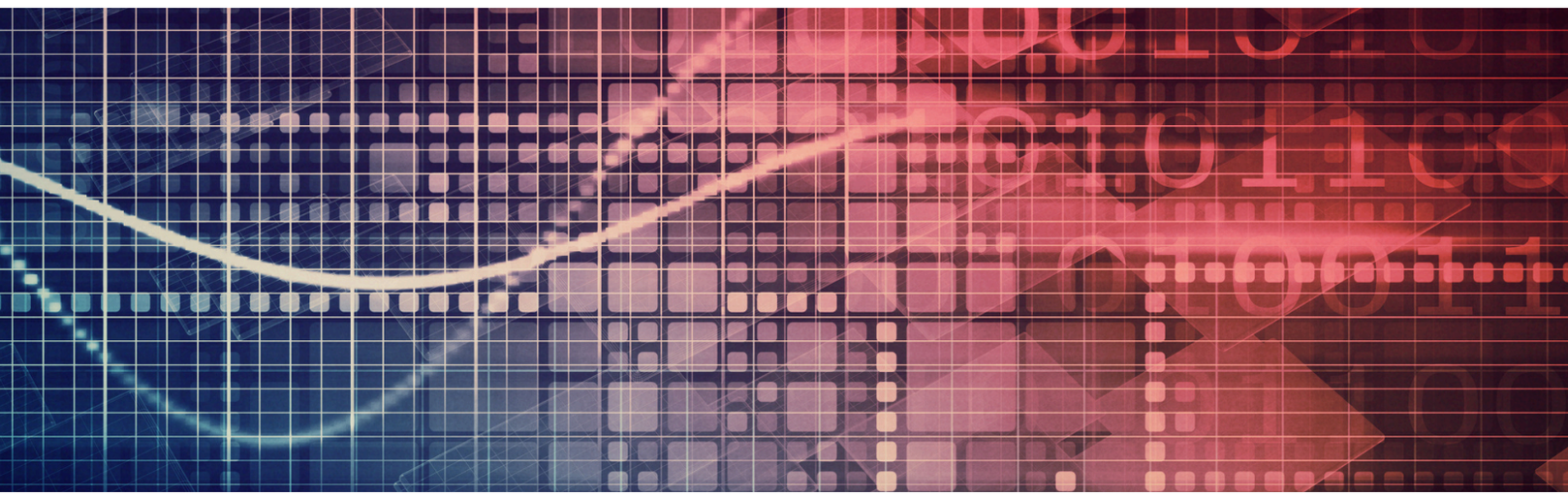
Table 4.2 Top amplifiers in Uzbekistan by narrative instance count

Actor (page name)	Platform	Narrative instances	Unique posts	Narratives covered	Clusters
Account A (UZB)	Facebook YouTube	146	91	14 / 32	6
Account B (UZB)	Telegram	70	51	17 / 32	5
Account C (UZB)	YouTube	48	38	13 / 32	5
Account D (UZB)	Telegram	47	30	10 / 32	5
Account E (UZB)	Telegram	41	33	12 / 32	5

The structural contrast between the two countries extends beyond volume. In Kazakhstan, the top amplifiers combine high posting frequency with near-complete narrative coverage — a profile inconsistent with organic commentary and more consistent with systematic amplification across the full monitored taxonomy, as discussed above. In Uzbekistan, the most active accounts include established media outlets and commentators whose narrative-aligned content represents a small share of broader editorial output, suggesting that globally oriented narratives circulate through actors with legitimate media identities rather than dedicated amplification channels.

Several top amplifiers maintain multiple handles across platforms. Account A (KAZ) operates across Telegram and YouTube, with narrative instances recorded on both. Account A (UZB) operates across Facebook and YouTube. This cross-platform presence complicates account-level monitoring and is examined further in section 4.2.

Repost data reveals a further structural pattern: seed accounts reposted content from other seed accounts (958 instances) at more than twice the rate at which amplifying accounts reposted seed content (429 instances). This amplifier-level repost activity is driven entirely by Kazakhstan (Uzbekistan recorded no repost activity in the dataset), pointing to a tightly networked seed tier in Kazakhstan rather than a simple origination-to-amplification pipeline.



4.2 Narrative Amplification Dynamics

The dataset provides sufficient information to characterise posting patterns and narrative concentration, but not to directly observe forwarding chains or coordination between accounts. The following observations, therefore, focus on patterns visible in the available data while recognising the limits of what can be inferred from it.

Narrative concentration among top amplifiers

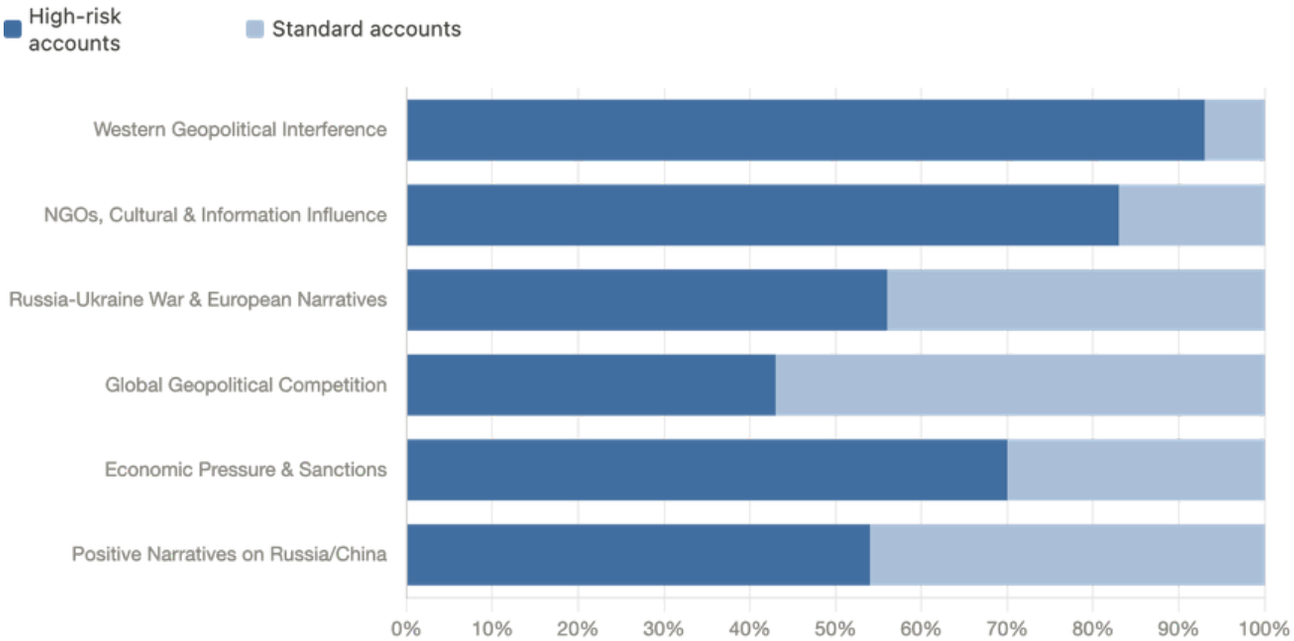
For the highest-frequency narratives, a small set of accounts makes up a large majority of instances. For 'West destabilises CA' (n = 246 in Kazakhstan), the top five amplifiers — all high-risk Telegram accounts — together produce 209 instances, or 85 percent of the narrative's Kazakhstan total. For 'Embassies destabilise governments' (n = 164 in Kazakhstan), the same five accounts produce 144 instances, or 88 percent of the total. This concentration is not distributed evenly across all narratives: for 'Western power is collapsing', the top five accounts produce approximately 64 percent of Kazakhstan instances, with the remainder distributed more widely.

The implication is that certain narratives — particularly those most directly targeting Kazakhstan's political stability and Western partnerships — are effectively controlled by a handful of high-risk actors. Their removal from the information environment would substantially reduce the volume of these specific narratives, though not necessarily their reach if their content is being forwarded by a wider network of downstream accounts not captured in the dataset.

Account tier and narrative cluster alignment

The relationship between account tier and narrative cluster reveals a structural division in how different types of content are amplified.

Figure 4.1. Share of narrative instances by amplifier tier and thematic cluster[8]



Narrative instances by thematic cluster and account tier. Combined Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan dataset (n = 3,008).

High-risk accounts dominate the Western Geopolitical Interference cluster (736 high-risk instances vs 57 standard) and the NGOs cluster (514 vs 106). Standard accounts, by contrast, produce a disproportionately large share of Global Geopolitical Competition content (362 standard vs 269 high-risk) and Positive Narratives about Russia and China (49 standard vs 58 high-risk — roughly even).

This alignment suggests a functional division: locally targeted destabilisation narratives (interference, NGOs, embassies) are the domain of dedicated high-risk amplifiers, while globally oriented content (Western decline, Russia-Ukraine war framing) circulates more broadly through standard accounts, including legitimate media outlets. The latter may reflect genuine editorial sympathy with certain geopolitical framings rather than coordinated amplification — a distinction with significant implications for how policymakers and platform operators should respond.

4.3 Limits of Network Inference

The findings in this chapter describe amplification patterns — who posts what, how often, and on which platforms — but they do not, and cannot, establish the existence of a coordinated network in the technical sense. Making that inference requires data that is not available in the current dataset: forwarding chains showing which accounts receive and repost content from which originators; subscriber and reach data showing the downstream audience for each account; timestamp granularity

8. High-risk accounts refer to accounts with repeated, consistent narrative amplification behaviour; Standard implies accounts whose content occasionally aligns with monitored narratives. See section 2.2.4.

below the day level to detect synchronised posting; and cross-account metadata that would allow identification of shared infrastructure, administrators, or funding sources. It also necessitates a non-digital understanding of user profiles, their economic relationships and links to FIMI actors.

Three cautions follow from these constraints. First, high narrative concentration among a small group of actors does not by itself demonstrate coordination. It is consistent with coordination, but also with independent actors converging on similar content for ideological or commercial reasons, or with a small number of highly active individuals who happen to share a worldview. These possibilities cannot be ruled out on the basis of frequency data alone.

Second, the full-spectrum narrative coverage of certain Kazakhstan accounts — posting on all 32 tracked narratives across 6 clusters — is behaviourally anomalous when compared to organic commentators, who typically focus on a narrower thematic range. This is a meaningful indicator warranting further investigation, but it is not conclusive evidence of adversarial direction.

Third, the distinction between coordination and alignment must be maintained throughout the analysis. Multiple accounts amplifying the same narrative in the same period may reflect a shared ideological orientation — pro-Russian, anti-Western, sovereigntist — without any direct communication between them. This is particularly relevant for standard-tier accounts with legitimate editorial identities: their amplification of certain narratives may reflect editorial choices rather than participation in an information operation. Attributing coordination to such actors without direct evidence would be both analytically unsound and potentially harmful to media actors operating in good faith.

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These constraints are not unique to this study but reflect the broader methodological reality in FIMI research, where platform opacity and legal restrictions on access to backend data systematically limit the depth of network analysis available to external researchers. The qualitative findings from interviews and roundtables, presented in the next chapter, provide a complementary lens on how these actors and their content are perceived by in-country experts.

5. Country Level Comparative Analysis

This chapter disaggregates the regional findings to examine what is structurally distinct about the FIMI landscape in each country, and what the comparison between them reveals about targeting strategies. The narrative write-ups and actor profiles for each country are presented in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively; the focus here is on the per-narrative platform and language breakdown, the country divergence pattern, and the regional picture, including a comparative note from the earlier ENC study on Kyrgyzstan. All findings are drawn from the narrative dataset (KZ n = 2,428; UZ n = 580; Oct 2025 – Feb 2026).

5.1 Kazakhstan: Platform and Language Profile by Narrative

The Kazakhstan dataset is characterised by near-total concentration on a single platform and in a single language. Telegram accounts for 88 percent of narrative instances, and Russian language for 94 percent. The figures hold with minimal variation across all ten of the most frequent narratives. The structural reasons for Telegram's dominance are discussed in section 3.3. The table below adds granularity to this picture by showing platform and language distribution within each of the ten most frequent narratives.

Table 5.1 Top 10 narratives in Kazakhstan by instance count, with platform and language breakdown. Oct 2025 – Feb 2026

Narrative	Count	% of KZ dataset	Primary platform	Primary language
Western power is collapsing	320	13.20%	Telegram (86%)	Russian (94%)
West destabilises CA	246	10.10%	Telegram (94%)	Russian (99%)
Liberal elites are evil	202	8.30%	Telegram (85%)	Russian (99%)
West weakens Russia in CA	180	7.40%	Telegram (92%)	Russian (98%)
Embassies destabilise govts	164	6.80%	Telegram (94%)	Russian (100%)
West pulls CA from Russia/China	156	6.40%	Telegram (89%)	Russian (98%)
West spreads anti-Russia/China sentiment	137	5.60%	Telegram (91%)	Russian (100%)
West erodes CA traditions	104	4.30%	Telegram (85%)	Russian (92%)
Russia's war is justified	98	4.00%	Telegram (77%)	Russian (97%)
Donors prepare regime change	88	3.60%	Telegram (90%)	Russian (100%)

Two features of Table 5.1 warrant attention. First, the Russia-Ukraine War cluster narrative ("Russia's war is justified") shows the most distributed platform profile in the KZ top ten — 77 percent Telegram against a dataset average of 88 percent — consistent with its likely origination in Russian-language news media before amplification on Telegram. Second, Kazakh-language content is near-absent across all top narratives, with the partial exception of "West erodes CA traditions" (92 percent Russian, implying 8 percent in other languages, including Kazakh). This confirms that the primary target audience for monitored FIMI in Kazakhstan is Russian-speaking rather than Kazakh-speaking — a demographic that skews urban and educated.

5.2 Uzbekistan: Platform and Language Profile by Narrative

The Uzbekistan dataset presents a structurally different profile. Platform distribution is more varied, and Uzbek-language content dominates across most top narratives — a pattern with direct implications for how FIMI production and attribution should be understood. The most immediate explanation is demographic: with approximately 18 percent of the population speaking Russian as a primary language, Uzbek is the dominant language of mass consumption and the natural vehicle for content seeking a broad audience reach. However, language distribution alone does not fully explain the pattern. There is a strong trend toward deliberate localisation in the Uzbekistani information environment: externally originated narratives are frequently adapted, translated, and reframed into Uzbek before amplification, creating content that appears locally rooted even when the underlying messaging is not domestic in origin. This is compounded by a broader strategic shift among politically aligned outlets — several of which originally operated exclusively in Russian language — toward introducing Uzbek-language versions over time, significantly expanding their reach into native-language audiences. The language profile of the Uzbekistani dataset, therefore, reflects not only audience preferences, but active production choices aimed at deepening penetration of the domestic information space.

Table 5.2 Top 10 narratives in Uzbekistan by instance count, with platform and language breakdown. Oct 2025 – Feb 2026

Narrative	Count	% of UZ dataset	Primary platform	Primary language
Western power is collapsing	203	35.00%	Telegram (48%)	Uzbek (62%)
Liberal elites are evil	87	15.00%	Facebook/TG	Mixed (55/46%)
Europe doesn't want peace in Ukraine	45	7.80%	Telegram (71%)	Uzbek (87%)
Russia's war is justified	39	6.70%	Telegram (90%)	Uzbek (95%)
NATO threatens Russia	34	5.90%	Telegram (82%)	Uzbek (97%)
West erodes CA traditions	24	4.10%	Telegram (71%)	Uzbek (75%)
The EU is collapsing	14	2.40%	Telegram (57%)	Uzbek (71%)
West destabilises CA	13	2.20%	Telegram (69%)	Russian (69%)
Embassies destabilise govts	13	2.20%	Telegram (92%)	Uzbek (77%)
The EU is a globalist project	12	2.10%	Facebook (42%)	Mixed (50/50)

The language pattern across clusters reveals a further structural distinction. Russia-Ukraine War narratives in Uzbekistan are overwhelmingly in Uzbek language (the "Russia's war is justified" narrative is 95 percent Uzbek; "NATO threatens Russia" is 97 percent Uzbek), while Western Geopolitical Interference content — where it appears — retains a Russian-language majority ("West destabilises CA" is 69 percent Russian). This suggests different production pathways for different content types: localised Uzbek production for war-framing narratives that require cultural adaptation, Russian-origin material for geopolitical interference content that travels with less modification.

The dominance of Uzbek-language content (66 percent of all instances) indicates that FIMI reaching Uzbek audiences is being deliberately translated and localised rather than passively consumed from Russian-language ecosystems. Uzbek-language production at this volume implies either significant local production capacity or dedicated translation infrastructure — a finding that warrants attention in any follow-on investigation of production attribution.

5.3 Comparative Analysis: Similarities and Divergences

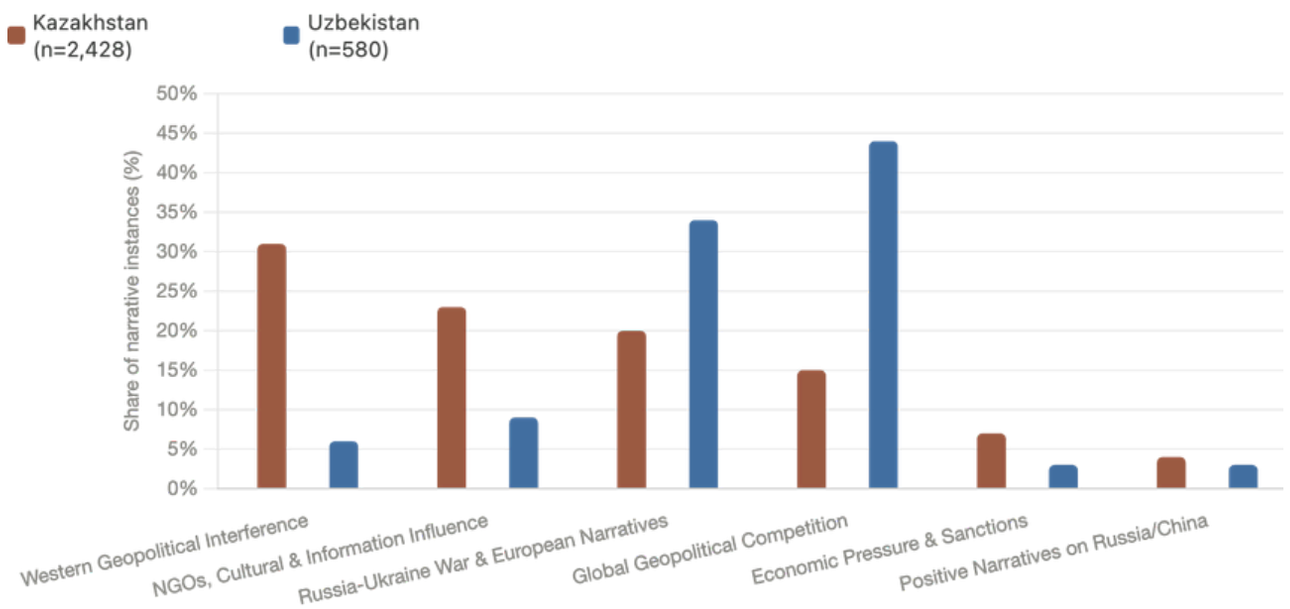
Shared narrative core

Despite structural differences, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan share a clearly identifiable common core. "Western power is collapsing" is the most frequent narrative in both countries. "Liberal elites are evil" ranks in the top three in both. "West erodes CA traditions" achieves comparable shares in both datasets (4.3 percent Kazakhstan, 4.1 percent Uzbekistan). These three narratives define the floor of the regional FIMI ecosystem: content that circulates regardless of country-specific targeting, drawn from pre-produced Russian-language media ecosystems that can be deployed across regional audiences with minimal localisation.

Cluster-level divergence

The most significant divergence is the inversion of cluster priorities between the two countries. Kazakhstan's FIMI landscape is led by Western Geopolitical Interference (31 percent) and NGOs and Cultural Influence (23 percent) — clusters focused on direct targeting of Kazakhstan's political stability and Western partnerships. Uzbekistan's is led by Global Geopolitical Competition (37 percent) and Russia-Ukraine War narratives (28 percent) — clusters focused on reshaping geopolitical worldviews rather than targeting Uzbekistan directly.

Figure 5.1. Thematic cluster distribution by country (share of narrative instances, Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)



Share of narrative instances by thematic cluster and country. Oct 2025 – Feb 2026.

This divergence reflects genuinely different thematic priorities in each country's dataset, not simply the larger volume of Kazakhstani instances, and is consistent across the monitoring period. It points to structurally different FIMI targeting strategies for the two countries rather than a uniform regional campaign with varied uptake. A plausible interpretation is that Kazakhstan — with its deeper institutional engagement with the West, larger Russian-speaking population, and more politically active civil society — represents a higher-priority target for locally calibrated interference content. Uzbekistan's audiences appear to be addressed primarily through the affective register of civilisational decline and elite corruption: content that does not require specific knowledge of Uzbekistan's domestic politics to produce or consume.

Language as a targeting signal

The language divergence between the two countries is the clearest indicator of different production strategies. Russian-language content can be produced centrally and distributed across the post-Soviet information space with minimal localisation. Uzbek-language content requires deliberate translation and adaptation — implying local production capacity and dedicated translation infrastructure, though the data does not allow assessing the relative weight of these. The prevalence of high-confidence, high-frequency Uzbek-language FIMI, particularly within the Russia-Ukraine War cluster, is a finding that warrants specific attention in any follow-on investigation of production attribution.

Actor landscape

The contrast in amplifier profiles documented in Chapter 4 is directly relevant to the comparative picture. Kazakhstan's FIMI ecosystem is anchored by a small, dense cluster of high-risk Telegram accounts covering the full narrative taxonomy at high frequency.

Uzbekistan's is more distributed, with standard-tier accounts — including named commentators and established media outlets — accounting for the majority of amplification. This structural difference is one of the most policy-relevant findings in the comparative analysis: intervention strategies effective in Kazakhstan (targeting a small number of high-risk channels) may not translate to Uzbekistan, where the amplification network is broader, less concentrated, and more embedded in legitimate media ecosystems.

5.3 Comparative Note: Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyzstan findings from the prior ENC study provide a partial regional reference point.[9] The pilot study analysed 51,348 digital content items published between September and December 2024, identifying 556 items across 55 sources as containing likely or highly likely FIMI.

Anti-Western interference narratives dominate the Kyrgyzstan dataset in a manner directly comparable to Kazakhstan. The most prevalent FIMI content depicted the West as interfering in other countries' affairs (285 instances, 75 percent of anti-Western content), followed by narratives portraying the US as exploiting its allies and as a global aggressor — structurally identical to the Western Geopolitical Interference cluster leading the Kazakhstan dataset at 31 percent. The overlap confirms that these narratives represent a regional template applied with country-specific inflection rather than content generated for a single national audience.

The Kyrgyzstan study shows a markedly stronger pro-Russian signal than is observed in either the Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan datasets: pro-Russian narratives appear in 24.5 percent of all flagged FIMI, compared to near-negligible volumes in the current study. Given Kyrgyzstan's deeper CSTO integration and its domestic media environment described by local experts as presenting a largely "empty field" of coherent national narratives, pro-Russian content appears to find more fertile conditions there than in either neighbouring state.

Platform landscape in Kyrgyzstan is more distributed than in Kazakhstan: websites accounted for 69 percent of flagged items, functioning as primary content repositories, with Telegram contributing 25 percent. Experts consulted in that study noted that social media and messaging platforms function as the primary amplification layer, with websites serving as content sources — an ecosystemic relationship between websites and social media amplification that appears structurally consistent across all three countries. Source concentration is directly comparable: 14 known disinformation sources produced 296 items at an average of 21 items per source, while 41 other sources averaged just 6.3 — a concentration ratio consistent with the high-risk amplifier dynamics documented in the Kazakhstan dataset.

9. The observations are based on findings from the earlier ENC/CARAVAN study on Kyrgyzstan and are offered as indicative comparisons rather than direct analytical conclusions. The Kyrgyzstan study used a partially different methodology and monitoring period; direct quantitative comparison should be approached with caution.

Russian-language dominance in the Kyrgyzstan FIMI ecosystem is comparable to Kazakhstan: 15.4 percent of Russian-language content contained identified FIMI, against 3.4 percent for Kyrgyz-language content — a 4.5-fold gap. Kyrgyz-language FIMI, where it does appear, circulates in distinctly different formats — memes, short video clips, peer-to-peer messaging — rather than the structured text articles that dominate Russian-language content. This format divergence parallels the Uzbek-language pattern. Across all three countries, the data points toward a shared targeting structure: Russian-language content is centrally produced and broadly distributed; vernacular-language content, where present, is more deliberately localised and targets cultural and identity fault lines specifically.

One of the more analytically generalisable findings from the Kyrgyzstan study is what local experts described as the "empty field" of domestic narrative production: the state's weakness in crafting coherent national narratives on major issues — geopolitical orientation, national identity, institutional reform — creates a vacuum consistently filled by foreign actors. The structural conditions — fragmented independent media, limited fact-checking infrastructure, absence of proactive counter-narrative capacity — are present across the region to varying degrees and provide the systemic context within which the narrative patterns documented in this report operate.

6. Qualitative Insights from Interviews and Roundtables

The quantitative monitoring presented in previous chapters maps the scale, distribution, and thematic structure of FIMI narratives across Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The qualitative component of the study complements this dataset by examining how media professionals, analysts, and civil society actors perceive the regional information environment and interpret the circulation of manipulative narratives.

This chapter synthesises findings from fourteen expert interviews and two structured roundtable discussions conducted between December 2025 and February 2026 with representatives of independent media, academic institutions, civil society organisations, and policy analysis centres in Kazakhstan (7 interviews, 1 roundtable) and Uzbekistan (7 interviews, 1 roundtable). All interviews were conducted on a background basis; interviewees are identified by professional role and country only.

Qualitative findings cannot establish causal relationships between specific narratives and measurable public opinion change. The monitoring dataset captures narrative circulation rather than audience persuasion or political impact. However, when narrative frequency in the dataset converges with expert assessments of resonance and exposure patterns, these combined sources provide a useful indication of how particular themes function within the broader information environment.

6.1 Kazakhstan: Expert Perceptions

Perceived vulnerabilities

Across all seven Kazakhstan interviews and the roundtable, interviewees converge on a shared assessment: Kazakhstan's information environment has become more — not less — vulnerable to foreign information manipulation since 2022, driven by the intersection of deteriorating media freedom, shifting platform dynamics, and an accelerating FIMI ecosystem anchored primarily in Russia.

Kazakhstan roundtable participant

"After 2022, we observed a manifold increase in disinformation, and its source is most often Russia."

The post-Kantar media trajectory is a recurring reference point. The January 2022 events triggered a sharp recalibration of the government's approach to independent media — leading to new legislation, throttling of critical websites, and a contraction of the independent information space. The practical consequence is that counter-FIMI infrastructure has shrunk at precisely the moment FIMI intensity has increased.

On platform dynamics, interviewees consistently identify Telegram as the primary arena for political narrative dissemination — confirming the quantitative finding that 88 percent of narrative instances in Kazakhstan originate on Telegram. But two platforms not captured in the dataset emerge prominently in expert testimony. First, TikTok: one sociologist with comparative research experience across the studied countries described it as the main carrier of disinformation in Kazakhstan today, having overtaken YouTube and Instagram in both volume and speed. Second, Threads: several interviewees independently note its rapid rise among Kazakh-language users — a platform dynamic not reflected in the monitoring data and warranting attention in future tracking.

Sociologist, Kazakhstan

"Today, TikTok is the main carrier of disinformation in Kazakhstan."

On audience vulnerability, expert interviews suggest a more complicated demographic picture. While older Russian-speaking populations in northern and northeastern Kazakhstan are consistently identified as the most structurally exposed group — consuming Russian television narratives directly and lacking digital media literacy — interviewees reject the assumption that younger or more educated audiences are reliably protected. One researcher observed that even highly educated parents hold anti-vaccine beliefs, noting that education level proved a weak predictor of resistance to health misinformation. A media expert stressed that the near-absence of high-quality Kazakh-language political content creates a pull effect: Kazakh-speaking audiences are drawn into Russian-language information ecosystems not only through ideological affinity but also through informational scarcity.

Narrative resonance

The most frequently cited narrative by experts — mentioned by five of the seven individual interviewees — is the "Kazakhstan will face Ukraine's fate" warning: the framing that Kazakhstan's language nationalism or Western alignment will provoke Russian intervention. This narrative does not appear as a distinct item in the ML taxonomy but maps onto the broader "West destabilises CA" and "West weakens Russia in CA" cluster. Its expert salience is striking because it functions as a threat rather than an ideological argument, invoking the Ukraine war as a precedent for coercive leverage rather than a geopolitical cause to support.

Think tank analyst, Kazakhstan

"A very prominent narrative: Kazakhs, come to your senses, or you will face the fate of Ukraine."

Related to this, one Kazakhstani journalist identified a specific variant — "We can repeat" — as a widely circulating implicit threat: the suggestion that what Russia did to Ukraine could be repeated with Kazakhstan.[10] This narrative operates below the threshold of explicit political statement, functioning as ambient pressure rather than direct propaganda. Its effectiveness, several interviewees suggest, derives precisely from its indirectness: it does not require attribution and can appear to originate from domestic voices.

Expert testimony also brings two narrative lines into view that are absent from the ML taxonomy. Soviet nostalgia — described by the Kazakhstan roundtable as a deliberate narrative line rather than incidental sentiment — functions as an emotional-political frame linking older generations to an imagined common past. It is cross-generationally transmissible through family socialisation, making it more durable than media-dependent narratives. WWII "heroisation" similarly operates through emotional rather than informational channels, and is specifically effective for age cohorts with direct family memory of the war.

On Chinese narratives, expert testimony across four Kazakhstan interviews describes a qualitatively different influence strategy: positive, development-focused, and operating primarily through curated experiential exposure — sponsored trips for journalists and analysts — rather than media content. One policy analyst recounts being taken to a Xinjiang museum and receiving Chinese publications during a conference visit; a political scientist describes journalists returning from such trips with markedly more favourable coverage of China. This soft-power mechanism is structurally invisible to content-monitoring approaches.

Institutional blind spots

The most analytically significant institutional observation from Kazakhstan experts is the state's consistent choice of silence and de-escalation over public counter-messaging when Russia pushes narrative boundaries. When Russian propagandist Solovyov made directly provocative statements about Kazakhstan, the Kazakhstani authorities chose not to escalate publicly.

10. The phrase originates as a Russian slogan directed at Germany, invoking the 1945 victory as a warning of what Russia could do again in the context of the Ukraine war.

The goal, as one interviewee notes, is to keep pressure in the media sphere and prevent it from becoming a diplomatic conflict — a rational short-term strategy that nonetheless leaves harmful narratives publicly unchallenged.

The roundtable adds a structural dimension to this observation: some domestically prominent commentators function as effective amplifiers of Russian-aligned narratives while maintaining the appearance of independent Kazakhstani analysis. One participant noted that a prominent analyst, after participating in the Valdai Discussion Club, became noticeably more pro-Russian in his public positions. These cases illustrate how FIMI can operate through locally credible voices rather than identifiably foreign sources — a dynamic that standard attribution-based detection approaches will systematically miss.

A related and analytically distinct pattern is the convergence between domestic state-aligned messaging and foreign narrative frames. Experts describe some local actors reproducing Kremlin-aligned rhetoric — including "foreign agents" framing, "traditional values" discourse, and anti-LGBT+ sentiment — in ways that are formally domestic but substantively indistinguishable from coordinated FIMI content. The 2024 Media Law, which expanded state authority over internet-based platforms, reinforces this dynamic by constraining the independent media's space to challenge such convergence.

Several interviewees identify the absence of a Kazakhstan-based institutional equivalent of EUvsDisinfo as a critical gap. The roundtable specifically noted this absence and argued for a structured, publicly accessible monitoring resource that could serve journalists, researchers, and AI systems alike. This last point — that low-traffic propaganda content still matters because it can be ingested by large language models and later reproduced as synthesised analysis — represents a forward-looking risk assessment not yet reflected in institutional response frameworks.

The contraction of donor-funded independent media support is described by roundtable participants as the most structurally consequential vulnerability on the horizon. Multiple speakers identify fact-checking and media standards organisations as having provided a balancing function that is now weakening rapidly. The vacuum created by donor withdrawal, they argue, will be filled primarily by Russian, Chinese, or state-managed content rather than by domestic independent alternatives.

6.2 Uzbekistan: Expert Perceptions

Perceived vulnerabilities

Expert testimony from Uzbekistan presents a structurally different vulnerability profile from Kazakhstan — one shaped as much by the constraints of the domestic information environment as by the volume of incoming foreign content.

The goal, as one interviewee notes, is to keep pressure in the media sphere and prevent it from becoming a diplomatic conflict — a rational short-term strategy that nonetheless leaves harmful narratives publicly unchallenged.

The paradox at the centre of the Uzbekistani picture is that the government's strong control of the information space functions simultaneously as a partial shield against external FIMI and as a structural vulnerability that limits the development of genuinely resilient counter-capacity.

Telegram dominates the Uzbekistani information ecosystem even more comprehensively than in Kazakhstan, having evolved — as one civil society practitioner describes it — from a messaging application into a full-scale media ecosystem. Government ministries, major media outlets, and mahallas (neighbourhood communities) all use Telegram channels and bots for communication. This concentration is confirmed by the quantitative data (61 percent of Uzbekistani narrative instances on Telegram) but expert testimony reveals its deeper significance: as traditional media lose credibility, audiences migrate toward anonymous Telegram channels, creating precisely the environment in which FIMI operates most effectively.

Civil society practitioner, media support organisation, Uzbekistan
"Telegram has stopped being just a messenger — it is a full-scale media ecosystem. People move into grey zones and anonymous channels because they find no answers in traditional media."

A political expert introduces the concept of "green light topics" — the informal system of permitted subjects within which Uzbekistani bloggers and private media operate. This self-regulatory constraint, enforced through the threat of prosecution under criminal code provisions on extortion and defamation, means that the pushback capacity of Uzbekistan's nominally independent media is structurally limited. This differs fundamentally from Kazakhstan, where independent media face pressure but retain greater operational latitude.

Language dynamics present a distinctive vulnerability pattern in Uzbekistan. Unlike Kazakhstan, where Russian-language dominance of FIMI content reflects the primary audience for such material, Uzbekistan is undergoing a more rapid linguistic transition. A media professional notes that young people under 30 predominantly speak Uzbek rather than Russian language, and that Russian language is increasingly associated only with those who have labour migration experience. Yet the quantitative data shows that the majority of Uzbekistani FIMI instances appear in Uzbek language — confirming that external actors have already adapted to this shift and are producing localised content for native-language audiences.

Labour migration to Russia emerges as a structural moderating force unique to Uzbekistan. Roundtable participants note that survey data shows near-equal public support for Russia and Ukraine among Uzbekistani respondents — a division they attribute partly to the economic reality that millions of Uzbekistani labour migrants depend on Russia for livelihoods. This creates a community of interest in maintaining tolerable Russia-Uzbekistan relations that softens potential anti-Russian mobilisation.

Narrative resonance

Expert testimony from Uzbekistan identifies a different set of resonant narratives from Kazakhstan — confirming the quantitative divergence documented in Chapter 4 and adding texture to why that divergence exists.

The most prominent Russian-origin narratives in expert perception are those challenging Central Asian sovereignty. A political analyst documents a pattern of specific provocations with compounding effect across several years: in 2023, a Russian State Duma deputy publicly claimed that the withdrawal of Soviet republics from the USSR had been "illegal" and that Russia might have to "fight all former Soviet republics"; in the same year, a prominent Russian public figure suggested the possibility of a military invasion of Uzbekistan. In 2025, statements by a well-known Russian television host suggesting that special military operation-style attack could be extended to other countries generated significant social media resonance across the region.

Crucially, expert interviews capture the institutional responses these provocations elicited — responses not visible in the quantitative dataset. Senate Chairperson Narbaeva publicly stated that Uzbekistan would "never be someone's colony." The rector of the University of Journalism and Mass Communications publicly characterised the Russian television rhetoric as reflecting "imperial thinking." These official and semi-official counter-statements represent a documented pattern of Uzbekistani institutional pushback that creates a counter-narrative space within the domestic information environment, even if it does not neutralise the original provocations.

Uzbekistan roundtable participant

"Influence has always existed, but in recent years it has increased significantly, especially from Russia."

Several interviewees note a distinctive pattern in how Uzbek-language and Russian-language outlets cover the same events. Uzbek-language media outlets are often more critical of Russia than their Russian-language counterparts — with Russian-language outlets in Uzbekistan avoiding the word "war" in favour of "conflict" or a "special military operation."

This divergence within the domestic media space suggests that the language of consumption shapes not only exposure to external narratives but the editorial register within which those narratives are contextualised.

Uzbekistani expert testimony also surfaces China as an emerging information actor, though characterised differently from Russia. Where Russian influence is described as active, high-volume, and sovereignty-threatening, Chinese influence is perceived as a longer-term soft power strategy operating through journalist training initiatives and invitations to visit China — mechanisms structurally similar to those documented by experts from Kazakhstan. Roundtable participants note that Uzbek-language content production by Chinese-linked actors is expanding, and that relations with China are explicitly identified as a thematic area particularly susceptible to external information influence. While Chinese information activity does not currently match the scale or intensity of Russian operations, its trajectory warrants monitoring as a distinct and growing presence in the Uzbekistan's information environment.

Institutional blind spots

The Uzbekistani institutional response to FIMI is characterised by expert consensus as cautious, indirect, and structurally constrained. The government's reliance on government-aligned NGOs to manage reactions to Russian-origin provocations is described by a political expert as a deliberate strategy for maintaining diplomatic distance while still generating a public response — useful diplomatically but ultimately a form of "managed silence" rather than substantive counter-FIMI capacity.

Beyond reactive management through proxies, the government increasingly functions as both a regulator and a direct sponsor of content production, establishing centres to direct domestic media output. This dual role — constraining independent voices while promoting state-curated content — limits the space available for genuinely independent counter-FIMI capacity to develop. The practical effect is an information environment that is managed rather than resilient: stable under current conditions but structurally unprepared for a scenario in which FIMI adapts further to operate within permitted topics or the state's control capacity weakens.

Fact-checking infrastructure is described as severely underfunded. Uzbekistan's main fact-checking initiative is struggling to sustain operations, in contrast to Kazakhstan, where fact-checking retains a recognised institutional presence. The roundtable is explicit that fact-checking and media literacy initiatives are insufficient in their current form.

AI-generated content represents an emerging vulnerability for which Uzbekistan has no specific institutional response.

Roundtable participants describe deepfake videos involving Uzbekistani political figures as already circulating, and the civil society practitioner identifies the growing technological sophistication of disinformation — increasingly adapted to Uzbek language and cultural context — as outpacing the counter-capacity of local civil society actors.

Journalist and media trainer, Uzbekistan

"There is no media outlet in Uzbekistan that is not under some degree of pressure from the government."

One further blind spot emerges from the roundtable: expert and academic recommendations are systematically ignored by decision-makers. Participants describe a disconnect between a relatively active analytical community producing assessments of FIMI risks and a government that responds to geopolitical information pressures through political management rather than institutional resilience-building.

6.3 Cross-Cutting Observations

Points of convergence

Russia is identified as the primary external information actor by every single interviewee across both countries, without exception. This unanimity is itself analytically significant: it reflects not only the dominance of Russian-origin content in the quantitative data but a qualitative judgement shared across diverse professional backgrounds — journalists, sociologists, policy analysts, civil society practitioners, and international observers — that the directionality, intensity, and intent of Russian information operations is distinguishable from the ambient noise of competitive geopolitical messaging.

Telegram's centrality as the primary information infrastructure is equally unanimous. Across sixteen sources in two countries, no interviewee disagrees with the proposition that Telegram is the dominant platform for information of political consequence. Experts describe Telegram not merely as a distribution channel but as the informational environment itself — the space in which communities form, narratives circulate, and interpretive frames are established.

The inadequacy of existing counter-FIMI responses is a shared concern, though its specific form differs between countries. In Kazakhstan, the critique focuses on the gap between the speed of social media and the reaction time of state and civil society institutions, combined with the state's preference for silence over rebuttal on Russia-sensitive issues. In Uzbekistan, the critique focuses on the structural incompatibility between a tightly managed media environment and the development of genuine information resilience. Both diagnoses converge on the conclusion that current approaches are insufficient and that the gap is widening as FIMI techniques become more sophisticated.

Differences in resilience

Expert testimony reveals meaningful differences in the resilience resources available to each country. Kazakhstan has a more active, if increasingly pressured, civil society counter-capacity: fact-checking organisations, media standards initiatives, and a journalistic community that retains some operational independence. Post-2022, pro-Russian expression has become less socially acceptable in Kazakhstan's public sphere — a shift attributed by one political scientist to the combination of Kazakhstan's direct border with Russia, its substantial Russian minority, and the vivid demonstration effect of the Ukraine war. This shift does not eliminate FIMI vulnerability, but it raises the social cost of openly amplifying Russian narratives.

Uzbekistan's resilience position is, in some respects, paradoxically better and in others significantly worse. The government's tight control of the information space does reduce direct FIMI penetration through formal media channels. But this relative insulation comes at the cost of the civil society and independent media capacity that would be needed to build sustainable, bottom-up resilience. When control eventually loosens — or when FIMI adapts further to operate within permitted topics — the counter-capacity will not be there.

A distinctive resilience resource in Kazakhstan that has no equivalent in Uzbekistan is the growing Kazakh-language public sphere as a partial buffer against Russian-language FIMI. In Uzbekistan, the linguistic transition toward Uzbek is proceeding faster, but the informational content of the Uzbek-language space is more domestically focused and less oriented toward critical geopolitical discourse — making it a weaker buffer against the global-register narratives that dominate the Uzbekistani FIMI dataset.

Perceived gaps in response mechanisms

Several response gaps emerge from interviews that are not adequately addressed by current institutional frameworks in either country.

The platform gap is the most immediate: TikTok and Threads are growing rapidly as FIMI vectors in Kazakhstan but are not covered by current monitoring systems, including the dataset underlying this report. This shift reflects a broader structural transition documented across the region: research conducted under the EU-funded REVIVE project found that television consumption is declining across Central Asia — particularly among younger audiences — while internet and social media use is growing rapidly, creating both new vulnerabilities as audiences migrate to less moderated digital spaces, and new opportunities for independent media to reach audiences previously dominated by state-controlled broadcasters.[11]

11. ENC/Internews (2023). Central Asian Media Consumption and Disinformation: a quantitative and qualitative assessment in the context of geo-politics. European Neighbourhood Council. Produced under the REVIVE (Resilience and Engagement with Varied Information for a Vibrant Environment) project, funded by the European Union.

The audience gap is equally significant. Expert testimony consistently identifies pension-age populations as the most vulnerable demographic and as the least reached by current media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. Yet institutional responses in both countries are primarily oriented toward younger, digitally active audiences — the group least in need of remediation.

The attribution gap — the difficulty of distinguishing foreign-directed FIMI from domestically produced content that happens to align with foreign narrative interests — is articulated most clearly by a journalist-editor in Kazakhstan and echoed by multiple Uzbekistani interviewees. One interviewee offers a practical analytical principle: verbatim, unedited reproduction of Kremlin press releases or divisive statements should be treated as FIMI amplification regardless of the apparent independence of the outlet reproducing it.

Finally, expert testimony surfaces a forward-looking gap that existing frameworks are not designed to address: the ingestion of low-traffic propaganda content by large language models, which may later surface as synthesised "analysis" in AI-generated outputs. The Kazakhstan roundtable is specific on this point: even low-traffic propaganda websites matter because they contribute to the training data and retrieval environments of AI systems. This represents a structural amplification pathway that bypasses human audiences entirely and requires institutional attention before it becomes a significant risk rather than an emerging one.

7. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This report presents findings from five months of systematic monitoring of foreign information manipulation and interference in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The evidence base – 3,008 flagged narrative instances drawn from 581,059 collected posts, combined with fourteen expert interviews and two structured roundtable discussions – is sufficient to support conclusions that go beyond descriptive observations. While the findings can never be methodologically definitive on questions of attribution or intent, they provide a grounded basis for understanding the pressures shaping today's information ecosystems.

The FIMI-aligned external information influence is real and sustained. Every expert interviewed across both countries, without exception, identifies Russia as the primary external information actor. The quantitative data confirms what expert testimony asserts: the five highest-volume narratives show no month of absence across the entire monitoring period. The persistence and repetition of these narratives - particularly on Telegram and within high-reach amplifier communities - highlight structural vulnerabilities in the information environment that allow such content to re-emerge, spread, and become embedded in everyday information flows.

The two countries face structurally different threats. Kazakhstan's FIMI landscape is characterised by locally embedded narratives calibrated to domestic political vulnerabilities — the 2022 Kantar events, civil society, Western security partnerships — delivered through a concentrated network of high-risk Telegram accounts reaching predominantly Russian-speaking audiences. Uzbekistan faces narratives that are transnational in character, focused on global civilisational and geopolitical themes rather than Uzbek- or Central Asia-specific topics. This thematic difference does not, however, reflect passive spillover: content reaching Uzbek audiences is being deliberately translated and localised into Uzbek, indicating active production choices rather than incidental cross-border diffusion.

Frequency understates exposure. The most analytically significant finding in the engagement data is the divergence between post volume and audience reach. Content in Uzbekistan generates 26 percent more total views than content in Kazakhstan from less than one-quarter of the narrative instances. A monitoring framework that counts posts without measuring reach will systematically underestimate Uzbekistan's exposure and misidentify the highest-impact narratives in Kazakhstan. These differences show that exposure patterns vary by country and cannot be assessed by post volume alone.

The resilience gap is widening. Expert interviews in both countries identify the same structural trend from opposite directions. In Kazakhstan, the civil society and independent media capacity that constitutes the primary counter-FIMI layer is contracting under a combination of regulatory pressure and donor withdrawal (e.g. acute lack of funding). In Uzbekistan, capacity-building has been limited and remains insufficient. These factors, while different in each country, facilitate susceptibility to sustained foreign manipulation – not necessarily because FIMI is becoming more sophisticated, but because the domestic infrastructure capable of contesting it is weakening.

Two emerging risks warrant early warning and attention. First, platform shifts are reshaping where audiences encounter malign influence content, with experts identifying TikTok as the primary disinformation space in Kazakhstan, and Threads gaining traction among Kazakh-speaking users - neither of which is currently covered by existing monitoring. Second, AI contamination: expert testimony from the Kazakhstan roundtable raises a forward-looking risk that low-traffic FIMI content, even when it reaches small human audiences, may be ingested by large language models and later reproduced as synthesised analysis. This creates an amplification pathway that bypasses human audiences entirely and indicates where monitoring and ecosystem resilience efforts will be needed.

Two further quantitative patterns deserve emphasis. First, while the taxonomy includes both delegitimising and positive narratives, the deployment pattern strongly favours delegitimisation: narratives framing the West negatively average 102 instances each, against 17 for narratives portraying Russia or China positively. This is a sixfold difference that reflects how the information influence operates in practice. Second, amplification is structurally concentrated in Kazakhstan — the top five accounts represent 76 percent of all Kazakhstani narrative instances — while Uzbekistan's amplifier network is more distributed, with the majority of instances produced by mainstream outlets rather than dedicated high-frequency channels. These structural differences have direct implications for how monitoring and response strategies should be designed in each country.

The recommendations that follow build directly on these findings. Their purpose is to strengthen the information ecosystems in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by focusing on long-term resilience rather than reactive measures. Each recommendation is grounded in the structural patterns identified in the monitoring and interview data and reflects the different conditions in the two countries.

7.1 Governments

Governments in both countries occupy an ambivalent position in the FIMI response architecture. They are among the most capable actors — with legal authority, institutional reach, and strategic communication capacity — but also among the most constrained, both by the political sensitivity of confronting Russian influence directly and by the temptation to use counter-FIMI powers in ways that suppress legitimate political expression rather than manipulative foreign content. The core challenge for both governments is to ensure that information-governance approaches support long-term resilience - by being transparent, proportionate, and grounded in clear institutional mandates - rather than reactive, opaque or overly security-driven.

The strategic recommendation for both governments is to shift from a de-escalation posture — managing FIMI exposure through silence and diplomatic calibration — toward an active resilience posture that invests in the structural conditions under which populations are less susceptible to manipulation. This does not mean escalating diplomatic confrontation with Russia; it means supporting the development of a more resilient and less centralised information ecosystem — one where independent media, civil society, and public institutions can collectively reduce the effectiveness of external interference regardless of its source.

R1 Strengthen resilience through mainstream public communication (e.g. storytelling) and trusted information capacity.

Both governments currently default to silence when Russian-origin provocations circulate in the domestic information space. This approach reduces diplomatic friction but leaves harmful narratives publicly unanswered. Instead of “silence” or “censorship”, governments should be supplemented with relevant institutions and a network of supportive civil society and media that can act independently and are able to provide accurate information and contextual explanations when high-confidence FIMI narratives begin to circulate. This requires improving internal coordination and ensuring that public communication is based on transparency, proportionality, and factual clarity - without creating new counter-disinformation structures or expanding state control over the information space.

he overarching objective should be to support a more resilient information ecosystem in which independent media, civil society, and public institutions each contribute to reducing the impact of harmful narratives. In Kazakhstan, the existing informal monitoring units inside ministries provide a foundation; what is needed is a mandate for public output, not merely internal reporting. In Uzbekistan, the reliance on existing institutional and civil society channels as indirect response vehicles should be supplemented by enhanced “storytelling” public communication capacities and immediate communication capacity at the institutional level.

R2 Strengthen the supply of Kazakh- and Uzbek-language content.

While much FIMI-aligned content in Kazakhstan circulates in the Russian language, the research shows that this reflects a structural gap. Audiences often rely on the Russian language information ecosystems, because there is insufficient trusted, local, engaging content available in national languages. Strengthening the supply, visibility, and quality of Kazakh- and Uzbek-language media — through independent outlets, local content producers, and platform-appropriate formats — reduces this dependence and expands the range of credible alternatives. The goal is not to replace Russian-language content, but to ensure that audiences have robust, diverse information choices across all languages they use.

R3 Ensure that measures intended to address harmful influence don't restrict independent media or public debate.

The monitoring and expert interviews show that regulatory tools in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are often applied broadly, with limited distinction between harmful influence and ordinary political or civic expression. In Kazakhstan, increasing regulatory pressure on independent outlets risks capturing legitimate journalism under the banner of “harmful content.” In Uzbekistan, centralised media governance means that measures aimed at addressing manipulation can easily merge with restrictions on public debate.

To prevent these dynamics, any regulatory or policy responses aimed at limiting the spread of FIMI content should be clearly distinguished from broader media regulation. This requires safeguards that prevent such measures from being used to constrain independent journalism, civil society actors, or critical commentary. Clear definitions, inclusive (e.g. including civil society in the legislative/decision-making process) and transparent procedures with proportional enforcement help ensure that resilience efforts strengthen — rather than inadvertently shrink — the information space.

R4 Establish a public-facing FIMI monitoring and transparency mechanism.

Neither Kazakhstan nor Uzbekistan has an institutional equivalent of EUvsDisinfo or the ENC Early Warning System — a publicly accessible, regularly updated resource documenting foreign information manipulation in the national information space. Such a resource serves multiple functions: it provides journalists and researchers with a reference point, it raises the reputational cost for domestic amplifiers of foreign narratives, and — as expert testimony in Kazakhstan noted — it reduces the risk that low-quality FIMI content is ingested and reproduced by AI systems. Governments should support, or where appropriate fund independently, civil society and media for monitoring with a transparent methodology and public output. To preserve credibility, it is vital that monitoring civil society and media operate at an institutional arm's length from the government rather than as a state communications tool.

7.2 Media and Fact-Checking Organisations

Media and fact-checking organisations are the front line of FIMI detection and public communication. The evidence in this study identifies several specific gaps in their current capacity and reach that are addressable through targeted investment and methodological adjustment.

The strategic challenge for media organisations in both countries is one of relevance and reach: the primary FIMI ecosystem operates on Telegram, with growing activity on TikTok and Threads, while much professional media and fact-checking work is oriented toward website-based audiences. Closing this gap requires both platform adaptation and audience segmentation — producing content for the channels where FIMI circulates rather than only for the channels where media organisations are most comfortable operating. We recommend national language promotion, in addition to offering more content that reaches wider and more diverse audiences, as outlined below.

R5. Expand platform-native presence where audiences already consume FIMI-related content.

Media should strengthen their presence on the platforms where FIMI-related content is actually circulating and being consumed. The quantitative data shows that 88 percent of Kazakhstan FIMI and 61 percent of Uzbekistan FIMI circulates on Telegram, while expert testimony identifies TikTok as the fastest-growing disinformation channel in Kazakhstan and Threads as an emerging political platform among Kazakh-language users. This means that outlets whose primary output remains website-based may not be well matched to the real information environment. That mismatch may grow further as audiences increasingly shift to these platforms or to others that may emerge in the future.

The implication is broader than expanding onto Telegram, TikTok, or Threads alone. Media should adopt the operating assumption that any platform where audiences are

already actively engaged and exchanging information is part of the relevant information space. This requires not only platform diversification, but changes in editorial workflows, production routines, and the use of technology. In particular, newsrooms may need to adapt how content is produced, reformatted, distributed, and timed, including through AI-enabled and other technology-supported solutions that help them respond more effectively to changing audience behaviour. Content designed for website audiences will not be effective unless it is reshaped for the channels, pacing, and consumption habits of the platforms where audiences actually visit.

R6. Move from reactive debunking to proactive resilience-building coverage.

Media should not rely mainly on reactive fact-checking or incident-based debunking when responding to recurring manipulative narratives. Debunking remains necessary, but it should not be the centre of gravity. A more effective approach is to build information resilience proactively through continuous, locally grounded coverage that reflects the real concerns, language, and priorities of the audience.

Where recurrent manipulative themes are already known, media should take them into account when covering related developments, public issues, and policy changes, so that audiences receive timely, credible, and useful information before false or distorted interpretations become dominant. Local media can be especially effective in building this kind of resilience because, when they are trusted and well grounded, their coverage is more immediate, more relevant, and more credible to the audiences they serve. The goal is not to create a separate stream of content "about disinformation," but to strengthen trusted coverage in ways that make manipulative narratives less plausible, less persuasive, and less likely to spread without scrutiny. In that sense, the emphasis should move from reacting to individual incidents toward shaping a stronger underlying information environment in advance.

R7 Strengthen media literacy outreach to pension-age and rural audiences as primary media literacy targets.

Expert testimony across all seven Kazakhstan interviews and multiple Uzbekistan interviews identifies older, rural, and television-consuming audiences as the most structurally vulnerable to Russian-origin FIMI — and the least reached by current media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. Existing initiatives are disproportionately oriented toward younger, digitally active, urban audiences. Media literacy organisations should develop formats specifically designed for pension-age groups: television-based content, community radio, local newspaper inserts, and in-person workshops in regional centres. Fact-checking organisations should consider partnerships with social service networks, pensioner organisations, and local government bodies to reach these audiences through trusted channels rather than digital ones.

R8 Strengthen editorial safeguards to prevent amplification of influence narratives.
One journalist-editor interviewee in Kazakhstan offers a practical principle with direct editorial implications: verbatim, unedited reproduction of influence narratives or divisive foreign-origin content should be treated as propaganda amplification, regardless of the editorial independence of the outlet reproducing it. This unintentional amplification increases the visibility and perceived legitimacy of such narratives across the national information space. Media organisations should adopt explicit editorial standards governing the reproduction of foreign-origin political statements — distinguishing between reporting on such statements (which requires contextualisation and attribution) and reproducing them verbatim (which functions as amplification). Fact-checking organisations should include verbatim reproduction as a category in their monitoring frameworks alongside conventional false-claim detection.

R9 Strengthen national-language information capacity and integrate fact-checking into trusted editorial production in national languages.

The growth of Uzbek-language FIMI content — 66 percent of the Uzbek dataset — and the emergence of Kazakh-language targeting in specific narrative clusters indicate that stronger information capacity in national languages is becoming structurally necessary rather than optional.

Kazakhstan, the problem is, first of all, the limited supply of strong, locally relevant content in Kazakh. In Uzbekistan, audiences already consume information predominantly in Uzbek, but the supply of high-quality, diverse, and cross-platform Uzbek-language content remains too weak. This creates a structural gap that manipulative content can exploit.

Media should therefore invest not only in national-language fact-checking capacity, but more broadly in stronger national-language editorial production. This should include more high-quality and more diverse content across platforms, including formats suited to Telegram, TikTok, and other channels where audiences already consume information. Fact-checking alone is unlikely to be sufficient if audiences do not also have trusted, locally relevant alternatives they can turn to.

Fact-checking capacity should be developed as an organic part of editorial work rather than as a detached function. It is likely to be most meaningful and sustainable when verification practices are integrated into regular reporting, supported by bilingual and national-language staff, and delivered through formats that feel native to the audience's actual information environment.

7.1 Civil Society

Civil society organisations play a distinct role in the FIMI response architecture: They hold local trust and community access, and they can respond to emerging issues with greater flexibility than formal institutions.

In both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, however, civil society capacity is under structural pressure — from state regulation in both countries and from donor withdrawal — that limits its ability to fulfil this function.

The strategic recommendation for civil society is to focus on building a lasting information resilience ecosystem rather than campaign-specific counter-messaging. The latter is important but time-limited; the former creates durable capacity that outlasts individual projects.

R10 Build audience-segmented media literacy programmes using a cluster-based approach.

Generic media literacy campaigns — 'think before you share,' spot-the-fake formats — have limited effectiveness against the effective and identity-based FIMI documented in this study. The Kazakhstan roundtable is explicit on this point, recommending cluster-based audience segmentation by values, income, education, geography, language, and age rather than one-size-fits-all messaging. Civil society organisations should design media literacy interventions that identify specific audience clusters, establish their distinctive vulnerabilities and entry points, and develop content and formats tailored accordingly. The 'movable middle' — audiences not strongly committed to influencing narratives but regularly exposed to them through their information habits — is the most productive target group for such interventions.

R11 Develop community-level resilience programming in northern Kazakhstan and mixed-language urban centres.

The geographic and demographic vulnerability concentration documented in this study — northern and eastern Kazakhstan, Russian-speaking communities, regions with strong Soviet-era social networks — suggests that geographically targeted community resilience programming would be more effective than national-level campaigns. Civil society organisations should design programmes for specific communities: local history and identity projects that provide alternative frames to Soviet nostalgia content; community media initiatives that build trusted local information sources; and dialogue programmes that address the Russia-Ukraine war's social polarisation effects in communities most affected by them. Effective approaches include strengthening local history and identity through positive, community-anchored narratives; hyperlocal engagement initiatives; and dialogue programmes that support social cohesion in communities experiencing information-driven tensions. These interventions build resilience in information systems and community-built independent media that address social polarisation in the most affected communities.

R12 Increase the public's understanding of how malign narratives circulate within communities.

The evidence in Chapters 4 and 6 identifies a network of domestic amplifiers — named commentators, Telegram channels, and media outlets — that reproduce or echo Russian-origin narratives while maintaining the appearance of independent Kazakhstani or Uzbekistani voices. Civil society organisations with research capacity can help understand how influence-aligned narratives circulate within communities. Civil society organisations could analyse the pathways through which narratives spread — such as informal networks, mixed-language groups, and local information habits — to inform more targeted resilience programming. Understanding patterns of circulation and audience resonance will enable civil society groups to design interventions that are relevant to local concerns, engage communities, and prove sustainable over time. Publication raises reputational costs for amplifiers, provides journalists with reference material, and contributes to the public monitoring function recommended under R4. This work requires careful methodology and legal review to avoid defamation exposure, but it is feasible and has precedent in comparable contexts.

7.4 International Partners

The strategic recommendation for international partners is to prioritise enabling domestic capacity — funding and technical support for locally led initiatives — over direct programming, i.e., promoting internationally branded counter-FIMI projects that can be more easily framed as foreign interference. It is therefore key that healthy information ecosystems exist with strong media and diverse content offering.
R13 Sustain and strengthen long-term support for independent media and civil society organisations

The single most consistent message from expert testimony in Kazakhstan — and a significant concern in Uzbekistan — is that termination of US foreign assistance has created a structural resilience gap that will be filled by malign narratives. International partners should treat independent media sustainability and civil society information capacity as core strategic interests, not optional programming categories. Multi-year, flexible funding for independent media and civil society - including content producers, fact-checking initiatives, investigative journalism groups, and media literacy organisations - would help ensure that they can operate at scale despite regulatory constraints and limited non-grant income. Enhancing direct contracts, as well as EU-Central Asia civil society funds (where EU and local partners institutionalise cooperation) is a functional method to support such initiatives and maintain information integrity, data on online consumption, improved popular outreach ("storytelling") while protecting new areas of EU-Central Asia cooperation from FIMI.

R14 Integrate FIMI resilience into existing bilateral and multilateral programming.

Counter-FIMI objectives do not require new standalone programmes; they can be integrated into existing security sector reform, governance, civil society, and media development programming. The 'Embassies destabilise governments' and 'Donors prepare regime change' narratives are most easily reinforced when international partners create high-profile, visibly branded counter-disinformation initiatives. FIMI resilience objectives integrated into broader governance or development programming attract less narrative attention while achieving comparable or greater impact. EU and OSCE programming in particular — which already includes significant media development and civil society support components — should explicitly incorporate FIMI resilience indicators into programme design, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks. In the same way that “digital” and “green” have become staple requirements in funding procedures, this recommendation suggests that information resilience and FIMI should equally be incorporated horizontally across funding and project streams at the EU level.

R15 Support shared analytical capacity, Early Warning System and Regional Monitoring Approach to track cross-border narrative trends in Central Asia.

National-level monitoring captures only part of the picture, limiting the ability of local actors to understand how narratives evolve and where they gain traction. Identifying regional patterns will improve ecosystem understanding across borders and create informed approaches and responses. International partners should invest in developing a harmonised monitoring methodology applicable across the Central Asian region, including the usage of an AI-supported Early Warning System in accordance with the European Democracy Shield Initiative, enabling genuine longitudinal and cross-national comparison through a Regional Monitoring Approach. This would substantially increase the analytical value of future monitoring rounds and provide a stronger evidence base for regional policy responses, while minimising risks and costs.

7.5 Strengthening AI-Supported Monitoring

The AI-supported monitoring approach used in this study — narrative classification, confidence scoring, actor-level analysis — represents a significant methodological advance over purely manual monitoring. It enables the processing of thousands of narrative instances at a speed and scale that human analysts cannot match. But the expert testimony and the evidence gaps documented throughout this report also identify specific limitations and risks in the current approach that should inform how the methodology develops in future monitoring rounds.

R16 Expand platform coverage to include TikTok, Threads, and television-adjacent content.

The current dataset covers Telegram, YouTube, websites, Facebook, and Instagram. Expert testimony in Kazakhstan identifies TikTok as the primary disinformation platform in the country and Threads as a rapidly growing channel for political narrative dissemination. Neither is covered in the current monitoring framework. Future iterations should expand the collection to include TikTok content from the tracked narrative taxonomy, Threads accounts, and — most ambitiously but most valuably — Telegram forwarding chain data that would allow network inference currently impossible with the present dataset. Television-retransmitted content, which reaches the most vulnerable older audiences, remains outside the scope of any current digital monitoring approach. Developing a methodological solution for this presents genuine challenges (e.g., access restrictions, republication constraints, the volume of broadcast content) but the vulnerability it creates warrants dedicated attention in future research design.

R17 Develop confidence score thresholds for tiered alert and response protocols.

The current confidence scoring system (0.55–1.00) provides a continuous quality indicator for individual narrative instances but is not currently operationalised into a structured alert framework. Future iterations should establish tiered thresholds — for example, instances scoring above 0.85 flagged for rapid-response counter-narrative consideration; sustained clusters of high-confidence instances in a specific narrative triggering a formal monitoring alert — that allow monitoring outputs to connect directly to response protocols. This would transform the monitoring system from a retrospective analytical tool into a prospective early-warning function.

R18 Address the AI contamination risk through monitoring output design.

The Kazakhstan roundtable raises a forward-looking risk that existing monitoring frameworks are not designed to address: low-traffic FIMI content, even if it reaches small human audiences, may be ingested by large language models and later reproduced as synthesised 'analysis' in AI-generated outputs. This creates a structural amplification pathway that bypasses human audiences entirely. Monitoring organisations should consider two responses: first, ensuring that monitoring outputs are themselves publicly accessible in machine-readable formats, so that AI systems have access to accurate FIMI taxonomy and attribution data that can counterbalance manipulative content; and second, exploring partnerships with AI developers to flag identified FIMI sources in content provenance systems. This is an emerging frontier rather than a solved problem, but it warrants institutional attention now rather than after it becomes a significant risk.

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