



Central European
Digital Media
Observatory

CEDMO Fact-checking Summary

Q4 2023



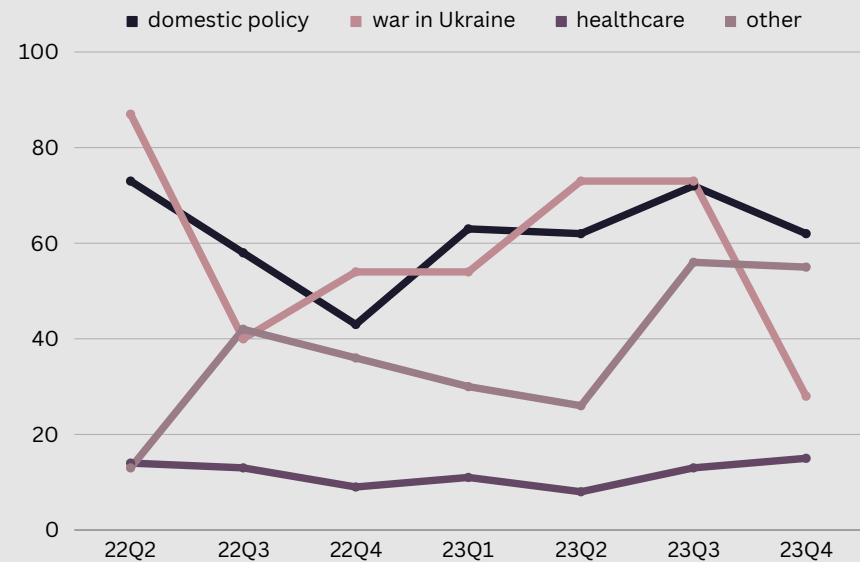
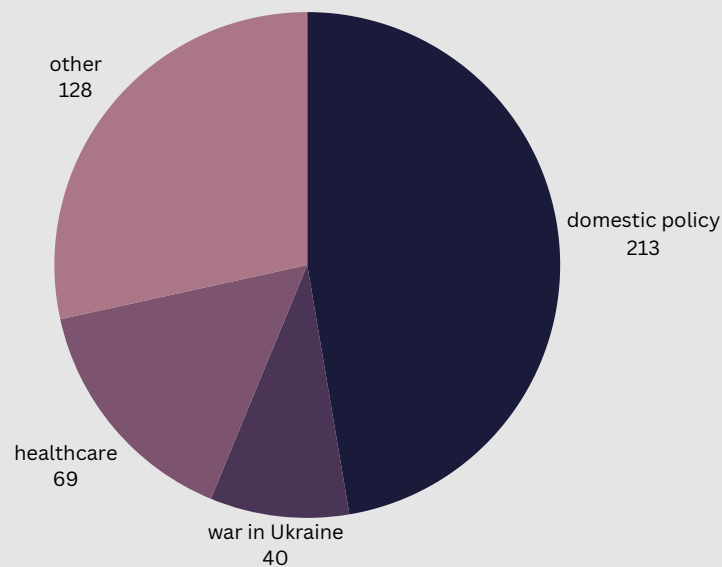
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Trends in Disinformation Narratives in CEE

Main trends and disinformation narratives in Q4 2023

In Q4, the authors of disinformation narratives remained interested in domestic policy, esp. in relation to the recent elections in Slovakia and Poland, the following negotiations and transfers of power. While the topic of the war in Ukraine had long been common in disinformation narratives, its popularity has significantly declined. Fact-checkers in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia published 450 articles in total, most of which (213) concerned domestic politics.

Fact-check topics frequency



Note: Some fact-checks concerned multiple topics. Demagog.pl is not included in the line chart due to the unavailability of historical data.

Main Narratives in CEDMO's Scope

Zelenskyy and falsified documents

During the final quarter of 2023, photos of alleged official documents appeared online, claiming to prove malicious intentions of the Ukrainian president Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian senior officials. The documents shared online included a U.S. certificate of citizenship, linked to Volodymyr Zelenskyy's alleged plan to escape to the USA. Other documents, supposedly from the president's office, were meant to prove a secret agreement to use part of Ukrainian land as toxic waste storage.

As AFP and [Demagog.cz](#) fact-checkers pointed out in [both cases](#), the documents are fake and first appeared as the findings of Western journalists. However, these journalists do not exist at all. Their identities were clearly created to spread misinformation.

The emergence of AI-generated deepfakes

In recent months, CEDMO fact-checking organizations had to analyse a higher number of AI-generated videos or voice recordings linked to the war in Ukraine. The manipulative content repeatedly showed Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. For example, some [deepfake videos](#) [showed](#) him calling on soldiers to revolt against the government in Kyiv and stage a coup.

Another AI-generated recording was the alleged [phone call](#) between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife Olena, in which the Ukrainian president harshly criticises Western officials.

Israel–Hamás conflict

Following the Hamas terrorist group attack on Israel in October and Israel's military response in the Gaza Strip, many [false](#) and [manipulative](#) social media [posts](#) [appeared](#) in Central Europe. CEDMO fact-checkers repeatedly dealt with [old](#) or [unrelated](#) [videos](#) being presented as current in the context of the Middle Eastern conflict, but also with [posts](#) [linking](#) this conflict to the war in Ukraine. There were also other, more general narratives and false [posts](#) about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Major Narratives in Individual Countries

Poland

Before the October parliamentary elections in Poland, then-PM Mateusz Morawiecki shared a campaign ad criticising EU migration policy and warning against the approach of the opposition led by Donald Tusk. His words, warning against the ill effects of illegal migration, were accompanied by videos of violent acts. However, many of them took place in other countries and had no connection to EU immigration.



Czech Republic

In Q4 2023, phishing attempts using deepfake videos to advertise an allegedly miraculous investment platform repeatedly spread in Czech on-line spaces. These deepfake videos usually used the likeness of Czech politicians, e.g., Andrej Babiš, Petr Fiala or Petr Pavel, who “recommended” investing through this platform, but news anchors and graphics of the TV station CNN Prima News were also abused.



Slovakia

In November, a viral post regarding the alleged risks associated with mammograms garnered tens of thousands of shares. The post claims that mammography was banned in Switzerland because it causes breast cancer and over 50% of the test results are incorrect. However, Switzerland had not banned mammography. The claims that the screening causes breast cancer and metastasis are also false. The study cited in the posts concerns the detection of cancer, not its potential cause.



Current Disinformation Narrative Awareness in Czechia

The awareness of false narratives ranged from 6% to 25%. Well-known narratives included the growing dissatisfaction of Ukrainian security and armed forces with president Zelenskyy (25%) and president Pavel's intentions to repeal the Beneš decrees (21%). The least known narratives were airborne COVID-19 vaccination (6%) and increased radiation levels due to the bombing of a depleted uranium storage facility (6%).

Question: To what extent are you aware of the following news or information?

Ukrainian security and armed forces are increasingly dissatisfied with the president Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, made a video calling for an uprising against the president and for overthrowing the government.

President Petr Pavel wants to repeal the Beneš decrees. He intends to return the property nationalized in 1945 based on those decrees to the Liechtenstein family.

Gangs of thieves in malls and at petrol stations are handing out free keychains with built-in GPS trackers. Their aim is to track the recipient and later rob their home.

According to the Washington Post, Ukrainian weapon deliveries to the Hamas movement in Palestine have tripled in the last month.

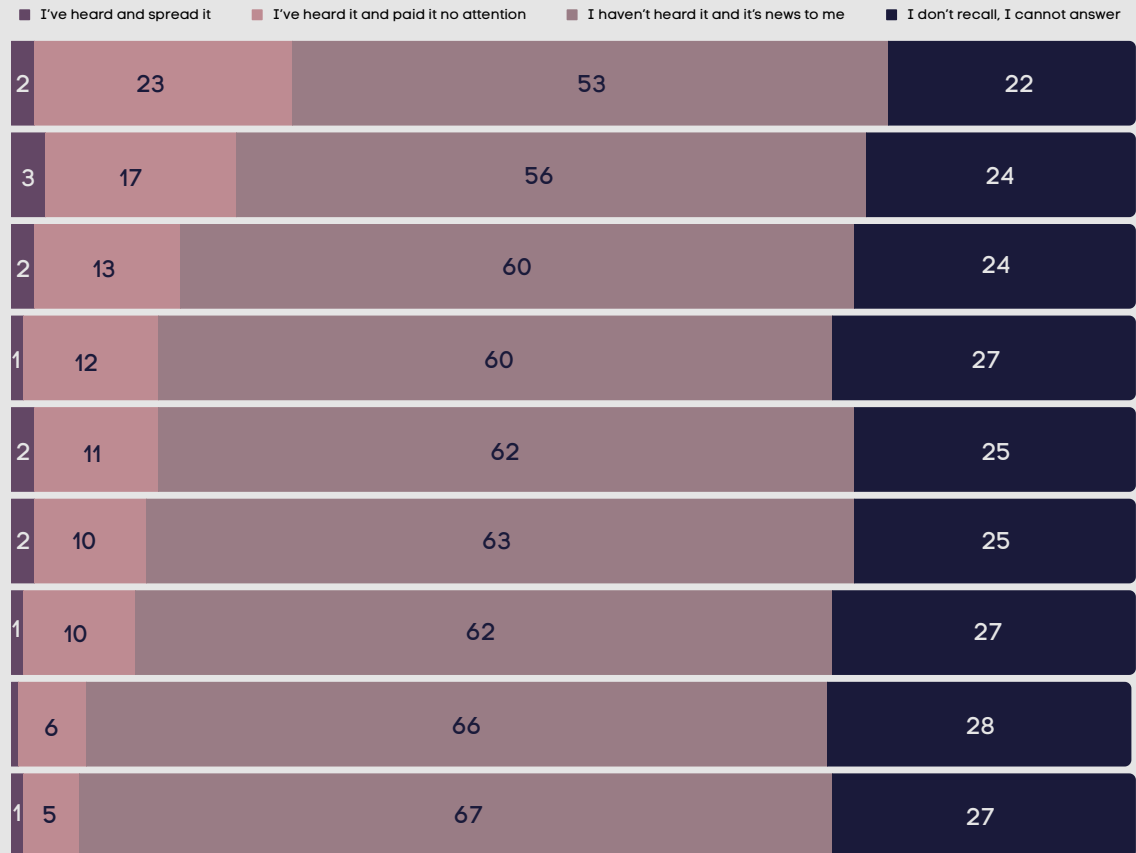
The Pirate party, led by Ivan Bartoš, plans to introduce permits and registration of foragers based on an EU requirement. Beginning in 2024, anybody foraging for berries, mushrooms etc. will have to comply with the daily limit.

Mammography, the X-ray screening of mammary glands in women, stimulates tumour growth and metastasis. Furthermore, 50–60% of all positive results are false, leading Switzerland to be the first country to ban mammogram screenings.

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen is related to Joachim Freiherr von der Leyen, who was a member of the NSDAP and a high-ranking official in Poland and in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia during WW2.

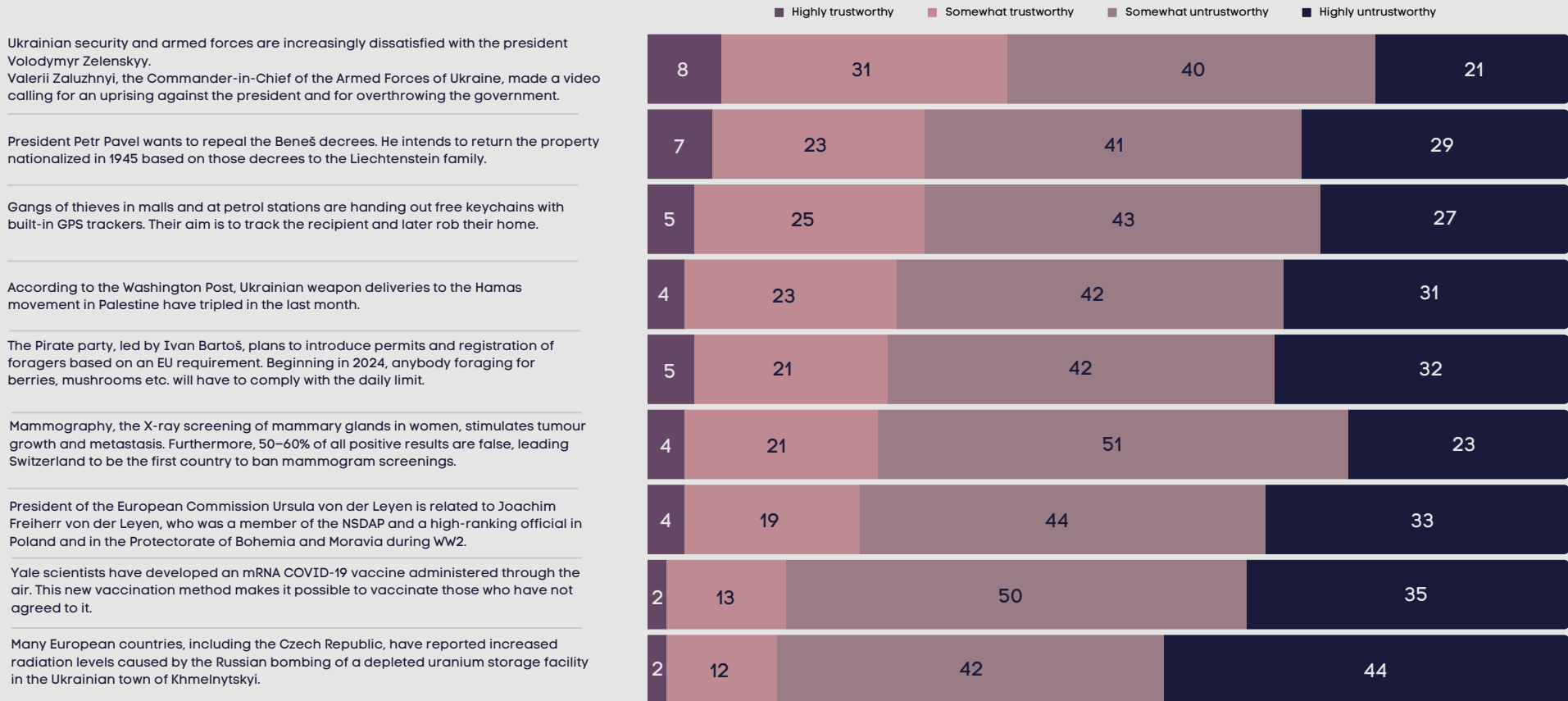
Yale scientists have developed an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine administered through the air. This new vaccination method makes it possible to vaccinate those who have not agreed to it.

Many European countries, including the Czech Republic, have reported increased radiation levels caused by the Russian bombing of a depleted uranium storage facility in the Ukrainian town of Khmelnytskyi.



Current Disinformation Narratives Trustworthiness in Czechia

Question: To what extent do you consider the following information to be trustworthy?

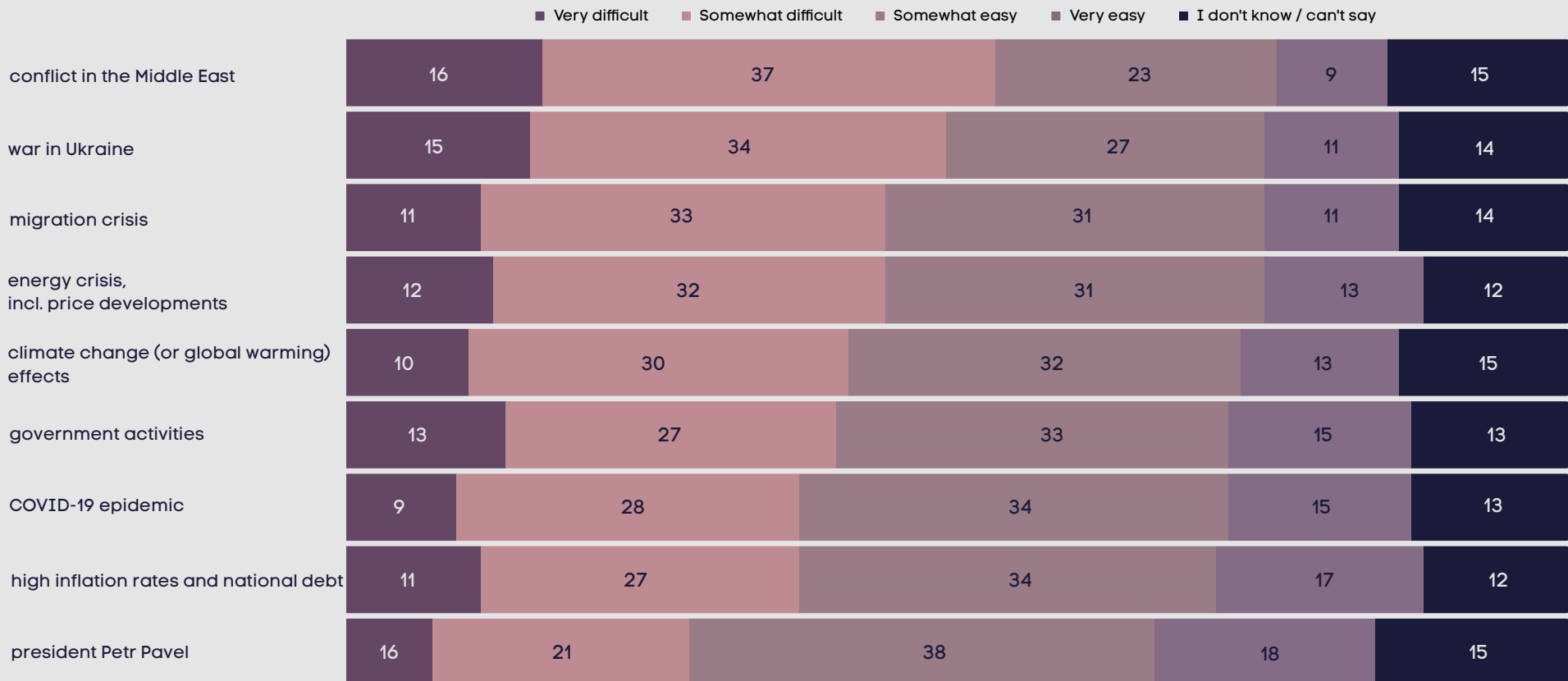


Perceived Difficulty in Identifying True Narratives in Czechia

Over half of all respondents found it difficult to determine the truthfulness of news and information about the military conflicts in the Middle East (53%) and in Ukraine (49%). In both cases, women found it more difficult than men.

The truthfulness of news about president Petr Pavel was the easiest to determine. 56% of respondents found it either very easy or somewhat easy.

Question: When you hear news/information about the following topics, how hard do you find it to determine their degree of truthfulness?

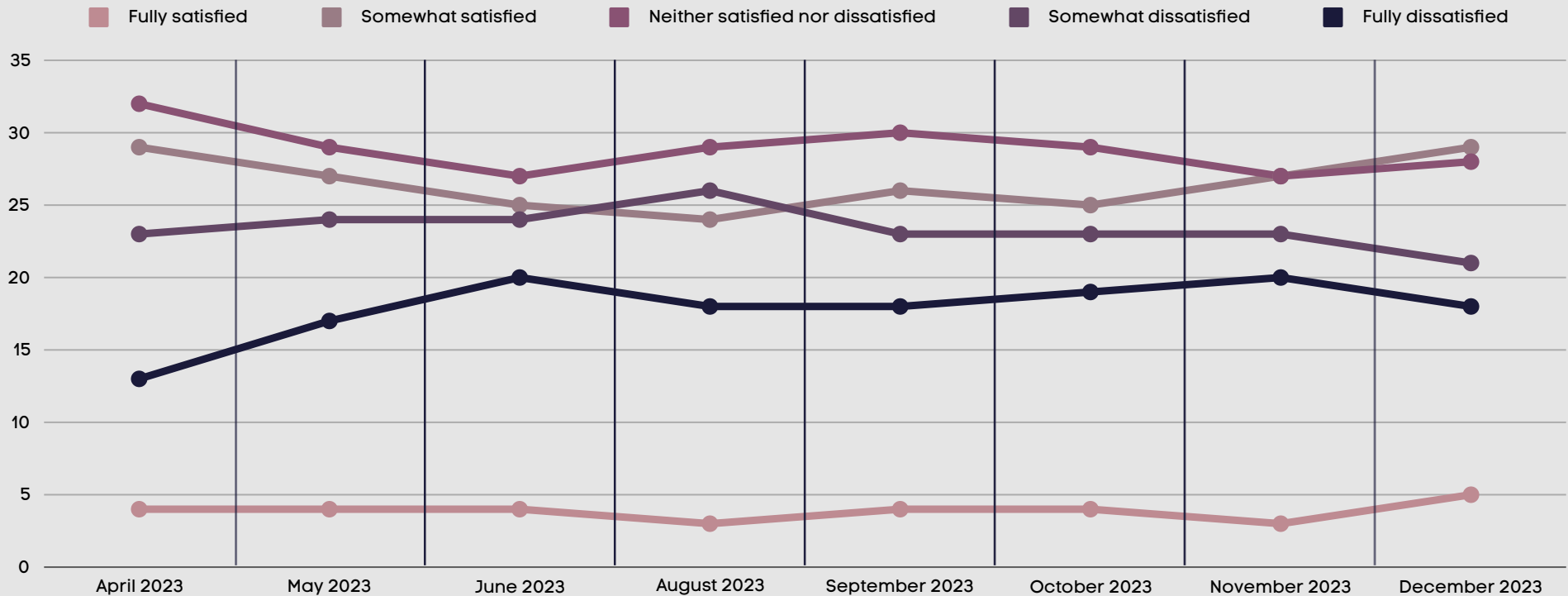


Democracy in Czechia

COMPARISON

The rates of satisfaction with democracy in Czechia have not undergone any significant changes. However, the amount of people who are fully satisfied with democracy has increased to 5%, the highest number so far. The percentage of people who are dissatisfied remains relatively high (33% are either “somewhat” or “fully dissatisfied”). That is, however, a drop from 43% in the previous wave. The youngest respondents, aged between 16 and 24, tend to be the most satisfied (51%), as do students (55%) and people with a university degree (47%).

Question: How satisfied are you with the functioning of the democracy in the Czech Republic?



Disinformation Narratives in Slovakia (I)

Out of the following narratives, two thirds of all Slovaks consider the report about the abolition of the Special Prosecutor's Office at the proposal of Fico's cabinet to be credible. 7 out of 10 Slovaks have heard this information.

To what extent do you consider the following information to be untrustworthy or, on the opposite, trustworthy? To what extent have you noticed the following news?

True
False

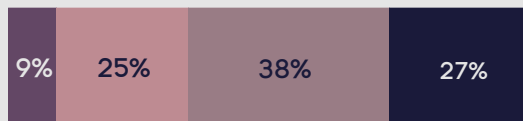
Trustworthiness

Highly untrustworthy Somewhat untrustworthy
Somewhat trustworthy Highly trustworthy

Awareness

I don't recall, I cannot answer I haven't heard it and it's news to me
I've heard it and paid it no attention I've heard and spread it

Robert Fico's cabinet has proposed the abolition of the Special Prosecutor's Office, which will affect any investigation of the SMER-SD party and its members.



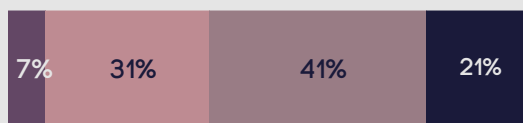
T2B

66%

T2B

70%

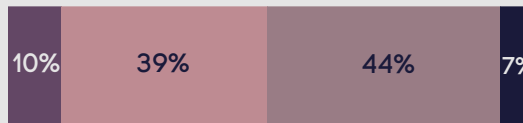
The Minister of Culture Martina Šimkovičová (SNS) was outraged by the display of a painting of two men made by one of the most famous Slovak contemporary painters, A. Dúbravský. The minister plans to introduce a bill to provide her office with more authority in similar situations.



62%

44%

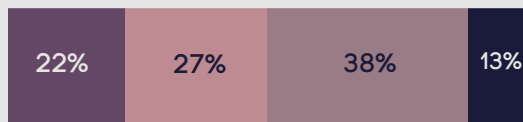
Pneumonia caused by the bacteria, which has recently been appearing in greater numbers in children in China, also appeared in isolated cases in Europe at the end of November.



51%

35%

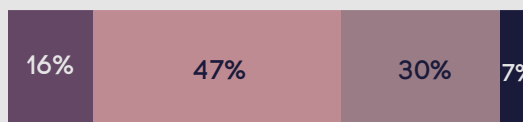
Vendors at Christmas markets in Bratislava offer homemade spelt bread with vegan lard and organic onion for €8.90.



51%

54%

Ukrainian security and armed forces are increasingly dissatisfied with the president Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, made a video calling for an uprising against the president and for overthrowing the government.



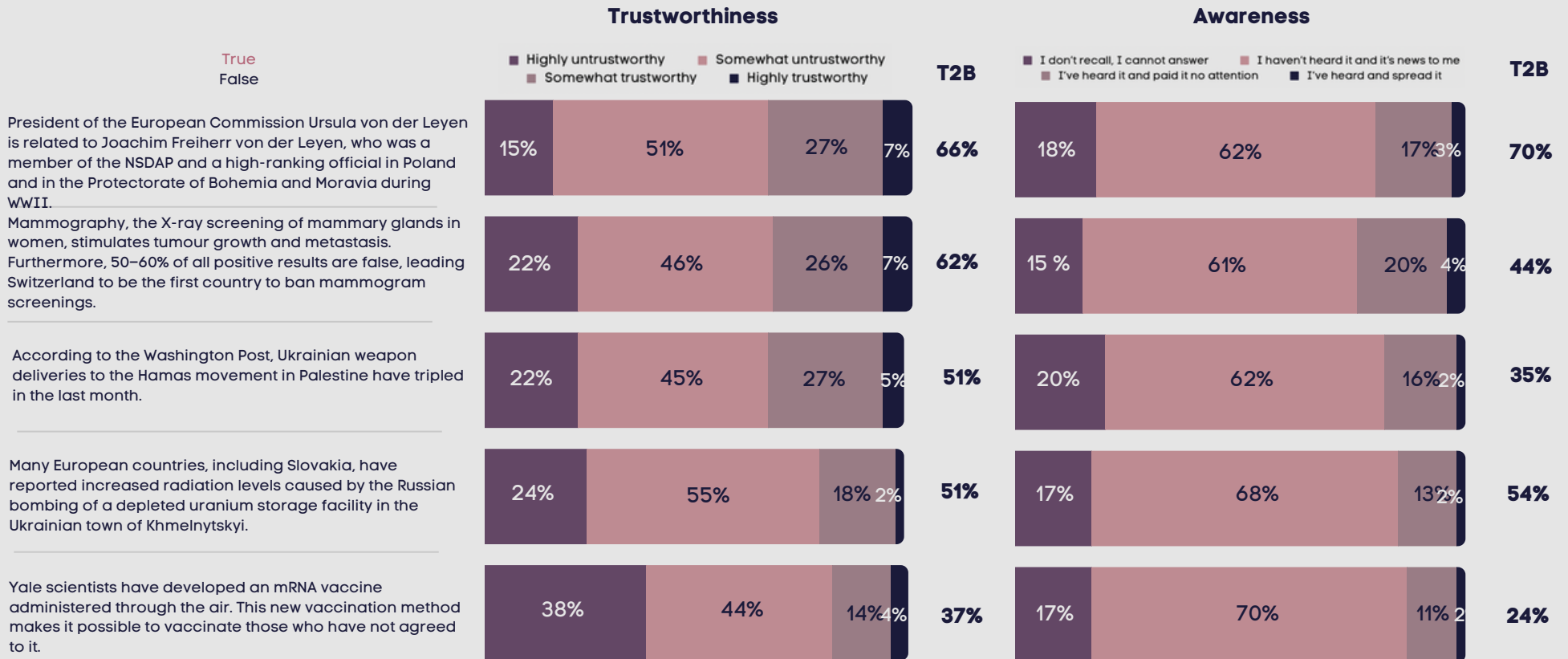
37%

24%

Disinformation Narratives in Slovakia (II)

On the other hand, 18% of Slovaks tend to believe the reports that there is a new, airborne COVID-19 vaccine from the United States. However, only 13% of Slovaks have heard about it.

To what extent do you consider the following information to be untrustworthy or, on the opposite, trustworthy? To what extent have you noticed the following news?



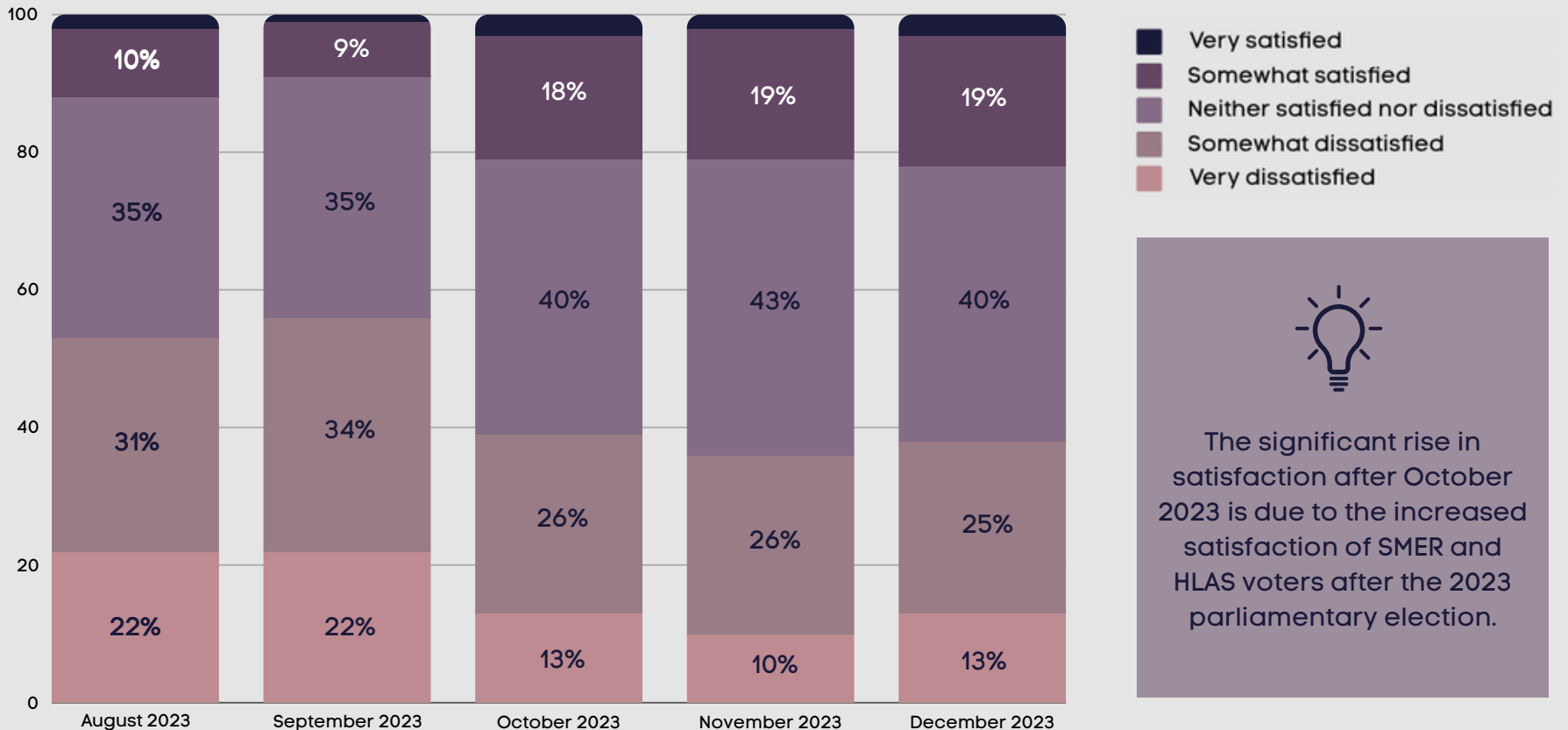
Base: n = 2002, December 2023

Note: T2B = sum of the "Highly trustworthy" and "Somewhat trustworthy" or of the "I've heard and spread it" and "I've heard it and paid it no attention" responses

Satisfaction with democracy in Slovakia

After a jump in satisfaction with democracy between September 2023 and October 2023, more than a fifth of the Slovak population is still satisfied today.

Question: How satisfied are you with the functioning of the democracy in Slovakia?



Note: T2B is the sum of the "Very satisfied" and "Somewhat satisfied" responses,
Base: wave 1: n = 2370; wave 2: n = 2106; wave 3: n = 2117; wave 4: n = 1956; wave 5: n = 2002

Research Method: Czechia

Sample size	3,172 respondents aged 16 or older
Survey date	December 8 – December 27, 2023
Survey method	on-line panel survey (CAWI)
Representativity	quota sampling the survey is representative for the general population of Czechia aged 16 or older based on basic sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, region and size of town), employment status, and past voting behaviour (2021 Chamber of Deputies election, 2nd round of the 2023 presidential election)
Contracted and carried out by	survey conducted by MEDIAN, s.r.o. (SIMAR member) exclusively for Charles University

Research Method: Slovakia

Sample size	2,002 respondents aged 16 or older
Survey date	December 8 – December 18, 2023
Survey method	the CASI method was used, utilizing the Populacia.sk online panel and Face2Face surveys
Representativity	a representative sample of the Slovak population aged 16 or older (quota sampling based on gender, age, region, size of town, and education)
Contracted and carried out by	survey conducted by Ipsos (member of SAVA and SIMAR) exclusively for the Charles University – CEDMO

This publication summarizes the work of selected CEDMO fact-checking organizations (AFP, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, and Infosecurity.sk) in Q4 2023.

The URLs of all fact-checks referenced in this publication can be found [HERE](#).

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