

PROPAGANDA NARRATIVES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HYBRID THREATS IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract This article examines propaganda as a key instrument of hybrid threats affecting Lithuania's information security environment. Drawing upon theoretical models of propaganda and analysis of publicly available sources, the study identifies the main groups of propaganda narratives circulating in the Lithuanian information space: the delegitimisation of democratic institutions, the discrediting of NATO and Western policies, the manipulation of historical memory, and narratives related to the war in Ukraine. The findings demonstrate that these narratives function as an interconnected architecture of information influence aimed at weakening state legitimacy, societal cohesion, and national defence policies. The analysis reveals several structurally vulnerable sectors: institutional legitimacy, historical identity, societal polarisation, perceptions of national defence, and energy security. These vulnerabilities are amplified by political tensions, gaps in media literacy, and socio-economic anxieties. The article also identifies likely future propaganda trends targeting Lithuania, including narratives about an "impending war", efforts to delegitimise NATO troop deployments, the instrumentalisation of migration, economic crisis narratives, and the reframing of historical interpretations. The study concludes that propaganda narratives in Lithuania represent a long-term, adaptive hybrid threat with significant implications for public and national security. Strengthening societal resilience, improving strategic communication, and enhancing media literacy are critical components in mitigating the impact of hostile information operations.

Keywords: propaganda, hybrid threats, information security, narratives, public security, information environment.

Introduction

In recent years, the European security architecture has been facing its most serious challenges since the end of the Second World War. The full-scale war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, together with the systematic application of hybrid threats, has fundamentally transformed the regional security environment and highlighted the growing significance of information influence instruments in contemporary conflicts. The information domain has become one of the central arenas of geopolitical competition, where propaganda is used to shape public opinion, fragment democratic societies, undermine societal resilience, and delegitimise strategic political decisions.

Lithuania is among the states that are consistently exposed to hostile narratives and coordinated disinformation campaigns. Despite increased public awareness of security-related issues, data from the *Democracy Sustainability Barometer* indicate that societal resilience to Kremlin propaganda remains moderate (58.6 out of 100 in 2024). This suggests that Lithuania's information environment continues to be vulnerable to systematically constructed narratives capable of influencing political processes, societal cohesion, defence policy, and overall strategic stability of the state.

Problem statement. Within the context of hybrid threats, propaganda has become one of the key instruments used to influence internal state processes. However, in the Lithuanian case, there is a lack of systematic analyses that would identify specific propaganda narratives, their dissemination mechanisms, and the most vulnerable sectors of society and state institutions.

Research novelty. This article integrates three analytical dimensions:

- content analysis of propaganda narratives circulating in the Lithuanian information environment;
- identification of the most vulnerable societal and institutional sectors;
- expert insights into propaganda narratives that may be activated in the near future.

By combining these elements, the study provides a comprehensive picture of propaganda as an instrument of hybrid threats in Lithuania—an area that has so far remained fragmented in academic literature.

Aim of the article. The aim of this article is to reveal the role of propaganda narratives as an instrument of hybrid threats in Lithuania, to identify the main types of these narratives, their dissemination channels, and the most vulnerable areas of Lithuania's information security.

Research objectives:

1. to review the phenomenon of propaganda and its place within the structure of hybrid threats;
2. to identify and classify Russian propaganda narratives relevant to the Lithuanian information environment;
3. to assess the most vulnerable sectors of Lithuanian society and the state;
4. to determine propaganda narratives that are likely to be activated in the near future.

Research Methodology. This study employed a qualitative research design combining systematic content analysis of publicly available information sources with semi-structured expert interviews. The methodological approach was chosen to capture both the empirical manifestation of propaganda narratives in Lithuania's information environment and expert-level assessments of their strategic logic, dynamics, and future trajectories.

The content analysis was conducted between December 2024 and April 2025 and focused on identifying recurring, targeted, and interconnected elements of propaganda narratives circulating in the Lithuanian information space. The analysis covered publicly available media content, social media materials, institutional threat assessment reports, and recognised propaganda monitoring sources. Narratives were analysed in relation to their thematic focus, semantic structure, and intended domains of influence.

The analytical framework was based on models commonly applied in democratic states for the assessment of information threats. These models enabled the classification of information messages according to their target audiences and areas of impact, allowing for the reconstruction of narrative functions and their underlying strategic logic within the broader context of hybrid threats.

To assess not only currently circulating narratives but also those likely to emerge in the near future, the content analysis was supplemented with semi-structured interviews conducted with three high-level institutional experts. The interview participants were: Vilmantas Vitkauskas, Head of the National Crisis Management Centre; Lieutenant Colonel Vidas Grunda, Deputy Director of the Strategic Communications Department of the Lithuanian Armed Forces; and Agnė Ivanauskienė, Head of the Planning and Analysis Division at the Strategic Communication and Public Relations Department of the Ministry of National Defence.

The selection of experts was based on purposive sampling, taking into account their professional experience, institutional responsibilities, and direct involvement in information

security policy, threat assessment, and strategic communication coordination. The interviews were conducted in person using pre-prepared thematic question blocks, which enabled open discussion and the generation of forward-looking insights into potential hostile propaganda directions.

The combination of empirical analysis of the information environment and expert insights made it possible to identify not only dominant propaganda narratives but also structural vulnerabilities within society and public institutions that could be exploited in the future. This multi-layered methodological approach allowed propaganda to be analysed as a dynamic and adaptive instrument of hybrid threats, whose content, intensity, and framing evolve in response to geopolitical developments, domestic political processes, and societal sensitivities.

Theoretical Aspects of Propaganda as a Hybrid Threat

In contemporary security policy, propaganda is regarded as one of the most effective instruments of information influence, capable of shaping public attitudes, undermining institutional legitimacy, and affecting state political decision-making. Within the framework of hybrid threats, propaganda functions as a systematic, targeted, and long-term process aimed at modifying the behaviour and value orientations of selected societal groups.

Classical scholars of propaganda propose different definitions of this phenomenon; however, they converge on one essential element: the primary objective of propaganda is to influence the thinking and behaviour of audiences through selectively chosen, manipulatively framed, or distorted information.

Harold D. Lasswell (1938) defined propaganda as a mechanism of public opinion control based on the use of symbols and meanings to influence collective behaviour. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell (2012) emphasise that propaganda constitutes “the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” From a NATO perspective, propaganda is understood as an organised activity aimed at manipulating specific target audiences in pursuit of political or strategic objectives (NATO, 2023).

Lithuanian scholars also highlight the psychological dimension of propaganda. Viktor Denisenko (2021) conceptualises propaganda as an integral component of psychological warfare designed to influence individual cognition and behaviour, while Mantas Martišius (2010) defines it as a consistent and methodical form of persuasion oriented towards transforming identity, values, and behavioural patterns.

These definitions underline that propaganda should not be understood as neutral information dissemination but rather as a manipulative practice driven by strategic objectives.

This study relies on the traditional trichotomy of propaganda:

- **White propaganda**, which employs selectively chosen but factually accurate information (Martišius, 2010);
- **Grey propaganda**, which combines factual and fabricated elements to create an illusion of credibility (Martišius, 2010);
- **Black propaganda**, which consists of entirely false information while concealing its true sources (Eastern Europe Studies Centre, 2017).

Grey and black propaganda are particularly prevalent in information operations targeting the Baltic States (Denisenko, 2020; Buinauskas et al., 2016).

The effectiveness of propaganda depends on the systematic application of psychological influence techniques. Lithuanian and international scholars identify several core methods (Denisenko, 2021; Maliukevičius, 2008; Eastern Europe Studies Centre, 2017):

- **Agenda-setting**, whereby relevant topics are reframed in a direction favourable to the propagandist;
- **Card-stacking**, involving selective presentation of facts;
- **Labelling**, which assigns emotionally charged negative attributes to individuals or groups;
- **Testimonial techniques**, using purported experts or authority figures to legitimise messages;
- **Bandwagon effects**, creating the illusion of majority support;
- **Association transfer**, particularly effective in the manipulation of historical narratives (Maliukevičius, 2008).

These techniques enable propaganda narratives to become embedded within society through emotional stimuli, stereotypes, and repetition.

According to OECD (2024) and European Commission terminology:

- **Disinformation** refers to deliberately created false or misleading information intended to cause harm;
- **Fake news** denotes entirely fabricated informational units designed to provoke emotional reactions and increase chaos.

Denisenko (2020) notes that fake news is frequently employed as a tactical instrument for the rapid dissemination of hostile narratives.

Hybrid threat theory (Hoffman, 2007; Treverton et al., 2018; Giannopoulos et al., 2021) emphasises several key functions of propaganda:

- preparing the information environment for other hostile actions, such as cyber operations or political interference;
- normalising adversarial narratives through sustained repetition and alternative interpretations of reality;
- fragmenting societies by eroding trust in democratic institutions.

Lithuanian researchers (Pūraitė, Vasiliauskiene, Bučiūnas, Bajarūnas, Keršanskas) consistently highlight that the information domain constitutes one of the most vulnerable spheres of hybrid aggression in the Baltic region. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that propaganda within the framework of hybrid threats should be understood not merely as a communication tool, but as a strategic, adaptive, and long-term instrument designed to exploit structural societal vulnerabilities, reshape collective perceptions, and weaken the institutional foundations of democratic states.

Propaganda Narratives in the Lithuanian Information Environment

Russian information operations targeting Lithuania are characterised by systematic implementation, methodological consistency, and a long-term strategic vision. Propaganda in this context should not be understood as an accidental or fragmented phenomenon; rather, it constitutes a continuous process of narrative construction aimed at identifying and exploiting structural vulnerabilities within society in order to influence public perception. Although individual narratives may appear isolated at first glance, they in fact form an interconnected information architecture directed against the foundations of Lithuanian statehood, security, and democratic governance.

The analysis of propaganda narratives in this study was conducted using qualitative content analysis, allowing for the systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of hostile information elements within Lithuania's information environment. The analysis drew on publicly available media and social media content, institutional threat assessment

documents, and recognised propaganda monitoring sources. Narratives were grouped according to their thematic structure, semantic features, and intended directions of influence. The classification methodology was based on established typologies of propaganda (white, grey, and black) and the application of influence techniques discussed in the theoretical literature and further operationalised in this study.

The narrative analysis identified four principal thematic clusters that are consistently reproduced in the Lithuanian information space: narratives targeting Lithuanian statehood and the political system; narratives discrediting NATO and the so-called “collective West”; narratives manipulating historical memory and identity; and narratives related to the war in Ukraine and regional security. The structure of these narratives reflects broader Kremlin information strategies adapted to the Lithuanian context.

a) Narratives Undermining Lithuanian Statehood and the Political System

One of the most deeply embedded narrative clusters focuses on delegitimising Lithuania’s political system. Propaganda messages consistently portray Lithuanian authorities as incompetent, corrupt, or externally controlled. The strategic objective of this narrative is to cultivate distrust in democratic institutions, reduce civic engagement, and foster political cynicism. These narratives frequently employ card-stacking techniques, whereby isolated incidents are removed from their broader context and presented as evidence of systemic failure. For instance, corruption cases—common to many democratic states - are reframed as proof of an inherently flawed political system. In this way, selective fragments of reality are instrumentalised to erode institutional legitimacy. Another recurring element within this narrative cluster is the claim that Lithuania lacks political autonomy and merely implements decisions imposed by external actors or the “Western dictate”. This aligns with a broader strategy employed in Russian information operations to diminish the perceived sovereignty of small states and create conditions conducive to their geopolitical weakening.

b) Narratives Targeting NATO and the “Collective West”

A second major narrative cluster seeks to discredit NATO and undermine Lithuania’s membership in the Alliance. Within these narratives, NATO is depicted as an aggressive, expansionist military organisation, while Lithuania is framed as a passive, peripheral state lacking real decision-making power.

A particularly prominent technique in this cluster is the bandwagon effect, whereby propaganda creates the illusion that the majority of society opposes NATO’s presence in the region. Such claims are often supported by fabricated opinion polls, pseudo-analytical data, or alternative “expert” opinions. This narrative strategy aims to portray security institutions as acting against public will and to recast NATO troop deployments as a source of instability rather than security. These narratives are frequently linked to energy, migration, or social issues, portraying NATO as a destabilising force across multiple policy domains. Such linkages reflect a broader information strategy designed to undermine Western unity and weaken transatlantic ties.

c) Manipulation of Historical Memory and Identity

Historical memory represents one of the most sensitive dimensions of information security in the Baltic region, and consequently occupies a central place in Russia’s propaganda architecture. In the Lithuanian case, two dominant directions can be identified.

The first involves the reinterpretation of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, promoting claims that its heritage is “Belarusian” and that Lithuania has illegitimately appropriated this legacy. The second focuses on reframing narratives related to the Second World War and the Soviet occupation, seeking to relativise or deny the occupation and to legitimise the Soviet regime.

These narratives extensively employ association transfer techniques, whereby historical symbols are infused with alternative meanings favourable to the propagandist. Core elements of Lithuanian identity—such as national symbols, key historical dates, and prominent historical figures—are depicted as fabricated, misrepresented, or illegitimately claimed.

Such operations are designed not only to destabilise historical self-perception but also to create fertile ground for broader geopolitical narratives portraying Lithuania as an artificial or historically unjustified state.

d) Narratives Related to Ukraine and Regional Security

Since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine-related narratives have become a central axis of propaganda operations directed at Lithuania. These narratives typically follow three interrelated lines.

First, Ukraine's statehood is delegitimised through claims portraying the country as failed, corrupt, or non-existent. Second, Western support for Ukraine is discredited, particularly by emphasising its alleged futility or economic burden on Lithuanian society. Third, military escalation narratives suggest that Lithuania's support for Ukraine will inevitably draw the country into war.

These narratives frequently rely on emotionally charged fake news, including fabricated incidents near the Lithuanian–Belarusian border, fictitious accounts of foreign soldiers killed in Lithuania, or invented stories depicting refugees and migrants as sources of chaos. The strategic objective is to weaken public support for Ukraine, undermine Lithuania's international positioning, and create the false impression of excessive national involvement in the conflict.

Taken together, these narrative clusters operate in a systemic manner. Delegitimising Lithuania's political system simultaneously weakens trust in NATO and Western partners (NATO, 2024). Manipulating historical memory undermines identity and resilience to information manipulation. Distorting narratives related to Ukraine contributes to a broader reconfiguration of geopolitical perception.

This analysis demonstrates that propaganda narratives targeting Lithuania are not fragmented or isolated; rather, they function as an integrated architecture of influence aimed at the long-term erosion of national security and democratic resilience.

Vulnerable Sectors of Lithuania's Information Security

The effectiveness of propaganda narratives depends not only on their content or dissemination channels, but also on the structural vulnerabilities of society and state institutions. Information environments characterised by social tension, unresolved historical grievances, or fragile identity narratives are particularly susceptible to hostile information operations. In the Lithuanian case, several sectors can be identified where propaganda narratives exert the strongest influence and where vulnerability is systematically exploited by hostile information campaigns (Buinauskas et al., 2016; Denisenko, 2021; Vasiliauskienė, 2022).

Statehood and the Legitimacy of Democratic Institutions. Lithuania demonstrates a particular sensitivity to narratives that undermine state institutions, question their competence, or challenge the transparency of political decision-making. This vulnerability is reinforced by several structural factors, including:

- partial public distrust in the political system;
- periodically emerging corruption cases, which are hyperbolised and instrumentalised by hostile counter-propaganda;
- an increasingly polarised political discourse.

Research indicates that the erosion of institutional legitimacy constitutes one of the primary objectives of hybrid operations, as weakened trust in public institutions creates favourable conditions for the entrenchment of more radical narratives (Pūraitė, 2021). In this way, information attacks seek not only to foster political cynicism, but also to create the perception that democratic procedures are unreliable or ineffective.

Historical Memory and Identity. Historical consciousness in Lithuania is closely intertwined with the foundations of national identity; therefore, attempts to transform it may have direct consequences for societal resilience. Particularly sensitive areas include:

- the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania;
- interpretations of the Second World War;
- narratives related to the Soviet occupation.

Kremlin information operations consistently seek to rewrite these historical elements by constructing ambiguous or distorted interpretations of the past (Maliukevičius, 2008). This strategy is oriented towards the fragmentation of identity, aiming to alter societal value orientations and reduce resilience to hostile narratives. The politicisation of history thus becomes a long-term instrument capable of undermining social cohesion and trust in the state's historical narrative.

Perceptions of National Defence and Security. The defence sector represents one of the primary targets of hybrid operations in the Baltic States (Keršanskas, 2020). Propaganda narratives in this domain typically focus on:

- diminishing the perceived capabilities of the Lithuanian Armed Forces;
- discrediting the presence of NATO forces in Lithuania;
- emphasising the alleged “futility” of military support for Ukraine.

The impact of these narratives is amplified by public fears related to regional security instability. Propaganda exploits natural feelings of insecurity by constructing claims that defence policy allegedly “provokes conflict” or “increases the risk of being drawn into military confrontation”. Such narratives are particularly effective during periods of crisis, when society seeks simple explanations for complex security situations.

Social Cohesion and Societal Polarisation. Like many democratic states, Lithuania is experiencing increasing political and value-based polarisation. This phenomenon creates fertile ground for the dissemination of propaganda narratives, particularly within social media environments where information is easily fragmented into ideological segments.

Hostile actors deliberately seek to accentuate societal divisions by exploiting:

- value-based conflicts (e.g. human rights, migration, family policy);
- cultural and regional differences;
- issues of socio-economic inequality.

Research shows that social tension and distrust between societal groups are among the strongest factors increasing vulnerability to information manipulation (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). In the Lithuanian case, this means that narratives reinforcing “us versus them” logic become particularly effective.

Energy and Economic Security. Energy-related issues occupy a prominent place in hostile propaganda, particularly in light of Lithuania's energy transition, disconnection from Russian energy resources, and synchronisation projects. Propaganda narratives frequently focus on:

- the alleged “inefficiency” of energy independence projects;
- supposedly increased prices;
- the motif of “damage caused by Western policies”.

Such rhetoric aims not only to generate dissatisfaction with economic decisions, but also to create the impression that Lithuania's strategic orientation towards Western energy policy is misguided. Energy security thus becomes a domain where geopolitical, economic, and informational narratives intersect, rendering it especially vulnerable to manipulation (Bajarūnas, 2018).

Systemic Vulnerability: Gaps in Information Literacy and Critical Thinking. A segment of Lithuania's population demonstrates limited information literacy, constraining the ability to critically evaluate sources, distinguish facts from opinions, and identify disinformation. Data from the OECD and the European Commission indicate that information literacy levels across the Baltic region remain uneven, creating additional risks for information influence operations.

This structural vulnerability creates conditions in which even low-quality narratives may gain traction if they are presented through simulated authority, emotional framing, or appealing but simplified interpretations of complex phenomena.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Lithuania's vulnerability to propaganda narratives is rooted not in isolated informational incidents, but in structural weaknesses related to institutional legitimacy, identity formation, social cohesion, security perceptions, and economic sensitivities. These vulnerabilities create favourable conditions for hostile narratives to gain long-term traction, particularly when they exploit existing societal tensions and cognitive gaps. Accordingly, these structural weaknesses not only shape the effectiveness of currently circulating narratives but also provide a framework for anticipating the directions of future propaganda campaigns, which are examined in the following section..

Narratives of Military Involvement and the “Impending War”

One of the most prominent future propaganda directions is likely to revolve around claims that Lithuania is being “inevitably” drawn into a military conflict. Current trends observed on social media already indicate the circulation of narratives alleging “forced mobilisation”, the existence of a “secret NATO plan” to use Lithuanian territory for escalation, and the deliberate fuelling of public anxiety through “impending war panic”. These narratives rely on instruments of fear, threat, and uncertainty, and their primary objective is to reduce societal preparedness for defence while simultaneously delegitimising state security policy (Keršanskas, 2020; Treverton et al., 2018). This narrative direction tends to intensify during periods of crisis, heightened public debate on mobilisation, or the conduct of military exercises.

Closely related to this trend is the delegitimation of NATO's military presence in Lithuania. In light of NATO's plans to strengthen forward defence and integrate a German brigade into the country, propaganda efforts are likely to intensify against these processes. Narratives portraying foreign troops as a threat to Lithuanian sovereignty, framing Lithuania as a NATO military training ground, or suggesting that brigade deployment will provoke a Russian response are expected to become increasingly visible. Research conducted by NATO StratCom COE demonstrates that such narratives are systematically activated wherever the Alliance strengthens its eastern flank capabilities (NATO StratCom COE, 2024). In the Lithuanian context, these messages may be used to erode public support for defence policy and promote ideas of “neutrality”.

Another persistent and highly effective propaganda direction concerns the instrumentalisation of migration and demographic change. For several years, Kremlin information policy has exploited migration as a catalyst for social tension, and this trend is likely to continue. Narratives suggesting that migration is destroying Lithuanian identity, that

the state has lost control of its borders, or that Western policies are forcing Lithuania to accept unwanted migrants remain particularly potent. Hybrid threat experts emphasise that migration constitutes one of the most effective topics for societal polarisation and will therefore continue to be exploited in hostile information operations (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; OECD, 2023). This narrative direction is especially sensitive during electoral cycles, when societal divisions are more easily amplified.

The erosion of historical narratives and national identity is also expected to remain a central target of propaganda activity. The domain of historical memory continues to be used to destabilise identity and undermine state legitimacy through claims that Lithuanian statehood lacks historical foundations, that the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is Belarusian, or that the Soviet occupation was not a genuine occupation. Research demonstrates that such narratives function as long-term instruments of influence, shaping not only political attitudes but also deeper value orientations (Maliukevičius, 2008; Denisenko, 2021). Their impact is further reinforced by polarised historical discourse and heightened societal sensitivity to identity-related issues.

Economic hardship and energy security likewise constitute highly manipulable informational themes. Propaganda narratives are likely to continue emphasising claims that Western sanctions harm Lithuania itself, that energy independence has caused a price crisis, or that Lithuania is responsible for its own economic decline. These narratives often emerge synchronously with key energy policy decisions or inflationary spikes and are aimed at fuelling public dissatisfaction while weakening trust in the state's economic policy (Bajarūnas, 2019).

In the longer term, propaganda narratives are expected to increasingly shift towards the social domain, particularly by exploiting value-based conflicts, regional disparities, and socio-economic inequality. Hybrid threat analyses indicate that one of the most effective ways to weaken a state is to stimulate internal polarisation (EU Hybrid CoE, 2022). In this context, the social media ecosystem—driven by algorithmic recommendation systems—provides an especially conducive environment for the amplification of polarising narratives.

It is important to emphasise that propaganda narratives are not static phenomena. They are continuously adapted to situational developments, tailored to emerging crises, and reconfigured to resonate with prevailing societal emotional states. This indicates that, within the context of hybrid threats, future narratives evolve not solely according to the strategic intentions of hostile actors, but also in response to the structural vulnerabilities of Lithuania's information security environment. Overall trends suggest that propaganda will continue to focus on delegitimising defence policy, eroding historical identity, amplifying economic distrust, and strengthening social polarization.

Taken together, the projected propaganda narratives demonstrate a clear continuity with existing patterns of information influence, while simultaneously adapting to emerging political, security, and social dynamics. Rather than introducing fundamentally new themes, future propaganda is likely to intensify and recombine established narratives in ways that maximise emotional resonance and exploit Lithuania's identified structural vulnerabilities. This forward-looking assessment provides a necessary foundation for the subsequent discussion, which situates these findings within a broader analytical and comparative context and evaluates their implications for public and national security.

Discussion

The analysis of propaganda as a hybrid threat in the Lithuanian context reveals several essential structural aspects that allow for a better understanding of the operational logic of hostile narratives. First, narratives are not self-contained phenomena – they are constructed according to a targeted strategy aimed at exploiting specific societal vulnerabilities. This is confirmed both by international research (Giannopoulos et al., 2021; NATO StratCom COE, 2024) and by insights provided by Lithuanian analytical centres (Maliukevičius, 2008; Keršanskas, 2020), which demonstrate that propaganda seeks to influence not only the information environment but also institutional, social, and political processes.

Second, the Lithuanian case clearly shows that propaganda narratives operate in a multi-layered manner. Seemingly separate topics – NATO, history, energy, migration – are in fact interconnected, and their impact is amplified synergistically. By drawing parallels between state policy decisions, historical interpretations, and economic arguments, propaganda seeks to construct an alternative model of world interpretation that gradually becomes attractive to social groups inclined towards scepticism or distrust. In this way, information manipulation acquires a deeper effect – it not only distorts facts but also reconstructs the cognitive reference points upon which society relies when assessing reality.

Third, attention must be paid to the fact that propaganda narratives are particularly effective in polarised societies. Over the past decade, value-based and political divisions have intensified within Lithuanian society, creating favourable conditions for the impact of hybrid threats. Research shows that polarisation reduces societal resilience to manipulation and encourages emotionally driven evaluation of information (Hybrid CoE, 2022). This is especially relevant in the Lithuanian case, where the social media ecosystem becomes the primary space for the dissemination of narratives, while algorithmic mechanisms often amplify radical or polarising messages.

Fourth, Lithuania's information security challenges are similar to those faced by other Baltic States. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, a consistent pattern of propaganda activity can be observed: the instrumentalisation of identity issues, the rewriting of historical narratives, the delegitimisation of the political system, and attempts to fragment society (OECD, 2024). This regional similarity indicates that propaganda mechanisms are not local in nature but form part of a broader strategy aimed at reducing the resilience of democratic states in Eastern Europe.

A fifth important aspect concerns the impact of propaganda on public security. Public security research identifies several threats that arise directly from the long-term influence of narratives (Treverton et al., 2018):

1. declining trust in institutions,
2. fragmentation of society,
3. destabilisation of the political process,
4. weakening of the capacity for collective crisis response.

In Lithuania, all of these processes are already observable in a fragmented manner, and in some cases are becoming increasingly pronounced, particularly within energy and defence security discourses.

Finally, it must be noted that propaganda narratives transform more rapidly than states are able to respond to them. This creates challenges for strategic communication and public sector institutions. Lithuania's response to hybrid threats has become more coordinated in recent years; however, there remains a lack of: a unified interinstitutional strategy; consistently funded information literacy programmes; systematic data collection on the effects of

propaganda. These shortcomings allow hostile actors to retain informational initiative, particularly during crisis situations.

In summary, it can be stated that propaganda narratives in Lithuania function as an integrated architecture of influence operating through institutional, social, and cultural mechanisms. This confirms the necessity of analysing propaganda processes comprehensively, not limiting the analysis to the identification of individual narratives, but also assessing their interconnections and long-term impact on national security. Taken together, these findings highlight that propaganda in the Lithuanian context operates as a sustained and adaptive process rather than a series of isolated informational incidents. Its effectiveness is closely linked to structural societal conditions, institutional vulnerabilities, and the broader regional security environment. This underscores the importance of addressing propaganda as a long-term security challenge, requiring continuous analytical attention and strategic response.

Conclusions

Propaganda is one of the central instruments of hybrid threats, enabling not only the manipulation of the information environment but also the systematic influence of a state's political, social, and cultural spheres. In the Lithuanian case, propaganda is employed to pursue long-term objectives, including the reduction of trust in democratic institutions, the weakening of societal cohesion, and the erosion of symbols of statehood. The propaganda narratives circulating in Lithuania's information environment are interconnected, even though they may appear fragmented on the surface. Narratives related to statehood, NATO, history, and Ukraine form a unified system of influence aimed at constructing an alternative representation of political reality and destabilising public trust in the state's strategic choices.

The most vulnerable areas include the legitimacy of statehood, historical narratives, perceptions of national defence, social cohesion, and energy security. Structural vulnerabilities existing within these sectors create favourable conditions for the entrenchment of narratives and their long-term impact. These trends correspond to the findings of international research on the logic of hybrid actions in Eastern Europe.

Future propaganda narratives are likely to focus on military policy, the presence of NATO forces, migration, economic challenges, and the transformation of historical narratives. These topics possess the greatest emotional potential and can be easily adapted to ongoing crises. This indicates that propaganda exploits not only informational gaps but also societal emotional states.

Lithuania's response to propaganda and hybrid threats requires a systemic approach encompassing the consistent strengthening of societal information literacy, the coordination of interinstitutional strategic communication, data-driven monitoring of narratives, and the reduction of critical vulnerabilities in politics and the public sector. These measures are necessary to prevent long-term information influence and to maintain state resilience.

In summary, propaganda narratives in Lithuania operate as an integrated architecture of influence characterised by adaptability, long-term orientation, and a focus on the state's structural vulnerabilities. Only a consistent, coordinated, and forward-looking response can reduce the threat they pose to national and public security.

Beyond its empirical findings, this article underscores the importance of approaching propaganda not as an episodic informational disturbance but as a structural and long-term security challenge embedded within broader political, social, and cultural processes. The Lithuanian case demonstrates that effective responses to hybrid threats must move beyond reactive counter-narrative measures and instead focus on strengthening democratic resilience

at multiple levels, including institutional credibility, societal cohesion, and critical engagement with information. By conceptualising propaganda as an integrated architecture of influence, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of hybrid threats in small democratic states and highlights the necessity of sustained, coordinated, and anticipatory policy responses in an increasingly contested information environment.

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