AUSTRIAN INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN AND SECURITY POLICY

Presence of Russian Disinformation Narratives in Austrian Parliamentary Discourse

An Empirical Analysis of Political Communication Based on the 2024 Report on the Protection of the Constitution

September 2026

Executive Summary

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Context and Scope of the Study

Russian information operations have received increased attention, particularly since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, as a component of hybrid influence targeting European democracies. While existing research has focused primarily on digital platforms such as social media and coordinated networks for the dissemination of disinformation, this study examines a sphere that has so far received less systematic attention: institutionalised political communication. It investigates the extent to which Russian disinformation narratives identified by Austria's Directorate for State Security and Intelligence (Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, DSN) in its 2024 Report on the Protection of the Constitution[1] were taken up in Austrian parliamentary discourse, which political actors adopted or rejected them, and how their presence developed over time. A key limitation must be taken into account when interpreting the findings: the study examines discursive resonance, not the intent behind individual statements. The substantive correspondence of a parliamentary statement with a Russian disinformation narrative defined by the DSN does not allow conclusions to be drawn either about targeted Russian influence or about whether an actor deliberately disseminated disinformation. Nor does the study assess the political legitimacy of individual positions or their impact on public opinion.

Research Design and Methodology

The study covers the three-year period from 24 February 2022, the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, to 24 February 2025. The analysis includes 11,490 speeches from the Austrian National Council and 43,066 speeches from eight state parliaments (Landtage). The Vorarlberg state parliament could not be included because no written parliamentary transcripts were available. The Salzburg state parliament is not represented in the final dataset because no relevant instances were identified.

The material was analysed using a multi-stage, LLM-assisted classification procedure. Potentially relevant speeches were first screened thematically, then assessed to determine whether they contained an actual reference to one of the narratives, and finally classified by stance as supporting, rejecting, or unclear. Instances with an unclear stance were excluded from the final analysis. Following an additional LLM-assisted audit, all remaining cases—2,840 instances at this stage—were individually reviewed manually by the research team.

[1] Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst (DSN), 2025: Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024, Bundesministerium für Inneres. https://www.dsn.gv.at/501/files/VSB/205_2025_VSB_2024_V20250929_webBF.pdf

The final analytical dataset comprises 520 confirmed narrative instances drawn from 432 speeches in the National Council (392 instances) and the state parliaments (128 instances).

The analysis is based on five narratives identified in Austria's 2024 Report on the Protection of the Constitution as the main narratives of Russian disinformation campaigns relating to Austria. For the purposes of the empirical analysis, these were operationalised as clearly defined claims. In addition, criteria were established for each narrative to classify identified instances as either "supporting" or "rejecting". An instance was classified as supporting a narrative when it adopted or reinforced its central claim, and as rejecting it when it rejected or substantively contradicted that claim. The five narratives are as follows:

Ukraine Support Is Pointless	*European (and Austrian) support for Ukraine is pointless.*
Sanctions Are Ineffective	*Sanctions against Russia are ineffective and are first and foremost harmful to the population.*
Energy Crisis Without Russian Gas	*Stopping Russian gas imports would lead to an acute energy crisis in Austria, with people facing cold homes during winter.*
Deindustrialisation Without Russian Gas	*Phasing out Russian gas would likely cause substantial economic decline and deindustrialization in Austria*
NATO Accession	*Austria is heading towards NATO membership.*

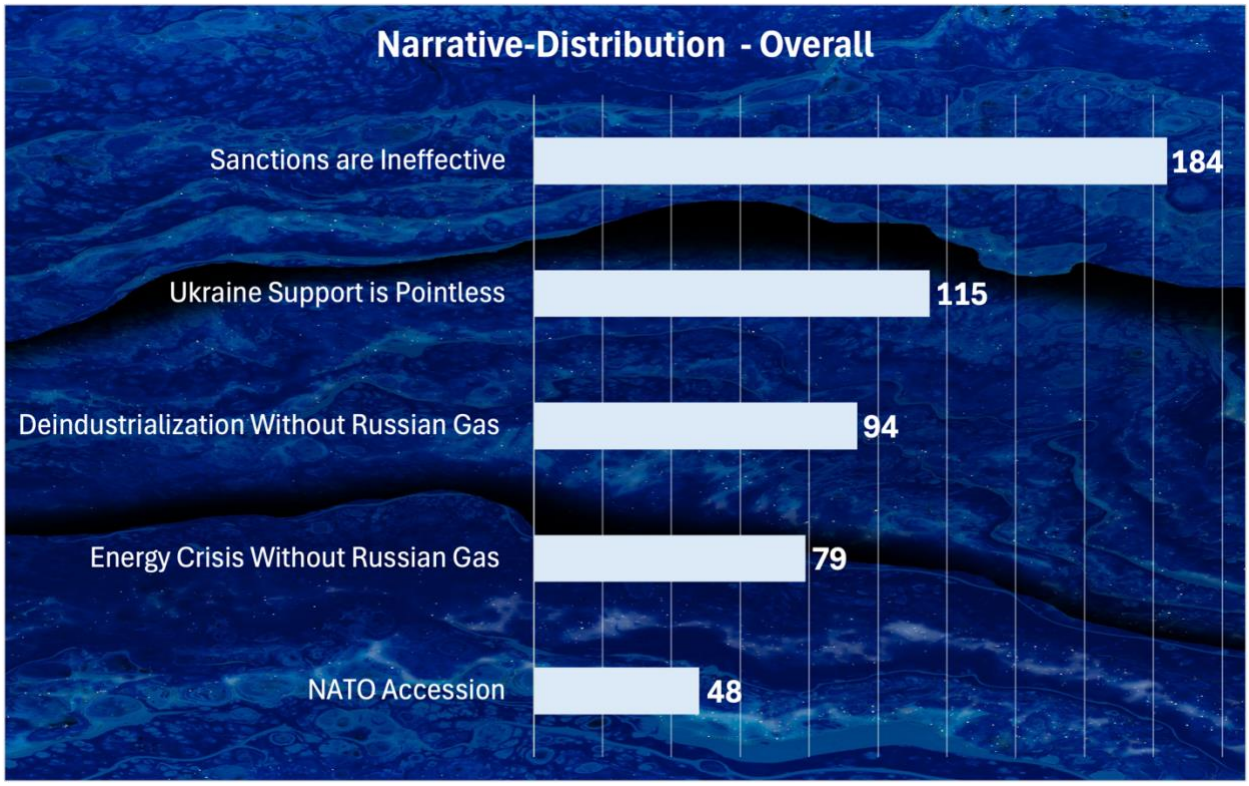
Narratives of Russian Disinformation Campaigns as identified in the 2024 Report on the Protection of the Constitution[2]

The following sections present the study's key findings along their main empirical patterns. They focus on the frequency and distribution of the five narratives, the balance between support and rejection, differences between the National Council and the state parliaments, and the political-party affiliation of the identified instances. The final section examines how the presence of the narratives and the associated parliamentary contestation developed over the period under review.

[2] Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst (DSN), 2025: Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024, Bundesministerium für Inneres. https://www.dsn.gv.at/501/files/VSB/205_2025_VSB_2024_V20250929_webBF.pdf

1. All Five Narratives Were Present in Parliamentary Discourse – but Their Frequency Varied Considerably

All five narratives examined can be identified in Austrian parliamentary discourse, but their frequency varies considerably. By far the most common is the narrative that sanctions against Russia are ineffective and primarily harm the domestic population, accounting for 184 confirmed instances, or 35.4 per cent of the total. This is followed by the claim that support for Ukraine is pointless, with 115 instances, the deindustrialisation narrative with 94, the energy crisis narrative with 79, and the NATO narrative with 48 instances.

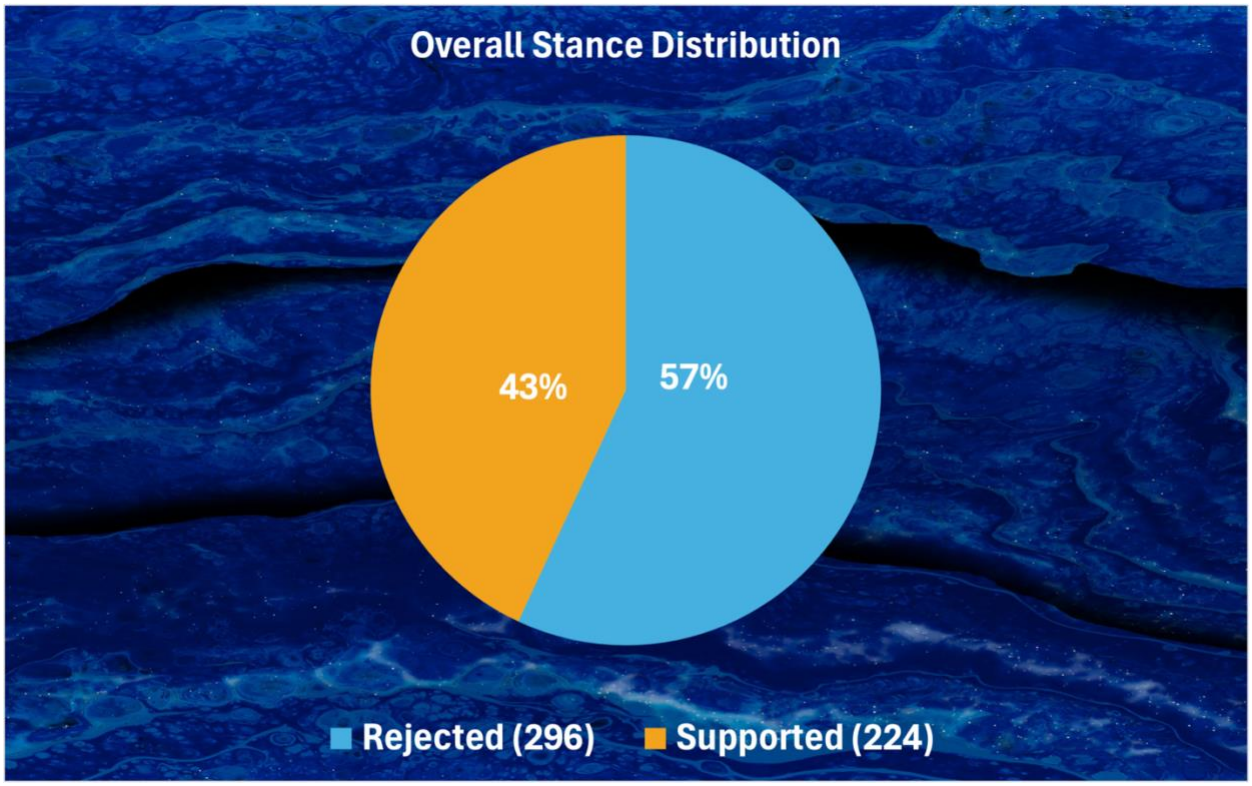


Frequency distribution of the five narratives across the entire dataset, including both supporting and rejecting instances

The concentration on the three narratives more closely related to economic and energy policy is particularly pronounced. The narratives concerning sanctions, energy supply, and the economic consequences of phasing out Russian gas together account for 357 of the 520 instances, or 68.7 per cent. By contrast, the two narratives more closely related to foreign and security policy—support for Ukraine and NATO accession—account for a combined 163 instances, or 31.3 per cent.

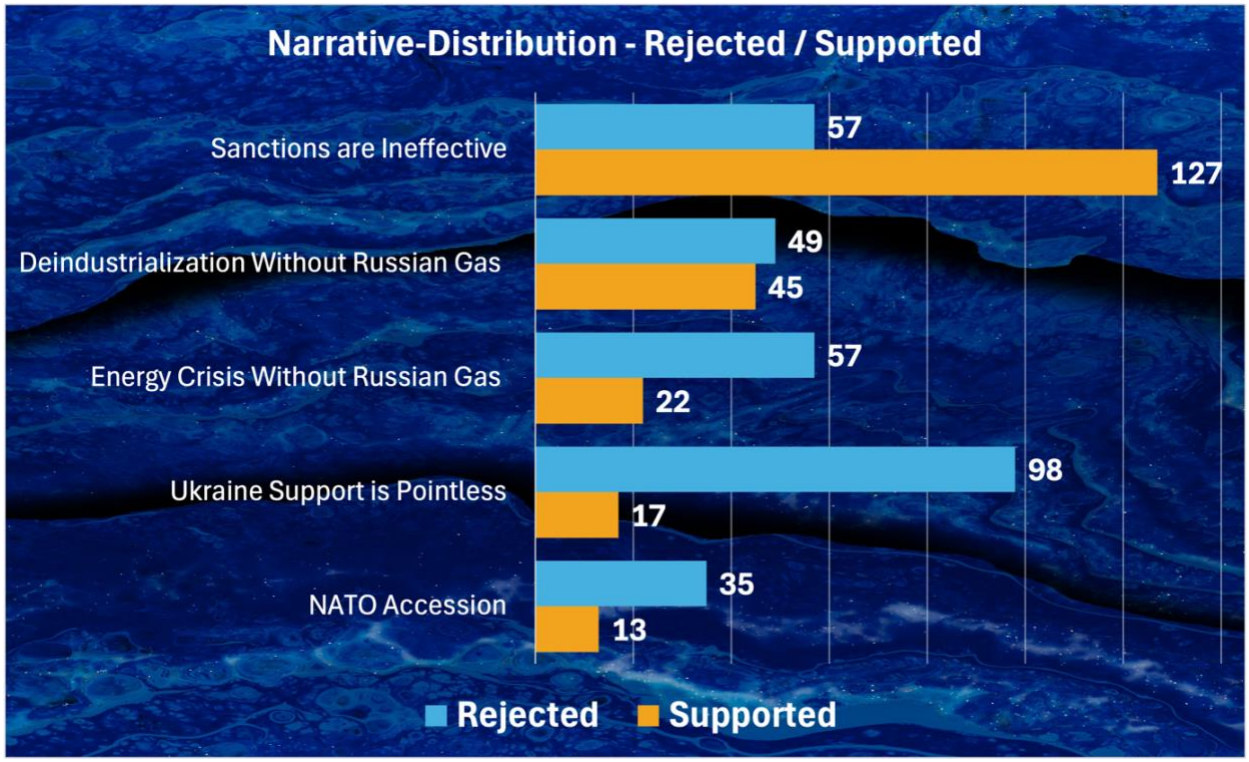
2. Presence Does Not Imply Endorsement: Rejection Predominates Overall

Of the 520 confirmed instances, 296 (56.9 per cent) were classified as rejecting the respective narrative, while 224 (43.1 per cent) were classified as supporting it. The mere presence of the narratives examined in parliamentary discourse should therefore not be equated with endorsement. More than half of all recorded instances reject the respective narrative claim.



Balance between rejecting and supporting instances across the entire dataset

There are, however, substantial differences between the individual narratives. The narrative portraying support for Ukraine as pointless is rejected particularly frequently: 98 of 115 instances, or 85.2 per cent, are classified as rejections. Rejection also clearly predominates for the NATO narrative, at 72.9 per cent, and the energy crisis narrative, at 72.2 per cent. The deindustrialisation narrative, by contrast, is almost evenly divided, with 49 rejecting and 45 supporting instances. The sanctions narrative follows a markedly different pattern: of its 184 instances, 127 (69.0 per cent) support the narrative, while 57 reject it. It is therefore not only the most frequently identified of the five narratives, but also the only one whose central claim is supported in a majority of the recorded instances.

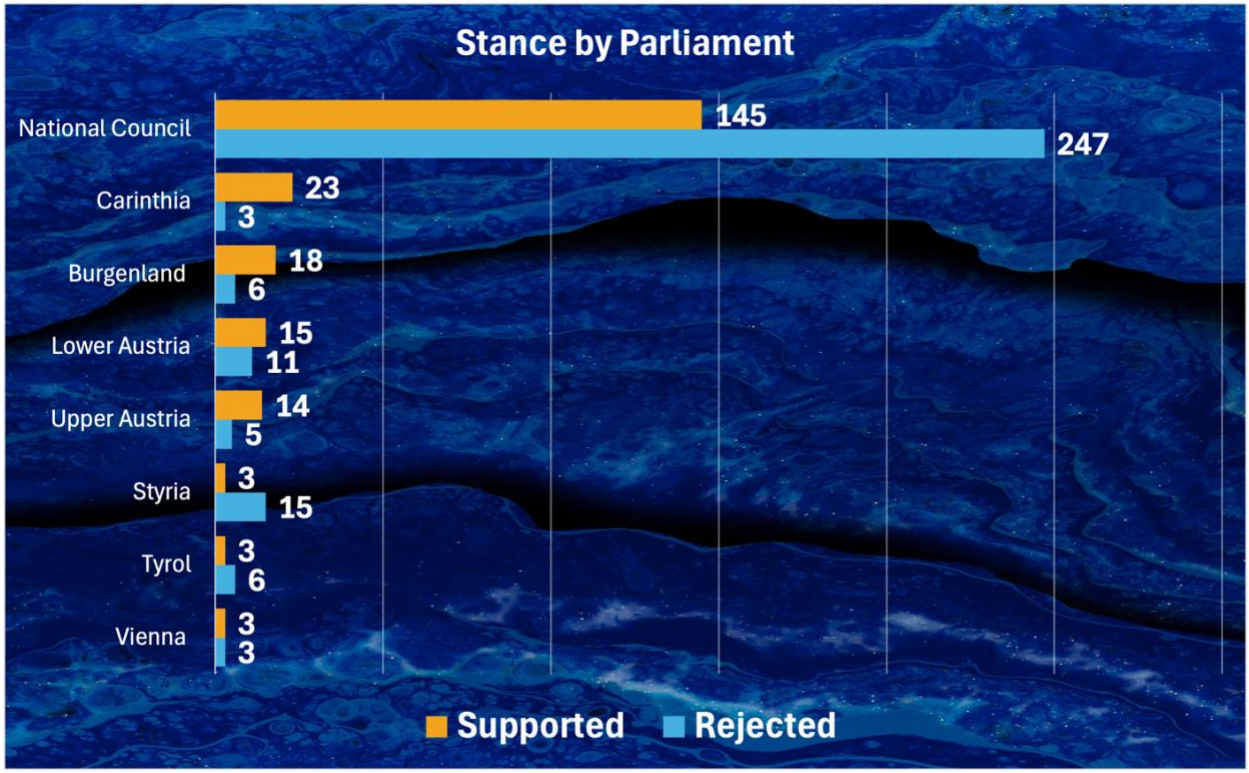


Breakdown of the five narratives by support and rejection

3. Clear Differences Emerge Between the National Council and the State Parliaments

Of the 520 confirmed instances, 392 were identified in the National Council and 128 across the state parliaments included in the study. Case numbers within the individual state parliaments remain small, ranging from six instances in Vienna and nine in Tyrol to 26 each in Carinthia and Lower Austria. Findings on the balance between support and rejection must therefore be interpreted in light of these sometimes very small case numbers, particularly at the state level. Only very limited conclusions can be drawn about broader stance patterns within individual state parliaments

In the National Council, rejection clearly predominates: 247 of the 392 instances (63.0 per cent) were classified as rejecting the respective narrative, compared with 145 (37.0 per cent) classified as supporting it. Across the state parliaments taken together, the pattern is reversed. Of the 128 instances, 79 (61.7 per cent) support the respective narrative and 49 (38.3 per cent) reject it. The distribution across individual state parliaments is heterogeneous. Among the instances identified, support outweighs rejection in Carinthia, Burgenland, Lower Austria, and Upper Austria, while rejection predominates in Styria and Tyrol. Vienna shows an even split.



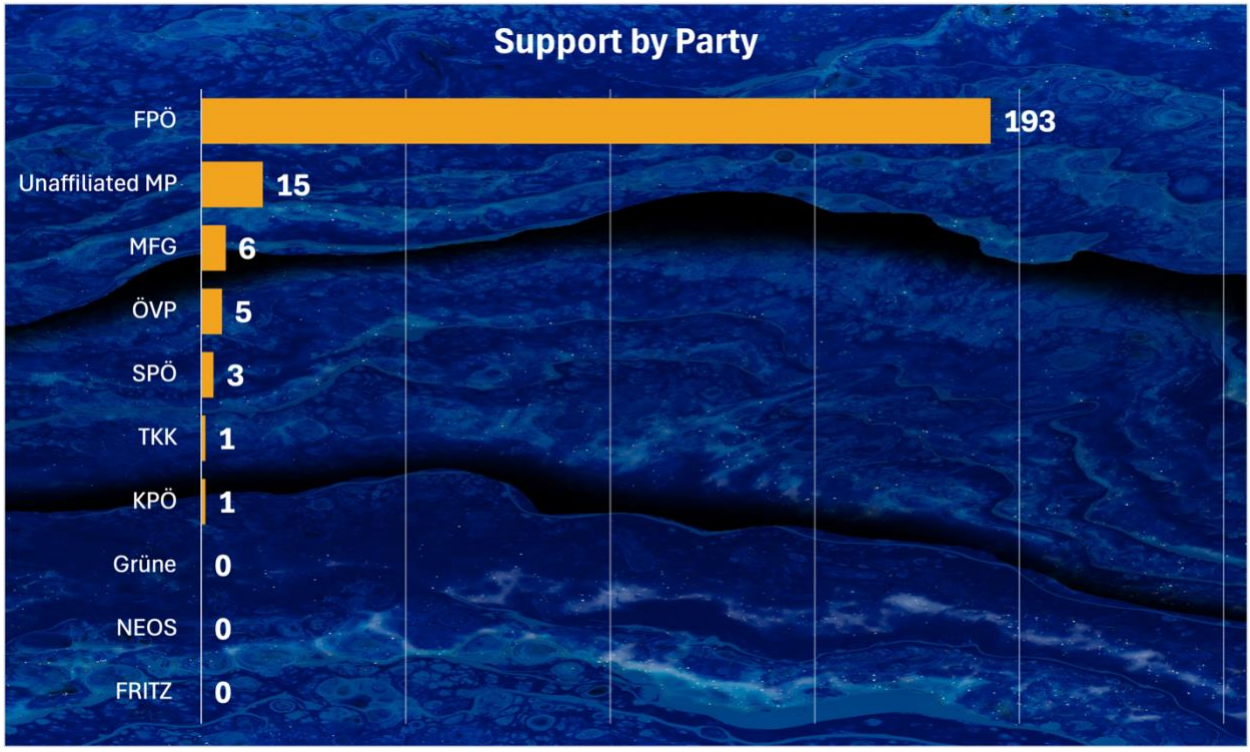
The National Council and the seven state parliaments represented in the dataset, by support and rejection

The state-level findings also show a strong thematic concentration: 111 of the 128 instances identified in the state parliaments (86.7 per cent) relate to the three economic and energy policy narratives concerning sanctions, energy supply, and deindustrialisation.

4. Support Is Highly Concentrated Along Party Lines

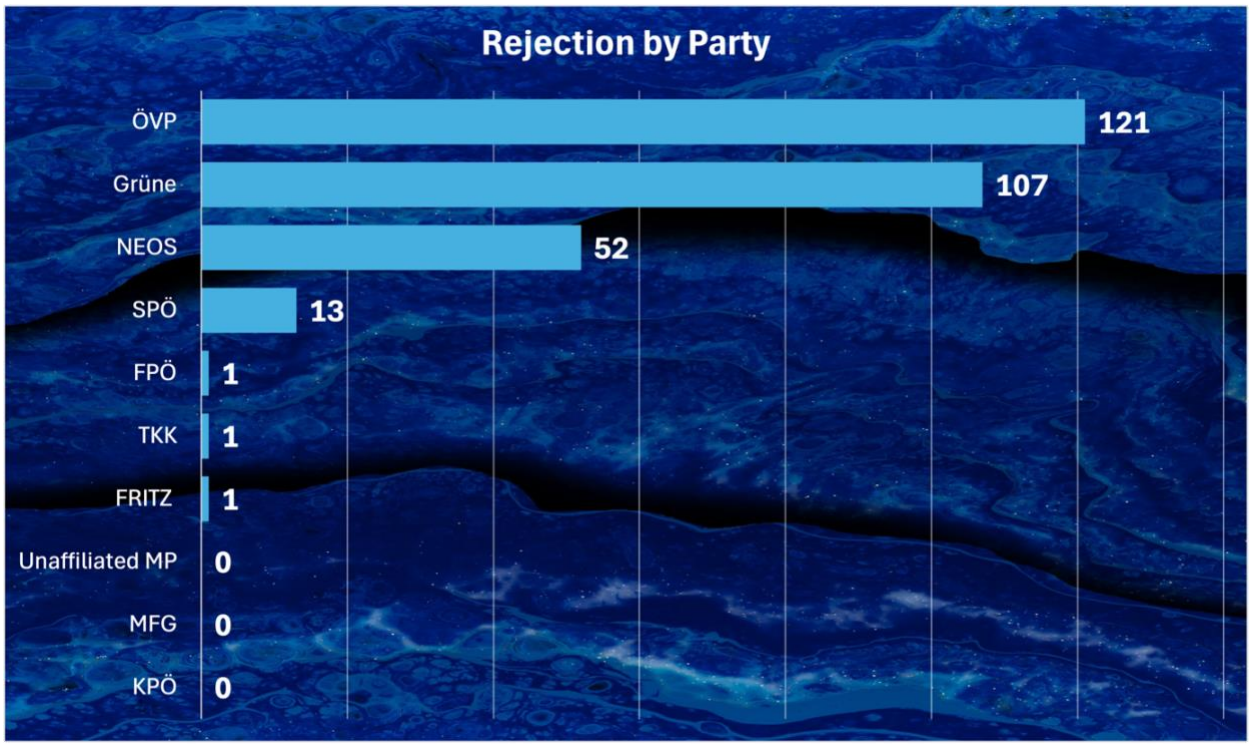
Of the 224 instances classified as supporting one of the narratives, 193 (86.2 per cent) are attributable to the FPÖ. The next highest figures are considerably lower: the independent Burgenland MP Géza Molnár accounts for 13 supporting instances, followed by MFG in Upper Austria with six. The ÖVP and SPÖ record only five and three supporting instances, respectively. Team Kärnten and the KPÖ account for one instance each, while no supporting instances were identified for the Greens, NEOS, or the Tyrolean Liste FRITZ.

Rejections are distributed across several parties, although they too are clearly concentrated. Of the 296 rejecting instances, 121 are attributable to the ÖVP, 107 to the Greens, and 52 to NEOS. Together, these three parties account for 280 rejections, or 94.6 per cent of the total. A further 13 rejecting instances are attributable to the SPÖ, while one each was identified for the FPÖ, TKK, and FRITZ.



Distribution of supporting instances across the entire dataset by party

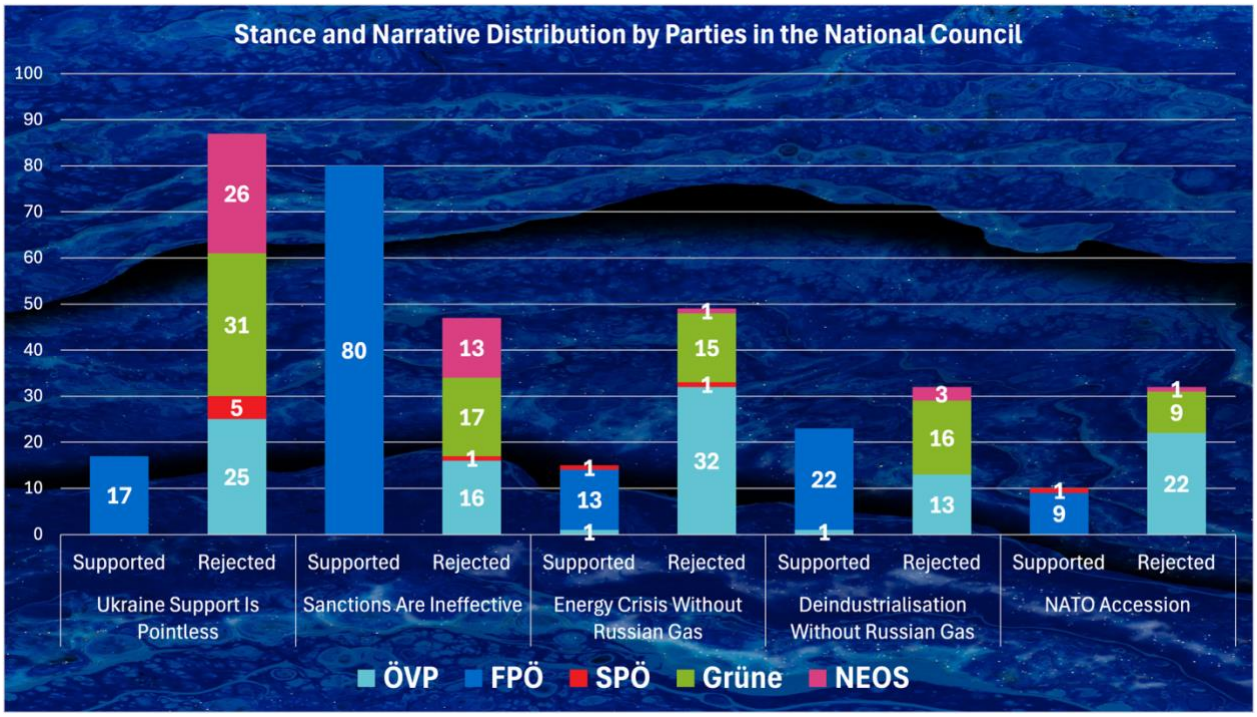
The findings therefore reveal a pronounced asymmetry in the party-political distribution of support and rejection: supporting instances are overwhelmingly concentrated within the FPÖ, whereas rejections are concentrated primarily among the ÖVP, the Greens, and NEOS.



Distribution of rejecting instances across the entire dataset by party

5. The Partisan Divide Is Even More Pronounced in the National Council

In the National Council, the party-political concentration of supporting instances is even more pronounced than in the overall dataset. Of the 145 instances classified as supporting one of the narratives, 141 (97.2 per cent) are attributable to FPÖ representatives. No confirmed instance of rejection was identified for the FPÖ in the National Council. Conversely, all instances identified for the Greens and NEOS were classified as rejections. The same tendency is also clearly evident for the ÖVP: of 110 identified instances, 108 were classified as rejecting and only two as supporting a narrative.



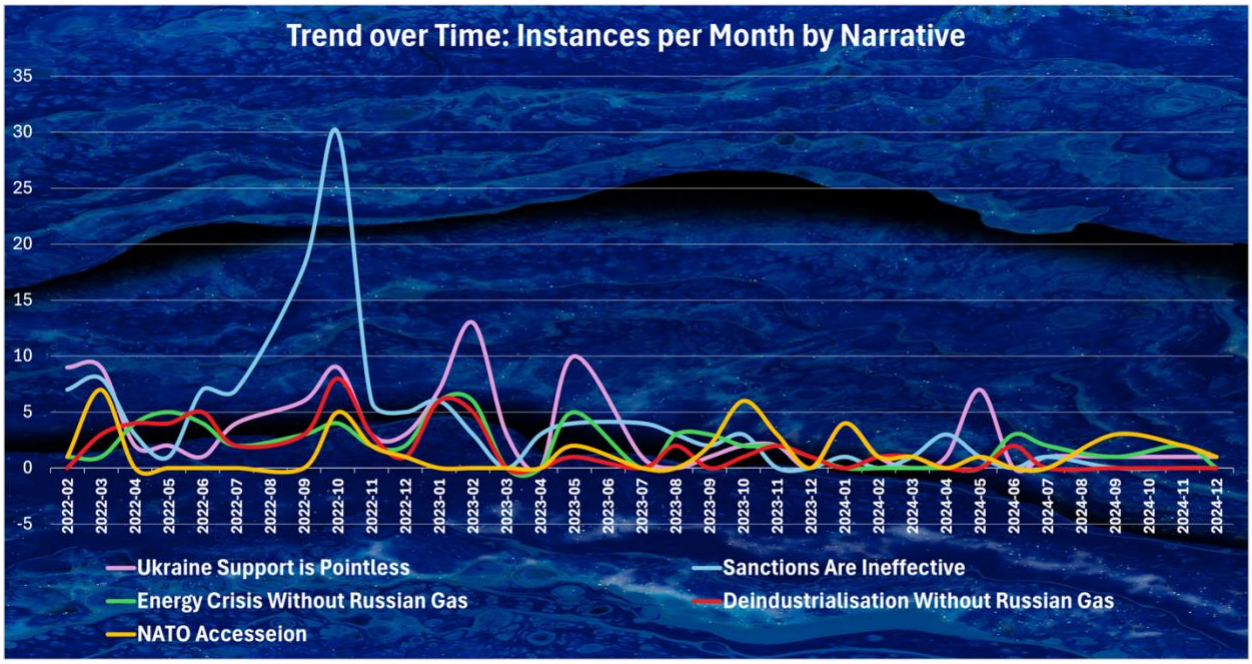
Instances in the National Council by party and stance

The FPÖ is represented among supporting instances across all five narratives examined. The sanctions narrative accounts for the largest share: 80 of the 141 FPÖ supporting instances (56.7 per cent) concern the claim that sanctions against Russia are ineffective and primarily harm Austria and Europe.

6. Parliamentary Engagement Was Strongest in 2022 and 2023, Before Declining

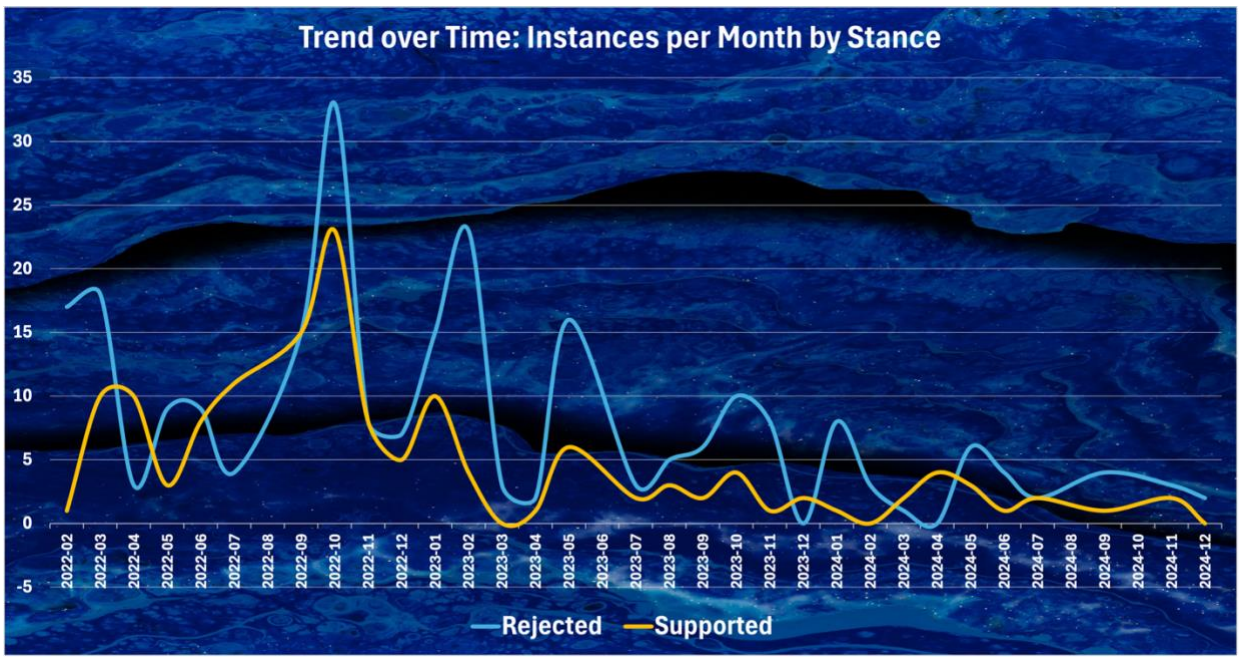
The temporal analysis of the National Council reveals several periods of heightened narrative presence. The most pronounced monthly peak occurs in January 2023 and is driven

primarily by the sanctions narrative. Further narrative-specific peaks appear over the course of 2023, including for the narratives on support for Ukraine and NATO accession. From 2024 onwards, monthly case numbers remain substantially lower overall.



Frequency of narrative instances over time

The findings therefore provide no indication of a gradual expansion in narrative presence over the period examined. Instead, the most pronounced peaks occur in the first two years following the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.



Frequency of narrative instances over time, by support and rejection

Examining stance over time also shows that periods of heightened narrative presence should not be equated with growing support. During several of the larger peaks, supporting and rejecting instances increase simultaneously, with rejections often outnumbering supporting instances. Temporal peaks therefore primarily indicate more intensive parliamentary engagement with the narratives under examination, regardless of whether their central claims were supported or rejected.

Key Conclusions

The study presents a more differentiated picture than the simple observation that Russian disinformation narratives are present in Austrian parliamentary discourse. All five narratives examined can be identified, but their resonance is unevenly distributed across both issues and political parties. Three findings stand out in particular:

- First, the narratives differ considerably in the extent to which they gain political traction. The sanctions narrative occupies a distinct position: it is both the most frequently identified narrative and the only one whose central claim is supported in a majority of instances across the overall dataset. More broadly, the three economic and energy policy narratives account for the large majority of all confirmed instances.
- Second, support is strongly concentrated among particular political actors. Of the 224 supporting instances, 193 are attributable to the FPÖ; in the National Council, FPÖ representatives account for 141 of the 145 supporting instances. Rejections, by contrast, are concentrated primarily among the ÖVP, the Greens, and NEOS. The SPÖ is comparatively weakly represented on both sides and accounts for only a small number of confirmed narrative instances overall.
- Third, heightened narrative presence should not be equated with stronger support. Parliamentary engagement with the narratives was most pronounced in 2022 and 2023, while the number of confirmed instances declined substantially from 2024 onwards. During periods of heightened presence, supporting and rejecting instances often increased in parallel.

Overall, the findings point to a pattern of selective political resonance, in which particular narratives and political actors stand out, while parliamentary counter-speech constitutes an important part of the broader contestation. The study does not, however, allow conclusions to be drawn about intent, Russian influence, or effects beyond the parliamentary sphere. Further research could extend the analysis over time, examine other communication environments, and compare the findings with those from other European countries.