

POLITICAL NARRATIVES IN THE SPIRIT OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

A report on their presence in Polish academic literature, 2014–2024

Executive Summary

This report provides the first comprehensive examination of how narratives aligned with Russian state propaganda circulate within Polish academic literature in the humanities and social sciences between 2014 and 2024. Drawing on a dataset of over 208,000 publications available in *Biblioteka Nauki*, our team used a confirmatory method and data-science tools to identify the presence of **44 predefined narratives** linked to Russia's information strategy. From this corpus, we analysed **3,201 texts** related to Russia or Ukraine and found **377 publications** containing **1,970 narrative instances**. The report does not assess authors' intentions. Instead, it evaluates how specific interpretative frames appear, coexist and shape scholarly discourse – sometimes critically or descriptively, occasionally approvingly, but almost always with consequences for how events are understood.

Key findings

The most prevalent narrative cluster concerns the **delegitimisation of Ukraine** – a central pillar of Russia's wartime communication strategy. The most common frames include:

- “*A divided Ukraine*” (200 publications),
- “*A corrupt Ukraine*” (126),
- “*A failed state*” (105),
- “*Ukraine as a Western puppet*” (99).

Network analysis shows that the “divided Ukraine” narrative operates as a hub that strengthens adjacent themes on state weakness, internal fractures and external manipulation.

Narratives legitimising Russian actions – such as historical claims over Crimea or the notion of “protecting Russian-speaking populations” – also appear, though less frequently. Direct attacks on the West and messages aimed at demobilising Polish society (‘this is not our war’, ‘Poland as a pawn of the USA’) are present but comparatively marginal.

Most authors approach these narratives critically or neutrally. Explicit endorsement is rare. Yet the report highlights a crucial paradox: **even critical repetition extends the reach of a narrative**, embedding it more deeply in public and academic discourse. The information environment is shaped not only by intent, but by frequency and visibility. Academic publications – often cited by journalists, students and policymakers – can inadvertently give propagandistic frames a degree of legitimacy they were never meant to have.

Temporal patterns reflect geopolitical events. The two major spikes in narrative visibility coincide with Russia's aggression in 2014 and its full-scale invasion in 2022, though academic publishing cycles mean these effects appear with a delay. The data shows how crises reverberate through scholarly communication long after the initial shock.

Why this research matters

Russia treats the information sphere as a key theatre of conflict. Its propaganda steers public opinion through framing, selective history,

emotional narratives and manipulative terminology. Academic discourse is not exempt from this influence. Scholars often engage with these narratives precisely to critique them – yet the very act of re-stating them can normalise the frames they carry. The danger does not lie in analysis itself, but in unreflective language use, lack of contextualisation or the adoption of concepts shaped by hostile actors.

This report aims to strengthen **information resilience without limiting academic freedom**. It avoids attributing intentions and strongly warns against approaches that resemble censorship. Instead, it highlights the responsibility of scholars, editors and institutions in shaping the linguistic environment in which public debate unfolds.

Recommendations

To help academic and media communities avoid the unintentional amplification of propagandistic frames, the report offers practical guidance:

- **explicitly state the purpose** of citing a narrative – e.g., for critique, falsification or comparison,
- use **precise terminology** (“annexation”, “invasion”) to counter manipulative framing,
- employ **pre-debunking**, warning audiences about predictable disinformation cycles,
- consider **strategic silence** in cases where repetition only serves to amplify disinformation,
- strengthen **editorial and methodological standards** around citation, narrative analysis and verification,
- develop a **code of good practice**—created by scholars and journalists, not imposed

The broader purpose

This study is a starting point. It establishes a methodological foundation and a data baseline for long-term monitoring of how hostile narratives enter and circulate within academic contexts. By raising awareness and offering practical tools, the report helps ensure that academic language – intentionally or not – does not become a vehicle for legitimising propaganda.