



Mediterranean  
Digital Media  
Observatory

## War of words: Malta's narratives about Trump's Board of Peace and ICE

*University of Malta*



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This report is part of a series of reports highlighting mis/disinformation narratives and campaigns spread across Greece, Cyprus and Malta since December 2022. Each report presents a narrative/campaign surrounding a particular topic or issue, bringing together examples of false or misleading claims, describing how mis/disinformation spread and discussing the context in which it was circulated.

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Polarisation forms the bedrock of much of the disinformation in Malta as well as in places like the United States. This report looks at narratives that emerged in Malta to dismiss those protesting against the idea of the country joining Trump's Board of Peace and against ICE's violence in the US. The narratives, propelled by social media, have fed and fed off deeper narratives entrenched in Maltese society relating to political polarisation.



## MedDMO's Approach

For this series of publications, the Mediterranean Digital Media Observatory's (MedDMO) partners developed a framework with a set of criteria that must be met to initiate the analysis.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information. Disinformation is misinformation shared with the deliberate intention to mislead.

We understand a disinformation campaign to be a widespread series of false or misleading claims surrounding a particular topic or theme, sometimes feeding into one another or contributing to a broader dis/misinformation narrative.

A dis/misinformation narrative is not necessarily a campaign – common narratives include those based on stereotypes (e.g. race).

Campaigns and narratives can occur within a single country or be spread across several.

In this series of reports, MedDMO's researchers and fact-checkers analyse a set of different claims that are demonstrably misleading or false concerning a specific event and that have emerged within a short period.



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# 1 Introduction

January 7th, 2026. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, a woman is shot and murdered in her car by masked agents. In the same city a few weeks later, on 24th January, a man is shot and murdered as he intervenes when another woman is pushed to the ground, also by masked agents.

According to Donald Trump's administration, the victims of both killings, [Renee Good](#) and [Alex Pretti](#), were "domestic terrorists" and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents were acting in self-defence – even despite eye witness accounts and video evidence [proving these narratives to be false](#).

Protests against ICE's violence and barbarity continued across the United States and elsewhere. Here in Malta, civil society NGO Repubblica [organised a vigil](#) on 27th January outside the US embassy in Ta' Qali in memory of Good and Pretti and in solidarity with all Americans of goodwill.

The plans for the vigil were [announced](#) a day before, on 26th January. Later that day, Malta's prime minister Robert Abela made known that the country had [received and was considering](#) an "informal" invitation to join Trump's so-called Board of Peace. Abela said Malta would join said Board if it is "in the national interest", regardless of the EU's stance on the matter. He then criticised the plans for the vigil, stating that he "[completely disagreed](#)" with it.

Thus began the narrative that the opposition (Nationalist Party) and its "allies" (a reference to the NGO Repubblica – more on this later in the report) are acting in a populist manner and want to incite war with America. This might have been seen as diverting attention away from Abela's announcement about the Board of Peace and his opposition to an anti-violence vigil, both issues in the process turned into a partisan battle. The narrative, propelled by social media, has fed off deeper narratives entrenched in Maltese society relating to political polarisation.

## 2 Why this subject was chosen

The narrative that the opposition and its "allies" are resorting to populism and want to incite a war with America – which arose in reaction to criticism of the government's announcement that it is considering Trump's "informal" invitation to join his Board of Peace and also in reaction to a vigil organised in solidarity with Americans amidst ICE's violence – is worthy of discussion for several reasons.

- It is illustrative of blind loyalty to – and unwillingness to question – authority (in this case, the Maltese government and US administration).



- It works to maintain voters' support, therefore benefitting those in power.
- It is related to current events.
- Similar rhetoric and tactics are used in Malta and the US, prime examples being the “us versus them” narrative, gaslighting and what has come to be known as “sane-washing”.
- At its core, the narrative holds that civil society opposed to government action is part of the opposition. This relates to [a report we published in July 2025](#), which analysed the narrative spread by the Maltese government and its media that civil society is an extremist faction of the opposition for protesting against a bill that has been widely regarded as an attack on the rule of law.

## 3 Background

### 3.1 The reason for street protests: on ICE

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) has faced increased scrutiny and condemnation across the US and the world, particularly in light of the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

ICE is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [which was established](#) after the Homeland Security Act of 2002 in response to the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001.

Trump has substantially increased ICE's funding over the past year, so its number of agents has [more than doubled](#). Months before the January 2026 killings, human rights advocates and former DHS officials [had warned](#) that this recruitment spree could result in increased violence and misconduct. Many, [including Bruce Springsteen](#) in his *Streets of Minneapolis*, have now dubbed ICE “Trump's private army”.

On paper, ICE is intended to enforce immigration laws and investigate and manage undocumented immigration. It leads Trump's mass deportation crackdown. It cracked down hard in Minnesota, particularly in Minneapolis, as part of “Operation Metro Surge”, which saw around 3,000 armed agents descend on the streets.

ICE agents have the power to stop, detain and arrest people on site if they suspect them of being in the US illegally. The US Constitution and the DHS's own guidelines [allow them](#) to use “deadly force” if they believe that the person poses a serious threat of death or injury to them or others.

Recent events have raised questions about accountability and trust when it comes to ICE, CBP and the US administration's readiness to defend their actions.

When Alex Pretti, an ICU nurse, was shot, the DHS [claimed](#) that he had “approached US Border Patrol officers with a 9mm semi-automatic handgun”, and that agents had “attempted to



disarm the suspect, but the armed suspect violently resisted”. DHS secretary Kristi Noem said he had “attacked” the agents and was “brandishing” a weapon. But video footage seems to [contradict](#) this narrative. Pretti had a phone in his hand, and he appeared to approach the agents to protect a woman they had shoved to the ground. Noem had made [similar accusations](#) against Renee Good, the poet and mother of three shot dead in her car.

ICE has exhibited questionable behaviour in other ways, [including](#) when agents took a five-year-old boy and his father into custody – despite the fact that they were reportedly following all correct procedures for pursuing asylum.

On 4th February, it was reported that Trump suggested using a “[softer touch](#)” in his aggressive approach to immigration. 700 federal agents were set to leave Minnesota. US Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer [said](#) “ICE’s abuses go beyond the headlines. Residents are afraid to go to schools, to grocery stores, to even step outside. Agents are patrolling the streets like a military operation. All of ICE needs to leave Minneapolis now.”

On 12th February, [it was reported](#) that Trump had agreed to end “Operation Metro Surge”. Still, its shadows linger, as do questions about where ICE will go from here.

### 3.2 Meanwhile: a controversial board with a chairman for life

On 22nd January 2026, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Trump [signed](#) the charter of his so-called Board of Peace, a body he has pitched as a solution for resolving international conflicts. Notably, this took place amid growing US-EU tensions following Trump’s repeated threat to annex Greenland.

The Board got the backing of the United Nations Security Council [in November 2025](#). Back then, it was intrinsically tied to a Gaza peace plan. But when, in Davos, Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, a senior White House adviser and real estate developer, [outlined](#) the Board’s development plans in Gaza – “New Gaza”, with Dubai-esque skyscrapers lining the coast – he made no mention of a path towards a Palestinian state. As one opinion writer [put it](#) on Times of Malta, “without Palestinian ownership, a rebuilt city will not rebuild society”. The Board of Peace does not miss the forest for the trees; it appears to bulldoze it.

The Board has raised eyebrows across the global stage. Some have feared that it was designed as a replacement to the United Nations – which Trump [has denied](#) – and indeed many believe that if it will not replace the UN, it will undermine it. There are also concerns about its mandate, as well as about its members and invitees, which include Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Russia.

Trump is the Board’s [chairman](#) in his personal capacity, meaning that he retains the position for life, even if he is no longer president. He also has [complete veto power](#) over decisions. Countries are invited to join the Board by him. Temporary membership for a term of

three years comes at no (monetary) price; permanent membership carries a [price tag](#) of one billion US dollars.

### 3.3 Which brings us to the case of Malta: key moments to contextualise the narratives

#### 3.3.1 Malta's deputy prime minister and foreign affairs minister nominates Trump for Nobel Peace Prize

Trump has long coveted the Nobel Peace Prize. On 9th October 2025, Malta's deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs, Ian Borg, [announced on Facebook](#) that he had nominated him for it. "I presented the American President with a letter I wrote in my own name, in which I informed him that, like many others, I have nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize," Borg wrote in his post.

Borg was one of eight world government officials [invited](#) to [Trump's inauguration](#) in January 2025.

**Figure 1: Screenshot of Ian Borg's Facebook post announcing that he nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize**





### 3.3.2 US Ambassador to Malta says she “will not hesitate” to pursue Trump’s agenda

In [an introductory video](#) posted on social media on 21st January 2026 – amidst ICE’s violence in Minnesota and Trump’s threats to annex Greenland – US Ambassador to Malta Somers Farkas said “President Trump has taken bold actions, and I will not hesitate to pursue his agenda”.

A week later, on 1<sup>st</sup> February, Times of Malta reported that Farkas’ name [surfaced](#) in documents released from the Epstein files (a partially released collection of millions of documents related to the criminal investigations into convicted child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, with whom, it has been documented, Trump had maintained a [long relationship](#)). An email sent to Epstein by a PR agent in 2010, the Times wrote, [claimed](#) that Farkas had said that she “liked” him. (According to the Times, questions sent to the US Embassy in Malta on the matter were not answered by the time the newspaper went to print.) It has been reported that [Farkas’ husband, Jonathan](#), and [his nephew, Andrew](#), also appear in the files.

### 3.3.3 Malta’s “informal” invitation to join Trump’s Board of Peace

On 26th January 2026, Malta’s prime minister Robert Abela [confirmed](#) in parliament that Malta had received and was considering an “informal” invitation to join Trump’s Board of Peace. He said that the country would join the Board if it was “in the national interest”, regardless of the EU’s stance on the matter.

This announcement was heavily criticised, including by [the opposition](#), [other political parties](#), and the [National Youth Council](#), as well as by figures within the [Labour Party’s own ranks](#). Within a week, Abela [appeared to retreat](#) from his defensive position, saying that the Board of Peace’s current format was [“not ideal”](#) but that change can only be brought about by “being at the table”. Abela did not clarify why the invitation to join the Board was “informal” unlike most other invitations, but he [confirmed](#) that the invitation was made to Malta’s deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs, Ian Borg (see section 3.3.1 of this report).

On 11th February 2026, it [was reported](#) that Malta’s permanent secretary for foreign affairs, Christopher Cutajar, said that Malta should not join the Board of Peace and that no formal invitation had been received up until then.



### 3.3.4 Malta's prime minister condemns vigil organised in response to ICE's brutality

When the prime minister made known the informal invitation to the Board of Peace in parliament on 26th January, he took aim at plans for a vigil organised in response to ICE's brutality in the US.

The vigil was organised by rule of law NGO Repubblika, and it was to take place on 27th January outside the US embassy in Ta' Qali. It was announced in [an open letter](#) to US Ambassador Somers Farkas following the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

Abela slammed the planned vigil, stating that he "[completely disagreed](#)" with it. "Have all the vigils you want," he said, "the country is not behind you". He [described](#) the NGO as a "branch of the opposition", and [accused it](#) of acting in a populist manner.

## 4 A look at the narratives

### 4.1 "Populism" and "war"

The prime minister's statements in parliament on 26th January play into the often-repeated narrative that particular people who go against the government's position or who criticise it are doing so merely for partisan reasons. His claim that Repubblika is a "branch" of the Nationalist Party has been used repeatedly by the Labour government and its media, seemingly as a means to discredit the NGO which actively campaigns for government accountability and rule of law. Indeed, these narratives work in tandem:

1. that those criticising the government's position are populists attempting to incite war with the US
2. that those criticising the government's position are a single entity (factions/branches of the opposition)

The former narrative is dependent on the latter. Claiming that an NGO is part of the opposition frames its actions as partisan tactics. It appeals to staunch supporters of the ruling party, as they are made to feel that they are up against a homogenous "them" out to take the power away from "us". The deep divisions surrounding Trump's MAGA ("Make America Great Again") movement only heighten this polarisation; Trump's own rhetoric is [built on demagoguery](#). Interestingly, a [Times of Malta poll](#) during the first weeks of Trump's return to office in 2025 found that supporters of Malta's Labour Party (the party in government) are more likely to support him.

The prime minister’s statements in parliament on 26th January were propagated by the Labour Party’s media and by social media users. His announcement about the Board of Peace invitation and his derogatory statements about the vigil in response to ICE’s brutality made the headlines in most of Malta’s media outlets and newspapers (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), for example). ONE, however, took a different stance. The Labour-Party-owned media outlet [reported](#)\* on the parliamentary sitting with the headline “Diplomacy remains the best tool for peace’ ... a statement from the PM constantly thwarted by the Opposition”. The article ignored the elephant in the room and instead focused on Abela’s statements that the government is acting “with maturity” while the opposition attempts to push populist rhetoric.

\*Note: Web archive tools were unable to archive the article on one.com.mt, hence why the original URL is hyperlinked in this report.

**Figure 2: Contrasting coverage: ONE, the Labour-Party-owned media outlet, framed the news differently**



ONE’s reporting might be seen as an example of “sane-washing” – the act of sanitising or playing down perceived problematic issues or ideas to make them appear more acceptable, in effect legitimising them. The term has been used to describe the world’s “polite” approach to Trump in politics and the media (for background, see the writing of the Financial Times’ Edward Luce, [here](#) and [here](#)). ONE’s reporting functions in a similar manner. On one level, the prime minister’s announcement about the Board of Peace invitation “sane-washed” Trump’s Board. ONE’s reporting adds another level to this by putting emphasis on the prime minister’s argument

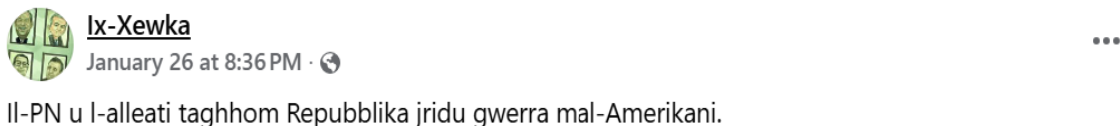


that the Maltese government is acting maturely in contrast to the opposition’s “populism”. This seems to attempt to rationalise Abela’s disapproval of the vigil organised against ICE’s violence. The article quotes the prime minister directly: “The protest or vigil, which will be held by the Opposition branch in the coming days in front of the American Embassy, I absolutely do not agree with, and let me be clear, it does not represent the position of the Government of Malta.”

ONE’s article quotes Abela extensively without contextualising or clarifying his comments. Abela is quoted repeatedly as describing the government’s “diplomacy” at this “sensitive time” as compared to the opposition’s “populist attitude”. Notably, the prime minister states that this “populism” is threatening local business and foreign investment – a spot below the belt for much of the public, and ironically, arguably a populist claim in itself. The article makes only a cursory reference to the Board of Peace towards its end, but omits to mention Malta’s “informal” invitation to join it; it only states that Abela “spoke about the creation of the Peace Board” and that “an analysis is currently underway on a number of elements, including its objectives and also in relation to United Nations policy”.

Abela’s arguments about “populism” and his statements about “having to distance” himself from it “on behalf of the country” propagated on social media, too. The same day as his statements and ONE’s reporting on them, a Facebook page called Ix-Xewka (Maltese for “the thorn”) published a post stating that “the PN [Nationalist Party, the opposition] and its allies Repubblika want a war with the Americans”. Ix-Xewka, which has some 27,000 followers, a sizable amount in relation to the Maltese population, is known for posting content aligned with and in support of the Labour government’s agenda, including misleading and false claims. We had [fact-checked](#) one case in November 2024, when the page was perpetuating disinformation about political murders in Malta.

**Figure 3: Ix-Xewka’s Facebook post on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026**



Ix-Xewka’s post feeds off the narrative about critics being enemies of Malta and the false sense of patriotism synonymous with this “us versus them” thinking. While numerous social media users spread the narrative under discussion, this particular Facebook page is highlighted because it is one of the major actors in the propagation of such rhetoric.



## 4.2 Evolution of a narrative: the “us versus them” ideology

It has become common for significant issues to be turned into partisan battles. This is quite prominent in Malta and the [United States](#). In both places, criticism of the current powers that be is perceived or framed as an attack for attack’s sake, a cry of one political party’s supporters against the other. Division is a tactic to maintain the status quo. The narrative works because it is malleable and fits the “us versus them” mentality – if a political party’s supporters are made to feel threatened, they are also made to feel bolstered.

[A report](#) we published in July 2025 looked at how the Maltese government and its media spread disinformation capitalising on polarisation in the context of a bill that was widely regarded as an attack on the rule of law. In that case, the narrative was that civil society is an “extremist” faction of the opposition because it opposed the said bill. AI-generated images supporting this narrative spread on social media.

Malta is a small country and, as Reporters Without Borders notes in [its country profile](#), “[o]n almost every issue of public interest, Maltese society suffers from deep polarisation”. While smaller parties do exist, the country is dominated by its two major parties: the Labour Party (government) and the Nationalist Party (opposition). The general mindset is that if you are not a supporter of one you must be a supporter of the other. Allegations of corruption and magisterial inquiries involving former and sitting public officials are framed as “vendettas” and “political vengeance” by politicians, particularly those of the ruling party, as well as by its media house and supporters – and these framings, or narratives, only appear to get stronger with every fresh allegation and revelation (see [our report](#) from July 2024 on the narratives surrounding the fallout of the controversial hospitals deal).

Party allegiance is fostered through various means. The two parties have clubs in almost every town and village across the country, and politicians frequently organise rallies, informal meet-ups and visits. The two parties have their own media houses, therefore having their own television stations, radio stations, newspapers and news sites, as well as social media pages/profiles (on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X and TikTok) for themselves as parties and also separate accounts for each of their media. Furthermore, dozens of Facebook groups dedicated to each of the two parties exist (some official, others not). These groups are echo chambers at their extreme. Posts from Ix-Xewka, the Facebook page mentioned in this report, tend to be widely shared across Facebook groups aligned with the Labour Party.

The “us versus them” mentality works both ways. Criticising the opposition – not for partisan reasons but on the same grounds as one might criticise the governing party – is often perceived as betrayal by staunch supporters of the opposition and as a sign of internal conflict by supporters of the ruling party.

As we discussed in [our July 2025 report](#), partisanship influences how people perceive and process political and social happenings, therefore affecting their susceptibility to disinformation.



## 5 Additional context

### 5.1 More on NGO Repubblika

The ruling Labour Party frequently argues that protests against its actions stem from “extremist groups” within the opposition (Nationalist Party), often pointing to personal and (past) professional links between the political party and some past/present members of activist groups, Repubblika in particular.

Repubblika was [founded in 2018](#) to fight for justice and rule of law in Malta. It argued from the outset that it is not affiliated with any political party. Critics, however, have pointed to links between several prominent organisation members and the Nationalist Party (PN). Repubblika’s first president was previously the president of PN’s women’s wing; the NGO would later be led by the brother of a prominent PN member of parliament and, today, by an academic who served as an ambassador between 2005 and 2013 under a PN government.

The NGO has been a particularly vociferous critic of the government. It played a key role in the [2019 anti-corruption mass protests](#) which led to the resignation of then-prime minister Joseph Muscat. A magisterial inquiry that led to [criminal charges](#) against Muscat and a number of his senior officials in 2024 in relation to the [hospitals deal](#) resulted from a complaint the NGO had filed in court.

In [our report of July 2025](#), we noted that the government, its media house and its supporters pushed the narrative that civil society is an extremist faction of the opposition in the context of protests against a controversial bill to reform the magisterial inquiry process. We noted then that since the start of 2025 until the time of writing, the Labour Party’s Maltese language news site ONE had used the word “estremisti” (“extremists”) in [dozens of articles](#), mostly in reference to the opposition and NGOs like Repubblika, portraying them as one and the same. ONE continues to perpetuate this narrative, as [another advanced search](#) on Google shows.

For many, Repubblika is a key player in fighting for accountability and rule of law. For others – almost exclusively Labour Party figures and acolytes – it is an extremist political lobby group.



## 6 Concluding remarks

Polarisation is being exploited repeatedly in political rhetoric and forms the bedrock of most of the disinformation circulating in Malta and other places, not least in the United States. The case of the narratives used in Malta against critics of the country's “informal” invitation to join Trump’s Board of Peace and against protestors of ICE’s violence in the US is a key example of this, as it concerns two places that, despite contrasting geographically and historically, have come to share similarities in terms of political fanaticism and the effects this has on information.

This report was written between January and February 2026. There have been many developments since then. Issues like the one this report analyses are always time sensitive, yet their core is the same: power survives on division and tends to distort information for its own ends. Disinformation, ultimately, is a human problem that technology exacerbates rather than creates.

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