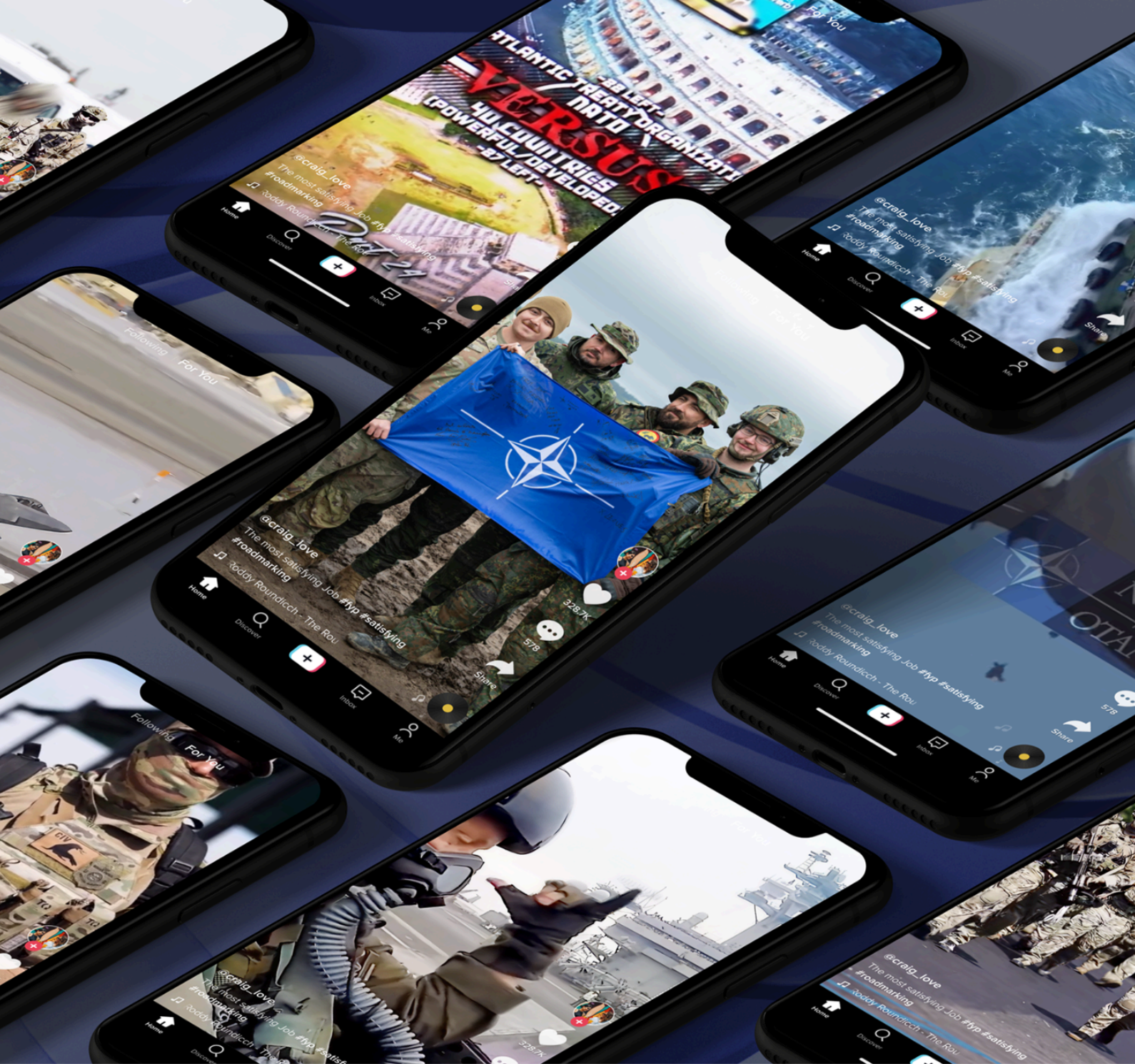




FROM FYP TO WW3

Analyzing TikTok's
Influence in Polarizing
Political Discourse During
the 2025 NATO Summit

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Credits

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Executive Summary

In this report, we investigate how TikTok's search and For You Page (FYP) algorithms may amplify polarized narratives surrounding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its 2025 summit in The Hague. In the midst of global conflicts and Dutch political instability, we compare TikTok's search results with its personalized FYP, querying and training accounts on the same NATO-related neutral queries. We emulated TikTok users in The Netherlands searching for NATO-related information using the FYP. Our analysis breaks down and compares the predominant topics, sentiments, countries, and leaders that appeared in the two resulting data sets.

We found that:

- Videos shown on TikTok's FYP prioritized content depicting military and weapons (39.79%), war speculation (19.3%), and history (16.38%). By comparison, search results featured more perspectives on NATO (78.27%), ongoing conflicts (36.42%), news (34.51%), and activism (6.31%).
- The term "World War III," as a hypothetical global conflict, was mentioned, across all FYPs, on average in 1 out of roughly 25 videos. Amongst war speculation videos that appeared on the FYPs, it is mentioned in 1 in 5 videos.
- A sentiment analysis revealed a gradual rise in playfulness and criticism in videos shown on the FYP over time, indicating a shift from formal or factual engagement toward more participatory and interpretive modes of expression, such as humor or critique.
- Videos both on TikTok's search results and FYP reflected an overall pro-NATO stance. However, the FYP videos leaned slightly more strongly in this direction by showing more content that is critical of Russia (62.7% in the search results, 48% on the FYPs) and Putin (42.9% in the search results, 34.8% on the FYPs). The FYP also showcased more positive sentiment toward NATO leaders and allies, such as Rutte (37% supportive) and Macron (33.3% supportive), reinforcing the platform's alignment with NATO-supportive narratives. The search results focused more on current events compared to the FYP, like the United States bombing of Iran, as is reflected by the two countries being amongst the five most mentioned ones.

The platform's algorithms seem to have substantial influence in shaping how our simulated users encountered narratives about war when seeking out information about the NATO Summit, providing them with topics like "WarTok" that resonated with a generalized fear of potential conflicts.

1. Introduction

At a climax of heightened global tensions, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) gathered on 24-25 June 2025 in The Hague, Netherlands for their latest summit. A political and military alliance of 32 countries from North America and Europe, NATO organizes cross-national defense and security for its member states. In the months prior to the summit, United States (US) President Donald Trump put out continuous threats that the [US would leave NATO](#) if its European counterparts did not increase their financial contributions to the military alliance. As the US is the biggest contributor to NATO's budget, this could have had dire consequences, at worst the dissolution of the alliance. Further, the summit occurred only weeks after the collapse of the Dutch government, setting in motion the upcoming Dutch elections in late October 2025. In the week leading up to the summit, Israel, Iran, and later the US dropped bombs, while Russia's war with Ukraine and growing threat to NATO percolated in the background. NATO's internal disagreements on financial contributions, against the backdrop of heightened global tensions, posed a ripe opportunity to explore polarization with regards to war and military investment.

TikTok is a growing platform for [political discussion](#). However, the platform hosts an algorithmic environment that [prioritizes virality and pushes content that will keep users on the platform](#). Therefore, TikTok provides an interesting landscape to understand how conversations about war, and in this case the 2025 NATO Summit, interact with and could be influenced by platform affordances.

This report looks at how TikTok's search and FYP algorithms potentially contribute to a polarizing discussion around the 2025 NATO Summit, grounded in the Dutch context. We ask: To what extent does TikTok amplify potentially polarized content around the 2025 NATO Summit? To what extent does TikTok's algorithm amplify potentially polarized content, compared to all content on the topic discoverable in search results? How do dominant narratives differ between TikTok's search results and the FYP? In this case, [polarization](#) means the division of opinion on an axis of two extremes, such as opposing sentiments (see section 4 Analysis for further explanation). The research analyzes the results returned by TikTok's search algorithm compared to TikTok's For You Page (FYP)—a personalized algorithmic feed based on a user's activity. To obtain the most informative result possible, we queried and/or trained the algorithms on neutral terms related to the 2025 NATO summit.

AI Forensics initially explored [this project](#) at the University of Amsterdam's Digital Methods Initiatives's data sprint, which this report methodologically refines and expands on. In the following sections, we show how TikTok's FYP elevates a pro-military narrative in relation to the NATO Summit when compared to TikTok's search results. We situate this research within the context of TikTok's political

influence, the presence of war narratives on the platform, and attitudes toward war in the Netherlands.

2. TikTok, War, and the Netherlands

TikTok is political. While traditionally viewed as a [platform for creative expression](#), where people sing, dance, and engage in challenges, TikTok has also become a [platform for political engagement](#) and a [regular source of news](#) for both adult and young users in the US. In the Netherlands specifically, *The NL Times* [reports](#) that 1 in 8 adults and 3 in every 10 young people consume their news on social media. Further, TikTok is one of the [fastest growing platforms](#) when measured by daily use in the Netherlands. According to [TikTok's Transparency Report](#), as of June 2025 there were 6.3 million monthly active users in the Netherlands.

TikTok has been found to have the [largest influence](#) out of all social media platforms on younger users' online political engagement. Political content on the platform can range from more playful engagement, such as [memes and challenges](#), to [toxic and hyperpartisan content](#), the latter often garnering the most attention from users. Similarly, [misinformation](#) and [polarization](#), typically driven by algorithmic content curation, are known issues on social media platforms. Therefore, while TikTok may energize a new set of people to participate in contemporary politics, it also risks exposing its audiences to [extreme](#) content on [any number of topics](#).

TikTok's algorithm is designed to [cater content to a user's viewing habits](#), to incentivize them to stay on the platform. Users sometimes even go so far as to cultivate their own ["sides" to TikTok](#) that center engagement around a specific topic (i.e. books). The recommender system is often thought to overwhelm users with certain types of content that can have a [negative impact on their mental state](#). While this report will not go into the experiences of users after viewing NATO-related content, understanding how TikTok might aggregate and recommend content around the topic enlightens us on the narratives the algorithm might prioritize, which ones a user might see and ultimately be influenced by.

Under the realm of political content on TikTok falls ["WarTok"](#), a [slice of TikTok](#) where users share war-related videos. This first came to the fore when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. The combination of war imagery on TikTok and the platform's algorithmically driven-feed could create an environment potentially ripe for the perpetuation of war anxiety, a phenomenon in which [people develop a fear that war or a similarly destructive disaster may happen where they live](#). For example, videos about what creators [would wear when drafted for World War III](#) proliferated after Israel and the US bombed Iran.

War anxiety is reflected in the Dutch public, with [recent reports](#) suggesting that nearly [50% of Dutch society fears](#) that the Netherlands may be involved in a war within the next 5 years. The [threat of war is one of the more unifying topics](#) amongst the Dutch, while they tend to be more polarized on topics such as migration and climate. Given the 2025 NATO Summit's timing with regard to conflicts between Israel, Iran, the US, and Russia and Ukraine, TikTok becomes fertile ground for exploring topics of war within the Dutch context.

3. Methodology

The basis for this research is the comparison of two data sets: search data and FYP data. The search data on TikTok refers to results that appear after a user makes a query using TikTok's search bar. [Search results](#) return videos related to user activity, based on the relevance of a video to the query. [The FYP serves](#) as a curated "feed of content" based on user activity, such as likes, views, watch time, and other metrics. The main difference between the two algorithms, as [TikTok describes](#) it, is in what they prioritize; search weighs relevance higher while the FYP emphasizes user activity over relevance. Therefore, we assume that search will surface many, if not all, relevant videos to our queries. On the FYP, we collect data with the goal of emulating a user searching for information about the NATO Summit. It is crucial to point out that users determine what content and related emotions exist on the platform, as they create and upload it. Search shows us this baseline. Then, we aim to understand how the discussion around the summit differs on the FYP compared to the search data, thereby illuminating the FYP's influence on information narratives.

We collected search and FYP data separately. Search data was collected automatically from the TikTok search results for specific queries. FYP data was collected from the feed, which we manually trained (on the same queries as search—see list of queries below in section 3.1) and manually scrolled to simulate a typical TikTok user's usage. We extracted the FYP data through TikTok's data export tool. For our analysis, we first conducted a manual exploration of the data, which enabled us to create a categorization that we could feed into an LLM for full data annotation. Below, we describe our data sets and our annotation in further detail.

3.1 Datasets

3.1.1 Collecting TikTok Search Data

We collected 2499 unique videos from search results on TikTok using neutral queries (“nato”, “nato summit 2025”, “nato summit the hague”, “nato news”, “nato leaders”) during the period 16 June through 29 June 2025.

We reduced this dataset by focusing on those videos that were listed within the first 20 results for a search term at least once, leaving us with 765 unique videos for annotations (of which 682 were successful and used for analysis). We chose the first 20 results as those are the ones an average user is likely to view. Further, these top 20 videos are those that TikTok’s search algorithm likely considers the most relevant videos. The search data was collected to gather as many videos as possible that were published on TikTok around the NATO Summit with the idea that they would serve as a baseline for the breadth of NATO-related content that users have uploaded on the platform.

3.1.2 Collecting Personalized TikTok FYP Data

In parallel to the search data, we collected data from personalized FYPs. The FYP dataset contains a total of 1231 non-unique videos that appeared across the feeds of 12 accounts collected from 16 June to 4 July 2025. Each of these 12 accounts was trained using the same neutral search queries related to the NATO Summit as described in section 3.1.1 above and hereinafter. The accounts collected one hour of data each, averaging to about 100 videos collected per account (varies depending on the scrolling speed). Six accounts (account numbers 1-6) were created in the week leading up to the summit, the following six in the week after the summit (account numbers 7-12). There were three researchers training accounts.

Researchers aimed to simulate Dutch TikTok users, therefore, one researcher was based in the Netherlands, while the other two connected via VPN. In order to personalize the accounts, we queried each account for 5 neutral terms related to the NATO summit: “nato,” “nato summit 2025,” “nato news,” “nato summit the hague,” “nato leaders”. Using neutral terms at the start enabled us to better understand how the algorithm changed the “tilt” of the results. After searching for the terms, each researcher scrolled the search results for every unique query. Rather than clicking into specific videos, the researchers would scroll the search results page for 30 seconds and let the videos play. The training took around five to ten minutes for each account.

After training each account to ensure a more personalized feed, the researchers scrolled the FYP for one hour, watching videos that were about the summit, NATO

more generally, its member states, political videos connected to them, war, military, or relevant to the Dutch context. The researcher would watch the video all the way through when relevant and would skip anything deemed irrelevant as quickly as possible. Only the FYP videos are considered in the FYP data (excluding any training videos).

3.2 Data Augmentation and Processing

The dataset of videos from personalized FYPs were extracted from the platform using TikTok's data export tool. We downloaded all account "activity" from the platform, which includes likes, favorites, browsing history, and comments. We then further processed this data by downloading metadata from TikTok that includes the video description, author, and music information as well as engagement metrics. We also downloaded the videos and slide posts, if available, and used [Whisper](#) to transcribe spoken words from any audio channel.

3.3 Data Annotation

Given the size of our combined datasets, we developed an innovative pipeline leveraging a large language model (LLM), in this case [Qwen 2.5 VL](#), annotating the data by pre-defined categories: topic, entity, and respective sentiments for each (see 4. Analysis). All categories were extracted and defined following detailed explorations of the datasets and systemically included into the final prompt. The entity detection was automatized and detected through the LLM, and includes country mentions and leader mentions. However, the main topics and sentiments emerged throughout the manual data collection and exploration. Therefore, all topics, and sentiments were listed, predefined, and incorporated into the prompt used to automatize the annotation process.

Before settling on Qwen 2.5 VL, we evaluated the annotation capabilities of three different LLMs (Qwen 2.5 VL, [Google's Gemma 3](#), and [MiniCPM-V](#)) on a draft prompt and had 4 researchers review and assess the accuracy of their results. We found that our researchers and Qwen 2.5 VL had the most similar annotations. While Gemma 3 also performed well, it had more instances of incorrect labeling and was therefore passed over in favor of Qwen 2.5 VL.

To be able to take all modalities into account when annotating the posts we had to mediate the audio information from each post to the LLM. We used the transcription and a state of the art [Music Emotion Recognition model](#) to generate descriptions for any music elements that were part of the video. Current vision-capable LLMs do not process full videos, but instead sample frames from the video to process. To speed up the annotation process we created our own sampling of video frames and

combined up to 48 stills in collages of images to reduce the overall input to the model. For videos shorter than 48 seconds a still from each second would be used, for longer videos we would random sample 48 stills to combine in collages.

4. Analysis

To explore dominant narratives across both the FYP and search datasets, the analysis focuses on dominant topics and entities. For a more nuanced contextual understanding, we developed sentiment scales to ensure a deeper analysis of both the topics and entities. Table 1 lists and predefines the main topics, Table 2 provides an overview of topic sentiments, and Table 3 refers to entity sentiments.

The dominant topics are *NATO Summit*, *Military and NATO Contributions*, *Activism*, *History*, *War Speculations*, *Military/Weapons*, *Ongoing Conflicts*, *News Coverage*, and *Other* (as defined in Table 1). These topics cover the most dominant themes emerging from both the search and FYP data. The categories are non-exclusive to one another, meaning that a video can have multiple topics (with the exception of the *Other* category). The topic sentiments (see Table 2) determine the general tone, attitude, or mood within each video and is scored on a relevance scale from 1-10, also allowing for the presence of multiple sentiments with varying intensities in a video. We contrast *informative* and *playful*, *supportive* and *critical*, as well as *celebratory* and *fearful*, with the aim of capturing the polarity of emotion evoked in the videos.

Lastly, the entity sentiments (Table 3) catalogue the countries and leaders that appear or are spoken about in each video. Here, the reduced sentiment categories *Critical*, *Neutral*, and *Supportive* assess the sentiment of each entity. Analyzing countries, such as NATO members or adversaries, or political figures, such as Secretary General of NATO Mark Rutte or US president Donald Trump, allows us to gain insights into how TikTok's algorithms could take into account geopolitical relations and attitudes.

In combination, topics, entities, and their respective sentiments provide a nuanced (albeit incomplete) annotation of what appears in the videos at scale. We observe a combination of how different topics and entities appear in the suggested videos across time and whether those videos suggested by the recommendation algorithm become increasingly polarized by sentiment, such as more fearful or more supportive the more a user watches.

Table 1. Topic Definitions

Topic	Definition
NATO Summit	A video that mentions the 2025 NATO Summit (see Figure 1a).
Military and NATO Contributions	A video that mentions how much a country funnels into their military budget, spends on a specific military-related event, such as security for the NATO Summit, the financial burden of military spending on taxpayers, or discusses a country's contribution to NATO (see Figure 1b).
Activism	A video that shows a rally, protest, or march (see Figure 1c).
History	A video that talks about or shows animations or images of an entity's history, including during the colonial era (see Figure 1d).
War Speculations	A video that speculates a hypothetical war breaking out between two or more countries or that mentions world war three (see Figure 1e).
Military/Weapons	A video that shows displays of military power, including soldiers, battlefields, weapons, ships, tanks, and aircrafts (see Figure 1f).
Ongoing Conflicts	Content that discusses or portrays current or recent military conflicts and war zones, such as between US and Iran, Israel, Iran, and Palestine, or Ukraine and Russia (see Figure 1g).
News Coverage	A video that shows a clip from an institutional news organization, including interviews or expert opinion (see Figure 1h).
Other	Any other topic not covered by the above categories. While the majority of the videos are overall related to NATO, some are completely unrelated. These videos were exclusively tagged as "Other" and do not co-occur with any of the above topics (see Figure 1i).

Table 2. Topic Sentiment Definitions

Topic Sentiment	Definition
Fearful	Videos expressing worry or uncertainty about safety or stability, fearmongering videos, or videos amplifying a sense of danger, panic, or catastrophic predictions.
Critical	Videos expressing doubt or skepticism in a possibly dismissive tone. Videos expressing disapproval or judgement and possible fault-finding.
Informative	Videos stating objective information, possibly plain reporting, with little to no emotive expressions.
Playful	Lighthearted, humorous or comedic videos. This includes videos expressing ironic, sarcastic, or mocking tones.
Supportive	Affirming or approving videos, possibly endorsing. Optimistic or uplifting videos, possibly encouraging.
Celebratory	Hyper-enthusiastic videos expressing pride, achievements, or patriotism.

Table 3. Entity Sentiment Definitions

Entity Sentiment	Definition
Neutral	Videos presenting an entity in a neutral or factual manner, without judgment, moral framing, or emotional appeal.
Critical	Videos expressing critique, doubt or skepticism about an entity. Videos expressing disapproval, judgement, or possible fault-finding.
Supportive	Affirming, approving, or endorsing an entity. Optimistic, encouraging or uplifting framing of an entity.

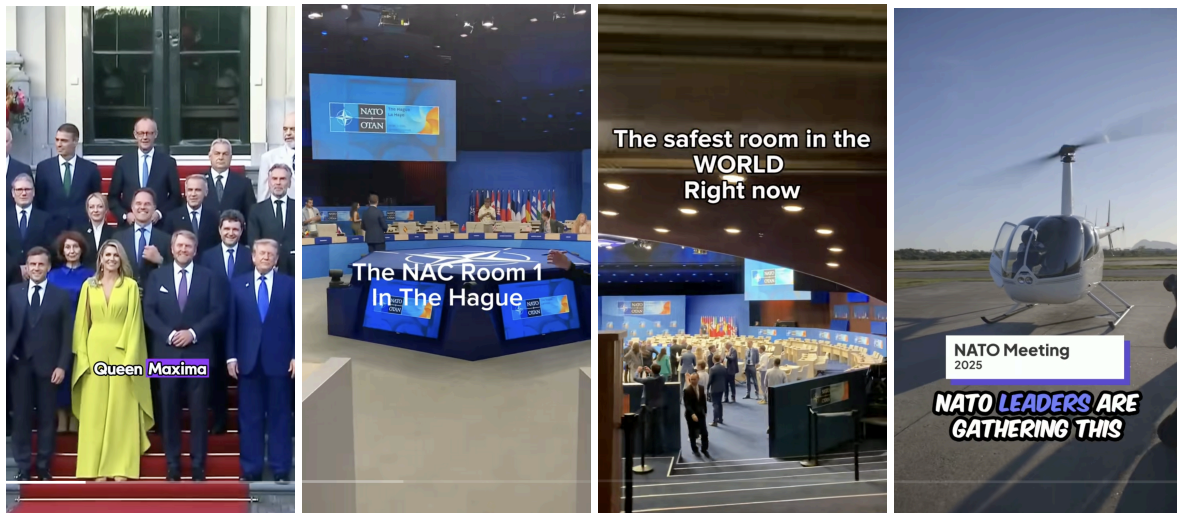


Figure 1a. Examples of "NATO Summit" videos

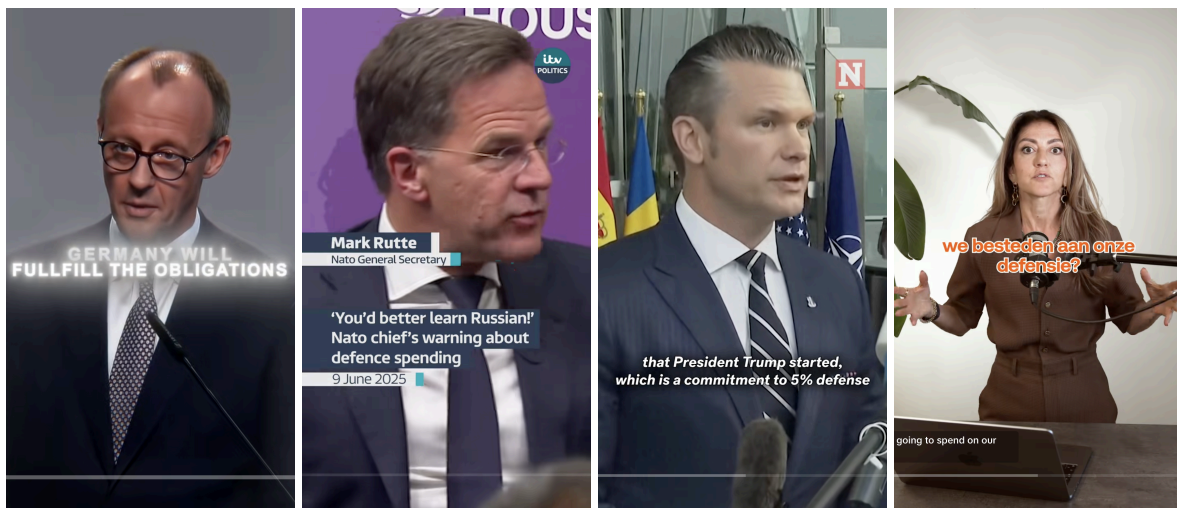


Figure 1b. Examples of "Military and NATO Contributions" videos

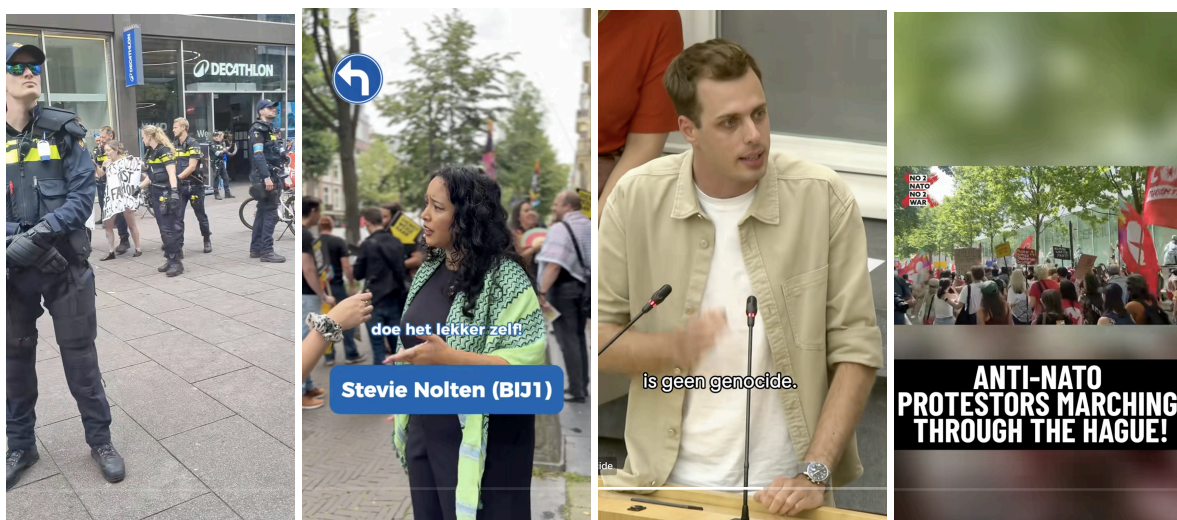


Figure 1c. Examples of "Activism" videos



Figure 1d. Examples of “History” videos



Figure 1e. Examples of “War Speculation” videos



Figure 1f. Examples of “Military/Weapons” videos

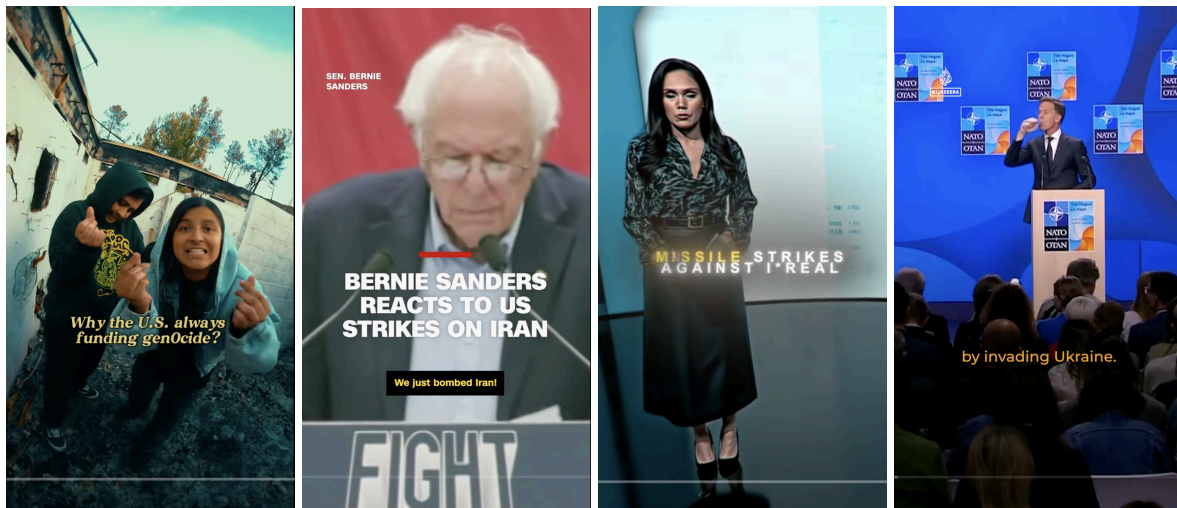


Figure 1g. Examples of “Ongoing Conflicts” videos



Figure 1h. Examples of “News Coverage” videos

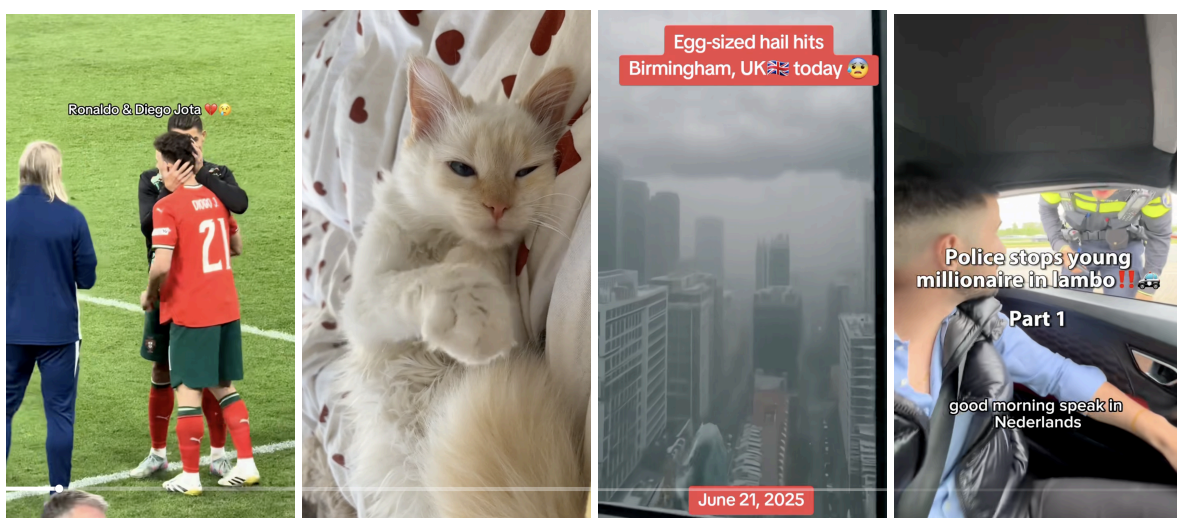


Figure 1i. Examples of “Other” videos, emphasis on unrelated content

4.1 Topic Analysis: A Pro-Military For You Page

We found that the FYP pulls the user toward highly militarized content topics, compared to the search algorithm. This can be seen in Figure 2a, where the percentage of topic occurrences per data set are compared in a bar graph. Military and weapons content shows up in 39.79% of the FYP videos, compared to 22.61% in search videos, war speculation content is 19.3% in the FYP and 16.01% in search, while historical content is 16.38% for the FYP and 4.55% in search (Figure 2a). The FYP also has a high level of “other” videos, close to 20% compared with nearly 3% in search, which aligns with TikTok’s stated goal for the FYP of providing opportunities for feed diversification. The search results appear to favor more current and relevant topics to the search queries, such as videos about the summit itself (78.27%), ongoing conflicts (36.42%), military and NATO contributions (36.27%), news (34.51%), and activism (6.31%) (Figure 2a). The preliminary topic analysis suggests that the FYP prioritizes militarized content.

War speculation videos appeared more in the FYP (19.3%) compared to the search (16.01%, see Figure 2a), which is further substantiated when we examine distinct mentions of “World War III” (collected through video transcripts, descriptions and hashtags; see Figure 1e for examples). Mentions of WWIII within the videos tagged as “war speculation” were proportionally higher in the FYP (20.5%) compared to the search (13.8%). In the overall videos, “World War III” was mentioned in 4% of all the FYP videos and 3.5% of the search videos. It should be remembered that these two recommendation systems have access to the exact same content database to make their suggestions. While the term “World War III”, as a hypothetical global conflict, is typically used to discuss or joke about rising geopolitical tensions, it can represent public anxiety, speculation, or conspiracy. Therefore, the term can possibly blur the line between factual information on geopolitical tensions and potential conspiracies, possibly spreading misinformation and fear. This exposure may heighten anxiety and polarization by exaggerating the likelihood of global conflict.

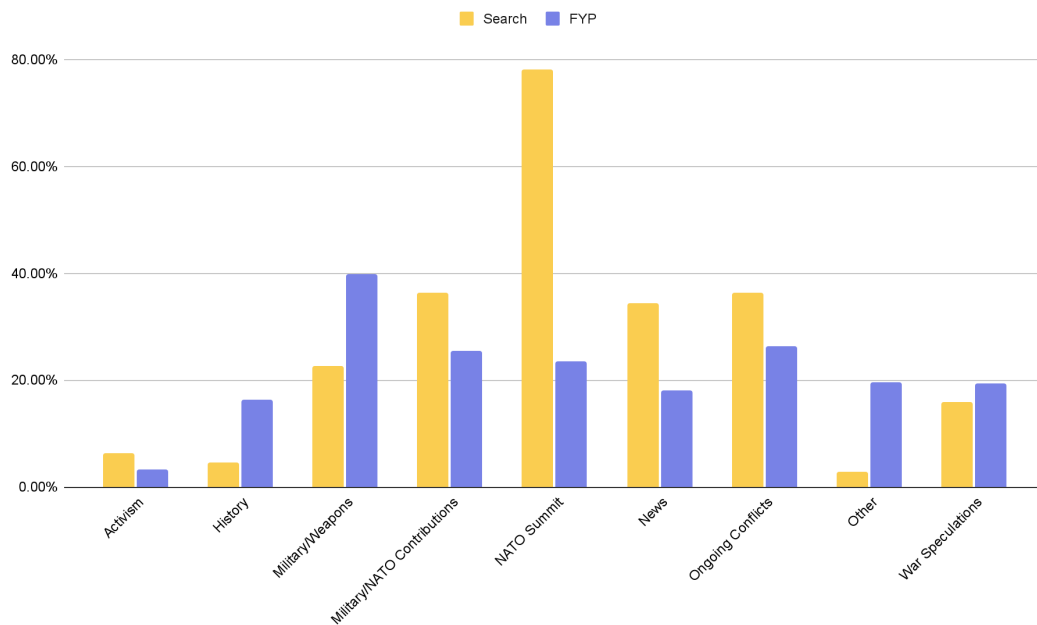
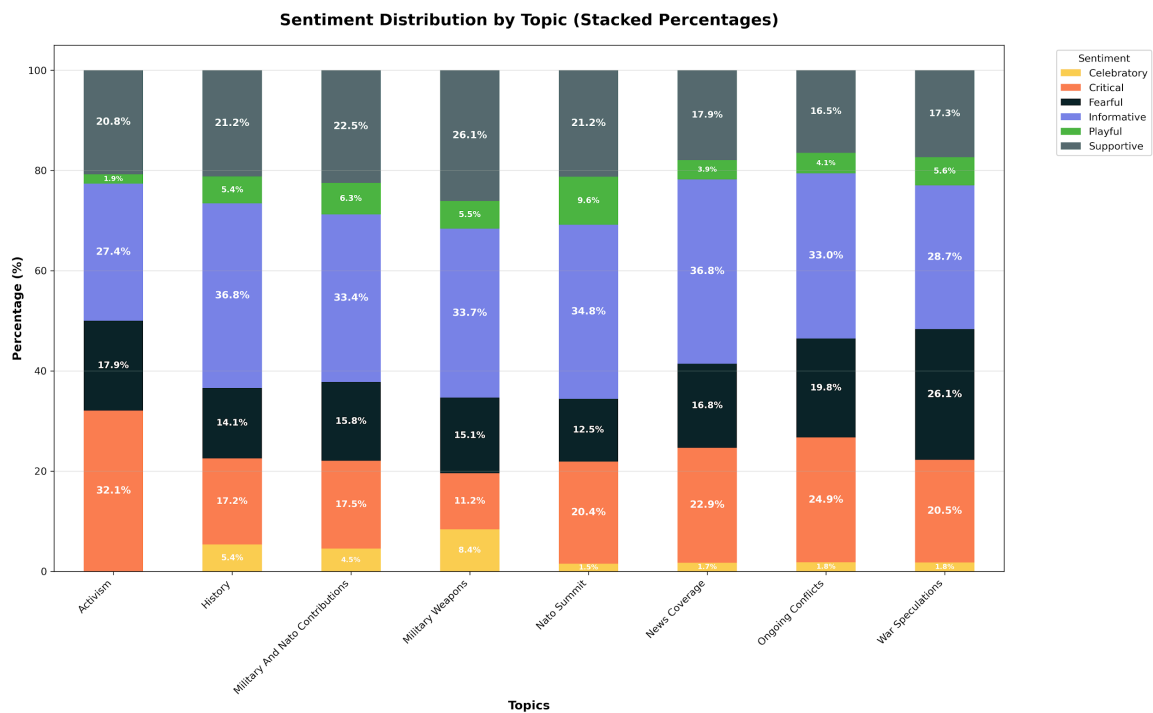
Sentiment provides further nuance in Figures 2b-2c, which display the count of how many times a specific sentiment is paired with a specific topic, divided by the total count of appearances of that specific topic, multiplied by 100. The military and weapons content that the FYP shows was more often labeled as supportive (26.1%) and, amongst the FYP topics, is the category with the highest number of celebratory videos (8.4%) (Figure 2b). This suggests a pro-military stance that comes through in the FYP. The search data, on the other hand, had more critical (18.7%) and fearful (18.7%) stances toward military and weapons content (Figure 2c). War speculation was the most fearful category in the FYP data (26.1%) and the search data (27.6%) (Figure 2b). However, war speculation videos were shown comparatively more in the FYP (19.3%) than in search (16.01%) (Figure 2a), potentially suggesting that the FYP prioritizes more fearful videos.

Activism, being content that criticizes military, war, or related topics, is the most critical content in both data sets at around 33%, but has more presence in the search data (Figures 2b & 2c). Therefore, we see that the FYP appears to elevate celebratory military content rather than critical activist content, despite the fact that this content does exist; twice as much in the search data (6.31%) relative to the FYP data (3%; see Figure 2a).

We then examined the distribution of sentiments across the one hour of scrolling the FYP per account, to identify emerging patterns (Figures 3a, 3b, and 3c, accounts 1-6 are pre-summit and 7-12 post-summit). We contrasted playful and informative (see Figure 3a), supportive and critical (see Figure 3b), as well as celebratory and fearful (Figure 3c), as these respective sentiment groupings are arguably oppositional to one another. Figure 3a shows that all feeds were consistently ranked as highly informative (average score of 6.3/10 per video) and less playful (average score: 3). However, we observe an increase of playfulness transitioning from pre-summit videos (average score: 2.3) to post-summit videos (average score: 3.2). This is likely due to the emerging memeification of recent events, such as the Dutch Queen Maxima playfully mimicking US president Donald Trump at an event at Huis ten Bosch Palace. Figure 3b shows that the feeds tended to be consistently somewhat supportive (average score: 4.9) as opposed to critical (average score: 3.4); although we observe a slight increase of critical content during the second half of scrolling for one hour. As seen in Figure 3c, the feeds were little celebratory (average score: 2.5) and slightly more fearful (average score: 3.2).

These findings suggest that the FYPs generally maintained an informational and moderately supportive tone, with limited emotional intensity, across the hour of scrolling. The gradual rise in playfulness and criticism over time indicates a shift from formal or factual engagement toward more participatory and interpretive modes of expression, such as humor or critique. This evolution points to how online discourse around major events tends to diversify as audiences begin to remix, respond to, and reframe the original narratives circulating in their feeds.

Topic Distribution for Search vs. FYP Data

Figure 2a. **Search vs. FYP data.** Topic distribution for the search and FYP datasetsFigure 2b. **FYP data.** Distribution of sentiment by topic

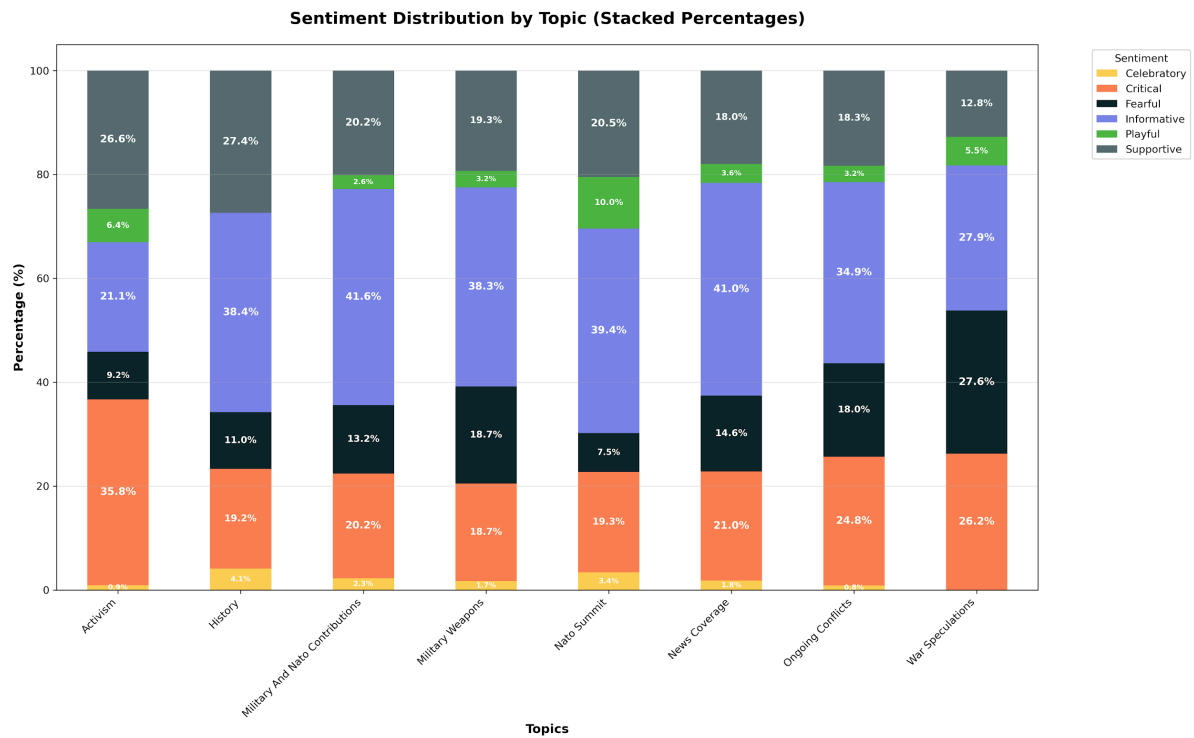


Figure 2c. **Search data.** Distribution of sentiment by topic

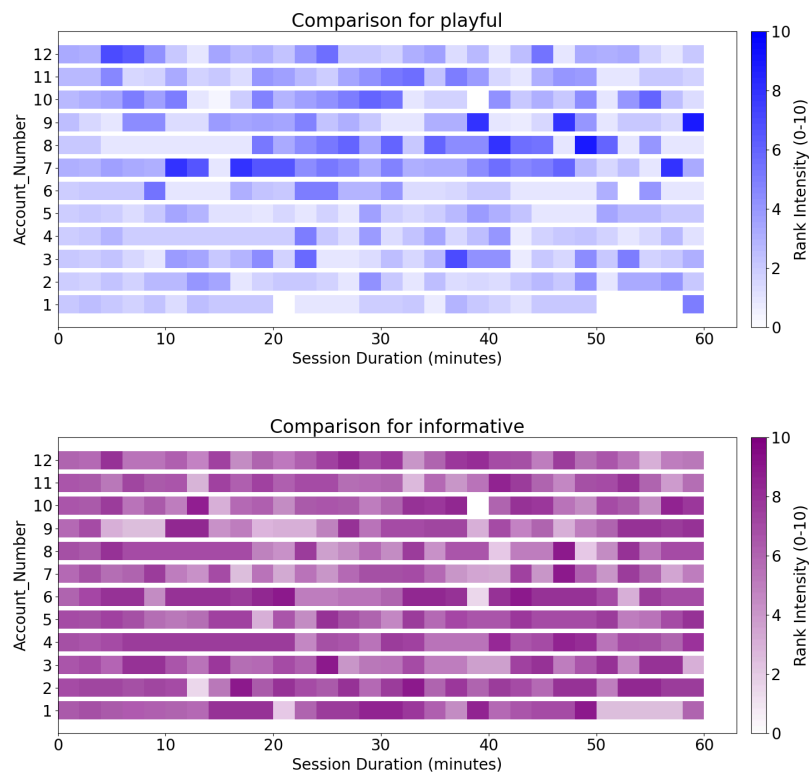


Figure 3a. **FYP data.** Playful vs Informative. Comparative heatmap per account

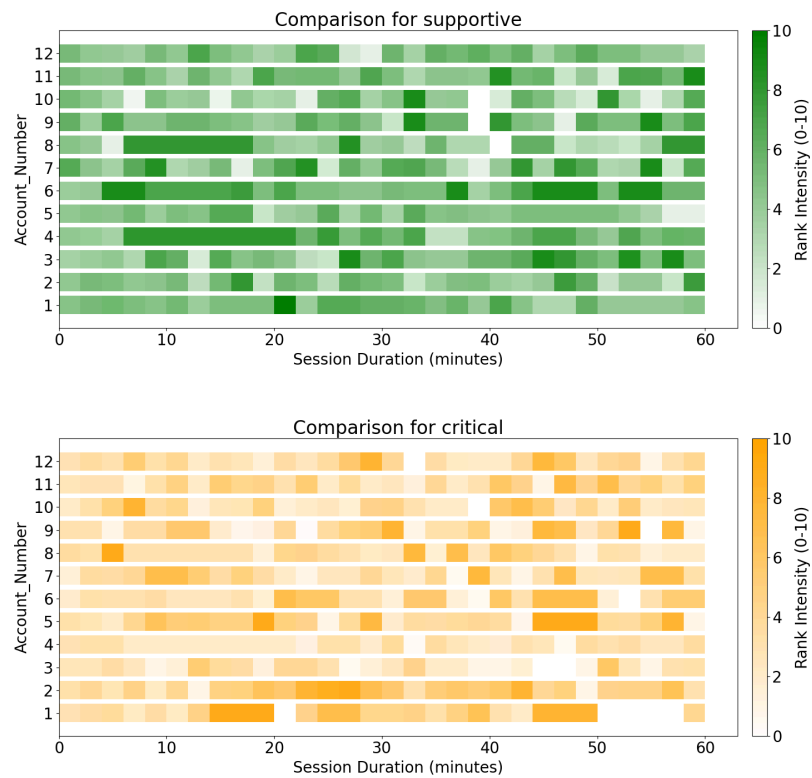


Figure 3b. **FYP data.** Supportive vs Critical. Comparative heatmap per account

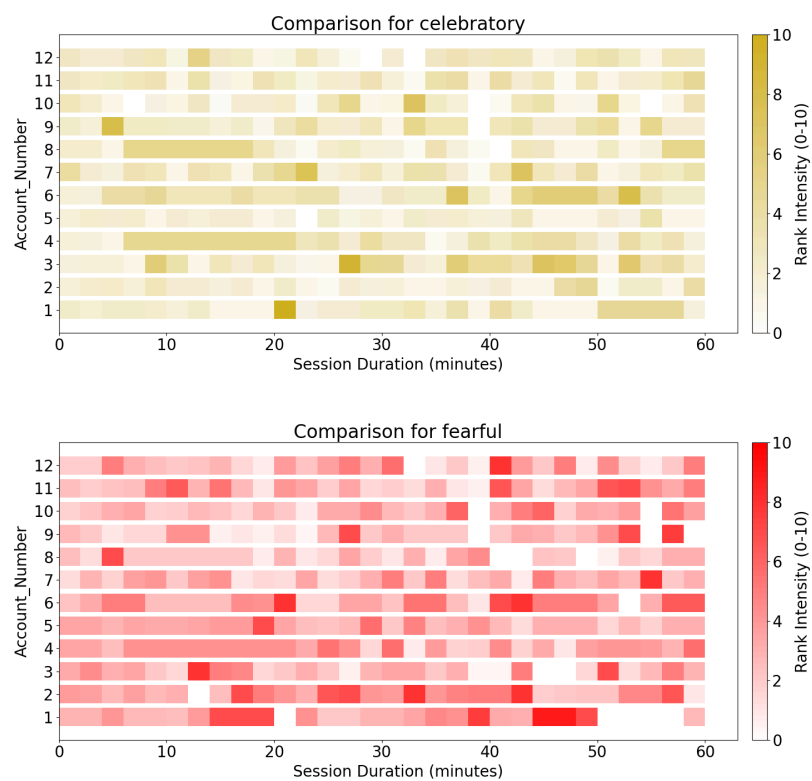


Figure 3c. **FYP data.** Celebratory vs Fearful. Comparative heatmap per account

4.2 Entity Analysis: Pro-NATO Attitudes Toward Predominant Leaders and Countries

The following analysis breaks down how often the entities, in this case countries and leaders, were mentioned in the two data sets. Further, we detect the sentiment toward each entity, whether critical, neutral, or supportive. Critical videos speak negatively of the entity, neutral without any particular leaning, and supportive videos speak positively. The data considers countries and leaders mentioned throughout the entire data collection period, from 16 June to 4 July 2025. We find that the search results and the FYP surfaced content along similar patterns with regards to leaders and countries mentioned. The FYP tends to have a slightly higher lean toward Russia-related themes, but even then, the sentiment is critical. Both the FYP and the search data reflect a pro-NATO stance, suggesting that the FYP more or less reflects the content uploaded by users in this regard.

4.2.1 Countries

In terms of countries mentioned, the search data leans slightly more toward countries involved in current events (Iran, US, Israel, Russia) whereas the FYP tends to feature NATO-related countries (such as Netherlands and Germany) and issues (Russia's invasion of Ukraine). As a reminder, during this time period Iran, Israel, and later the US were involved in an exchange of hostilities. In the search data, The Netherlands was the most mentioned country at 19.3%, followed closely by Russia (16.8%) and the US (12.7%), then Ukraine at 12.3%, Iran (10.5%) and Israel (7.5%) (Figure 4a). While search results focus mainly on the Dutch context, the FYP reflects a stronger pull toward Russian content compared to other countries mentioned, with Russia being the highest mentioned country (14.3%), followed by the US (12.6%) and the Netherlands (9.7%) (Figure 4b).

The top countries mentioned are generally shared between the two data sets. However, Iran's predominance in the search data suggests a slightly higher emphasis on current events. In contrast, the FYP mentions Russia, US, and the Netherlands most often. This suggests the FYP elevates countries which are generally connected to the NATO Summit, given Russia's ongoing threat to NATO territory and the summit took place in the Netherlands.

The sentiments (critical, neutral, or supportive) toward each country are, for the most part, evenly shared between the FYP and the search data. In Figures 5a and 5b, we show leaders that were counted as present at least 10 times and countries that were mentioned at least 20 times. For each of these single terms, we calculated a

percentage of occurrence for each sentiment. Palestine was close to the most positively discussed occupied territory in both data sets, at 59.1% in the search data (Figure 5a) and 33.3% in the FYP data (Figure 5b). Between the two datasets, Iran, Russia, and North Korea were amongst the top 5 most critically discussed. Therefore, while the search data is slightly more oriented toward current events, compared to the NATO Summit tilt of the FYP data, both datasets appear to display a similar sentiment overall, aligning critiques with NATO adversaries.

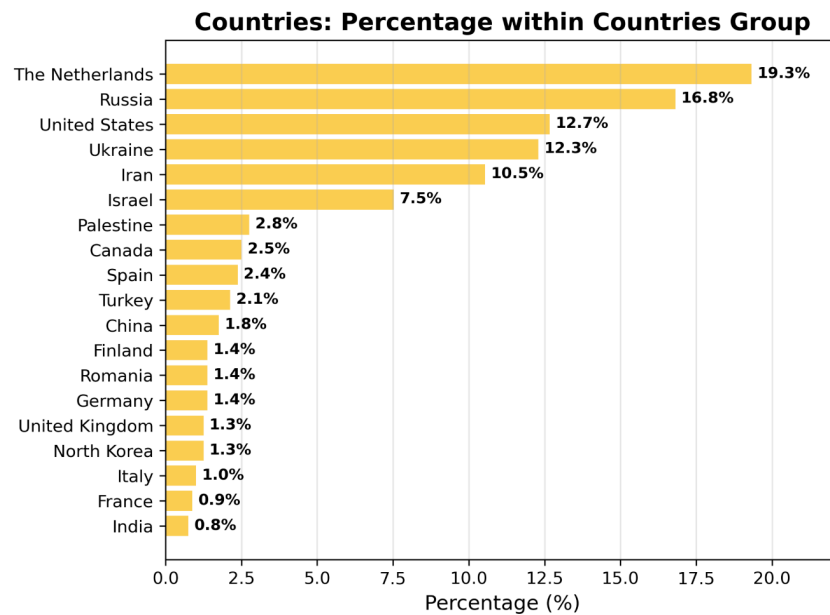


Figure 4a. Search data. Country mentions

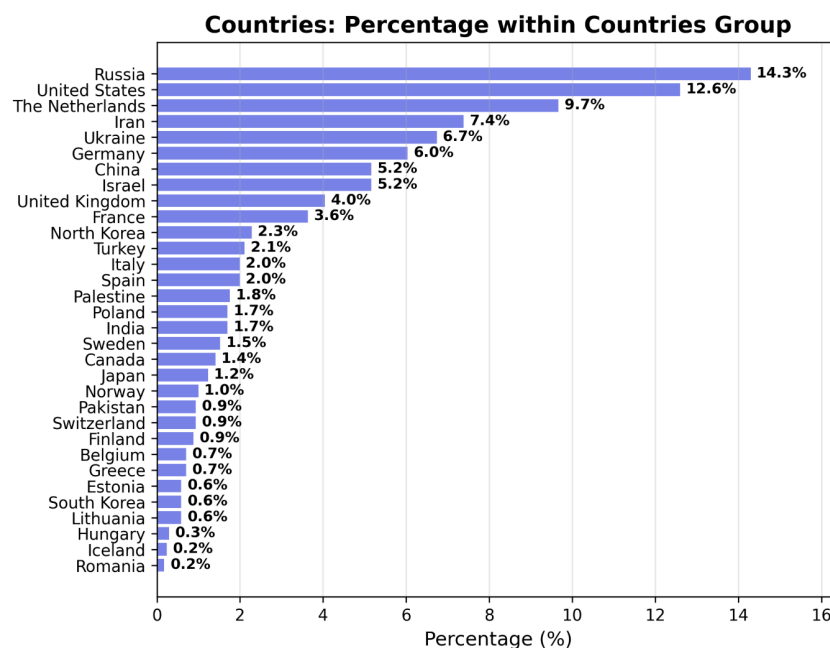


Figure 4b. FYP data. Country mentions

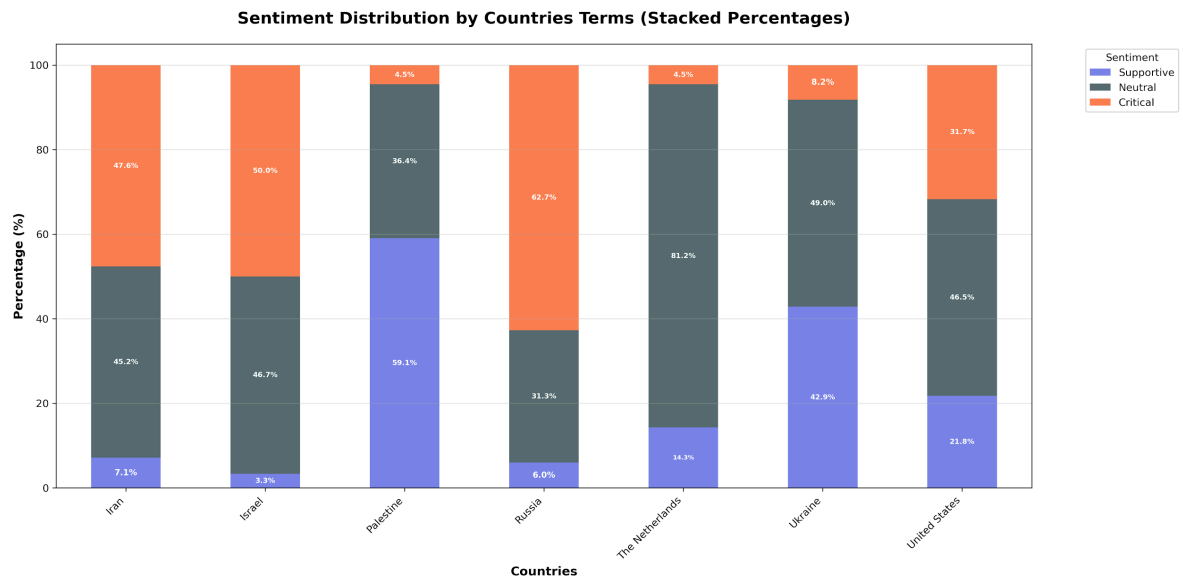


Figure 5a. **Search data.** Sentiment distribution per country

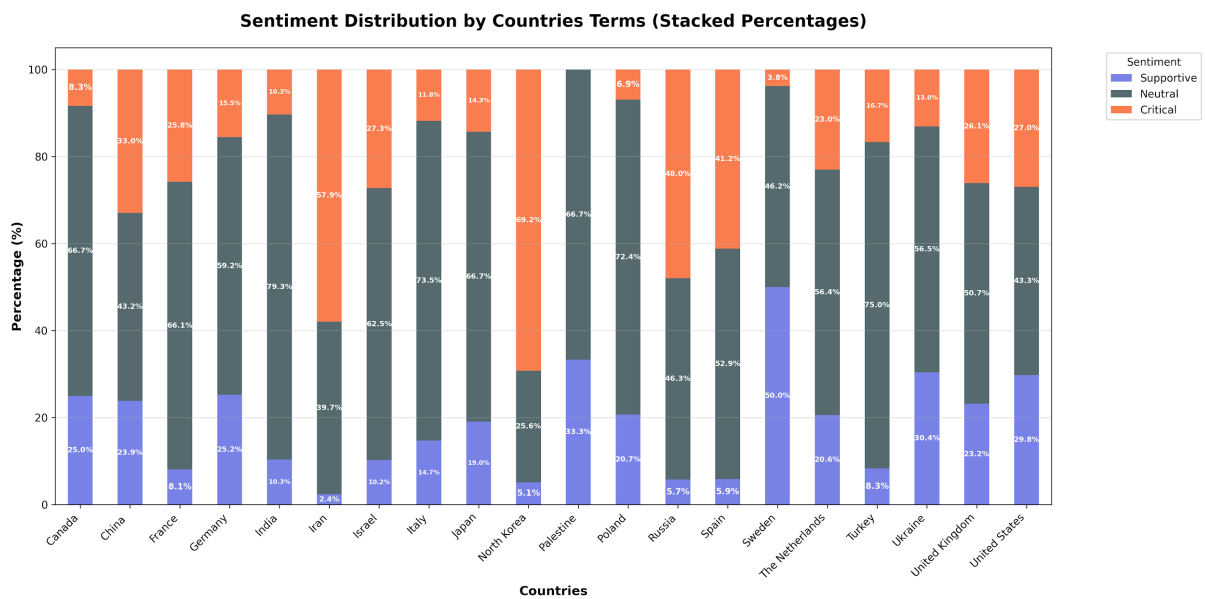


Figure 5b. **FYP data.** Sentiment distribution per country

4.2.2 Leaders

Both datasets show that a lot of videos published on TikTok have a deep fascination with Trump, who far outranks other leaders. Trump dominates the search data set, having been mentioned in 58.1% of the videos where a leader is present; the next most frequently mentioned is NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at 16.4%, followed by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky at 5.5% and Russian president Vladimir Putin at 4.3% (Figure 6a). Trump and Putin's appearances align more or less with the country data, as these are the leaders of some of the top countries mentioned (except for Iran), while Rutte is Dutch and a key figure in the NATO Summit. Similarly, Trump is the most frequently mentioned leader in the FYP data, at 45.8%. However, Putin and Rutte swap compared to the search data, with Putin being mentioned 16% and Rutte at 9.4% (Figure 6b). This suggests a slight pull toward Putin-related content by the FYP, which we also saw in the country data, with Russia having the highest number of mentions.

When we analyzed the sentiment toward leaders, we found that both data sets have videos that predominately speak critically about Trump and Putin, however, with a marginally higher percentage in the FYP (Figure 7.1). While the number of mentions suggest a bend toward Russia and Putin in the FYP, these videos that surface are nonetheless critical of the leader. Italy's prime minister Giorgia Meloni joins Trump and Putin as one of the more critically discussed figures at 41.7% in the FYP data (Figure 7.1), although she appears in only 4.2% of the videos (Figure 6.2). Those with a critical sentiment in the FYP data are more considered as far-right, although not exclusively; Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was amongst those critically mentioned in the FYP data. The critical sentiment toward Sanchez likely derives from [tensions between him and NATO](#), Sanchez being one of the most outspoken critics of the alliance and refusing to meet their spending requirements. This underscores the potential "pro-NATO" stance of the FYP, critically representing those in opposition to the alliance even when they are also a member state.

The search data tells a similar story, albeit a little more balanced in sentiment. For example, while Putin is amongst the top 5 critically discussed leaders in both data sets, he is discussed 28.6% in a supportive fashion in the search data (Figure 7b) compared to 10.9% in the FYP data (Figure 7a). Sanchez does not even appear in the search data, despite having few videos but has a high critical sentiment in the FYP data (Figure 7a). French president Emmanuel Macron appears in both data sets, but does not receive any criticism in the FYP data and a score of 33.3% on positive sentiment (Figure 7a). In the search data, on the other hand, he receives only neutral sentiments (Figure 7b). The differences in critical sentiment between the two datasets reinforce the pro-NATO sentiment, especially in the FYP data.

Taken together, the two data sets overall reflect a pro-NATO stance. However, this narrative carries through somewhat stronger in the FYP than in the search results. Therefore, while the search shows that users were uploading pro-NATO videos, the FYP moves a user even further in that direction with the content that it recommends. We see the pro-NATO stance in the positive discussion of Dutch leaders and Rutte, as well as key NATO members, such as Macron. Further, the critical stance toward Russia, a NATO adversary, and overall more positive view of Ukraine, a NATO ally, suggests a pro-NATO stance. The FYP notably departs from the search results by surfacing a few more videos critical of Russia and Putin, whereas search is marginally stronger on current events. In comparison, the FYP can be said to be a step further along the spectrum than the search results when assessing support for NATO.

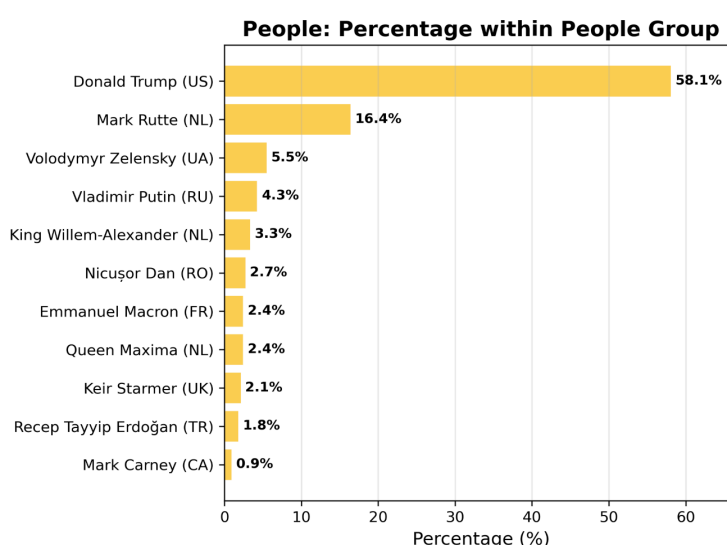


Figure 6a. Search data. Leader mentions

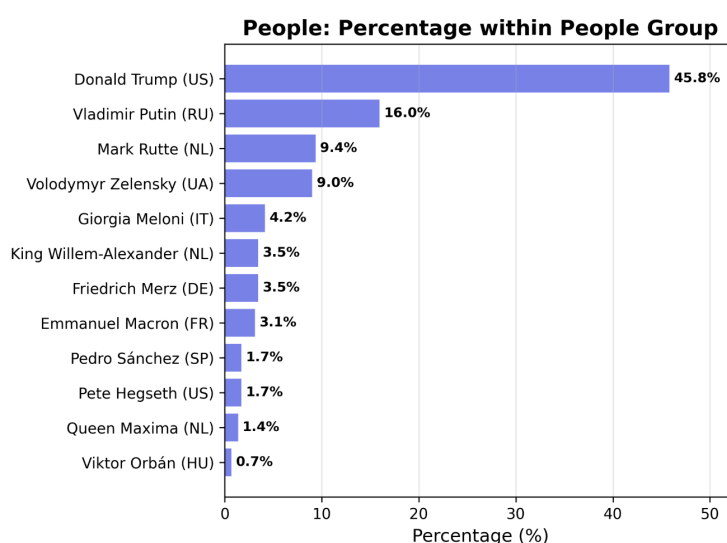
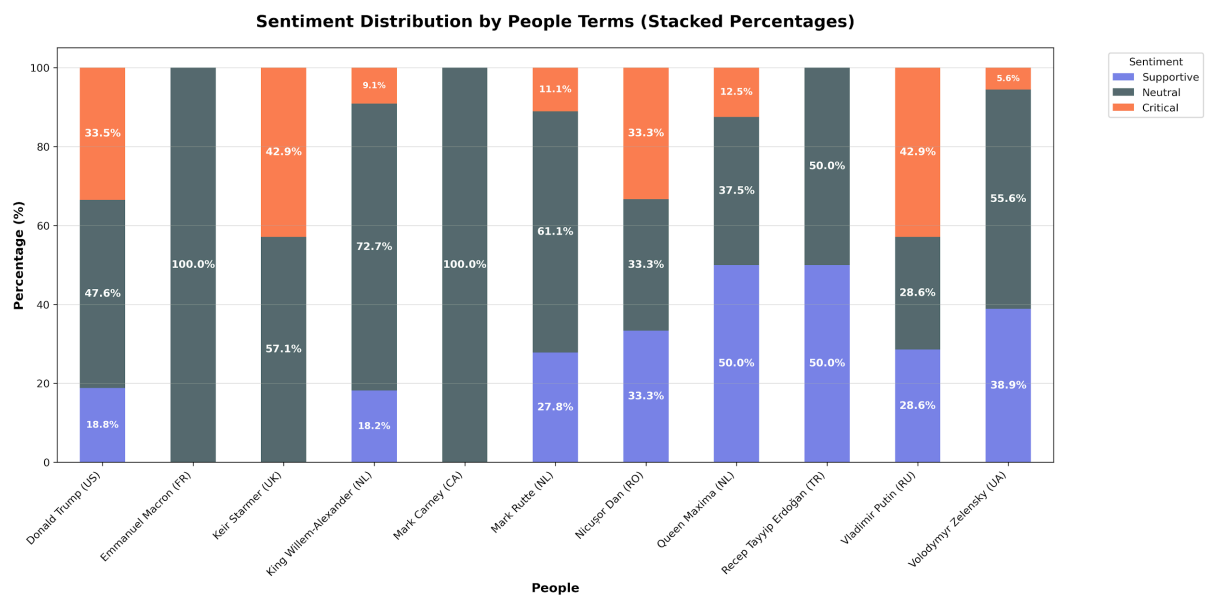
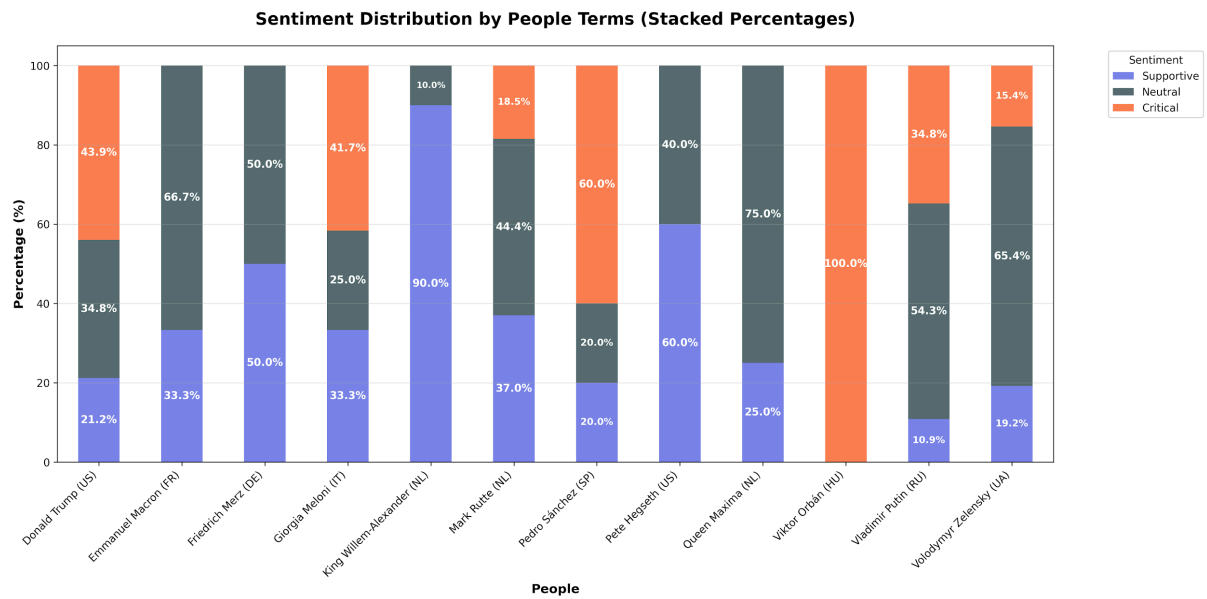


Figure 6b. FYP data. Leader mentions



4.3 A Focus on Dutch Content

Dutch language videos provide insight into what Dutch creators were discussing in relation to the NATO Summit. While the topics Dutch creators discuss are not a direct proxy for the concerns of the Dutch public, they nonetheless supply a helpful sample and point of comparison. Dutch language videos had a small overall presence in both datasets. 69 unique Dutch language videos (10%) showed up in the search data, whereas Dutch language videos appeared in the FYP feeds around 207 times, with 123 of those being unique videos. Around 9% of unique videos that appeared across the FYPs were Dutch language. While our data collection took place in the Netherlands via VPN or physical location, our search queries were in English, which may account for this smaller subset. Further, we detected Dutch videos from Dutch language in the video transcripts, therefore this does not include videos that were created by Dutch creators or news outlets that appeared in English.

The Dutch videos that showed up in the search data set and the FYP data set skewed toward the summit itself (Search: 92.65%, FYP: 49.61%), news coverage (51.47%, 34.65%), military and NATO contributions (54.41%, 38.58%), and activism (13.24%, 15.75%) compared to the topic breakdown of all of the videos in the search and FYP data sets (Figures 8a and 8b). These findings suggest that the Dutch videos were more relevant to the Dutch context, given that the summit was happening in that country, and grounded in current events. For example, NATO spending is a [divisive topic amongst Dutch political parties](#). While Dutch creators were focused on covering the summit and related topics, the FYP comparatively did not appear to favor those same subjects, and instead pushed toward more celebratory military and weapons content and war speculation (Figure 8a). Dutch content similarly outweighs the search data in activism, NATO/military contributions news and the summit (Figure 8b).

As we were simulating Dutch users by locating our accounts in the Netherlands, one might expect the FYP to reflect content that Dutch creators were showcasing. However, this section shows how the FYP departs further from Dutch creator content topics than the search results. The FYP leans more toward military and weapons and war speculation than the Dutch creators, who are more concerned with direct topical relevance and activism. This suggests a slight polarization toward pro-military content (rather than anti-military). With this said, the pro-NATO/military attitudes represented in the FYP are, to some extent, represented in Dutch society, [according to some reports](#).

FYP Data Topic Comparison: Dutch vs. All Videos

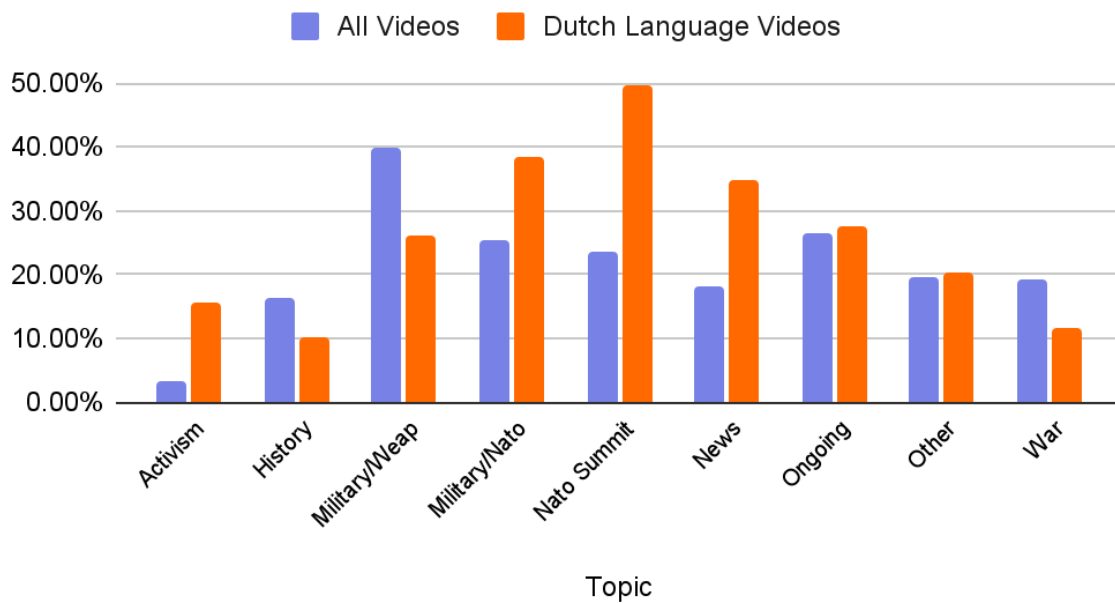


Figure 8a. **FYP data.** A comparison of the topic distribution for Dutch-language videos and overall videos

Search Data Topic Comparison: Dutch vs. All Videos

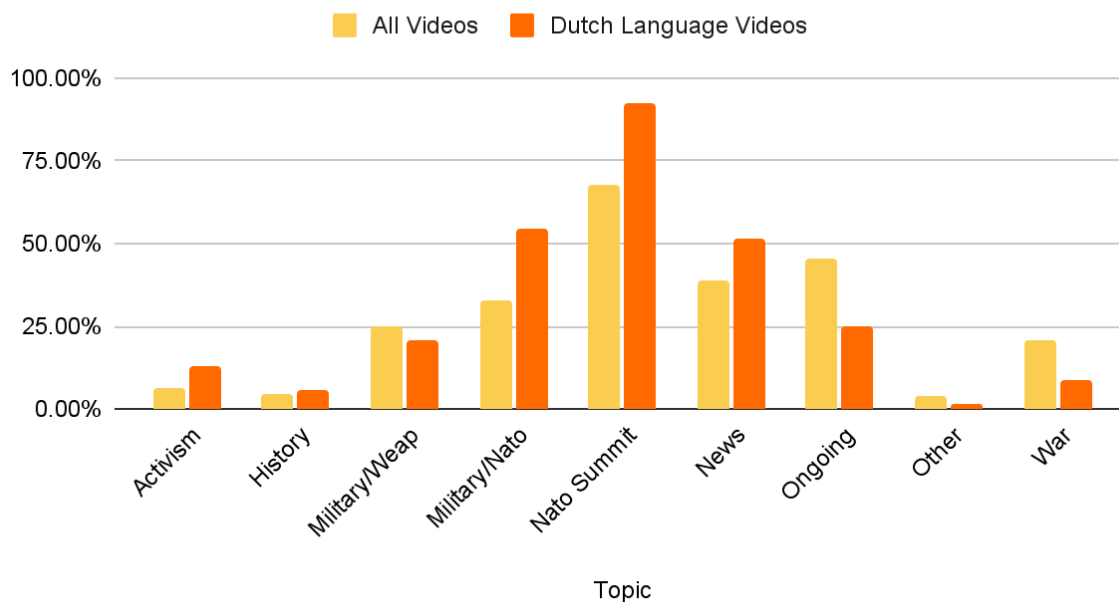


Figure 8b. **Search data.** A comparison of the topic distribution for Dutch-language videos and overall videos

5. Discussion & Conclusion

This report examines TikTok's search results and FYP content related to the 2025 NATO Summit. While NATO remains a military alliance, its role extends into the realm of global politics, particularly in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This has not only reshaped NATO's strategic priorities but also intensified public debate about its legitimacy, purpose, and geopolitical influence. Examining how these issues are represented on highly influential platforms, such as TikTok, provides insight into how algorithmic systems mediate the intersection between political discourse and military narratives.

We found that the FYP pushed our users toward a pro-military narrative. In our analysis, search results served as our comparison, the underlying assumption being that search results should surface a more representative view of content that users have uploaded about the NATO Summit, whereas the FYP might amplify particular narratives in response to user behavior on the platform. In our analysis, the FYP shows content that paints a positive view of NATO, and more generally of the military and weapons. It also showcases more fearful war speculation content compared to the overall content that is published on the platform and available via the search results.

The topic analysis showed how the FYP favored glorified military content and fearful war speculation, whereas the search data focused on more current events, the summit, and activism. Critical content, often uploaded by activists, was less present on the FYP, demonstrating the FYP's swing to the pro-military pole. Our analysis of countries and leaders undergirds this finding, showing how the FYP suggests more videos which portrayed NATO leaders more positively and its adversaries more critically than the videos in the search results. At a time when Dutch people are unified in their fear of war, and [57% believe that a higher prevalence of war rhetoric could increase the chance of entering into war](#), TikTok becomes another mechanism where this rhetoric, and fear, is potentially reinforced.

Concerns around developing a deeper fear of war, including increased war rhetoric, are heightened by TikTok becoming a source of news for many users. Our sentiment analysis suggests that, over the course of time, what starts as a more factual and moderately supportive tone, evolves into one that is more playful and critical. A departure from facts, and a move in the direction of celebratory military and fearful war speculation content, can potentially reinforce war rhetoric, rather than providing a healthy balance in the discourse. This dynamic could contribute to a distorted public perception of NATO and of contemporary conflict, where the entertainment value outweighs informational accuracy.

Our findings open up interesting pathways for future research into how this content impacts viewers. Interviews with Dutch citizens who use TikTok and are exposed to this type of content could provide further nuance into the consequences of a more militarized FYP. This could also include further visual, sound analyses for the content, as well as a deeper dive into especially problematic content, such as those stoking fears of WWII. As global tensions between states and alliances continually shift, examining social media platforms helps illuminate how those narratives trickle down, and are potentially distorted, when they reach the general public.