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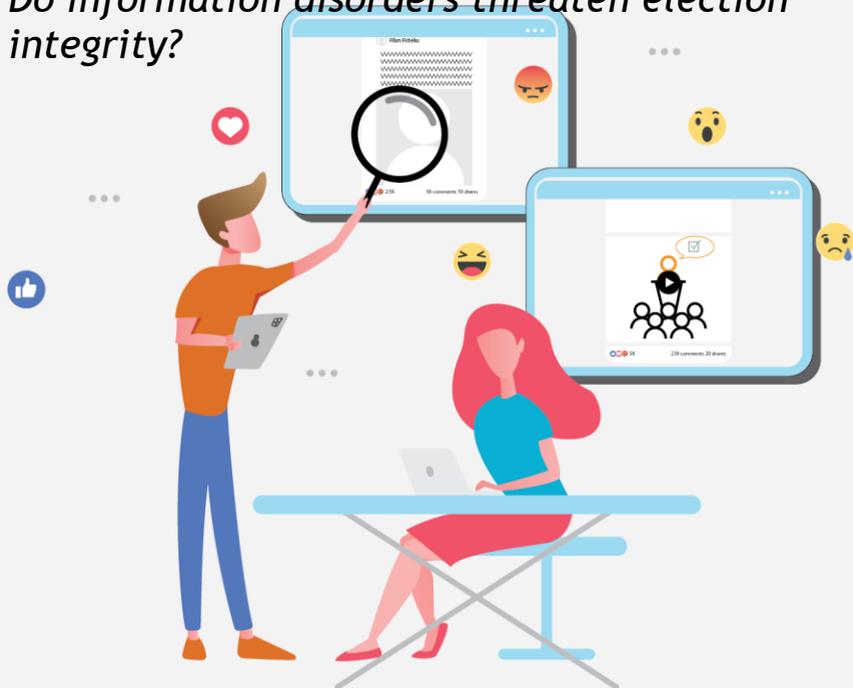
Democracy for Development

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Demokratija za razvoj

ELECTION CAMPAIGN UNDER SCRUTINY

Do information disorders threaten election integrity?



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Pristina, December 2021

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1 | Introduction

Elections are considered the most democratic instrument for the election of political representatives in the country, where the entire election cycle is regulated by the relevant laws of the Republic of Kosovo and the Rules of the Central Election Commission, from the announcement of Election Day until the certification of results. A very important part of this process is the election campaign, but with the development of information technology and the use of Facebook and Twitter, it is difficult to control the line that separates freedom of expression from that of violation, between the opposing parties. This report includes monitoring the news during the election campaign period and the race during the runoff elections, in relation to the distribution of news and the manner of informing citizens.

According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics latest 2021 report on the use of Information and Communication Technology, 96.1% of households in Kosovo have access to internet at home or apartment, where the frequency of internet use several times a day reaches 80%¹. This in fact reflects the distribution of information in record time to the majority of the population, specifically to persons 16-74 years of age. It is essential that the dissemination of information is done fairly and without erroneous or partial information. In addition, the use of offensive, harsh and sexist language should be avoided. In fact, misinformation and dissemination of news with distorted content is done largely by various portals which operate in Kosovo, but also by individuals in various fields, be that journalists or representatives of political entities who have a great influence among certain groups. The impact on certain groups is even more evident during election

¹ <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6422/tik-ne-ek-familjare-2021.pdf>

periods, when political entities conduct election campaigns regulated by [Law no. 03/L-073 on General Elections](#) and [Law no. 03/L-072 on Local Elections](#). In fact, political entities continue the practice of pre-election campaigning, even though the latter is not regulated by the above mentioned applicable laws. Apart from political entities, the media are the ones that have an essential role in disseminating information, and it is not uncommon for the dissemination of news to be one-sided, favorable, distorted, misinforming, with sexist language content, with exaggerated headlines for the purpose of arousing the curiosity of the readers. For more detailed definitions of these terms, see Annex 9.2.

Seeing the large number of news articles with such characteristics and in order to identify them, D4D Institute monitored the official election campaign for the local elections which were held on October 17, 2021, as well as the election campaign period for runoff elections, that took place from 8 to 12 November. The purpose of this report is to identify news aimed at misinforming citizens and inciting hatred against different individuals or groups, as well as to familiarize the public with the terms of misinformation and news verification. This report also provides recommendations addressed to online media, political entities, journalists and citizens.

2 | Methodology

Between September 15, 2021 and October 15, 2021, which was the official duration of the election campaign for the first round of local elections, as well as during the runoff election campaign from November 8, 2021 to November 12, 2021, the D4D Institute monitored online portals, social networks, and senior representatives of political entities. The monitoring was done using two automated platforms for monitoring online media and social media where online media news and posts from Facebook

and Twitter were collected. The monitoring was conducted in parallel in two samples: one in Albanian and one in Serbian. In the Serbian language sample most of the monitored portals come from Serbia or 48 out of 55 and only 7 are portals operating in Kosovo. The reason why portals in Serbia are also monitored is that most Kosovo Serbs receive news from these portals.

The reason why the two automated platforms have been used to collect numerical data is that while on Facebook pages and groups it has been possible to measure interactions,² the potential readership³ of articles and posts was measured on online portals and Twitter accounts. Through these two platforms in the Albanian language sample a total of 75,198 articles were downloaded, of which 9,613 from Facebook pages while 1,105 from Facebook groups, 63,232 articles from online portals and 1,157 posts from Twitter. Of these, 4,237 articles were analyzed, including 1,398 articles from Facebook pages, 1,105 articles from Facebook groups, 1,344 articles from online portals and 390 articles from Twitter. The same methodology was used for the sample in Serbian where a total of 1,801 articles/posts were monitored. 195 posts were downloaded from Facebook pages, while there were no posts in Facebook groups, 45,678 articles from online portals and 4,191 posts from Twitter. Of these, 1,801 articles were analyzed, including 157 articles from Facebook pages, 0 articles from Facebook groups, 1,344 articles from online portals and 300 articles from Twitter.

² Interactions include Facebook reactions such as: Likes; comments; shares and other feedback (wow, haha, sad, angry, love)

³ Potential readership refers to the number of people who have viewed a specific article or post. The reason it is called potential is because people can have two or more accounts or devices.

In the Albanian sample, 76 online portals, 10 groups and 203 Facebook pages and 32 Twitter accounts were monitored. The Serbian language sample included 55 online portals, 1 Facebook group and 16 pages and 18 Twitter accounts. It should be noted that many Kosovo online portals that operate in the Serbian language receive news directly from online portals from Serbia. Therefore, a significant part of the monitored portals in the Serbian language sample are portals operating in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, Albanian language sample included some portals that operate in Albania and North Macedonia. For more details, the list of online portals, Facebook pages and groups and Twitter accounts is included at the end of this report, in the Annex. Examples of samples in Albanian and Serbian will be included in the content of this report. Online portals, Facebook sites and groups, and Twitter accounts have been selected based on the number of followers they have had, based on the potential greater influence they may over citizens and that the speed with which information can be disseminated, that can be many times higher than those with the smaller number of followers. We have built a database of keywords on the platforms we monitored, to better identify news that related to elections.

		Facebook		Online Portals	Twitter Accounts
		Page	Group		
Sample	ALB	203	10	76	32
	SRB	16	1	55	18
Total		411			

The categories the report focuses on include political divisions, external influence, and misogyny. These categories include the

monitoring of information disorders involving intentional or unintentional dissemination and publication, of untrue, manipulated, exaggerated information or information containing harsh, sexist or hate speech. Based on these categories, the D4D Institute has also categorized articles with information disorder content, where the highest percentage of articles during the election campaign in the Albanian language sample promoted political divisions, while in the runoff period articles with harsh and offensive language dominated.

2.1. Monitoring process

Monitoring process was done throughout the election campaign, while the analysis was conducted on a weekly basis. The reason why articles with highest interactions were selected for this report was to better see the impact they had on the election campaign process. Information during the monitoring process is stored for the sake of the veracity of the data, as well as because sometimes it happens that some articles or posts are removed after being posted by certain portals or groups. On this occasion we created a database where the following materials were stored:

- *Screenshots;*
- *Numerical data such as the number of potential readers, distribution and other interactions such as likes, comments and shares;*
- *Titles of articles with photos, posting date and the name of the news publisher;*
- *Comments related to the category of misogyny posts on Facebook.*

3 | Key findings

While analyzing 6,038 articles, we noticed a fairly large number of articles and posts which had misleading information, including articles and posts which promoted political divisions, insults, harsh and sexist language, hate speech, taken out of context, untrue, manipulated, fabricated content and exaggerated headlines. Given that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the campaign has focused more on social media, due to the prohibition of having in-person gatherings of electorate in large numbers, political entities increased their use of online campaigning. This has made even more apparent the promotion of political divisions, with intentional or unintentional hate speech and information disorders taking a prominent place.

The main findings include the election campaign period and the runoff period in both the Albanian language sample and the Serbian language sample. What has generally been observed is a greater number of article posts during the election campaign, than during the run-off campaign, and this may be the case because the election campaign lasted for one month, while the runoff campaign lasted for one week, as governed by election laws. However, despite this and despite the smaller number of articles with information disorder content, the number of interactions and potential readership has been much greater during the runoff period.

The total number of articles and posts with information disorder content in both samples was 237. In both periods, there were 180 articles and posts in the Albanian language sample containing information disorders, of which 134 were during the election campaign and 46 during the runoff period, which generated 219,397 interactions on social networks and 4,954,302 people potentially read these articles and posts. During the election campaign, posts and articles containing information disorders on

Facebook groups were 17 in total, on Facebook pages 53 posts, 51 articles from online portals as well as 13 posts on Twitter accounts. While in the runoff period there were 11 posts on Facebook groups, 22 posts on Facebook pages, 12 articles on online portals and 1 post on Twitter.

	ALB	SRB
 Analyzed articles and posts	4,237	1,801
 Interactions in social media	219,397	32,746
 Articles and posts with information disorder content	180	57
 People that potentially read articles and posts with information disorder content	4,954,302	1,672,684

While in the Serbian language sample, 57 articles and posts with information disorder content were analyzed, of which 56 during the election campaign and 1 in the runoff period. These articles and posts generated 32,746 interactions on social media and 1,672,684 people potentially read these articles or posts. During the election campaign, articles and posts that contained information disorders included: 3 posts on the Facebook pages, 44 articles posted on online portals and 8 posts on Twitter account. While in the runoff period, there was only one article that contained information disorder in online media.

The Albanian language sample in articles and posts with information disorder during the election campaign was dominated

by articles promoting political divisions, with a total of 36%, followed by harsh and offensive language with 34% and exaggerated headlines with 23% while the news containing disinformation accounted for 7% of monitored articles.

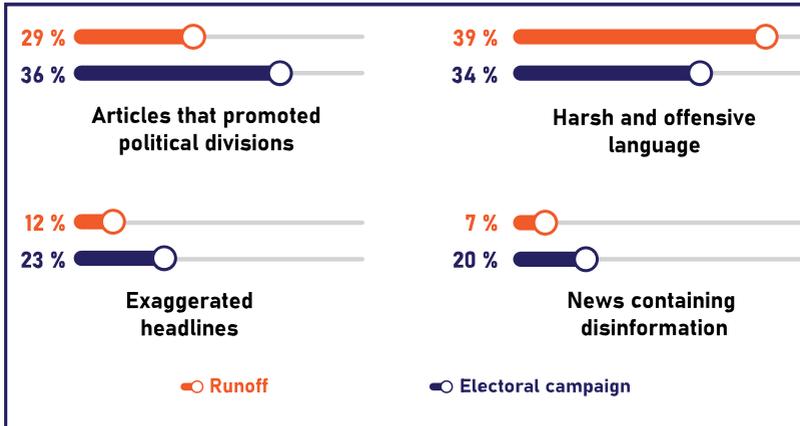


Figure 1. Type of information disorder (sample in Albanian language)

The sample in Serbian language in articles and posts with information disorder during the election campaign was dominated by articles containing harsh and offensive language with 64%, followed by political divisions with 34%, and 2% news containing disinformation. While in the runoff, only one article had an information disorder which had the context of inciting political divisions.

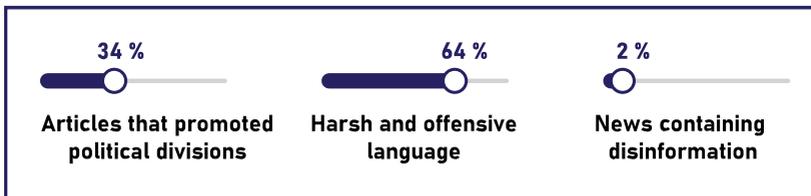


Figure 2. Type of information disorder during electoral campaign (sample in Serbian language)

During the runoff, there was a smaller number of articles with information disorder content but on the other hand these articles had greater potential readership and interactions. In contrast to the election campaign period, where the highest percentage of articles with information disorder content promoted political divisions, at this stage this category is ranked second with 29% with harsh or offensive language taking the spotlight in 39% of articles and posts. Even news articles containing disinformation during the runoff were more frequent with a total of 20% of articles, while there was a drop of articles with exaggerated headlines by a total of 12%.

In terms of the articles from the sample in Serbian language, there was a decrease in both articles and readership during the runoff period, which is related to the fact that the Serbian List won 9 out of 10 municipalities in the first round. In addition, from the sample that we monitored, only one article with biased content was found during the runoff period, where suggestion was made to vote for the Serbian List in the municipality of Klllokot. The article was published by an online portal operating in Serbia.

Articles and posts promoting political divisions generally included all political entities, but more prominent were those against the Self-determination Movement and the Democratic League of Kosovo, especially with regard to the Municipality of Prishtina, while in some smaller municipalities against the Democratic Party of Kosovo and independent candidates. In terms of external influences, the articles in most cases related to the central level and not directly to the local elections. When it comes to the chapter on external influence, a higher number of articles and news were observed in the Serbian language sample, that

especially dominated the news, at times when the situation in the north of the country was in focus.

Campaign sponsored by online portals, without indicating whether the articles are sponsored by any particular political entity. News sponsorship has greatly increased potential readership. A specific case involves the article with Përparim Rama saying that he swore that with Sami Lushtaku he would take Prishtina since he could not take Badovc. This article was potentially read by over 2.1 million people, and then the article was removed from the portals. Furthermore, this article will be elaborated in the examples listed below.

The campaign organized in different Facebook groups, as the phenomenon observed in the sample in the Albanian language and to a large extent promoted political divisions, with exaggerated descriptions, and disinformation posts did not lack.

Reproduction of articles from various portals, without fact-checking. Reproduction of articles was done using the same text and headline as the online portal that produced the news initially, or by changing only minor subtleties in the headline.

Charges and counter-charges against political entities and their representatives often based on distorted facts. This was observed on their official Facebook profiles and after the production and reproduction of this news by the portals, writing articles based on such posts.

Opening of portals and groups at the time of election campaign, which were closed right after the elections.

The exercise of online violence through sexist, misogynistic language against women, observed through comments by citizens against women candidates for mayors, has been extremely high, including 28.99% of the monitored comments. Even more prominent were the comments with negative content, which included harsh language and political divisions towards women and their pertinent entities, with a total of 40.43%.

The tendency of distributing news and articles on online portals and portals in Albania and North Macedonia has been seen as a phenomenon. The same phenomenon has been observed in the media and portals in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. For example, in the Albanian language, the news circulated mainly between Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia or Montenegro, while in the Serbian language sample, the news circulated between Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4 | Political divisions and harsh language

In general, the election campaign was characterized by articles and posts which had a significant impact on citizens, based on the high number of comments and negative reactions on social media. This was the case when it comes to political divisions, with special emphasis on the Albanian language sample, with 36% of articles promoting political divisions. Many online portals published articles that had exaggerated headlines aiming to serve as click baits for their readers and prompt their comments on the Facebook platform. In addition to articles from online portals and representatives of political entities, comments from citizens were largely prominent and presented their attitudes against a particular candidate or political entity, often containing hate and offensive speech.

The election campaign by the candidates also focused more on how they "misgoverned" in the previous legislatures, when these opposition parties were in power, and to a far lesser extent on presenting their programs and specific plans that they planned to implement over the next four years. In addition to accusations, insults, harsh language used, many articles also contained misinformation. During the election campaign for the first round of 2021 local elections in the Republic of Kosovo, an action was taken by the Kosovo Police throughout Kosovo, to remove the license plates that had expired based on the agreement reached in Brussels. Due to potential tensions, a special unit was sent to the border crossings in Brnjak and Jarinje. These actions encouraged the writing of articles from portals in Albanian and Serbian, with exaggerated headlines and content, which had an impact on increasing the political divisions and citizens' misperception of the events that were taking place. Posting of such articles was especially noticeable in the Serbian language

sample, where in addition to political divisions, ethnic divisions were also encouraged.

In the Albanian language sample, news on online portals with information disorder and exaggerated headlines about political divisions, were also observed during the monitoring of the election campaign, reaching 23% of the total number. It is worth noting that during the two campaign periods, news with these features were observed, but we have not elaborated them below as the number of interactions has not been very high compared to those which are listed below. In terms of harsh and offensive language, 34% of the articles monitored during the election campaign had such content, either in the headline or in the content of the articles in general.

In the Serbian language sample, in most cases, in addition to defamation, exaggerated headlines were also used, to serve as click baits, thus trying to create a wrong perception even without opening the article at all. In most cases, this phenomenon has been used in Serbian language articles. There was also strong support for the Serbian List, which came from politicians in Serbia, with their statements in the mainstream media and portals in Serbia and Kosovo. Through these articles/statements, the idea that the Serbian List was a shield for the interests of Kosovo Serbs was promoted. Moreover, the opponents of Serbian List did not have any media coverage. Harsh language was used in 22 of the 45 articles analyzed in the Serbian language sample only during the first round of 2021 local elections. This means that this phenomenon was encountered in almost 50% of cases. Runoff elections have seen a lower number of articles distributed, consequently a lower number of articles that promoted political divisions because most of the municipalities closed the race in the first round. Here, we can mention the case of the Director of the

Office for Kosovo Petar Petkovic, who called for the voting of the Serbian List candidate in the Municipality of Klllokot.

4.1. Election campaign: Examples from the Albanian language sample

On the first day of the election campaign, word spread that Ukshin Hoti's son had left the PDK and joined the Self-determination Movement. The news was initially shared with the public by a portal which was reposted with similar headlines by nine

other portals/sites. In total, these ten articles accounted for 1,957 interactions, of which 1,252 likes, 560 comments, 26 shares, and 119 other interactions. However, Andin Hoti denied leaving the Democratic Party of Kosovo and joining the LVV through a post on his official Facebook account, calling as unacceptable the news which caused uncertainty in the public, based on the biased and orchestrated attacks that culminated in the "sensational" news of his alleged departure from the PDK. After verifying this news, we noticed that initially a representative from the ranks of the political entity PDK was asked about this issue, in an interview on one of the televisions that operates in the country, from where this news had started to spread.



Article with the headline: "VV seeks votes for Haskuka with Kurti's photo", is the article that made a big fuss during the election campaign. This news was in fact distorted, because the portals placed only half of the billboard with the photograph of the leader

of Self-determination Movement Albin Kurti, while they removed the other part with the photograph of the candidate for mayor from this political entity, Mytaher Haskuka. This article was reproduced by three Facebook pages accounting for a total of 967 interactions, of which 236 likes, 224 comments, 14 shares and 493 other interactions.



During the election campaign, Përparim Rama, an LDK candidate for mayor during the election campaign, and now Mayor of Prishtina, was labeled by media profiles on Facebook which shared the news that Përparim Rama had been sued by the family of the famous Kosovar singer Rita Ora because he did not complete the design/renovation works of the Sahatçiu-Ora family home in London, as agreed. Përparim Rama in an interview for the newspaper Reporteri denied everything, saying that he had good relations with the Sahatçiu-Ora family. This news was also used as a click bait, by halving the headline "Përparim Rama is sued by Rita Ora's family?" while removing the part "Candidate for Mayor of Pristina gives a statement". Such articles were shared on 22 public Facebook pages as well as 11 open groups. In total, the distributed articles accounted for 413 interactions of which 198 likes, 120 comments, 21 shares and 74 other interactions.

On 13 October, when the situation in the North was unstable, an article entitled "PDK and Brnabic with similar reactions to police action in the north" was shared, in which the same group



described the PDK being under Belgrade directives. This conclusion encouraged political division and misinformed the citizens as there is no evidence that this political entity is under directives from Belgrade, but such accusations were made due to different political beliefs. The shared article had 4,095 potential readers, while it accounted for 1,463 interactions of which 650 likes, 430 comments, 114 shares and 269 other interactions.

4.2. Election campaign: Examples from the Serbian language sample

In addition to inciting language, the headline of this article obviously creates an exaggeration of the whole event. The article at the same time links the events of the police action in the north of the country, to create the impression among the citizens that such a conflict has the dimensions of the conflict of the 90s. This article reached 213,292 potential readers and had 4,098 interactions, of which 2,716 likes, 1,189 comments, and 193 shares in social media.

Another article exaggerated and taken out of context is the article with the headline "Leviathans headed to war in Kosovo, but returned from the border because they did not have PCR tests." The article also published a video of the neo-nationalist

"DA LI ĆEMO SAHRANJIVATI BRAČU KAO 1999.?"
Sestra ranjenog Srečka Sofronijevića obratila se Vučiću, predsednik u Raškoj sluša emotivne ispovesti Srba sa KiM: "Neizdrživo je!"

"A do ti varrosim vëllezërit si në 1999?" Motra e të plagosurit Srečko Sofronijovic i është drejtuar Vucicit, presidenti në Rashkë, i ndëgjoi fjalimet emotive të serbëve në Kosovë: "Është e padurueshme!"

Levijatani pošli u rat za Kosovo, pa vraćeni s granice jer nisu imali PCR test

"Levijatani janë nisur për luftë në Kosovë, por janë kthyer nga kufiri pasi nuk kanë pasur teste PCR"

extremist of Leviathan, an organization that generally claims to deal with animal rights, but is known for its radical extremist views. In the video inside the article, the extremist Pavle Bihali announces that all those who want to go into a war in Kosovo must have their PCR tests. Through its message, this article among others also incites interethnic hatred, by informing all those willing on how to enter Kosovo in order to fight in the war. The article in question had 68,209 potential readers, generated 3,506 interactions, of which 2990 likes, 423 comments, and 93 shares on social networks.

The other article used biased language, referring to statements by Petar Petkovic, Director of the Office for Kosovo, within the Serbian government. One-sided statements by politicians in Serbia have been prominent, in most cases referring to actions in the north and calling on Serbs to vote only for the Serbian List. This article accuses Prime Minister Kurti of failing to campaign, and of using the actions in the north for campaigning purpose. At the same time, in the same articles, the embassies that are in Kosovo have been accused of supporting such an action, stating that they were supporting violence against the Serb community in Kosovo. The article in question had 14,700 potential readers.



4.3. Runoff Election Campaign - examples from the Albanian language sample

In the first days of the runoff campaign a news article circulated in the media, according to which Përparim Rama has sworn that he will win Prishtina with the support of the member of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Sami Lushtaku. This article is entitled "Perparim Rama swears: "Since I could not take Badovc, now with Sami Lushtaku I will take Pristina!", and it was published by an online portal on the evening of December 11. This article initially had 2.8 million potential readers and was shared 43,453 times. This article has been removed from all publishing portals since it was considered untrue news.



Article with the headline: "Scandalous: Document showing how Xhafer Tahiri "bought" the AAK official for 490 Euros is Published ", is the article that was circulated during the runoff campaign, as a news that is considered distorted, manipulated and exaggerated. This news with this headline was first published by a Facebook page. The document mentioned in the headline is a grant for the maintenance of the village-maintenance of public space, which former member of AAK Rrahman Ajeti, who has joined the Democratic League of Kosovo



(LDK), had won from Xhafer Tahiri, Mayor of Vushtrri Municipality. The page that published this news described it as "AAK official being bought" for the mentioned sum of money. This article was also published by a portal and was distributed to a group on the social network Facebook, where it accounted for 450 interactions, of which 58 likes, 45 comments, 27 shares and 48 other interactions.

Article with the headline: "Neither Serbia nor Arben Vitia have apologized for the hundreds of deaths of Albanians", is an example of news where analyst Kimete Berisha uses harsh language against the candidate for mayor of Prishtina, Arben Vitia, calling him a bride, criminogenic and murderer. This statement was initially posted on analyst Berisha's profile and it was then shared by a portal and accounted for 4,180 interactions, of which 245 likes, 93 comments, 13 shares and 67 other interactions.



4.4. Runoff Election Campaign - examples from the Serbian language sample

Statements of Serbian state officials suggested local Serbs how to vote. Such a statement was given by Petkovic - Director of the Office for Kosovo "I am convinced that the Serbs of Kllokot will choose wisely and vote the candidate of the Serbian List, Vladan Bogdanovic", this is the headline which transmitted the statement of Petar Petkovic, which undoubtedly incites political divisions and is also considered as an external influence. At the same time, this article has reached 8260 potential readers, while the interactions included 189 likes, 18 comments, and 13 shares.

Petković: Uveren sam da će Srbi u Klokotu umeti mudro da izaberu i glasaju za kandidata Srpske liste Vladana Bogdanovića



"Petkovic: Jam i bindur se serbet e Kllokotit do të zgjedhin menqur dhe të zgjedhin kandidatin e Listës Serbe, Vladan Bogdanovic"

5 | External influence

In the Albanian language sample, external influence included mainly articles translated from the Serbian media. When it comes to the examples in the Albanian language, there was a significantly higher number of articles which related to the Government of Kosovo, Grenell, the situation created in the North of the country with increased police forces, but not articles that could directly affect the opinion of citizens regarding local elections.

In the Serbian language sample, articles posted about external influence during the election campaign period were not directly related to local elections, with the exception of influential articles from Belgrade and Milorad Dodik, the former president of the Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were more visible. Their statements were divided into two parts. Firstly, they made exaggerated statements about the situation in the north, and secondly, they called on Serbs in Kosovo to vote for the Serbian List. In this context, there was a tendency of Serbian-language online portals to distort the facts on the ground and exaggerate the circumstances of the situation.

5.1. External influence during the election campaign- Albanian language sample

Article with the headline: "Djuric: "Kurti is leading the region to bloodshed", is the news that has circulated in various media, including those from abroad, during the election campaign in Kosovo. According to the statement of Marko Djuric, Ambassador of Serbia to the US, with these actions the Prime Minister of Kosovo is leading the region to bloodshed and all this is for electoral reasons. This statement can be described as exaggerated and baseless. Djuric's statement on his Twitter profile was published in the Macedonian media, in which case it accounted for total of 3,136 interactions, of which 1714 likes, 1400 comments and 32 shares.



Following the situation created in the north of Kosovo, where Kosovo Special Units had to intervene, the reports started saying that Russia was preparing to send its army to the border between Kosovo and Serbia. This article was published by the media in Russia and was reproduced by websites in Kosovo, with the same exaggerated headline. This post accounted for 17 interactions, of which 5 likes, 4 comments and 8 other interactions.



5.2. External influence during the election campaign - Serbian language sample

In the article "Mentors of Kosovo's independence are pushing towards radicalization - and that's not the end of it", the guest speaker on Sputnik.rs talks about the events in northern Kosovo, and portrays this as evidence that those who have supported the project of unilateral independence on the part of Pristina, have decided to radicalize and accelerate this process, and this is the most dangerous. Through disinformation and biased narrative, Western states are portrayed as the main influencers of the events that took place. This article reached 57,200 potential readers and was shared 12 times.

In the article "I call on all Serbs in Kosovo to gather around the Serbian List", the member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, invited Kosovo Serbs to gather around the Serbian List, whom he wished success in the local elections scheduled to take place on October 17th. The article has been translated and published in media and portals in Albanian. This article had 3,981 potential readers, but it was not shared.

To prove that there was an attempt for outside influence by various portals and media as well as by various political officials

Dodik: Pozivam sve Srbe da se okupe oko Srpske liste



Dodik: I ftoj të gjithë serbët, të mbiledhen rreth Listës Serbe

Vesti: Da li je moguće da Rosu krene da zauzima Gazivode, Trepču i ostale vitalne objekte /video/

19.02.20.09.2021



"Lajme: A është e mundur që Rosu të nis kapjen e Ujmanit, Trepçës dhe objekteve tiera vitale/video/"

in Serbia, including those with influence from Russia, one can see one of the news which was circulated by Sputniknews, which was described as disinformation, entitled "News: Is it possible that ROSU will start capturing Ujman, Trepça and other vital objects/video/ ". This article had 28,004 potential readers. This article in general talks about another issue which is completely unassociated with the headline it contains. After this article is opened, one can see that it speaks about the elections in Russia and the holding of the Duma by Vladimir Putin's party.

5.3. External influence during the runoff election campaign - Albanian language sample

The news with the headline "Janjic: Grenell is paid 100 thousand dollars a month by Serbia for lobbying ", published on November 8 is one of the articles that was distributed by 10 other Facebook pages during the runoff election campaign. The statement of the political analyst, Dusan Janjic, has been considered as misinformation by Richard Grenell himself. The same news was denied by the Serbian analyst, Janjic, saying that his statement was misinterpreted. In an interview, Janjic denied it. This article has been distributed by 11 pages and 8 groups on Facebook, where it accounted for a total of 3,075 interactions, of which 1,365 likes, 854 comments, 444 shares and 411 other interactions.



6 | Misogyny

The election campaign did not pass without hate speech and sexism against women in politics, for certain personal reasons or for the purpose of undermining the involvement of women in politics. The articles and posts also contained exaggerated headlines to arouse readers' curiosity as well as to incite comments on Facebook posts by citizens. The involvement of women in politics, especially at the local level, continues to be weak and unbalanced, only to the point of complying with the Law on Local Elections but not with the Law on Gender Equality. Both the number of women candidates for municipal assemblies and the number of women candidates for mayors is low in all political entities. This in fact reflects the position of women within the political structures and then leaves room for such treatment by online portals as well as Facebook pages and groups. Undoubtedly, such a situation incites citizens to comment with offensive and hate language towards women in politics, as they do not see them worthy of these positions, based on the monitored comments on women candidates for municipal mayors. Such comments can be described as online violence against women. One of the most targeted women in this campaign was Mimoza Kusari Lila, who was the only woman mayor of a municipality, while currently she is a member of the Assembly of Kosovo and President of the Political Entity Alternativa, and was also a candidate for Mayor of Gjakova in the LVV list. During the election campaign, various articles were circulated in relation to Kusari Lila which contained sexist and hate speech that reflects all the features of misogyny. As for the other candidates, there were more comments with misogynistic content from the citizens themselves, than articles and posts with information disorder. Cases of misogynistic language content from the monitored comments were observed only in the sample in Albanian

language, while no such case was observed in the Serbian language sample.

6.1. Misogyny during the election campaign

On September 27, a news article was shared regarding the President of the political entity Alternativa, Mimoza Kusari-Lila, and a statement of the President of AKR, Behgjet Pacolli. The headline of this article was taken out of context and the statement was distorted. However, even Behgjet Pacolli's statement as a whole has promoted political divisions and used harsh language. This article accounted for 453 interactions, of which 165 likes, 196 comments and 36 shares and 56 other interactions.

The woman candidate for Mayor of Ferizaj from the ranks of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Sibel Halimi, has been the subject of ridicule regarding her promise to use the electric scooters in this municipality. This news was published by a portal, accompanied by a manipulated photo, taking out of context her promise to use electric scooters in the Municipality of Ferizaj. In addition to the portal that made this photo manipulation, this article was posted 8 more times on Facebook where a large number of comments were found that contained insults, misogynistic and sexist language, thus

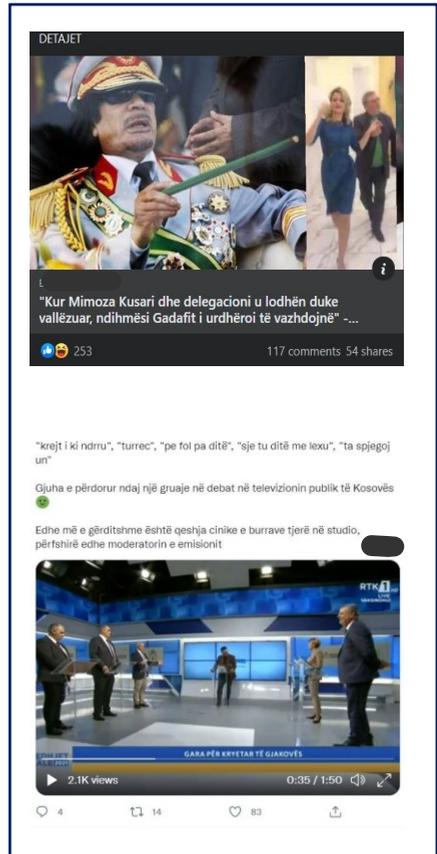


accounting for 1,862 interactions of which 552 likes, 676 comments, 8 shares and 623 other interactions.

The article entitled "When Mimoza Kusari and the delegation got tired of dancing, Gaddafi aide ordered them to continue" was republished and it targeted Mimoza Kusari Lila. This article was published some time ago, while it was republished during the election campaign. The article contained a manipulated photo, offensive language towards the candidate for Municipality of Gjakova, Mimoza Kusari-Lila, and was taken out of context. The article generated 425 interactions on Facebook, of which 164 likes, 54 shares, 118 comments and 89 other interactions. In addition to the offensive and insulting language used by this portal, there were hundreds of comments on this news on Facebook where misogynistic language was used against Mimoza Kusari-Lila, calling her "a doll".

In a Twitter post that reflected the TV debate with the candidates for mayor of Gjakova, there were a series of comments addressed to Kusari-Lila with misogynistic content. She was labeled as a bird, who can not speak and can not read; moreover during these comments a cynical laugh was

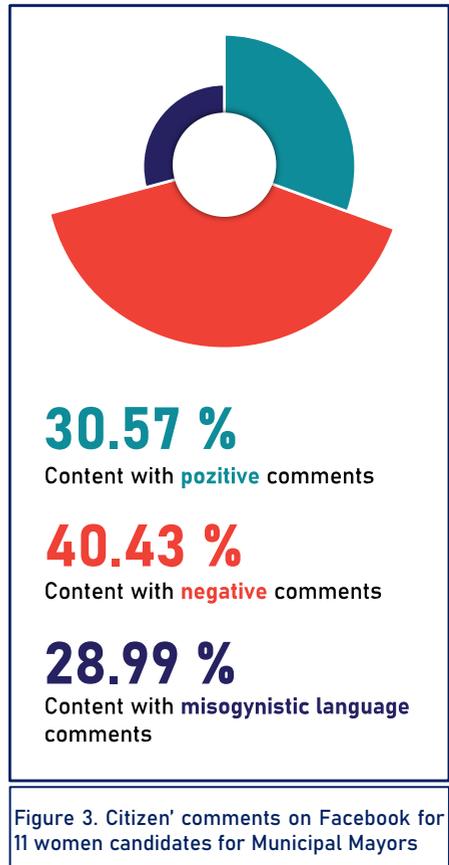
observed by all the men who were present in this debate. This



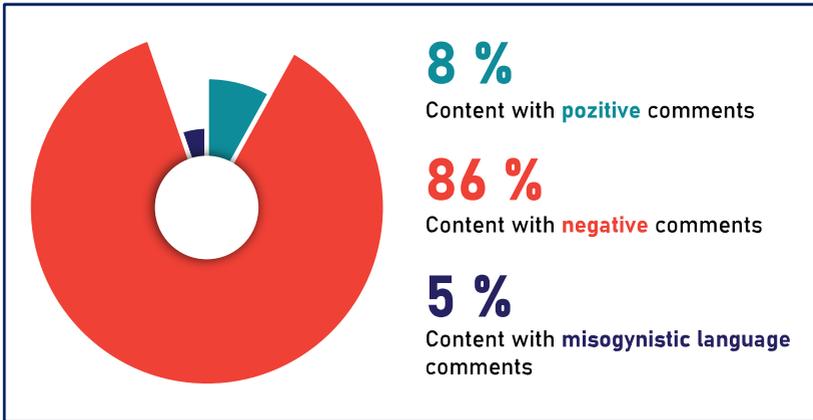
video was shared on Twitter and reached 2,100 potential viewers and 101 interactions of which 4 comments, 14 shares and 83 likes.

6.2. Misogyny towards women candidates for Mayor: Citizens' comments on Facebook posts

In 2021 Local Elections, there were in total 14 women candidates for Mayor. 11 of them were from Albanian majority political entities. Although there is a lower media coverage of women candidates compared to their male counterparts, from time to time they were part of articles and posts shared especially through Facebook pages. Posting various news on Facebook enabled many users of this platform to comment on their opinions, which largely contained sexist, offensive language, hate speech and political divisions. D4D Institute monitored the comments in the posts that talked about the 11 woman candidates for Mayors in the Albanian language sample (Arbëneshë Kuqi, Floretë Zejnullahu, Kaltrina Salihu, Leonora Bunjkau-Morina, Sibel Halimi, Hyrije Dobrunaj, Arta Ahmeti-Xhylani, Gralleva, Ardiana Qorraaj, Mimoza Kusari-Lila, Drena Podrimcaku) whereby 373 posts with a total of 5,567 comments were analyzed.



	No. of articles	No. of posts with ZERO comments	No. of posts with comments	No. of comments	Positive comments	Negative comments	Misogyne comments
Arbënesha Kuqi	80	51	29	612	52	529	31
Floretë Zejnullahu	147	104	43	356	192	128	36
Kaltrina Salihu	81	41	20	100	84	15	1
Leonora Morina Bunjaku	166	113	53	728	364	305	59
Sibel Halimi	238	185	53	932	402	383	147
Hyri Dobrunaj	233	173	60	176	139	34	3
Arta Ahmeti Xhylani	119	111	8	23	16	6	1
Anduena Gllareva	11	6	5	5	3	2	0
Ardiana Qorraaj	55	39	16	79	72	6	1
Mimoza Kusari Lila	418	338	80	2,556	378	843	1,335
Drena Podrimçaku	8	2	6	0	0	0	0
Total	1,556	1,163	373	5,567	1,702	2,251	1,614



Arbënesha Kuqi was a candidate for mayor of Gjakova from the ranks of the Democratic Party of Kosovo. 80 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Arbënesha Kuqi directly, of which 51 posts had no comments while the other 29 posts had a total of 612 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 52 comments had positive content, 529 negative content and 31 comments with misogynistic language content.

Comments:

E te vraft zoti po vujn per buk me kushte te dobta ti lyp strehim per qen bash mir qe po te fryn me komente



1

Ti kandidate per kryetare te Gjakoves 🤔🤔🤔🤔 , ty ftyra te kallxon qe je e prisht .



6

E për **Kudra** !! Endacake si Psh Ti , si qëndron puna ?



6

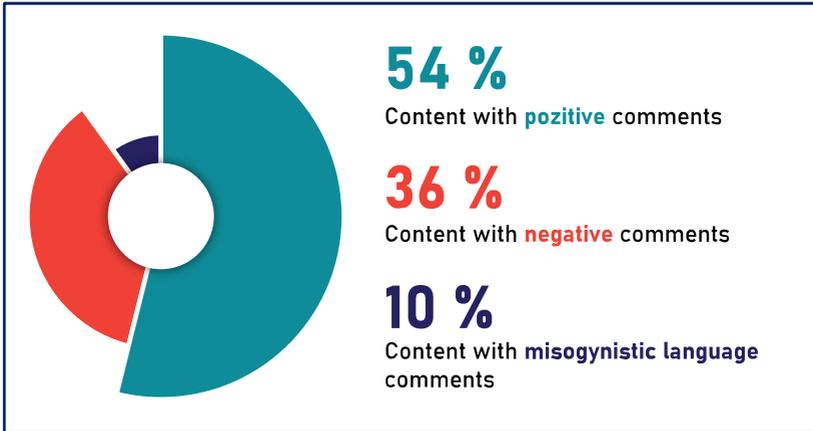
Kuku qfar kandidate e nivelit 0 🤔🤔🤔🤔 qe ne qka jeni met pdk



2

Mjerim vetem ta ndegjosh kete titull oj qur njerzimi eshte ne hall per te jetuar jo qent

Po a edhe ty t dul me hy n politik po shko moj merru me punt tjera se tybe dy lidhje si paske nderto syrehimore per ata njetz te varfer qe flejn rrugve e qe lusin neper shoqsta bamirsie meja bo zgjedhjen .se sa per qent endacak meri strehoni neper shtepit e juja se kogja si ju jon



Floretë Zejnullahu, was a candidate for Mayor of Besiana from the ranks of the Democratic Party of Kosovo. 147 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Floretë Zejnullahu directly, of which 104 posts had no comments while the other 43 posts had a total of 356 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 192 comments had positive content, 128 negative content and 36 comments with misogynistic language content.

Comments

Le ti pastron durt dhe ta qeveris kuzhinen me naj

ik bre *paturrakja* nihere



A po rritesh bacit



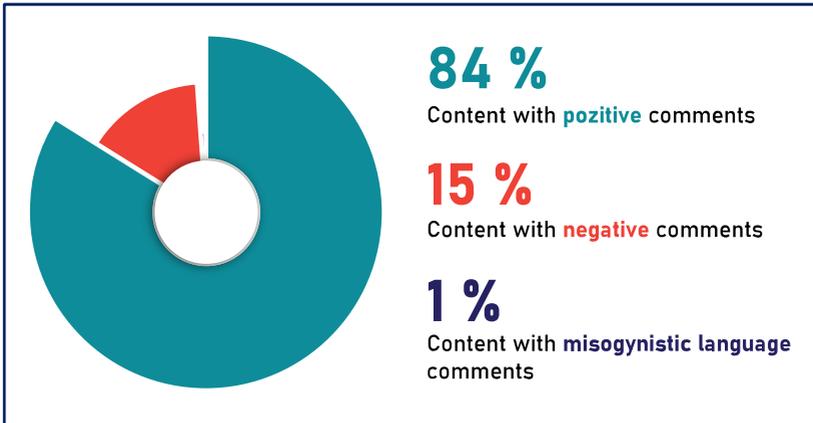
Kjo qika e paska hup udhen



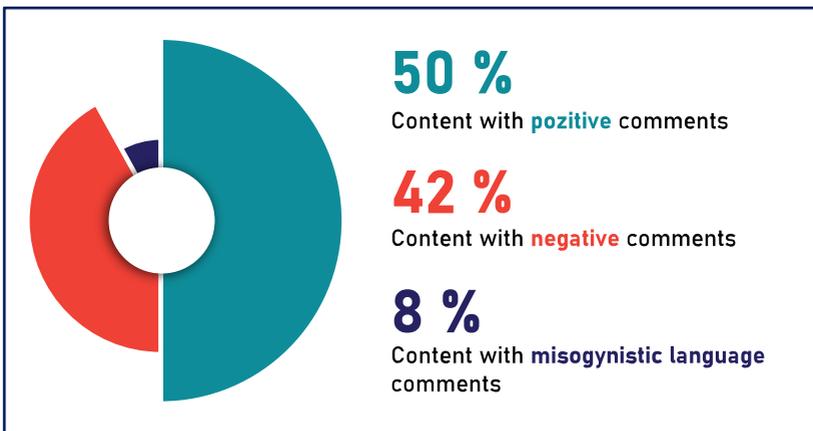
oo gjynahit qka te bonen ty qe te qiten atu po ti as per asmbleiste tybe sishe

Nshpi tane tmujsh me la naj en e me dur tpastra bon se per ktu larg je

Më mirë është me u merr ti me ish-dashnorat e tu se qe po mirresh me qytetar zot e nderume se tash djali i Sami Lushtakut te ka ne grusht po don me ja jep podujeven Mergimit a harro *...*



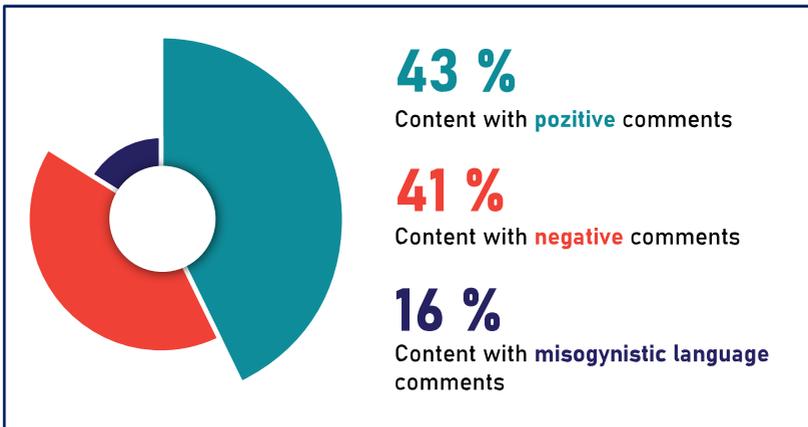
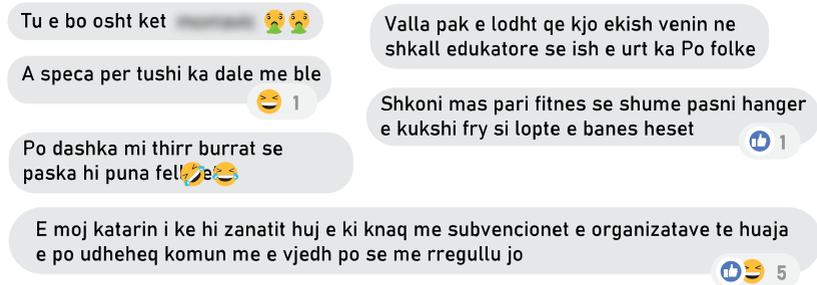
Kaltrina Salihu was a candidate for mayor of Dragash municipality from the ranks of Vetëvendosje Movement and “Guxo” List. 81 posts were made on the Facebook platform which included Kaltrina Salihu directly, of which 41 posts had no comments while the other 20 posts had a total of 100 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 84 comments had positive content, 15 negative content and 1 comment with misogynistic language content.



Leonora Bunjaku Morina was a candidate for Mayor of Gjilan from the ranks of the Democratic Party of Kosovo. 166 posts were made

on the Facebook platform which included Leonora Bunjaku-Morina directly, of which 113 posts had no comments while the other 53 posts had a total of 728 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 364 comments had positive content, 305 negative content and 59 comments with misogynistic language content.

Comments



Sibel Halimi, was a candidate for Mayor of Ferizaj municipality from the ranks of the Democratic League of Kosovo. 238 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Sibel Halimi directly, of which 185 posts had no comment while the other 53 posts had a total of 932 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 402 comments had positive content, 383 negative content and 147 comments with misogynistic language content.

Comments

Kandidat mat lodht se di a ka Pas
ldk ja naj her qe 20 vjet



2

Lej bre kto pun
se si di ti.

Raki t'fortë pijnë kto t'Ldk-së
Përshëndetje Zonja Tapë 😊

Oj gerdhaj qfar Uji
t'nxet a t'ftoft



4

ik moj ti sun i ke zgjidh problemet e familjes tane
e po zgjidh probleme tjera hahhah



8

kjo gjaja qe ish bre

Kap more nreqni trotuaret se i murrnt ngaf njerzt qe ecin
e sidomos nanat me fmi lej trotinetet oj inxhe



5

hahahahaha po kjo flokt e veta smun me i rregullu e po e rregullon
problemin e ujit 😂😂😂😂 qe ma keni qit nje gazz

Ti me zgjidh problem a! ik moj ik mos te shef kush
naper ara se pot vrasin per lepurushe

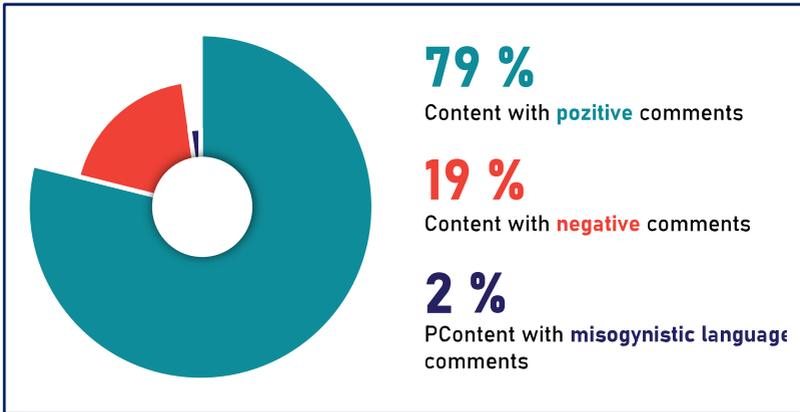


2

Mos e ke ngatru me naj sen tjeter elektrik qe mi ja fut vetit n'përdorim
Lopo ...
Hello N'Kosov po jetojmë



4



Hyri Dobrunaj was a candidate for Mayor of Deçan municipality from the ranks of the Democratic League of Kosovo. 233 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Hyrie Dobrunaj directly, of which 173 posts had no comment while the other 60 posts had a total of 176 comments which were analyzed. Of this number 139 comments had positive content, 34 negative content and 3 comments with misogyny content.

Comments

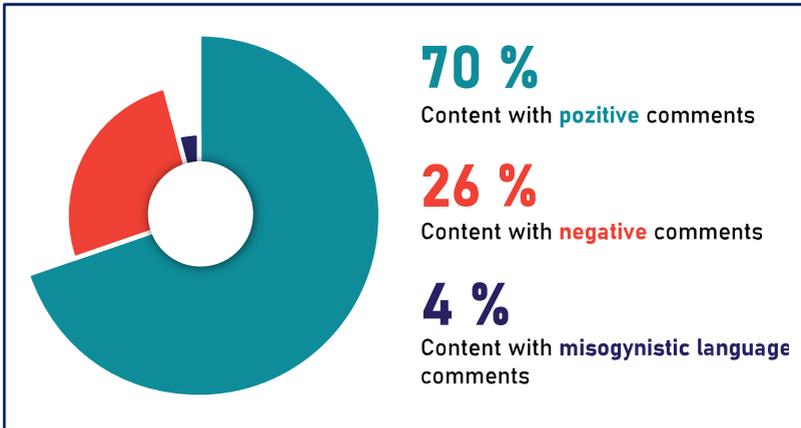
Hec.moj.shko.

E paske kostumin Pa lidhje! 🤪

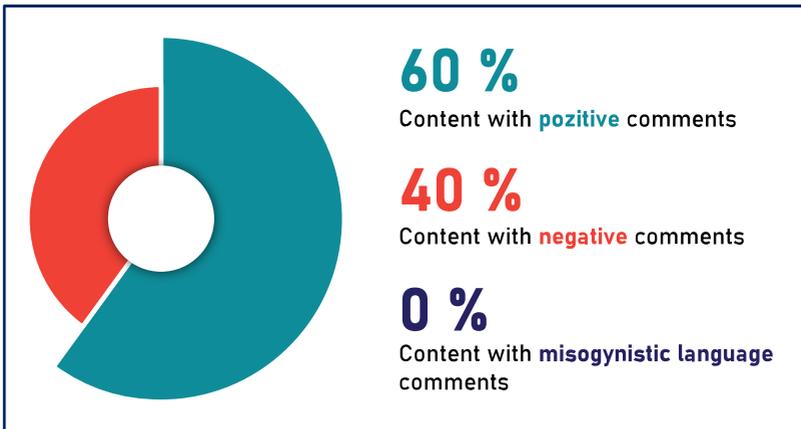
Uuu hori hori ma shum
ka me mar vota nje
asambelist i aak s se ti

Ty tkom pa ndebat ni nat krejt ok vec
teper e pasjellshme guhen 3 metra



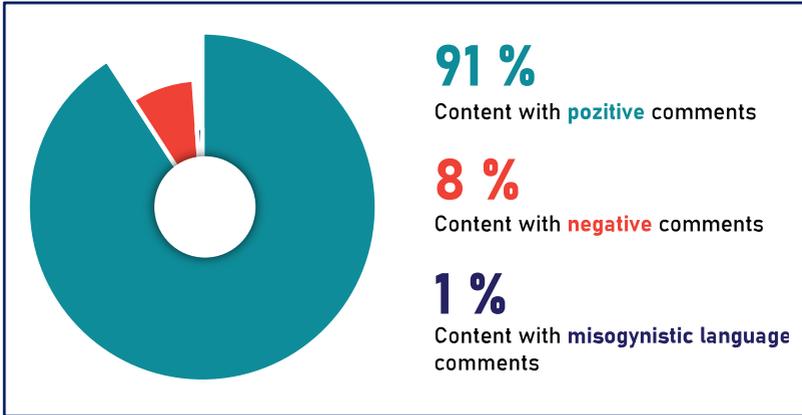


Arta Ahmeti Xhylani was a candidate for Mayor of Drenas municipality from the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo. 119 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Arta Ahmeti Xhylani directly, of which 111 posts had no comment while the other 8 posts had a total of 23 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 26 comments had positive content, 6 negative content and 1 comment with misogyny content.

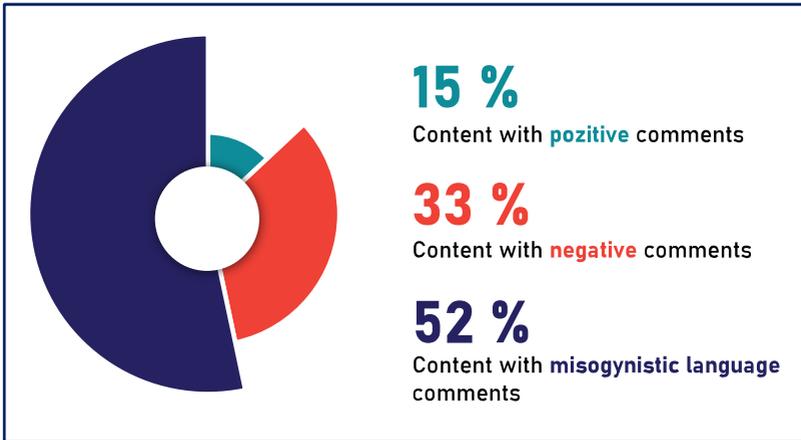


Anduena Gllareva was a candidate for Mayor of Drenas municipality from the Democratic League of Kosovo. 11 posts were

made on the Facebook Platform which included Anduena Gllareva directly, of which 6 posts had no comments while the other 5 posts had a total of 5 comments which were analyzed. Of this number, 3 comments had positive content, 2 negative content and 0 comments with misogyny content.



Ardiana Qorraj was a candidate for Mayor of Deçan municipality from the Democratic Party of Kosovo. 55 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Ardiana Qorra directly, of which 39 posts had no comments while the other 16 posts had a total of 79 comments which were analyzed. Of this number 72 comments had positive content, 6 negative content and 1 comment with misogynistic language content.



Mimoza Kusari Lila, candidate for mayor of Gjakova municipality from the ranks of Vetëvendosje Movement was one of the women candidates for mayor with the most posts on Facebook. 418 posts on the Facebook Platform included Mimoza Kusari-Lila directly, of which 338 posts had no comments while the other 80 posts had a total of 2556 comments which were analyzed. Of this number 378 comments had positive content, 843 negative content and 1335 comments with misogynistic language content.

Comments

Po e meriton mi rujt dhit kjo 🤔🤔 Jooo nuk i duhet gjakoves nji 🤔🤔 Oj 🐮 ti e meriton 🤔

E kisha ba drejtoresh ne Asamblin Shota.

👍😂 12

si [redacted] doken.. kurfar hajrin keta zbajn per popull..

👍😂 27

[redacted] Nanen me ba me t'dal naj kun naten kto ethet n'bark ti shtin

👍😂 17

Kushe kjo eshte e mire me shkue per frizerk aaaaahhh

Ehhh,cfare politikane i kemi,si thonin pleqt si pevaqicat e kafeve.

👍 11

[redacted] mos u korit burr pastruse te wc puplike pi pranojm hahaaa te pershendes

Vallëzoni pak, nga se vallëzimi është profesion i Mimosës!

👍😂 7

Terr tiki-tiki , a ka kush naj cop buke more se kokan met pulat pa çakat 🤔🤔

👍😂 9

Drena Podrimçaku was a candidate for Mayor of Peja municipality from the National Front Party. 8 posts were made on the Facebook Platform which included Drena Podrimçaku directly, of which 2 posts had no comment while the other 6 posts had a total of 0 comments which were analyzed. Of this number 0 comments had positive content, 0 negative content and 0 comments with misogynistic language content.

7 | Conclusions

Information disorders have been an integral part of these elections as well, including both the election campaign and the run-off campaign. Online portals, Facebook groups and Twitter accounts sometimes post articles and news which may or may not intentionally affect the integrity of the electoral process, attacking representatives of political entities or political entities as a whole. Exaggerated headlines, distortion of statements and news content only in order to increase readership should not be the goal of portals that post news for the first time but also when they repost articles from other portals. In addition to posting the news for the first time, whose content must be verified, the same must happen by other media when they repost the news. Political parties should be careful about the misogynistic content towards women and promote as much as possible the importance of inclusion of women in the political scene. It is also important that every post and article sponsored in the media lists the exact sponsorship, as this would increase the transparency of political entities and would contribute to increasing citizens' trust in the media. During this research sponsored articles were observed, particularly in the runoff elections, when the potential readership and interactions were much higher despite the lower number of posted articles with information disorder. Regarding external influence, it has been noticed that there are more articles with such characteristics in the Serbian sample than in the Albanian language one. This goes on to show the continuous impact that the state of Serbia aims to have on citizens of Serbian ethnicity living in Kosovo, thus trying to influence especially the continuous strengthening of the Serbian List. Information disorders are a global trend which occurs even in the most democratic countries; such a trend has of course been inevitable in Kosovo, but the continuous growth of this trend does not contribute to fair information of citizens and naturally diminishes citizens' trust in the media. Therefore, the media but also political parties and their

representatives must be extra careful in disseminating information to readers, in order to inform them fairly and contribute to the integrity of the elections and the political situation in the country in general.

8 | Recommendations

Public information should be provided accurately, without the aim of bringing personal gain or harming the other party. Dissemination of untrue, distorted or hate speech should not be an option, either by online portals or by certain individuals. Freedom of expression ends where the freedom of others is violated. Based on the conclusions from this report, recommendations have been aimed at representatives of portals, political parties, journalists, analysts and citizens. Some of the recommendations are addressed to all the groups listed below.

8.1. Recommendations to portals

1

Identify all facts before publishing the news

2

Do not promote political distortion and hate speech

3

Report carefully and responsibly on religious groups

4

When reporting on racial language and hate speech, do not use the word "racist"

5

When announcing any political results, ensure that there is no hate speech and racist language

6

Provide facts and figures and avoid bias in the reporting of results

7

All articles generated by the portals should have a note that they are generated by the political entity or the journalist of the political entity

8.2. Recommendations to Political Entities

1

Do not promote political disinformation which incites hatred among citizens

3

Political parties and political leaders must refrain from hatred, hatred and incitement to language

5

Political parties must make campaigns open and transparent results

2

Do not use credit language against someone

4

Political parties and political leaders should not be involved in disinformation campaigns

8.3. Recommendations to citizens

1

Check and verify the accuracy of information, the author, the date of publication, and the link of the post

3

Read the article in the original and do not distribute information based solely on the headline of the article

2

Verify the truthfulness of the news before sharing them on social media

4

Refrain from hate speech and avoid language that incites on social networks

9 | Annexes

The following are the lists of online media, Facebook pages, Facebook groups and Twitter accounts which have been monitored.

9.1. Summary of the number of news downloaded and reviewed

Sample in Albanian language

	Facebook groups		Facebook pages		Online Media		Twitter		Total
	Election Campaign	Runoff	Election Campaign	Runoff	Election Campaign	Runoff	Election Campaign	Runoff	
Downloaded articles	937	168	5,288	4,325	41,930	21,302	1,067	90	75,107
Articles/posts monitored	937	168	1,000	398	1,000	344	300	90	4,237
Articles with information disorder	17	11	53	22	51	12	13	1	180
Total No. of shares from other media	44	5	38	19	86	12	N/A	1	205
Total No. of interactions	27,098	4,272	74,986	21,000	37,702	54,339	N/A	N/A	219,397
Potential No. of readers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,622,870	3,328,671	2,136	625	4,954,302

Sample in Serbian language

	Facebook groups		Facebook pages		Online Media		Twitter		Total
	Election Campaign	Runoff							
Downloaded articles	N/A	N/A	119	38	43,566	2,112	4,191	N/A	50,026
Articles/posts monitored	N/A	N/A	119	38	1,000	344	300	N/A	1,801
Articles with information disorder	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	45	1	8	N/A	57
Total No. of shares from other media	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	29	1	N/A	N/A	32
Total No. of interactions	N/A	N/A	456	N/A	31,922	220	148	N/A	32,746
Potential No. of readers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,649,729	8,260	14,695	N/A	1,672,684

9.2. Definitions of terminology on information disorder content

Termi	Definicioni
Information disorders	Information disorders are intentional or unintentional dissemination and publication of untrue, manipulated, exaggerated information or information containing harsh, sexist and hate speech.
Potential readership	Potential readership means how many people have potentially read the article from articles on online portals. The data for each item were generated from the platforms with which we did the monitoring.
Interactions	Interactions involve all the actions of readers in relation to a post on Facebook or Twitter, which includes likes, comments, article sharing or other reactions like happy, sad, nervous and surprised.
Disinformation	Unverifiable, false or misleading information, created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to mislead the public internationally, which may cause public harm, threats to democratic political and policy-making processes, and the public good.
Hate speech	Abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudice against a particular group
Misogyny	Hatred, disgust or prejudice against women
Online violence	Use of digital devices or services online to engage in activities that result in physical, psychological, or emotional self-harm or harm to another person.
Exaggerated headlines	Title created to make readers want to click on a hyperlink, especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest.

List of acronyms

AAK	Alliance for the Future of Kosovo
AKR	New Kosovo Alliance
D4D	Democracy for Development
LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
LVV	Self-Determination Movement
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction Test
PDK	Democratic Party of Kosovo
SHBA	United States of America

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts who were increasingly worried that the state-building exercise had neglected democracy.

D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated citizenry that participates fully in the public space and utilizes the public arena of representation and decision-making to deliberate and build consensus over resource allocation that is efficient, smart, long-term, and that brings about equitable development.

D4D influences specific policy, promotes a cross-sectorial approach to problem solving, and tackles the institutional routine of decision making by recommending incremental improvements and operates with maximum effectiveness in order to fully promote Kosovo's stabilization and democratic development.

For more information about D4D's activities please visit our website: www.d4d-ks.org



USAID
NGA POPULLI AMERIKAN
OD AMERIČKOG NARODA

