"hd

MONITORING OF THE DECLARATION FOR GOOD CONDUCT IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

MONITORING OF THE DECLARATION FOR GOOD CONDUCT IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Pristina, December 2021

Prepared by: Democracy for Development (D4D)

———

Declaration signed by

6 Political Parties
4 Media outlets
7 CSOs

Social media monitored

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Youtube
- Website/Blogs
- Viber/WhatsApp

Monitoring Unit

10 young journalists were involved in monitoring of the content on social media during the election campaign

Key findings

27 municipalities

197 violations

Facebook **76 %**
Youtube **18 %**
Website **4 %**
Other **4 %**

62 % Hate speech
4 % Disinformation
4 % Meme
3 % Fake News
2 % Out-of-context information
2 % Personal harassment
5 % Other

Social media in which violations occurred the most

Nature of reported violations

Type of alleged violator

Political parties targeted the most

Political parties with most violations

34 % Media outlets
27 % Political Parties
25 % Individual candidates
8 % Party supporters
6 % Other

Vetevendosje! **67 %**
AAK **14 %**
LDK **11 %**
PDK **6 %**

32 % Vetevendosje!
27 % AAK
17 % LDK
16 % PDK

Table of Content

Introduction

On October 17, 2021, Kosovo held local elections to elect municipal mayors and representatives of municipal assemblies in 38 municipalities of Kosovo. In 21 municipalities where the candidates for mayor did not win the majority in the first round (50% +1), a second-round election was held on November 14, 2021. Despite the shortcomings in the legal framework and recurring challenges with respect to administration of out-of-country voting and lack of pluralism in Serb-majority municipalities, the elections were widely regarded as free and fair and representative of the will of the people.

During the 2021 local elections, Democracy for Development implemented a pilot project supported by the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), which aimed to engage political parties, candidates, media and civil society organizations in signing a Declaration of Good Conduct in Social Media. By signing these declarations, these stakeholders undertook commitments relevant to combatting hate speech, fake news, disinformation, slanderous language and other content that could negatively affect the election environment. The declarations were prepared in collaboration with election stakeholders in workshops held in August 2021 and were tailored to the specific actors and their role. The declarations were signed by 6 political parties, four media outlets (Including Council for Written Media of Kosovo), and 7 civil society organizations. The list of entities that signed the Code of Conduct is presented in Annex A.

The project established a monitoring unit, comprised of 10 persons with educational background in journalism, who were involved in monitoring of the content on social media during the election campaign. The scope of the monitoring took place during the campaign period and only for the content in social media. For more information about the monitoring, please review the methodology section below in Annex 6.

This was a pilot project and among the first of its kind implemented in Kosovo. The project was welcomed by political parties, civil society, media and other election stakeholders who view fake news, hate speech and other slanderous content as an emerging and growing challenge encountered in elections in Kosovo. The project benefited from the lessons learned and experiences of implementing similar projects in other countries by HD Centre.[1]

This project was a pilot to explore the validity and possibilities of monitoring. The findings of this report present an overall summary of the content covered by the monitoring unit (197 violations reported), but may not include all the content that was made public in the social media as the project was implemented with a limited number of monitors due to its scale. The findings therefore present a general picture of the issues and patterns found

---

[1] For more information about HD Centre and previous project please visit the website: https://www.hdcentre.org

for the 2021 local elections, with many lessons learned and recommendations that are to be taken for consideration in the future.

The implementation team employed a number of quality measures in assessing the violations reported by the monitoring unit. This report should nevertheless be read with the understanding that different stakeholders, entities or persons may have different interpretations as to whether a piece of content meets the threshold to be considered as a violation (i.e. hate speech or disinformation). Having different views on findings presented in this report is therefore entirely possible.

The electoral legislation does not provide for a definition of hate speech, although general provisions exist that prohibit it. For example, during the campaigning period a political entity, its supporters or candidates are prohibited from "using language, in oral or written form, which incites or provokes, or is likely to incite or provoke, another person to commit an act of violence against other persons or property, or which incites or is likely to incite hatred towards others, or publishing or using pictures, symbols or any other material that has or is likely to have such effects."[2]

The prohibited acts are further enshrined in the Code of Conduct for Political Entities, Candidates and their Supporters, which was also adopted as a Regulation (11/2013) by the Central Election Commission. Some examples of acts prohibited by the code of conduct include: destroying materials of other parties, distributing meetings of other parties, preventing journalists to carrying their functions, promising financial rewards for gaining support of voters.[3] There are also a number of other acts prohibited by the electoral law, which if committed, may be sanctioned on the basis of complaints by the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel.[4]

Various anti-discrimination provisions exist also in the Law on Anti-Discrimination, Law on Gender Equality, and Law on Protection or Rights of Communities and their members. However, there remains substantial space to address the legal gaps in electoral law or code of conduct in the future, in light of new and emerging challenges in relation to availability of negative content in the social media.

---

[2] Law on General Elections, Article 33 (l)

[3] For more information, please refer to regulation (11/2013) by the Central Election Commission, Art.4
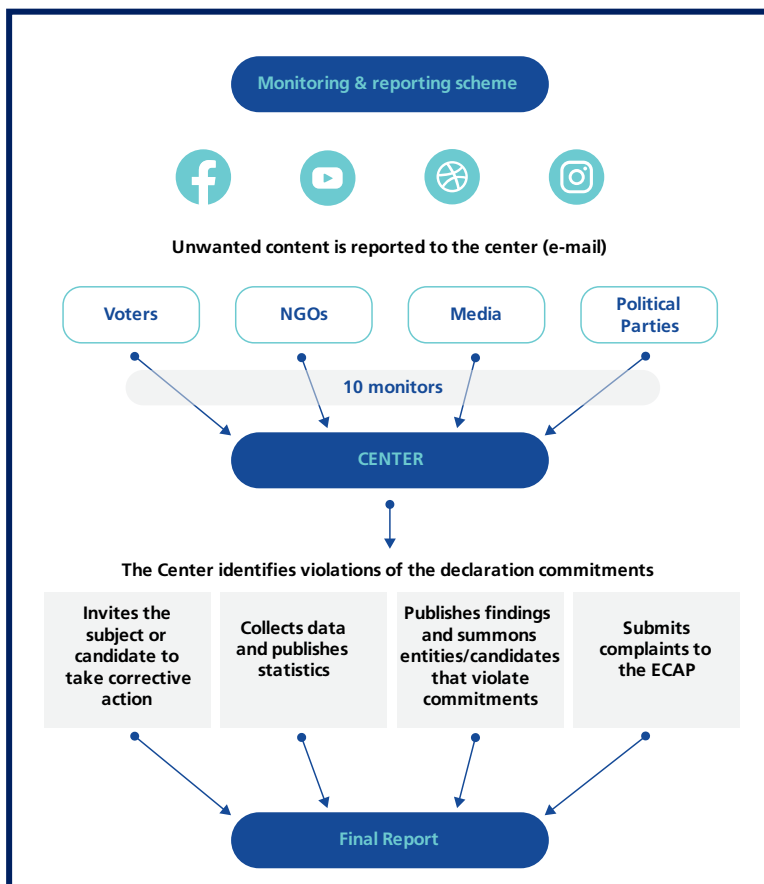
[4] For more information, please refer to regulation (11/2013) by the Central Election Commission, Art.9

Methodology

Scope of monitoring

The monitoring focused on the extent to which political parties, candidates, media, and NGOs respected the commitments they undertook by signing the declarations. The monitoring also covered political parties and other entities that did not sign the code of good conduct.

The monitoring included all Kosovo regions and municipalities. Whilst the monitoring looked at social media use of all parties, monitors also paid attention to social media content that affected non-majority communities, women, and other vulnerable groups.

Monitoring & reporting scheme

Unwanted content is reported to the center (e-mail)

| Voters | NGOs | Media | Political Parties |

10 monitors

CENTER

The Center identifies violations of the declaration commitments

| Invites the subject or candidate to take corrective action | Collects data and publishes statistics | Publishes findings and summons entities/candidates that violate commitments | Submits complaints to the ECAP |

Final Report

The social media platforms monitored included but were not limited to: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Youtube, Website/Blogs, Viber/Whatsapp. The monitoring covered all political and election advertising and content created by third parties, supporters, and other actors in broadcast and written form, including, posts, declarations, responses, and any other forms of communication. Crowdtangle was also used as a tool for identifying stories, social media performance, although it has limitations in terms of data that can be tracked. [5]

The content that was monitored emerged from Kosovo's legislation, including laws pertaining to elections, and code of conduct for political parties, candidates and their

---

[5] Annex A, page 23 of the report.

supporters, and law against discrimination. The type of content monitored included: hate speech, degrading language, fake news, disinformation, and other slanderous or malicious content that was assessed as damaging the electoral environment. A limitation of the analysis is that it was impossible to have a fully representative sample of incidents.[6]

Monitoring unit

D4D established a monitoring mechanism composed of 10 trained students of journalism (hereinafter, "monitors") who were responsible for monitoring the commitments undertaken by the political parties, candidates, media and NGOs. The monitors were representative and inclusive of all ethnic communities in Kosovo, and were assigned to monitor specific regions and political parties and candidates. The monitors were involved to monitor the election period from the moment of commencement of the campaign to the announcement of results, on both first and second round of elections (16 september to 15 october first round, and from 3rd to 12th November second round).

In addition to the monitors, the project actively encouraged stakeholders and citizens to monitor content on social media and submit any remarks and complaints to respective election complaints bodies. This was done through calls posted in D4D's social media page and posting of infographics during the campaign. A separate e-mail account was established by D4D to collect reports and evidence of violations committed. Voters and other stakeholders were invited to report undesirable content. Reports were also encouraged from stakeholders such as parties, candidates, media and CSOs.

Quality assurance

HD social media staff conducted training of the monitors, including on how to conduct the monitoring, monitoring tools and techniques, and how to make judgments about the content that they receive or report. The training also equipped data collectors with knowledge about Facebook Community Standards and Advertising Policies. D4D's senior program managers and the project trainers provided daily guidance to the monitors, and ensured a quality check of the reports received. The monitors were also required to follow-up in the reports, and conduct background checking to verify the source of the information, and examine the evidence.

The data from the monitoring was compiled in a joint database, which included the link or evidence to every violation that was reported. The database was updated each day as

---

[6] During the 2021 municipal elections parties and candidates relied mainly on social media to conduct the campaign, which increase the amount of content posted and disseminated through social media. This was a pilot project and with only 10 monitors it was not possible to monitor every party, candidate or supporter in the social media, but the project team did their best to capture the main content and identify patterns and findings that could inform a future project.

___

new violations were reported, and integrity measures were implemented to ensure that each violation is documented.

Engagement of stakeholders

During August 2021, D4D organized several focus group discussions with political parties, media, civil society organizations, and election commission to identify the priority issues and discuss commitments relevant to the declaration. The findings from the focus groups were used to design the monitoring methodology and to draft the declarations that were later signed.

D4D organized a Signing Ceremony of the Declaration of Conduct in the Social Media during the 2021 local elections, which was also received global distribution by the HD Centre. The ceremony was attended by representatives of political parties, media, civil society and other electoral stakeholders. Not all the parties that competed in the election signed the code of conduct, however some of the main political parties in both government coalition and opposition signed.

Key findings

Overall

The monitoring unit reported a total of 197 violations which occurred in 27 municipalities across all regions in Kosovo. The municipalities with the highest proportion of violations reported were Prishtina (31%), followed by Prizren (9%) and Gjakova (8%). In these municipalities the stakes were high, and the competition was heated as all three municipalities held a second-round election, and the margin of victory between the first and second candidate was relatively small. Violations were also reported in Serb-majority municipalities including in North Mitrovica (6%), Kllokot (3%) and Gracanica.

Figure 1. Proportion of violations reported, by municipality
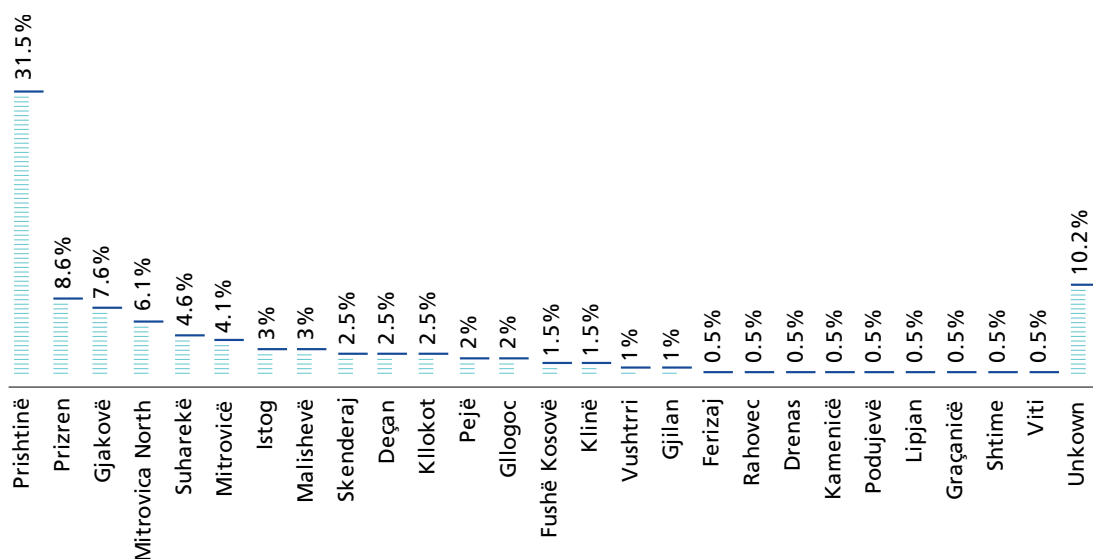
Most of the reported violations occurred in the period before the first round of elections (September 16 to October 15, 2021). This could be due to a large number of candidates, including candidates competing in municipal assembly elections, compared to the second round where the proportion of reported violations reduced significantly. The majority of violations reported (53%) occurred two weeks prior to first-round election day, though a considerable proportion of violations (5%) also occurred during the silence period and election day (October 16-17, 2021) of the first round. The tension decreased after the first round of elections, and increased again in the period before the second-round elections (Nov 1 – 12, 17%).

Figure 2. Reported violations, by period of occurrence
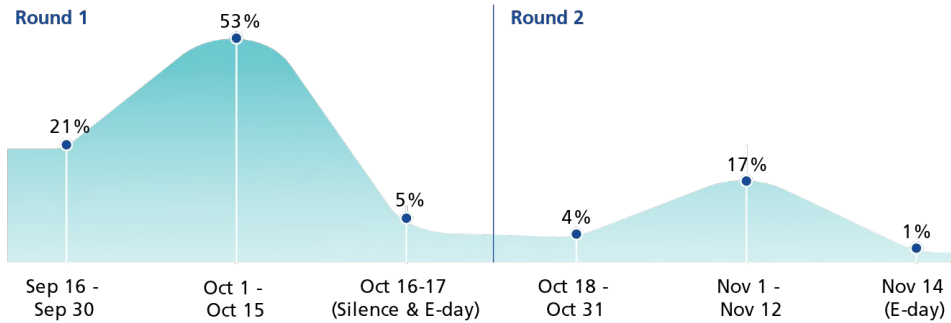
Nearly two-thirds of the violations reported pertained to use of hate speech (62%). The other violations recorded were in form of disinformation (4%), meme (4%), fake news (3%), out-of context information (2%), and personal harassment (2%). There were a considerable number of other violations (5%) such as use of children during the campaign, breach of silence period, and other violations that fall within the Code of Conduct, and that were also noted for the purpose of this report.

Figure 3. Proportion of reported violations, by type of violation
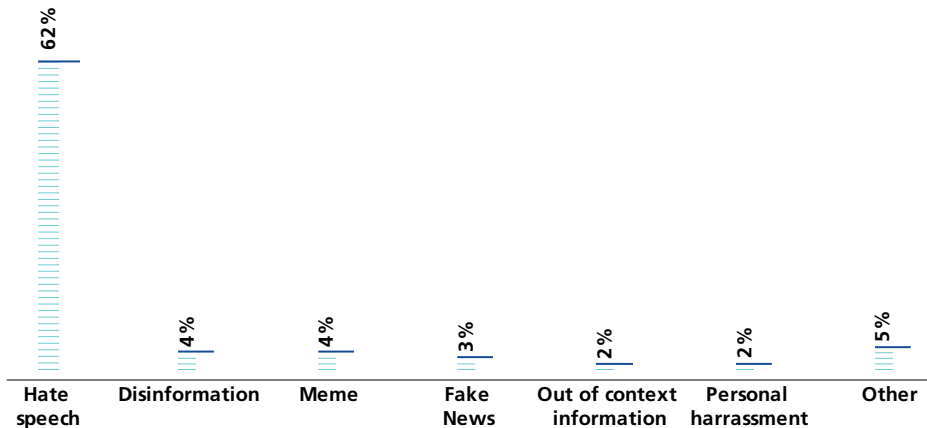
In terms of the entities that committed the violations, more than half of the reported violations were by political parties (27%), or the individual candidates (25%) competing in the election. A considerable proportion were also committed by the media outlets (34%), and party supporters (8%). Very few violations were recorded being committed from unidentified sources, third party accounts and NGOs.

Figure 4. Proportion of violations reported, by alleged violators

- **34%**   Media outlet
- **27%**   Political Party
- **25%**   Individual Candidate
- **8%**   Party supporter
- **5%**   Bots/unidentified
- **1%**   NGO
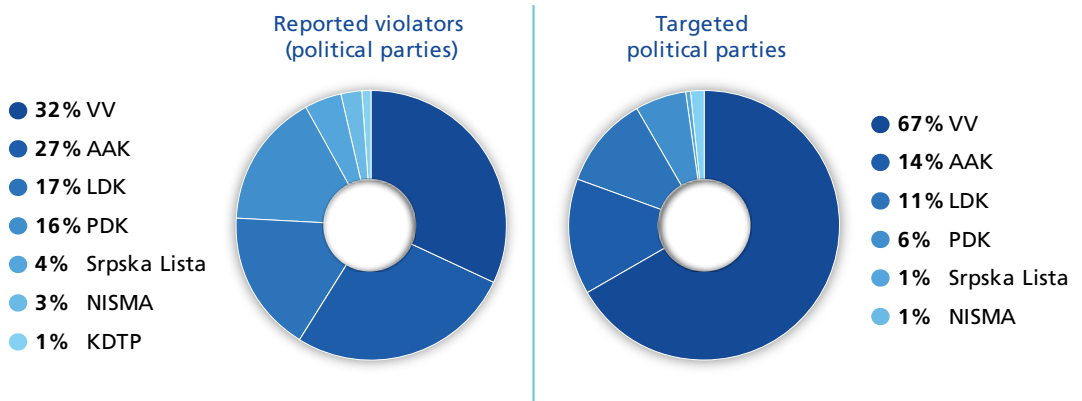- **1%**   Third party account
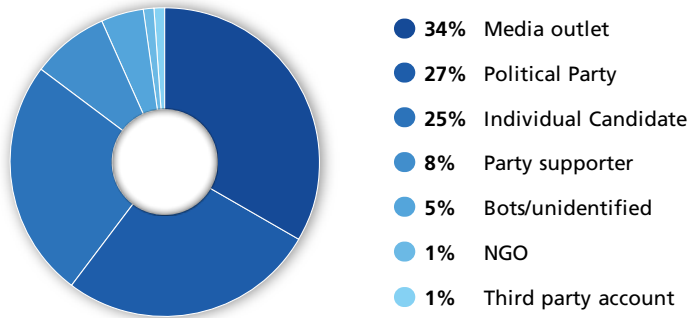
The data indicate that political parties that reportedly violated the most are also the parties that are targeted the most by negative content such as hate speech, disinformation, slanderous language etc. The data show the parties with most reported violations were Vetevendosje! (32%), Aleanca per Ardhmerine e Kosoves (27%), followed by Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves (17%), and Partia Demokratike e Kosoves (16%).

More than half of reported violations done by parties and candidates

The data show that political parties that were targeted the most are VV, which leads with nearly two-thirds (67%), followed by AAK (14%), LDK (11%), and PDK (6%). As we will see further in the report, the reason why VV is targeted the most is because a considerable proportion of violations conducted by media or media analysts were targeting VV candidates. As the party that won more than 50% of the national vote in the general election held in February 2021, VV is also the party that governs at central level and therefore its candidates receive most attention by media and other actors.

Figure 5. Reported violators (political parties) versus targeted political parties

Reported violators
(political parties)

Targeted
political parties

- **32%** VV
- **27%** AAK
- **17%** LDK
- **16%** PDK
- **4%** Srpska Lista
- **3%** NISMA
- **1%** KDTP

- **67%** VV
- **14%** AAK
- **11%** LDK
- **6%** PDK
- **1%** Srpska Lista
- **1%** NISMA

The monitoring team conducted monitoring of a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Websites and other chat platforms such

as Viber and WhatsApp. The political party campaign activity was concentrated and carried largely via online platforms, partly also as a measure to safeguard the public against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The largest proportion of reported violations were reported in Facebook (76%), followed by Youtube (18%), and Website (4%) – with the last being particularly relevant for the online media portals. The data in this graph do not mean that violations posted in one social media (ex. Facebook) were also not posted in other social media platforms. The data only shows the social media where the monitors have seen the content. Of those violations that were committed, Facebook remains the platform where most of the negative content was produced and shared in, as it is also the most used platform in Kosovo, with 1.1 Million monthly active users. Most of the Youtube violations pertain to live media debates between the candidates which were streamed on Youtube.

Figure 6. Percentage of hate speech posts, by social media
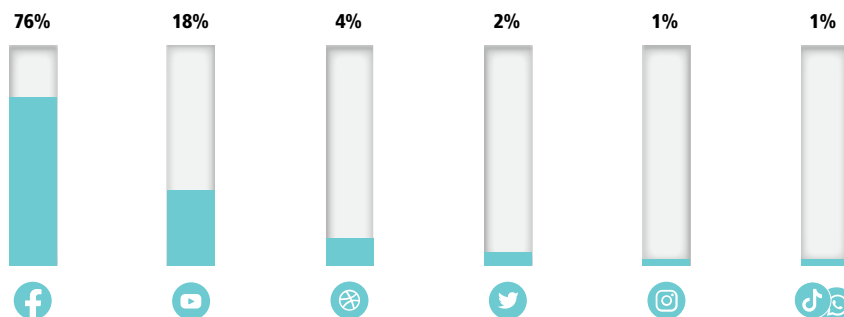
In terms of the format through which violations were posted in social media, the main form of violation is the written form (42%), followed by video or media debates (37%) streamed online, and post that includes an image (17%). One limitation of the project was that it was unable to monitor the comments which made up a low proportion in terms of violations reported in this report, but nevertheless remains the most common form of expression for negative content. In the future, consideration should be given to monitoring the comments in social media, which requires allocation of more significant resources and monitors across all municipalities.

42% Written posts   **37%** Videos   **17%** Post & image

1% Stories   **3%** Comments
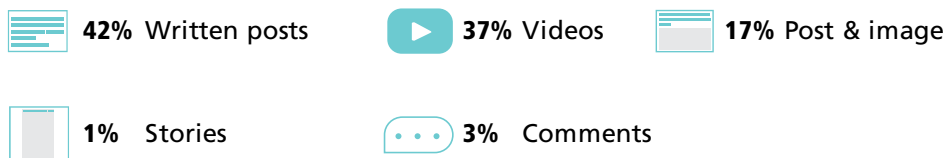
Political parties and candidates

The Law on General Elections of Kosovo provides that "All political entities, their supporters, and all other institutions are obliged to respect the fundamental principles

set forth in this article and take all measures to ensure the conduct of free, fair and well-informed elections within a climate of democratic tolerance, peace and respect for the rule of law."[7]

During the campaigning period, a Political Entity and its supporters or candidates are prohibited from "using language, in oral or written form, which incites or provokes, or is likely to incite or provoke, another person to commit an act of violence against other persons or property, or which incites or is likely to incite hatred towards others, or publishing or using pictures, symbols or any other material that has or is likely to have such effects."[8]

As indicated previously in this report, political parties, their candidates and supporters account for the majority of the violations recorded as part of the monitoring conducted within this project. This section of the report presents only some of the selected, illustrative violations used by leaders, candidates or members of various political parties during the campaign.

In a TV debate between the candidates competing in Kamenica, the Vetevendosje candidate used slanderous language against the other candidate:

The statement was repeated at least three times during this debate by the VV candidate.

> **This shows the face of this [miserable person]**

'Kjo tregon fytyrën e mjeranit politik' - 'Më vjen keq pë edukatën tënde' -...

---

[7] Law on General Elections, Article 32

[8] Law on General Elections, Article 33 (l)

Although the leader of AAK was not himself a candidate in this election, he was quoted in numerous instances using hate speech or degrading language. In at least one instance, the AAK leaders declared:

Albin Kurti is a thief

Haradinaj: Albin Kurti është hajn

Such allegations, which are common also across other parties, were made without any evidence or information that would render a need for further investigation on the matter.

The NISMA leader also used hate speech in one of the declarations made.

wimps, unknowledgeable, children in government

Limaj: Kurrë Kosova nuk ka pasur njerëz më qyqana, më të padijshëm e më fëmijë në qeverisje

As it can be noted one of the media platforms highlighted the statement made by NISMA leader. In several instances the media was reinforcing the hate speech used by politicians, by either selecting the key words and highlighting them.
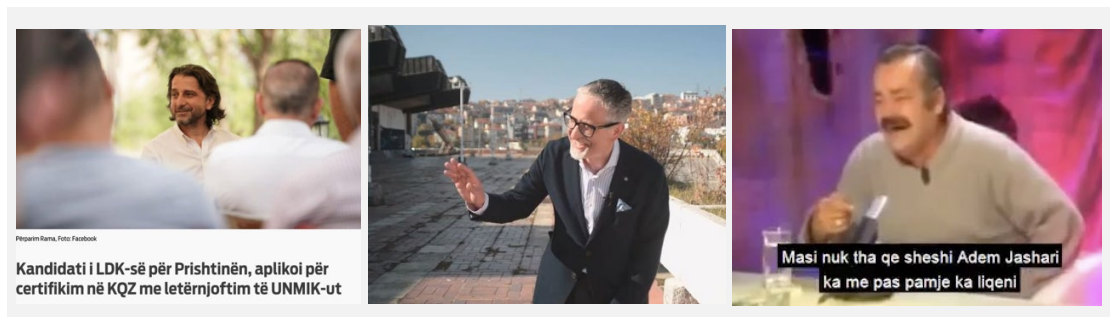
As it can be noted one of the media platforms highlighted the statement made by NISMA leader. In several instances the media was reinforcing the hate speech used by politicians, by either selecting the key words and highlighting them.

Another statement was made by a member of parliament (former candidate of Lista Vjosa on behalf of VV list), who declared:

platelicker, fraudulent, boneless [...] how low the village has fallen for "Lugovists" [...] go lick together....

INDEKSONLINE.NET
Haxhi Avdyli për koalicionet LDK-PDK: Sahanlëpirsa, hani, pini e lëpini bashkë, me 14 nëntor do iu pensionojmë!

This box presents at least three noticeable forms of attack against the candidate from LDK, who was elected as mayor of the Capital of Prishtina. The left was a fake news that Perparim Rama's candidacy may be refused because he applied for certification with UNMIK ID (a form of ID that is no longer in use). The middle photo shows a form of negative campaign through a ironical statement made by the counter-candidate that Perparim Rama will dismantle the Palace of Youth and Sports. The right was use of derogatory and slanderous language.

Përparim Rama, Foto: Facebook

Kandidati i LDK-së për Prishtinën, aplikoi për certifikim në KQZ me letërnjoftim të UNMIK-ut

Masi nuk tha qe sheshi Adem Jashari ka me pas pamje ka liqeni

Attacks were also made against the VV candidate in Prishtina, including publication of various unverified news alleging sexual scandals. As the data indicate, the Capital of Prishtina had a relatively heated race, and around a third of reported violations were committed in Prishtina.

In a TV debate between candidates for mayor for the Drenas Municipality, the mayoral candidate of PDK declared:

You fraudulent owl….

'O hut', 'mashtrues', Lladrovci kapet keq me kandidatët e tjerë të Drenasit

admin October 2, 2021

Another form of hate speech was used by a member of parliament of LDK, who attacked two candidates of Levizja Vetevendosje in one comment. The LDK member of parliament was responding to a statement against the candidate of VV in Podujeva, and using derogatory language against him by calling him a charlatan like Agim Bahtiri.

Charlatan Agim Bahtiri of Llapi

Meta për Shpejtim Bulliqin: Ky Agim Bahtiri i Llapit, s'la personalitet llapjan pa e sha

21/10/2021 | 15:23

Media

As noted earlier in this report, about a third (34%) of the reported violations were committed by media. The violations by media typically occurred due to current or former media analysts, editors and opinion makers using hate speech, slanderous or derogatory language against certain political parties or candidates, for publishing unverified news that show indications of bias in their views.

One major dis-information by the media related to a billboard in the municipality of Prizren, where many media outlets published a cropped image of Prime Minister Albin Kurti (see image on right), stating that the municipal candidate of Prizren is using the image of the Prime Minister for his campaign. This was later clarified after the billboard was shown having the photos of both municipal mayor of Prizren and the leader of VV.

Many media outlets and analysts rushed into publishing the disinformation without verifying the design/photography of the billboard in this case. The post was shared by at least two well-known media analysts, including Berat Buzhala and Vehbi Kajtazi.

The post: The reality:

The monitors reported a number of violations made by media analysts, editors and opinion makers, including Valon Sylaj, Berat Buzhala, and Milaim Zeka, who were reported in numerous instances as posting content that was classified as hate speech or derogatory language.

In one quote, for instance, Valon Sylaj is quoted "Albin Kurti is a liar, foolish person, and he is also registered as a fake veteran, with the help of some retarded commanders". There were a number of other quotes of such kind recorded in the database, expressed in the form of a post, post with image, or participation in a media debate. In some instances, these journalists will quote or share each other posts.

It is of grave concern that the media are aware of the violations that are committed by these media analysts, and they rarely miss an opportunity to use hate speech or slanderous language to attack political figures, yet the media provides opportunities and space for these analysts to express these views.

In other instances, the media committed a violation not by expressing their own views, but by quoting and highlighting slanderous or derogatory language presented by political leaders, candidates or their supporters. It is common that media will highlight the phrases (see image on right highlighted in red), which reinforces the views presented to the audience. Additionally, very often the media will often 'cut' certain parts of televised debates in which the debate is so heated as candidates are using hate speech against each other, and present these video cuts as highlights of the video in order to generate more viewership.

Gender-based reported violations

Only 12 of the 158 (8%) of candidates for mayor in the 38 municipalities of Kosovo were women. Women continue to be under-represented in the lists of candidates for mayors that are appointed by the political parties, and there are a number of barriers that women continue to face in terms of political representation and participation in Kosovo.

Although the number of women mayoral candidates is low, hate speech, slanderous and derogatory language was a common occurrence against women who participated as candidates in the election.

One of the most targeted women candidates was Mimoza Kusari Lila, who was the only women mayor to be elected in Kosovo and serve a term as Mayor of Gjakova. In a live TV debate of candidates for Mayor for Gjakova, the AAK candidate made a number of insulting statements:

> **Wow, what a 'turrec' [insulting word], let me finish one sentence [...] you should not be trusted as who knows what you would do you have changed all of them**

In another video posted on Facebook, a female member of parliament (VV) presents her endorsement of Mimoza Kusari Lila while singing on Facebook. There was a plethora of gender-based insults and derogatory language used against both women.

In one statement, the AAK candidate for the Municipality of Istog made the following declaration:

> ## The cleaning lady is more of a director than the director

Another reported violation was committed by the VV municipal Mayor in Prizren, who in a meeting of the Municipal Assembly of Prizren made insulting statements in response to a previous statement made by a women representative of the municipal assembly.

> ## Streetwomen who slander and lie [...]

In another video that can not be found now on the internet, one of the media analysts asks one of the women candidates running for mayor "What is it like to compete knowing you are not going to win". While this may not qualify as hate language, it certainly presents a degrading statement on the basis of gender.

Ethnic-based reported violations

There were a number of violations reported with ethnic relevance, both in terms of relations within the communities and between the communities in Kosovo. In most part, the social media environment during the campaign, especially in relation to Kosovo Albanian and Serb communities, was significantly affected by events in relation to license plates.

The Kosovo Government imposed a reciprocity measure, which requires vehicles entering Kosovo with Serbian plates to take temporary plates, a measure that the Serbian government has been imposing for a number of years against Kosovo vehicles entering Serbia. While this event is not necessarily related to municipal elections, it nevertheless sparked grave security concerns during the campaign.

In response to the measure, Serbs in northern municipalities of Kosovo placed roadblocks in the roads leading to border check points. The government of Kosovo deployed special police units in Kosovo's northern municipalities, while the government of Serbia deployed its army and tanks near the border with Kosovo. After a number of days of hold-off, Kosovo and Serbia reached an EU-mediated agreement on September 30 (around two weeks before elections). While this event is not within the scope of this research, it should nevertheless be noted as it occurred during the electoral period and it manifested in hatred expressed in social media between the communities in Kosovo.

For example, when the Kosovo police units were deployed in response to the road blocks, a number of [videos] were disseminated online of Serb protesters insulting the Kosovo police with insulting, degrading and offensive language questioning their status, competence and appearance.

On another occasion, the Prime Minister of Kosovo posted a photo alleging that certain individuals [in the photo] with extremist views were involved in criminal activities and were participating in the roadblocks of the Jarinje and Brnjak border crossing. One of the individuals tagged in this post, responded: "[…] in the last few days, I have received hundreds and even thousands of brutal death threats from some Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija"

One representative of the Srpska Lista, was quoted as saying "Kurtijevim Srbima" referring to any Serb who does not support Sprska Lista as if they were belonging to the Prime Minister Kurti.

A number of Serb media portals quoted Serb politicians in Serbia using hate speech against politicians in Kosovo. For example, in numerous quotes Serb government officials for Kosovo were quoted calling Kurti a "psychopath", a "supporter of terrorism", and in one occasion calling on KFOR/NATO to "restrain" him.

Conclusions

The aim of this pilot project was to present a general picture of the issues and patterns in social media during the 2021 local elections, with many lessons learned and recommendations future consideration. The findings of this report present an overall, representative summary of the content covered by the monitoring unit (197 violations reported), but may not include all the content that was made public on social media.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the monitoring data, and from consultation workshops held with political parties, media, civil society organizations, and the election commission.

1 | Fake news, hate speech and other malicious content is present across social media in Kosovo and is a growing issue that needs to be addressed. In consultation meetings, the political parties, media and CSOs widely expressed the view that such content negatively affects the electoral environment and has the potential to affect the conduct of administration and the outcome of elections. A multi-stakeholder approach from political parties, candidates, media actors, civil society, and the election commission, is needed to reinforce the commitments in the declaration and to combat such content.

2 | Political parties, candidates and their supporters are the primary purveyors of negative content in social media both in terms of creation, publication and distribution of content. This is done in a number of ways such as statements made in the media, posts in official social media pages, or distribution of content through various communication channels (viber, whatsapp etc). Most of the content is produced directly by parties and candidates, rather than third-party accounts or bots.

3 | The media portals and media analysts create or reinforce negative content. This report has shown a number of instances where renowned journalists, analysts or reporters have used hate speech or degrading language against political parties, candidates and other actors. The report has also shown that media has tendencies to indirectly reinforce negative content, particularly by highlighting, displaying and sponsoring certain parts of hate speech made by political parties and their candidates.

4 | Parties that produce the most hate receive the most hate. Within the limitations noted in this report, the data has shown that VV and AAK which have been the parties that produced most negative content, were also the parties that were targeted the most by others. All other major parties and their candidates have also been reported as having committed violations.

5 | Ethnic-based hate speech is affected by central-level politics. Although the 2021 municipal elections were meant to elect municipal mayors and municipal assembly, candidates who were at the forefront of the electoral race, from an ethnic relations perspective, discourse

related to the license-plates dominated the campaign period, which in and of itself is only part of a broader issue of dispute between Kosovo and Serbia.

6 | Social media violations reinforce traditional patriarchy in the society: despite the low number of women candidates, attacks against women candidates were significant. Women continue to be under-represented in the lists of candidates and face barriers in political representation and participation. Instead of encouraging, promoting and supporting women candidates, the political parties discriminate against women candidates of other parties on grounds of their ability, social status, and appearance. The insults against women have also been reinforced by some media, either by having analysts that promote hate speech, or by quoting political candidates in their statements expressed against women, reinforcing some of the negative content made available online.

7 | Overall, the spread of hate speech, disinformation, fake news, and personal harassment in social media has the potential to damage the electoral environment, change the outcome of the election, and affects the democratic process. These issues should be addressed as a matter of priority so that such discourse is not encouraged, used or promoted in public.

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations to consider for the future:

1 | The code of conduct for political parties, candidates and their supporters should be expanded to include provisions that prohibit fake news, disinformation, hate speech and other forms of negative content presented in this report.

2 | The electoral law should provide the legal standing for any voter, candidate or political party to submit complaints of violations, and on the basis of admissibility and merits, sanctions and fines should be imposed against political parties and candidates.

3 | The political parties should provide orientation to their candidates and supporters during the election period, distance themselves from candidates who produce negative content in social media, and take adequate measures against any members of their party who uses hate to discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, gender or social status. The political parties should also self-regulate, avoid from posting or promoting negative content, distance themselves from candidates who do it, and remove or demote the undesirable content.

4 | The CSOs should continue to monitor political parties, candidates and their supporters, the extent to which they enact the commitments in the declaration (including in elected positions), and extent to which they make financing of social media ads open and transparent.

5 | The Media Written Press Council should provide trainings for media outlets, their journalists and reporters, on the codes of conduct applicable to media, and specific conduct related to campaign and elections.

6 | Media and social media literacy trainings should be provided as part of ongoing international development projects, and where possible these should also be instituted within the formal education system in schools and universities.

7 | Work with Facebook and other social media companies and key political and government actors to develop an effective 'policy regime' governing this discourse in the social media. Facebook should also be reached out to activate the "Ads Library" for Kosovo, which would enhance the transparency over financing of the social media posts in Facebook.

8 | Regulations and establishing norms on the use of hate speech and disinformation – with steps taken to ensure the evolution of norms and reforms – and a focus not on how others attack your party but on how the back-and-forth of such discourse will tend to limit democracy and enhance the chances of conflict.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of signatories to the declaration

Non-governmental organizations

- Young Active Gračanica
- Democracy Plus
- Kosovo Justice Institute
- Voice or Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
- FOL Movement
- Democracy for Development
- Kosovo Democratic Institute
- NGO Aktiv

Media

- Press Council
- Telegraf
- Ballkani.info
- Kosovalive

Political parties

- New Kosovo Alliance
- Self-determination Movement
- Socialdemocrats Initiative (NISMA)
- Democratic Party of Kosovo
- SDU
- IQ Green for Drenas
- Democratic League of Kosovo

Annex 2: Declaration for Political Parties and Candidates

DECLARATION

for

GOOD CONDUCT OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES IN SOCIAL MEDIA
DURING THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Principles

With the purpose of respecting and properly implementing election laws and regulations,

In order to improve the environment of the election campaign of the local elections of 2021,

In order to respect the principles of non-discrimination, accurate information, and protection of privacy,

and In order to combat negative content on social media,

We pledge to:

- Respect the election laws, regulations and the code of conduct for political entities, candidates and their supporters
- Ensure that advertisements, positions and messages given during the campaign do not contain negative content such as hate speech, fake news, dis-information, and slanderous language
- Use official accounts to communicate, and refrain from using third-party or fictitious accounts
- Disclose the expenditures incurred for the paid advertising in social media
- Provide objective and constructive criticism for other political entities, candidates and their supporters
- Check the facts and take proper care of all information during the political campaign.

Date:

Name of Political Party/Candidate/ Name and Surname:

Signature:

Annex 3: Declaration for non-governmental organizations

DECLARATION

for

GOOD CONDUCT OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA
DURING THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Principles

With the purpose of respecting and properly implementing election laws and regulations,

In order to improve the environment of the election campaign of the local elections of 2021,

In order to respect the principles of non-discrimination, accurate information, and protection of privacy, and

In order to combat negative content on social media,

We pledge to:

- Provide support to all stakeholders in implementing commitments of Declaration of Good Conduct on Social Media
- Monitor social networks and take action, make reports and collect feedback as needed to combat negative content such as hate speech, fake news, dis-information, and slanderous language
- Check the facts and take proper care of all information on social networks
- Report and publicize instances where political parties, candidates or their supporters or third parties use negative content as a form of political advertising

Date:

Name of NGO:

Signature:

Annex 4: Declaration for media

DECLARATION

for

GOOD CONDUCT OF MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Principles

With the purpose of respecting and properly implementing election laws and regulations,

In order to improve the environment of the election campaign of the local elections of 2021,

In order to respect the principles of non-discrimination, accurate information, and protection of privacy, and

In order to combat negative content on social media,

We pledge to:

- Respect the existing Code of Ethics of the Independent Media Commission and the Written Press Council
- Report and evaluate the factual correctness of political advertisements and encourage colleagues to be aware of political advertising messages
- Ensure that advertisements, positions and messages given during the campaign do not contain negative content such as hate speech, fake news, dis-information, and slanderous language
- Provide objective and constructive criticism of political candidates and campaign teams, political parties and political campaigns
- Check the facts and take proper care of all information in political campaigns
- Ensure editorial quality so that inaccurate, untrue, slanderous and malicious information is not published

Date:

Name of Media Entity:

Signature:

___

Annex 5: Glossary of key terms

The following terms were extracted from Oxford Dictionary or Merriam Webster and have the following meaning in this report:

Hate speech	abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses categorical prejudice against a particular group, especially on the basis of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation
Disinformation	false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth
Misinformation	incorrect or misleading information
Meme	an amusing or interesting picture, video, etc., that is spread widely through the Internet
Fake news	false reports of events, written and read on websites

Annex 6: Monitoring Scheme

D4D established a monitoring mechanism composed of 10 trained students of journalism (hereinafter, "monitors") who were responsible for monitoring the commitments undertaken by the political parties, candidates, media and NGOs. The monitoring team were consisted of participants from majority and non-majority communities from all regions in Kosovo. The monitoring was done in Albanian and Serbian languages. The monitors worked during the election period from the beginning of the formal commencement of the campaign to the final certification of results, until the end of the second round. The distribution plan of coverage was as follows:

- Monitor 1 – Levizja Vetevendosje
- Monitor 2 – Partia Demokratike e Kosoves
- Monitor 3 – Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves
- Monitor 4 – Aleanca per Ardhmerine e Kosoves
- Monitor 5 – NISMA & AKR
- Monitor 6 – Lista Srpska and other Serb community parties
- Monitor 7 – All other non-majority community parties
- Monitor 8 – Third party content (accounts not officially affiliated to parties)
- Monitor 9 – Third party content (accounts not officially affiliated to parties)
- Monitor 10 – Media and CSO content

In addition to the monitors, the project actively encouraged stakeholders and citizens to monitor content on social media and submit any remarks and complaints to respective election complaints bodies. D4D established a separate email and call line to collect reports and evidence of violations committed. Voters and other stakeholders were invited to report undesirable content. Additionally, D4D established convenient methods for reporting (e-mail, call, WhatsApp, tag) and inform the availability of such resources.

In addition to monitoring manually, the primary tool used was CrowdTangle (CT). CT is a public insights tool from Facebook that helps publishers, journalists, researchers, and fact-checkers follow, analyze, and report on what is happening across social media in public facebook pages. Through this 'Facebook-specific' tool, the monitors extracted "overperforming posts" of selected media and political actors from Kosovo related to the election throughout the entire campaign. Overperforming posts are the posts which lead to higher interaction by Facebook users than the average interaction on any given page. Pages with a lower number of followers (and, thus, a lower number of interactions) are not discriminated against those pages with a higher number of followers, because only the average interactions on one specific page provides the baseline for analysis. CrowdTangle calculates their average performance/benchmark based on performance of the last 100 posts of each of the media and political actors examined. Monitors investigated key words on public Facebook and Instagram pages of public figures and public media. They explored two variables – the Facebook page and the key words. Both

—

variables were selected by one Kosovo Serb researcher and one Kosovo Albanian researcher. The monitors were trained in using CT and accordingly on the monitoring scheme by HD Social Media Experts to ensure quality assurance.

The monitoring focused on the extent to which political parties, candidates, media, and NGOs respect the commitments they take under the declaration. The monitoring was done according to the following guidelines:

- The monitoring covered the electoral campaigns in ALL Kosovo municipalities. Specific attention was also given to social media content that affects non-majority communities, women, and other vulnerable groups.

- The social media that was monitored included: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Youtube, Website/Blogs, Viber/Whatsapp.

- The monitoring covered all political and election advertising and content created by third parties, supporters, and other actors in broadcast and written form, including posts, declarations, comments, responses, and any other forms of communication.

- The kind of content monitored included: hate speech, degrading language, fake news, disinformation, and other slanderous or malicious content that could damage the electoral environment.

D4D created a database with pre-coded variables to ensure a uniform data collection from the monitors and other stakeholders. This ensured that the data collected from the reports were compiled, analyzed and presented in comprehensive formats in the final report. The kind of data collected included:

- Date of occurrence:
- Municipality: drop-down menu – list of municipalities
- Alleged violator: i.e. Political Party, Third/unofficial party, Media, CSO, Supporter, or other
    - Alleged violator: if political party, select from the dropdown menu
    - Alleged violator: if media, select from the dropdown menu
- Nature of violation: dropdown menu - i.e. disinformation, hate speech, degrading language, defamation, slanderous language.
- Social media: dropdown menu - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Youtube, Website/Blogs, Viber/Whatsapp, etc. With the possibility of selecting multiple options.

Link: For each report, links were collected. In addition, the monitoring team should collect screenshots, recording of videos, audio or other evidence to support the reports. These should be stored safely for each of the reports.