Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

November 2025

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

November 2025

Prepared by:

Democracy for Development

—

This monitoring report was drafted under the project "Monitoring a Code of Conduct on Responsible Social Media Use," implemented by Democracy for Development (D4D) with the support of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD).

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of Democracy for Development and can in no way be considered as reflecting the views of the **HD**.

Key Findings

152 violations

Social media platforms with the highest number of violations

- 95% Facebook
- 5% TikTok
- 1% Instagram

Nature of reported violations

- 70% Hate speech
- 14% Personal bullying
- 9% Disinformation
- 1% Incitement to violence
- 1% Ethnic/religious attack
- 5% Other

Political parties with the most violations

- 58% Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (LVV)
- 13% Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)
- 6% Alternativa
- 5% Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)
- 2% Serbska Lista (LS)
- 1% Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)
- 1% GUXO
- 14% Other

Most targeted political parties

- 30% PDK
- 16% LVV
- 13% LDK
- 2% AAK
- 2% LS
- 1% GUXO
- 23% Other
- 14% Cases with no political party targeted

Type of alleged violators

- 66% Candidate for municipal assembly
- 13% Media
- 11% Political analyst
- 10% Candidate for mayor
- 1% Political party

....

Table of Content

....

....

List of Abbreviations

AAK   Alliance for the Future of Kosovo

D4D   Democracy for Development

HD   Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

LDK   Democratic League of Kosovo

NISMA   Social Democratic Initiative

NDS   The New Democratic Party

PDK   Democratic Party of Kosovo

SL   Serbska Lista

LVV   Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!

....

Executive Summary

The report "Monitoring the Code of Conduct on the Responsible Use of Social Media during the 2025 Local Elections," conducted by Democracy for Development (D4D), analyses political communication on social media during the campaign period of the local elections held on October 12, 2025.

The main objective of the report is to assess compliance with the Code of Conduct for the Responsible Use of Social Media during the 2025 Local Elections, and to identify violations that influenced the campaign atmosphere and the quality of public debate.

Monitoring was conducted in 14 municipalities across Kosovo using a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology, which combined manual content analysis with the use of the Pikasa platform for the automated detection of problematic comments, posts, and reactions (see Table 1 for the selected municipalities).

The monitoring covered digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and online news portals.

Key Findings:

→ 152 violations were identified during the monitoring period (September 1 – October 26, 2025).

→ 95% of the violations occurred on Facebook, confirming it as the dominant platform for pre-election political communication; TikTok accounted for 5% and Instagram for only 1%.

→ Hate speech was the most common form of violation (70%), followed by personal bullying (14%), disinformation (9%), and incitement to violence (1%). (See a glossary of definitions in Annex 3 below).

→ Candidates for municipal assemblies were the most frequent offenders (66% of cases), followed by media outlets (13%), political analysts (11%), and mayoral candidates (10%).

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

→ Among political parties, Vetëvendosje (LVV) was the source of more than half of all identified violations (58%), followed by PDK (13%), Alternativa (6%), AAK (5%), and Srbska Lista (2%).

→ In terms of targets, PDK was the most attacked party (30% of negative content), followed by LVV (16%) and LDK (13%).

→ 40% of violations occurred before the official campaign period, indicating that political actors often test their messages outside the legally permitted timeframe, possibly, to avoid any penalties that might be incurred during the election campaign.

→ Prizren (36%) and Prishtina (21%) recorded the highest number of violations, while no violations were detected in municipalities where ethnic minorities are in the majority.

The monitoring suggests that social media platforms have become a central arena of political competition - but also spaces dominated by defamatory language, polarization, and disinformation. The use of hate speech and personal attacks, often with gender-based undertones, undermined women's participation and public trust in the electoral process.

The report concludes that while social media has become an essential tool for political communication and citizen mobilization, the lack of accountability in its use poses a serious threat to the democratic integrity of elections. Therefore, greater attention to supporting more responsible online conduct, digital civility, transparency, and gender equality must remain central priorities for the future of democratic political campaigning in Kosovo.

....

Introduction

Electoral campaigns in Kosovo have undergone a profound transformation over the past decade, with social media emerging as a significant platform for political communication, electoral campaigning, and public debate.

In the 2025 local elections, this trend became more visible than ever before. Candidates, political parties, and their supporters used the digital space - particularly Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram - as a tool to disseminate political messages, mobilize voters, and construct localized narratives of the race. Alongside the opportunity for broader participation, transparency, and direct communication with citizens, the increased use of social media has also created new challenges for the integrity of the electoral process, and for social and political life more broadly. The spread of hate speech, disinformation, personal bullying, and political defamation has contributed to growing social polarization and a decline in the quality of public debate, diminishing the role of ideas and policy platforms in favor of emotional and divisive content.

In this report, Democracy for Development (D4D) presents the findings of its monitoring of social media activity during the 2025 local election campaign to measure the extent of adherence, by political subjects, to "The Code of Conduct on the Responsible Use of Social Media during the 2025 Local Elections." The monitoring employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of posts published across major digital platforms during the pre-campaign, official campaign, and post-campaign periods. Its purpose is to identify the nature and extent of violations, the leading actors involved in problematic content, in online political communication.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this campaign was the high prevalence of gender-based derogatory language, which demean women who participate in political life. Female candidates were routinely subjected to personal attacks and insults unrelated to their political platforms or views but rather to their gender, appearance, and social roles - demonstrating that gender equality in Kosovo's political life still faces barriers.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

In this report, D4D analyzes whether political actors adhered to the commitments they signed up to in the Code of Conduct on the Responsible Use of Social Media during the election campaign. The analysis also sheds light on how social media is influencing local election campaigns more broadly. It also explores how self-regulatory efforts such as the Code of Conduct can contribute to a fairer, more ethical, and inclusive electoral environment - one in which political competition is grounded in ideas, programs, and public accountability, rather than divisive rhetoric or defamatory propaganda.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

Methodology

This report is based on the systematic monitoring of the electoral campaign on social media, conducted by Democracy for Development (D4D), with the support of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), through a combined qualitative and quantitative monitoring methodology. The main goal was to monitor violations of the Code of Conduct on Responsible Use of Social Media, as well as to identify violations of ethical and legal standards.

Focus and Scope of Monitoring

The monitoring focused on assessing the compliance of political parties, candidates, media outlets, political analysts, and civil society organizations with their commitments to the responsible use of social media during the election campaign. The analysis also included political actors that did not sign the Code of Conduct, to ensure a comprehensive assessment.

Table 1. The monitoring covered electoral activity in 14 municipalities of Kosovo.

No.	Municipality	Number of inhabitants	Incumbent mayor from the 2021 elections	Majority community	Second round of elections 2025
1	Prishtina	195,509	LDK	Albanians	Yes
2	Prizren	84,720	PDK	Albanians	Yes
3	Peja	41,171	LDK	Albanians	Yes

....

4	South Mitrovica	44,293	PDK	Albanians	Yes
5	Gjilan	53,279	LVV	Albanians	Yes
6	Gjakova	41,809	AAK	Albanians	Yes
7	Ferizaj	52,392	PDK	Albanians	No
8	Drenas	7,081	PDK	Albanians	No
9	Vushtrri	28,150	PDK	Albanians	Yes
10	Mamusha	5,507	KDTP	Turks	Yes
11	Gracanica	4,923	SL	Serbians	No
12	North Mitrovica	27,730*	SL/LVV**	Serbians	No
13	Leposavic	16,906*	SL/PDK**	Serbians	No
14	Zubin Potok	8,081*	SL/PDK**	Serbians	No

For municipalities in 12-14, the data is unreliable, due to low census participation and reliance on estimates.

** *In the 2021 Municipal Mayor Election, SL candidates were elected, but after their resignations, mayors were elected from different political parties.*

Special attention was devoted to content referring to non-majority communities, women, youth, and other vulnerable groups.

....

The monitored platforms included:

Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and online news portals.

The monitoring covered both organic and sponsored content published by political parties, candidates, supporters, third parties, and other influential actors, including posts, statements, comments, video messages, and any other form of online political communication.

Legal Basis and Categories of Monitored Content

The assessment was guided by Kosovo's legal framework and voluntary norms, including:

→ The Law on General Elections and the Law on Local Elections;

→ The Code of Conduct for Responsible Use of Social Media;

→ The Law on Protection from Discrimination.

The categories of monitored content included, among others:

→ Hate speech, discriminatory, or degrading language;

→ Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news;

→ Defamation, insults, and content harmful to the electoral process.

Monitoring Unit

D4D engaged a team of five monitors, assigned to different regions and political subjects, representing diverse ethnic communities, while the lead monitor systematically verified and validated all findings before inclusion in the analysis.

→ The monitoring took place in three phases:

→ Pre-campaign: September 1 – 12, 2025

....

→ Official first-round campaign and election day: September 13 – October 11, 2025

→ Post-election period: October 13 – 26, 2025

The local elections were held on October 12, 2025, and the second round for mayoral races on November 9, 2025. Six of the 14 monitored municipalities elected mayors in the first round (after surpassing 50% of votes), while eight proceeded to the second round.

Use of the Pikasa Platform for Data Analysis

To enhance accuracy and transparency, the monitoring was supported by the Pikasa analytical platform[1], which enables automated collection, filtering, and classification of social media data.

Pikasa was used to:

→ Identify and categorize offensive, discriminatory, or inappropriate comments;

→ Measure engagement (likes, comments, shares) to analyze the reach of political content;

→ Classify violations by typology (hate speech, defamation, disinformation, etc.);

→ Highlight the most targeted or most active candidates and political parties.

---

1 *Pikasa Analytics (accessible at pikasa.ai) is a commercial media-monitoring and social-listening tool that covers major social-platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) and thousands of digital and news channels. The company states it has over 15 years of experience in data analytics and AI for media monitoring; it operates in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and beyond, and serves corporate, media, civil-society and government clients. Its multi-region and multilingual capabilities (including local languages) support monitoring across several markets, which helps build confidence in the tool's relevance and reliability for this project.*

....

Through Pikasa, a dedicated monitor analyzed Facebook content, including original posts from political actors and user reactions.

Stakeholder Engagement

On September 3, 2025, D4D and HD organized the signing ceremony of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Use of Social Media during the 2025 Local Election Campaign, aimed at fostering safer, more constructive, and inclusive online political discourse.

The Code included commitments related to:

→ Compliance with the law and ethical standards;

→ Desisting from disinformation and hate speech;

→ Promoting constructive debate and equal participation;

→ Mutual respect among political actors.

→ Compliance with gender-sensitive standards in political speech

D4D and HD reached out to all political parties and to a broad range of civil society organizations and media organizations to encourage broad buy-in for the Code. Although not all political parties signed the Code, several key ruling and opposition parties joined the initiative, demonstrating broad support for strengthening ethical standards in online campaigning.

Limitations of the Study

This report only analyzes publicly available content posted on social media and does not include private communications or data inaccessible to the public or page administrators.

Due to the dynamic nature of social media, including the deletion of posts or comments, some cases may not have been fully documented.

Nevertheless, the combination of manual monitoring by D4D's team and advanced analysis through Pikasa provides a comprehensive, balanced,

....

and reliable overview of the nature, intensity, and impact of problematic online content during the election campaign.

....

Key Findings

General Overview

During the monitoring period, the team identified a total of 152 violations of Code of Conduct and ethical and legal standards in online political communication, recorded across 14 municipalities included in Kosovo's 2025 local elections.

Violations were concentrated mainly in several large urban municipalities, where the political race was more competitive. Prizren emerged as the municipality with the highest number of cases (36%), followed by Prishtina (21%), reflecting the high level of political activity and competition among leading candidates. Gjilan ranked third with 9%, showing a notable presence of divisive language and political accusations during the campaign.

Graph 1. *Proportion of reported violations by municipality*
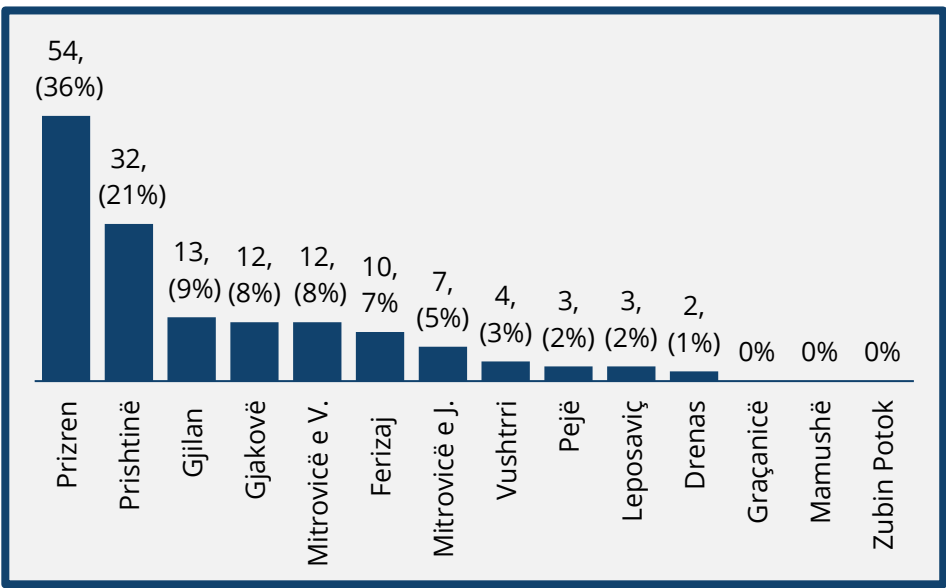
In contrast, in the three municipalities with non-majority communities, no violations were identified during the monitoring period. This can be

....

attributed to several factors: lower levels of online campaigning , a smaller number of active candidates on social media, and a lower degree of political competition in those municipalities.

Overall, the findings indicate that violations were concentrated in areas with higher levels of digital political communication, suggesting a direct correlation between online campaign activity and the likelihood of ethical or legal breaches.

The time-based analysis of the data shows that violations in online political communication were most frequent before the official start of the election campaign.

During the pre-campaign phase (1–12 September 2025), 40% of all identified violations were recorded. This indicates that political parties and candidates began testing their messages and political narratives outside the legal framework governing campaign conduct.

In the first two weeks of the official campaign (13–27 September 2025), the frequency of violations remained almost unchanged - 39% of all cases - reflecting a period marked by heated political clashes and polarized content.

In the final two weeks of the campaign (28 September – 11 October 2025), a significant decline in violations was observed, as the number of cases was halved, accounting for only 21% of the total. This trend is not unusual for the final stage of the race. A similar pattern was observed during the 2021 local elections, when the number of violations decreased in the last weeks of the campaign – suggesting that political actors tend to exercise greater caution as election day approaches, likely due to increased public scrutiny, media attention, and oversight by institutions.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the pre-campaign period experienced the highest number of violations, highlighting the need to strengthen monitoring mechanisms even before the official start of the election campaign.

....

Graph 2. *Reported violations by time period*
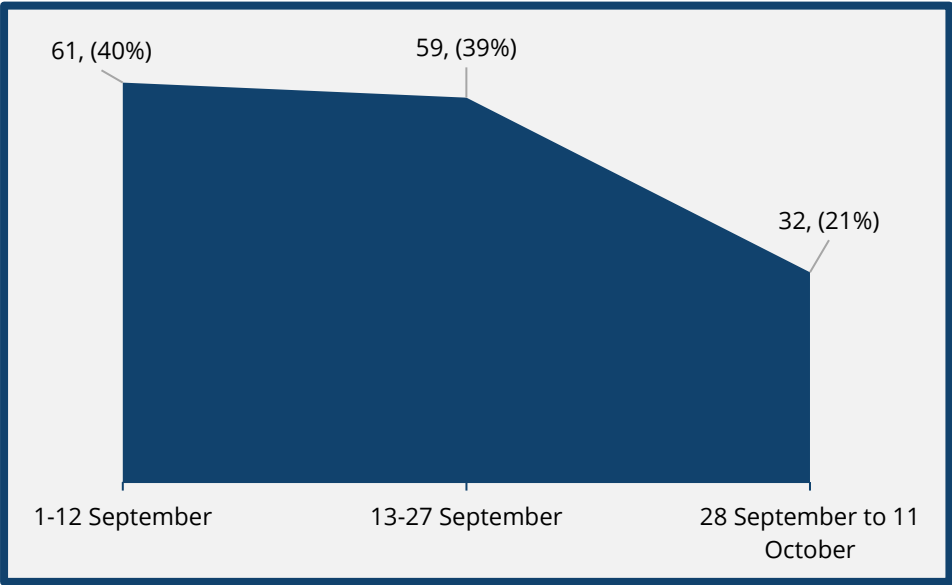
The analysis of the monitored content shows that hate speech was the most widespread form of violation, accounting for 70% of all identified cases. This high level of derogatory, offensive, or inflammatory language directed at specific social groups indicates that social media is being used to spread political division and social polarization.

Other notable types of violations included: personal bullying and attacks on individuals (14% of cases), usually directed at political opponents, journalists, or party supporters, and disinformation and the spread of false news (9% of cases), which were often used to influence public perceptions of candidates or parties.

Regarding the profile of violators, the analysis shows a clear distribution among groups of political and media actors:

Candidates for municipal assemblies were the most frequent violators, representing the largest share of reported cases. This finding aligns with the high number of certified candidates for local elections (5,624 candidates) and the fact that many of them managed their own social media pages

....

individually, often without professional guidance on public communication standards.

Media outlets accounted for 13% of the violations, demonstrating that biased reporting, sensational headlines, and the sharing of unverified content remain widespread practices during election periods.

A new category identified in these elections was political analysts –mostly journalists and independent political commentators – who contributed to 11% of violations through their social media posts and comments. The use of polarizing language by these influential public figures has contributed to reinforcing partisan divisions and shaping public discourse during the campaign.

Candidates for mayor appeared to be more cautious in their online communication, representing only 10% of violations. This suggests that high public visibility and reputational risk prompted leading candidates to avoid divisive language and controversial content. Additionally, candidates who anticipate a potential second round may deliberately avoid polarizing or hostile rhetoric to keep open the possibility of support from other political parties. Taken together, these factors help explain why leading candidates tended to refrain from divisive language or controversial content.

Overall, the data indicates that hate speech remains the dominant form of violation, while the influence of non-party actors – such as media and analysts – has increased in spreading polarizing narratives throughout the election campaign.

....

Graph 3. *Proportion of reported violations by type of violation*
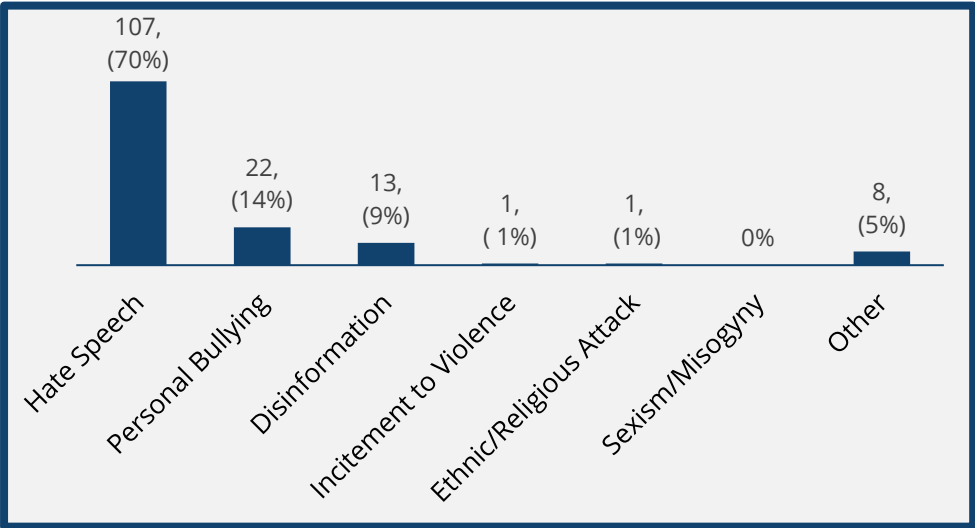
Graph 4. *Proportion of reported violations by alleged violator*

- 66% Candidate for Municipal Assembly
- 13% Media
- 11% Political Analyst
- 10% Candidate for Mayor
- 1% Political Party
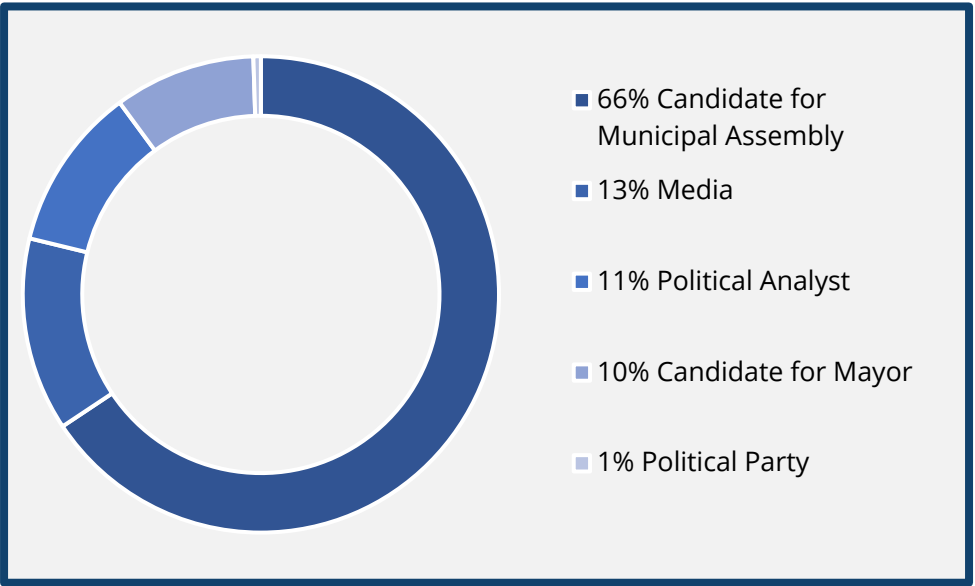
The monitoring data show that most social media violations during the election campaign were caused primarily by the Vetëvendosje

....

Movement (LVV), which tops the list with 58% of all identified violations. This high percentage is linked to the intensive online activity of VV's local branches and the large number of its candidates engaged in online communication.

It is followed by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) with 13%, Alternativa with 6%, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) with 5%, the Serb List (LS) with 2%, and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) with 1% of recorded violations.

On the other hand, an analysis of negative content and verbal attacks shows that PDK was the most targeted party, being the subject of 35% of negative content, followed by VV (18%), LDK (15%), AAK and SL (2%), and Guxo (1%). Besides political parties, the targets of negative content were political analysts and media outlets in 27% of the cases.

Overall, the data suggest that parties with a stronger digital presence are not only the most frequent sources of violations but also the most common targets of negative content, creating a reciprocal cycle of accusations, counterattacks, and political polarization in the online space.

Graph 5. *Political parties with the highest number of violations*

- 58% VV
- 13% PDK
- 6% ALTERNATIVA
- 5% AAK
- 2% LS
- 1% LDK

....
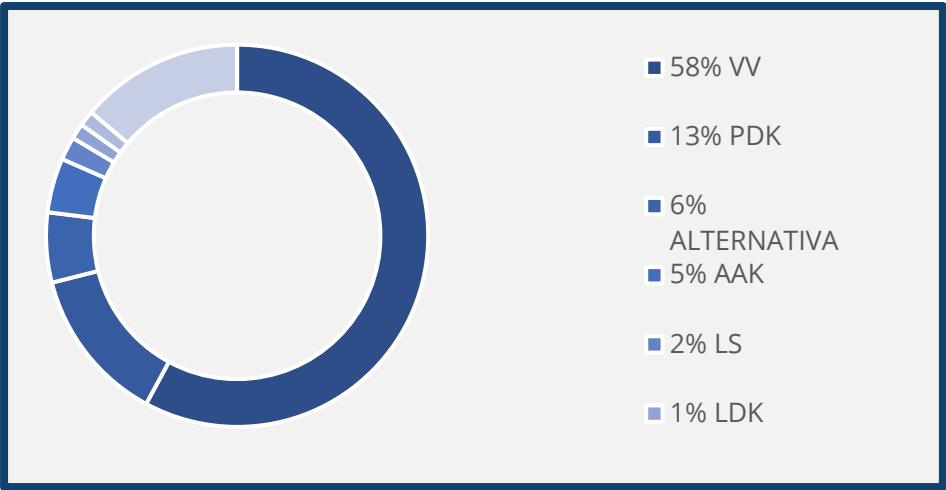
Graph 6. *Politically Most Targeted Parties*

- 35% PDK
- 18% VV
- 15% LDK
- 2% AAK
- 2% SL
- 1% Guxo
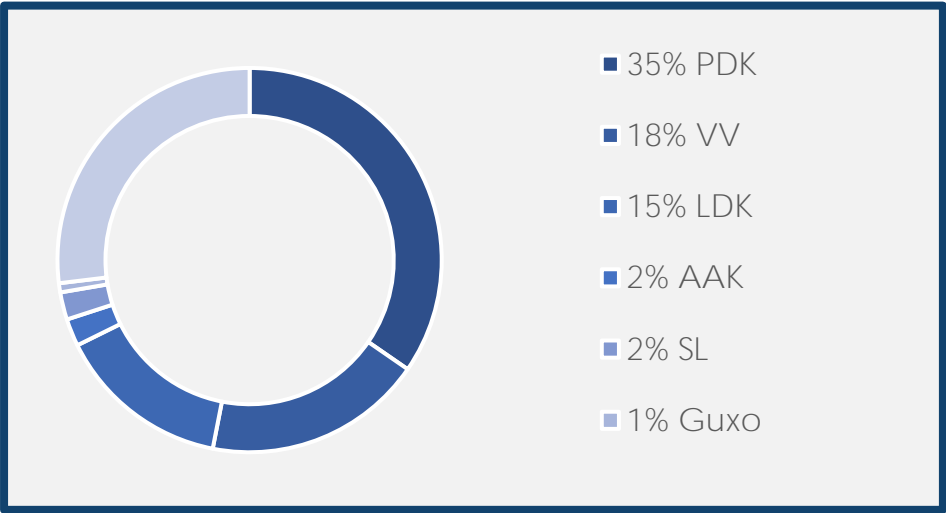
The monitoring data show that the vast majority of violations (94.7%) were recorded on Facebook, which remains the dominant channel of political communication in Kosovo.

Facebook is the most widely used platform by both citizens and politicians, serving as the primary space for sharing political messages, mobilizing supporters, and engaging in public debate. In most cases, politicians use their personal accounts or official pages to communicate directly with voters – often without professional media or editorial oversight – which increases the likelihood of ethical and legal violations.

TikTok ranks a distant second, accounting for 4.6% of identified cases. The platform is gaining ground in political campaigning, particularly among younger candidates who aim to reach new and more dynamic audiences. TikTok content is often characterized by short, humorous, or emotionally charged videos, some of which have contained elements of derogatory language.

Meanwhile, Instagram accounted for only 0.7% of cases, reflecting the platform's more limited nature and its primary use for personal image-building and event promotion, rather than for direct political communication.

....

Table 2. Violation registered based on social media platforms

No.	Social media	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Facebook	144	94.7%
2	TikTok	7	4.6%
3	Instagram	1	0.7%

The data show that Facebook continues to be the main arena where violations occur during election campaigns in Kosovo, while TikTok is emerging as a growing platform that will require greater attention from monitoring mechanisms and digital literacy initiatives in future elections.

Graph 7. *Proportion of violations by social media platform*

....
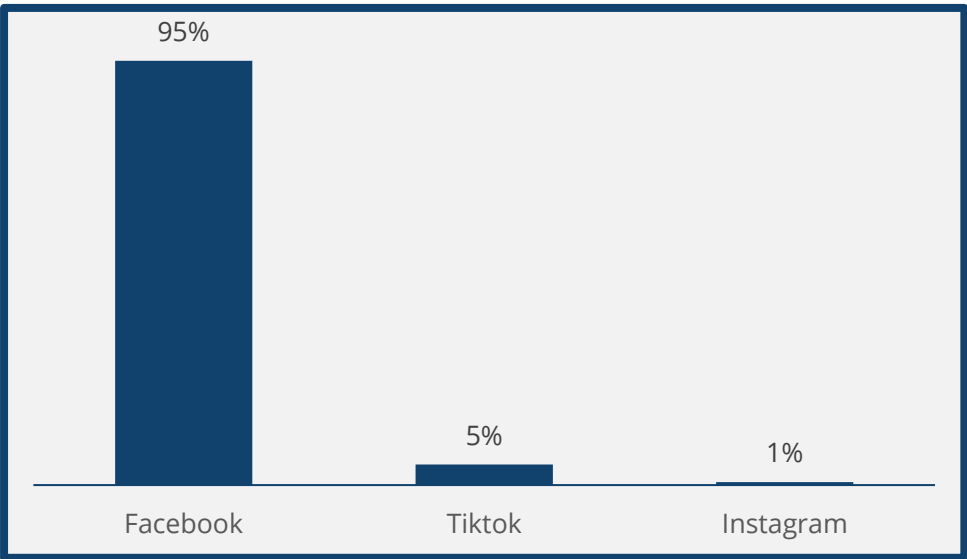
Graph 8. *Type of Content Involved in Violations*
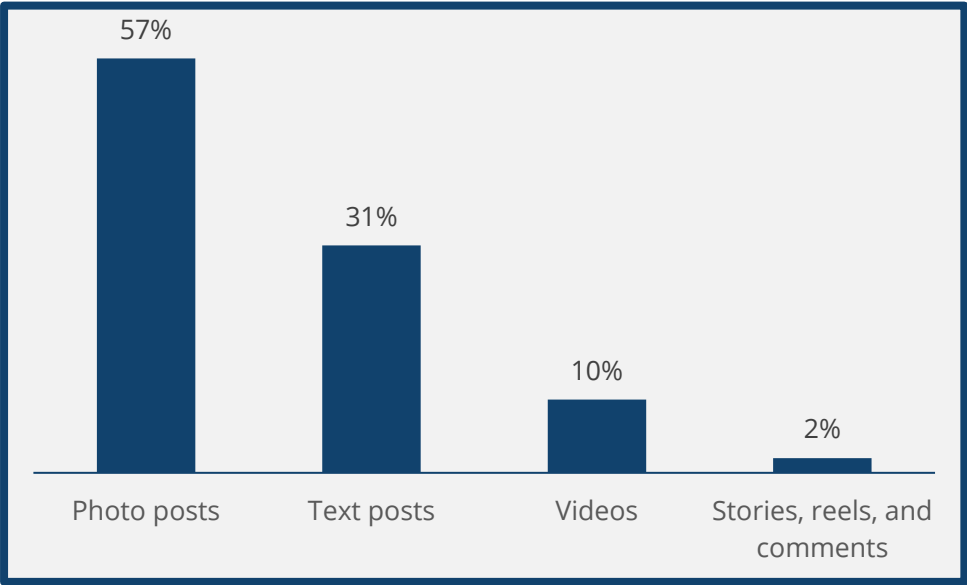
Regarding the formats through which problematic content was posted, the analysis shows that the majority of violations occurred through photo posts, which account for 57% of all identified cases.

This format is the most commonly used by candidates and political parties, as photos and images carry a strong emotional and visual impact, reaching wider audiences and generating higher engagement rates (likes, comments, shares).

Text-based posts rank second, representing 31% of violations, often appearing as personal statuses, statements, or derogatory comments. This format is typical of direct political communication and emotional expression, frequently used to issue criticisms, accusations, or share divisive language against opponents.

Meanwhile, videos containing negative content make up 10% of the cases, while stories or reels account for only 2%.

This lower share is likely due to the greater technical effort required to produce video content, as well as the ephemeral and short-lived nature

of these formats, making them less commonly used for aggressive or defamatory political messaging.

In summary, the findings suggest that visual formats - particularly photo posts - remain the primary means of disseminating negative and hateful content online, underscoring the significant role of imagery in shaping political narratives on social media.

Political Parties and Candidates

The Code of Conduct for the Responsible Use of Social Media during Local Elections in Kosovo outlines clear expectations for political parties and candidates, requiring that their online communication be honest, transparent, and grounded in ethical principles. They pledged to use only official accounts, respect electoral laws, and refrain from using derogatory language, spreading disinformation, or posting content that incites hatred or division.

The Code also called for transparency in paid advertisements and the disclosure of digital spending, as well as the promotion of constructive campaigns that respect gender equality and the participation of marginalized groups. These principles were established to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and ensure that political competition took place in a fair and equal manner.

Applying these standards can help foster a calmer and more responsible campaign environment, one in which political actors compete based on distinct policy priorities and programmatic options. In turn, such an approach supports a healthier democratic culture and can contribute to strengthening citizens' trust in the electoral process.

The case studies presented below focus on VV, AAK, and PDK because these parties generated the highest volume of relevant data in the monitoring period. They were among the most active political actors online, produced a significant share of posts with elevated engagement, and were the primary subjects of user comments where violations were detected.

....

Lëvizja Vetëvendosje!

As presented earlier in the report, our monitors identified 88 violations committed by the LVV across 14 monitored municipalities during the pre-campaign and first-round campaign period of the 2025 local elections.

The violations were recorded in eight municipalities, with the highest number in Prizren (48) and Prishtina (22). The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) was the main target of VV's negative content, with 22 negative posts, followed by political analysts with 22 posts and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) with 14 posts.

VV candidates frequently used derogatory language, portraying their opponents as traitors or agents of foreign interests (Serbia, Russia) and accusing them of corruption, theft, and ties to oligarchic networks. They publicly mocked and humiliated rivals using offensive epithets and dehumanizing comparisons, often labelling them as "failures," "thieves," or "bastards," and describing them as immoral and incompetent.

LVV posts also included insinuations of criminal organization and clientelist control of municipalities, accusations of public property misuse and media manipulation, and indirect calls for the political exclusion of certain figures. The language was often mixed with ironic humor, memes, and degrading descriptions aimed at discrediting opponents personally and provoking emotional reactions among followers.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

One example is a post made by a VV candidate for the Prishtina Municipal Assembly, which contained derogatory language toward the media, specifically Klan Kosova and the journalist who had questioned the Prime Minister. The post accused the media of hypocrisy, lack of ethics, and ties to oligarchs, describing the journalist's question as "a low personal attack on a minor." The candidate used emotionally charged and aggressive language, with insulting expressions such as "shame on you, may you be cursed" and "stop it, you're making a fool of yourself," shifting from a critique of professional behavior to personal insult.

This content clearly violates the provisions of the Code of Conduct prohibiting inciting, offensive, and derogatory language, as well as personal attacks on journalists and media outlets. Although it began as a comment on journalistic ethics, the tone of the post escalated into a direct attack, contributing to public polarization and undermining the spirit of respectful debate that the Code seeks to promote during the election campaign.

In two posts made by the Vetëvendosje (VV) candidate for the Prizren Municipal Assembly, there is clearly derogatory content directed toward the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and its public figures.

....

In the first post, the candidate uses an ironic reference to Edith Durham, adapting it to the current political context with the phrase: "In the PDK, the greatest pride is to steal!" This statement implies a collective accusation of corruption and criminality against the party and its members, portraying theft as a defining value of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). The language carries contemptuous and inflammatory elements, shaping a negative public perception of political opponents.

In the second post, the candidate labels PDK as a "criminal party" and accuses it of being under surveillance, claiming that "NATO has all the telephone recordings of the PDK gang for the past two decades." The post links PDK figures to criminal acts and the establishment of the Specialist Court, making serious and unsubstantiated allegations that violate the principles of the Code of Conduct for responsible communication on social media – particularly the prohibition of defamatory, derogatory, and discrediting language toward political rivals.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

Both posts represent personalized political attacks without factual basis, intended to damage the reputation of a rival party through hate speech and criminal insinuations, thereby contributing to the polarization of public debate during the election campaign.

In another post, the Vetëvendosje candidate for Mayor of Prizren addressed a public interest issue – the municipality's €57 million debt – but characterized it as "usury", a term that in everyday language implies illegal or criminal activity (lending money at excessively high interest rates outside the legal system). This choice of wording crosses the line of legitimate political debate, turning a financial critique into an unfounded criminal accusation.

Thus, the post contains derogatory and misleading elements, as it attributes unlawful behavior to an opponent without any institutional or factual basis. This constitutes a violation of the Code of Conduct, which prohibits the use of language that "defames, degrades, or damages the reputation of political opponents."

Therefore, even though the issue of municipal debt may be a legitimate topic for public discussion, labeling it as "usury" represents a misuse of language and manipulation of public perception, contributing to the spread of false narratives and the erosion of ethical communication standards during the campaign.

....

Democratic Party of Kosovo

The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) committed 22 violations during the monitoring period, the majority of which occurred in Gjilan (12 cases) and Prizren (3 cases). The main target of PDK's negative content was the Vetëvendosje Movement (VV), with 12 posts containing negative messages.

The rhetoric used by PDK candidates in these posts was marked by confrontational, derogatory, and polarizing language, aimed at personal and moral discrediting of political opponents - primarily political oponents from Vetëvendosje. The negative posts often contained offensive and degrading labels such as "liar," "criminal," "gang of liars," or "sons of whores," descending into vulgar and insulting language. Opponents were depicted as anti-national, traitorous, and enemies of the KLA, often linked with the Serb List or "the underworld," while PDK presented itself as the defender of patriotic and state-building values.

This rhetoric was intended to evoke fear, contempt, and emotional mobilization, but at the same time constituted a violation of the Code of Conduct due to the use of derogatory language, defamation, and the incitement of political polarization in the public sphere.

One example involves a PDK candidate for Mayor of Gjilan, who used accusatory and derogatory language against Alban Hyseni, portraying him as being involved in "dark deals" with the Serb List and accusing him of "political betrayal" and "vote-buying with public money." Although the post addressed issues of public interest – such as political appointments or the use

of municipal funds – the tone shifted from institutional critique to criminal accusation and political stigmatization, aiming to intimidate and morally discredit the opponent.

....

Such language constitutes a clear violation of the Code of Conduct, as it incites division and undermines the integrity of public debate during the election campaign.

Alliance for the Future of Kosovo

The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) committed seven cases of negative content on social media, five of which were identified in Prishtina. The rhetoric used by AAK candidates and supporters in posts containing negative content was marked by offensive, insulting, and exclusionary language, often crossing the boundaries of political debate and entering the realm of personal and ethnic insults.

Political opponents were described with humiliating epithets such as "spoiled brat," "poor fool," "thief," "loser," and "deceptive politician." In some cases, posts included discriminatory and racist expressions, such as the phrase "with Albin, the ashkali, not the gypsy."

The posts carried mocking and derisive tones, often accompanied by memes that trivialized political figures and sought to create ridicule and public scorn toward them.

Such language violates the fundamental principles of the Code of Conduct, as it incites hatred, prejudice, and division, shifting public discourse away from policy-based debate toward personal insults and the use of discriminatory language against ethnic groups.

	Comments	Hate Speech	Hate Speech %
	64,308	1,903	3%

Search:

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Përparim Rama Perparim Rama (639/7395), IndeksOnline (68/404), Vrojtuesit e lagjes – Prishtinë...	823	9	8,729	151
Faton Peci Nacionale.com (91/211), Faton Peci (31/1143), GazetaBlic (17/68), Gazeta...	202	9	2,139	46
Uran Ismaili Uran Ismaili (131/2479), IndeksOnline (6/30), Ardian Kastrati (3/60), NjeLajm.co...	141	5	2,600	80
Alban Hyseni Alban Hyseni (47/2321), Albin Kurti (11/130), GazetaBlic (10/36), Gjithçka Nga Gjilani...	94	3	2,789	193
Sami Lushtaku Sami Lushtaku (67/1581), Komuna Skenderaj (4/107)	71	4	1,69	9
Shpejtim Bulliqi Albin Kurti (35/274), Shpejtim Bulliqi (12/1597), Llapianet (10/107), Lëvizja...	66	3	2,215	42
Hajrulla Çeku Hajrulla Çeku (39/1032), IndeksOnline (8/32), Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJEI (5/85),...	5	4	1,36	66
Agim Aliu Agim Aliu (36/1252), FerizajPress (12/82)	4	3	1,44	27
Ardian Gjini Ardian Gjini (21/1272), NjeLajm.com (9/76), IndeksOnline (4/37), Besim Dina (4/36),...	4	3	1,53	42
Artan Abrashi Artan Abrashi (20/682), IndeksOnline (6/28), RTV21 (6/22), Gazeta Express...	4	5	90	47

Hate Speech on Social Media

Through the monitoring of social media using the Pikasa platform, a total of 64,308 comments published on the profiles of mayoral candidates and in media outlets that shared content related to them were analysed. Out of this large number of interactions, 1,903 comments were identified as containing hate speech, representing about 3% of the total.

This percentage indicates a consistent presence of negative and offensive discourse in online spaces during the election campaign, confirming that social media has become a polarized arena for local political debate.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

Among the monitored candidates, the most targeted by hate speech was the LDK candidate for the Municipality of Prishtina, Përparim Rama, who received 823 derogatory comments out of a total of 8,729 analyzed comments. In percentage terms, this means that 9% of the comments directed at him contained elements of hate speech – the highest proportion among all monitored candidates. A similar percentage was recorded for the VV candidate for the Municipality of South Mitrovica, Faton Peci, with 202 offensive comments out of 2,139 total, also making up about 9%.

This high level of negative discourse is linked not only to the public profile of these candidates and their participation in high-profile races – such as those in Prishtina and South Mitrovica – but also to the deep partisan divisions that characterize the political debate in the country.

The PDK candidate for Prishtina, Uran Ismaili, faced 141 hate speech comments, representing 5% of all comments directed at him. Although the absolute number and percentage are lower than those of Rama or Peci, it is significant because it reflects the deep polarization in the election in the capital city.

In the case of VV's candidate in Gjilan, Alban Hyseni, 94 offensive comments were identified out of 2,789 total, making up about 3%. While the volume of negative discourse was comparatively lower, it remained notable. It is also relevant that Hyseni was both the incumbent and ultimately the winner of the election, factors that may have contributed to a more stable or less polarized online environment around his campaign.

In the Municipality of Skenderaj, PDK candidate Sami Lushtaku received 71 hate speech comments out of 1,679 total, or 4%, which may be linked to his political image and the frequent public debates surrounding his past.

The data show that candidates with greater media exposure and those running in municipalities of high public interest are more likely to be targeted by hate speech. The negative discourse is mostly political in nature, involving accusations, mockery, and personal denigration, while ethnic or gender-based content is rarer in the case of male candidates.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

Partisan polarization emerges as the main driver of hate speech comments, with marked differences between candidates from the major political parties. Overall, the monitoring shows that hate speech in election campaigns is not randomly distributed but follows clear political lines and is often used as an instrument to undermine the credibility of opponents.

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Lëvizja Vetëvendosje Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJEI (633/6165), Albin Kurti (540/6907), Glauk Konjufca...	2,563	8	32,875	1,290
Partia Demokratike e Kosovës Mefail Bajqinovci (511/1590), Qyteti i Mitrovicës (111/657), IndeksOnline (86/323...	1,633	6	28,879	1,122
Srpska lista Bahri Cani (132/987), Specbuk (119/569), Kosovo Online (111/319), IndeksOnline...	1,338	20	6,73	203
Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës Xhevdet Pozhari (177/954), Jeta n'Podujevë (101/1108), Llapianet (73/655), Visar Azemi...	1,099	3	35,345	1,420
Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës Ardian Gola (39/198), Labinot Tahiri (30/314), Deçani (29/212), Natyra Kuçi...	400	4	9,024	325
Lista Guxo Partia GUXO (143/1995), Qyteti i Mitrovicës (3/64), Donika Gërvalla (1/64),...		7	2	175
NISMA Socialdemokrate Gazeta Express (40/161), Sinjali (20/77), Paparaci (11/34), IndeksOnline (10/58),...		12		89
Aleanca Kosova e Re Behgjet Pacolli (27/266), Qyteti i Mitrovicës (1/41)		7		16
Partia Social Demokrate Universal (15/253), Lëvizja Vetëvendosje Dardanë (3/42), Deçani Info (2/54)		6		17
Serbian Democracy Srpska Demokratija (9/381)		2		160

From the analysis of social media content through the Pikasa platform, which includes over 150,000 interactions related to political parties and their candidates during the local election campaign, a significant level of hate speech and aggressive political discourse was observed.

In total, around 9,400 comments containing derogatory or offensive language were identified in posts that targeted the main political parties, representing about 6-7% of all analyzed comments. These figures reflect

....

the extent to which the parties were the targets of such language, rather than the sources of it.

At the top of the list is the LVV, who were the targets of 2,563 hate speech comments out of 32,875 total, making up 8% of all comments. This high level of negative discourse may be linked to the party's strong online presence, stemming from its institutional dominance and the active engagement of its leading figures. Vetëvendosje is both the most followed and most commented-on party in the digital space, but also the most polarizing, as strong activism among its supporters often triggers harsh reactions from political opponents.

The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) ranks second, who were the targets of 1,633 hate speech comments out of 28,879 total, accounting for 6%.

In third place is the Serb List (SL), who were the targets of 1,338 hate speech comments out of 6,734 total, representing 20% – the highest percentage among all analyzed parties. This exceptionally high level of offensive commentary is likely linked to political tensions and ethnic divisions, especially in posts concerning northern Kosovo and intercommunity relations. Hate speech targeting the Serb List often contains ethnic elements and represents an example of polarization in the digital public discourse.

The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was the target of 1,099 hate speech comments out of 35,345 total, or 3%. The party tends to avoid direct confrontation with political opponents. This more restrained communication style may reduce the level of polarizing reactions and, consequently, the volume of hostile or aggressive comments directed at the party.

The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) was targeted by 400 hate speech comments out of 9,024 total (around 4%), while the Guxo List had 2,180 comments in total, of which 7% contained offensive content. These figures show that smaller parties, although less exposed, face a comparable level of negative discourse relative to their overall engagement.

Overall, hate speech directed at political parties on social media reflects the deep political and social divisions within the country. The negative

....

discourse is mainly focused on the larger and more influential parties and on topics related to political, ethnic, or institutional identity. Although in most cases hate speech is political rather than discriminatory on gender or ethnic grounds, the increasingly aggressive tone in digital spaces during election periods remains a cause for serious concern.

Post-election period

Based on Pikasa Analytics monitoring, the post-election period from 13–26 October 2025 remained highly contentious online, with significant volumes of comments containing hate speech and derogatory language even after election day. Across mayoral races, party pages and media content, the platform recorded tens of thousands of comments, allowing a closer look at where hostility was concentrated and which actors and topics attracted the most polarising reactions.

For mayoral candidates, Pikasa captured 75,032 comments in total, of which 4,424 were flagged as hate speech, or around 6%. This indicates that one in every sixteen comments on content related to leading mayoral contenders contained insulting, threatening or dehumanizing language. The distribution was uneven among candidates. Faton Peci and Përparim Rama received the highest absolute numbers of hateful comments (over 1,200 and 800 respectively), followed by Arian Tahiri with more than 500. Other candidates such as Ramiz Lladrovci, Gazmend Muhaxheri, Hajrulla Çeku, Sami Lushtaku, Shpejtim Bulliqi, Sylejman Meholli and Xhafer Tahiri registered lower but still substantial counts, typically in the high double or low triple digits. While percentages varied between roughly 4% and 13%, the overall pattern shows that the most visible candidates in tightly contested municipalities remained focal points of online hostility even after ballots had been cast.

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

| | Comments 75,032 | | Hate Speech 4,424 | | Hate Speech % 6% |

Search:

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Faton Peci — Faton Peci (334/3701), Qyteti i Mitrovicës (184/1602), IndeksOnline (116/417), Gazeta...	1,247	13	9,243	131
Përparim Rama — Perparim Rama (526/7256), Paparaci (75/246), IndeksOnline (60/370), Specbuk...	816	9	9,199	106
Arian Tahiri — Zëri i Mitrovicës (244/1546), Qyteti i Mitrovicës (145/1161), Bahri Cani (84/581),...	522	10	5,439	80
Ramiz Lladrovci — IndeksOnline (37/386), Bahri Cani (37/614), Xhevdet Pozhari (21/120), NjeLajm.com...	188	9	2,204	62
Gazmend Muhaxheri — Peja në Fokus (76/777), Xhevdet Pozhari (29/199), Peja Ndryshe (22/305)...	187	7	2,791	55
Hajrulla Çeku — Fitore Pacolli (56/306), Hajrulla Çeku (50/1749), Sinjali (16/68), Shpejtim Bulliqi...	179	7	2,720	85
Sami Lushtaku — Sami Lushtaku (40/854), RTV21 (24/165), IndeksOnline (23/96), Zëri i Mitrovicës...	14	8	1,819	15
Shpejtim Bulliqi — Shpejtim Bulliqi (34/2316), IndeksOnline (29/100), Gazeta Express (25/79), Llapian...	13	4	3,178	43
Sylejman Meholli — Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE! (92/437), Bahri Cani (27/291), Dr.Sylejman Meholli (5/39),...	13	10	1,3..	21
Xhafer Tahiri — Xhevdet Pozhari (35/240), Mefail Bajqinovci (18/139), Specbuk (15/96), Fitor...	9	4	2,715	33

A separate view focusing on women mayoral candidates reveals both continuity and difference. In this subset, Pikasa identified 662 comments, of which 29 were classified as hate speech, equivalent to 4%. The volume is much smaller than for male-dominated races, reflecting the limited number of women contenders, yet the rate of abusive content remains significant. Arta Vokshi Nallbani alone accounted for nearly half of all hate-speech comments in this sample (13 cases, or 11% of the 114 comments about her). Vildane Latifi and Emilija Redxhepi also faced notable levels of hostility, with 6 and 8 hate-speech comments respectively, corresponding to 9% and 8% of all comments mentioning them. Other women public figures such as Xhevahire Izmaku and Besa Shahini attracted fewer incidents. Still, the presence of hate speech across

....

all profiles confirms that women who engage in post-election debate - whether as candidates, former officials or commentators - remain exposed to gendered and personalised attacks.

Comments 662		Hate Speech 29		Hate Speech % 4%	

Search:

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Arta Vokshi Nallbani — Peja në Fokus (13/95)	13	11	114	2
Vildane Latifi — Fushë Kosova Portal (6/43)	6	9	66	6
Emilija Redžepi — IndeksOnline (4/13), Artan Abrashi (3/76), Specbuk (1/17)	8	8	106	3
Xhevahire Izmaku — Specbuk (1/17)	1	4	27	4
Besa Shahini — Bahri Cani (1/40)	1	1	142	4
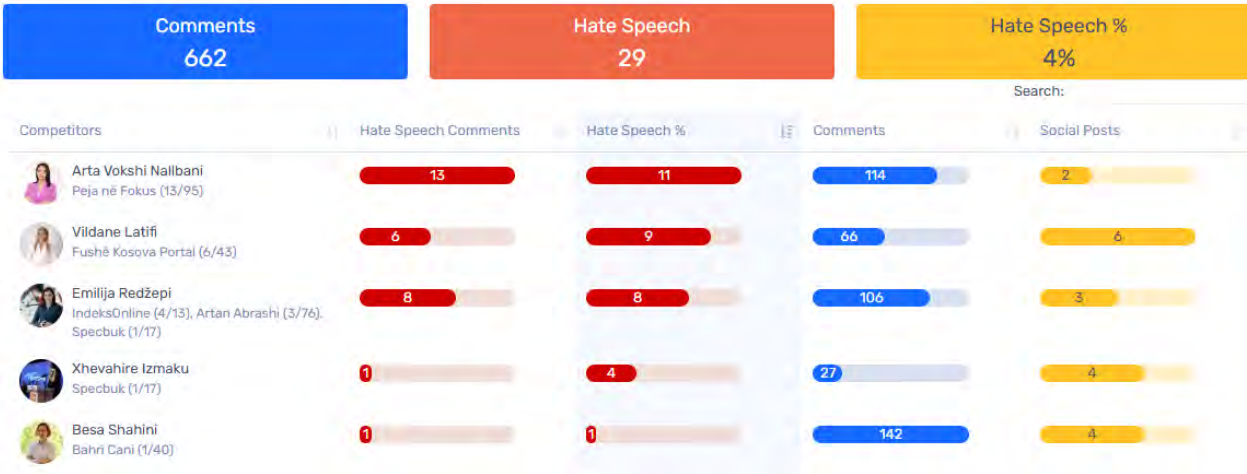
The topics visualisation for the same period helps explain why certain actors drew more aggression than others. Articles and posts mentioning key mayoral candidates - such as Përparim Rama, Faton Peci, Arian Tahiri, Xhafer Tahiri, Ramiz Lladrovci, Alban Hyseni, Hajrulla Çeku, Uran Ismaili, Sylejman Meholli and Shaqir Totaj - were heavily linked to highly polarising themes. The largest stream of content was connected to the diaspora, with 920 items, followed by debates on the mayors of the municipalities in the north of Kosovo (420), the Serbian List (400) and "North Kosovo" more broadly (240). Other recurrent topics included investments, the Constitution of the Assembly, the Association of Serbian Municipalities, the Special Court, corruption allegations and high-profile media figures such as Baton Haxhiu. This configuration shows that local races continued to be framed through national and geopolitical questions, especially the situation in the north and relations with Serbia, which are known to generate intense emotional reactions and, frequently, hateful language.

40

....

Topics Distribution (Articles and Posts) ⓘ ⌃ ✕

Përparim Rama 368
Faton Peci 491
Arian Tahiri 340
Xhafer Tahiri 133
Ramiz Lladrovci 285
Alban Hyseni 277
Hajrulla Çeku 153
Uran Ismaili 72
Sylejman Meholli 133
Shaqir Totaj 144

Diaspora 920
Mayors of municipalities in the North of Kosovo 420
Serbian list 400
North Kosovo 240
Investments 133
Special court 39
Constitution of the Assembly 100
Association of Serbian Municipalities 19
Baton Haxhiu 76
Corruption 49

When shifting the lens from individuals to political parties, the level of online hostility appears even higher. For party-related content, Pikasa recorded 63,009 comments in the post-election window, of which 7,337 were identified as hate speech, representing 12% – double the share observed for mayoral candidates. This suggests that parties as collective entities attract more aggressive discourse than individual contenders, likely because they symbolise broader political identities and long-standing partisan rivalries. Vetëvendosje received the highest absolute number of hate-speech comments (2,221, or around 12% of more than 18,000 comments), followed closely by the Democratic League of Kosovo (1,959; 10%) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (1,443; 10%). Srpska Lista stands out with 1,099 hate-speech comments out of roughly 5,991, an estimated rate of 18%, underscoring how discussions related to Serb political representation and the north of Kosovo are particularly prone to polarized discourse. Smaller parties such as AAK and NISMA also recorded elevated shares (around 11–14%), while newer or less prominent actors like Lista Guxo, Serbian Democracy, and the Social Democratic Party appeared with very low volumes and marginal violation counts.

....

	Comments	Hate Speech	Hate Speech %
	63,009	7,337	12%

Search:

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Lëvizja Vetëvendosje Bahri Cani (547/4142), Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJEI (456/2552), IndeksOnlin...	2,221	12	18,312	283
Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës Xhevdet Pozhari (337/1995), Specbuk (227/1156), Bahri Cani (217/1949), Albin...	1,959	10	19,113	296
Partia Demokratike e Kosovës Specbuk (214/1203), Zëri i Mitrovicës (192/1001), Bahri Cani (163/1604), Lëvizja...	1,443	10	14,019	260
Srpska lista IndeksOnline (135/521), Xhevdet Pozhari (119/773), Kosovo Online (93/317),...	1,099	18	5,991	118
Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës Specbuk (82/372), Kimete Berisha (39/674), Peja në Fokus (33/387), Kosova Report...	342	11	3,23	82
NISMA Socialdemokrate IndeksOnline (96/755), Nacionale.com (32/188), Gazeta Express (25/126),...	26	14	1,8	44
Serbian Democracy Srpska Demokratija (5/35)		14		3
Lista Guxo Partia GUXO (4/276)		1		25
Partia Social Demokrate Bahri Cani (1/40)		2		7

Taken together, the Pikasa data for 13–26 October 2025 demonstrates that the end of formal campaigning did not bring an end to polarised and abusive political communication online. Instead, the post-election period remained marked by intense debates around diaspora voting, the legitimacy and role of mayors in the north, the Srpska Lista, and questions of corruption and institutional legitimacy. Mayoral candidates continued to be targeted, with several facing thousands of comments and hundreds of hateful messages, while women candidates and women political figures experienced a smaller but still worrying share of hostile reactions. At the same time, party-centred conversations were even more likely to contain hate speech, particularly when they involved Vetëvendosje, PDK, LDK or Srpska Lista.

These patterns confirm that social media in Kosovo functions as an extension of electoral competition well beyond election day, with

....

persistent waves of hostility that can affect both the safety of individual actors and the broader quality of democratic discourse. The Pikasa monitoring for this period provides a crucial snapshot of how post-election tensions, unresolved political questions, and identity-based divisions continue to play out in the digital sphere.

....

Reported Gender-Based Violations

Gender-based attacks in campaign-related posts were characterized by insults, belittlement, and stereotyping of women in politics – often portraying them through their social roles or appearance, rather than their ideas or political performance. Terms such as "wicked woman" or "vile person", along with derogatory remarks like "focus on stylists, designers, and hairdressers," were used to depict women as superficial or unfit for public responsibility.

In several cases, the language degenerated into explicit insults and sexist or religious insinuations, including phrases like "without burka," "ninja," or allusions to "deceit" and "collaboration with terrorists." These posts aimed to morally and personally discredit women in politics, reinforcing gender stereotypes and clearly violating the principles of the Code of Conduct, which prohibits discriminatory, sexist language, and incitement to gender-based hatred.


The comments directed at Mimoza Kusari-Lila in another post contain harsh, offensive, and explicitly gendered and degrading language, far exceeding any acceptable limit of public discourse. Insults such as "youfilthy woman," "creature," "disgraceful one," "trash," and

Monitoring the code of conduct on the responsible use of social media during the 2025 local elections

....

"Radoičić's mistress" carry humiliating and sexualized connotations, intended to degrade her as a woman and portray her as worthless and shameful in the public eye.

These comments contain no element of political or ideological debate – they are filled solely with personal hatred and gender prejudice, linking a woman in politics with moral, sexual, and national betrayal labels. Through terms like "disgraceful one" and "Radoičić's mistress," the attack takes on both political and ethnic overtones, depicting her as morally and nationally "tainted."
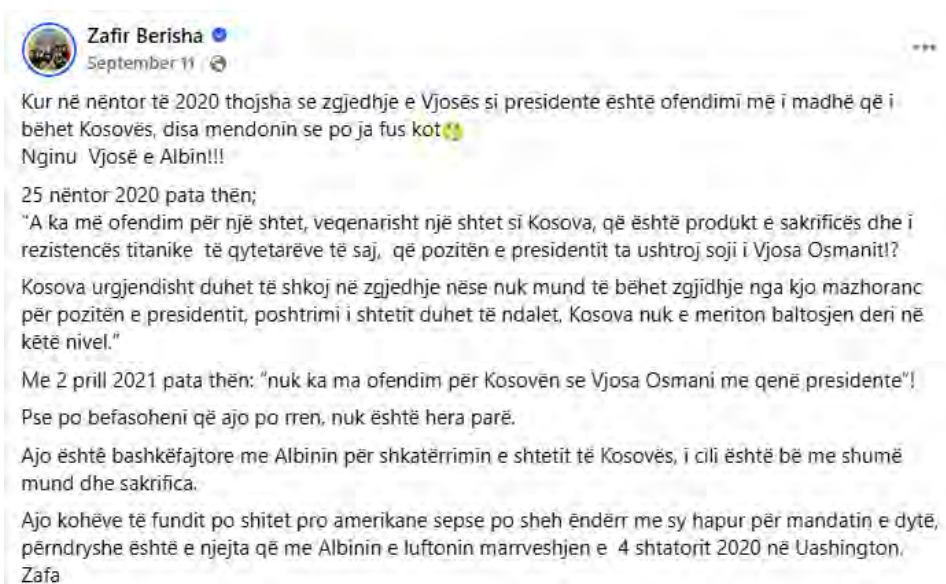
Such language constitutes a serious violation of the Code of Conduct and of public communication standards, as it not only attacks a person on the basis of gender but also incites hatred, contempt, and symbolic violence against women in politics.

Another example of gender-based hate and derogatory language comes from Zafir Berisha, candidate of the Democratic Union of Prizren for Mayor of Prizren, directed against a woman in a public position – the President of the Republic, Vjosa Osmani.

....

The post uses derogatory language, describing her as "of that kind" ("soj" in Albanian) and calling her election "the greatest insult to Kosovo." These expressions go beyond political criticism, amounting to sexist and exclusionary commentary that denies her legitimacy as a woman in a high state position.

Berisha portrays the President as "an accomplice in the destruction of the state" and "a liar," using an emotionally charged tone that paints her as unworthy, deceitful, and unfit to lead. The phrase "Nginu Vjosë e Albin" (roughly meaning "get lost, Vjosa and Albin") is a contemptuous and degrading expression, intended to personally and publicly humiliate her, far beyond the bounds of legitimate political critique.
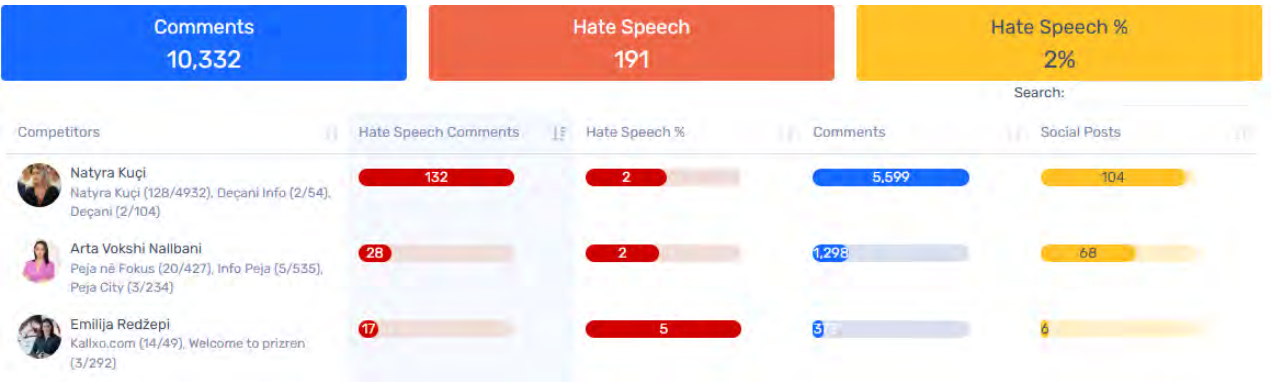
This post constitutes a direct violation of the Code of Conduct, which explicitly prohibits sexist, discriminatory, and derogatory language against women in politics. It contributes to the normalization of gender-based attacks and exclusionary discourse, undermining the standards of respect and gender equality in election campaigns and shifting public debate from political issues to personal insults and gender bias.

Cases like these demonstrate that online verbal violence based on gender remains one of the most common forms of political attack on social media - directly undermining women's equal participation in public and political life.

Through the monitoring of social media using the Pikasa platform, over 10,000 comments were analyzed on the profiles of women candidates in the local elections, as well as on other public profiles that published content related to them.

Out of this total number of comments, 2% explicitly contained gender-based hate speech. The most targeted candidate was Natyra Kuçi (PSD, Municipality of Deçan), with 132 comments containing derogatory or offensive language. She was followed by Arta Vokshi Nallbani (PDK, Municipality of Peja) with 28 comments, and Emilja Rexhepi (NDS, Municipality of Prizren) with 17 hate speech comments. However, when compared to the total number of comments on their profiles, Rexhepi had the highest percentage of hate speech comments (5%).

....

	Comments			Hate Speech			Hate Speech %	
	10,332			191			2%	

Competitors	Hate Speech Comments	Hate Speech %	Comments	Social Posts
Natyra Kuçi Natyra Kuçi (128/4932), Deçani Info (2/54), Deçani (2/104)	132	2	5,599	104
Arta Vokshi Nallbani Peja në Fokus (20/427), Info Peja (5/535), Peja City (3/234)	28	2	1,298	68
Emilija Redžepi Kallxo.com (14/49), Welcome to prizren (3/292)	17	5	3	6

Although the overall percentage (2%) may seem low, it indicates a persistent presence of derogatory language toward women in the digital space, particularly during electoral periods. The data does not suggest that women candidates are systematically targeted more frequently than men; rather, it shows that when women are attacked, the content of those attacks often reflects gendered patterns – focusing on appearance, perceived character, or questioning their suitability for public life. These forms of online hostility echo broader societal stereotypes that portray women as less competent or less legitimate political figures.

At the same time, the variation between individual candidates indicates that exposure is shaped by additional factors such as party affiliation, media visibility, and the size of the political party. Women with higher public profiles or those perceived as easier targets due to weaker political backing face greater vulnerability. Importantly, the nature of the attacks reflects a "male gaze" dynamic: women are judged on their physical appearance or personal traits in ways that male candidates generally are not, reinforcing gendered barriers to their full participation in public life.

The case of Bosniac former DPM Emilja Rexhepi, who received negative comments in 5% of the posts mentioning her, shows that the level of online hostility is not necessarily linked to fame or follower count. Instead, it appears to be influenced by ethnic or political affiliation, which shapes how certain public figures are perceived and discussed online.

....

Conclusions

The report shows that social media has become a significant arena for political communication during the 2025 local election campaign and, importantly, a space where divisive and derogatory language widely circulates. Instead of facilitating substantive debate on programs and policy choices, much of the online discourse was dominated by accusations, insults, disinformation, and personal attacks.

A total of 152 violations of the Code of Conduct on Responsible Social Media Use and other ethical and legal standards were identified. Approximately 70% of these violations involved hostile or derogatory expressions, while the remainder included personal bullying, defamation, and misleading claims. The vast majority of violations occurred on Facebook , reflecting its central role in political outreach and public engagement in Kosovo.

The actors most frequently associated with violations were candidates for municipal assemblies (66%), while political analysts and media pages made up an additional 24%. This distribution suggests that polarizing language is not confined to high-profile politicians, but is also shaped by other influential voices in the public sphere.

At the party level, Vetëvendosje, PDK, Alternativa, and AAK were most often targeted by violations. PDK was the most frequently targeted by negative user comments, demonstrating that parties who produce polarizing content but also frequent targets of it – indicating a tit-for-tat political environment

Gender-based hostility emerged as a significant concern. Women in politics were often confronted with derogatory comments that targeted their appearance, character, or private life, rather than their political positions. These patterns illustrate how gendered stereotypes continue to shape online behaviour and present an additional barrier to women's equal participation in public life. Importantly, such reactions differed in both tone and substance from those typically directed at male politicians.

Overall, the data indicated a lack of adherence to ethical standards and accountability in online communication, contributing to a more polarized

....

and hostile information environment during the election campaign. While social media remains an important channel for promoting political participation and transparency, the prevalence of personal attacks and polarizing rhetoric undermines the quality of public debate and affects citizens' trust in political processes. The findings therefore highlight the need for greater focus on the influence of digital communication on electoral integrity in Kosovo.

....

Annex 1: Code of Conduct for the Responsible Use of Social Media During the Local Elections in Kosovo

Preamble

Recalling Kosovo's international commitment to uphold democratic norms and electoral integrity as incorporated in the Constitution, the recommendations of the European Union Election Observation Missions active during the previous election cycles, the European Union's Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), Central Elections Comission's Code of Conduct for Political Subjects, their Supporters and Candidates, and Kosovo's obligations under its EU integration process;

Acknowledging the importance of social media in shaping public opinion during elections in Kosovo, the need to foster an online environment conducive of upholding the integrity, transparency, and fairness of elections, enabling all citizens to make well-informed decisions in the spirit of peace, tolerance, and respect for the rule of law,

Reaffirming our commitment to full implementation of electoral laws and rules; democratic standards; ethics in conducting politics; non-discrimination; data privacy protection; and access to verified and impartial information throughout the electoral process;

Recognizing the importance of fact-checking and the provision of professional, accurate, and objective information; while upholding the Code of Ethics of the Press Council of Kosova, complying with the legislation and by-laws of the Independent Media Commission, and adhering to internationally accepted standards and best practices in journalism.

Recognizing the importance of preventing disinformation, hate speech, and manipulated content on social media networks and online media, and of building citizens' trust in democratic processes through ethical and professional engagement, while countering online violence and harmful

stereotypes that disproportionately affect candidates and activists from marginalized groups,

Acknowledging the Declaration on Violence Against Women in Politics and Public Life as a significant non-binding instrument reaffirming zero tolerance for violence or intimidation against women in politics, and emphasizing the urgent need to prevent and respond to all forms of violence and harassment against women engaged in political and public life, including in online spaces.

We, the undersigned political parties, media, and civil society organizations, commit to the following:

I. Political Parties and Candidates

Use Official Communication Channels

Use only official and verified party, candidate, and campaign accounts for political communication.

Avoid using anonymous, impersonating, or fake accounts to spread political content or attack opponents.

Ensure Transparency in Paid Advertising

Clearly label all paid advertisements on social media platforms, aimed at political transparency and accountability and avoid discrepancies between declared expenditures and actual spending.

Disclose expenditures for all digital advertising, including promoted content, influencer partnerships, and third-party services.

Use ad transparency tools provided by platforms (e.g. Meta Ad Library, TikTok Ads Library, Google Ads Transparency Center) to strengthen visibility and public trust, in line with the obligations the Digital Services Act (DSA) asks from large platforms operating in the EU.

....

Create and share Accurate and Verified Information

→ Verify the authenticity and accuracy of information before publication or dissemination including through stronger cooperation with certified fact-checkers.

→ Promptly correct any false or misleading information shared, whether intentional or accidental.

→ Provide voters with accurate and transparent information about the election process to enable informed decision-making.

Respect Election Laws and Ethical Standards

→ Abide by the Kosovo election legal framework, the Code of Conduct for Political Entities, and all other relevant by-laws and regulations governing campaign conduct, both offline and online.

Promote Constructive and Inclusive Campaigning

→ Promote constructive debate and avoid personal attacks and unfounded accusations.

→ Promote respect and equality in all communication and campaign activities offline and online.

→ Ensure that women and men, as well as marginalized individuals, can participate safely and equally in political life, both offline and online.

Prevent and Refrain from Harmful Online Content

Political parties and their candidates, supporters, and affiliates shall not create or promote the following:

Disinformation and Misinformation

→ False information or manipulated content intended to mislead, distort the truth, or deliberately harm an individual, social group, or organisation.

....

→ This includes manipulated images, audio or video, and fake digital content (e.g. deepfakes) used to mislead or influence voters.

Hateful Content and Incitement to Violence

→ Discriminatory, inflammatory, or dehumanising language targeting individuals or groups based on sex, gender, race, ethnicity, geographical background (e.g. urban vs rural), language, religion, political opinion, or sexual orientation. Special attention shall be paid to women candidates, activists, journalists, and public figures. This includes attempts using hidden or coded language to avoid being blocked by platforms and to spread hate or fuel conflict.

Coordinated Influence Operations

→ Deployment or coordination of networks of accounts (including bots, trolls, and "cyberbullies"), either directly or via third parties, to manipulate the online information environment or simulate false support. These practices must not be used to discredit or silence any individuals or social groups, especially women or minority voices in political processes.

Harassment

→ Any content that causes individuals to feel unsafe or become targets of intimidation or harassment, whether physical or online.

→ Special attention shall be paid to protecting women from online gender-based harassment, threats, and abuse, including coordinated digital attacks, doxxing, and sexualized content.

II. Media

Respect Ethical and Legal Standards

→ Respect the Code of Ethics of the Press Council of Kosovo and other applicable laws related to media, elections, and information.

→ Ensure all political coverage upholds standards of accuracy, impartiality, and professional integrity.

....

→ Apply a gender-sensitive approach in all reporting, avoiding sexist language, stereotypes, or biased representations of women, men who do not conform to traditional gender norms, and gender minorities in politics.

Ensure Transparency in Political Advertising

→ Report and assess the accuracy of political advertisements, and clearly distinguish paid political ads from editorial content.

Prevent and Refrain from Harmful Online Content

Media outlets and journalists shall ensure that their reporting and online presence do not include or promote:

Disinformation and Misinformation

→ The creation or sharing of unverified, false, or misleading content, whether in news, political shows republished in online media, headlines, visuals, or campaign coverage.

→ When sharing statements from public figures, it should be clearly indicated when the content reflects a personal opinion rather than an already established verified fact. This includes manipulated images, audio or video, and fake digital content (e.g. deepfakes) used to mislead or influence voters.

→ Actively highlight and flag patterns of online abuse, harassment, or coordinated disinformation campaigns that target individuals based on their gender or other aspects of their identity, particularly forms of manipulation that exploit appearance, personal life, or fabricated scandals.

Hate Speech and Incitement

→ Discriminatory, inflammatory, or dehumanising language targeting individuals or groups based on sex, gender, race, ethnicity,

....

geographical background, language, religion, political opinion, or sexual orientation.

→ This includes attempts using hidden or coded language to avoid being blocked by platforms and to spread hate or create conflict.

Harassment

→ Any content that causes individuals to feel unsafe or become targets of intimidation or harassment, whether physical or online, including through personal attacks or the amplification of hostile narratives.

→ Special attention shall be given to digital gender-based violence and harassment, such as sexist insults, sexualized abuse, threats, doxxing, and reputational attacks disproportionately targeting women in public life.

Promote Objective, Accurate, and Balanced Coverage

→ Conduct objective and constructive reporting of candidates and campaign teams without resorting to language that demeans individuals based on sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or other identity markers..

→ Verify facts and give careful attention to the accuracy and context of all political content, especially narratives that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups with false or misleading information.

→ Strive to ensure equitable visibility of diverse candidates, giving space to underrepresented groups to articulate their political positions.

→ Commit to enhanced cooperation among media outlets to reduce polarisation in Kosovo's information environment and promote more constructive public discourse.

....

III. Civil Society Organizations

Collaborate to Uphold the Code

→ Continue cooperation with all actors to raise awareness and implement commitments generated from this Code of Conduct.

→ Promote participation of vulnerable groups, including non-majority communities, in electoral activities and information sharing.

→ Promote participation of women and gender minorities in these efforts, including in monitoring activities.

Promote Voter Awareness

→ Raise awareness among citizens about the importance of accurate information during the election process, including through online and offline campaigns on election, media, and digital literacy.

→ Provide reliable and accessible election information to diverse constituencies by addressing barriers such as language, literacy, and connectivity

Support Participation and Inclusion

→ Support and encourage the active participation of all citizens in the election process, including women, youth, and underrepresented groups, through targeted voter outreach and engagement.

→ Promote their voices and presence in the public space and election process, including through election-focused civic initiatives.

Protect Privacy and Uphold Ethical Standards

→ Promote the protection of privacy and personal data of voters and candidates, stressing that such data should not be used for voter microtargeting without explicit prior consent.

....

→ Ensure that privacy protections are especially attentive to risks faced by women and marginalized individuals, who are often targets of online doxxing and exposure.

Monitor and Report Harmful Content

→ A monitoring body, composed of five field monitors, will oversee the online space and social networks to assess compliance with the Code of Conduct and report any violations. The monitoring period will last eight weeks: two weeks prior to the official one-month campaign period and throughout the campaign. All identified cases of compliance and non-compliance with the Code of Conduct will be documented in weekly reports and summarized in a final report after the elections.

Conclusion

By signing this Code of Conduct, we affirm our shared responsibility to protect the integrity of online discourse during the upcoming elections in Kosovo. We commit to fostering a safe and inclusive electoral environment in which all voters, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or other identity markers, can make informed choices, free from manipulation, abuse, or fear.

Signed on 3 September 2025 at Swiss Diamond Hotel, Pristina, Kosovo

Kodi i Sjelljes për Përdorimin e Përgjegjshëm të Rrjeteve Sociale gjatë Zgjedhjeve Lokale në Kosovë

Parathënie

I. Partitë Politike dhe Kandidatët

Të përdorin kanalet zyrtare të komunikimit

Të sigurojnë transparencë në reklamat e paguara

II. Mediat

Të respektojnë standardet etike dhe ligjore

Të sigurojnë transparencë në reklamat politike

Të promovojnë dhe shpërndajnë informacion të saktë dhe të verifikuar

III. Organizatat e Shoqërisë Civile

Të bashkëpunojmë për të zbatuar Kodin

Të rrisim vetëdijen e votuesve

Të monitorojmë dhe të raportojmë shkeljet e mundshme

IV. Partitë politike, mediat dhe shoqëria civile

Kodeks ponašanja za odgovorno korišćenje društvenih mreža tokom lokalnih izbora na Kosovu

Preambula

I. Političke partije i kandidati

Korišćenje zvaničnih komunikacionih kanala

Transparentnost plaćenog oglašavanja

II. Mediji

Poštovanje etičkih i zakonskih standarda

Obezbeđivanje transparentnosti političkog oglašavanja

Promovisanje i širenje tačnih i proverenih informacija

III. Organizacije civilnog društva

Sprečavanje i uzdržavanje se od kreiranja i širenja štetnog onlajn sadržaja

Poštovanje izbornih zakona i etičkih standarda

Podsticanje konstruktivne i inkluzivne kampanje

Sprečavanje i uzdržavanje od štetnog sadržaja

Praćenje i prijavljivanje štetnog sadržaja

Zaključak

Potpisanog dana 03.09.2025 u Prištini, Kosovo.

Subjekti Politik / Politički subjekt		
Emri Mbiemri-Subjekti Politik-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Politički subjekat-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-Subjekti Politik-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Politički subjekat-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-Subjekti Politik-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Politički subjekat-Potpis

Mediat / Mediji		
Emri Mbiemri-Mediat-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Mediji-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-Mediat-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Mediji-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-Mediat-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-Mediji-Potpis

Organizata të Shoqërisë Civile / Organizacije civilnog društva		
Emri Mbiemri-OJQ-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-OCD-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-OJQ-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-OCD-Potpis	Emri Mbiemri-OJQ-Nënshkrimi Ime Prezime-OCD-Potpis

....

Annex 2: List of Signatories to the Declaration

Political Parties

→ Party URA

→ Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)

→ Alternativa

→ Iniciativa e Re Demokratike e Kosoves (IRDK)

→ Lëvizja Vetëvendosje! (LVV)

→ Social Democratic Movement (NISMA)

→ Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)

→ The New Democratic Party (NDS)

Mediat

→ Kallxo.com

→ Kosovo 2.0

→ Media Centar Caglavica

→ Telegrafi.com

→ RTV MIR

....

Civil Society Organisations

→ Lëvizja FOL (FOL)

→ Hibrid.info

→ Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR)

→ Prishtina Institute for Political Studies (PIPS)

→ Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)

→ NGO AKTIV

→ Democracy Plus (D+)

→ Kosova Democratic Institute (KDI)

→ Democracy for Development (D4D)

→ Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC)

....

Annex 3: Glossary of Key Terms

Hate Speech

Language that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence against individuals or groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, religion, political affiliation, or other identity markers.

Disinformation

False or misleading information that is intentionally created and shared to deceive or manipulate public opinion.

Misinformation

Incorrect or misleading information shared without the intent to deceive, often resulting from misunderstanding or lack of verification.

Out-of-Context/misleading Information

Accurate content presented in a misleading way by removing or altering its original context to distort meaning or perception.

Defamatory/Derogatory Language

Speech or expressions that insult, degrade, or damage the reputation of individuals or groups through offensive or humiliating remarks.

Meme

A visual or textual element - often humorous or satirical - shared on social media to comment on social, cultural, or political issues; in some cases, used to spread stereotypes, mock individuals, or reinforce political narratives.

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts 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 activity, please visit our website: **www.d4d-ks.org**