

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL PURPOSE DURING ELECTIONS

Overview document



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INTRODUCTION

The information environment has changed significantly in recent years, particularly as a result of new trends and developments, including the increased role of social media networks. The technological and social shift is changing the information landscape in a way that impacts democratic decision-making processes, in particular during the electoral period, as online social media and other digital technologies are increasingly being used for political purposes.

This phenomenon raises the question of what impact these social and digital media have on the political landscape, notably in developing regions where traditional media are often scarcer, democracies are younger, and the effect of social media on politics has the potential to be quite distinct.

This document is a part of a series of toolkits that are produced within the project and address monitoring of Abuses of State Resources, Campaign Violations, and Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior on social media. It builds on the Social Media Monitoring Pilot Project carried out during the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Montenegro, diving deeper into the monitoring strategies and its practical application.

The series of publications serve as a practical tool for key stakeholder audiences to take the insights and knowledge from the Social Media Monitoring Pilot Project and implement them directly in their work. While the elaborated approach outlined across these publications has considered investigating the use of social media for political purposes from the standpoint of civil society organizations, the insights from this project are applicable to anyone who is monitoring social media and evaluating its effect on politics.

This publication's primary purpose is to support civil society organizations that investigate the use of social media in their countries, in considering the best ways to monitor social media and online behavior of political actors during the electoral period. They are available as a resource to the general public and any organization, public institution, media, expert, academic, that wishes to get involved in investigating the use of social media during elections. Publications use language simple as possible to make this technical topic easy to understand.

The publications provide a practical guide on how to investigate the use of social media during electoral period, thus they should be used as a starting point when developing research methodologies. Depending on the design and anticipated outcomes of interventions and activities, it is advisable to consider a detailed approach for each aspect of the investigation this document addresses, e.g. Abuse of State Resources, Campaign Violations, and Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior. They provide a simple step-by-step guide to developing measurable, proportionate, and high-quality plans for your investigation. The steps should help you to decide what, how, and when to investigate social media and political behavior online.



IN THIS DOCUMENT YOU WILL FIND:

- » What investigating the use of social media implies and why it is important
 - » Guidance on how investigating the use of social media can support organizational/institutional priorities
 - » What Abuse of State Resources (ASR) is and why it is important
 - » What Campaign Violation is and why it is important
 - » What Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) is and why it is important
 - » Tips on how to leverage insights from investigating efforts
-



1. INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR POLITICAL PURPOSE

Nowadays social media plays a crucial role as people around the world communicate and share knowledge through these information sources. In this way, the social media has become popular during election campaigns as a consequence of the raising number of tech and social media users, as well as the overall economic, social, and political landscape. The social media can be a legitimate tool for motivating existing or new supporters to vote for the party, sharing the party's political message, attracting first time voters, providing feedback to the party, etc. However, we have been witnessing the cases of abuse of social media in recent years.

When it comes to the role of social media as a tool of political communication two main reasons for its usage could be distinguished. First, to share political ideology, information, vision, and propaganda that's consumed by the voters, and to grow their network of supporters. Second, to respond to their competitors, political opponents, and other social media actors. This type of communication in many cases is characterized by attacks among candidates, smear campaigning, black PR, aiming to undermine the reputation of candidates, including hate speech, and incitement of violence among social media users, i.e. voters, which by logic causes the rise of negative tendencies during the political campaigning.

In this regards, many negative trends have been noted during the conduct of elections in different countries, including countries with authoritarian system of governance, transitional systems, and also established democracies. Some of the most used tactics and negative trends in political campaigning are coordinated behavior (influence campaigns, foreign interference, internet trolls), inauthentic behavior (fake profiles, manipulations, bots), and inauthentic content (disinformation campaigns, fake and junk news, deep fakes), all of which aim to reduce voter trust in political parties and undermine the integrity of the electoral process. Other emerging threats include abusive behavior, campaign violations, privacy violations, and negative public propaganda against the media and state institutions by politicians, causing further issues for the democracy in general and the electoral process in particular.

In this new landscape, balanced and comprehensive oversight of elections and the social media sphere require an approach that looks for different kinds of violations during elections. In particular, monitoring social media for tracking cases of Abuse of State Resources (ASR), Campaign Violations, and Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB).



DEFINITION

Investigating the use of social media for a political purpose is a set of activities conducted using different monitoring tools to collect data and document various violations committed during the elections, aimed at protecting and improving trust and integrity of the electoral process.

There are two different functions of social media investigation. The first function is ensuring compliance of online behaviors of certain actors with legal and regulatory guidance, while the second function often implies social listening as an attempt to distill meaning from the conversations that are happening on social media.

In the continuation we analyze four key concepts that are constitutive pillars of the social media investigation, that could be distinguished from the definition above. In this way, it provides a detailed overview of every aspect of the investigation that researchers and monitors may find useful to better understand the overall process.

First of all, investigating the use of social media for political purposes consists of **the set of activities** aimed to assess the behavior of the political entities during various phases of the election process on social media and evaluate their behavior in terms of compliance with international standards and national electoral legislation. Activities help to establish how political entities are using social media for campaigning and whether information available through this means of information is adequate for voters to make free and informed choice. Statistical data on the post activity, interactions, paid ads, along with analyses of abusive behavior ad violations, serve as a basis for assessments. The results of the investigation show how the political entities behave and keep the public aware of any issues. When deficiencies are identified, corrective action should be taken to improve political behavior during elections and protect voters' rights. In this respect, investigating the use of social media should be an ongoing process, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

It is important to note that design of each investigation activity depends on the objectives of the research. However, when we talk about set of activities, it refers to the four general steps to the investigation approach which include: tracking, collecting, analyzing, reporting.

Graph 1: *Investigating the use of social media for political purposes general steps – How to investigate?*



Second, investigating the use of social media for political purposes uses a combination of **monitoring tools** in order to obtain a comprehensive and clear data that will be analyzed. Here it is important to understand that there are substantial differences between traditional and social media analyses and tools. Most importantly, different types of traditional media are regulated by international and domestic law and specific standards to evaluate the role and impact of traditional media during elections exist, while there are no such standards nor regulations in the case of social media. Besides, the quantity of information available on social media is huge, which is why it is important to blend media monitoring tools to filter and analyze the data.

For this reason, it is important to know which social media networks are the most influential in the country where the investigation will take place. This due to the imposed challenges when accessing the data needed for the social media analysis. In the case of Facebook, the best possible option to access data of the platform is via Crowdtangle which provides detailed data on all public accounts, their post activity, number of interactions of a specific post/link/video, and which posts/videos have been most shared.¹ CrowdTangle allows monitoring of narratives on social media by identifying keywords commonly used in the subject matter and counting their frequency. Besides CrowdTangle, there are different online tools, paid and free, which could also be used for data collection and analysis.² However, it is important to select the platform to monitor and proper tool which will provide the necessary data access, depending on the goal and focus of the monitoring.

Graph 2: Social media platforms to investigate

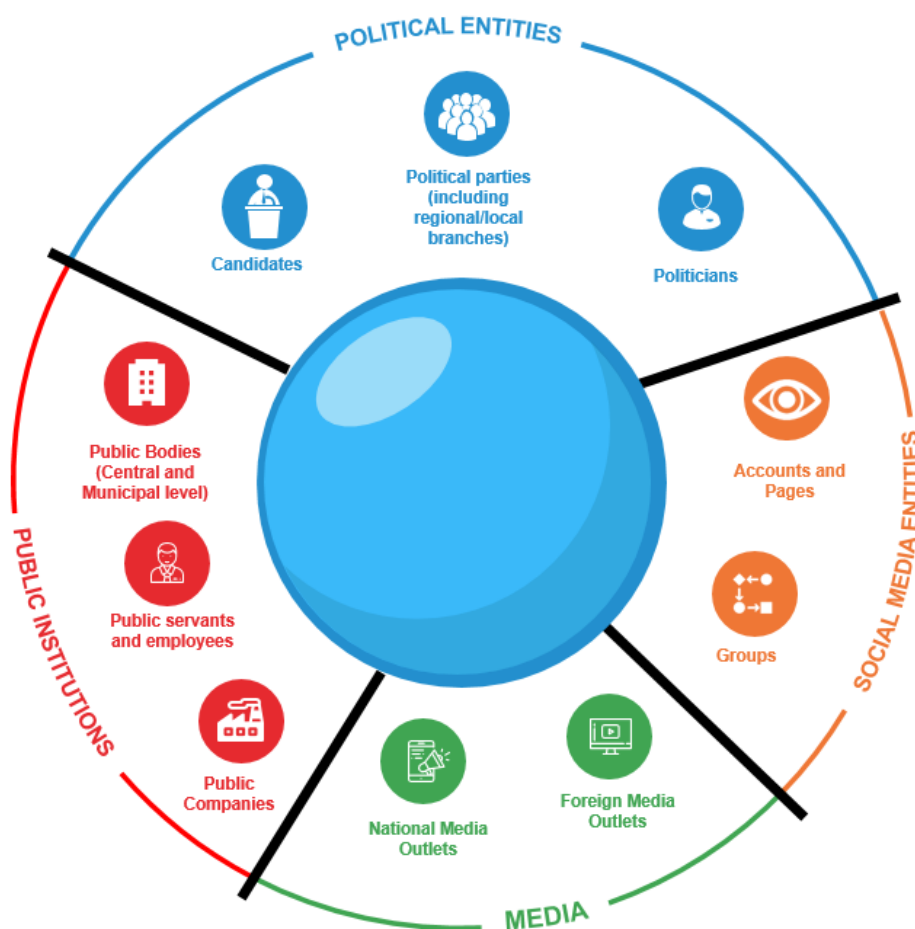


Regardless of the combination of the monitoring tools that are used, the key is to have clearly defined groups of actors whose behavior on social media is going to be investigated.

¹ CrowdTangle is platform owned by Facebook/Meta and only available to recommended, vetted researchers, journalists and academics

² Buzzumo, Google trends, Social Searcher, BoardReader, and many other apps that are available online

Graph 3: Who to investigate?³



Third, investigating the use of social media for political purposes tries to identify **various violations committed during the elections** by evaluating behavior that is manifested by different political parties, candidates, and other actors on social media and to assess to what extent this behavior influences public opinion and voters right to make a free and informed choice. The investigation also tries to evaluate to what extent and how political entities use social media networks for campaigning and voter mobilization.

³ Social Media Entities refer to public Facebook accounts, pages, and groups

Graph 4: What to investigate?

Political Activity	Abuse of State Resources (ASR)	Campaign Violations	Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of posts • Interactions • Type of content • Followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of state cars • Use of state premises for campaigning • Use of official state accounts on social media for political campaigning • Engagement of state employees in the electoral campaigning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid advertisement on social media • Use of hate speech or incitement to violence • Respect of electoral silence • Extraterritorial operation of social media accounts (influence operations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same post sharing • Fake profiles • Disinformation campaigns • Foreign influence operations

Fourth but not least important aspect of the investigating the use of social media for political purposes definition is the overall scope of the investigation initiative **aimed at protecting and improving trust and integrity of the electoral process**. Such approach shows encouraging signs of the increase of electoral process trust, suggesting that given sufficient civil-society coordination and collaboration, social media can be an effective tool for electoral scrutiny and can help build public trust in the electoral process. Furthermore, social media-based investigation can help to achieve higher level of information integrity during the electoral process, leading to increased transparency and information quality in the online space.

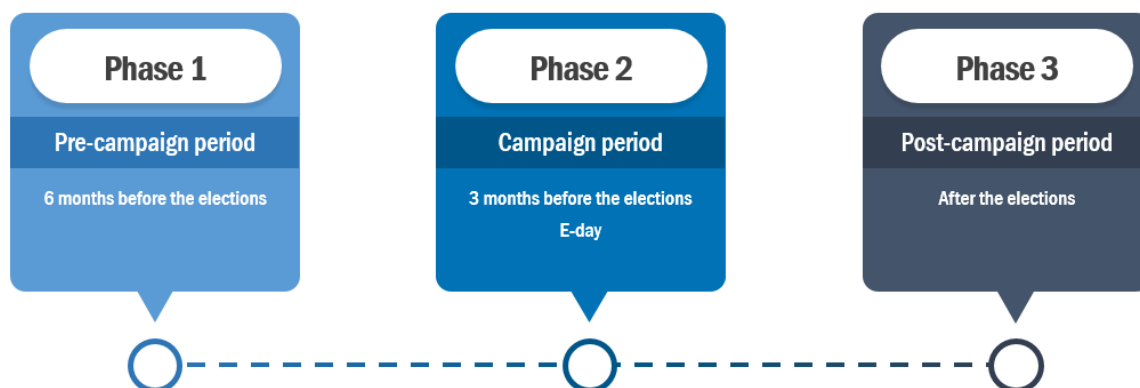
In order to have a comprehensive overview and detail elaborated recommendations for improvement, social media investigating effort should be conducted continuously, not limited to the electoral period only. Indeed, the investigation process should consist of the three phases:

- » **Phase 1 – Pre-campaign period:** During the pre-campaigning, monitors should conduct the assessment of the overall social media environment and identify key actors to investigate. These assessments will serve as a baseline against which investigating activities will be conducted. They will also have to identify deceptive behavior and third-party actors engaged in the campaigning including among others, public employees, fake profiles, domains, location of page admins, and overall infrastructure of potential organized operations. Following the preliminary assessment, monitors will track campaign activities by investigating behavior and collecting data on a weekly basis till the beginning of the electoral campaign. This phase should include of six-month period prior the elections in order to have a valid sample of data to evaluate and compare with other periods.
- » **Phase 2 – Campaign period:** the second phase comprise the period before the elections, i.e. campaigning period, including the Election Day. Monitors should conduct assessment of the usage of social media during the campaign, as well as for evidences of abuse of

state resources, campaign violations, and coordinated inauthentic behavior. In addition, they should focus on public institutions, employees, media, and other actors potentially engaged in campaign activities. Throughout the second phase, monitors must track activities, news, events, and other campaigning tools occurring outside the scope of social media investigation, e.g. documentation provided by the political parties regarding the campaign financing including social media paid advertisement. During the E-day, monitors should closely note violations of rules and principles exclusive for that day.

- » **Phase 3 – Post-campaign period:** last but not least important phase of the investigation includes the period after the elections when all the statistical data should be collected and organized. In the post elections period there could be some developments or important events which can be interesting for the reporting. As well, if during the previous phases there were any social media-related violations reported to the competent body or company, it is important to follow on that in this phase. It is also interesting to notice how political activity and various operations and propaganda progresses after the elections.

Graph 5: *When to investigate?*





2. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL/ INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES THROUGH INVESTIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA

It is important to ensure that investigating the use of social media by a civil society organization fits well into the pre-election context in a country where such investigation is possible. This type of investigation should not be understood as a substitute for any other type of monitoring conducted by different stakeholders entitled to investigate social media. If it is clear that national authorities entitled to oversee the media coverage during elections do not have any plans to conduct comprehensive monitoring of social media (due to a lack of capacity or resources), monitoring by a civil society organization (if carried out properly and using sound methodology) could be an important element in increasing the overall integrity of elections.

Systematic investigation of social media assists in identifying violations and taking prompt corrective actions. During elections, the results of such analyses demonstrate how political actors behave and keep the public and contestants aware of relevant issues. When deficiencies are identified, remedial initiatives should be taken to improve information integrity or protect voters' rights and freedoms.

It is essential that civil society organizations that monitor media create synergy and co-operation with other relevant electoral stakeholders, including media regulators, state bodies responsible for overseeing the financing of political parties/campaign financing, election management bodies, and other civil society organizations working in the field of election observation. It is important to make sure that rather than duplicating efforts (for example by monitoring the same types of media), civil society organizations try to create synergies and reach an agreement in advance of the monitoring.

There can be many goals of investigating the use of social media for political purposes, and having a specific goals such as objective assessment of political behavior and campaigning on social media, informing the public about the potential abuses of state resource and campaign violations during the elections, initiating a discussion about the quality of the information provided and promoting the adherence to international standards and best practices regarding the rule of law and election integrity, can be a meaningful way to achieve impact.

What are the priorities supported by conducting an investigation of the use of social media for political purposes?

- » To provide the relevant stakeholders with measurable results to assess the fairness of the election process.
- » To advocate for amendments to the electoral and media laws to address the use of social media during campaigning.
- » To inform voters whether social media is enabling them to gain a fair and unbiased picture of the campaign; and raise public awareness about negative trends such as coordinated and inauthentic behaviors, and of the need to question their sources of information prior to an election.
- » To document and raise public awareness about all cases of abuse of state resources, campaign violations by the public officials and employees or political party.
- » To build public awareness and inform media and journalists about influence operations, disinformation/misinformation campaigns, and coordinated inauthentic behaviors during elections.
- » To strengthened CSOs and media capacity to monitor social media in a professional manner and in line with international standards, by using this unique methodology and advanced tools to monitor social media during elections.



3. ABUSE OF STATE RESOURCES

To better understand what abuse of state resources (ASR) is, it is necessary to first define what state resources are. Venice Commission in its Report on the Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Processes highlights importance of proper definition of the term “administrative/state resources”. According to the Commission’s interpretation, following definition of administrative resources can be retained: *Administrative resources are human, financial, material, in natura and other immaterial resources enjoyed by both incumbents and civil servants in elections, deriving from their control over public sector staff, finances and allocations, access to public facilities as well as resources enjoyed in the form of prestige or public presence that stem from their position as elected or public officers and which may turn into political endorsements or other forms of support*⁴.

There is no universally accepted definition of abuse of state resources either in domestic legislations or international law. However, numerous countries, as well as international institutions and organizations recognize the importance of this subject matter. Therefore, there is a common approach that explains this phenomenon, and several attempts of defining abuse of state resources that can be mentioned.



DEFINITION

One possible definition of abuse of state resources, that will be used for further reference, is „ any use of state resources to support or undermine any political actor (such as a political party or coalition or a candidate for public office)”⁵.

From the aforementioned, it can be concluded that ASR is a form of political corruption dominantly present during the electoral campaigns, characterized by an increased degree of an unfair electoral advantage the ruling majority political parties drag out through unlawful use of state resources. ASR is recognized as the unethical, and sometimes even unlawful behavior of civil servants, incumbent political candidates, and parties to use their official positions or connections to government institutions aimed at influencing the outcome of elections. In its essence, the ASR alters power balances amongst political actors, which and may have a decisive impact on the electoral results.

Linking the notion of abuse of state resources with the election campaign specifies the essence and the time component of this phenomenon. Of course, state resources can also be abused outside the election campaign, but in that case, it usually represents ordinary corruption whose aim is personal enrichment of individuals or political/material benefits of the parties in power, although it is possible to abuse state resources for the purpose of reelection even outside of the official campaign. Therefore, the necessary prerequisites for the existence of abuse of state resources are:

4 Venice Commission Report, CDL-AD (2013)033 paragraph 12

5 Ohman M, The Abuse of State Resources, Washington, D.C., IFES, 2011

- » **The object of abuse** (financial, institutional, human, media, regulatory, and other state re- sources);
- » **The agent carrying** out the abuse – political entities, politicians, state/ local institutions; and
- » **The motive for abuse** – gaining an electoral advantage for the political party or candidate who the subject supports, staying in power etc.

As social media has become an increasingly important tool during election campaigning, it is a useful tool for documenting abusive behavior like use of state cars or government offices during campaigns. Abusive behavior refers in particular to the abuse of institutional resources, i.e. *“non-monetary material and personnel resources available to the state, including publicly owned media and other communication tools.”*⁶ Specifically, misuse of state media, government social media accounts, and public servants’ time, as well as their personal social media accounts during campaigning, represent examples of the abuse of institutional resources.

In this regard, the international community highlighted the importance of the legal and regulatory framework to prevent specific abuses related to a state’s institutional resources and preserve the impartiality and professionalism of the civil service⁷. Furthermore, ASR can have a negative impact on the overall integrity of the electoral process, as well as on the trust of the citizens in fair and free elections, its legitimacy and outcomes.

Ideally, state resources would serve only to achieve and promote public interests. They are an integral part of every state apparatus, without which its functioning is inconceivable. However, in many countries, the use of state resources by political subjects for the purpose of achieving personal or party goals and interests is a common occurrence, which can be detrimental to the legitimacy of the electoral process and ultimately to democracy.

By investigating the use of social media for political purposes and providing e-evidence on documented cases of potential abuse of state resources, organizations contribute to the advocacy efforts for the establishment of the legal framework and coordinated institutional response mechanisms to prevent and combat abusive behavior online and offline during the electoral period.

Against this backdrop, it is increasingly important to support initiatives where policymakers, electoral authorities, and other national stakeholders collaboratively capitalize on opportunities and tackle challenges presented by the use of social media during elections. With this in mind, advocating for the improvement of domestic anti-corruption strategies and tactics could play a crucial role in preventing deceptive political behavior on social media and abuse of state resources, as political actors worldwide are increasingly adopting new methods to manufacture and artificially amplify social media content.

⁶ *Idem*

⁷ Joint Guidelines for Preventing and Responding to Misuse of Administrative Resources during Electoral Process, Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, 2016



4. CAMPAIGN VIOLATIONS

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.21) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art.25) provide the right to participate in public affairs, voting rights, and the right of equal access to public service.⁸ In conformity with the Covenant, elections must be conducted fairly and freely on a periodic basis within a framework of laws guaranteeing the effective exercise of voting rights. Persons entitled to vote must be free to vote for any candidate for election and free to support or to oppose government, without undue influence or coercion of any kind which may distort or inhibit the free expression of the elector's will. Voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of manipulative interference of any kind.⁹

In order to obey internationally recognized standards and principles, domestic electoral legislation, laws and codes, contain basic principles for holding elections, as well as other details such as the timing of the elections, eligibility of voters and candidates, acceptable campaign practices and rules, and so forth. In some countries, electoral laws and codes may itself contain criminal offences, while in other countries these offences are part of the criminal code. However, election-related violations include acts of interference with a citizen's right to vote, integrity of the voting process, election candidates, etc.



DEFINITION

Campaign violations, in this sense, imply infringement of established rules by domestic legislation strictly correlated to the campaign and candidacy.

As social media becomes an increasingly important tool during election campaigning, it is crucial to find ways to investigate campaign violations that may occur in this space¹⁰. Given that regulations on the use of social media in campaign periods are nascent in most countries and that monitoring and oversight of political advertising on social media are limited as well, the opportunities for parties and candidates to abuse these channels of communication may increase as a larger share of campaigning happens online.¹¹ Bearing in mind that during political campaigning on social media, in the countries where social media campaign strategies are less prominent, political parties and candidates are unlikely to exceed spending limits through their use of Facebook and similar services¹².

8 Venice Commission, Council of Europe, OSCE, and other international and inter-governmental organizations have adopted many documents, recommendations, and opinions regarding elections and principles that should be respected. However, they apply only to the member countries and in many cases they do not impose any legal obligation for respecting them.

9 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25): 12/07/96. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, General Comment No. 25, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1996

10 Ohman, M. (Ed.), Training in Detection and Enforcement (TIDE): Political Finance Oversight Handbook, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 2013a

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12 Marantz A., Why Facebook Can't Fix Itself, The New Yorker, October 2020

Examples of campaign violations that pertain to social media include, but are not limited to:

- » Political advertising on social media that takes place outside of the designated campaign period;
- » Lack of proper disclosure of political ads;
- » Lack of disclosure of a paid relationship between a political actor and third party posting content or advertisements on behalf of that party or candidate;
- » Creation or re-sharing of content that has been flagged as problematic by third-party fact-checkers;
- » Use of hate speech or incitement to violence in violation of the law or a code of conduct;
- » Extraterritorial operation of social media accounts that violate national law;
- » Political ads being placed by foreign accounts/actors;
- » Not respecting electoral silence.

Whether we talk about evading campaign restrictions, campaigning throughout the silence period, disseminating false or misleading information, purchasing and disseminating political advertisements before the campaign period commenced, or promoting intolerant, negative rhetoric and incitement to hatred and violence, campaign violations can have a significant impact on the fairness and overall outcomes of an election.

For example, if during the electoral silence day, a social media post reaches tens of thousands of individuals, in particular in case when the voter turnout is substantially higher than in previous rounds and elections, the results of elections are likely to be impacted by the violations of the silence period. In some cases, while certain political parties respect the principle of electoral silence, others do not, it therefore creates an environment prejudicial to candidates running for elections, which undermines principles of free and fair democratic elections. Manipulative content, disinformation and smear campaigning, and aggressive rhetoric can have far-reaching repercussions in particular in terms of increase of voter abstention that can undermine the “sincerity of the ballot”.

On that account, it is important to investigate and report on campaign violations that occur on social media in order to protect voters’ rights on free and informed choice, as well as to preserve overall election integrity and fairness of the process. Civil society organizations and actors play a critical role in improving campaign environment, from analyzing political finance data from political parties and candidates published by public oversight bodies, investigating its accuracy and compliance with data provided by social media companies, to increasing the electorate’s awareness regarding issues that are harmful to the political process, and push for reform on the issue in a way that many public oversight bodies would not have the mandate to do.



5. COORDINATED INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR

Recognizing the importance of social networks for communication and interaction, Facebook has developed a set of Community Standards that outline what is and is not allowed on Facebook. Standards introduced the concept of Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB), focusing primarily on protection of integrity and authenticity of the users on the platform.



DEFINITION

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) is defined as “groups of pages or people working together to mislead others about who they are or what they are doing”.¹³

The people behind CIB coordinate with one another and may use fake accounts to misrepresent themselves.¹⁴ The network often uses compromised and fake accounts to run Pages – some of which change names and admins – disseminate their content, comment in Groups, and artificially increase engagement in targeted countries. This could be done for ideological purposes or can be financially motivated.¹⁵

It is important to note that the increase in negative phenomena such as inauthentic and manipulative behaviors and abuses, particularly during the periods of intensified political and social engagement, i.e., elections, is a global trend. Indeed, international research showed the rise of popularity of right-wing political ideologies as they are more successful in engaging their Facebook followers than their competitors.¹⁶ They often use sensational rhetoric and hate-mongering as campaign techniques, utilizing social media to largely undisputedly articulate their ideology and spread their messages.¹⁷

There is an evident increase in the use of various tools available on the Internet to reach as many citizens, i.e. voters, as possible. Creation and usage of various Pages, Groups and Meme account on social networks (dedicated to entertainment, culture or community) that, without revealing their authentic goals, share content through which they promote a certain political narrative, are just one of them.

All of this can have a negative consequence on the electoral process, as political entities in that way influence the political opinion of citizens, and thus jeopardize voters' right to free and informed choice. It also leaves the space for online manipulations such as creating the illusion of massive support or the popularity of certain subjects in order to bring in genuine support, the spread

¹³ Gleicher, N., Inside Feed Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior, Facebook, 2018

¹⁴ Gleicher, N., *Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior in UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia*, Facebook, 2019

¹⁵ *Idem*

¹⁶ Larsson O. A., Right-wingers on the rise online – insights from the 2018 Swedish Elections, Kristiania University College, School of Communication, Leadership and Marketing, 2019

¹⁷ *Idem*

of disinformation/fake news/misinformation. Additionally, technologies make it possible for international actors to interfere with national electoral processes.

From this perspective, active investigation and oversight of social media plays an important role, not only in terms of educating citizens and conducting awareness-raising campaigns about digital rights and online threats, but also in strengthening their own capacities in using new technologies and combating deceptive campaigns, such as coordinated inauthentic behaviors, disinformation, fake news, misinformation campaigns, etc.



6. LEVERAGING INSIGHTS FROM INVESTIGATING EFFORTS

Transparent and accountable systems of political campaigning that enhance the integrity of the political process and ensure a level playing field for parties and candidates are important for emerging, consolidating, and established democracies. Clearly defined and enforced regulations may reduce competitive advantages for wealthier contestants, vote buying and the abuse of state resources, hate speech and incitement of violence, deceptive behavior, disinformation campaigning, and increase public confidence in the political system.

In order to contribute to the strengthening of political campaigning regulations and oversight, and to cultivate effective and appropriate transparency and accountability measures, immediately after the elections, CSOs should consider organizing a collaborative initiatives with the relevant stakeholders, including the representatives of the government, the election management body, members of parliament, and media sector to discuss the monitoring findings and improvements to be implemented before the next elections.

Initiatives should provide a good opportunity to present the social media monitoring findings, including recommendations for legal and systematic changes in the election and media-related legislation.

TIPS

While defining activities for improvement and recommendations, CSOs should focus on answering the following questions:

- » What should be done to improve the political behavior during the next elections?
- » How to ensure fair elections and voters' right to free and informed choice?
- » Changes to legislation and regulatory practices?
- » Short-term and longer-term recommendations for improvements and changes?

In continuation, four main channels on how to leverage the monitoring insights are presented.

6.1 LEGAL AND REGULATORY REFORM

CSOs may work on providing assistance to the lawmakers and political regulators in conducting electoral legal reforms, developing procedural regulations to update and expand the existing legislative framework on usage of social media during campaigning. This is accomplished through encouraging consultation of key domestic stakeholders and the organization of workshops, working groups, and round tables.

Examples of this include:

- » Supporting the recommendations of the working group for electoral legislative and regulatory reform to enhance transparency and accountability during elections;
- » Hosting a multi-stakeholder workshop involving representatives from institutions that play a crucial role in controlling compliance with election-related regulations.

6.2 SUPPORT TO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

CSOs may assist public institutions with a mandate to receive and review reports from electoral contestants, and/or to monitor/investigate potential violations. CSOs should work with political regulators to develop internal procedures and manuals as well as conduct training that help clarify individuals' roles and responsibilities and the timing of different activities. Additionally, CSOs may support competent authorities in applying effective enforcement of regulations to deter non-compliance and corruption.

Examples of this include:

- » Assistance to the competent institutions, including training on how to conduct social media monitoring and oversight investigations;
- » Conducting training on social media campaign finance reporting requirements.

6.3 INVESTIGATION SOCIAL MEDIA AND OUTREACH

CSOs may work on strengthening the capacity of other non-governmental organizations to detect and raise awareness of major campaign and electoral irregularities. CSOs may work together with other organizations to develop an appropriate monitoring methodology targeting key areas of focus (e.g., the abuse of state resources, campaign violations) and based on best practices in investigating social media from around the world.

Examples of this include:

- » Supporting the monitoring of paid ads on social media in the electoral campaigns;
- » Advocating for introduction of the necessary reforms and political campaign rules

6.4 RESEARCH AND AWARENESS BUILDING

CSOs may ground their programs in research conducted at a national, regional and global level, and examines the interconnectedness of social media and other electoral issues, such as information integrity and the political participation of women. CSOs may also conduct public opinion research to gauge national attitudes on issues such as electoral reforms, the use of social media for the campaigns, funding for online campaigns, and reporting of campaign expenditures and the prevalence of vote buying.

Examples of this include:

- » Conducting a public opinion survey to measure both facts and opinions of the voters about social media, campaigns and elections;
- » Research and publication to help identify important regional electoral issues;
- » Conducting interviews and convening working groups to further understand the dynamics of social media in election campaigns.

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