MONITORING OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS

Toolkit for civil society organisations | Rasťo Kužel

MONITORING OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS

Toolkit for civil society organisations

Author:
Rasťo Kužel

Council of Europe

ELECLAB

Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory

Useful
Relevant
Sustainable
Owned

Council of Europe methodology for electoral cooperation

www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/overview

Contents

Acknowledgements

Division of Elections and Civil Society (DG Democracy)

T he Division of Elections and Civil Society (Directorate General of Democracy) at the Council of Europe provides advice and technical assistance to the member states on various aspects of elections, such as capacity building of electoral stakeholders and raising voter awareness.

In the field of capacity building, the Division of Elections and Civil Society works closely with election commissions to ensure that election commissioners are familiar with national election regulations and that they observe voters' rights when performing their duties. The division also works to enhance the capacities of other relevant electoral stakeholders, such as the bodies in charge of oversight of campaign and political party financing (for example, the State Audit Office of Georgia) or media coverage of election campaigns (such as the Audiovisual Co-ordination Council of the Republic of Moldova).

In this field, special attention is paid to enhancing the capacities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in charge of domestic observation of elections (more than 5,000 domestic observers were trained ahead of the 2014 early presidential elections in Ukraine, for example). Furthermore, in order to guarantee access to information for domestic observers, an e-learning course with a certification based on two handbooks on report writing techniques and international standards in elections has been put at their disposal.

The division also contributes to raising awareness of the importance of participating in elections as voters and candidates. It assists national election administrations in developing voter education and information campaigns, with a special focus on women, first-time voters and persons belonging to national minorities (such as awareness-raising campaigns for first-time voters in Albania).

In addition, technical assistance work has been carried out with a view to updating Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2004)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting. At the 1289th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies on 14 June 2017 the Committee of Ministers adopted a new recommendation on standards for e-voting. This new Recommendation, CM/Rec(2017)5, which follows the previous Rec(2004)11, was developed to ensure that electronic voting complies with the principles of democratic elections and is currently the only international standard on e-voting in existence.

The Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory (Elec Lab) concentrates on the division's research and thematic work in order to innovate and produce useful and relevant guidelines on various electoral matters, ranging from primo voters and better representation of women to modern strategic planning. Since 2019, the Division has implemented its assistance and support activities in line with the URSO (Useful, Relevant, Sustainable and Owned) methodology for electoral co-operation. The URSO toolkit for strategic and co-operation planning will be available online and as an app in the very near future. Its primary target group is national electoral stakeholders continuously engaged in electoral reforms, in particular central electoral commissions.

"The mass communications media provide information to most voters that is essential to the choice they exercise at the ballot box. Therefore, proper media conduct toward all political parties and candidates, as well as proper media conduct in the presentation of information that is relevant to electoral choices, are crucial to achieving democratic elections. Monitoring media conduct – when done impartially, proficiently and based on a credible methodology – establishes whether this key aspect of an election process contributes to or subverts the democratic nature of elections. Media monitoring can measure the amount of coverage of electoral subjects, the presence of news bias, appropriateness of media access for political competitors and the adequacy of information conveyed to voters through news, direct political messages, public information programming and voter education announcements. Shortcomings in media conduct can be identified through monitoring in time for corrective action. Abuse of the mass media power to affect voter choices also can be documented, which allows the population and the international community to appropriately characterize the true nature of the electoral process."[1]

Robert Norris and Patrick Merloe

---

1. Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections: An NDI Handbook for Citizen Organizations, Hardcover, July 2002, by Robert Norris and Patrick Merloe, https://www.ndi.org/files/1420_elect_media_02_1-31_0.pdf

Introduction – What is the purpose of this toolkit? Who can use it and how?

During elections, media monitoring provides benchmarks to judge the fairness of the election process. It assesses the behaviour of the media during various phases of the election process and evaluates their compliance with international standards and local regulations on election coverage. It helps to establish whether the candidates are given equitable access to media to convey their messages to voters and whether information available through the media is adequate for voters to make a well-informed choice at the ballot box. Statistical data on the amount of time dedicated to contestants and the manner in which contestants and other key political actors are covered by the media, along with analyses of bias, of the extent and quality of voter education campaigns or of the relevancy of election-related information serve as a basis for assessments. The results of the monitoring show how the media behave and keep the public and contestants aware of these issues. When shortcomings are identified, corrective action should be taken to improve media coverage or protect media rights and freedoms. In this respect, media monitoring should become a strong and ongoing process, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to provide feedback to the sector and to foster professional and ethical standards for the media.

The aim of this document is to provide a methodology to deal with common issues that may be addressed by pre-election monitoring. It is, however, important to note that the exact design of each media monitoring activity is dependent on the research question to be answered. In the above-mentioned examples, the intention was to provide tools that would allow monitors to determine whether broadcasters' coverage of election campaigns was balanced and fair and if broadcasters exercised balance in their coverage of contentious political and other issues.

The Council of Europe has addressed the issue of media and elections in various standard-setting instruments, including Recommendation No. R (99) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns; Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns; and practical guidelines like the Code of good practice in electoral matters drawn up by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the Guidelines on Media Analysis During Election Observation Missions issued jointly by the Venice Commission and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), or more recently PACE Resolution 2254 (2019) on Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections.

The methodologies described in this document do not presuppose the use of any particular computer software for storing and analysing the data gathered but could be used in conjunction with widely available spreadsheet or database software (such as Microsoft Excel or Access), with more sophisticated analysis carried out through a specialised statistical package, if required. It should be noted that the author of this guide has longstanding experience of media monitoring, in a variety of contexts, using widely available software.

Election campaigning in the 21st century. New challenges in monitoring media coverage of elections

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The will of the people, expressed through genuine, democratic elections, is the basis of the authority of any democratic government. That authority cannot be established unless voters make a free and informed choice among the political contestants. 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. This technological and social shift is changing the way media influence the whole democratic decision-making process, notably during elections. Television is still generally the most popular source of political information for voters but the internet, with online media and social media networks, has gradually increased its role. For a certain segment of society, particularly younger people, it has already overtaken television as the main source of political information.

The role of television, the internet and other types of mass communication media is very important for most voters in determining their choice at the ballot box during elections. Proper mass media conduct towards all political parties and candidates, as well as proper media conduct in the presentation of information that is relevant to voters, is therefore crucial to achieving democratic elections. In addition, through reporting on the performance of incumbents and on campaign developments, and by providing a platform for debates among candidates and allowing candidates to communicate their message to the electorate, the media should inform voters how to exercise their rights, monitor the electoral process, including election-day proceedings, and report the results to the public.[2]

We have unfortunately seen a number of negative trends in the past few years which have cast a shadow over the conduct of elections in a number of countries. This concerns not only countries with an authoritarian system of governance but also well-established democracies. There is a general tendency for politicians to become disconnected from voters and quickly forget about their promises once the elections are over. They are instead busy determining how to stay in power, which contributes to the overall lack of trust in politicians and institutions. As recent experience with elections in many countries shows, growing public distrust of mainstream political parties has resulted in people voting for populist or more radical alternatives. Populists offer short-term solutions to long-term problems, which resonate with many voters and are amplified by social media networks. According to a report by Freedom House, in countries ranging from Italy to Sweden, anti-liberal politicians have shifted the terms of debate and won elections by promoting an exclusionary national identity as a means for frustrated majorities to gird themselves against a changing global and domestic order.[3] Thanks to the internet, we live in a society of immediate consumption – if we see something online that we like, we can order it right away. Responsible political decisions require more time and are often not very popular, which is why it is more difficult to pursue them in an online media world "virtual supermarket".

---

2. OSCE/ODIHR Handbook On Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions, 2012 pp. 13, http://www.osce.org/odihr/92057?download=true.
3. Freedom of the World 2019 report available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf

THE CHANGING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Some 2.8 billion people globally use Facebook, which is more than the number of conventional followers of Christianity. There are about 1.8 billion users of YouTube, which is about the number of conventional followers of Islam. Millennials check their phones approximately 150 times per day. The above numbers demonstrate to what extent social media networks have intruded into our lives. The arrival of largely unregulated private actors in the democratic arena has impacted our ability to receive important information about elections. According to an article in The *Guardian*, "by acting like technology companies, while in fact taking on the role of publishers, Google, Facebook and others have accidentally designed a system that elevates the cheapest and 'most engaging' content at the expense of more expensive but less 'spreadable' material. Anyone who wants to reach a million people with a poorly produced conspiracy theory video is in luck. If, however, you want to run a well-resourced newsroom covering a town of 200,000 people, that is not going to be sustainable."[4]

New media is a broad term that describes a range of media utilised for many different purposes, comprising the internet, mobile phones, social media networks such as blogs and micro-blogs, social networking websites, video-sharing sites, and others. Unlike traditional media, new media are usually interactive. They use digital, online and mobile technology and are often audience-created and user-driven.[5] In addition, they function in real-time and are usually borderless. The line between traditional media and social media is often blurred, with many 'traditional' journalists using the internet as a key source of information for stories, and many traditional media creating online editions or transforming themselves into fully multi-media outlets. Moreover, traditional media also utilise "citizen journalism" pieces and rely on personal mobile phone images and video to cover certain stories where they do not have their own reporters.[6] Indeed, the rise of new media, such as social media websites, blogs, email and other new media platforms, provides further avenues and possibilities for participatory citizenship, information and knowledge sharing, inclusion and empowerment. Both traditional and new media can play a vital watchdog role and serve as a campaign platform, as a forum for public debate and as a public educator, ultimately strengthening democracy. At the same time, however, online media can pose serious challenges to the integrity of the election process, mainly due to the emergence of disinformation and fake news. As recent experience has shown, social media networks can be used by extremists to work against democracy or by foreign governments to interfere in elections. As a result, the initially positive view of social media has changed and many are now aware that social media networks can be used for good and bad purposes, like any technology.

According to the Freedom of the Net 2018 report by Freedom House, "disinformation and propaganda disseminated online have poisoned the public sphere. The unbridled collection of personal data has broken down traditional notions of privacy."[7] The report also highlighted that "if democracy is to survive the digital age, technology companies, governments, and civil society must work together to find real solutions to the problems of social media manipulation and abusive data collection."[8] Freedom House had previously criticised online manipulations, with bots, propaganda producers and fake news outlets exploiting social media and search algorithms to ensure high visibility and seamless integration with trusted content, and it expressed concern that "the effects of these rapidly spreading techniques on democracy and civic activism are potentially devastating." Mention should also be made of the fact that these actions contribute to a declining confidence in international alliances and organisations, public institutions and mainstream media. The main goal appears to be to destroy trust, pollute the information space and attempt to destroy public discourse and democratic institutions.

While social media networks have expanded the possibility of receiving and imparting information, they have contributed to a general lack of meaningful debate, with internet users divided among "filter bubbles" of like-minded people who are locked in echo chambers that reinforce their own biases. These trends are contributing

---

4. Lenore Taylor,: "Decent, trusted journalism is worth fighting for. We have to find a way", *The Guardian*, 6 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/may/06/decent-trusted-journalism-is-worth-fighting-for-we-have-to-find-a-way.
5. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory in its study entitled "Media coverage of elections: the legal framework in Europe", while "online" indicates the internet accessed through computers, smartphones and tablets, there are at least three different types of online media. In the first group, there are online news media, and as a study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has indicated, many of the most influential online media in Council of Europe member states are the online versions of a broadcaster or newspaper (such as *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, and *BBC News*). In the second group, there are online news media which developed as an exclusive online presence, such as the *Huffington Post* and *Buzzfeed*. In the third group, there are online social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, which are used to access and share news. Notably, in the Reuters study, 51% of respondents said that they used social media as a source of news each week, but only 12% said that it was their "main source" of news. In addition, of those aged between 18 and 24, 28% said social media were their "main source" of news.
6. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/meb/mab02e
7. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN_2018_Final%20Booklet_11_1_2018.pdf
8. Ibid.

to a decrease in critical thinking among audiences. Disinformation created for profit or other gain, disseminated through state-sponsored programmes or spread through the deliberate distortion of facts by individuals or groups with a particular agenda, including the desire to impact elections, is a serious problem with negative implications for democratic institutions. Those behind such disinformation include co-ordinated actors (influence campaigns and internet trolls) who spread inauthentic content (junk news and deep fakes) aiming to undermine the reputation of candidates (especially women), to discourage or eliminate voters (particularly marginalised groups) and to cast a shadow over the integrity of the electoral process.

Other emerging threats to democratic discourse in general and electoral processes in particular include abusive behaviour, hate amplification, trolling, identity theft and other privacy- invasive practices, foreign interference – and the inability of observers to identify them. Other challenges include the growing politicisation of the media, public accusations against the media by politicians, and the fact that journalists often have to work under undue pressure.

These developments have prompted various stakeholders to conceive appropriate responses in terms of regulation and self-regulation which can help tackle these challenges. It is clear that big technology companies are disconnected from the local context in many countries and should have greater responsibility for the content which appears on their networks. Given that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used to address content-related issues, it is important that it is taken into consideration from the perspective of states' human rights obligations, with transparency becoming a standard norm integrated into the system. There is a general lack of international standards and regional commitments aimed at regulating the new media and introducing complaints processes, although some states (such as Germany or France) have brought in national legislation to regulate and sanction intolerant content and disinformation online. However, these attempts have been met with negative reactions from freedom-of-expression advocates who fear that these regulations may go too far and result in censorship.

It is therefore important that the development of international standards and regional commitments with regard to the regulation of the new media is based on solid and comprehensive research. At the same time, it is important to review the existing standards regulating the media coverage of elections and bring them into line with the current new trends. For example, does it still make sense to impose a campaign moratorium prior to election day in the internet era, particularly as it is very difficult if not impossible to properly implement it given the transborder character of the internet. The relevant stakeholders should ask these questions and should have reliable and comprehensive data at their disposal. The monitoring of traditional and new media by civil society organisations helps to provide such data and could generally help to inform the debate on future standards and commitments in this area.

NEW CHALLENGES IN MONITORING THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS

Among the challenges encountered in monitoring media coverage of elections is the fact that a more comprehensive approach to monitoring social media networks is yet to be developed. A number of organisations have conducted monitoring projects focusing on the way social media networks behave during elections and what sort of information is available for voters who use them as their source of information. Given the absence of a clear methodology and standards in this area, consistency, clarity and proper referencing to international standards are limited.

Conversely, clear regulations exist for traditional media, with broadcasters historically subject to the highest level of regulation, in particular during election periods. Among other factors, this has been linked to the fact that they continue to be the main source of news for most people. Broadcast media (both public and private) have been made subject to a broad range of rules during elections, including the obligation for public and private broadcasters to cover elections in a "fair, balanced and impartial manner". Given the different nature of the print and the broadcast media, the press is free to have a distinct political leaning.[9] This is mainly connected to the way the public has had access to and has been influenced by the press, which differs as compared with the broadcast media.

Public service media have an enhanced duty to inform the electorate about election matters, including the role of elections in a democracy, how to exercise one's right to vote, the key electoral issues and the policy positions of the various parties and candidates contesting the election. This should normally include reporting that involves questions being put to party leaders and candidates, as well as debates between candidates.

---

9. According to Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (99) 15, the regulation of media coverage of elections "should not interfere with the editorial independence of newspapers or magazines nor with their right to express any political preference".

Moreover, public service media are subject to strict rules of impartiality and balance, particularly when reporting on the governing party and on government decisions and actions during an election period.

The changed media environment also presents new challenges in the case of media monitoring. It is always important to have clear benchmarks for media evaluation. Such benchmarks exist when it comes to the analysis of traditional media. For example, it is less problematic to decide what to focus on in terms of sampling. It is also not so difficult to determine which media outlets are most used by people when they are looking for election-related information. In addition, traditional media generally have fixed schedules, and it is usually possible to determine which programmes and sections should be monitored. By contrast, social media networks and their users generate a large amount of content, most of which may have little or no relevance to elections. While it is possible to determine the country-specific popularity and relevance of different social media networks, it is much more difficult to identify which content is important from the election-related perspective.
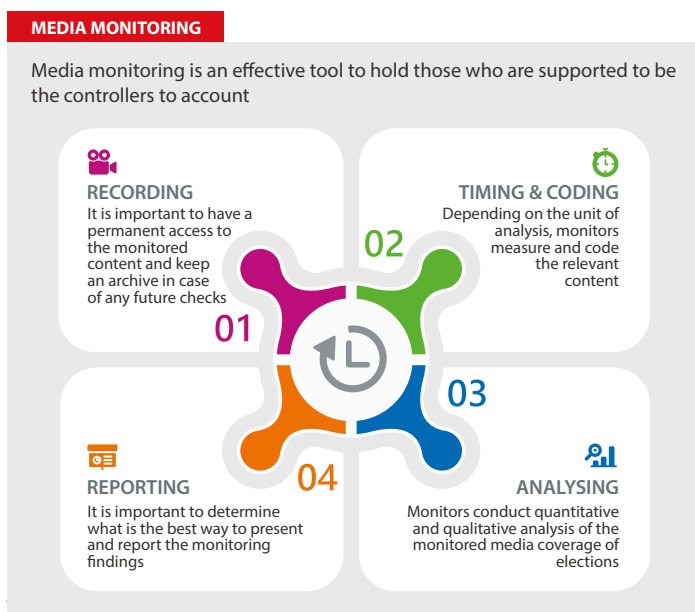
SECTION 2

Initiating a media monitoring project

During elections, media monitoring provides benchmarks for judging the fairness of the election process. Media monitoring assesses the behaviour of the media during various phases of the election process and evaluates their compliance with international standards and local regulations on election coverage. It helps to establish whether the candidates are being given equitable access to media to convey their messages to voters and whether information available through the media is sufficient for voters to make well-informed choices at the ballot box. Statistical data on the amount of time dedicated to contestants and the manner in which contestants and other key political actors are covered by the media, along with analyses of bias, of the extent and quality of voter education campaigns or of the relevancy of election-related information serve as a basis for assessments. The results of the monitoring show how the media behave and keep the public and contestants aware of these issues. When shortcomings are identified, a corrective action should be taken to improve media coverage or protect media rights and freedoms. In this respect, media monitoring should be part of an ongoing process, both quantitatively and qualitatively, feedback to the media sector and to foster professional and ethical standards.

Media monitoring is an effective means of holding those supposed to be critical scrutinisers to account. The main goal of media monitoring conducted by a civil society organisation (CSO) is to provide feedback to media audiences and initiate a discussion about the quality of media reporting and the importance of real watchdog-type reporting and investigative journalism. Given the recent changes in the way media and other sources of information operate during elections, monitoring of the media by citizens so as to observe and question their compliance with existing standards is an important part of election observation and should contribute to overall media literacy and awareness. Furthermore, media monitoring reports provide the media, political contestants and citizens with benchmarks whereby they can assess the fairness of the election process as a whole. The basic question citizens should ask when conducting a media monitoring exercise is whether information available through the media is sufficient for voters.

CHART 1 SHOWS VARIOUS PHASES OF THE MONITORING PROCESS

MEDIA MONITORING

Media monitoring is an effective tool to hold those who are supported to be the controllers to account

01 RECORDING It is important to have a permanent access to the monitored content and keep an archive in case of any future checks

02 TIMING & CODING Depending on the unit of analysis, monitors measure and code the relevant content

03 ANALYSING Monitors conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of the monitored media coverage of elections

04 REPORTING It is important to determine what is the best way to present and report the monitoring findings

As can be seen from Chart 1, the monitoring process consists of the following four phases: recording and archiving; timing and coding;analysis; and reporting.

Recording & Archiving – it is important to have permanent access to the monitored content and to keep an archive permitting to check the data matrix to ensure the overall quality of the monitoring and eliminate any possible errors that may occur in the course of the monitoring. All the analysed media are carefully recorded and compiled into an exhaustive project archive and database, both physical with original recordings and electronic.

Timing & Coding – depending on the *unit of analysis*, monitors measure and code the relevant content. In the case of the coverage of political contestants and other relevant entities, the *unit of analysis* is the time devoted to each contestant or entity (counted in seconds, if the unit of analysis is 1 second). In addition to calculating how much time relevant entities receive in the media, it is also important to understand how the time is used. Equal time does not automatically mean equal coverage. The tone of the coverage

(sentiment analysis) and how the actor or entity is portrayed is important information complementing the data on time allocation. The *sequence of time* relating to the *relevant political actor* is coded according to the following variables: the total *direct/indirect time* and the *tone of the coverage* (positive, neutral, negative, see also *Media Analysis: What are We Trying to Determine*). Within a program, which is the *unit of context*, there are numerous units of analysis related to various political actors or entities. The *units of analysis* are recorded and coded separately with selected variables.

> When the level of political diversity in the election-focused reporting is assessed, it is a good practice to analyse a minimum period of two weeks before identifying any tendencies and trends and before drawing any conclusions on whether or not a particular media outlet is fair and balanced.

Analysis – corresponds to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the monitored media coverage of elections. *Quantitative analysis* includes a number of numeric measures and indicators (variables) that can be counted and analysed, including assessing and producing findings regarding the time allocated to each monitored subject, topics, top stories and geographical area of coverage and also evaluating the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. In addition, monitoring can focus on the structure of news programmes in terms of their thematic diversity, geographical coverage and top stories in the monitoring period, as well as the duration of news items. *Qualitative analysis* evaluates the performance of selected media outlets against ethical and professional standards, such as balance, accuracy, timeliness, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language that cannot be easily quantified (see also *Media Analysis: What are We Trying to Determine*). These data are reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

Reporting – it is important to make sure that people with experience of media monitoring carry out the data analysis, create tables and charts and write monitoring reports. It should be clear before each monitoring process how many reports will be published along with the precise timeline. Depending on the length of the monitoring, it is important to determine the number of interim reports to be published in the lifespan of the project. Given the fact that it is good practice to analyse a minimum of two weeks of monitoring and to leave some time for data analysis, it is recommended to leave at least three weeks between the reports (the precise timing is determined in accordance with the number of monitored outlets and the amount of data to be processed and analysed). The final report should include a comprehensive analysis with in-depth information about the trends and tendencies monitored, along with monitoring results (in the form of charts and tables) showing a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage, as well as project recommendations for legal and other improvements (see also Reporting).

DEVELOPING PROJECT GOALS

It is important to develop a clear project goal and to identifty the key objectives and the reasons for conducting a media-monitoring project during elections.

MEDIA MONITORING PHASES

Developing a clear project goal
It is important to develop a clear project goal and to know what the key objectives are and why we conduct a media-monitoring project during elections. In addition to the main goals stated in the introduction, here are some additional objectives.

Determining the type of monitoring
It is important to determine the type of monitoring which will be conducted based on the type of elections taking place as well as other important factors (financial and human resources, monitoring period, number of reports etc.)

Sampling & unit of analysis
It is important to determine which media are relevant and important to be included. When using quantitative monitoring, it is necessary to set the unit of analysis. This refers to the different blocks of broadcast time that is monitored, measured and assigned various codes. The unit of analysis is determined according to what sort of monitoring is being conducted.

Deciding which subjects to monitor
For the purpose of monitoring the level of political diversity in election-related reporting, it is important to include the following subjects: President, Government, Local government, Registered contestants, Parliamentary parties, Relevant non-parliamentary parties, and Others.

Quantitative analysis
Quantitative analysis focuses on the amount of time allocated to selected political subjects and the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral and negative.

Qualitative analysis
Qualitative media monitoring is used to assess the performance of media against measures, such as ethical or professional standards, that cannot be easily quantified. These standards include but are not limited to balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language, etc.

Data entering
For each day's coverage, monitors complete a monitoring form. This form should be reviewed by a data enterer who will enter the data into a special monitoring programme (database).

Interpretation of the data
It is important that people experienced with media monitoring do the data analysis, create tables and charts and write monitoring reports.

CHART 2: MEDIA MONITORING PHASES

PURPOSE OF THE MONITORING

The aim of the monitoring is to provide a professional, comprehensive and objective assessment of political diversity and balance in the news and current affairs coverage of the monitored media. Additional objectives of the monitoring include focusing on social media networks and the potential impact of disinformation and propaganda, or determining to what extent the media combat stereotypes (for example, in the context of gender-related topics and issues). In general, the main goal of the monitoring is to inform the public about the conduct of the media during the elections, to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and to promote media compliance with international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and independence.

In addition to the main goals stated above, here are some additional objectives.

> ► To provide voters with accurate information on whether the mass media enable them to have a fair and balanced picture of the campaign and alert them regarding the need to question their sources of information prior to elections.
> ► To raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe standards of balanced reporting in the broadcast and print media focusing on specific important political issues.
> ► To motivate citizens so that they learn how to view and accept information. For many citizens, this could be a unique opportunity to better understand what actual role the media should play in a democratic and free society.
> ► To advocate for positive changes to media laws so that public media become independent and reporting is balanced.
> ► To document and raise public awareness about cases of administrative restrictions, intimidation or harassment of the media attributable to the state administration or a political party.

RECRUITING MONITORS

ELECTION KEY DATES

The number of monitors is determined by the number of media to be monitored, as well as the level of detail of the media analysis. If the intention is to include a number of variables and choose a bigger media sample (include bigger time segments or a larger number of programmes to be monitored), it will be necessary to hire more monitors or they will have to spend more time on the analysis. It is therefore important to clarify the goal of the monitoring and to select the number of relevant variables so as to avoid overloading the monitors and at the same time have sufficient data available for the analysis.

HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

It is important to have a clear idea of the financial resources available as well as the monitoring objectives in order to plan the recruitment of monitors accordingly.

DEVELOPING A TIMELINE

Taking into consideration the project goal and the financial and human resources, a project timeline should be developed, including the precise dates when the monitoring will commence, when the reports will be published and when the monitoring will end (see also Appendix 2 *Useful Tips for a Media Monitoring Project*).

SECTION 3

How to monitor television, print and online media

ANALYSING THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are essential to any democratic process. The role of the mass media in enabling political contestants to communicate their messages and in presenting news about political parties, political leaders and matters of political importance is vital to the integrity of the electoral process.

The issue of media coverage of elections is complex and can be handled by regulatory intervention or self-regulation, or is even left unregulated in some member states. A diversity of approaches therefore exists in this regard. A regulatory system with strong government supervision is unlikely to promote media pluralism and diversity. On the other hand, a voluntary system with strong legal or constitutional guarantees of media independence can safeguard media pluralism and protect against government or political interference while also helping to foster professional skills and standards. In some Council of Europe member states where the media environment is less well developed, a clear regulatory framework is needed for the media coverage of elections. In the presence of a weak democratic system that is not sufficiently developed, self-regulatory measures are seldom sufficient to ensure pluralism and fair access for all contestants. A system of self-regulation is more advisable when the conditions facilitate responsible, mature journalistic coverage and favour a higher level of media literacy among the general public.[10]

International human rights treaties, declarations and court cases have led to the emergence of standards whereby the environment in which the media operate during elections can be gauged. There are several fundamental principles which, if promoted and respected, enhance the right to seek, receive and impart information.[11] In the context of elections, the European Convention on Human Rights generally guarantees the right to freedom of expression for the media, candidates and political parties, as well as voters' right to receive information. As such, these rights are also protected by any national legislation relating to the media and elections that may have been passed by the relevant Council of Europe member state. Other rights which should be taken into consideration include a candidate's right to privacy and reputation or his/her right of reply.

In sum, three main principles govern media coverage of elections:

▶ **The rights of voters:** voters have the right to be informed about political alternatives and candidates' platforms in order to be able to make an informed choice.

▶ **The rights of contestants:** candidates and parties have the right to communicate their platforms and their views. To that end, they have a right of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis in order to inform the electorate about their policies and opinions on matters of public interest.

▶ **The right of the media:** the media enjoy the freedom to inform the public about an election campaign and to express their opinions on issues of public interest. They also cover all relevant election-related issues and play an active role in informing voters by offering them a diverse range of views, which include those of journalists and political analysts free to criticise politicians for their platforms or their performances. At the same time, they have a duty to inform voters in a correct, accurate, transparent, and balanced manner.

---

10. **Draft explanatory memorandum to draft Recommendation** CM/Rec(2007) **15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns, available at** https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=09000016805d4f78.

11. These are summarised in ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, "International Law on Media and Elections", 3rd ed., 2012, Available at http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/mea/mea01 Accessed 21 November 2017.

Alongside the traditional media, social media networks have emerged and are having a growing impact on public opinion, including during election campaigns. They enable political parties and candidates to pass on their messages "directly" to the electorate and are a means for their supporters to disseminate those messages. By and large, they are not yet subject to general media regulations or to the specific rules that apply at election times. Also, the particular nature of online communication makes it difficult to extend the principles that the professional media have to observe to social media networks. Most attempts at regulation have so far failed to bring convincing results in terms of compliance; other attempts have been heavy-handed and have amounted to censorship.

While the international standards form a general framework, it is very important to know and adhere to the legal and regulatory framework of the country where the monitoring is taking place. This framework usually consists of the country's constitution, the electoral and media-related legal framework as well as other laws applicable during elections. Electoral legislation usually stipulates that contestants should be treated equally and that the broadcast media (particularly if in receipt of public funding) should observe the principles of fairness, accountability, balance and impartiality while covering elections. The media should not grant candidates privileged treatment based on their social status and/or the positions they hold. The media should be entitled to cover elections and inform the public about all electoral issues and should be free from any interference by the public authorities, candidates or other entities. The electoral legislation usually provides that voters are to be given access to diverse, objective and unbiased information necessary for making informed and free choices at the ballot box.

> The most important aspect of media regulations during elections is to strike the right balance between respect for editorial independence and the need for certain rules to guarantee media fairness.

A very important aspect of media regulations during elections is to strike the right balance between respect for editorial independence and the need for certain rules to guarantee media fairness. During elections, it is important that the body overseeing the media coverage of elections should be independent and trusted. This body should have experience, sufficient resources, knowledge, know-how, and a mandate to oversee compliance with the rules. It should act promptly in response to contestants' complaints or whenever it records a violation (regardless of whether it has received a complaint) and properly investigate alleged violations. Consequently, it should impose effective remedies when violations take place.[12]

It should be clear which body deals with complaints from candidates and political parties about unfair or unlawful coverage. As stated above, these procedures should be timely, clear, and accessible to give complainants a prompt and effective remedy. It is important that the sanctions imposed by the regulator should be commensurate with the gravity of the offence committed by the media outlet.

SCOPE AND TYPE OF MONITORING

The type of monitoring is determined in line with the monitoring objectives. If the main aim is to know the degree of political diversity in media reporting, as well as what kind of information is available to voters prior to elections, it is important to identify the outlets which serve as the main sources of information for people in making their political choices. The scope of the monitoring is determined in line with the available human and financial resources as well as the objectives of the monitoring project. A good approach is first to make a baseline assessment of the media situation in the country concerned and find out what other monitoring projects are planned by non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders. Other organisations which may be engaged in media monitoring during elections include media regulators, election management bodies, professional media organisations, media themselves, academia and international observers. While it is obviously good to avoid duplicating efforts by civil society organisations, it is not a problem if there are two parallel media monitoring operations by these organisations as long as the methodological basis and main objectives of each operation are clear (see also Section 5 *How to engage monitoring actors and ensure synergy between stakeholders and sustainability of monitoring results*).

----

12. The Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters states the following in chapter 3.6 (an effective system of appeal): *It is imperative that appeal proceedings be as brief as possible. Two pitfalls must be avoided: first, that appeal proceedings retard the electoral process, and second, that, due to their lack of suspensive effect, decisions on appeals – other than those concerning the voting in the elections and the results – are taken after the elections have been held. Finally, decisions on the results of elections must also not take too long, especially where the political climate is tense. This means both that the time limits for appeals must be very short and that the appeal body must make its ruling as quickly as possible. Time limits must, however, be long enough to make an appeal possible and for the commission to give its ruling. A time limit of three to five days (both for lodging appeals and making rulings) seems reasonable.*

DECIDING WHAT OUTLETS TO MONITOR

The main criteria for selecting media outlets to be monitored include media ownership (state/public or private), their potential impact (size of their audiences and their popularity) and what other sources of information are available. For example, there are countries with very restrictive media environments and very limited diversity where the only alternative sources of information to state-owned media are print or online newspapers with a very low circulation. They would probably not meet the second criterion for selection concerning the size of their audience (as their potential reach may be very low), but it is important that they be included as they take a different editorial line from the state/public media and thus provide a platform for different views. With regard to the types of programmes to be monitored, the monitoring usually focuses on all the programmes aired during prime time, i.e. the time when the audience peaks (usually from 6pm to midnight). Of course, important political programmes or special election programmes could also be recorded and analysed if aired outside what is generally perceived as prime time (for example, for radio, prime time often also includes morning programmes).

PUBLIC BROADCAST MEDIA

The **public broadcast media** have obligations to serve all the people as they are funded by taxpayers' money. They should inform the electorate about election matters, including the role of elections in a democracy, how to exercise one's right to vote, the key electoral issues, and the policy positions of the various parties and candidates contesting the election. Moreover, they are subject to strict rules of impartiality and balance, particularly when reporting on the governing party/parties and on government decisions and actions during an election period. This means that equal coverage should be given to arguments in favour of both sides in any referendum. They should also grant all parties and candidates equitable access to the media, enabling them to communicate their messages directly to the public, either free of charge or at subsidised rates. Equitable access means fair and non-discriminatory access allocated according to objective criteria for measuring overall levels of support and includes factors such as timing of access and any fees.[13]

PRIVATE BROADCAST MEDIA

Various international instruments recommend that **private broadcast media** provide fair, balanced and impartial information during election campaigns.[14] Terrestrial broadcasters, allocated a portion of the public frequency spectrum, are accordingly obliged to serve the public. In particular, during elections private broadcasters should also comply with a number of obligations regarding the fair and impartial coverage of elections, especially in their information programmes. Their responsibility to play fair in the elections also derives from the fact they are widely watched and are often more popular than public media outlets in transitional countries. Given the digital switchover in a number of countries, it is relevant to reconsider the scarcity argument used previously vis-à-vis the private broadcasters.

During elections, broadcast media are key instruments influencing and shaping political, social and cultural realities and they have to comply with ethical and professional standards of journalism. Nationwide broadcasters play a key role in virtually all types of elections as they serve as a primary source of information. Regional or local media could also play an important role, whether in parliamentary elections in the case of a majoritarian election system or in local elections.

PRINT AND ONLINE MEDIA

The previous Council of Europe resolutions did not envision any special regulations for the print media, non-linear audio-visual media services and online news-services regarding reporting on or the editorial coverage of elections in Council of Europe member states. As a matter of tradition, and because of the different natures

---

13. UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the ACHPR (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Joint Statement on the Media and Elections. 15 May 2009, http://www.osce.org/fom/37188?download=true.

14. See for example the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR's, *Guidelines on Media Analysis During Election Observation Missions,* 2004, available at: http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)031-e, or Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, **e**xplanatory memorandum to Recommendation No. R (99) 15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns *(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 9 September 1999 at the 678th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*, https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=ExpRec(99)15&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&direct=true.

of various forms of media, the press has generally been free to have a distinct political leaning. The way the public has access to and is influenced by the press differs significantly as compared with the broadcast media.[15]

During elections, quantitative analysis involves recording, measuring and coding the space allocated to the coverage of relevant political parties and other entities, such as the government and the president. It also includes measuring the time spent on items or topics relating to the elections to determine whether the elections were presented in the media as an important political event. Qualitative analysis looks at the professionalism and accuracy of the media coverage of elections, the use of language, intentional manipulation, etc.

MONITORING DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRAMMES

News programmes primarily provide information. They should reflect a variety of news which is relevant, fresh, accurate, balanced and factual, and they should in principle refrain from stating opinions. It is important that a fair and equitable mechanism should be established to determine the proportion of election news coverage to be allocated to election contestants. They should receive news coverage commensurate with their importance in the election and the extent of their electoral support. The law usually lays down general provisions on the equal treatment of contestants. However, importantly, it should be within the editorial discretion of each media outlet to determine the specific election formats and models on the basis of which they will allocate airtime to contestants. For example, the amount of news coverage devoted to the competing parties is strictly controlled in the United Kingdom (UK), as the BBC takes measures to ensure parity among the competing parties.[16] In a number of Council of Europe member states, broadcast media are frequently criticised for not providing comprehensive and analytical coverage of the campaign, contestants and their platforms which would enable the electorate to make a more informed choice at the ballot box.

> In general, there is no need to overexpose small parties – in particular, if this is done at the expense of more relevant parties. Significant minor parties should also receive some coverage during the campaign, for example at the time of their manifesto launch.

Televised debates provide the best forum for exchanges of views. An opportunity for public debate of differing viewpoints offers voters an improved understanding of the choices available to them on election day. As a supplement to news, these programmes offer commentary, debate or an opportunity for competing interests to present their opinions directly to viewers and listeners.[17] However, the decision on how such fairness should be achieved (for instance, deciding the format, the number of participants, the length, etc)[18] should be left to the initiative of the broadcasting organisation itself.

Talk show formats are attractive for viewers because they present a diversity of ideas and provide a good opportunity for voters to receive more information about candidates. It is, however, important to establish some rules for talk shows too as if they are left totally uncontrolled they can mislead, misrepresent and misinform many viewers. It is consequently important for candidates to be treated fairly when it comes to designing formats of talk shows during elections.

---

15. Draft explanatory memorandum to the draft Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=09000016805d4f78.
16. BBC Election Guidelines 2016, Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates, pp.17-31, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/2016ElectionGuidelines.pdf.
17. Kužel, Rasťo. *Media reporting and conduct during the electoral process*, (pp.4), OSCE mission in Kosovo, 2017
18. In 2007, the European Court of Human Rights considered the case of *Partija "Jaunie Demokrāti" and Partija "Mūsu Zeme" v. Latvia*, which involved two Latvian political parties that had made an application to the Court under Article 3 of Protocol No. 1, complaining about Latvia's public service broadcaster, Latvijas Televīzija. The parties pointed out that the broadcaster had only invited to take part in television debates those parties which were already represented in parliament or which had the support of 4% of the electorate according to the opinion polls, while other parties had only been offered free air time in off-peak viewing slots. However, the Court held that Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 did not guarantee the right of a political party to airtime on radio or television in the run-up to elections. The Court did admit that "problems" could arise in "exceptional circumstances" – for example, if in an election period a political party was refused airtime when other parties were not. However, the Court held that no such special circumstances had been established.

DECIDING WHAT ACTORS TO MONITOR

The list of subjects for monitoring should be determined prior to the launch of the activity. The only relevant entities are those subjects that can be clearly identified as particular political parties or groupings. Certain political terms (for instance "opposition" or "authorities") commonly used in political communication are frequently to be found in the media. However, they should be included in the list of relevant subjects only when these terms are not used vaguely but represent concrete political forces recognised as such in society.

For the purpose of monitoring political diversity in media reporting during elections, it is important to include the president, the government, local government, registered candidates, parliamentary parties and relevant non-parliamentary parties. When it comes to monitoring the government, it is important to have a list of ministers and deputy ministers and to circulate it to all monitors. If the incumbents (the president and government ministers) are seeking re-election, it is important to include both the coverage these subjects receive as state officials as well as the time they are allocated as candidates.

CHART 3 SHOWS THE ACTORS WHICH SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE MONITORING OF POLITICAL DIVERSITY PRIOR TO ELECTIONS

ADVANTAGE OF INCUMBENCY

While incumbents generally receive more media exposure than those challenging them, the media should not cover the activities of institutions in such a way as to highlight solely the results and successes achieved, with government ministers appearing at official events such as the opening of new roads, factories, etc. Instead, they should offer a platform for independent and critical opinions on the institutions' performance in order to provide the public with fully informed, properly analysed and well-founded views. By comparison, opposition candidates are often criticised, or else the media ignore their activities, including campaign rallies. The media should be consistent in separating the activities of the incumbent government representatives from the activities they engage in as representatives of political parties running in the election. During election campaigns the media should not grant privileged treatment to public institutions. The media approach should primarily be based on an editorial decision as to the relevance and newsworthiness of such events. Clearly it would be difficult to ignore a visit by a foreign dignitary. However, even in such cases the media should try to strike a balance not only by covering the official part of the visit and meetings with the incumbents but also by speaking to the opposition and obtaining their point of view.

MEDIA ANALYSIS: WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DETERMINE?

The monitoring of media coverage prior to elections seeks to address three main concerns, the rights of voters, contestants and the media. More specifically, the monitor aim to determine if voters are able to receive sufficient information to make informed choices at the ballot box, if all contestants have unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis and if the media are free to cover the elections (see also Section 3 *Analysing the Legal and Regulatory Framework*).

For the purpose of monitoring, we use quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Quantitative analysis focuses on the amount of time allocated to selected political subjects and the tone of the coverage, namely the way in which these subjects are portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. The monitoring also focuses on the thematic and geographical structure of news, evaluating thematic and geographical diversity by measuring the actual time devoted to different topics and focusing on the geographical area from where the news is broadcast. The monitoring could also focus on the top stories during the monitoring period and compare them in different phases of the campaign.

It is important to keep in mind that it is the behavior of media outlets that is being assessed, not the subjects monitored.

It is the behaviour of the media outlets that is being assessed, not the subjects monitored. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether the viewer/reader is offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors give an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to looking at time allowed and references, in order to provide information on how the subject is portrayed by each media outlet. The evaluation mark is thus allocated to all subjects monitored in order to determine whether the subject is presented in a positive, negative, or neutral light. It is important for monitors to consider the actual evaluation of the subject monitored as well as the context of the story or item.

When using quantitative monitoring, it is necessary to establish the *unit of analysis*. This refers to the different blocks of broadcast time that are monitored, measured and assigned various codes. The *unit of analysis* is determined according to what sort of monitoring is being conducted. For example, in the case of advertising, the unit is each advertisement. When monitoring the media coverage of elections, it is the actual time and space given to each subject monitored (either as a reference or in the form of direct coverage).

The *unit of analysis* is monitored in relation to the *unit of context*, depending on what is being monitored. The *unit of context* for advertising is both the hour and the day (or 24 hours) since there are legal obligations concerning the proportion of advertising that can be broadcast within each hour and in the course of a day. For a news item, the *unit of context* can be the entire news programme, as it is also important to determine the order in which different items are broadcast (because some politicians/political parties could always be covered at the beginning of the news and others always at the end – see also the positioning of news items in the qualitative analysis). In addition, the *unit of context* can also be the news programmes in a longer period (two weeks) – in order to determine if a story is balanced over a period of time (e.g. if it is reported over a longer period).

In order to monitor the broadcast media (television and radio), monitors use stopwatches (or any available computer application) to measure the actual "direct appearance time" of previously selected subjects. They also separately record each instance where a subject is mentioned indirectly (e.g. by a news presenter or

someone else) as a "reference". For example, when *subject A* speaks about *subject B*, it is important to record both the time allocated to *subject A* to speak (direct time) and the time given to *subject B* (indirect time). The evaluation of the data is based on the total time (both direct and indirect) allocated to different subjects monitored in the period concerned (see Appendix 2 *Useful Tips for a Media Monitoring Project* for an example on how to calculate the time).

Tone

Quantitative analysis also evaluates whether the information about selected monitored subjects is positive, negative, or neutral in its content. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether a viewer is given a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. These data are recorded for all stories and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.

For online media, monitors could measure the space dedicated to relevant subjects in pixels using a page ruler (an add-on in Google Chrome). As for indirect references in online media, monitors record them as "remarks".

Positive and negative evaluation refers to whether a viewer is offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic.

It is important that monitors think how an article or TV/Radio programme influences an average voter and do not speculate about how it is perceived by specific party supporters – they should use their common sense.

It is important to remember that there is no expectation that news should be neutral.

Media should not be afraid to present reality as it is and to convey people's emotions and positive or critical/negative viewpoints. Neutrality should not be seen as an ultimate goal, as people are not interested in watching superficial and sterile news. In dealing with news, media should present all sides of the story with a comparable time and manner of presentation to avoid any preference or bias.[19]

The mere existence of positive or negative ratings attributed to monitored subjects do not indicate bias, providing that the respective media outlets treat all monitored subjects in a similar manner. However, where there is a visible longer-term tendency to always report on some subjects in a positive manner and to criticise others, this could indicate bias.

To eliminate any elements of subjectivity present in quantitative or qualitative analysis, there should be frequent checks on how individual monitors analyse the media by a monitoring co-ordinator. Where there is a difference of opinion over the evaluation of a particular item, the entire monitoring team (or team leader) evaluates the item before making a final decision on its "tone." Ultimately, there could be a very small number of occasions when there will be a difference in the tone evaluation – between positive and neutral and negative and neutral – but such differences apply to only a few seconds of the coverage, a duration which is statistically irrelevant in a monitoring period of not less than two weeks.

Indicators in media monitoring (as in all social science research) have to meet two important criteria. They must be both *reliable*[20] and *valid*[21].

The common indicators generally used in the monitoring methodology described here are the sources of information identified in broadcasts, the topics covered and, of course, the time allocated to different topics and speakers. If we want to carry out a more complex evaluation, we need to add other indicators. A statistical analysis of these indicators is not especially complex. The monitoring data gathered during a monitoring exercise are *descriptive* rather than *inferential*. This means that the analysis only addresses the actual broadcasts

---

19. Kuzel, Rasto and Godarsky, Ivan, *Final Narrative Report*, Council of Europe, Georgia 2012, https://rm.coe.int/168048ba65
20. *Reliability* means that indicators should be consistently identified by any trained monitor, so assigning each code would always produce the same result regardless of who is doing the monitoring. This is achieved first by selecting indicators that are objectively verifiable – they are not the result of a monitor's subjective opinions or preference. Time-related indicators are clearly objective, as are pre-determined lists of codes that identify different topics or different types of people who appear in the broadcast. Consistency is achieved by systematic and thorough training and practice.
21. *Validity* means that the selected indicators actually show what they are intended to show. They must be selected for a clear purpose and not interpreted to show more than they actually do. For example, counting the number of times women are cited as sources does not necessarily indicate that the media have a gender bias. If women's voices are under-reported, there are several possible explanations for this. It might be media bias, but it may equally be that government institutions, political parties and businesses do not choose women to represent them.

that have been monitored and does not attempt to predict the characteristics of other broadcasts that have not been monitored (by techniques such as *regression analysis*[22]).

The main analytical techniques used in the media monitoring methodology are *aggregation* and *cross-tabulation*. Aggregation simply consists of adding up (and comparing) data such as the amount of direct and indirect broadcast time allocated to politicians or other subjects monitored. Cross-tabulation or crossing variables, which is easily carried out even with basic spreadsheet software, compares the frequency distribution of a variable with another variable to check their degree of association. This could indicate, for example, if a politician was quoted more by one television station than another. A more complex analysis could show the association between the topics reported by the media and the sources they use. The possibilities for crossing variables are extensive.[23]

Qualitative media monitoring is used to assess the performance of media against benchmarks, such as ethical or professional standards, that cannot be easily quantified. These standards include but are not limited to balance, accuracy, timeliness, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language, etc. These data are then reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports. For instance, while the quantitative assessment can define whether political advertising has been broadcast within the legally permissible limits (in terms of its length or within a prescribed broadcast segment), it cannot determine if a particular advertisement has contained inflammatory language or hate speech.

Unlike quantitative monitoring, which follows a set of clear criteria, qualitative monitoring is more "subjective" as it depends on the opinion of an individual monitor. At the same time, even qualitative monitoring is based on legal or ethical standards – so it is not simply a reflection of what the monitor likes or does not like. It is consequently possible to conduct qualitative monitoring in a consistent and scientific manner.

For example, it is useful to conduct qualitative monitoring when we are interested in evaluating the overall quality of media reporting. In such a case, we would focus on the content of stories and on important aspects of the information presented by monitored media, such as its quality and variety. We would assess the overall quality of reporting provided by each TV channel, based on its overall informational value.

Other relevant issues that should be covered by qualitative monitoring are:

▶ Is there any relevant information missing? Media often avoid the problem of how to cover politically sensitive stories by simply not covering them at all. The omission of information is one of the most effective manipulation techniques.

▶ Choice of issues – Does the selection of news items favour the agenda of one party or another, even if there is no explicit bias?

▶ Similar style of coverage – Are different candidates' campaign events reported in a similar way (for example, is actuality footage always used or are direct quotations provided in all cases) or are only some of them?

▶ The incumbent factor – Are the activities of incumbent officeholders who are also candidates properly reported or are the two roles confused to the incumbents' advantage?

▶ Positioning of items – Are items about the opposition placed alongside unfavourable stories (e.g. foreign accounts of political violence) to create an unfavourable impression?

▶ Prioritising – Are some candidates always reported ahead of others in the sequence of bulletins?

▶ Inflammatory language – Are inflammatory language or actual incidents of violence reported in an accurate, sober and balanced manner, with all sides quoted? Or is media reporting itself inflammatory and unbalanced, with the danger that it could lead to further violence?

▶ Manipulative use of film, picture and sound – camera angles, distance of the camera from the candidates, light, sound quality, use of footage which does not correspond to the content of the story or gives the story a negative or positive spin.

A key component of the monitoring methodology described here is that it is a qualitative approach to monitoring media content.

_____

22. Regression analysis is a way of mathematically sorting out which of the variables does indeed have an impact. It answers the questions: Which factors matter most? Which can we ignore? How do those factors interact with each other? And, perhaps most importantly, how certain are we about all of these factors?

23. Media Monitoring Indicators, described by Richard Carver (Oxford Brookes University/Oxford Media Research) and Marek Mracka (MEMO 98) in *Monitoring Moldovan Broadcasters: Methods and Techniques*

For each day's coverage, monitors complete a monitoring form, which should be reviewed by a data enterer who will enter the data into a special monitoring programme (database).

> Frequent and periodical **inspections of the database** are an essential part of the media monitoring methodology in order to avoid systematic or accidental errors.

The methodologies described above could be used in conjunction with a widely available spreadsheet or database software (such as Microsoft Excel or Access), with a more sophisticated analysis carried out through a specialised statistical package, if required. The last phase of working with data is data processing – computer data processing and storage has several advantages:

► Possibility of storing data in a PC
► Flexibility and simplicity of data manipulation, e.g. specific data selection and evaluation
► Ability to create graphics and their direct use in presentations

Since the monitoring forms include a relatively small number of different data types and the data can be easily organised according to the given criteria, Microsoft Excel (in combination with the entire Microsoft Office package) is suitable for processing the results of a monitoring exercise. The data acquired during the monitoring consist of subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic and its time.

As an example, let us assume that media monitors will use a monitoring form designed with Microsoft Excel. It will contain five different sheets:

► Codes
► Topics
► Political
► Media effects
► Media effects explanation

In the Codes sheets, monitors could find different codes (acronyms) used for topics, top stories, media effects (in the upper part of the sheet) and subjects & names in the lower part.

REPORTING

Interim reports could be prepared in the course of the campaign to share preliminary media monitoring findings and trends, so as to highlight the problems and trends identified. An interim report provides a basic description of the main trends and supports them with one or two best examples to make them clear.

The final report is divided into several parts, including the introduction, statistical methods used, results of the monitoring and the conclusions and recommendations. It should include more concrete examples highlighting the trends and potential breaches of the law. It can also include quotations, appendices, references or reviews.

In the case of the introduction, it is important to explain the purpose of the report and the methods used for collating data, to provide an overview of the analysis and, finally, to mention the results. It is important to write it in a way that is interesting for a reader, who should be tempted to find out what lies inside. As for the methodology used, it is important to properly explain all the calculations and methods employed for collecting and analysing the data.

With regard to the actual monitoring results, it is necessary to provide good insights into the media's performance and explain the background and context so that everyone can understand it. The reports should be designed in such a way as to convey the most important information first. The technical details can always be highlighted later in the body of the report. Good monitoring reports make the most important information easy to find so that busy readers, many of whom will not have time to read a report in full, can identify what they need to know without searching for it.

Moreover, care must be taken regarding the way the monitoring terms and jargon are used as it is necessary to make sure that most readers can understand them, regardless of their knowledge of monitoring and data analysis methods.

It is good to use tables, charts and graphics that help illustrate the results of the data analysis and write text references that explain the important findings. When writing text references, it is necessary to highlight what is important about each table and graphic and not only report the data. Consequently, the charts should be as self-explanatory as possible. In addition, tables and other graphics should be positioned close to the text that references them.

It is important to provide a proper conclusion to the study. The basis of this conclusion will be a thorough analysis and commentary on any changes suggested. It is possible to prove a point if the data are complete, correct, and clear.

How to monitor social media

In recent years, the manner in which people receive political messages has changed profoundly, also in relation to the growing impact of social media networks. These changes have also brought with them some negative phenomena, such as a substantial increase in unverified, decontextualised, and manipulative information, which confirms many individuals' prejudices and biases. It is increasingly apparent that thanks to social media networks various stakeholders may take advantage of existing social divisions either by conducting their activity from outside national borders (as was notably the case for the first time during the 2016 US presidential election) or by being active directly in the country where the elections are held. Experience from several countries suggests that the risk of abuse increases several-fold in a period of intensified political and social engagement, such as elections. Increasing attention is being paid to social media networks and to disinformation as a potential threat to the integrity of elections.

An increase in the influence of social media networks also brings with it some advantages, including the possibility of obtaining information directly from a source in the form and volume that society learns to accept and reflect in a meaningful way. During an election campaign, this enables candidates to communicate immediately and directly with voters or to mobilise them. Social media networks have become a very important source of political information and messages in general, all the more so during elections – they completely change the perception of politics when the filter of traditional media is bypassed. This chapter provides some general hints and ideas for civil society groups wishing to analyse how various social media networks are used during elections: whether they increase and improve voters' awareness or their mobilisation or whether they spread disinformation or even outright lies. It draws upon the methodological framework and toolkit designed by Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and MEMO 98 under their joint project *A toolkit to help monitoring social media during elections in the EU.*[24] The monitoring could provide a basis for responsive advocacy (such as intervention with firms) and long-term advocacy for better regulation.

It is important to understand that there are substantial differences between traditional media and social media analyses. While clear benchmarks exist for judging the role of television, radio or print media during elections, there are no such benchmarks in the case of social media networks. Both international standards and domestic laws and regulations impose obligations for different types of traditional media. These are stricter with regard to broadcast media and less strict where print media are concerned. These regulations guide the monitoring organisers in choosing what media to focus on (media sampling) as well as what criteria to apply for the analysis of different types of programmes. For example, given the importance of prime-time news as an important source of information, stricter editorial rules apply – which is also reflected in the monitoring as the methodology of news monitoring is the most detailed in comparison with other programmes.

Conversely, while debates or talk shows are very important platforms for contestants to communicate their views to voters, they have to observe different editorial standards than news broadcasts. All of these nuances should be reflected in a monitoring methodology. In the case of social media networks, their role and impact on elections is still being analysed, and more time is needed. Given the very specific television or radio time slots to be analysed, or specific sections in online or print media devoted to political and election coverage, the number of monitors/coders needed for a monitoring exercise is clear. By comparison, the amount of information available on social media networks is huge, which is why it is important to use technological tools to filter and analyse the data. Both approaches have certain advantages and disadvantages but, clearly, at this stage even the most sophisticated tools are not able to replace human coders in determining different types of manipulations and biases.

_____

24. The toolkit is available at www.memo98.sk

CHART 4: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA MONITORING
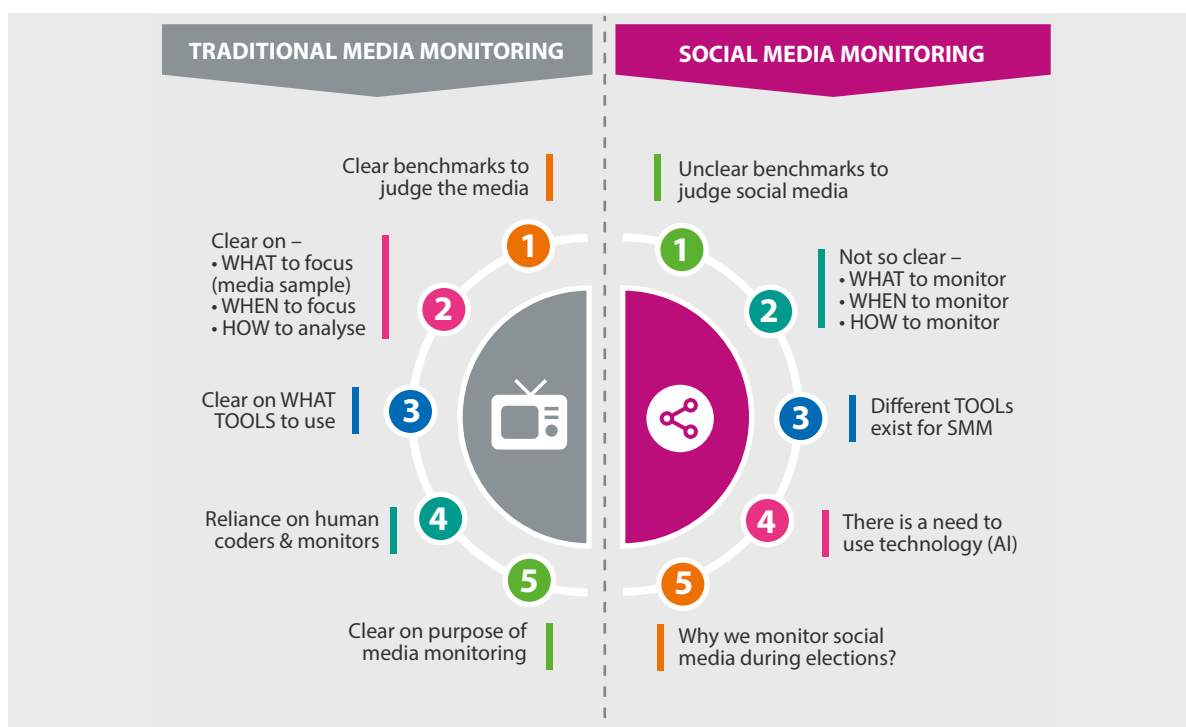
Social media networks entail new challenges for election observers who are monitoring them. Not only do they have to deal with huge amounts of data and try to determine which are most relevant to focus on, but developments are emerging fast and in real time, making it even more difficult for analysts to cope. It is also important to remember that a good deal of information in the public sphere is no longer under editorial control by journalistic "gatekeepers" who used to have a significant say on what information was presented to the public. It is now up to the private big tech companies in charge of the algorithms to decide what users are more likely to see. According to a PACE report, "the increase of content production and the centralisation of online distribution channels such as Twitter, Google and Facebook have had several unintended consequences:

► the proliferation of private and public disinformation tactics,

► the arrival of non-regulated private actors in the democratic arena that literally "own" the information infrastructure and gateways to information."[25]

According to ACE, the Electoral Knowledge Network, "the line between traditional media and new media is blurred, with many 'traditional' journalists using the internet as a key source of information for stories, and many traditional media creating online editions or transforming into fully multi-media outlets. Also, traditional media use 'citizen journalism' pieces and rely on personal mobile phone images and video to cover some stories where they do not have their own reporters."[26] To enhance the distribution of their content, traditional news media have positioned themselves within the social media networks. At the same time, Facebook, Google, Twitter and other social media networks have become important platforms via which news can be generated, so social media networks function both independently of, and in conjunction with, news outlets as sources and distributors of news and information.[27]

Standards employed by domestic election observers for the analysis of social media networks include:

► international legal obligations accepted by almost all United Nations member states, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the standards of the Council of Europe, which are part of international law;

► national laws (such as fundamental rights enshrined in constitutions or criminal legislation against defamation);

► self-regulation by social media companies that applies in every country in which they do business.

---

25. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Report 15028, "Democracy hacked? How to respond?", 8 January 2020.
26. ibid.
27. http://compact-media.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/D2.2-REPORT-ON-NATIONAL-COURTS-SOCIAL-MEDIA-CONVERGENCE-.pdf.

VOTING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

United Nations Committee on Human Rights' General Comment 25 protects the voters' right to form opinions independently, free of manipulative interference of any kind

There is a need to lay down a general methodological framework for observing social media. The existing international standards on freedom of expression and the right to participation are an appropriate starting point to identify benchmarks for observation and assessment. In particular, the United Nations Committee on Human Rights' General Comment 25, which protects voters' right to form opinions independently and free of manipulative interference of any kind, can offer a basis for social media assessment:

"Persons entitled to vote must be free to vote for any candidate for election and for or against any proposal submitted to referendum or plebiscite, 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 violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind."[28]

The reference to undue influence, distortion, inhibition and manipulative interference shows the relevance of General Comment 25 for the quality of public discourse, which is very important during elections.

SCOPE OF MONITORING

Prior to any monitoring of social media networks, it is recommended to conduct a capacity assessment to determine the scope of the monitoring.

Deciding what social media to monitor

It is important to know which social media networks are the most influential in each country where the monitoring will take place. In order to obtain this information, it is possible to consult the Global Digital Reports prepared by *We Are Social*, an agency for digital communication, and *Hootsuite,* which contain details on the use of the internet, social media, mobile technology and e-commerce around the world, information that is publicly available and broken down by country and region. The reports show how social media are used in a given country and break the data down by categories such as age and gender.

Having determined the most influential social media networks, it is important to consider the human and financial resources available for the monitoring as well as the tools to be used for data scraping. Access to data is one of the biggest challenges in the case of social media analysis, as data policies are constantly changing. Following the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook and other social media companies are now much more careful about providing access to data on their platforms.

Depending on the focus of the monitoring, it is necessary to consider if it is possible to obtain API access, which varies from platform to platform. Twitter is the platform most open to data collection, but it is not so relevant for monitoring as Facebook (which is more popular). The latter shares data only with specific partners, giving them access to a tool called Crowdtangle which it acquired in 2017. There are different commercial tools which could also be used for data scraping and analysis.[29] It is always important to determine what are the specific objectives of the project and make sure to select the proper tool which will provide the necessary data access.

For example, Newswhip allows analysts to look for content on a specific topic that goes viral on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and websites. Specific keywords can be entered and Newswhip returns data

---

28. UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 25, 1996, para. 19.
29. There are alternatives which require a paid subscription and can be expensive for a smaller CSO. For example, these are Newswhip, Buzzumo, VIsibrain, Sysmos, Talkwalker, and BrandWatch.

collected from different social media platforms, with the number of times a specific link about a given topic was shared. It also predicts the impact of a given link using past interactions as a proxy to predict future popularity.

Monitoring messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber or Messenger, is even more difficult due to the encrypted character of their design. Some analyses have been carried out using data from public groups on WhatsApp, but it is important to remember that importing data from users in public groups on a platform where users assume that their data privacy is respected raises ethical considerations about possible breaches of that privacy.

If laws regulating social media networks exist, monitoring whether the legal requirements are being met is important. Many aspects of social media campaigning are not yet regulated, so focus on compliance with the law may be limited.

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT – THINGS TO CONSIDER

Mapping the media & social media landscape
Which social media are relevant

Human & financial resources

Tools for data scrapping

Regulations and laws

Monitoring period

It is important to decide when to start and when to finish social media monitoring and to have a clear project schedule, including deadlines and cut-off dates for monitors so that they know when to submit their reports and entered data sheets or forms. For the sake of the data validity, it is good to start earlier rather than later, depending on the available resources – both financial and human. It is clear that within the lifespan of the monitoring, the intensity of the political discourse will vary, with the peak expected closer to election day. It is important to cover at least the election period, which is usually between one to two months before the elections.

MONITORING PERIOD

Election period   Post Election period

ELECTION DAY

When to start monitoring?
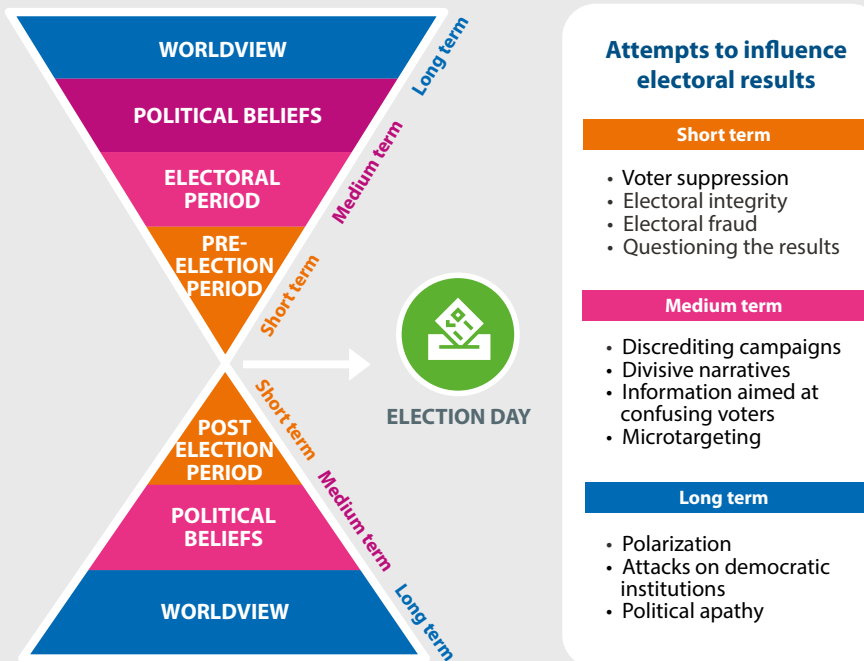
CHART 5 DEMOCRACY REPORTING INTERNATIONAL SHOWS PRE-ELECTION AND POST-ELECTION PERIODS IN TERMS OF POTENTIAL ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE ELECTORAL RESULTS BY SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS AND DISINFORMATION

In Chart No 5, Democracy Reporting International (DRI) has divided the election run-up period and the post-election period into different time segments, ranging from long term and mid term to short term.[30] The long-term period is when our worldview and political beliefs are formed, whereas medium term and short term coincide with an election period. Where potential attempts to influence electoral results via social media networks are concerned, in the longer-term period, one might see attempts to polarise and get people to feel apathy, as well as attacks on democratic institutions (media and CSOs). In the medium term period, there might be various campaigns to discredit candidates or officials (undermining their credibility), the spreading of divisive narratives (aimed at vulnerable groups such as migrants), the transmission of confusing messages to mislead voters or microtargeting (a technique used by political parties that includes data-mining techniques employed by direct marketing and involving predictive market segmentation). In the short term, there might be attempts at voter suppression and attacks on electoral integrity, claiming electoral fraud or questioning election results.

Actors to be monitored

With regard to the actors and other matters to focus on during the monitoring of social media networks, it is possible to look at three different areas – **messenger**, **message** and **messaging**. The messenger is the actor who spreads the message (source of information) – so it could be a political party or candidate, a media outlet (using social media profiles to promote stories) or a social media influencer (a person with substantial number of followers and supporters on social media networks).

The actual message consists of the topics and narratives disseminated by actors (messengers). Messaging is the way the message travels on social media networks (for example, is it amplified by inauthentic actors – bots – or trolls or is it boosted as sponsored content?). To determine which actors are relevant, it is possible to use a tool for actor mapping called Socialbakers which provides data about which pages are most influential in a given country, dividing them by category (politics, media, NGOs, etc). The platform is fee-based (its free version is limited).

30. For more information, check the Guide for Civil Society on Monitoring Social Media During Elections developed by DRI, with contributions from an expert working group.

Messenger	**Message**	**Messaging**
Source of information	Topics & narratives	Focus on how a message travels
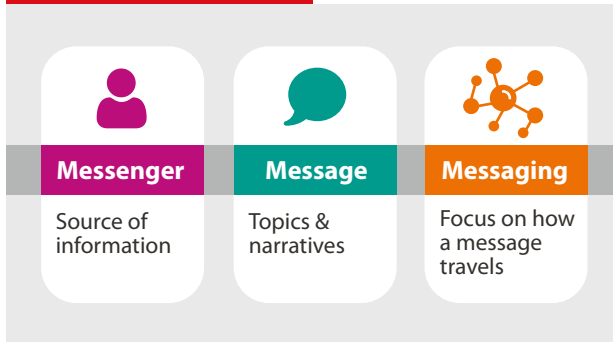
MESSAGING
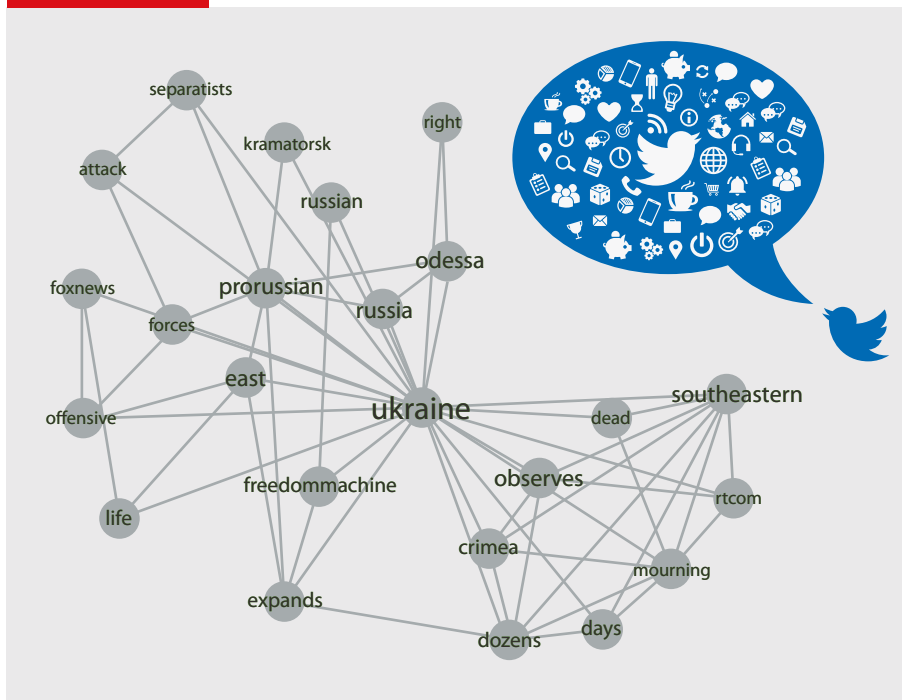
Topics and narratives to be monitored

When it comes to monitoring messages, it is important to pay attention to potential external and internal disinformation efforts aimed at undermining citizens' trust in the democratic institutions and elections as such. Content analysis of narratives is used to see if such narratives are employed by any political parties/stakeholders involved in the elections with the aim of spreading disinformation and confusion. This method identifies a series of selected "narratives" – deliberately expressed views – on a particular issue and counts the frequency with which they appear in posts. Choosing the narratives varies country to country. Many can be predicted on the basis of the political discourse in the country but monitors should be ready to add new ones as they proceed with their work when it turns out that an important narrative is becoming the subject of considerable debate (see examples of different social media monitoring projects which also focused on monitoring narratives in Appendix 4 *Examples of Social Media Monitoring Projects*).

MESSAGE
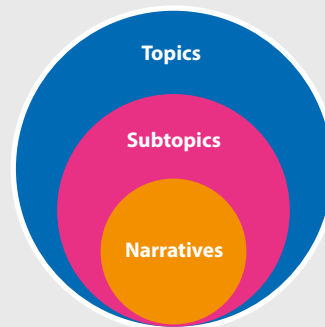
In the long-term context, the intention of such monitoring is to focus on the social drivers, and therefore the frustrations that are spreading into an ever-wider national and international sphere and are implicitly reflected in some of the narratives. The monitoring of narratives assesses whether they are present on the monitored accounts and whether they have received any significant attention (interactions).

It is also important to look at potential signs of hate speech and inflammatory language (used in posts) as well as attempts to discredit political opponents. Finally, the monitoring could in a broader sense try to determine if information posted on social media networks focuses on important public policy issues or if actors are just trying to grab people's attention by focusing on scandals, conspiracies and myths.

TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

There are many different tools available depending on the actual goal of the monitoring. Regardless of the specific goal, the best option is to gain full access to social media networks' API. For example, Twitter provides more direct access to researchers via its API (or via Gnip, a Twitter owned API aggregator company). In the case of Facebook, it is more difficult to obtain such access given the previous problems mentioned above. The best possible option is to access Facebook and Instagram data via Crowdtangle which provides detailed data on how many interactions a specific post/link/video receives, and which posts/videos have been most shared. Access to Crowdtangle allows monitoring organisations to easily spot content that goes viral and check whether it contains false information or not. To date, Crowdtangle is the most advanced platform to perform social media monitoring on Facebook and Instagram, but access given researchers is not yet widespread.

ANALYSING AND CHOOSING RELEVANT DATA

The monitoring tries to evaluate what kind of content is published by different actors on social media networks and to assess to what extent this information is useful for voters so that they can make more informed choices at the ballot box. The monitoring also tries to evaluate to what extent parties, candidates and other stakeholders use social media networks for campaigning and voter mobilisation and voter education.

The actual monitoring process is conducted as follows. Monitors review all posts which are published in the monitoring period but focus only on those that mention the narratives or topics monitored. The frequency of the appearance of these narratives can then be quantified. The intention is to monitor output over a given period in order to determine, first, how much coverage the monitored narrative receives and, second, what the reaction on social media networks is (how many interactions – shares, comments and reactions).

A similar method would be to identify certain *keywords* commonly used in conjunction with the subject matter. As with the monitoring of narratives, monitors simply identify the items that refer to the chosen narratives and count the frequency of appearance of the predetermined keywords.

Quantitative criteria of social media monitoring

- ► Collecting basic data (number of followers, likes), which provide a certain outline of their social media presence/popularity
- ► To what extent parties and candidates use social media networks (campaign strategy)
- ► Approaching voters with voter information messages
- ► Are political parties using groups and/or any other social media platforms to expand their reach and/or spread their message to voters?
- ► Creating specific hashtags for elections
- ► Interaction with voters
- ► Paying for (or boosting) the content – crosschecking posts with the Ad Library (Facebook and Instagram)

Following actual posts

- ► Count the number of posts throughout a certain period
- ► Focus on what political parties or politicians refer to in their posts – list of topics and how many comments which post generates
- ► The unit of analysis is one post
- ► Inflammatory language (hate speech)
- ► Disinformation and propaganda, determining if there are bots and trolls – general efforts to divert the discussion on specific issues and topics

Depending on the actual data mining tool used, we can extract the data from the public accounts of selected stakeholders' profiles and enter them into Microsoft Excel sheets.

This will enable information to be collected on the type of post, post link, post message, picture, the time of posting, interactions, likes, shares, comments, reactions and other forms of engagement.

Consequently, it is possible to further analyse the actual content of the posts and code it according to a list of narratives and topics, taking into consideration various aspects ranging from more general topics and issues (such as social issues, gender equality or education) to more local and specific issues and narratives.

PUBLISHING REPORTS: FORMAT AND FREQUENCY

In general, the same principles apply to reporting on the social media monitoring as to reporting on monitoring traditional media (see also Section 3 *Reporting*). The following are some suggestions for writing monitoring reports. In general, as with media monitoring reports there are two different formats – interim (preliminary) and final reports.

Interim report

Interim reports could be prepared in the course of the campaign to inform readers about the preliminary social media monitoring findings and trends and highlight the problems and trends identified. The interim report provides a basic description of the main trends.

Final report

The final report is divided into several parts, including the introduction, statistical methods used, results of the monitoring and the conclusion and recommendations. The report should include more concrete examples highlighting the trends and potential breaches of the law. It can also include quotations, appendices, references or reviews.

In the case of the introduction, it is important to explain the purpose of the report and the methods used for collating data, to provide an overview of the analysis and, finally, to mention the results. It is important to write it in a way that is interesting for a reader, who should be tempted to find out what lies inside. As for the methodology used, it is important to properly explain all the calculations, methods and tools employed for data mining and analysing the data.

With regard to the actual monitoring results, it is necessary to provide good insights into the social media's performance and explain the background and context so that everyone can understandable it. The reports should be designed in such a way as to convey the most important information first. The technical details can always be highlighted later in the body of the report. Good monitoring reports make the most important information easy to find so that busy readers, many of whom will not have time to read a report in full, can identify what they need to know without searching for it.

Moreover, care must be taken in the way the monitoring terms and jargon are used as it is necessary to make sure that most readers can understand them, regardless of their knowledge of monitoring and data analysis methods.

It is good to use the tables, charts and graphics that help illustrate the results of the data analysis, and to write text references that explain the important findings. When writing text references, it is necessary to highlight what is important about each table and graphic and not only report the data. Consequently, the charts should be as self-explanatory as possible. In addition, tables and other graphics should be positioned close to the text that references them.

It is important to provide a proper conclusion to the study. A thorough analysis will form the basis of this conclusion and any changes suggested. It is possible to prove a point if the data are complete, correct, and clear.

DATA INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of numeric data needs to be done carefully, taking into account not only what statistical tables show but also possible reasons for the values reported in them. Accordingly, it is always important to explain the main trends in the media monitoring and support each with one or more concrete examples. The media analyst needs to describe a phenomenon, in this case media performance, but he or she also has to be able to explain it. There is no general model for interpreting data. What follows are some simple indications that can improve the reading of data and make it easier to analyse them.

ROADMAP FOR SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

1. PREPARATION

- Sample selection
- Sample classification
- Data collection

2. DATA ANALYSIS

- Coding phase
- Definition of coding categories
- Analysis of CIB & exploratory analysis

3. REPORTING

- Report outline
- Interpretation of data & narratives

FINAL OUTPUT
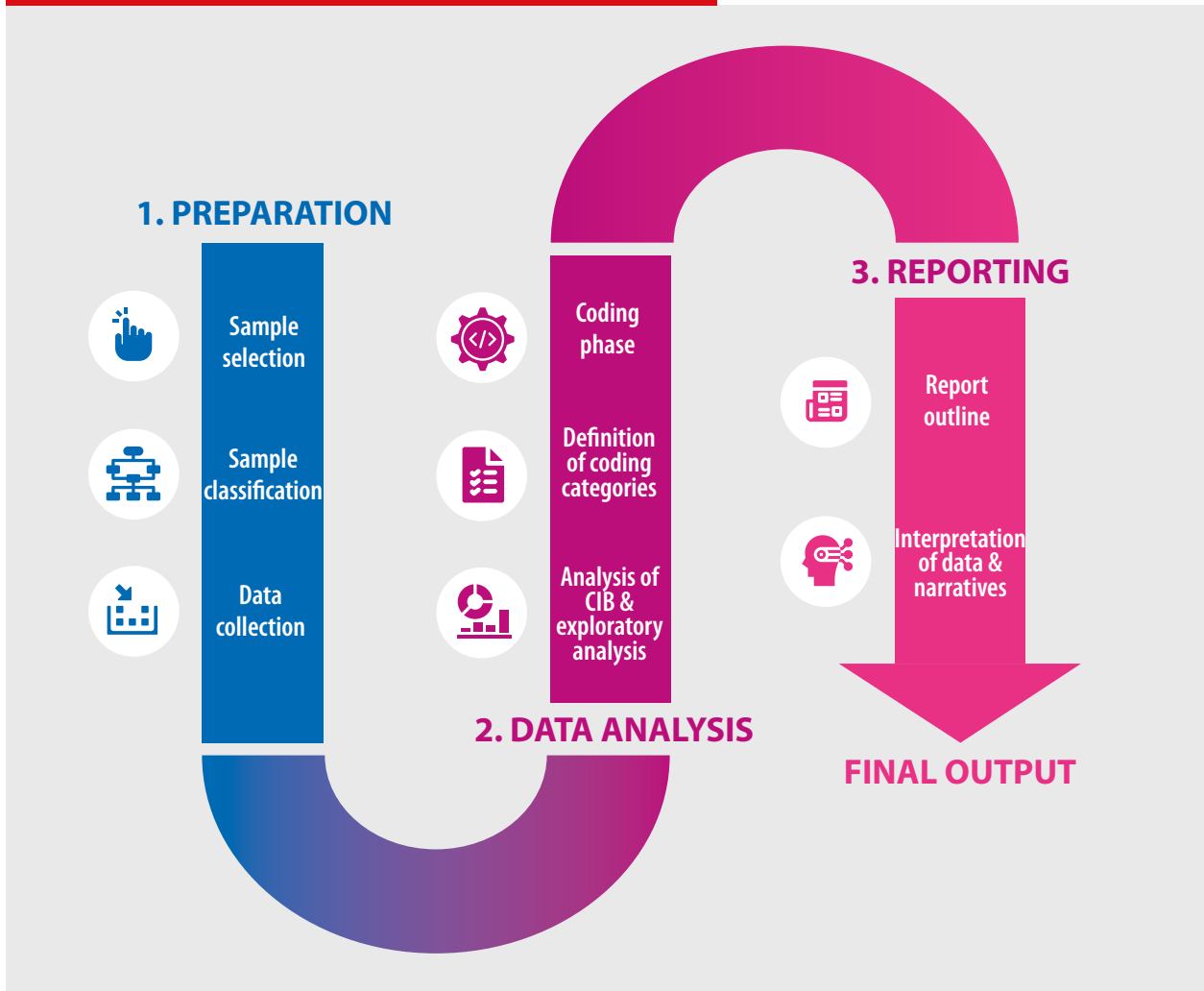
CHART 6 DRI SHOWS THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING ANALYSIS

How to engage monitoring actors and ensure synergy between stakeholders and the sustainability of monitoring results

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

Who monitors the media?

- ► Academics
- ► Election observers
- ► NGOs
- ► Market researchers
- ► Regulators
- ► Media

Pre-election media monitoring could be conducted by academics, international election observers, non-governmental organisations, market researchers, media regulators and the media themselves. The media monitor their own output to look into their own profile, to see how they cover important issues and to determine whether their coverage complies with the law and is ethical and fair. The media and journalists should, as appropriate, support effective systems of self-regulation whether at the level of specific media sectors (such as press complaints bodies) or of individual media outlets (ombudsmen or public editors) which include standards on striving for accuracy in the news, including by offering a right of correction and/or reply to address inaccurate statements in the media.[31]

31. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organisation of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, "Joint declaration on freedom of expression and 'fake news', disinformation and propaganda", 3 March 2017, http://www.osce.org/fom/302796.

A media regulator monitors media coverage for compliance with licence conditions, for local content and language requirements, for compliance with the law on advertising, for political balance, for social pluralism and for general compliance with the law and the constitution. Media monitoring gives the regulator more effective tools for investigating media coverage issues. When a broadcaster fails to respect the law or the conditions specified in the licence, the regulatory authorities should have the power to impose sanctions, in accordance with the law. Media regulators or other relevant bodies are obliged to oversee how the media report on contestants and identify any manipulations or biases, based on their analyses. Systematic media monitoring assists media regulators in identifying violations and taking prompt corrective action. During elections, the results of such analyses demonstrate how the media behave and keep the public and contestants aware of relevant issues. When shortcomings are identified, corrective action should be taken to improve media coverage or protect media rights and freedoms.

Why does a regulator monitor broadcasters?

► For compliance with license conditions

► For local content and language requirements

► For compliance with the law on advertising

► For political balance

► For social pluralism

► For general compliance with the law and constitution

It is essential that civil society organisations monitoring 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 organisations 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 organisations try to create synergies and reach an agreement in advance of the monitoring.

For example, before the 2019 presidential and parliamentary election in Ukraine, five civil society organisations consisting of the Commission on Journalism Ethics, the Human Rights Platform, the Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute and StopFake formed a coalition to carry out the systematic pre-election monitoring of the media coverage. The activity was implemented with the support of two Council of Europe projects: "Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine" and "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine", implemented under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 (see Appendix 3 *Case Study from Ukraine* for more information).

If it nevertheless happens that two or more civil society organisations conduct similar pre-election media monitoring projects, it is important to be aware of each other's methodologies – particularly if there are differences in the monitoring periods, sampling, methods applied, etc. It is not a very big problem if there is more than one monitoring project but the overall gain could be undermined if two similar efforts arrived at dramatically different conclusions and results. Consequently, it is important to understand if there are differences in advance so that they can be explained.

It is obviously much better if civil society organisations agree to work together and handle different aspects of monitoring. For example, one organisation could focus on monitoring TV programmes and another on online media or social media networks. The co-ordination role could either be carried out by a donor, as was the case in Ukraine in 2019 when it was undertaken by the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, or it could also be assumed by civil society organisations themselves.

At the outset of the monitoring project, it is recommended to organise meetings with all relevant stakeholders who are either involved in the election process or will in some way be involved in the monitoring. When meetings take place with media regulators, it is advisable to find out the scope and timeline of their planned election activities. It is good practice for a media regulator to establish systematic media monitoring during an election campaign as it assists it in identifying any inequitable and preferential coverage of contestants

and in taking prompt corrective action. If the regulator does not have the resources or capacity to conduct pre-election media monitoring, co-operation with civil society organisations with experience in this area could be considered.

While the goals of the media monitoring exercise conducted by civil society organisations are different from those of a media regulator, the latter can still take such monitoring into consideration, particularly if it is carried out by respected and experienced organisations. The main goal of media monitoring by civil society organisation is to provide a professional, comprehensive and objective assessment of political diversity and balance in news and current affairs coverage by the media monitored. The main goal of the project is to inform the public about the conduct of the media during the elections, initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and promote the media's adherence to international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and media independence.

General considerations before starting a media monitoring exercise

► Are state media free to play an impartial, fair and objective role in covering the activities of all candidates and political parties or is there a selective approach to provide information on selected events where topics are chosen not for their information value but in order to portray a favoured party in a positive light and its opponents in a negative light. Is there any preferential treatment in favour of or against a candidate or political party?

► Is there any intentional manipulation of the privately-owned media by its owners or other partisan forces?

► Is anyone imposing direct censorship?

► Are journalists forced to adjust their comments or criticisms to what is considered acceptable by the authorities and/or are they engaged in self-censorship?

► Are any media and/or journalists penalised or harassed in any way for broadcasting programmes or publishing articles merely because they are critical of the government, its policies or the powers that be?

► Are journalists ready to "cross the line of objectivity" in return for money or other personal benefits – are they corrupt?

► Are journalists competent and responsible enough to have adequate resources before releasing any information?

► Is there any prejudice in reporting based on racial, ethnic and religious hatred?

What are the objectives we want to achieve by conducting a domestic media monitoring project?

► To provide the media, the political contestants, the international community and the citizens with benchmarks to judge the fairness of the election process.

► To provide the voters with accurate information on whether the mass media are enabling them to gain a fair and balanced picture of the campaign; and alert them of the need to question their sources of information prior to an election.

► To raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe the standards of balanced reporting in the broadcast and print media focusing on specific important political issues.

► To motivate citizens so that they learn how to view and accept information. For many citizens, this could be their first unique opportunity to finally better understand what should be the actual role of the media in a democratic and free society.

► To advocate for positive changes to the media laws so that public media become independent and reporting is balanced.

► To document and raise public awareness about all cases of administrative restrictions, intimidation and harassment of the media by the state authorities or a political party.

Another objective of monitoring media coverage could be to evaluate media compliance with international standards and recommendations concerning good practices. As mentioned above, the mechanism of co-operation among national stakeholders could enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral environment and prevent and counteract possible electoral violations in the media. Such monitoring could also be important from the media literacy point of view and there should be further activities in the run-up to elections explaining how easily people could become targets of manipulation. The media monitoring results could also be used to update existing ethical rules, such as the media code of conduct.

It is clear that the role of civil society organisations monitoring media may not be limited to elections but could also focus on pre-election and post-election phases. It is also important to reach out to international election observers who normally undertake their own media monitoring work. While international observers are limited by their remits and are not able to use the media monitoring results of a local civil society organisation, they are nevertheless interested to meet the local players and have an understanding of existing media monitoring projects.

Consequently, international observers could support domestic players in playing a more active role when it comes to advocating the implementation of recommendations contained in reports by international observers. As international observers leave the country after elections, domestic media monitors are well placed to advocate important changes and recommendations. For this to be successful, it is important to create synergy between international observers and domestic media monitoring groups. This synergy is important given the existing stereotypes on both sides – international observers tend to consider some domestic media monitors biased and unprofessional while domestic media monitors consider some international observers unable to fully understand the complexities of their local elections and media environment.

It is important that only domestic media monitors with a proven record of independent and genuine monitoring are involved in this type of activity. In addition, domestic media monitors should strengthen their abilities to work more professionally and make sure that their independence is not questioned. This includes both their monitoring activities and reporting. Bringing the reports into line with international standards will make them stronger.

Civil society organisations are taken more seriously when they demonstrate their ability to work jointly on communicating their findings on various aspects of their observation. It is only through greater professionalisation and trust in domestic observation groups that they could be more successful in advocating important policy changes and reforms after elections. The Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation states that organisations engaging in election observation "*should offer recommendations for improving electoral and political processes*". Accordingly, recommendations contained in final reports – of both international and domestic observers – can provide a basis for post-election advocacy efforts.

It is also recommended that civil society organisations try to co-ordinate their efforts with international organisations involved in post-election work as both Council of Europe and OSCE also organise post-election roundtables and other events to discuss their final reports. Civil society organisations could use these events to identify common ground for advocating recommendations, along with international observers.

This process can begin right after elections – with civil society organisations organising round tables with the participation of all relevant stakeholders – including international observers – to discuss recommendations to improve the electoral process. The recommendations should be to the point and implementable, so it is important that these organisations set realistic and achievable targets for their advocacy campaigns, taking into account existing resources as well as opportunities to raise additional funds. Creating coalitions helps in achieving these tasks. The Council of Europe and OSCE permanent missions (in the respective countries) can play a more active role in discussing follow up and advocacy efforts with civil society organisations. These organisations have often benefited from sharing their experiences with other bodies, particularly from discussions with those facing the same challenges. It is not necessary to "reinvent the wheel" but lessons can be learned from other groups and mistakes avoided.

Making an impact with monitoring: How to use the results to advocate for improvements and changes

We live in a world where misinformation and disinformation are becoming frequent and omnipresent and where people do not know whom to trust. The main aim of propaganda is to sow doubt, distort truths, paralyse the decision-making process and undermine democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. Its goal is also to eradicate activism, which is why civil society should fight back. It is important that civil society identifies and raises awareness about deliberately false news stories, disinformation and propaganda through continuous fact checking and media monitoring projects that provide important feedback to people on the fundamental nature of the propaganda.

It is incumbent upon professional journalists to demonstrate responsibility to the public by providing credible and comprehensive newsworthy reporting. The journalistic standards and values that the media should represent are crucial in this era of misinformation and disinformation.

The current crisis of confidence in the traditional concept of media is an opportunity to reinforce the role and mission of professional journalism. High-quality, credible and trustworthy information is a cornerstone of a strong democracy. In order to uphold these values and enhance the trust in them, media should focus more on fact checking, in-depth reporting and investigative journalism. Any steps we take to address the current challenges before the news industry should put the professional journalism first and foremost and not undermine that commitment. It is important for people to understand the danger of mis/disinformation and propaganda on the internet, which is why measures to promote professional journalism and digital literacy should be taken. Media monitoring should become a strong and continuous process, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to provide feedback to the sector and foster standards of journalism. Media monitoring could be very helpful as a way of ensuring fact- and research-based advocacy for better standards.

It is important to have a clear plan on how to use the monitoring results to advocate improvements and changes in the process. A good approach is to inform the monitored media at the beginning of the project of the intention to monitor them. If it is clear that there is a clear absence of an independent regulatory body able to properly oversee the media coverage of elections, consideration could even be given to establishing a media code of conduct by which the media would voluntarily sign up to self-regulatory obligations. The implementation of the code would then be monitored. Even if a code is not drawn up, it makes sense to meet the monitored media and explain the main objectives of the exercise. The main idea behind the monitoring project is not to name and shame but, rather, initiate discussion about professional standards and provide important feedback to voters about the type of information they receive. It also constitutes feedback to journalists on their work.

From the outset, it is important to have a project calendar with an agreed timeline for publishing the monitoring findings. When the project is conducted for the first time, it is advisable to consider holding press conferences, particularly at the beginning. This would allow project implementers to properly explain the monitoring methodology and answer any questions about what the public needs to know about the project. The more the project resonates in the public mind, the greater the potential pressure is on the media to live up to their legal obligations and standards of professional journalism. After each press conference, it is also important to draw up a mailing list consisting of media, contestants, international observers, the diplomatic community and other relevant stakeholders, who should all receive monitoring reports. Apart from interim monitoring reports, a preliminary report should be published shortly before election day (before the moratorium) summarising the entire campaign and providing preliminary conclusions about the media coverage.

POST-ELECTION FOLLOW-UP

Immediately after the elections, project implementers could consider organising a workshop or roundtable with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including the media regulator, the election management body, (newly elected) members of parliament and monitored media to discuss the project findings and improvements to be implemented before the next elections. This type of event provides a good opportunity to publish the final report, which should include recommendations for legal and systematic changes in the election and media-related legislation. As mentioned above, co-operation in this respect could be envisioned with international observers (if they are still in the country) or by adopting their reports and recommendations – in case the findings and recommendations coincide. The main objective of the roundtable should be to reflect on the conduct of the media in the election campaign and discuss standards and best practices regarding the media coverage of elections and their practical implementation in the country concerned. The discussion could focus on recommendations to enhance the media coverage of elections to bring it fully into line with international standards and best practices. The following questions could be raised in the course of the event.

General questions

► Did the media fulfil their role to inform voters in an objective and accurate manner with regard to the platforms and views of different candidates and parties?
► Coverage of state authorities – was the line between official activities and campaign-related appearances of state officials blurred?
► Was the election-related coverage determined by newsworthiness or by political considerations – who determined the editorial policy?
► Did the media provide in-depth and analytical coverage of election platforms?
► Did the media facilitate vibrant political discussions? Comparison with previous election campaigns – improvement or deterioration?

Media regulation

► The role of a media regulator during elections. How to provide a timely and effective remedy in the case of unbalanced coverage.
► Dealing with media-related complaints – how to ensure a timely and effective remedy in the adjudication of complaints.
► Applying sanctions – how to ensure that sanctions are commensurate with the nature and gravity of the violation.
► How to find the right balance between regulation and editorial freedoms.
► Should a regulator and/or commission conduct its own media monitoring?

Improvements and recommendations

► What should be done to improve the media coverage of the next elections?
► How to ensure media independence and non-interference in their work by political and economic interests.
► Changes to legislation and regulatory practice?
► Short-term and longer-term recommendations for improvements and changes.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – MEDIA MONITORING MATRIX

MEDIA MONITORING

Type of monitoring

It is important to determine the type of monitoring which will be conducted based on the type of elections taking place as well as other important factors (financial and human resources, monitoring period, number of reports etc)

Sampling and unit of analysis

While it is generally possible to monitor the entire 24-hour period of media broadcasts, for the purpose of analysing the election coverage of the media, it is enough to focus on selected segments of the media coverage (broadcasts, newspaper articles or specific sections of websites).

Monitored subjects

The list of subjects for monitoring should be defined prior to the launch of the activity. Relevant entities are only those that can be clearly identified as particular political parties or groupings. Sometimes certain political terms (for instance, "opposition" or "authorities"), which are commonly used in political communication, are frequently employed in the media. However, they should be included in the list of relevant subjects when these terms are not used vaguely, but represent concrete political forces recognised as such in society.

Type of programmes

When deciding the type of programmes to monitor, The focus should primarily be on all the programmes aired during prime time, i.e. the time when the broadcasts usually have their largest audience (for instance six hours of evening broadcasts from 6pm to midnight). Important political programmes or special election programmes could, of course, also be recorded and analysed if aired outside the generally perceived prime time (for example, for radio, prime time often also includes the morning programmes).

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis includes a number of numeric measures and indicators (variables) that can be counted and analysed, including assessing and producing findings regarding the time allocated to each monitored entity, topics, top stories and geographical area of coverage and also evaluating the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. In addition, the monitoring can focus on the structure of news programmes in terms of their thematic diversity, geographical coverage and top stories in the monitoring period, as well as the duration of news items

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis evaluates the performance of selected media outlets against ethical and professional standards, such as balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, omission of information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items, inflammatory language that cannot be easily quantified. These data are reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

Data collection

Monitors complete an electronic data entry form which is available on the computers they use to also conduct the monitoring.

Data entry and analysis

The last phase of working with data is data processing. Since the monitoring forms consist of a relatively small number of different data types and the data can be easily organised according to the given criteria, Microsoft Excel is suitable for processing the results of the monitoring process. The data acquired during the monitoring consist of subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic and its time.

Interpretation of the data and reporting

It is important to make sure that people experienced with media monitoring carry out the data analysis, create tables and charts and write monitoring reports. It should be clear before each exercise how many reports will be published along with the precise timeline

Broadcast media (TV and radio programmes)

1 Legal framework and standards for coverage of elections

○ **International legal framework:**
• Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;
• Recommendation No. R (99) 15 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states, on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;
• Resolution 2254 (2019) Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections;
• Guidelines on Media Analysis During Election Observation Missions issued jointly by the Venice Commission and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

○ **National legal framework:**
constitution, electoral law, media laws, other laws and provisions in the civil and criminal codes related to the media; rules and regulations on media coverage issued by the election administration; rules and regulations issued by media regulators; and self-regulation instructions issued by associations of journalists or similar organisations.

○ **Standards for media coverage:**
There are a number of ethical norms and standards of the media industry:
• balance
• accuracy
• timely
• choice of issues
• omission of information
• advantage of incumbency
• positioning of items
• inflammatory language etc.

2 Sampling and unit analysis

The unit of analysis is *1 second* and there is a different approach in the case of **news programmes** (which are monitored in a very detailed way, including quantitative analysis (measurements) of all relevant subjects and **current affairs programmes** (talk shows and debates) where a mainly qualitative analysis is applied (focusing on the role of hosts/moderators, formats, participants, guests, etc)

Free airtime/space – it is mostly sufficient to conduct the quantitative monitoring of free airtime and space to assess if everything is done in accordance with the specific legislation.

Paid advertising – same as with free airtime. It is also mostly sufficient to conduct quantitative monitoring of paid airtime and space to assess if everything is done in accordance with the specific legislation.

3 Monitored subjects/topics/narratives/ top stories

Monitored subjects
• President
• Government
• Local government
• Registered candidates
• Parliamentary parties
• relevant non-parliamentary parties

Topics – the monitoring of topics provides a more detailed background on certain aspects of monitoring related to specific subjects (for example, when focusing on monitoring gender aspects, it is important to know if certain candidates are associated with certain topics etc)

Topics can be the following:
• Agriculture
• Army/military
• Business, economy
• Culture
• Catastrophes, incidents, accidents
• Charity
• Corruption
• Crime
• Civil society
• Education, science
• Environment
• Foreign Affairs
• Health care
• IT, digitalisation
• Judiciary
• Media
• Minorities
• Politics
• Religion
• Social issues
• Sport
• Transport
• Others

The aim of monitoring **narratives** is to monitor articles through which the narratives are disseminated in connection with particular topics or subjects. The aim of such monitoring is to capture the dynamics of the identified narratives and to understand the demographic groups' susceptibility to certain narratives.

4 Type of monitoring data

There are different types of monitoring data depending on the types of programmes

• news
• talk shows
• debates
• free political advertising
• paid political advertising

○ **Public service media**

As public institutions, publicly funded media hold a unique position regarding the trust of the general public. Members of the public pay broadcast receiving licence fees and the public media have a legal and moral responsibility to serve the interests of the general public. Public media are obliged to broadcast news and election platforms in an unbiased, balanced and objective manner, offering the general public a basis for choosing candidates and political parties. State/Public media should:

• provide candidates and parties in elections with equal or equitable access opportunities and give them fair treatment;
• provide coverage that meets the criteria of balanced, pluralistic and impartial reporting;
• comply with the provisions for election coverage, as set out in national legislation;
• ensure pluralistic reporting, as they are public "property"; and
• adhere to journalistic ethics and professional standards.

○ **Private broadcasters**

Although the status of private media is different from that of the public media, they also have to comply with a number of obligations regarding the fair and impartial coverage of elections, especially in their information programmes. This stems from the fact that they have been issued their licence on a periodic basis by a public authority and it may contain certain requirements as mentioned above. Private broadcast media should:

• comply with the provisions for election coverage as set out in national legislation; and
• adhere to journalistic ethics and professional standards.

5 Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis includes a number of numeric measures and indicators (variables) that can be counted and analysed:

– **Amount of time** allocated to selected political subject – divided into direct/indirect time;
– **Tone** of the coverage in which the monitored subjects are portrayed - positive, neutral and negative;
– **Topics** - structure of news programmes concerning their thematic diversity;
Geographical coverage – from where the news items or articles originate (cities and regions and countries);
– **Top stories** in the monitoring period;
– **Narratives**

6 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis evaluates the performance of selected media outlets against ethical and professional standards:

• balance
• accuracy
• timely
• choice of issues
• omission of information
• advantage of incumbency
• positioning of items
• inflammatory language
• choice of issues

• prioritising
• advantage of incumbency
• positioning of items
• inflammatory language
• choice of issues
• prioritising
• manipulative use of film, picture and sound

7 Tools/Programs for monitoring data collection, entering and analysis

• monitoring data (broadcast records) storage in PC
• stopwatches for monitors
• database software (such as Microsoft Excel or Access) for collection and analysis of data
• abilities to produce graphics and their direct use in presentations of the monitoring results

8 Comments

Depending on whether publicly funded or private broadcasters are involved, the focus is on news and current affairs programmes. Public service media are under strict rules of impartiality and balance, whereas private broadcasters should also comply with a number of obligations regarding the fair and impartial coverage of elections, especially in their information programmes.

When deciding on the list of broadcast media to monitor and the respective sampling, it is worth noting that depending on the scope of the monitoring, 1 monitor could usually monitor 1-2 prime time TV channels on 5-6 days a week.

Print press | *Traditional media*

1 Legal framework and standards for coverage of elections

° **International legal framework:**
There are no special regulations for the print media regarding reporting or the editorial coverage of elections in Council of Europe member states. On the basis of tradition and because of the different natures of various forms of media, the press has been free to have a distinct political leaning. The way the public has access to and is influenced by the press differs significantly compared to the broadcast media.

° **National legal framework:**
Election laws may include provisions regulating certain aspects of the campaign relating to the dissemination of opinion polls, silence periods and hate speech.

° **Self-regulatory and ethical standards**

Private print media should**:**
• comply with the provisions for election coverage as set out in national legislation, as well as with journalistic ethics and professional standards; and
• be free from regulatory interference that would impact on their editorial independence or their right to express a political preference.

2 Sampling and unit analysis

Unit of analysis is *1 cm²* and the monitoring focuses on the news coverage. In the case of editorials or readers' letters or blogs, these are not included (unless they are written by journalists and are part of the respective media outlet's editorial policy.

3 Monitored subjects/topics/narratives/top stories

The same as for broadcast media

4 Type of monitoring data

- news
- free political advertising
- paid political advertising

Usually not included:
- editorials or readers' letters
- blogs

5 Quantitative analysis

Amount of space allocated to selected political subjects. The same as in broadcast media in the case of topics, tone, narratives.

6 Qualitative analysis

The same as for the broadcast media

7 Tools/Programs for monitoring data collection, entering and analysis

- Monitoring data (print versions of newspapers)
- using a ruler to measure the space in cm²
- using electronic versions of newspapers (in pdf)
- database software same as broadcast media

8 Comments

When deciding on the list of print media to monitor and the respective sampling, it is worth noting that newspapers are usually more analytical than television channels so the monitoring is usually also more complex and takes more time in comparison with television.

NEWS

Online media — *New media*

1 Legal framework and standards for coverage of elections

◦ **International legal framework:**
There are no special regulations for online news-services regarding reporting or editorial coverage of elections in Council of Europe member states.

◦ **National legal framework:**
Election laws may include provisions regulating certain aspects of the campaign relating to the dissemination of opinion polls, silence periods and hate speech.

◦ **Self-regulatory and ethical standards**

As in the case of the print media, **private online media** (online versions of standard print media) should:

• comply with the provisions for election coverage as set out in national legislation, as well as with journalistic ethics and professional standards; and

• be free from regulatory interference that would impact on their editorial independence or their right to express a political preference.

2 Sampling and unit analysis

Unit of analysis could be 1 pixel or one word, 1cm², as well as one article. The measurement could also focus on the number of characters counted by copy/pasting the articles into MS Word. Similar to print media, the online media monitoring focuses on the news coverage.

3 Monitored subjects/topics/ narratives/top stories

The same as for broadcast media

4 Type of monitoring data

Same as the print media

5 Quantitative analysis

Amount of space allocated to selected political subjects. The same as in broadcast media in the case of topics, tone, narratives.

6 Qualitative analysis

The same as for the broadcast media

7 Tools/Programs for monitoring data collection, entering and analysis

It is important to have access to all relevant sections of the online media which will be monitored (if it is not provided free of charge, it is important to subscribe to such access).
- using Measure-it for measuring online articles – add on in the case of Chrome

8 Comments

The Internet has undoubtedly increased the possibility of providing information to a larger section of the population by creating more opportunities for ordinary voters to generate political news and opinions.

Social media

1 Legal framework and standards for coverage of elections

○ **International legal framework:** No specific standards developed yet but the United Nations Committee on Human Rights' General Comment 25, which protects the voters' right to form opinions independently, free of manipulative interference of any kind, can be the basis for social media assessment.
○ **National legal framework** (electoral law, media law)
○ **Policies and regulations of specific social network**

2 Sampling and unit analysis

Unit of analysis is one post. The monitoring can focus on the frequency of publishing posts by selected actors and on the level of interactions with these posts.
– **frequency of posts** (how many posts are published in the monitoring period
– **interactions** (reactions, shares and comments)
– **type of posts** (text, picture, video)
– **reactions** (6 different types of reaction)

3 Monitored subjects/topics/narratives/top stories

Monitored actors

Messenger – is the actor who spreads the message (source of information) – so it could be a political party or candidate, a media outlet (using social media profiles to promote stories) and a social media influencer (people with a substantial number of followers and supporters on social media networks).

Message – in the case of the actual message, these are the topics and narratives spread by actors (messengers).

Messaging is the way the message travels on social media networks (for example, is it amplified by inauthentic actors – bots – or trolls or is it boosted as sponsored content?).

In the case of monitoring topics and narratives, it is the same as for broadcast, print and online media.

4 Type of monitoring data

The monitoring primarily focuses on official public pages or groups

5 Quantitative analysis

Using a data scraping tool or platform, in the first phase of the monitoring, it is important to collect information on the type of post, post link, post message, picture, the time of posting, interactions, likes, shares, comments, reactions and other forms of engagement. The same as in broadcast media in the case of topics, and narratives.

6 Qualitative analysis

In the second phase of the monitoring, it is possible to carry out content analysis by assessing the actual content of the posts and code it according to a list of narratives and topics, taking into consideration various aspects ranging from more general topics and issues (such as social issues, gender equality or education) to more local and specific issues and narratives.

8 Comments

It is important to know which social media networks are the most influential in each country in which the monitoring will take place. Consequently, the scope of the monitoring is determined according to whether it is also possible to establish how many social media monitors are necessary for the monitoring – when monitors are used to assess posts and code them for narratives, one individual can monitor 70–100 posts a day.

7 Tools/Programs for monitoring data collection, entering and analysis

- CrowdTangle
- NewsWhip
- Buzzumo
- VIsibrain
- Sysmos
- Talkwalker
- BrandWatch
- Social Bakers

APPENDIX 2 – USEFUL TIPS FOR A MEDIA MONITORING PROJECT

Media monitoring project calendar

Taking into consideration the project goal and financial and human resources, it is important to develop a project timeline, including the precise dates when the monitoring will commence, when the reports will be published, and the end date of the monitoring.

The interpretation of numeric data needs to be done carefully, taking into account not only the data contained in statistical tables, but also possible reasons for the values reported in them. It is always important to explain the main trends in the media monitoring and support each of them with one or more concrete examples. The media analyst needs to describe a phenomenon, in this case media performance, but he or she also needs to be able to explain it. There is no general model for interpreting data. What follows are some simple indications that can improve the reading of data and make it easier to analyse them.

The picture shows a project calendar covering the entire monitoring period, elections in Palestine 2006.

Summary of monitoring tips

It is always important to understand clearly what the main objectives of the monitoring are and to correlate them with the available resources, both human and financial. Once it is clear what the objectives are, it is important to set the unit of analysis. It could be 1 pixel or it could also be one article, depending on how detailed the monitoring results we expect are. It is important to be aware of the shortcomings and strengths of different methodological approaches and to properly communicate the methodology to monitors/analysts.

Remember that the tone of the coverage is positive if the way the message is presented and the nature of the message are both positive, similarly if both the factors are negative, the tone is negative. A neutral tone is the result of both factors being neutral. If the way the message is presented and the context of the message do not match, then monitors have to determine the tone according to what is the prevailing factor (so it could be either the content of the story or the context).

Balanced news coverage means that a media outlet attempts to cover events in a balanced, fair and objective manner by offering time or space to all subjects in the context of an item to present their views. Such a news item is purely informative and does not contain any one-sided evaluating standpoints or criticism.

It is important to remember that there is no expectation that the news should be neutral.

It is important to use all relevant variables (time, tone, direct/indirect and others) when carrying out the analysis – do not reach conclusions by looking at them separately.

Media should not be afraid to describe reality as it is and to present people's emotions and positive or critical/negative viewpoints. Neutrality should not be seen as an ultimate goal as people are not interested in watching superficial and sterile news. Media should present all sides of a story with comparable time and manner of presentation to avoid any preference or bias.

The mere existence of positive or negative ratings attributed to monitored subjects does not yet indicate bias – providing that the respective media outlets treat all monitored subjects in a similar manner. If however, there is a visible longer-term tendency to always report on some subjects in a positive manner and to criticise others, this could indicate bias.

It is crucial to frequently test the validity of the media monitoring data and to test the reliability of monitors.

For the quantitative analysis, we avoid including subjects which are too general and vague – they should represent concrete political forces recognised in society.

Bear in mind the need to think how a TV programme influences an average voter and do not speculate how it affects specific party supporters –common sense is required.

When the level of political diversity in the election-focused reporting is assessed, it is a good practice to analyse a minimum period of two weeks before identifying any tendencies and trends and before drawing any conclusions on whether or not a particular media outlet is fair and balanced.

Example of how to calculate time in the quantitative analysis

Time

Candidate A speaks for 5 minutes. Of this time, she speaks for 3 minutes about her election rival, *Candidate B*. She describes her opponent as a politician who has lied to his voters in the past and who makes promises but never delivers on them. Candidate A uses the rest of the time – 2 minutes – to speak about her platform, saying that she is the one who will deliver. Let us see how this example should be processed

Candidate A – 5 minutes (direct time) → 2 minutes (about herself)
→ 3 minutes (about Candidate B)

Candidate B – 3 minutes (indirect time)
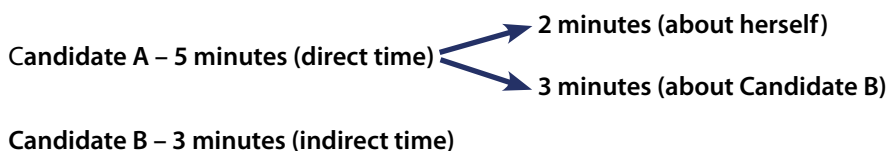
It is important to include both the time for Candidate A, who spoke directly, as well as the time for Candidate B, who was mentioned.
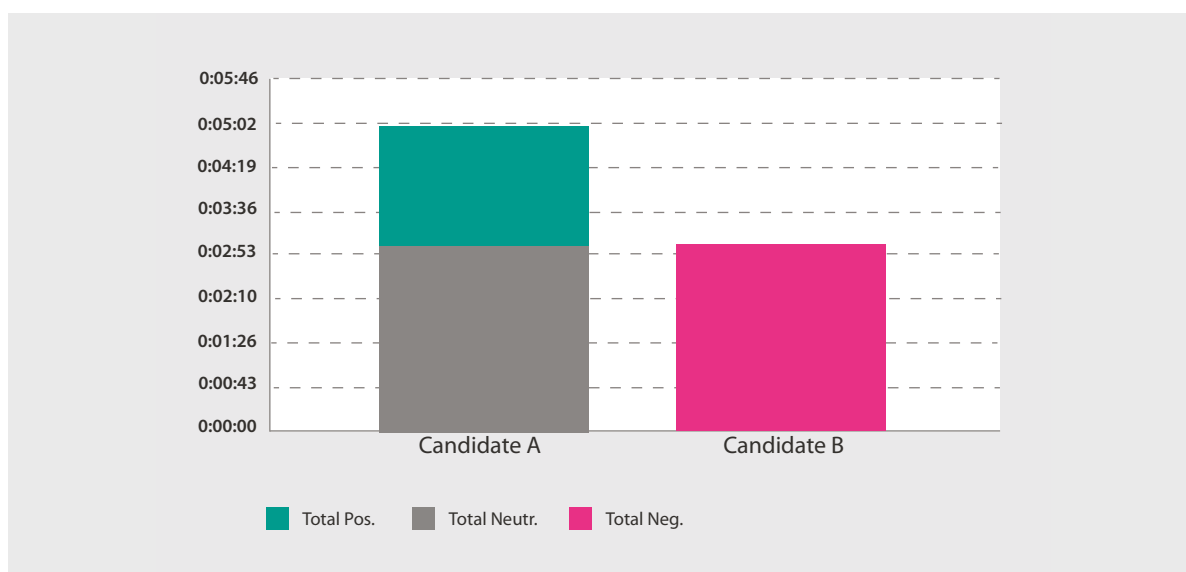
For example, the Slovak media monitoring organisation MEMO 98 uses the following five-level scale evaluation: Grades 1 and 2 mean that a given monitored subject is presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage is favourable. Grade 3 is a "neutral mark", with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations. Grades 4 or 5 signify that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light, respectively. Such coverage has negative connotations, including accusations or one-sided criticism regarding a subject portrayed in an item or story. It is always important to consider the actual evaluation (judgment) of the subject being monitored and also the context of the story or item.

Examples of a positive evaluation of the selected subject would be: *subject A* is a very popular member of parliament; people like *subject A*; he/she is a respected politician. Examples of a negative evaluation would be: *subject B* is a political loser; he/she is not an honest politician. If there is no positive or negative evaluation, the message is rated as neutral, for example when the report says: *subject C* is a candidate in the upcoming elections.

For the assessment of the tone, a monitor considers the context in which the information is reported (this entails the background of the story, how it is reported by a journalist or news presenter, the intonation of his/her voice, background music, pictures, a happy or angry crowd, people applauding or shouting derogatory words, etc). The second parameter to consider when carrying out the assessment of the tone is the content – is the reported information positive, neutral or negative in connection with the subject being monitored? For example, the fact that *subject A* has negotiated an agreement whereby the country will receive financial aid, or the fact that the unemployment rate in the country will be reduced by a new law proposed by *subject A* (member of parliament) is perceived by the majority of society as a rather positive development. On the other hand, inherently negative stories could feature. For instance, there might be a report on *subject B*, a minister whose car injured a pedestrian because he did not keep to the speed limit. The fact that: *subject C* participated in a sitting of parliament is neutral.

Accordingly, monitors consider how the story is reported (context) and the actual content of the story – does it shed a positive, negative or neutral light on the monitored subject. When both content and context are positive, the monitor's final evaluation will be positive; when they are both negative, it will be negative.

It is a little more challenging to determine the overall tone if there is a difference between content and context. For example, the context of the story is neutral – a factual report on *subject A* having been detained in connection with a traffic accident. However, the content is negative as the mere fact that someone is detained is negative. In such a situation, the monitors have to establish what the determining factor is (the content or context).

This may be compared to a media report that the incumbent president met with a president of another country and signed an agreement thanks to which a big financial investment will be coming into the country in the next three years. The context of the story is again neutral, but the content of the information is positive for the president as details of achievements, progress, improvements and successes always have positive connotations. Here again, monitors have to determine what is the final assessment – in the first example, the overall assessment will most likely be negative, whereas in the second it will be positive.

APPENDIX 3 – CASE STUDY FROM UKRAINE

Prior to the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine, a coalition of civil society organisations consisting of the Commission on Journalism Ethics, the Human Rights Platform, the Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute and StopFake was formed to systematically monitor the media coverage of Ukraine's presidential election on 31 March and 21 April and the early parliamentary elections held on 21 July. This activity was initiated and implemented with the support of the two Council of Europe Projects "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine" and "Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine", implemented under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021.

Methodology

At the outset of the project, the Council of Europe recruited two consultants, Rasťo Kužel and Oleksandr Burmahin, who developed a Media Monitoring Methodology that covers the legal and political context, the legal framework, media monitoring methodologies, media monitoring issues and the presentation of monitoring results. It was developed well in advance of the elections, allowing important stakeholders to provide their comments and modify it according to their needs. The methodology has been recognised at the international level and applied in similar projects in over 50 countries during the last 20 years, including Ukraine. Based on a content-oriented comprehensive approach, it enabled an in-depth analysis to be made of pluralism and diversity in media coverage, in particular, the coverage of specific subjects and topics, which are assessed in the proper context, together with a detailed comparison and analysis.

The intention of the methodology was to help Ukrainian civil society organisations to enhance their existing media monitoring capacity in order to observe how Ukrainian media covered the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019. It provided the project partners that co-operated with the Council of Europe before the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine with more effective tools for assessing media coverage issues.

Assessment mission

Following the preparation of the methodology, both the consultants working on the project conducted an assessment mission to meet relevant stakeholders, including local partners involved in the project as well as the media regulator, the election management body and others involved in the election process or in the monitoring project.

Training
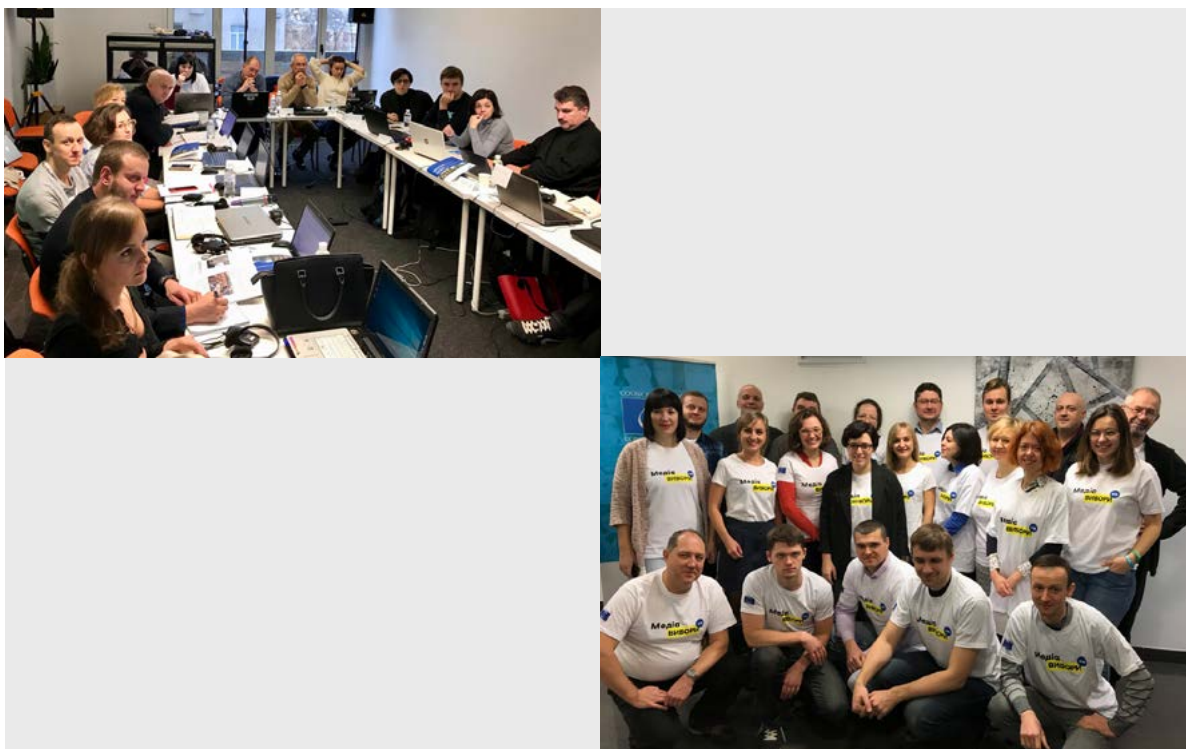
In the next stage of the project, the Council of Europe office in Ukraine announced that experts who had prepared the media monitoring methodology were going to conduct a training course on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage, making it possible for those meeting the criteria of the public announcement to apply. From 10 to14 December 2018, 20 people attended the course, learning how to monitor television and online media, how to analyse Facebook and how to monitor gender aspects relating to the media coverage of elections. The trainers utilised a mixture of informative, creative and personality-building exercises, as well as a number of visual elements, to ensure the involvement of all the participants (bearing in mind that different people have different levels of knowledge, experience and ways of thinking, with some learning best through visual media, others remembering more what they hear and yet others learning through physical or emotional feelings).

Given the project's overall objectives and the more concrete aims (expectations) stated by the participants, in particular at the initial introductory session, the trainers slightly modified the original agenda so as to make the necessary introduction to various methodological approaches to media monitoring, paying special attention to quantitative and qualitative methods, the assessment of tone, the fair allocation of airtime to political contestants, advertising, social media monitoring, disinformation and propaganda, hate speech, and social and gender issues. In addition, there were numerous practical exercises focusing on news programmes.

The above-mentioned applied training techniques helped to ensure that the training was quite interactive and entailed a high degree of trainee involvement in virtually all the fields covered. In addition, the trainers utilised some energisers as well as other techniques such as brainstorming, chalk & talk, small group work, and report-back.

The training sessions included:
- ► Introduction to media monitoring – purposes and basic principles
- ► Review of the Ukrainian media landscape and existing legal framework ahead of the elections
- ► Quantitative and qualitative media monitoring methodologies;
- ► Monitoring diversity and pluralism in political and electoral coverage (fair allocation of airtime, assessment of tone)
- ► Practical exercises focusing on monitoring diversity and pluralism in political and electoral coverage
- ► Advantage of incumbency
- ► Social media monitoring
- ► Disinformation and propaganda
- ► Inflammatory speech
- ► Gender stereotypes and media monitoring
- ► Practical exercises focusing on quantitative methodologies

The trainers' intention was to share their experience of conducting similar media monitoring projects in different countries and to draw attention to a number of specific and more problematic aspects of media monitoring (e.g., how to eliminate the potential subjectivity and/or bias of media monitors, how to deal with the advantage of incumbency, how to ensure the credibility of media monitoring etc).

Training agenda

Monitoring media coverage of elections
Training
10-14 December 2018

Day 1 | Monday, 10 December 2018

10:00 - 10:30	Registration of Participants
10:30 - 1:00	Opening Remarks & Introduction & Expectations
	– Marten Ehnberg, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine
	– Oleksandr Burmahin
	– Rasťo Kužel, MEMO 98
11:00 - 12:00	Legal and Political Context for the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections & Legal framework for the media coverage of 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections & Media regulation during elections (Oleksandr Burmahin)
12:00 - 12:15	Coffee Break
12:15 - 13:00	Media monitoring – structure and means (Rasťo Kužel)
	Developing a clear project goal
	Type of monitoring
	Sampling & Unit of analysis
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 14:30	Energiser
14:30 - 16:00	Media monitoring – structure and means (Rasťo Kužel)
	Deciding which subjects to monitor
	Deciding which programmes to monitor
	Quantitative analysis
	Coverage of political contestants and other relevant entities
16:00 - 16:15	Coffee Break
16:15 - 17:00	Practical exercise - working groups (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)

Day 2 | Tuesday, 11 December 2018

09:00 - 10:30	Media monitoring – structure and means (Rasťo Kužel)
	Qualitative analysis
	Data entering
	Reporting and publishing the results
10:30 - 10:45	Coffee Break
10:45 - 13:00	Practical exercise (Oleksandr Burmahin)
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 14:30	Energiser
14:30 - 15:30	Monitoring issues (Rasťo Kužel & Oleksandr Burmahin)
	Advantage of incumbency
	Monitoring news programmes
15:30 - 17:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis (Rasťo Kužel & Oleksandr Burmahin)

Day 3 | Wednesday, 12 December 2018

09:00 - 10:45	Monitoring issues (Rasťo Kužel & Oleksandr Burmahin)
	Debates and talk shows
	Advertising
	Paid-for coverage
	Voter education
	Election blackout
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 - 12:15	Practical exercise (Rasťo Kužel & Oleksandr Burmahin)
12:15 - 13:00	Monitoring issues (Rasťo Kužel & Oleksandr Burmahin)
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 14:30	Energiser
14:30 - 16:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis
16:00 - 16:15	Coffee Break
16:15 - 17:00	**Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis**

Day 4 | Thursday, 13 December 2018

09:00 - 10:00	Monitoring online media & Internet (Rasťo Kužel)
	Social media as an object of scrutiny for observers
	What can we capture in each platform? Insights from WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter
	Different types of "Fake news": Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation
10:00 - 10:15	Coffee Break
10:15 - 11:30	Quantitative and qualitative indicators (Rasťo Kužel)
11:30 - 12:30	Practical exercise (Oleksandr Burmahin)
12:30–13:30	Practical exercise (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch
14:00 - 14:30	Energiser
14:30 - 16:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
16:00 - 16:15	**Coffee Break**
16:15 - 17:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)

Day 5 | Friday, 14 December 2018

09:00 - 09:45	Inflammatory/hate speech, xenophobia, racism, defamation (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
09:45 - 10:45	Monitoring gender (Rasťo Kužel)
10:45 - 11:00	Coffee Break
11:00 - 13:00	Practical exercise (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
13:00 - 15:00	Lunch
14:00 - 14:30	Energiser
14:30 - 15:00	Practical exercise (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
15:00 - 16:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
16:00 - 16:15	Coffee Break
16:15 - 17:00	Practical exercise – quantitative and qualitative analysis (Oleksandr Burmahin & Rasťo Kužel)
17:00	Conclusions, end of workshop

2019 presidential election

Following the training course and in response to the trainers' recommendations, a team of 15 analysts was recruited and started conducting a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage of the elections as from 14 January 2019. An additional three experts were recruited at a later stage to conduct the monitoring of Facebook. The initial data for media monitoring were collected by the analysts working 5 days a week. Afterwards, experienced media experts reviewed the data and provided further assessment and analysis. The monitoring was carried out every day during the period from 14 January to 21 April 2019.

The biggest challenge at the beginning of the monitoring work was to ensure that the monitors did not encounter any significant delays in receiving the data for monitoring and analysis. On 22 January, there was a press conference to announce the launch of the project and most of the monitors were fully conversant with their monitoring tasks by that time.

It is important to leave a sufficient amount of time for data processing before press conferences and the publication of results. Consequently, the cut-off date for the first monitoring period (14 January–3 February) was 3 February, after which the experts had to work on the data. The data recorded in Excel needed to be cleaned for misspellings and incorrect entries, which usually takes some time, particularly with such a big monitoring sample as in this monitoring project. It is recommended to establish a group on social media platforms (Messenger, WhatsApp or any other) to enable experts to respond to the monitors' questions.

It is also important for senior experts to oversee the work done by the monitors, double checking the findings and making sure that there are no mistakes in the data. They also draft reports, analyse the data and create charts. In the course of a monitoring exercise, it is normal to have updates on the different monitoring forms (for both traditional and social media monitoring), including forms for the monitoring of new top stories (those receiving more significant attention in the media) as well as narratives (those looking into external influences on elections).

Council of Europe consultants and civil society analysts provided on-the-job mentoring, spending time with the monitors and dealing with various challenges commonly occurring at the start of a media monitoring exercise. This kind of support is necessary because monitors always have questions relating to monitoring, particularly on methodological issues such as how to assess the tone of the coverage in particular situations as well as what should be regarded as breaches of professional standards. The monitoring forms were also updated regularly to include candidates who were registered or indicated their intention to run. Following intensive discussions, the media monitoring sample was also finalised, along with the distribution of the media among the media monitors. Every day, each monitor had to report to the expert on what he/she had monitored during the day and the expert checked his/her forms to make sure they were properly filled out and the monitoring was carried out correctly. The expert also produced a special talk show form and conducted additional training for those monitoring talk shows. A special Google drive was created for the project to enable monitors to upload their forms on a daily basis, allowing the experts to review and oversee the process.

The monitoring was intended to provide a professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity and balance in news and current affairs coverage on 12 television channels and 8 online media outlets. Moreover, other aspects and indicators included in the monitoring were the role of Facebook during elections, the potential impact of disinformation/propaganda and the extent to which the media struggle against stereotypes and how they portray gender-related topics.

Що ми моніторимо?

Випуски новин у
вечірній прайм-тайм
на 10 національних
телеканалах:
• UA: Перший
• 1+1
• Інтер
• Україна
• ICTV
• СТБ
• 112 канал
• Прямий
• 5 канал
• NewsOne

Ток-шоу/ дебати
(кожен випуск) на 8
національних
телеканалах:
• 112 канал
• Прямий
• ICTV
• 1+1
• Espresso TV
• NewsOne
• ZIK
• UA: Перший (з 18
березня)

TV

Онлайн-ЗМІ (моніториться
контент стрічки новин):
obozrevatel.com, segodnya.ua,
strana.ua, korrespondent.net,
pravda.com.ua, gordonua.com,
hromadske.ua, nv.ua.

FB сторінки ЗМІ та
програм:
• «Факти» (ICTV)
• «Вікна» (СТБ)
• «Подробності»
  (Інтер)
• ТСН (1+1)
• «Прямий»
• UA: Перший
• 5 канал
• NewsOne
• 112 канал
• «Україна»
• obozrevatel.com
• segodnya.ua
• strana.ua
• korrespondent.net
• pravda.com.ua
• gordonua.com
• hromadske.ua
• nv.ua

FB сторінки
кандидатів:
• Володимир
  Зеленський
• Петро Порошенко

FB сторінки ЗМІ та
програм:
• Дмитро Чекалкін
• Дмитро Гордон
• Віталій Портніков
• Юрій Бутусов
• Олександр
  Мочанов
• Олег Пономар
• Сергій Іванов
• Роман Шрайк
• Соня Кошкіна
• Вахтанг Кіпіані

Моніторинг проводить коаліція громадських
організацій «Комісія з журналістської етики»,
«Платформа прав людини», «Український інститут
медіа та комунікації» та «StopFake» за підтримки
проектів Ради Європи

Перший та другий проміжні звіти українською та англійською
мовами, а також методологію моніторингу можна переглянути на
сайті Комісії з журналістської етики http://www.cje.org.ua/.

Focus of the monitoring – media sample:

Evening **prime-time newscast** on **10 nationwide channels**

Seven talk shows/debates (each release)

Eight online media outlets (monitoring of news feed content)

Social media networks – Facebook pages of 10 most popular candidates: Facebook pages of monitored media and specific programmes; Facebook pages of 10 leaders of public opinion, Facebook page of media outlet

Objectives

The main goal of this monitoring was to provide the media, the political contestants, the international community and the citizens with benchmarks to judge the fairness of the election process. Moreover, it was also intended to support civil society in conducting the professional monitoring of the media coverage of elections and to assess the coverage against the Council of Europe and other international standards for that coverage and reduce the negative effect of disinformation and propaganda on the election process. The principal objective of the project was to inform the public about the conduct of the media during the elections, to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and to promote their adherence to international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and media independence. Overall, the goal was also to contribute to the fairer and more impartial media coverage of elections, with the monitoring results to be used for advocating important changes to and improvements in the media coverage of the next elections.

Monitoring reports

Interim reports

Between 14 January and 31 March 2019, the coalition of civil society organisations issued three interim reports, sharing the results of their monitoring at three press conferences (which were also broadcast live on Facebook).

Following the first round of the presidential election on 31 March, none of the candidates received more than 50% of the votes cast, so a runoff was held between Volodymyr Zelenskyi and Petro Poroshenko. The monitoring in-between the rounds was launched on 1 April and focused on the coverage of the two candidates, political actors and other relevant entities, topics and narratives as well as other election-related issues.

The results of the monitoring showed significant differences in the way different outlets covered the campaign, some of them in breach of journalism standards. Despite the fact that the media provided diverse coverage of candidates, most did not provide in-depth and analytical coverage of the campaign. Contestants' appearances in news and current affairs programmes were sometimes not determined on the basis of newsworthiness but because of their payments for such appearances. The use of such items that were either promotional (about those who ordered them) or negative (against their opponents) continues to be a very disturbing trend with a huge impact on general trust in the media.

The media coverage in-between the two rounds largely confirmed the trends identified in the first monitoring period and voters could form an objective view of the campaign only if they followed several media outlets. While it was easier to cover only two candidates competing for the presidency, voters still needed to watch several channels to form a more objective view of the campaign. Importantly, candidates should also understand that media need to be able to obtain their views and opinions so that they can properly inform voters. More information on the project and previous reports can be found at http://www.cje.org.ua/ua

The monitoring exercise included a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage. The quantitative analysis focused on the amount of time allocated to candidates and other political actors (such as the government and local governments) as well as the tone of the coverage in which these subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. Monitoring also focused on the thematic structure of news, evaluating the thematic diversity by measuring the actual time devoted to different topics, including gender equality in media coverage.

Qualitative media monitoring was employed to assess the performance of media according ethical or professional standards – balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, omission of certain information, advantage of incumbency, positioning of items and inflammatory language, which is hard to assess in quantitative terms. In addition, the monitoring specialists assessed the compliance of the media's conduct with the principles and standards enshrined in the Code of Journalism Ethics and they inform the Commission of Journalism Ethics on a regular basis about possible breaches.

It should also be noted that these elections were held under the existing oligarchic media system (large media holdings, which include central TV channels, are owned by powerful oligarchs who retain their influence on political processes in the country), the lack of a strong public broadcasting company and the growing role of new media, including social networks. The number of information TV channels that cover political processes in the country round-the-clock has increased compared to previous campaigns. This campaign was characterised by a uniquely large number of political talk shows and electoral marathons.

Final report

The final report included a detailed comparative analysis of the various monitoring periods and consisted of the following chapters:

► Recommendations
► Introduction
► Methodology
► Context
► General findings
► Election legislation and the role of the regulator
► Findings of the media monitoring
► Gender
► Social media
► Signs of potential Russian external information influence on Ukrainian elections
► Compliance with the Ukrainian Code of Journalism Ethics

The monitoring project report's main recommendations were sent to the following stakeholders:

the state authorities, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine Parliament), the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council, the electoral subjects, the opinion leaders, the public broadcaster, the editorial teams of mass media.

The recommendations concerned the training of journalists and other editorial staff, the presentation of sociological data during election campaigns, the decrease in the conflict level in the media environment, the completeness of information, the sources of information, work with social networks, possible Russian influence, on avoiding materials with any indications of being advertorial/paid ("dzhynsa") during content planning, and gender-related issues.

Post-election roundtable

It should be highlighted that the final report was presented at a well-attended roundtable held on 20 May, the aim of which was to discuss the monitoring findings and recommendations with relevant stakeholders.

Example of a press release

PRESS RELEASE

WHICH CANDIDATES DO UKRAINIAN MEDIA FAVOUR: RESULTS OF MEDIA MONITORING

Kyiv, Ukraine – On Thursday, **28 March**, a press conference was held at **11:00** at Information Agency UKINFORM by a coalition of the civil society organisations consisting of the Commission on Journalism Ethics, Human Rights Platform, the Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute" and StopFake to present the results of the **independent monitoring of the media coverage of the presidential election in Ukraine of the second monitoring period from 4 February to 17 March 2019**.

The monitoring was carried out with the support of the Council of Europe Projects "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine" and "Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine", which are implemented within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021. The data for the media monitoring was collected by 15 independent specialists who worked full-time on a minimum of five days a week.

The results of the monitoring show that in the run up to the elections the media covered the election campaign intensively, providing voters with a great deal of information on candidates and their activities. However, voters could form an objective view of the campaign only if they followed several media outlets. Despite the diverse media environment, most outlets were divided along political lines and remained under the strong influence of their owners. For the election coverage, this meant that a number of outlets were under the influence of candidates and political parties.

"It is important to consider what is newsworthy from the viewer's perspective and not to merely satisfy candidates thanks to possible payments for their appearances in the news. This has a huge impact on the general trust in the media", emphasised **Rasťo Kužel**, *the Council of Europe international expert. "I am confident that journalists can do more to be proactive rather than reactive in their coverage of elections and can create a better platform for public debate on important issues, as some online media showed. It is incumbent upon politicians to accept the role independent media should play during elections",* he added.

The media lawyer and Executive Director of the CSO Human Rights Platform **Oleksandr Burmahin** noted that any legal "rules of the game", including those for the media during the electoral process, have to be backed up by sanctions if they are breached – without this, rules become declarative and not mandatory with regard to their observance.

"In this context, the regulator, the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine, plays a crucial role for television, which remains the main source of information for 74% of Ukrainians nowadays. However, due to doubts regarding their own authority, loopholes in the current legislation and the regulator's internal procedures, letters to the channels remain the only response tool." said Oleksandr Burmahin. *"Therefore, the coverage is as it is and it includes hate speech, campaigning in the news and the absence of even formal data sources when publishing the results of public opinion polls in connection with elections. In general, the results of the monitoring clearly speak for themselves. After all, when there are no sanctions the rules are arbitrary".*

The monitoring shows that the negative trends identified by the team of 15 independent monitors in the course of the previous monitoring period (14 January–3 February 2019) had even intensified with the election day approaching.

"The oligarch-owned television channels continued to support their chosen candidates and attack their opponents both in talk shows and news broadcasts. Unfortunately, the number of paid items ("dzhynsa") increased. Both in TV news programmes and on websites, there were many meaningless items about candidates' trips to regions as well as their meetings with voters. However, we saw a lack of objective coverage of candidates and their platforms, which does not help them in making an informed choice", noted **Diana Dutsyk**, a media expert and executive director of the CSO Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute.

The media expert and co-founder of the NGO StopFake **Olga Yurkova** believes that: *"general trends regarding the appearance of signs of possible Russian influence in Ukrainian media remain."* According to her, *"(t)his includes ignoring the Russian presence in the Donbas (with the narrative "Russia is not there"), imposing the Russian informational agenda and the use of Russian sources to inform about events in Ukraine".*

With regard to the messages, narratives discrediting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian authorities and some politicians, as well as the legitimisation of the occupation of the Crimea and part of the Donbas were shared the most. The monitoring team also noted that such narratives were increasingly also disseminated by presidential candidates if they were given a floor on either a TV channel or online media outlet.

"In social networks, instead of focusing on their platforms and visions, the majority of candidates criticised their opponents. According to our monitoring of the social network accounts of opinion leaders, the latter have for the most part clearly identified their political preferences. When it comes to the social accounts of traditional media, the analysis of the most popular posts on their Facebook-pages showed the priorities of the audience and the approach of the respective media with regard to the coverage of elections. All in all, only one TV channel systematically paid attention to electoral education", added **Olga Yurkova**.

From 4 February to 17 March 2019, the monitoring team identified **46 cases** of possible violations of the Ukrainian Code of Journalism Ethics. Most concerned the failure to observe a balance with regard to opponents' points of view and the obligation to provide the opinions of independent experts. Also, during the previous monitoring period (14 January–3 February 2019), **16 cases** of violations of journalism ethics were detected, most of them concerning the failure to separate facts from comments or to separate and properly distinguish advertising from news content, as well as the improper coverage of public opinion polls.

Svitlana Ostapa, the member of the CSO "Commission on Journalism Ethics" noted: *"The Commission on Journalism Ethics as a self-regulatory body of journalists and media houses carefully reviewed complaints and issued eight decisions with regard to the following media outlets: the online media SEGODNYA.ua, STRANA.UA and GORDON and the TV channels 1+1, Pryamyi, and Ukraina. The Commission's decisions contained seven friendly warnings and one public condemnation, the latter concerning the TV channel Pryamyi.*

The Commission stresses the importance of journalists' adherence to the principles of consistency, completeness and accuracy, objectivity and the unbiased presentation of information on candidates during elections as set out in section 56-5 of the Ukrainian Law on Presidential Elections.

The media have to provide balanced coverage of the comments from all parties – electoral subjects and presidential candidates – on events related to elections. Taking this into account, the Commission on Journalism Ethics recommends that journalists refrain from giving preference to individual candidates with regard to presenting their position during elections.

The media monitoring co-ordinator **Ielyzaveta Kuzmenko** noted that *"the monitoring data showed significant differences in the coverage of the activities of women and men in the Ukrainian media, especially given the ongoing election campaign".* Despite the fact that some media have started providing broader coverage of issues related to gender equality, domestic violence, and women's work at the front and begun using feminine gender-specific job titles, most media continue to broadcast and thus enhance gender stereotypes, sexism and gender-based discrimination.

"One of the blatant examples of the lack of gender balance is the talk show Pulse (Пульс in Ukrainian) on the TV Channel 112 Ukraine broadcast on 19 February 2019, which lasted for almost 4 hours, focusing on such topics as elections, candidates' trips to the regions, as well as the five-year war with Russia. Only men were invited to the studio (15 men and no women)", said **Ielyzaveta Kuzmenko**.

The main goal of the monitoring is to inform the public about the behaviour of the media during the election campaign, stimulate discussion about the objectivity and quality of their campaign coverage and encourage their compliance with international standards and best practices regarding freedom of expression and media independence.

In case of the second round, the monitoring team will continue monitoring the media to determine whether the identified trends also continue during that and **will present the results on the eve of the 21 April election day.**

The full reports on monitoring results in Ukrainian and English, updates on the monitoring, decisions of the Commission on Journalism Ethics are available on the Commission's website http://www.cje.org.ua/ua/elections.

Ukrainian early parliamentary elections in 2019

Similar to the 2019 presidential election, the coalition of civil society organisations consisting of the Commission on Journalism Ethics, Human Rights Platform, the Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute and StopFake systematically monitored the media coverage of the 2019 early parliamentary elections. The monitoring took place from 22 June to 21 July 2019 and was carried out with the support of the Council of Europe's projects "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine" and "Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine" implemented under the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Ukraine 2018–2021. The monitoring focused on 10 TV

channels, 8 online media and the 10 most popular parties and their leaders on Facebook and was conducted by 13 independent media-monitoring specialists working full-time 5 days a week. [32]

Meetings and co-operation with other relevant stakeholders

National TV and Radio Broadcasting Council(NTRC)

During the meeting with the media regulator, the National TV and Radio Broadcasting Council (NTRC), the monitoring project implementers outlined the main goal of the monitoring. The NTRC welcomed the initiative, pointing to problems concerning its lack of powers with regard to the effective monitoring of media coverage during elections. Another problem noted was how to deal with bloggers and social media as there were no provisions regulating them. Furthermore, so called "fake news", defamation and overall access to media (pluralism) were identified as being at the forefront of the NTRC's concerns regarding the elections. As for its own media monitoring, it was conducted by 7 monitors in Kyiv and some 50 experts in the regions – which was not enough. The NTRC has created a working group consisting of its own experts and media to discuss problems during elections. It has expressed an interest in using the project's monitoring results. The interim results of the media monitoring conducted by the coalition of CSOs were regularly presented and discussed during the working group meetings throughout the electoral process and campaign.

Central Election Commission (CEC)

During a meeting with the CEC, it was stated that the latter mainly dealt with the allocation of free airtime. The problem of using money from election funds was also highlighted, with as much as 90% of the money spent on paid political advertising and extra resources would definitely be required from the state authorities to check this. From the CEC's point of view, the legal framework was not entirely clear with regard to the system of oversight and effective control over the media coverage of elections, but the CEC was clearly overburdened with complaints on the issue. It said it was eager to obtain the media monitoring results, highlighting the need to also focus on "social" advertising and voter education.

The Commission on Journalism Ethics

During the 2019 presidential election, thanks to the monitoring conducted by the coalition of CSOs, the Commission on Journalism Ethics considered 82 violations of the Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalist during the monitoring period lasting from January to April 2019.[33] The Commission considered the complaints and took 18 decisions. Among these decisions, the Commission issued 13 friendly warnings and 5 public condemnations of the media.

During the 2019 early parliamentary elections, thanks to the monitoring conducted by the coalition of CSOs, as many as 150 instances of breaches of the Code of Ethics by the monitored media were registered during the monitoring period. The Commission on Journalism Ethics issued 8 decisions (5 in the form of a public censure and 3 in the form of a friendly warning).

The results of the monitoring of the media coverage of two electoral campaigns have formed a solid basis for improving the national electoral and media legislation on the media coverage of elections. In particular, based on the results of the media monitoring a new model of media regulation of all types of media (TV, radio, online and press) during elections has been developed and put on the agenda of the national authorities.

32. More information on the monitoring and the final report can be found at: http://www.cje.org.ua/sites/default/files/Monitoring%20 Report%20Parliamentary%20Campaign%202019%20ENG.pdf.

33. All complaints received by the Commission on Journalism Ethics and relevant CJE decisions are published on the Commission's website in the Elections section http://www.cje.org.ua/ua/elections.

Monitoring facebook during the 2019 european parliament elections

Between 1 April and 15 May 2019, MEMO 98, a Slovakian non-profit specialist media-monitoring organisation, monitored with the assistance of international experts 48 public Facebook accounts of parties running in the European Parliament elections in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The main goal was to evaluate the role of Facebook during the elections and the potential impact on their integrity of the messages disseminated through this social platform, and thus assess public trust and confidence in the process. Moreover, the monitoring tried to determine what topics and issues were addressed by political parties on their public Facebook accounts in the run-up to the elections. More information on the monitoring can be found here.

Given the growing impact of social media, the way people consume political information has changed considerably in the past few years. The negative aspect of this change is that information is often unverified, decontextualised and manipulated to affirm or exploit pre-existing biases. There is a growing awareness that underlying societal grievances can be exploited in the media ecosystem by opportunistic actors, either from outside the or inside country. Previous experience has shown that these risks can be exacerbated in times of heightened social and political debate, such as elections. The issue of social media and disinformation has gained increasing attention as a possible threat to the integrity of elections worldwide. It was in this context that MEMO 98 decided to analyse the role of Facebook during the EP elections in four EU countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Monitoring facebook during the 2019 polish elections

Between 1 September and 11 October 2019, the Political Accountability Foundation (FOP), in co-operation with MEMO 98, monitored 74 public Facebook accounts of political parties, election coalitions, politicians, media and other influential actors involved in the parliamentary elections. The main goal was to assess the importance of Facebook (FB) during the elections and the potential impact on their integrity of the messages disseminated through this social platform. The monitoring also tried to assess what topics and narratives were presented by political actors and others on their public Facebook accounts in the run-up to the election and which one of them generated the highest level of engagement (comments, shares and reactions – see also the section on methodology).

The monitoring was organised as part of a project carried out by Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and MEMO 98 and funded by Civitates. The project sought to significantly increase a real-time understanding of social media dynamics by providing a toolkit for social media monitoring in elections to be offered to observer organisations across the EU and beyond. The project builds on the methodology that DRI and other experts developed in the context of Supporting Democracy, an EU project. Facebook was actively used by almost all monitored election stakeholders. There was no major party registered for these elections which did not have its official FB account. As many as 8,848 posts uploaded by 74 selected actors on FB were analysed between 1 September and 11 October. More information on the monitoring can be found here.

Monitoring facebook during the 2019 romanian presidential election

Between 1 and 24 November 2019, GlobalFocus Center, in co-operation with MEMO 98, monitored 102 public Facebook accounts of political parties, candidates, politicians, media, and other influential actors involved in the presidential election. The main goal was to assess the importance of Facebook as a means of communication during elections and the potential impact on their integrity of the messages disseminated through this social media network. The monitoring also tried to assess what topics and narratives were presented by politicians, political parties, media, and influencers on their public Facebook accounts in the run-up to the elections and what level of engagement (comments, shares and reactions – see also the section on methodology) they generated. More information on the monitoring can be found here.

Monitoring facebook and instagram during the slovak parliamentary elections 2020

In recent years, the manner in which people receive political messages has changed profoundly, also in relation to the growing impact of social media. These changes have also brought with them some negative phenomena, such as a substantial increase in unverified, decontextualised and manipulative information, which confirms many individuals' prejudices and biases. We increasingly realise that thanks to social media various stakeholders may take advantage of the existing social divisions in society either by conducting their activity from behind the borders (as evidenced more noticeably for the first time during the 2016 US presidential

election) or by being active directly in the country where the elections are held. Experience from a number of countries suggests that the risk of abuse increases several-fold in a period of intensified political and social engagement, such as elections. More and more attention is being paid both to social media and disinformation as a potential threat to the integrity of elections.

A major increase in the influence of social media also brings with it some advantages, including the possibility of obtaining information directly from the source in the form and volume that society only learns to accept and reflect in a meaningful way. During an election campaign, this enables candidates to communicate immediately and directly with voters or to mobilise them. Social media have become a very important source of political information and messages in general, all the more so during elections – they completely change the perception of politics, when the filter of traditional media is bypassed. These were among the main reasons why MEMO 98 decided to analyse in greater detail the use of various social media networks during the 2020 Slovakian parliamentary election campaign – whether to increase voter awareness, improve voter mobilisation or spread disinformation or even outright lies.

While TV still continues to be the primary source of information on politics for most people, the relevance and role of social media has also been growing in Slovakia. This fact, together with the above-mentioned reasons, inspired MEMO 98 to also include Facebook and Instagram in its election monitoring together with TV channels (which have been monitored in Slovakia since 1998). More information on the monitoring can be found here.

During elections, media monitoring by civil society organisations provides benchmarks for judging the fairness of the election process, and gives professional, comprehensive and objective assessment of political diversity and balance in the news and current affairs coverage. The results of media monitoring can help to initiate and substantiate an open discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting and to promote media compliance with international standards and good practices of fair, balanced and impartial media coverage of elections.

The aim of this Toolkit is to provide civil society organisations with detailed methodology of how to implement a monitoring project of media coverage of elections, containing description of its stages and activities, as well as practical step-by-step guidelines and tips with regard to monitoring of different types of media (TV, printed and online media, social media).

The publication contains tools and methods that can be applicable in any Council of Europe member state and adjusted according to the given context and research question to be answered, as well as presents media monitoring case studies from several countries.

ENG

www.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE