DETERMINING POLITICAL HARMFUL NARRATIVES

Institute of Communication Studies

ШТЕТ-НА

Introduction

In Macedonia's deeply politically polarized environment, in which media and information literacy is insufficiently developed, harmful narratives can seriously undermine democratic processes. The impact of harmful narratives can further weaken state institutions, strain relations between communities, and discredit progressive processes. For a long time, the public has been facing an increasingly polluted communicative ecology, that is, with disinformation, malinformation, propaganda and hate speech.

In the absence of in-depth research that will reveal the scope, sources, patterns, and elements of harmful content and narratives, the purpose of this research is to offer comprehensive empirical material on the content, scope, and prevalence of harmful narratives. The results provide an answer to the questions of whether and how political actors in Macedonia generate harmful narratives and what is the role of media in reporting on these narratives, that is, whether they apply professional and ethical journalistic values and standards.

The research covers two segments:

1. Monitoring and analysis of the narratives generated and shared by political actors in Macedonia,
2. Monitoring and analysis of media coverage on political actors and the narratives they generate and share.

For the first segment of the research, there was conducted monitoring of the websites and Facebook pages of the 10 political parties and their leaders whose parties have at least two MPs in the 2020-2024 parliamentary composition: Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa, DUI, Democratic Movement, VMRO- DMPNE, Levica, LDP, NSDP, SDSM, SPM), as well as the 20 members of the RNM Government, monitored in the period September-October 2023. The dynamics for monitoring the content of political actors is every consecutive third and fourth day of the month, i.e. a total of 15 days in September and 16 days in October 2023.

For the second segment of the research, monitoring of 11 online media and 9 television stations was conducted.

Online media: Lokalno, Nezavisen, Sloboden Pechat, A1on.mk, MKD.mk, Republika, Kurir, Almakos, Tetova Sot, Nova TV, Vecer.mk.

Televisions: Public and private TV stations at the national level with the highest viewership, nine in total: MTV 1 (public); MTV 2 (public, in Albanian language); Alfa TV (private); Kanal 5 (private); Sitel TV (private); TV 24 (private); Telma (private); Alsat M (private, in Albanian); TV21 (private, in Albanian language).

The monitoring of these media was conducted for a total of 16 days – October (8) and in September (8).

For more information on media selection criteria and research methodology, go to ResPublica (link).

The research Determining Political Harmful Narratives was conducted by the Institute of Communication Studies (ICS) within the project Fact-Based Journalism for Raising Awareness and Countering Disinformation in the Media Space in North Macedonia: Use Facts, supported by the British Embassy Skopje. The research during 2023 and 2024 is being conducted in several stages by a team from ICS in cooperation with experts in the field of communications and media, as well as with media professionals in the field of monitoring and control.

This document presents a summary of the monitoring in September and October 2023. The complete research can be read HERE.

KEY FINDINGS

Political actors in Macedonia and the media are complicit in creating a reality that is populated with harmful narratives. At the same time, the former seem oblivious to the set norms and standards for public communication (transparency; ethics; professionalism and impartiality in communication; communication based on evidence; nurturing the culture of speech and refraining from discriminatory speech), and the latter the ethical codes and the basic journalistic rules for informing the public. It is noteworthy that the main source of harmful narratives is usually a small number of political parties, as well as that part of the media with one-sided and uncritical reporting helps these toxic narratives gain echo in the media environment.

Unsubstantiated accusations and manipulations

The monitoring and analysis of the party public communication shows that in the public discourse represented on the websites and social media posts of political actors in Macedonia, rhetoric prevails in which allegations of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office are presented without any attempt to substantiate those claims. Unverified findings are used as a basis for accusing political opponents, for producing harmful narratives of populism, undermining trust in institutions, biased data selection that leads to incorrect conclusions and inciting socio-political divisions among the public.

The analysis shows that the parties generate the most harmful narratives when they communicate through press releases, regardless of whether they are posted on the Internet or on a Facebook page, followed by press conferences, politicians' speeches, etc. In the Facebook posts, it is also noted that images, videos and audio recordings are used that are created in order to mislead the public that something is a reality and true, but it is not (and whose falsity can be proven), in order to develop harmful narratives with manipulative audio-visual content, biased selection, character attack and demonization, as well as spreading panic and fear.

Some are 'anti-people', others 'anti-EU'

It is noteworthy that the largest political parties SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE lead in using harmful narratives.

SDSM usually discredits the political opponent as a party that offers 'only isolation', 'uncertainty', 'insecurity' and 'blockade', and at the same time labels and demonizes the president of VMRO-DPMNE, Hristijan Mickoski with the epithet 'Little Gruevski'. At the same time, through a biased selection of facts by emphasizing only the positive aspects of the process of the country's accession to the EU and by omitting the arguments of the opposition (the non-acceptance of the constitutional amendments), the ruling party builds a narrative for the opposition party that it incites divisions because it is 'anti- EU':

On the other hand, the critical messages by VMRO-DPMNE are mostly aimed at the Government, SDSM, DUI and the Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski. The government is often called 'the authorities', 'SDS and DUI government', and the policies are 'anti-national' and 'anti-people'. Populism, undermining trust in institutions, character attacks and labelling are used in VMRO-DPMNE narratives frequently in the context of talking about the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in 2024. The narrative used expresses self-confidence in the winning results that VMRO-DPMNE will have, and criticizes the political opponent for being timid or a loser.

Abuse of political functions

Furthermore, the trend of using official government channels of communication for party propaganda, i.e. publishing party content on the Facebook profiles of the prime minister and government ministers, is worrying. With messages about party promotion and propaganda on the official Facebook profiles, the prime minister and the ministers directly violate the principles of professionalism and impartiality in the communication of government representatives, but the government's Code of Ethics for Civil Servants is also violated.

As a basis for determining the harmful narratives propagated by political actors, ICS was guided by a series of documents, guidelines and regulations of international and domestic institutions, internal acts of political parties and ethical codes of conduct for appointed or elected persons, which determine the standards and the principles of non-discriminatory and transparent political communication [Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Elections in the Digital Age of 2020; Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression from 2021; Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation from 2022; Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States (Council of Europe); Code of Ethics for Civil Servants of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia; Code of Conduct for SDSM officials and members].

Forgotten obligations of political actors

The standards to be followed in political communication underscore that political actors have: an obligation to be transparent and accessible to the media; the obligation to represent the public interest in communication; obligation not to be a source and not to spread disinformation and unverified information; ban on using hate speech, ban on discriminatory speech and preservation of freedom of speech.

Politicians who are elected and appointed officials, in addition to their party communication channels, also have access to the official communication channels of the institutions they manage. Therefore, they should use government communication channels to inform about government policies, decisions and measures, in order to ensure a clear distinction between the work of institutions and political parties, that there is no abuse of government communication channels for the promotion of party goals.

Journalists are silent purveyors of harmful narratives

Media coverage of online media is abounding with a large amount of content with harmful narratives. This image is predominantly influenced by two online media (out of a total of 11 analysed), Vecer.MK and Republika, in which negative narratives are by far the most numerous. Online media outlets are dominated by one-sided information. This is followed by the occasion for the publication of the news item, where the primacy is held by the so-called pseudo-events, that is, events that are created to attract media attention. Mostly these are party press conferences, statements of political actors, etc.

The analysis from the monitoring of the media contents of the televisions shows that as the election date approaches, the rhetoric of the political actors and the number of statements containing harmful narratives intensify. More than half are noted on the private TV station TV Alfa (34 news items or 51.5%). The political actors who dominate such reports usually come from the largest political parties SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, which can mean two things – that they are the most frequent creators of such narratives or that smaller parties do not receive equal space in the central news on TV stations.

With the exception of TV Alfa, in which there are cases where journalists participate in the creation of harmful narratives with their reporting and framing of the articles, in the rest of the cases the journalist is mostly just a silent broadcaster of political statements, without setting a filter for such a narrative.

Reporting without professional standards

As a basis for determining possible non-compliance with professional standards, ICS in this research and in media monitoring is led by the valid documents that regulate the work of the media (Article 16 of the Constitution of the RNM, the Law on Media, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Law on Prevention of Discrimination, by-laws and regulations of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services), as well as by the principles and guidelines of trade unions, media organisations and educational institutions: the Code of Journalists of Macedonia of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia; Guidelines for Ethical Reporting of Online Media (Application of the Code of Journalists in the online sphere) of the Council for Media Ethics in Macedonia; The values, professional standards and practices outlined in the Handbook of Public Interest Journalism of the Institute of Communication Studies; The Journalists' and Editors' Handbook Recognise and Prevent: Journalistic Tools for Tackling Disinformation by the Institute of Communication Studies.

The lack of a professional barrier and verification of statements that promote accusations without evidence, populism, intolerance, spreading disinformation and even hatred towards certain groups only encourages political actors who see the media as a free platform to promote their harmful narratives. The one-sided reporting of the media, that is, the representation of only one side in the news item, is a serious problem that points to unprofessional reporting and an unbalanced and biased attitude.
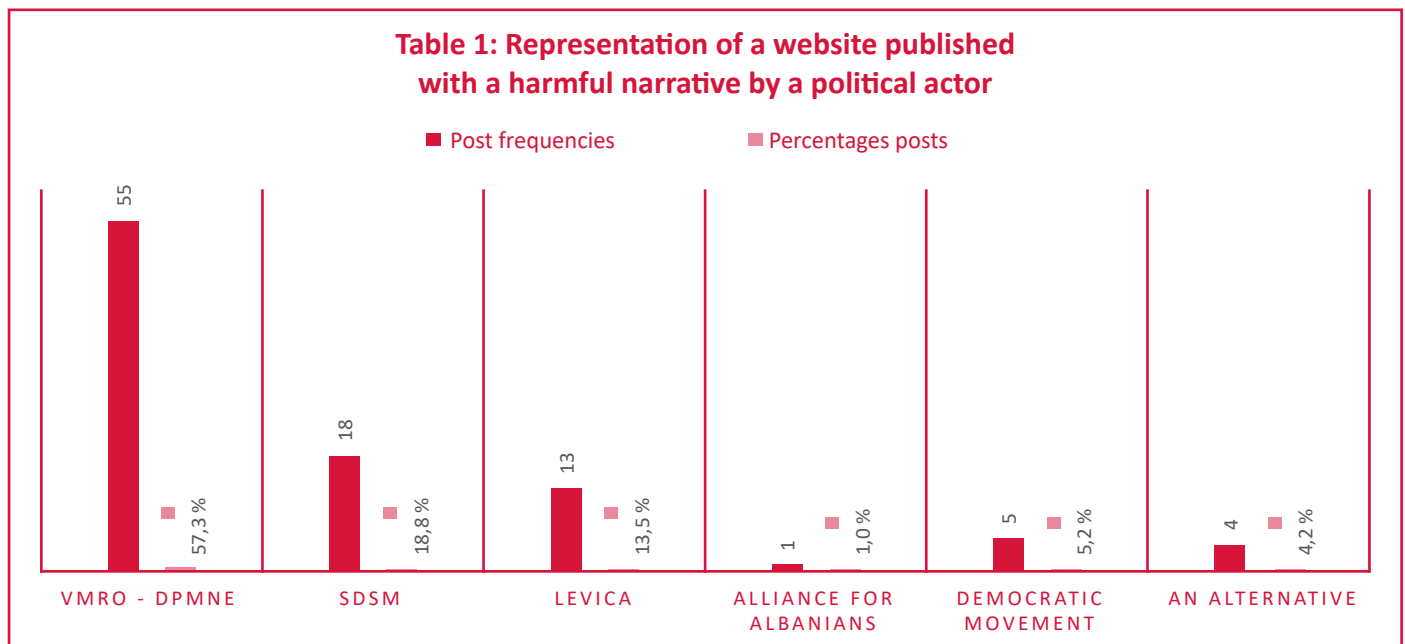
1. Monitoring of the communication practices and narratives of political actors through their web pages and Facebook profiles

The monitoring of communication practices and narratives of political parties is the first part of the research Determining Political Harmful Narratives. It provides the primary quantitative and qualitative data on the manner in which the 10 political parties and members of the RNM Government communicate through their communication channels, namely their webpages and official Facebook pages/profiles (of both the party and the leaders of the party).

The second part of the monitoring is aimed at a critical discourse analysis of the language propagated by politicians in public discourse. In doing so, not only their speech and language in the narrower sense is analysed, but also the linguistic imprint they leave on social, cultural and communication processes.

1.1. Communication practices of political parties and their leaders in October 2023

During October, a total of 136 posts with a harmful narrative were identified from the monitoring of the internet and Facebook pages of political actors, 87 of which are on the parties' websites and a total of 49 posts on the Facebook profiles of parties and government members.

Table 1: Representation of a website published with a harmful narrative by a political actor

- Post frequencies
- Percentages posts

	VMRO - DPMNE	SDSM	LEVICA	ALLIANCE FOR ALBANIANS	DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT	AN ALTERNATIVE
Post frequencies	55	18	13	1	5	4
Percentages posts	57,3 %	18,8 %	13,5 %	1,0 %	5,2 %	4,2 %

In the days of monitoring, only four political parties (out of a total of 10) used harmful narratives in their communication through their website, and these are actually the largest and most active parties: the first is VMRO-DPMNE (55 posts), SDSM (18 posts), Levica (13 posts) and Alliance for Albanians (only 1 post).

Political actors with the most harmful Facebook posts are: Levica and the profile of its president Dimitar Apasiev (19 posts in total), then VMRO-DPMNE and the profile of its president Hristijan Mickoski (12 posts in total), SDSM (5 posts), Democratic Movement and Izet Medjiti's profile (5 total), Alternativa (4 posts). The analysis shows that the parties generate the most harmful narratives when they communicate

through press releases, regardless of whether they are posted on the Internet or on a Facebook page (total (73), followed by press conferences (16), politicians' speeches (15) etc. In the party communication, the most harmful narratives are observed in the field of domestic politics (80 in total) and the economy (17). In the posts on the websites of the political parties, the harmful narratives are most represented in the posting of unverified findings, which is noted in 78 or 89.7% of the posts, as well as allegations of corruption present in 67 posts, from the posts.

Table 2: Representation of the representation of harmful narratives in the posts of the political parties
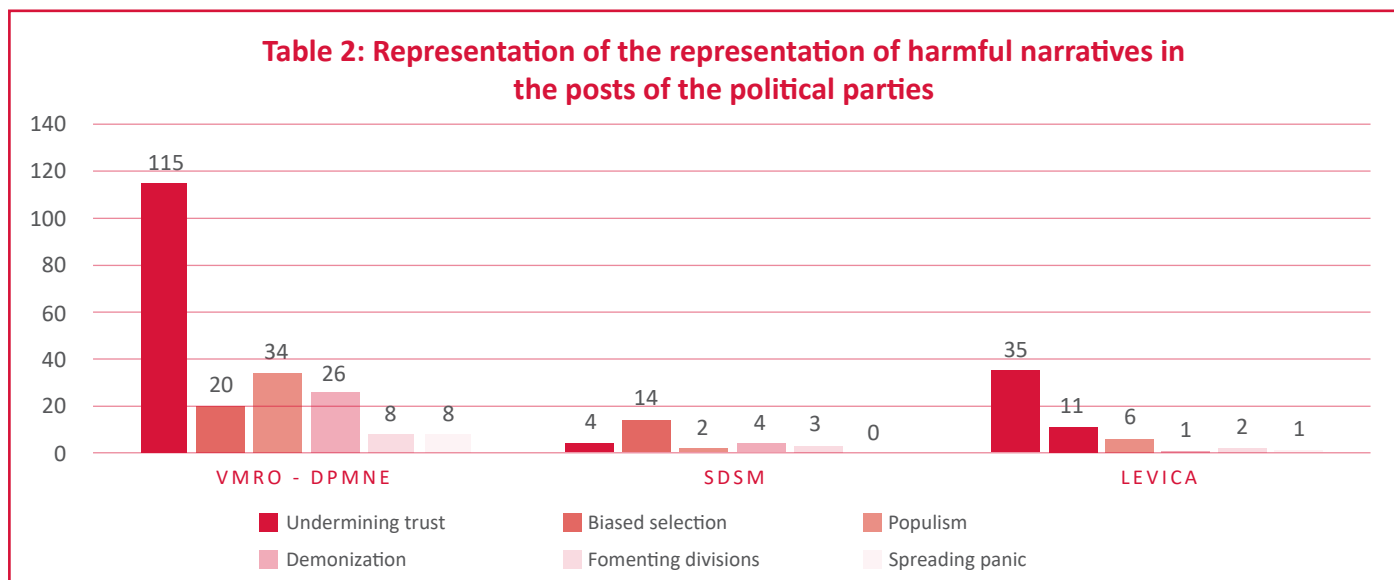
Similarly, in Facebook posts with harmful narrative, claims of corruption (38 posts) and posting of unverified findings (37 posts) are most common. Less represented (both on the Internet and on Facebook) in October are the promotion of one's own ideologies, labelling and ridicule, the deliberate failure to convey the full picture and words and formulations that denigrate a certain group.

1.2. Communication practices of political parties and their leaders for September 2023

In September, a total of 143 posts (Internet 123 and Facebook 20) containing a harmful narrative were identified on the websites of political parties and their Facebook pages. Almost half of the posts with harmful narratives on the Internet pages are from VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, and less from Levica, while on Facebook the most posts with harmful narratives can be seen on the profiles of the leader of Levica, Dimitar Apasiev, and the Levica party.

Table 3: Number of posts of parties with harmful narratives on websites and Facebook pages of the political actors

number of published

44 %	16,80 %	37,60 %	1,60 %	5,88 %	35,29 %	2,94 %	14,71 %	35,29 %	5,88 %
VMRO-DPMNE	Levica	SDSM	DUI	Mickovski	Apasiev	Alternativa	Levica	Izet Medjeti	DUI

Websites | Facebook profiles

■ Frequency   ■ Percentages
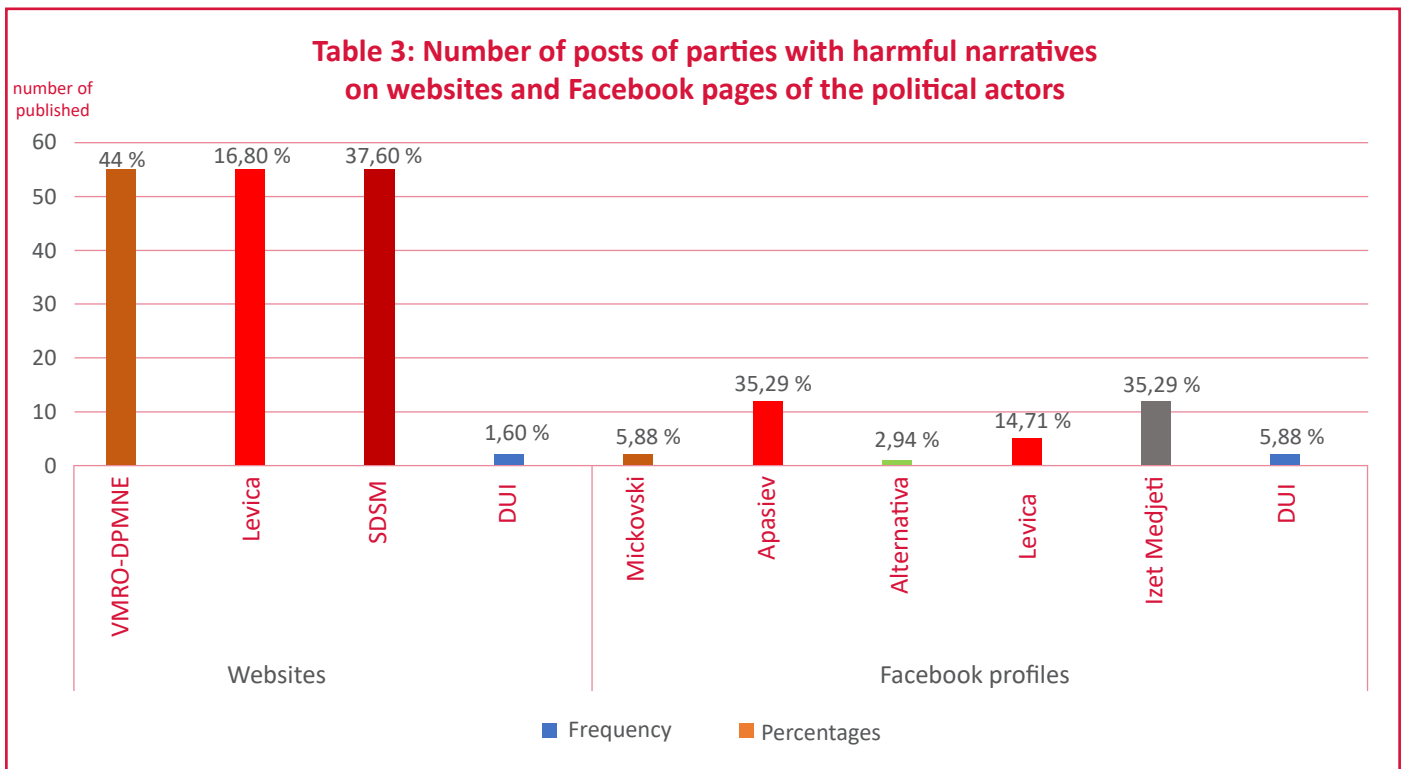
The most common topic in posts containing harmful narratives on both platforms is domestic politics (a total of 94 of 123 posts on the Internet and 19 of 20 on Facebook). Other topics are health, economy, education, foreign policy and economics.

On the Internet, VMRO-DPMNE in its total of 55 posts with harmful narratives, on 92 occasions tried to undermine trust in public institutions without offering evidence; with 31 narratives, they tried to selectively present data about an event to confirm a position, less often they tried to spread panic, to make character attacks against political opponents and to incite divisions in society, and once it was also observed that disinformation was presented. Levica, on the other hand, most often tried to undermine trust in institutions (41) and used a biased selection of information to confirm their position (25), on four occasions they used demonization of political opponents, and less often they tried to incite divisions and to spread panic in society. In a total of 47 posts with harmful narratives, SDSM mostly used biased selection of data to confirm their position, on 3 occasions they tried to undermine trust, twice they developed a harmful narrative by demonizing political opponents, and once inciting social divisions and spreading disinformation was noted.

Table 4: Presentation of the representation of harmful narratives in the posts of the political parties on websites
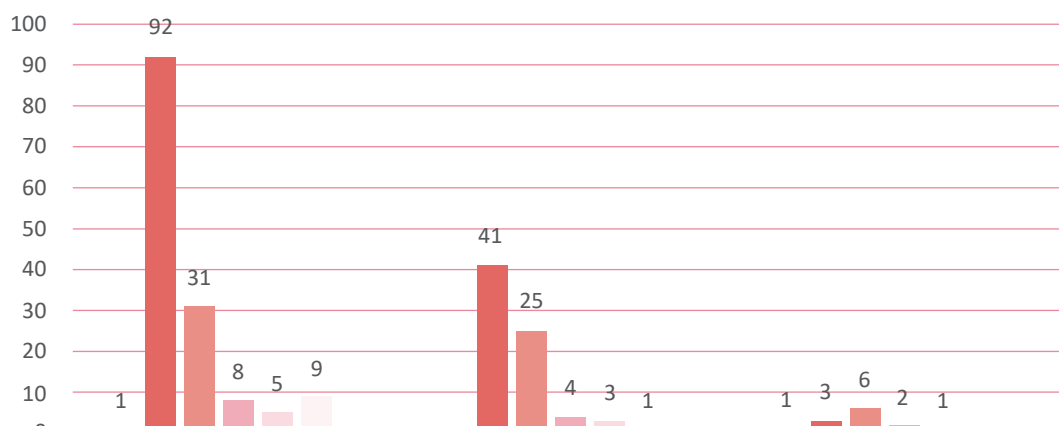
	VMRO	Levica	SDSM
■ Disinformation	1		1
■ Undermining trust	92	41	3
■ Biased Selection	31	25	6
■ Demonization	8	4	2
■ Inciting divisions	5	3	1
■ Spreading panic	9	1	
Total Posts	55	21	47

With similar trends observed both on the Internet and on Facebook, these harmful narratives are mostly developed using unverified findings, claims of corruption, less often with labelling and ridicule, wording that denigrates a certain group and divides us and you, intentionally the full picture of the event in question is not conveyed, and once there is an accusation of foreign entities for interfering in domestic politics.

1.3. Monitoring of the communication of the members of the RNM Government through the official Facebook pages

The analysis of the political communication of the members of the RNM Government includes their communication practices through the official government Facebook channels. The focus of the analysis is not directed to the monitoring of information about the regular official activities of the prime minister, his deputies and ministers, but only in the case when the appointed officials use these institutional channels for party promotion, for spreading harmful narratives or when they violated the principles of public communication of the elected or appointed officials (for the principles and standards of professional public communication, see Methodological Framework on https://respublica.edu.mk/istrazhuvanje-shtetna/shtetni-narativi-i-indikatori/standardi-i-nachela-za-politichkata-komunikacija/). Hence, it is immediately observed whether the members of the Government respect the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants, according to which they should perform their work tasks in a politically neutral way, not to represent their political convictions in the performance of their work tasks, nor to carry out political activities that may affect citizens' confidence in their ability to perform work tasks in an impartial manner.

1.3.1. Monitoring of the communication of the members of the RNM Government through the official Facebook pages - October 2023

On the Facebook pages of the prime minister and the ministries managed by SDSM members (Dimitar Kovachevski, Bojan Marichikj, Slavica Grkovska, Oliver Spasovski and Kaja Shukova) no harmful narratives were noted. Abuse of the official institutional Facebook page for the promotion of party activities and policies was noted among some public officials. In October, several harmful narratives were noted in the Facebook communication of government ministers, including the Minister of Culture, Bisera K. Stojchevska, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Jovanka Trenchevska and Minister of Justice Krenar Loga.

1.3.2. Monitoring of the communication of the members of the RNM Government through the official Facebook pages – September 2023

Aside from the identified harmful narratives, abuses were noted in September on the official Facebook page for party propaganda by Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, Deputy Prime Minister Artan Grubi, Minister of Interior Oliver Spasovski and Minister of Environment and Physical Planning Kaja Shukova.

With these posts about party promotion and propaganda on the official Facebook profiles, the prime minister and ministers directly violated the principles of professionalism and impartiality in the communication of government representatives and also the government's Code of Ethics for Civil Servants is also violated. Politicians who are elected and appointed officials, through this unprofessional practice, do not make a clear distinction between the work of the institutions they manage, and the activities in the parent political parties, that is, there should be no abuse of government communication channels for the promotion of party goals.

2. Monitoring of media coverage on political actors

The analysis of online media and television stations' coverage of political actors is the second, parallel process in the Determining Political Harmful Narratives research. It is complementary to the first monitoring, i.e. monitoring the public communication of political actors. While the analysis of political parties and their leaders is focused on determining the dominant harmful narratives in the context of respecting public communication standards, media monitoring should provide an answer as to how this toxic and polarizing public discourse penetrates the media arena. During the monitoring, it is analysed who are the most common 'sowers' of harmful narratives in the information content, whether and how they manage to break into the prime minutes and headlines, which topics are fertile ground for their spread, but also most importantly - what is the role of journalists in this process: does the media adhere to professional and ethical standards for accurate, fair and impartial reporting, or do they unquestioningly follow the agenda dictated by political actors.

2.1. Monitoring of online media coverage of political actors – October

In the eight days in October when the published contents in online media were analysed, a total of 154 posts containing harmful narratives were identified. They are dominantly 'broadcast speech of a politician' at a rally or other type of gathering (68 items) and 'broadcast announcement' i.e. official position of a certain body (political party, parliament, government, ministries) on a current event (33 posts), and together (101 posts) constitute 65.6% of all analysed news items. Of them, the largest number have only one source (130 or 84.4%), that is, one-sided information prevails even when the media consulted two or more sources (129 news items, or 86.0%).

The largest number of these posts are not signed, as many as 139 news items (90.3%). Thematically, the focus is on domestic politics (93 articles, or 60.4%), followed by economy (22 articles, or 14.3%) and corruption (13 articles, or 8.4%).

Table 5: News items containing harmful narratives in online media in October
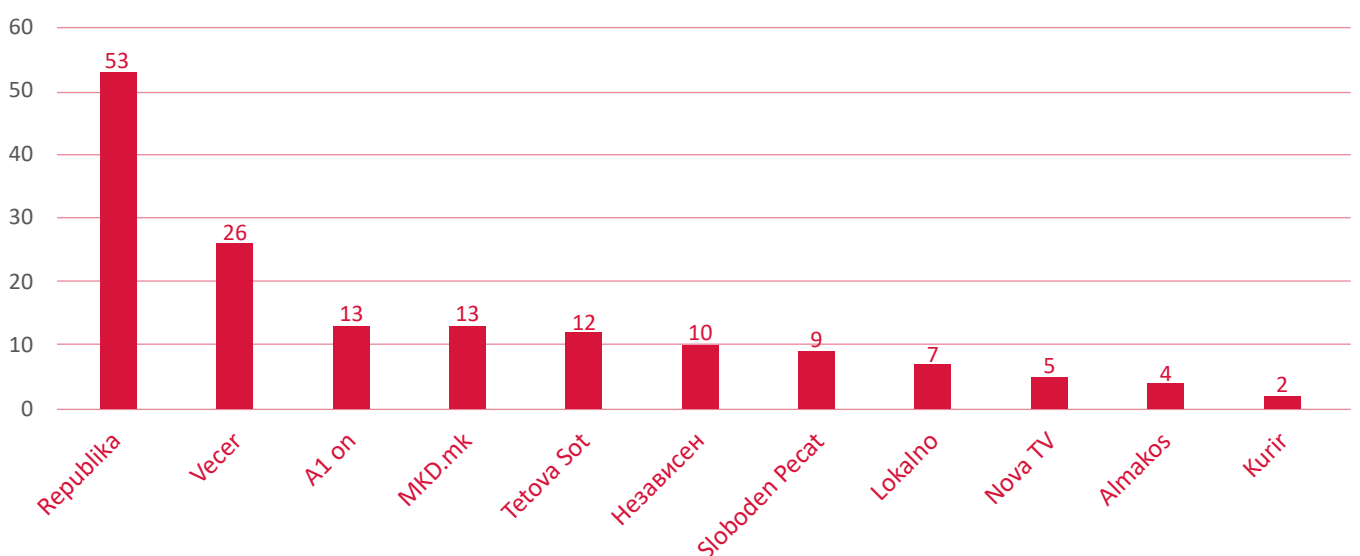
Regarded individually by online media, the most articles with harmful narratives are identified in the Republika portal, as much as 1/3 (53 articles or 34.4%) of all 154 such articles determined, and with almost the same representation in the entire monitored period. Vecer.MK is second in frequency of harmful narratives, and their number is the lowest in Nova TV, Almakos and Kurir.

Political actors are represented differently in the articles with harmful narratives, but those with two (in 46 articles, or 29.9%), three (36, or 23.4%), and even four (23, or 14.9%) dominate. Of all the mentioned actors, Hristijan Mickoski and Dimitar Kovachevski have primacy, and of the political parties VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM.

One-sided reporting is a feature of all Internet portals. Out of a total of 154 analysed news items, in 129 only one side dominates the reporting.

In the analysis, several indicators are singled out as the most present, indicating the presence of more harmful narratives. The most represented in the articles are the undermining of trust, biased selection, character attacks and demonization, populism and disinformation.

Table 6: Presence of harmful narratives in online media news items in October 2023

	Teto-va Sot	Alma-kos	Vecer MK	Kurir	Repub-lika	Nova TV	Loka-lno	Neza-visen	Slo-boden Pechat	A1 On mk	MKD.mk
Disinformation		2	16		24		1	2		5	
Inciting divisions			11	1	4	4		4		1	1
Undermining trust	7	1	36	1	44	3		5	5	9	7
Populism		2	13	2	20		4	3	1	2	5
Biased Selection		1	41	1	1	2	4	1	2	4	
Character attacks, demonization	4		6	1	22	3	1	5	3	2	6
Malinformation			1						1		1
Foreign Influence	2		2		1					2	
Spreading panic, fear	1		2		3	3		1		2	
and extreme patriotism Nationalism			4		3					1	
Total news items	12	4	26	2	53	5	7	10	9	13	13

Republika and Vecer.MK have the most articles with harmful narratives, with indicators showing that statements that undermine trust in institutions and populism dominate. Individually, in Republika there are character attacks on a certain person and their demonization, and in Vecer.MK - biased selection.

2.1.1. Monitoring of online media coverage of political actors – September

During September, a total of 209 articles containing harmful narratives were identified in online media. In terms of genre, they are mostly news items from 'broadcast speech of a politician' (75) and 'broadcast press release' (70). Thematically, the most represented is domestic politics (117 news items), and far less, for example, health (36 news items) and the economy (18 news items).

Table 7: News items containing harmful narratives
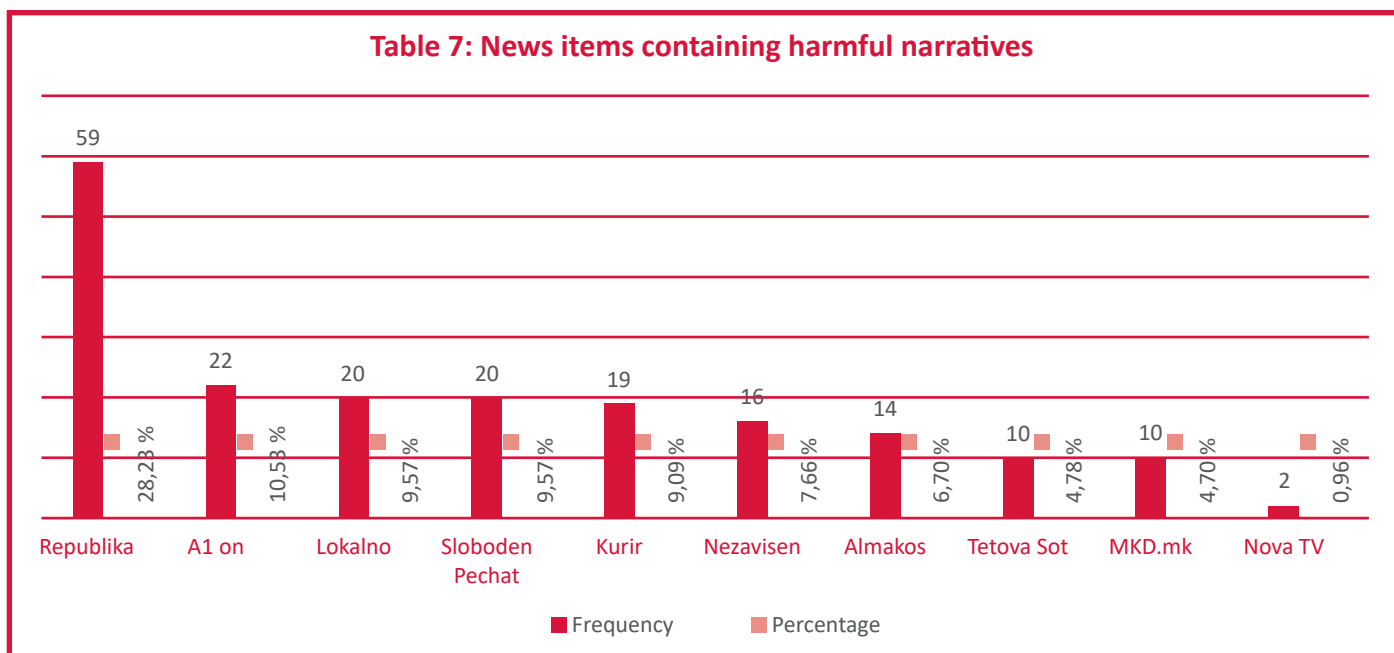
Their frequency varies according to individual online media, and articles with harmful narratives dominate the Republika portal (59 articles or 28.23%). They are followed by A1On.mk with 22 articles, Lokalno and Sloboden Pechat with 20 articles each, Kurir with 19 articles, Vecer MK with 17 articles.

Analysis of news items identifies a predominance of (1) allegations of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office without any attempt to substantiate those allegations (104 cases/posts) and (2) unverified findings (or findings that are difficult to check) as a basis for accusing political opponents (106 cases/posts).

2.2. Monitoring of reporting by TV stations on political actors - October

In the analysed period, a total of 66 articles containing harmful narratives were identified. More than half were registered with the private TV station TV Alfa (34 articles or 51.5%), with TV Sitel 8 such articles were recorded (12.1%), 5 articles with a harmful narrative (7.6%) were registered at TV Telma, TV Alsat M and TV 21, at MTV 2 there were 4 (6.1%), 2 each (3%) at MTV 1 and Kanal 5 and only 1 at TV 24 (1.5%).

Table 11: Frequency of news items containing harmful narrative

1.5%, TV 24	
3.0%, MTV 1	
6.1%, MTV 2	
7.6%, TV 21	
3.0%, Kanal 5	
12.1%, Sitel	
7.6%, Telma	
51.5%, Alfa	
7.6%, Alsat M	

Legend:
- MTV 1
- MTV 2
- Kanal 5
- Sitel
- Telma
- Alsat M
- Alfa
- TV 21
- TV 24
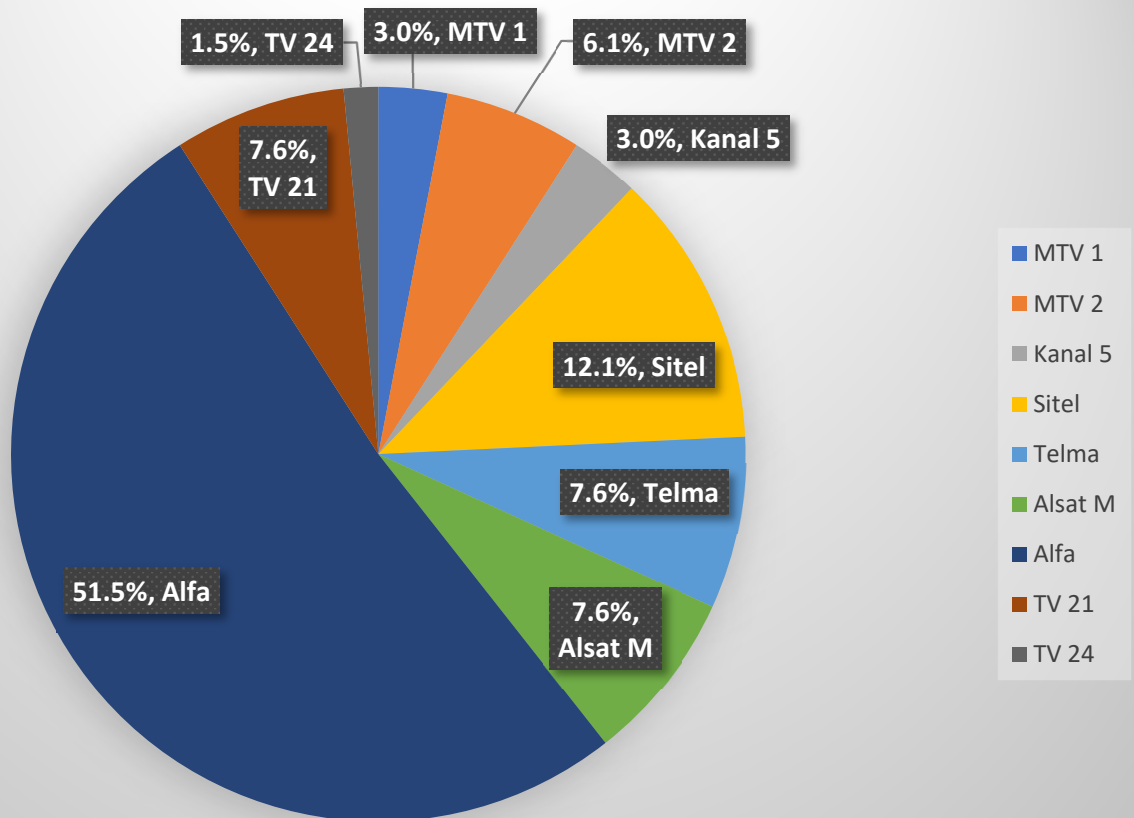
Domestic politics dominates among the TV programs in which a harmful narrative is identified, which should not be surprising, if we consider that domestic political actors are the subject of the analysis. More than half of the news items (56.1 %) are on this topic, followed by the topics of judiciary (10.6 %) and justice (10.6 %).

The news items with a harmful narrative mostly addressed the constitutional amendments and the upcoming elections, which were often used for mutual accusations and insults.

It is noted that largest part of the news items that contain harmful narratives have one-sided reporting, that is, out of a total of 66 analysed articles, the journalists in 40 (60.6%) consulted only one side. Here, TV Alfa stands out, where out of a total of 34 articles included in the analysis, 23 contain only one side, 8 have two sides, while only 3 have three or more sides.

Table 12: Number of sources by online medium

	Tetova sot	Almako s	Vecer MK	Kurir	Republi ka	Nova TV	Lokalno	Nezavis en	Slobode n Pechat	A1 on.mk	MKD.m k	Total
No source	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Three and more	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	9
Two	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	2	2	1	11
One	9	3	25	1	48	4	6	10	5	9	10	130
Total	12	4	26	2	53	5	7	10	9	13	13	154

The fact that more than 60% (40 news items, 60.6%) of the news items include only one side, even though they are articles that contain a harmful narrative in themselves, is alarming considering that impartiality and objectivity must be among the most important journalistic standards.

In October, the most common were news items related to unverified findings (or findings that are difficult to verify) that are used as a basis for accusing political opponents (29 cases in total) and news items related to claims of corruption, non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office without attempting to substantiate those claims (24 cases).

Table 13: Presence of indicators in posts

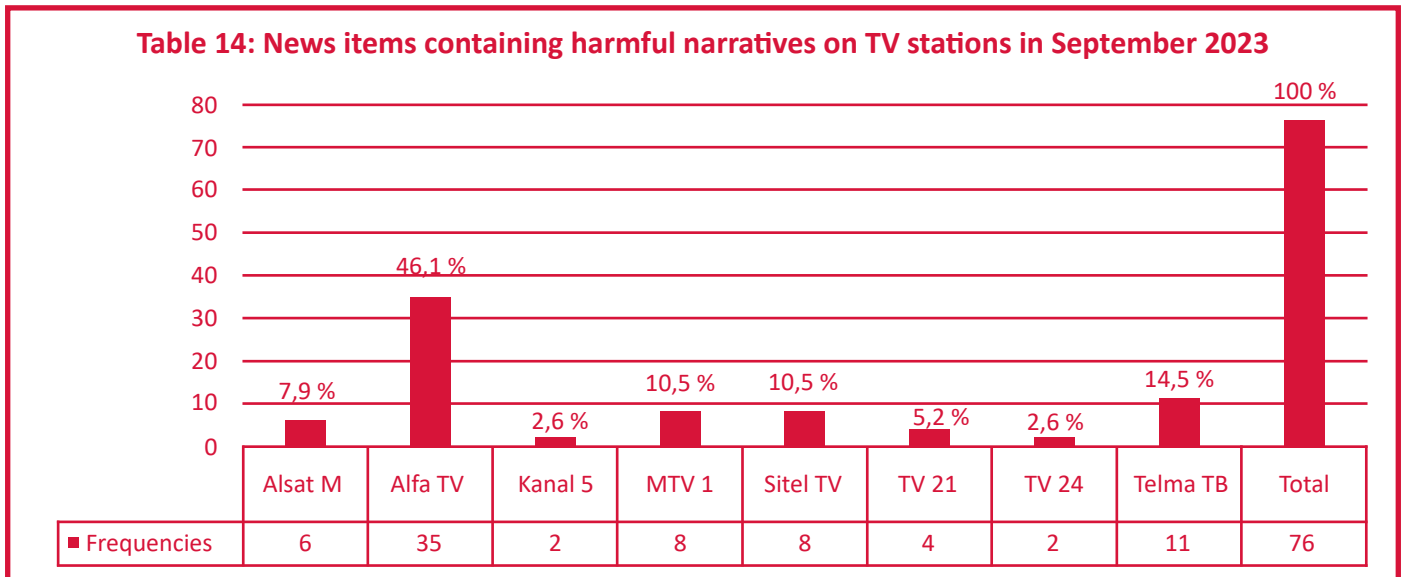| #	Indicator	Value
14	Words/sentences that explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly promote one's ideologies/activities/behaviours as something that benefits the people/the masses/the common 'honest man', humanity…	9
13	Images, videos and audio recordings that are created to mislead the public that something is real and true when it is not (and which can be proven false)….	0
12	Use of sentences, words, phrases that glorify one's own ethnicity, and all others are less important, valuable, worthy.	0
11	Use of words that insult, discredit, defame a group of people (foreigners/aliens) in order to cause fear, rejection and distancing from them, even causing certain behaviour towards that group.	0
10	Use of words and phrases that insult, belittle, ridicule a person and/or group based on their gender and/or sex.	0
9	Use of words and phrases that denigrate a certain group of people in order to cause division and discord between us/we/our and you/your. Usually we/our is good, positive and desirable and you/your is bad, negative and…	12
8	Use of sentences, phrases that accuse a foreign entity (or entities) of interfering in the internal affairs of the state, contrary to the interests of the state, which, in fact, is a violation of the democratic processes.	3
7	It is claimed to be true that political opponents/public institutions are manipulated by behind-the-scenes (secret) powerful groups (e.g. Freemasons, etc.) without presenting any facts or evidence, or using…	1
6	Deliberately not conveying the full picture of the 'event', deliberately omitting information that refutes the position of the one presenting it..	7
5	Speech that insults a specific group or justifies hate speech against a specific group, based on race, skin colour, origin, national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, nationality….	1
4	Labelling, ridicule and grossly disrespecting other persons (media workers, civil activists, political opponents, public office holders…). Use of negative words.	23
3	Misuse of information of private nature or personal tragedies, disability, social status, marital status of one's political opponents to achieve one's own goal	0
2	Unverified findings (or findings that are difficult to verify) are used as a basis for accusing political opponents.	29
1	Allegations of corruption, non-transparency/non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office without any attempt to substantiate those claims.	24

This type of news items promotes various types of harmful narratives, starting with Undermining Trust (noted in 56 of the items); Character attacks on persons and their demonization (23 examples); Biased selection (20 examples), Disinformation (15 examples); Inciting divisions (12 examples); Populism (9 examples) etc.

2.2.1. Monitoring of reporting by TV stations in September

In the analysed period, a total of 76 news items with harmful narratives were registered. Most of them were identified on 29 September (15), then on 13 September (13) and on 1 September (12). According to the genre, most often such narratives appear in analytical-reportage items (26) and reports (17), while there are 11 harmful narratives registered as news or news with a statement.

More than half of the news items (52.6% or 40 items) belong to the section of domestic politics, while other topics are much less represented, health (10), economy (6), etc. The most common are the news items that cover the debate on the constitutional amendments and the amendments to the Criminal Code.

Table 14: News items containing harmful narratives on TV stations in September 2023

	Alsat M	Alfa TV	Kanal 5	MTV 1	Sitel TV	TV 21	TV 24	Telma TB	Total
■ Frequencies	6	35	2	8	8	4	2	11	76

Percentages shown: Alsat M 7,9 %; Alfa TV 46,1 %; Kanal 5 2,6 %; MTV 1 10,5 %; Sitel TV 10,5 %; TV 21 5,2 %; TV 24 2,6 %; Telma TB 14,5 %; Total 100 %

The largest number of news items with harmful narratives was recorded in TV Alfa (35 or 46.1%), while in other media, the number of such reports is smaller - TV Telma (11), MTV 1 (8), TV Sitel (8), Alsat M (6), TV 21 (4) and TV 24 and Kanal 5 (2 each).

Most notable are news items related to unverified findings (or findings that are difficult to verify) used as a basis for accusing political opponents (38 cases in total) and news items related to allegations of corruption, non-accountability, unprofessionalism, abuse of office without attempt to support those claims (26 cases).

This is followed by news items in which we notice labelling, ridicule and gross disrespect of other people and the use of negative words (15 cases), as well as news items in which one's own ideologies and activities are promoted as something that benefits the people, in contrast to the activities and the ideologies of political opponents (14 cases). Such news items mostly refer to undermining trust, biased selection, as well character attacks, that is, demonization.