

Safeguarding democratic elections in Central and Eastern Europe – practical tools for CSOs

**International conference
on best practices**

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Introduction

Free and fair elections are considered the backbone of functioning democratic societies. When the option of choosing a new leadership is curtailed, impeded or unduly influenced, democracy itself begins to erode.

With most countries in Central and Eastern Europe experiencing some degree of democratic backsliding, constant vigilance is required to protect this foundational component of political freedom from the threats arrayed against it, which range from old-fashioned fraud on election day to media manipulation and regulatory obstacles during the campaign period.

To discuss new threats and share possible counter measures, Transparency International Hungary organised a one-day international online conference, on 17 March 2026, that brought together representatives of civil society organisations, think-tanks, investigative journalists and politicians from the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Poland, as well as the European Parliament.

The event took place just weeks before Hungary's last parliamentary election, which, on 12 April, ended 16 years of authoritarian and anti-EU governing by the previous prime minister, Viktor Orbán, and ushered in a pro-democratic and pro-EU government lead by Péter Magyar, Hungary's new prime minister.

1. Mobilising citizens

Speakers in the first session discussed ways and shared experiences for motivating citizens to turn out to vote in national, regional or local elections, and to register themselves as members in the local election committees and as vote counters. The speakers also exchanged best practices for educating citizens about detecting election manipulation techniques and attempts at election fraud. Such knowledge is key for enabling citizens to act as local watchdogs to ensure the transparency and fairness of the election campaigns and the election process.

Opening speech:

Magnus Öhman, Director of the Regional Europe Office of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems

The speakers of the panel were:

Zsófia Banuta, Co-founder of Unhack Democracy, which is a member of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) and the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)

Katarzyna Batko-Tołuć, Managing Director of Fundusz Obywatelski im. Ludwiki i Henryka Wujców, Fundacja dla Polski

Mónika Bálint, Managing Director of Civil Kollégium Alapítvány (Civil College Foundation)

Zuzana Petkova, Managing Director of Nadácia Zastavme korupciu (Stop Corruption Foundation), Slovakia

The session was moderated by **József Péter Martin**, Executive Director of Transparency International Hungary.

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Mobilisation by civil society organisations greatly contributed to the high voter turnout in the 2023 parliamentary election in Poland, but the strong anti-establishment sentiment prevailing among young voters was also a key factor. Mobilisation before the next election will greatly depend on whether people can keep the feeling of empowerment.”

Katarzyna Batko-Tołuć,
Managing Director of Fundusz Obywatelski im.
Ludwiki i Henryka Wujców, Fundacja dla Polski

”

It has never been easier for people to engage with each other — yet mobilizing voters remains one of the defining challenges of our time. Artificial intelligence can be used to protect the integrity of elections, just as it can be used to undermine them.”

Magnus Öhman, IFES

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I believe in turning pain into hope, and hope into action — and this should happen continuously. We have many tools to protect the integrity of elections; the question is whether we deploy them in time.”

Zsófia Banuta, Unhack Democracy, Hungary

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Many young people leave Slovakia because they are fed up with corruption. 137 NGOs have launched a joint campaign to bring them back. The government have tried to criminalize the campaign and restrict the right to vote from abroad. This approach tells a lot about the ruling party’s fears and political intentions.”

Zuzana Petková,
Stop Corruption Foundation
(Nadácia Zastavme korupciu), Slovakia

”

Having the right to vote is no longer enough. The narrative around participation matters — we need to get people to cast their ballots if they want to see changes. We are building a broader sense of »we« across communities that have felt oppressed and neglected.”

Mónika Bálint, Civil College Foundation
(Civil Kollégium Alapítvány), Hungary

2. Detecting and countering disinformation and manipulation techniques

The second session looked into different forms of election malpractice, such as getting a seemingly independent third party to carry out de facto political campaigns, using fake online profiles to spread false information or run targeted smear campaigns about election candidates, blurring the lines between state and party financing, and bending electoral rules and re-drawing electoral districts shortly before the elections to influence election outcomes.

The speakers of the panel were:

Duncan Allen, Digital Democracy Research Officer at Democracy Reporting International

Ján Ivancík, Legal Counsel of Transparency International Slovakia

Péter Krekó, Executive Director of Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute

Ana Mocanu, Executive Director of Funky Citizens

The session was moderated by **József Péter Martin**, Executive Director of Transparency International Hungary.

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In Slovakia, populist political narratives don't always aim at winning arguments — often the goal is to make everyone look equally corrupt. Corruption scandals create general mistrust between groups, thus influencing not just the elections, but society as a whole.”

Ján Ivancík,
Transparency International Slovakia

”

A hundred social media accounts sharing the same content at the same time is suspicious — and that is exactly the kind of pattern that platform data reveals. As a civil society organization, we have a legal right to examine that data under the EU's Digital Services Act. X refused. We went to court and won. Having access to data is a huge legal win.”

Duncan Allen,
Democracy Reporting International, Germany

”

It is often forgotten that voters tend to decide based on very personal considerations. The political campaign of Călin Georgescu during Romania's 2024 presidential election was successful not only because of foreign interference — it targeted genuine social and economic frustrations and an anti-establishment sentiment. What we are seeing now is AI generating complete profiles, realistic photos and varied content in minutes. But prevention mechanisms remain dangerously weak.”

Ana Mocanu,
Funky Citizens, Romania

”

Hungary was the EU champion of political advertising in the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections. The government was spreading disinformation at an unprecedented scale and paid for it lavishly. When the social media platforms banned political ads, the campaign continued through influencer networks and a myriad of made-for-purpose fake profiles.”

Péter Krekó,
Political Capital Policy Research
and Consulting Institute, Hungary

3. Detecting and countering election fraud

Panellists in the third session discussed ways for detecting and countering different kinds of election fraud, such as coercing citizens to vote in a particular way, convincing (even paying) a large number of like-minded people to register as permanent residents in key electoral districts shortly before the elections, or buying people's votes with different techniques, including "chain voting".

The speakers of the panel were:

Sándor Léderer, Executive Director of K-monitor

Wojciech Przybylski, Editor-in-Chief of Visegrad Insight

Lucia Vilimovská, Project Manager at Transparency International Czech Republic

Zalán Zubor, Investigative journalist at Átlátszó.hu

The session was moderated by **Miklós Ligeti**, Legal Director of Transparency International Hungary.

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The incumbent political parties in Hungary had a wide variety of ways to channel vast amounts of state resources and knowledge, and even to use the police forces for campaign purposes, meaning that the whole government machinery was favouring or supporting these parties.”

Sándor Léderer,
K-Monitor, Hungary

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Poland has spent a decade testing what the centralization of power does to democratic integrity. The answer is: it amplifies every problem. We all should do more and innovate to get back to a more democratic track.”

Wojciech Przybylski,
Visegrad Insight, Poland

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In the Czech Republic, vote buying is rare — but voter coercion is more common, and harder to document. Political parties spend heavily before campaigns officially start, which makes monitoring extremely difficult. The media still plays a watchdog role around elections. The buzzwords for media and NGOs are: participate, monitor, and educate.”

Lucia Vilimovská,
Transparency International Czech Republic

”

Most election fraud in Hungary doesn't happen at polling stations — it happens before you even get there. Vote buying is the most blatant form, but coercion by local power brokers is just as real: if you don't vote for the incumbent parties, you may lose your job. Informing voters is the most important thing anyone can do.”

Zalán Zubor,
Átlátszó.hu, Hungary

4. Hopes and frauds – mixed outlook before Hungary’s April parliamentary election

The last session focused on the 12 April parliamentary election in Hungary. In the run-up to the election, NGOs and election monitoring organisations repeatedly warned of thinly veiled attempts by the governing parties to blur the lines between state and party financing to fund a massive election campaign that had been a mix of lavish welfare spending aimed at winning the hearts of citizens and coercive measures and massive smear campaigns targeting opposition candidates. In a country where democratic backsliding had been well documented, what were the chances of holding free and fair elections? Panellists discussed these points with a view to providing useful input into the broader debate on how to safeguard democratic elections in the region.

The speakers of the panel were:

Eszter Galgóczi, Chief Analyst at Forrás Társadalomkutató Intézet

Endre Hann, Managing Director of Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute

Róbert László, Election Expert at Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute

Tineke Strik, member of the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, permanent rapporteur on the rule of law situation in Hungary

The session was moderated by **Miklós Ligeti**, Legal Director of Transparency International Hungary.

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Public opinion polls have been brutally weaponised by the political actors in the runup to the 2026 parliamentary election in Hungary. This has never happened to such an extent before, reaching a point when Medián and other independent polling companies have become targets of political heat speech and smear campaigns. This should never happen again; we need reliable public opinion polls that adhere to high professional standards and should filter out and expose attempts at distorting and weaponizing public opinion polls.”

Endre Hann, Managing Director, Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute, Hungary

”

Most citizens don’t have a thorough knowledge of how to read public opinion poll results. For example, they don’t pay attention to how polling companies weigh the raw figures and why. But they see the data and it influences them, and it can be misused as a campaigning tool by politicians. We may need to educate voters about interpreting opinion poll results, and it might be worth considering not publishing poll results right before the elections.”

Eszter Galgóczi, Chief Analyst, Forrás Társadalomkutató Intézet, Hungary

”

The political context of the 2026 parliamentary election in Hungary was a hybrid regime, not a well-functioning democracy. But it doesn’t mean that there can be no regime change via democratic elections. Quite the contrary: it is more difficult, of course, and requires the opposition parties to win by a bigger margin, because all the rules favour the incumbent parties. But it is doable.”

Róbert László, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, Hungary

”

The EU should harden, not soften its approach when elections in a Member State don’t happen in a fully democratic, fair and transparent way. That means no unfreezing of blocked EU funds (in the case of Hungary), no political bargaining, more systematic infringement procedures and no pretending that »cosmetic« reforms amount to durable compliance with the rule of law.”

Tineke Strik, member of the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, permanent rapporteur on the rule of law situation in Hungary, Holland

The recordings of the four sessions are available here:



Session 1



Session 2



Session 3



Session 4

Overall, the speakers found that digital platforms had been the new battleground for democracy. Shaping the flow of information on the internet is now an essential strategy of those seeking to disrupt the democratic transfer of power through elections. Incumbent political actors in Central and Eastern Europe use both blunt and nuanced methods to deter or discredit opposition movements while preserving a veneer of popular legitimacy. Such actions tend to escalate before and during crucial votes.

The speakers also concluded that despite some foreign attempts at influencing election outcomes, it was chiefly domestic actors who had been abusing information technology to subvert the electoral process. They identified three main forms of digital election interference: informational measures, in which online discussions are surreptitiously manipulated in favour of the government or particular parties; technical measures, which are used to restrict access to certain news sources and communication tools; and legal measures, which authorities apply to punish regime opponents and chill political expression.

The country-specific aspects of these trends are presented below with the help of six case studies.



Case studies

Czech Republic: New frontiers of election fraud

Source: Lucia Vilimovská (Transparency International Czech Republic)

TI Czech Republic has been systematically monitoring domestic campaign finance violations, electoral integrity, and disinformation trends since 2012. According to Vilimovská, election fraud in the Czech Republic has evolved away from classic forms – such as vote buying or ballot box stuffing (whereby a greater number of ballots are cast than the number of people who legitimately voted) – toward more subtle “upstream” interventions.

Key findings:

- Political parties start spending heavily much before the campaigns officially begin, and they do so outside the monitoring windows set by the campaign finance rules. “The campaign basically never ends now,” Vilimovská said.
- Vote buying, which in poorer areas used to be done by handing out sacks of potatoes or supermarket vouchers as currency to secure votes, has been replaced by more sophisticated voter coercion, as it’s harder to document and easier to upkeep.
- Attacks against dissenting voices on social media have been quite common, coming close to hate speech. Some political actors have gone quite far, testing the limits of hate speech without triggering corrective measures by the platform operators.
- Unlike in Hungary, where public media have been brought under the absolute control of the incumbent political parties, Czech public media have retained independence, and the media landscape generally fulfils a watchdog function around elections – this is considered a relative strength in Central and Eastern Europe.
- The Czech disinformation ecosystem has been varied and highly prolific – around 120 articles per day from over 39 websites before the last parliamentary election –, and TikTok has become a particularly effective vector for pro-Russian narratives.
- Some voters tried to sway the election results in battleground constituencies by registering in smaller municipalities as permanent residents before the election, but this was quite easily detected and thus easy for the municipalities and police to counteract.
- Forming “ghost coalitions” have become common; this involves some parties registering together as a new entity before the election to ensure that they cross the 5% threshold for securing a place in the parliament.
- It is relatively easy in the Czech Republic to hide crucial parts of corporate structures – including the ultimate beneficial owners of a business – from public scrutiny. An increasingly popular way for owners to do so is by paying so-called “white horses” – often homeless people – to act as frontmen. While campaign financing has been quite robustly regulated in the Czech Republic, the spreading of such methods will require more nuanced monitoring.

For more on this subject:

- [Transparency International Czech Republic – campaign finance monitoring project \(monitoring of Senate and local election campaigns across 8 cities and 27 districts\)](#)



Hungary: State-funded disinformation campaigns and voter coercion

Sources: Péter Krekó (Political Capital) and Zalán Zubor (Átlátszó.hu)

Political Capital monitors sponsored political advertising and the evolution of hostile political narratives in Hungary, documenting what it calls “systematic promotion of disinformation”. Their work, in partnership with fact-checking media outlet Lakmusz and Mérték Media Monitor, has provided some of the most detailed pricing data available on state-backed information manipulation in the EU.

Átlátszó.hu, one of Hungary’s leading independent investigative media outlets, documents on-the-ground election fraud.

Key findings:

- Hungary was the EU’s largest buyer of political ads on Facebook before online platforms imposed a ban ahead of the 2024 EP elections.
- After the ban, Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz party turned to funding influencer networks (most notably the Megafon network) and proxy NGOs (“GONGOs”), which were tasked with gathering supporters into different thematic digital communities. By dressing up campaign funding as support for seemingly public-service NGOs, the government successfully blurred the line between state and campaign financing.
- Proxy NGOs also had the task of creating and operating a large network of inauthentic social media profiles, which endorsed the government’s messages and supported smear campaigns against opposition candidates.
- In the run-up to the 2026 parliamentary election, Viktor Orbán’s government contracted a social media agency with known ties to Russian influence operations – tactics included large-scale promotion of deepfake content through a myriad of inauthentic social media profiles (with popular themes including casting the opposition leader, Hungary’s current prime minister, Péter Magyar as a pro-Ukraine and therefore pro-war figure) and the staging of emotionally and politically loaded events (such as the incident of Hungarian authorities detaining an official Ukrainian vehicle carrying what the Hungarian state media labelled in flashy news programmes as “treasures of dubious origin”).
- Voter blackmail and coercion was widespread in rural Hungary: some employers and local officials threatened voters that their jobs and key municipal services were at risk unless they supported the incumbent political parties. On election day, buses carrying coerced voters were frequently spotted by monitoring organisations in the vicinity of polling stations.
- Unlike in the Czech Republic, vote buying was a prominent form of fraud in rural Hungary in the run-up to the 2026 parliamentary election (chain-voting for example), with most instances occurring outside the polling stations.
- In 2013, the legal provision on “campaign silence” on the election day was abolished, thus making voters more exposed to coercion.
- In December 2023, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law establishing the Sovereignty Protection Office – a state administration which has enjoyed broad powers to investigate and issue defamatory reports about any organisation or individual that received foreign funding (including funding by the European Commission). The SPO possessed unfettered access to personal data, and operated without oversight, offering no avenue for legal redress. This had the potential of intimidating independent watchdog organisations and jeopardise their watchdog role before the 2024 municipal and EP elections, as well as the 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election.
- Independent NGOs and media outlets, including TI Hungary and Átlátszó.hu, were among the first targets of the SPO.

For more on this subject:

- [Political Capital – “Fidesz & Co. flooded social media with anti-Western hostile disinformation in Hungary’s election campaign” \(2024 EP election monitoring report\)](#)
- [Hungary’s Sovereignty Protection Office targets Transparency International Hungary with investigation – Transparency International Hungary](#)



Poland: Political and emotional microtargeting, propaganda and democratic recovery

Source: Wojciech Przybylski (Visegrad Insight)

Visegrad Insight is a Warsaw-based analytical journal covering democracy and governance issues across Central Europe. Wojciech Przybylski's presentation drew on a decade of tracking democratic backsliding in Poland, including the role of media capture, political microtargeting, and cognitive warfare during elections.

Key findings:

- Before the election of Donald Tusk, a pro-EU politician, as the prime minister of Poland in December 2023, the country experienced eight years of centralized power under the leadership of the conservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party. This period was characterized by lack of institutional checks and balances, state capture, the weaponization of the media, the curtailing of the independence of the judiciary, and the widening of societal divisions.
- Visegrad Insight has been monitoring the integrity of Polish elections for over a decade: It found that initially, irregularities happened sporadically, but a shift towards systemic fraud already started around 2015.
- Parliamentary and presidential elections have been widely covered and well documented both in the national and international media, but the abuse of power and clientelism happening at local level have not attracted that much media attention, thus leaving room for more hidden malpractices.
- The changes the PiS implemented in the electoral system smoothed the way for malpractices on the municipal level, and systemic irregularities became more common as centralization gained strength.
- Cognitive warfare tactics were widely deployed, including trolling, the use of bot networks, and political and emotional microtargeting – the latter involves a data-driven campaign strategy that uses personal data, such as web browsing habits, demographics, and psychographic profiles, to deliver highly tailored political and emotional messages to narrow, specific groups of voters.
- The lack of transparency in social media campaigning remains a structural problem in Poland. For example, state funds originally intended for boosting digital innovation and helping start-ups were re-directed under the PiS for social media campaigns.
- Young people feel hesitant to engage in politics for fear of being trapped in polarization – that hesitancy was actively exploited by the PiS to try to lower voter turnout in this (typically reform-oriented) age group.
- The 2023 parliamentary election showed that mobilizing the collective memory of harmful state intervention and propaganda can reverse democratic backsliding.
- On the whole, democratic recovery is possible, but it requires an active civil society, independent media and sustained institutional reforms.

For more on this subject:

- [Visegrad Insight – “Disinformation in Poland” policy brief \(Konfederacja, regulatory gaps, platform accountability\)](#)



Romania and Moldova: AI-powered influence operations

Source: Ana Mocanu (Funky Citizens)

Funky Citizens is a Romanian civic tech and transparency NGO that utilises digital tools, open data, and technology to make governments more accountable, empower citizens, and encourage public participation. Ana Mocanu's team was at the forefront of documenting the coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) campaigns that upended Romania's 2024 presidential election and the 2025 Moldovan parliamentary election – campaigns that have since become reference cases for EU policymakers and platform regulators.

Călin Georgescu, an independent far-right populist, faces multiple criminal trials in Romania following the unprecedented annulment of the 2024 presidential election results. Among other things, he was indicted on charges of alleged illegal, clandestine online operations – including bot networks and paid influencers – that artificially boosted his campaign while concealing its funding.

Key findings:

- Romania served as a laboratory for a new generation of election manipulation techniques: in 2024, over 30,000 coordinated accounts operated across TikTok and Facebook, none of them directly naming, or campaigning for, an explicit candidate.
- Campaigns targeted emotions rather than policy – examples included exploiting grief, fear of violence, economic insecurity, and promoting narratives of peace and prosperity.
- AI now generates complete fake profiles – photos, biographies, online posting histories – in minutes, replacing traditional troll farms.
- The 2024 campaigns exploited genuine social frustration: the general anti-establishment sentiment, economic anxiety, and distrust of institutions were real vulnerabilities that mirky accounts amplified.
- Platform exploitation operated at an infrastructural level — this meant that certain actors were bypassing security boundaries to commandeer cloud, network, or device-management architectures. Instead of attacking end-user devices, this strategy targeted core systems like Domain Controllers or Identity Providers to manipulate environments undetected. During the examined period, Telegram groups coordinated domestic actors, while the Pravda network translated Russian disinformation for local consumption.
- Prevention mechanisms remain weak: no final report on the Georgescu case had been published by the time of the conference, and the lack of adequate research APIs on major platforms – specifically social media and AI ecosystems – severely hinders independent data scrutiny.

For more on this subject:

- [Funky Citizens – Observation Mission Report: 2025 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Moldova](#)



Slovakia: Media capture, trust erosion, and the engagement of young voters

Sources: Zuzana Petková (Nadácia Zastavme korupciu) and Ján Ivancík (Transparency International Slovakia)

Nadácia Zastavme korupciu (Stop Corruption Foundation) is one of Slovakia's most active civil society organizations focusing on anti-corruption, the rule of law, and democratic integrity. TI Slovakia provides legal monitoring and anti-corruption advocacy.

Key findings:

- Slovakia's governing coalition, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, has systematically eroded trust in mainstream media while building a parallel "alternative" media ecosystem, mostly registered as (proxy) NGOs to bypass the scrutiny and accountability regulations imposed on mainstream media outlets.
- Coalition members communicate almost exclusively through alternative media platforms, thus creating a sealed, contradiction-free information environment for their supporters, shutting out all means to scrutinize or factcheck the content or the credibility of information sources.
- Manufactured scandals have been utilized not to win specific arguments but to make all actors look equally corrupt and unreliable in the eyes of most voters. This has made 30–60% of Slovaks susceptible to well-targeted disinformation campaigns – this trend is reinforced by sustained economic frustration, brain drain, and years of deliberate trust erosion.
- As the governing coalition has had a large and secure voter base, the strategy of discouraging "unsure" citizens from voting altogether through disinformation has helped to cement their majority.
- The government has tried to criminalise NGO voter mobilisation campaigns – including a joint campaign of 137 NGOs that targeted young Slovaks living abroad – and restrict voting from abroad.

For more on this subject:

- <https://transparency.sk/en/slovakia-has-improved-its-corruption-rate-disinformation-actors-deliberately-reinforce-the-notion-of-the-opposite-podcast/>
- <https://transparency.sk/en/the-winners-of-the-last-election-are-leading-the-least-transparent-campaigns/>
- <https://share.google/Wv7ObTtRMdWyLzhvY>



Cross-border issues: The fight for access to digital platforms data

Sources: Duncan Allen (Democracy Reporting International)

Democracy Reporting International (DRI) is a Berlin-based international NGO that conducts systematic research on how social media platforms are used in election campaigns – specifically to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) and foreign information manipulation. This requires access to platform data: engagement metrics, reach figures, and amplification patterns. Article 40(12) of the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) explicitly requires Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) to provide this access to vetted researchers. Thus, a legal battle between DRI and X (formerly Twitter) over access to platform data linked to Hungary's 2026 parliamentary election has become a landmark case for the enforcement of the Digital Services Act.

Key developments:

- In February 2026, a German appeals court ordered social media platform X to give DRI access to publicly available data through its API, free of quota limits and through June 30 2026, linked to Hungary's April 12 parliamentary election.
- The Berlin Court of Appeal said X's noncompliance affected DRI's ability to conduct research in Germany.
- The court's ruling is not related to the type of algorithm used but ordered X to share information such as the reach and engagement of posts related to the election.
- The court also ruled that jurisdiction in this case lay in Germany, where DRI is based, and not in Ireland, where X has its EU headquarters.
- The ruling directly enables investigation of whether X's algorithms were amplifying disinformation or enabling foreign interference ahead of the election.
- "The court order would lower barriers for civil society groups across Europe seeking to enforce digital rights through national courts," Allen told the conference.

For more on this subject:

- [EU Digital Services Act](#)
- [Democracy Reporting International – Digital Democracy Monitor: social media monitoring toolkit and DSA platform data access tracker](#)



Best practices and recommendations

Headline goals:

- Inform citizens and expose and counter disinformation, fake social media accounts and deepfake content in real time.
- Ensure the availability of high-quality, reliable public opinion polls throughout the election campaigns.
- Enforce data access rights under the EU's Digital Services Act through legal channels.
- Build a stable network of civil society organizations that together cover a broad range of monitoring skills.
- Improve the quality of education – reduce the underlying conditions that make disinformation effective.
- Strengthen democratic participation at local level, not just at national level.
- Rebuild trust in democratic institutions.

Zooming in:

Data collection and legal frameworks

- Collect large volumes of data to identify patterns and ensure that there is a reliable, robust source of data to support observations/suspicions — platform and backend data are essential to prove Russian influence behind CEE election campaigns. (Duncan Allen, DE)
- Actively enforce the EU DSA's Article 40(12) on the right of access to data for vetted researchers and organizations investigating systemic risks – this is especially important considering that not every organization exercises this right. A clean, independent and strong legal environment is key to ensuring that the rule of law persists. (Duncan Allen, DE)
- Use courts to enforce the rights to access platform data – the court ruling in the DRI v. X case confirms researchers can litigate in the country where they conduct research at any time they detect systemic risks, not only before election periods. (Duncan Allen, DE)
- Get fake accounts removed as quickly as possible. (Duncan Allen, DE, and Péter Krekó, HU)
- Ensure the availability of reliable public opinion polls that adhere to high professional standards throughout the election campaigns, filter out and expose attempts at distorting and weaponizing public opinion polls. (Endre Hann, HU).

Capacity building

- Adopt a proactive rather than reactive approach — monitoring infrastructure must be operational before election periods begin, so that overseeing and detecting malpractices can start way before the official launch of the campaign period; the infrastructure of disinformation is much more proactive, while civil organisations tend to be reactive. (Ana Mocanu, RO)
- Run trainings and workshops on documentation and reporting of online content so that civil society actors and citizens can contribute to fact checking – like in the case of debunking a “false flag operation” that happened during the 2026 parliamentary election campaign period in Hungary: a huge Ukrainian flag was unfolded during an opposition-led rally to falsely link the movement to supporting the idea of Hungarian participation in the war in Ukraine. Citizens closely monitored the communication on government funded media platforms and identified the activists behind the operation as persons being affiliated with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party. Their posts about the “false flag operation” being a staged incident went viral on social media. (Péter Krakó, HU)
- Build real-time monitoring infrastructure; final election reports come too late to be actionable. (Ana Mocanu, RO)
- Establish rapid response systems in collaboration with social media platforms (Lucia Vilimovská, CZ) and on-site (election site) volunteers for public observation and monitoring. (Wojciech Przybylski, PL, Mónika Bálint, HU)
- Educate citizens about their voting rights, their democratic responsibilities and the influence they can exert on their countries' political climate. (Ján Ivancík, Zuzana Petková, SK)

- Counter brain-drain by improving the state of the economy and people's general sense of well-being. (Ján Ivancík, Zuzana Petková, SK)
- The EU's current NGO support tools are inadequate to fund full scale election monitoring projects. (Zsófia Banuta, HU)
- Implementing mail voting through embassies would increase the security and legitimacy of the election process in Slovakia. (Zuzana Petkova, SK)

CSOs and citizens

- Civil society organizations are key actors in mobilisation and oversight — the coordinated voter mobilization campaign of 137 NGOs before the 2023 parliamentary election in Slovakia serves as a reference case. The campaign successfully mobilised young voters: despite pre-election public opinion polls predicting a below 50% turnout among young voters, the exit polls showed that 69 percent of young Slovaks eventually did show up to vote. After the election, the campaign turned into a permanent movement. (Zuzana Petkova, SK)
- Build a network of young volunteers to monitor the election campaigns and later the election process. (Zuzana Petková, SK, Mónika Bálint, HU)
- Civil society organizations have had a significant role in ensuring that the voter turnout all across Europe stayed relatively high, and even increased over the past few years, thanks to grassroots activities and educating new voters – it is important to continue reaching out beyond the already engaged population. (Zsófia Banuta, HU, and Magnus Öhman, Director of the Regional Europe Office of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems)
- Social media-focused NGO campaigns in Slovakia show that targeting the younger generations through Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and other platforms, can positively influence voter turnout. A joint online campaign of 137 NGOs before the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election engaged 80 influencers and managed to reach over one million Instagram accounts. (Zuzana Petková, SK)
- However, offline interaction and workshops are just as important as online advocacy and monitoring. (Ana Mocanu, RO)
- CSOs, investigative organizations and activist groups should join forces to cover a broad range of election monitoring skills and better fulfil a watchdog function. This is already happening in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia around elections. (Mónika Bálint, HU, Zuzana Petková, SK, Lucia Vilimovská, CZ)
- Build bridges between marginalized and vulnerable communities for shared representation, amplifying their voices (Mónika Bálint, HU)
- “Turn voters’ pain into hope and hope into action” – the mobilization of voters is a longer process that must start well ahead of the elections, and engagement must remain continuous. (Zsófia Banuta, HU)
- Artificial intelligence, while not always reliable, can be used as a tool by the general public to better understand complex issues, and work through larger quantities of information. (Magnus Öhman, IFES)

