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Vulnerability Index of Disinformation in Kosovo

VULNERABILITY INDEX OF DISINFORMATION IN KOSOVO

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> "Solving the disinformation problem won't cure all that ails our democracies or tears at the fabric of our world, but it can help tamp down divisions and let us rebuild the trust and solidarity needed to make our democracy stronger."
>
> —Former U.S. President Barack Obama
> APRIL 21, 2022

Summary

Disinformation is a major threat for Kosovo's democracy and national security. Foreign malign influence, lack of media literacy, and polarization of political events and elections weaken citizens' access to information, undermining their ability to make informed decisions. The rapid spread of dis/misinformation can trigger violence and increasing tensions with Serbia.

To better understand the threats to information integrity in Kosovo, Democracy Plus created this Vulnerability Index of Disinformation in Kosovo (hereinafter, Index) from December 2021- November 2022. It assessed the state of Kosovo's vulnerability to information disorders on a measurable scale. The Index provides an overall assessment of the state of play and 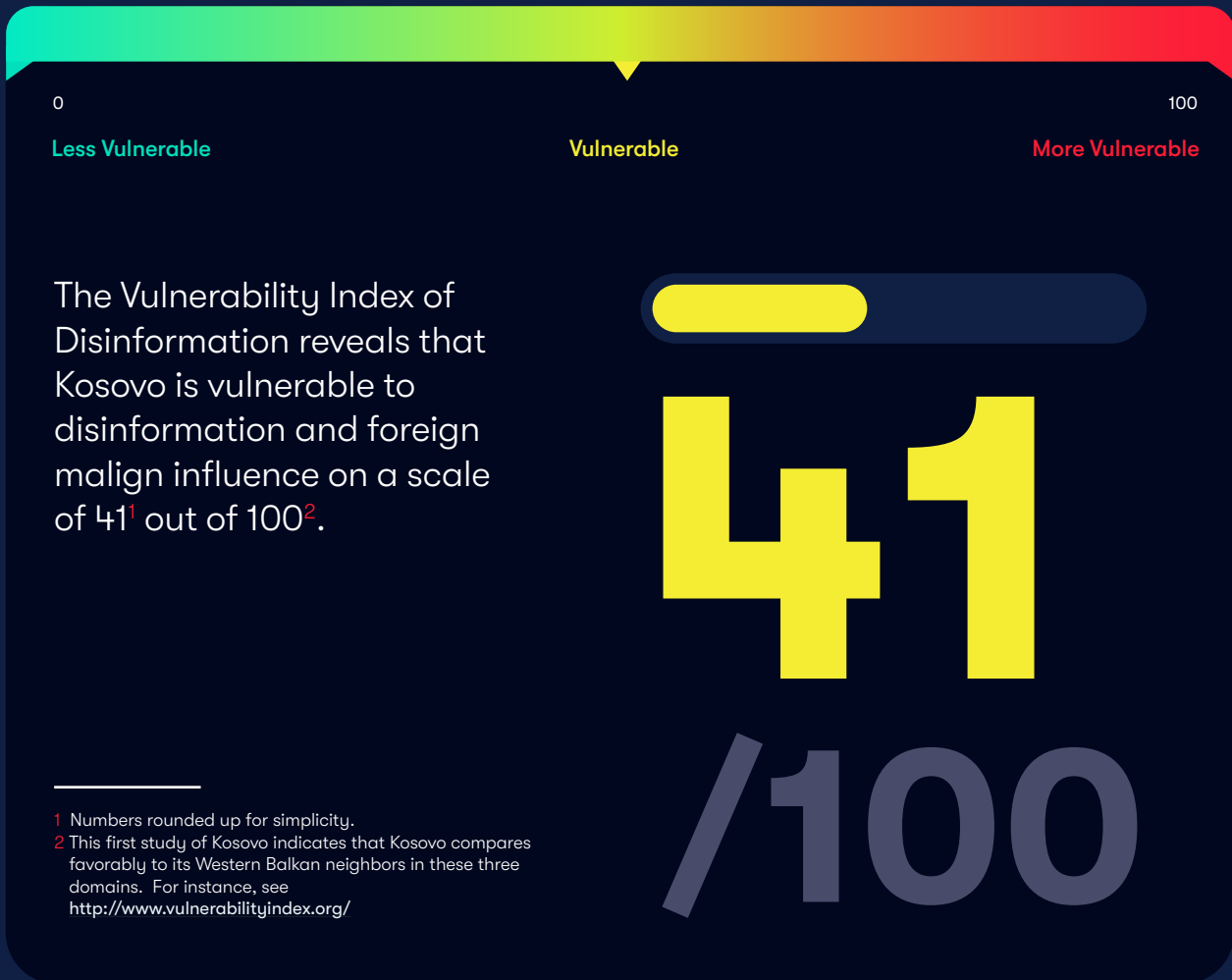for mapping of other key factors involved, while providing a comprehensive baseline assessment of the vulnerability level.

The goal of the Index is to understand in depth the ongoing dynamics in Kosovo's media information space and the attitudes of Kosovars toward information disorders and malign foreign influence. Additionally, this Index aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the measures that need to be implemented by the decision-making institutions to mitigate threats to Kosovo's information environment.

The Index assesses three key domains: 1. Media Environment, 2. Political Landscape, and 3 Public Perceptions. The key domains were assessed from the perspective of foreign malign influence in Kosovo. These domains were selected to examine the current situation and map out other important factors. In the coming years, the Index will be expanded to include other domains that are or can be vulnerable to disinformation.

The quantitative representation of vulnerabilities in each domain provides an overarching perspective on the level of vulnerability for each domain and allows for a comparison among them. There are seven overarching sources of information utilized (see Annex II). All sources are adjusted to reflect 0-100 scale, the closer to 100 the more vulnerable. Using R software, each variable is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100. The domains fall into three categories: Less Vulnerable (0-33.3), Vulnerable (33.4-66.6), and More Vulnerable (66.7-100).

Less Vulnerable

Vulnerable

More Vulnerable

The Vulnerability Index of Disinformation reveals that Kosovo is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence on a scale of 41[1] out of 100[2].

41
/100

1 Numbers rounded up for simplicity.
2 This first study of Kosovo indicates that Kosovo compares favorably to its Western Balkan neighbors in these three domains. For instance, see http://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/

The Index found that Kosovo's media environment and political landscape are more vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence than the public perception domain:
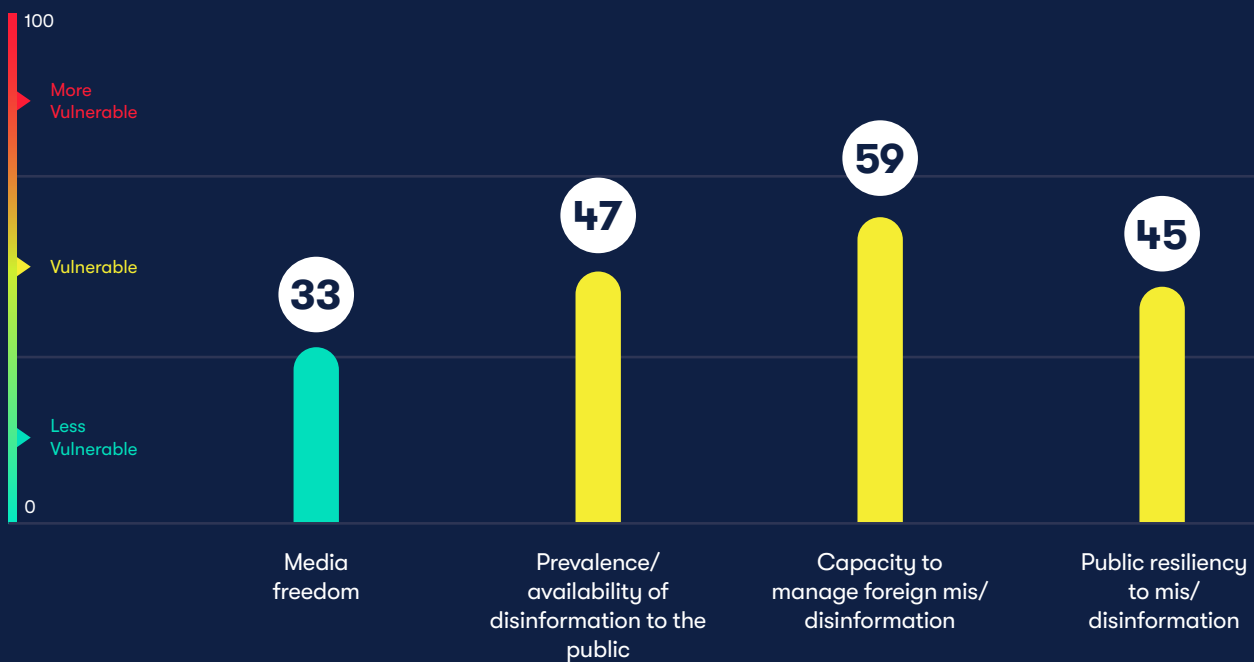
The Media Environment is vulnerable, with a ranking of

46
/100

The Political Landscape is vulnerable with a ranking of

45
/100

The Public Perception is less vulnerable with a ranking of

32
/100

1 Media Environment domain findings:

46/100

The Index reveals that the Media Environment is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring 46/100, the most vulnerable among the three Index domains.

100

More Vulnerable

Vulnerable

Less Vulnerable

0

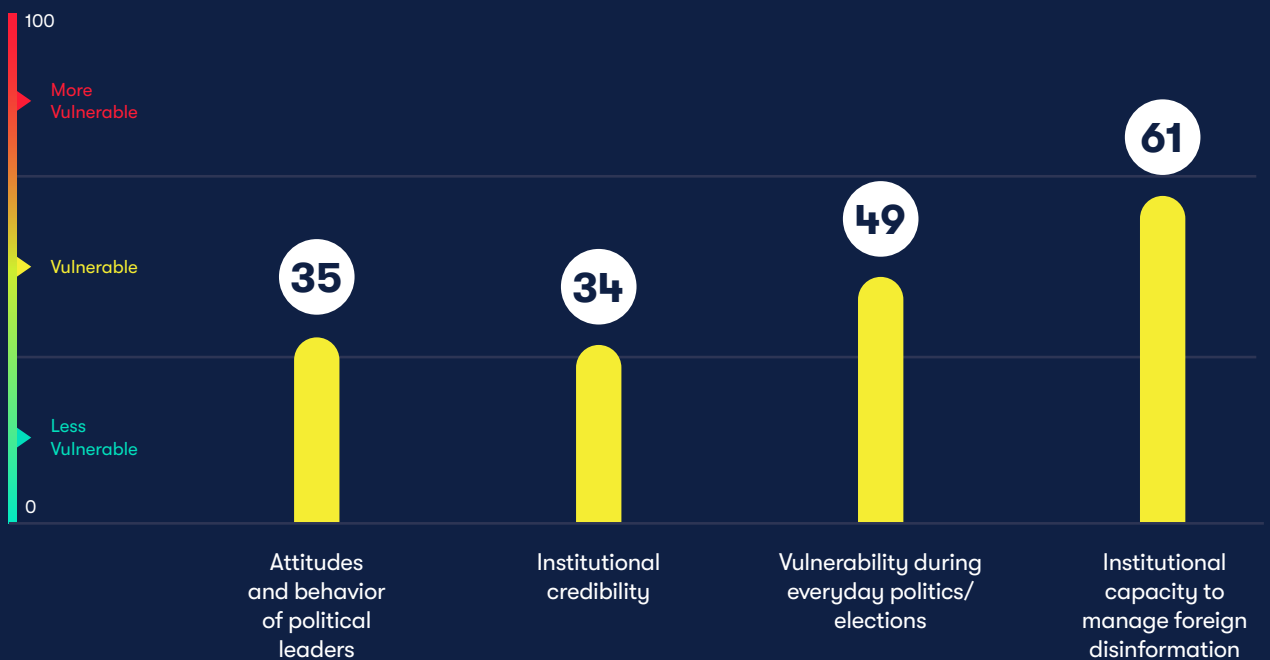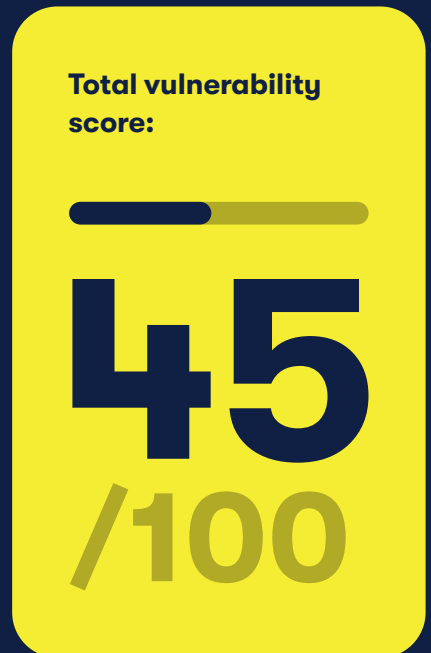|			
33	**47**	**59**	**45**
Media freedom	Prevalence/ availability of disinformation to the public	Capacity to manage foreign mis/ disinformation	Public resiliency to mis/ disinformation

The challenges include the capacity of institutions to manage disinformation including media and the role of Facebook, and public resiliency to misinformation and disinformation. The capacity of institutions, in particular the media, to manage the threat from disinformation is vulnerable.

Similarly, the effectiveness of Facebook to control disinformation has been considered weak/ nonexistent, mainly due to lack of a fact-checking partner in Kosovo, until recently. Disinformation is considered a more serious threat in the digital space as compared to traditional media, including public

and private television channels. The education system does not prepare Kosovar citizens to identify information disorders, contributing to weak public resiliency to mis/ disinformation. Overall, public resiliency is low and weak, while citizens do not fact-check.

2 Political Landscape domain findings:

Total vulnerability score:

45/100

The Index reveals that the Political Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and malign foreign influence, scoring 45/100. This domain captures attitudes and the behaviors of the institutional leaders (president, head of parliament, and prime minister), institutional capacity, vulnerability during everyday politics and elections, and institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation.

100

More Vulnerable

Vulnerable

Less Vulnerable

0

35 Attitudes and behavior of political leaders

34 Institutional credibility

49 Vulnerability during everyday politics/ elections

61 Institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation

While vulnerable, the attitudes and behavior of political leaders' is slightly less vulnerable than that of the institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation and vulnerability during elections and everyday politics. Disinformation narratives during elections and everyday politics are a considered common practice and exploit societal divisions using digital content as fodder. The most polarized societal issues in Kosovo include the Dialogue with Serbia, the border demarcation with Montenegro, and the Specialist Chambers Cou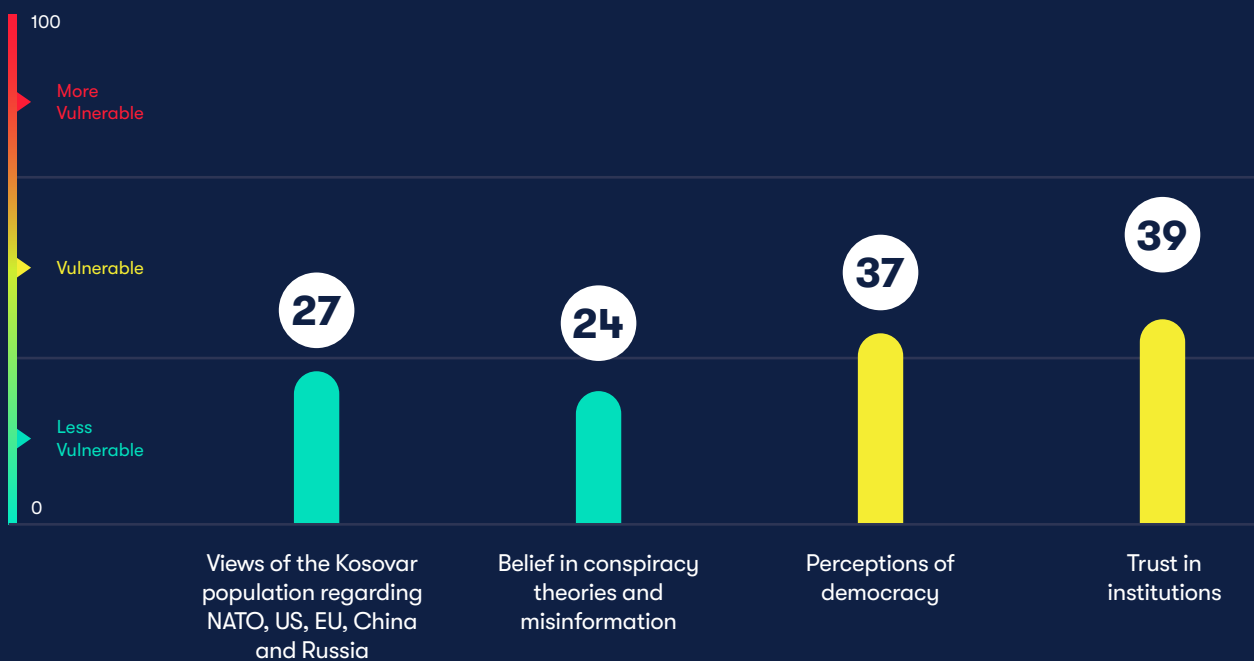rt. The institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation is the most vulnerable indicator in this domain, indicating a weak or non-existent legal and institutional framework. Kosovo has no policy in place to protect institutions from cyber threats, despite ongoing cyber threats from abroad for years.

3 Public Perception domain findings:

Total vulnerability score:

32
/100

The Index reveals that the Public Perception domain is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring 32/100.

100

More Vulnerable

Vulnerable

Less Vulnerable

0

27	24	37	39
Views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, US, EU, China and Russia	Belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation	Perceptions of democracy	Trust in institutions

The indicators reveal major differences in views among ethnicities in Kosovo's population, with Kosovo Albanian citizens viewing more favorably NATO, US, EU, while Kosovo Serb citizens view less favorably Western powers with positive opinion towards Russia and China. Three fourths

of citizens believe there is "fake news" in the media. Despite this awareness, 41% of citizens do not fact check the information they receive, respectively 28% of them turn to family and friends and 13% check social media.[3] Perceptions of democracy among Kosovo citizens are vulnerable, with the

Kosovo Serb community trusting democracy only half as much as the Kosovo Albanian community. This result is in line with Kosovo Serbs' favorable views of Russia and China as opposed to Western powers. The trust in institutions indicator reveals that citizens are vulnerable.

Implications for Policy Changes

The rise of the usage of digital platforms including online portals, on one hand, has changed the way Kosovo's societal actors' access and communicate information, contributing to the democratization of this process. On the other hand, these same tools create an enabling environment for malicious domestic and foreign actors to undermine democratic values through spreading disinformation. If disinformation is not checked by those who are exposed to it, any form of it can cause public confusion, intensify political polarization, and weaken trust in the democratic values and system.

Moreover, being a daily part of the digital space, on a daily basis, citizens are bombarded with disinformation on topics of global importance, including climate change, gender equality, environment, democratic values, etc. Thus, disinformation is only exacerbating the way society handles these global challenges, while exposing people to contradictory and misleading information.

Accurate and sound information is a prerequisite for addressing these global challenges; therefore, addressing disinformation is an urgent necessity for Kosovo.

There is no one single solution to disinformation, yet, effective responses to it should have a multi-dimensional approach through policies, including laws and strategies, and civil society actions, among others. What are the potential implications of this analysis?

→ **First,** membership of Kosovo in NATO and the EU will enable Kosovo to strengthen institutional resiliency from foreign malign influence coming from Russia, China, Serbia and elsewhere.

→ **Second,** the introduction of media literacy classes in schools and universities will provide students with skills to identify information disord ers and contribute to greater individual resiliency to disinformation and foreign malign influence. Likewise, raising awareness on information disorders and tools to combat it among groups that are not enrolled in the education system is crucial for a comprehensive and inclusive institutional approach. Individual resiliency has the potential to positively shape the information and media space.

→ **Third,** a consolidated legal framework on cyber-security would pave the way for the establishment of sustainable institutional mechanisms to monitor and combat foreign malign influence.

→ **Fourth,** strengthening the capacities of the self-regulatory body of online media – Press Council in Kosovo – would help address on a more timely basis all the complaints received and to conduct proactive monitoring of online media. The latter serves as a safeguarding mechanism in terms of prevention of the spread of disinformation.

→ **Fifth,** cooperation and partnerships between the private sector, civil society, and government institutions and digital platforms will improve the resiliency of digital space from disinformation and foreign malign influence. In particular, these partnerships will serve as important identification mechanisms of information disorders; thus, helping to prevent disinformation spread through monitoring and fact-checking.

→ **Six,** information integrity in Kosovo would benefit from civil society organizations' expansion of their work to improve citizens' critical thinking, especially with the youth. Their cooperation with the media to improve journalists' fact-checking capacities is also important.

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1 Media Environment Domain

Total vulnerability score:

46 /100

The Index reveals that the Media Environment is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence**,** scoring 46/100. This domain, being the most vulnerable among the three Index domains, captures the prevalence and availability of disinformation in Kosovar media, the capacity of institutions to manage disinformation including media and the role of Facebook, and public resiliency to misinformation and disinformation. In particular, this domain includes: (1) media freedom, (2) prevalence/ availability of disinformation to the public, (3) capacity to manage disinformation, and (4) public resiliency to mis/disinformation.

First, the capacity to manage mis/disinformation is vulnerable, scoring 59/100. According to experts' opinion, the capacity of institutions, in particular

the media, to manage the threat from disinformation is perceived as low. Similarly, the effectiveness of Facebook to control disinformation has been considered weak/nonexistent, mainly due to lack of a fact-checking partner in Kosovo, until recently. Currently, there are 1.1 million social media users, with Facebook being the largest platform used in the country.[4] Starting June 2022, Meta launched its local third party-fact-checking program in Kosovo – Kryptometri.[5] According to this announcement, this program will improve the quality of News Feed posts, where Facebook will remove accounts and content that violates its communication standards or marketing policy. Additionally, while Kosovo's high internet penetration is beneficial to citizens, it can also serve as a vehicle for spreading disinformation. There are only a few independent fact checking portals in the country, owned by local civil society organizations, where stories are debunked.[6]

Second, the prevalence and availability of disinformation to the public through the digital platforms

is a serious issue across Kosovo. The Index reveals this indicator as vulnerable, scoring 47/100. According to experts' opinions disinformation is considered a more serious threat in the digital space as compared to traditional media, including public and private television channels. Supportive of these experts' opinion is the NDI poll data which reveals that traditional TV stations are the most trusted source of information.[7] Overall, the proliferation of online platforms and the lack of institutional capacities has made it more difficult to ensure safety of online users. Online media are self-regulated through the Press Council of Kosovo.[8] However, the capacities of the Press Council of Kosovo to conduct ex-ante monitoring of online content and to review all complaints received, are deficient. Additionally, the Council does not have binding powers over its decisions; thus, limiting its functionality. The media environment deteriorates during polarizing events, especially during elections, as people following specific agendas are buying their domains in digital platforms to share mis/disinformation.[9] Given this context, spread of disinformation becomes easier.

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4 NDI Report. (2022). "*Information Integrity in Kosovo: Assessment of the Political Economy of Disinformation*" Available at https://www.ndi.org/publi-cations/information-integrity-kosovo-assessment-political-economy-disinformation

5 Kallxo.com. (2022) "*Kryptometri do të verifikojë faktet e publikimeve në Facebook dhe Instagram*" Online media article. Available at https://kallxo.com/gjate/krypometri-do-te-verifikoje-faktet-e-publikimeve-ne-facebook-dhe-instagram/

6 These portals include hybrid.info and kryptometri. The latest allows citizens to inform them about any stories they want to check by tagging krypto-metri on Facebook and Twitter.

7 NDI Kosovo Public Opinion Survey April 2021

8 For more information see the website of the Press Council in Kosovo https://presscouncil-ks.org/

9 Interview with Getoarbë Mulliqi. Director of Association of Journalists of Kosovo. 29 June, 2022.

Third, the education system does not prepare Kosovar citizens to identify information disorders; thus, contributing to weak public resiliency to mis/disinformation.[10] The Index reveals this indicator as vulnerable, scoring 45/100. Both, pupils of all ages and students (apart from journalism students), are not taught any media literacy classes.[11] It is important to note that the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year-olds' ability to read, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges amongst others, has ranked 15-year-old students in Kosovo as the lowest in the region.[12]

10 All experts interviewed.
11 Interview with Dren Gerguri, University of Prishtina Assistant Professor. 23 May, 2022.
12 OECD, PISA 2018 results. Available at https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm

2 Political Landscape Domain

Total vulnerability score:

44.75 /100

The Index reveals that the Political Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and malign foreign influence, scoring 44.75/100. This domain captures attitudes and the behaviors of the institutional leaders (President, Head of Parliament, and Prime Minister), institutional capacity, vulnerability during everyday politics and elections, and institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation. This domain includes four indicators: (1) attitudes and behavior of political leaders, (2) institutional capacity, (3) vulnerability during everyday politics/elections, and (4) institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation.

First, the threat from foreign malign influence is considered a major challenge facing Kosovo institutions and democracy overall.[13] The institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation is the most vulnerable indicator in the domain of political landscape, scoring 61/100; thus, indicating a

weak legal/institutional framework or lack thereof. Similarly, if foreign malign efforts were ramped up to destabilize Kosovo, the institutional capacity to respond is perceived as low.[14]

Second, the indicator on vulnerability during everyday politics/elections scores 49/100. Disinformation narratives during elections and everyday politics are a considered common practice.[15] Most disinformation narratives in Kosovo exploit societal divisions using digital content as fodder. The most polarized societal issues in Kosovo include the Dialogue with Serbia and border demarcation with Montenegro.[16] CSO monitoring data shows that large amounts of disinformation are spread around these issues in the digital space.[17] Additionally, a lot of disinformation is also spread about the establishment of the Specialist Chambers Court, an issue on which society holds highly polarized views, thus again providing rich fodder for disinformation on a "hot button" issue where there is already highly divided social opinion.

Third, the attitudes and behavior of political leaders' indicator is vulnerable, scoring 35/100; yet, it is important to highlight that it

is less vulnerable when compared to the institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation and vulnerability during elections and everyday politics. This indicator assesses the position of political leaders towards the USA, NATO, EU, China, Russia, and Serbia, and the extent to which their actions and statements have lived up to democratic norms. The analysis depicts the most tenuous relations of the Kosovar political leader with Serbia, followed by Russia and China and the least tenuous with the USA, followed by EU and NATO.

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13 All experts interviewed for this Index (see the list of experts interviewed) agreed that foreign disinformation is a major threat for Kosovo's democracy.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 D4D (2022). "*Information Disorder: Its Impact on the Information of Citizens*" Monitoring Report.

3 Public Perception Domain

Total vulnerability score:

31.75 /100

The Index reveals that the Public Perception domain is vulnerable to disinformation and malign foreign influence and scores *31.75/100*. This domain captures views of Kosovo citizens in regards to relations of Kosovo with other countries, their beliefs in democracy and their ability to distinguish credible information from misinformation and disinformation. It includes four concrete indicators including: (1) Views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, US, EU, Russia and China; (2) Belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation; (3) Perceptions of democracy; and (4) trust in institutions. The sources used in this domain include data from NDI national and regional polls.

The above bar chart shows the overall score for each indicator, though it is important to understand that data segregation by gender and ethnicity plays a significant role in preparing better - targeted policies. This becomes even more important in the context of Kosovo's multiethnic society; thus, in the section below, each indicator is discussed taking into consideration data segregation by gender and ethnicity.

First, the indicator on views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, US, EU, China and Russia is less vulnerable, scoring 27/100. But, data segregation by ethnicity depicts major differences in views; Kosovo Albanian citizens view more favorably NATO, US, EU and the majority would vote pro a referendum for joining the EU and NATO, while Kosovo Serb citizens view less favorably Western powers and the majority would not vote for joining either the EU and NATO. Differing from Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs opinion about Russia and China is positive. This, given the level of vulnerability to disinformation, is significantly higher among the Kosovo Serb community compared to Kosovo Albanian community. Moreover, data segregation by gender reveals no differences in views and voting among women and men on this indicator.

Second, belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation indicator reveals that citizens are less vulnerable, scoring 24/100. This result shows that three-fourths of citizens believe there is fake news in the media and they could identify conspiracy theories related to COVID19. Despite this awareness, 41% of citizens do not fact check the information they receive, respectively 28% of them turn to family and friends and 13% check social media.[18] Data segregation by ethnicity depicts small differences among Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs, and other communities (Bosnian, Goran, Turkish, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian). The least vulnerable group of citizens belongs to the Kosovo Serb community (22/100), followed by Kosovo Albanian community (25/100), and other communities (29/100). The differences in beliefs between men and women are also not large; women's respondent score is 25/100, while for men it is 23/100.

Third, perceptions of democracy among Kosovo citizens are vulnerable, scoring 37/100. Polls indicate that Kosovars have a high degree of support for democracy overall.[19] Yet, data segregation by ethnicity reveals slight differences among ethnicities. Other ethnicities (Bosnian, Goran, Turkish, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian) have better perceptions of democracy (34/100), followed by Kosovo Albanians (38/100) and Kosovo

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18 NDI Report. (2022). "Information Integrity in Kosovo: Assessment of the Political Economy of Disinformation" Available https://www.ndi.org/publica-tions/information-integrity-kosovo-assessment-political-economy-disinformation
19 NDI Public Opinion Polls Survey 2019 and 2021.

Serbs (43/100). This result is in line with Kosovo Serbs' favorable views of Russia and China as opposed to Western powers. On the other hand, disaggregated data by gender depicts similar perceptions of democracy among women (38/100) and men (37/100) of all communities living in the country.

Fourth, the trust in institutions indicator reveals that citizens are vulnerable, scoring 39/100. This indicator measures the views of citizens towards institutions, including the president, parliament, government, prime minister, police, media, civil society, political parties, army, judiciary, and independent institutions. No major differences are shown among women and men of all communities.

However, data segregation by ethnicity reveals major differences between Kosovo Albanians and other communities (Bosnian, Goran, Turkish, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian), on one side, and the Kosovo Serb community, on the other side. Trust in institutions among Kosovo Serbs citizens (66/100) is half of that as compared to the trust in institutions among Kosovo Albanian citizens (38/100) and citizens of other communities (37/100). These results are in line with lower trust in institutions that Kosovo Serb citizens have and their favoring views towards Russia and China as compared to the US, NATO, and EU.

Overall, the Index reveals public perception as vulnerable towards disinformation and foreign malign influence. First, ethnicity disaggregated data shows major differences in views towards Western powers, on one hand, and Russia and China, on the other hand. These differences lie mostly between the Kosovo Albanian community and other communities versus the Kosovo Serb community living in the country. Thus, the analysis implies that the Kosovo Serb community living in the country is more vulnerable to disinformation, as compared to Kosovo Albanian community and other communities. Two key explanatory factors behind this include the Serbian language and the cultural connection with Serbians and Russians. Second, gender disaggregated data across all indicators of this domain does not show any major differences among women and men.

Information integrity challenges in Kosovo

It is highly alarming "that the EU accession countries in the Western Balkans are being hit particularly hard by foreign interference and disinformation campaigns originating from Russia and China..."

(The European Parliament Resolution, 6 July 2022).[20]

Disinformation, understood as the deliberate dissemination of false information, is spreading worldwide and becoming a more complex phenomenon. In a functioning democracy, credible information plays a key role in government transparency, thus any lack of information integrity threatens citizens' ability to monitor government actions and to hold their government accountable. Along the same lines, amplification of disinformation among inhabitants of a community can sow confusion, while endangering the security of that particular community, and beyond.

It is the increased usage of digital platforms and the devastating COVID 19 pandemic that have accelerated the spread of disinformation across countries. A number of academic and policy studies have analyzed this major concern and its impact to democracy and national security

worldwide, as well as attempts to create a "post-truth" era in relation to public health during the pandemic.[21]

Two of the most recent examples of worldwide intensive spread of disinformation in digital platforms are related to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. During the lockdown period of March-April 2020, people were unable to move freely; and they more frequently used the internet to find and share information about the pandemic leading to more than 500 million tweets and exceeding, by a large margin, other related news on google.[22] Much of the information disseminated was misleading, skewed and unreliable. Thus, a number of high-profile decision makers, including the President of the European Commission- Ursula Von Der Leyen, acknowledged the presence of such disinformation while addressing social media users through a video where

20 European Parliament resolution of 06 July 2022 on the 2021 Commission Report on Kosovo. Article 41. Available at https://www.europarl.europa. eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0285_EN.html
21 Das., R. and Ahmed., W. (2021). "*Rethinking Fake News: Disinformation and Ideology during the time of COVID-19 Global Pandemic*". SAGE Journal Publishing.
    Colomina, C., Sanchez Margalef., and Youngs., R. (2021). "*The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human right in the world*". Directorate- General for External Policies. Policy Department. European Parliament.
    Sarts., J. (2020). "*Disinformation as a Threat to National Security*" Springer Link. Available at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-5876-4_2
    McKay,. S. and Tenove., Ch. (2020) "*Disinformation as a Threat to Deliberative Democracy*" Political Research Quarterly. Sage Journal. Available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1065912920938143
    Tenove., Ch. (2020). "*Protecting Democracy from Disinformation: Normative Threats and Policy Responses*" The International Journal of Press/ Politics. Available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1940161220918740
22 Wang. X., Zhang. M., Fan. W., and Zhao. K., (2022). "*Understanding the spread of COVID-19 misinformation on social media: The effects of topics and a political leader's nudge*" Journal Association Information Technology.

she stated **"... I am worried that those behind these claims exploit peoples' fears about the virus just to make money..."**[23]. This video, amongst many other videos and press releases of public figures, presented an attempt at the highest levels of EU decision making to debunk COVID 19 and vaccine related misinformation and disinformation.

Moreover, disinformation has been utilized by the Russian government as a tool in its attack on Ukraine,[24] as well as across the Western Balkans. Russia has used a diverse strategy to introduce and spread false and distorted narratives across the world while using fake accounts and anonymous websites to advance its own state interests.

Unfortunately, disinformation continues to be widespread in many countries and the motive behind its proliferation is often political and/or economic in nature. First, disinformation can take place through foreign malign influence (foreign actor(s) pushing domestic agendas. Disinformation campaigns from foreign malign actors continue to threaten well-established democracies, as it has been noted by the US President Biden:

"Russia has operationalized the concept of perpetual adversarial competition in the information environment by encouraging the development of disinformation and propaganda ecosystem".[25]

Second, disinformation can take place at the domestic level by a domestic actor in order to undermine political opponents and/or push specific agendas (domestic actors to a domestic audience). Third, disinformation can be spread for the sole purpose of making a profit; this category is known as lucrative disinformation.[26] A recent example of this form of disinformation is related to vaccines, in particular, disinformation spread about one vaccine being better than the other in terms of producing less negative health consequences. Fourth, disinformation can also take place to serve ideological purposes of specific groups.

No country is immune to disinformation of any form, Kosovo being no exception; thus, effective responses are key to addressing and combating it. Kosovo is subject to disinformation from malign foreign actors like Russia, China, and Russia's proxy in the region, Serbia.[27] The European Parliament also notes that Kosovo is subject to disinformation campaigns and foreign malign hybrid activities, in particular those from Russia and China, that aim to weaken the EU perspective of the region, including Kosovo.[28] Thus far, disinformation is acknowledged as a fundamental challenge to our democracy and national security.[29]

However, neither Kosovo institutions, nor other societal actors have done any situational analysis to assess the level of disinformation vulnerability. Thus, the first step towards protecting the country's institutions and society from disinformation and foreign malign influence should be to assess the state of play and identify the domains where the country is most vulnerable. This will provide data and information for the responsible governmental actors to prepare evidence-based interventions towards combating them. Therefore, Democracy Plus (D+), supported by NDI in Kosovo, has

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23 COVID-19: President von der Leyen on disinformation. 31 March 2020. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZooWOdU1xg

24 OECD (2022). "*Policy Responses: Ukraine Tackling the Policy Challenges*" Policy Paper. Available at https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/disinformation-and-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-37186bde/

25 U.S. Department of State. Disarming Disinformation: Our Shared Responsibility. Press Release. Available at https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/

26 Lucrative disinformation refers to disinformation for financial benefits.

27 Interview with Perparim Kryeziu. Spokesperson of the Government. 19 August, 2022.

28 European Parliament resolution of 06 July 2022 on the 2021 Commission Report on Kosovo. Article 43. Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0285_EN.html

29 Interview with Ehat Miftaraj. Director of Kosovo Law Institute. 16 May, 2022.
Interview with Demush Shasha. Director of EPIK Institute. 23 May, 2022.
Interview with Shpat Balaj. Researcher at QKSS. 31 May, 2022.
Interview with Blerim Rexha. University of Prishtina Professor. 25 May, 2022.

prepared this Vulnerability Index of Disinformation. It is important to mention that NDI is one of the most important external partners of the government to assess, discuss and combat disinformation, through the Information Integrity Forum.[30]

This Index offers a comprehensive picture of the vulnerability level for three domains, including Public Perception, Political Landscape, and Media Environment. The below section discusses major findings, followed by analysis for each domain separately.

We hope that the Vulnerability Index of Disinformation in Kosovo will stimulate the government to prioritize the need to monitor and combat any form of disinformation, thus, protecting democracy and the national security of our country.

The critical challenge of cyber security. Kosovo institutions have faced cyber-attacks from time to time, the most critical challenges to our communication and information systems. The most recent cyber-attacks targeting Kosovo institutions took place during the first week of September, 2022 and came from outside the country.[31] During this time, neighboring countries, Albania and North Macedonia have also been faced with cyber-attacks to their information systems.[32] Thus far, the Kosovo government is in the process of public consultations for the current draft-law on cyber security, according to which an Agency for Cyber Security will be established. Currently, this draft-law is in the phase of public consultations.[33] However, cyber security was not included as part of the newly adopted National Security Strategy (2022-2027).[34] In the latter, the term cybersecurity is only mentioned once as part of the section covering digital transformation. Overall, there is a lack of a consolidated policy on cyber-security. Moreover, there are no institutional sustainable mechanisms in place to monitor and combat disinformation, rather there are only ad hoc mechanisms established depending on the situation at risk (e.g., on an ad-hoc basis).[35]

Malign foreign influence from Russia. The government decision on car plates reciprocity on 20 September, 2021[36] is a stark example of the impact foreign malign influence can have on the national security of Kosovo. Following this decision on car plates, propaganda, disinformation and fake news from Serbia were spread in the northern municipalities aimed at escalation of the situation in the ground, in majority Serbian communities, stoking fears that the Kosovo Security Forces would enter these majority-Serbian areas. However, the government, in close coordination with international allies, successfully coordinated all national security mechanisms, preventing escalation of the situation on the ground. According to an organization that monitors online portals, this government decision was followed with the highest number of disinformation and misinformation in the digital space during the year.[37] Additionally, various government institutions debunked such disinformation while issuing press releases and stating that Kosovo Security Forces had no intention to intervene in the north.[38] Yet, this remains a robust example of how dangerous malign foreign disinformation from Russia and Serbia can be to Kosovo's national security and showcases the necessity to have consolidated mechanisms against disinformation in place.

Interview with Dren Gerguri, University of Prishtina Assistant Professor. 23 May, 2022.

30 Interview with Perparim Kryeziu. Spokesperson of the Government. 19 August, 2022.
    Information Integrity Forum aims to facilitate the internal dialogue amongst key stakeholders on issues that need to be addressed. Through constructive discussions and dialogue that are going to be the starting point of this forum, NDI aims to initiate talks on possible solutions for the problems of the media environment in Kosovo.

31 Epoka e Re. (2022). "*Cyber Attack on Kosovo Institutions*". Online media article. Available at https://www.epokaere.com/sulm-kibernetik-ndaj-institucioneve-te-kosoves/

32 Euronews Albania. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in7U134m98I

33 Public Consultations Platform. Draft-law on Cyber Security. Available at https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/viewConsult.php?ConsultationID=40905 . Note: The draft-law at the time of INDEX publication might be at a different phase of lawmaking.

34 Republic of Kosovo. Strategy on National Security 2022-2027. Available at https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2-Strategjia-e-Sigurise-e-Kosoves-ENG.pdf

35 Interview with Perparim Kryeziu. Spokesperson of the Government. 19 August, 2022

36 Prior to this decision, vehicles with KS number plates could freely enter Serbia, while those with RKS plates had to change them at the border and receive provisional paper plates. The KS government's decision of 20 September 2021 instituted a reciprocal process for vehicles from Serbia entering Kosovo.

37 D4D (2022). "*Information Disorder: Its Impact on the Information of Citizens*" Monitoring Report.

38 Koha Ditore. (2021) "*The KSF denies reports that it is preparing for intervention in the north*" Online Media Article. Available at https://www.koha.net/arberi/289885/fsk-ja-demanton-raportimet-se-po-pergatitet-per-nderhyrje-ne-veri/

Furthermore, this Index reveals that key enabling environment factors to disinformation and foreign malign influence include the political party Serbian List, non-robust institutions, social polarization over issues of dialogue with Serbia and the Special Court, amongst others. According to the director of Association of Journalists of Kosovo, the lack of government cooperation with journalists serves as another important enabling factor for foreign disinformation to more easily spread through various communication channels, mainly through social media.[39] Overall, disinformation is produced related to topics that have a divisive nature and for which there is a social demand. These mainly include issues of political nature, such as the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and the Specialist Chamber Court.[40]

Kosovo remains steadfast in support for the West. It is important to highlight that the Index reveals that there is no evidence that Kosovo has undergone any changes to its pro-western orientation policy, meaning that the political landscape has not been vulnerable in its strategic orientation. Additionally, the NDI Public Opinion Poll (2021) shows that Kosovo public favorable views of US, NATO, EU are consistent, but they are declining

in favor of China and Russia as compared to previous years.[41] Yet, disaggregated data by ethnicity show a strong connection to ethnic differences; that is, those that favor western powers are generally Kosovo Albanians, while those that favor China and Russia are generally Kosovo Serbs.

Kosovo's high internet penetration. Moreover, one important factor that facilitates the penetration of misinformation and disinformation is the crowded online media market in Kosovo. The online media environment faces challenges in terms of financial sustainability, transparency and independence, thus being a breeding ground for disinformation, misinformation, and other inflammatory language to grow and spread.[42] They are self-regulated through the Press Council in Kosovo; however, the Press capacities to conduct ex-ante monitoring of online content and to review all complaints received, are deficient. The NDI survey data, which depicts that 38% of Kosovo citizens believe false stories are published online for financial interests or potential financial gains, supports this finding.[43] The lack of transparency and financial independence of the media can impair public opinion, political participation of citizens, and decision-making.

Additionally, whilst Kosovo's high internet penetration rate is beneficial to citizens, it can also serve as a vehicle for spreading disinformation. NDI data depicts that there are 1.1 million social media users in the country, with Facebook being the largest platform.[44] More precisely, Kosovo has the most Facebook users per capita in Europe.[45] However, Meta did not have a third party-fact checking program in Kosovo until mid-2022, but rather worked through other Albanian speaking fact-checkers from the Western Balkans. Starting June 2022, Meta launched its local fact-checking partner in Kosovo to identify misinformation and remove any information that violated its communication standards.[46] In the framework of this partnership, from July to October 2022, Krypometer debunked 206 articles that were shared in over 600 Facebook posts.[47] Therefore, the role of Facebook is immense in terms of preventing the spread of mis/disinformation; thus, partnerships with other digital platforms are a necessity in this fight against foreign malign influence and disinformation.

39 Interview with Getoarbë Mulliqi. Director of Association of Journalists of Kosovo. 29 June, 2022.
40 D4D (2022). "*Information Disorder: Its Impact on the Information of Citizens*" Monitoring Report.
41 NDI Public Opinion Poll Survey. April 2021.
42 NDI (2021). Monitoring Information Integrity Disorders in Kosovo. Opinion Piece. Available at https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/monitoring-information-integrity-disorders-kosovo
43 NDI Public Opinion Poll Survey. April 2021.
44 NDI Report. (2022). "Information Integrity in Kosovo: Assessment of the Political Economy of Disinformation" Available at https://www.ndi.org/publications/information-integrity-kosovo-assessment-political-economy-disinformation
45 Documentary: "Think like a fact-checker" produced by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo. 30 September, 2022. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQccXUlS8Ds
46 Kallxo.com.(2022) "*Kryptometri do të verifikojë faktet e publikimeve në Facebook dhe Instagram*" Online media article. Available at https://kallxo.com/gjate/krypometri-do-te-verifikoje-faktet-e-publikimeve-ne-facebook-dhe-instagram/
47 Interview with Kreshnik Gashi, Independent Fact Checker, Editor of Kallxo.com. 24 May, 2022.

ANNEX I

Key concepts

→ **Vulnerability Index:** A vulnerability index is a measure of the exposure of a population to some hazard. Typically, the index is a composite of multiple quantitative indicators that via some formula, delivers a single numerical result. [48]

→ **Vulnerability:** In the context of a state, this represents a susceptibility to harm from malign state or non-state actors, which can be domestic and foreign, based on the presence of either a single or of multiple deficiencies that can be exploited. [49]

→ **Information Disorders:** The sharing or developing of false information with or without the intent of harming and they are categorized as misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. [50]

→ **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological or social motivations. [51]

→ **Misinformation** is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. For example, individuals who do not know that a piece of information is false may spread it on social media in an attempt to be helpful. [52]

→ **Malinformation** is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere. [53]

→ **Foreign Malign Influence:** Foreign actors which use distraction and manipulation tactics to limit free expression and distort the democratic political environment.

→ **Digital Platforms:** Digital platforms refer to online spaces where an exchange of information takes place, such as Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Instagram, and TikTok, amongst others.

→ **Digital Space:** The concept of digital space utilized in this Index is as a broader concept compared to digital platforms and refers to all information spread digitally including platforms and online portals.

48 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Available at https://archive.unescwa.org/vulnerability-index
49 GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index 2021. Extended Methodology. November 2021. Available at www.vulnerabilityindex.org
50 Wardle,. C. and Derakhshan., H. (2017) *"Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making"* Council of Europe report.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.

ANNEX II

Methodology – Overarching Sources of Information

Vulnerability Index of Disinformation is based on 7 overarching data sources:

1

Opinion Polls

Representative opinion national and regional polls were conducted in the Republic of Kosovo in 2019, 2020, and 2021 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). A number of questions from the NDI surveys were used for the Index.

2

Expert Interviews

Democracy Plus developed a list of experts from civil society, academia, journalists and government officials. Each expert group (e.g., civil society, academia, and journalists) had at least 20% representation in the interviews. The list included 14 experts, 11 of whom were men and 3 of whom were women. A total of 13 were from the Albanian commu-

nity and one was from the Serbian community. Moreover, the interview included 28 questions and 3 out of 28 were open ended questions.

3

Desk Research

Desk research was conducted to find out whether there is a strategy or other mechanisms available that the government has utilized to manage disinformation, the information space and cyber threats.

4

V-Dem Index

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a research project conceptualizing and measuring democracy, based at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.[54]

5

Corruption Perceptions Index developed by Transparency International[55]

6

World Press Freedom Index developed by Reporters Without Borders[56]

7

Media Literacy Index developed by Open Society Institute Sofia and European Policies Initiative.[57]

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54   Varieties of Democracy. Available at https://www.v-dem.net/
55   Corruption Perception Index. Available at https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIyJbMhpjk-AIVz49oCR1i7QTrEAAYASAAE-gI_M_D_BwE
56   World Press Freedom Index Available at https://rsf.org/en/rsf%E2%80%99s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0
57   Media Literacy Index. Open Society Institute Sofia. Available at https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en

→ **Media Environment Domain**
(Indicators, Variables, and Variables' sources)

1

Media freedom

1.1 World Press Freedom Index

2

Prevalence/ availability of disinformation to the public

2.1 Trusted sources of information (Opinion Poll)

2.2 Some online news portal report false information (Opinion Poll)

2.3 Trusted information obtained from social media (Opinion Poll)

2.4 Most used social media (Opinion Poll)

2.5 Prevalence of disinformation in the Kosovo media environment (Expert Survey)

2.6 Seriousness of disinformation in Kosovo (Expert Survey)

2.7 Impact of disinformation in shifting attitudes in Kosovo (Expert Survey)

2.8 Rating of private television channels: how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo (Expert Survey)

2.9 Rating of digital space: how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo (Expert Survey)

2.10 Rating of public television channels: how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo (Expert Survey)

3 Capacity to manage disinformation

3.1 (a) Government (not) has sufficiently technologically skilled staff and resources to mitigate harm from cyber-security threats. (b) What type of content is covered in the legal framework to regulate the Internet? (V-Dem Index)

3.2 Effectiveness of institutions to combat disinformation (Expert Survey)

3.3 Effectiveness of Kosovo's current legal framework for dealing with disinformation (Expert Survey)

3.4 Kosovo institutions capability to effectively manage the threat to disinformation (Expert Survey)

3.5 Effectiveness of Facebook to manage the threat of disinformation on their platform in Kosovo (Expert Survey)

4 Public resiliency to mis/disinformation

4.1 Open Internet Society Scores

4.2 Capacity of the educational system to prepare the citizens of Kosovo to differentiate between real news and disinformation online (Expert Survey)

→ Political Landscape Domain

(Indicators, Variables, and Variables' sources)

1 — Perception towards attitudes and behaviors of political leaders from the perspective of foreign influence

1.1 Leading political representatives influenced foreign policy orientation of your country in the last five years (Expert Survey)

1.2 Most significant actors and their "worst" action or inaction, which led to increased country's vulnerability/ decreased our state resilience (Expert Survey)

1.3 Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, the tenacity of relations between Kosovo and Serbia/Russia/China/EU/NATO/USA (Expert Survey)

1.4 The extent to which the actions of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizens' democratic ideals (Expert Survey)

1.5 The extent to which the statements of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizens' democratic ideals (Expert Survey)

2 — Institutional credibility

2.1 Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International)

2.2 Checks and Balances (V-Dem)

2.3 Civil Liberties and Non-discrimination (V-Dem)

3

Vulnerability during everyday politics/ elections

3.1 Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)

3.2 The prevalence of disinformation narratives during elections in Kosovo (Expert Surveys)

3.3 The prevalence of disinformation narratives during everyday politics in Kosovo (Expert Surveys)

3.4 Most divisive political issues in Kosovo (Expert Surveys)

4

Institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation

4.1 The preparedness of government of Kosovo to respond to foreign disinformation (Expert Survey)

4.2 If foreign disinformation efforts to destabilize Kosovo were ramped up tomorrow, the level of Kosovo performance in managing the threat (Expert Survey)

4.3 Kosovo's legal and political institutions to manage cyber threats (Expert Survey)

4.4 The significance of the threat posed by disinformation when compared to other challenges (Expert Survey)

4.5 Availability of resources (governmental, private, or non-profit) for citizens to check the veracity of potentially misleading claims (Expert Survey)

→ Public Perceptions Domain
(Indicators, Variables, and Variables' sources)

1
Views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, EU, US, China and Russia

1.1 Opinion about the European Union (Opinion Polls)

1.2 Referendum for EU membership (Opinion Polls)

1.3 Opinion about the United States (Opinion Polls)

1.4 Opinion about NATO (Opinion Polls)

1.5 Opinion about Russia (Opinion Polls)

1.6 Opinion about China (Opinion Polls)

1.7 Country or international institution that supports your country the most (Opinion Polls)

1.8 Referendum for NATO membership (Opinion Polls)

2
Belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation

2.1 Belief there is "false news" in the media (Opinion Polls)

2.2 Believe in the following statements: (1) Coronavirus is not a virus but it is just a regular flu; (2) People who get vaccinated will not be able to have children; (3) Coronavirus was developed by Chinese scientists; (4) Coronavirus was developed by US scientists; (5) Coronavirus was created to cause deaths and reduce the global population (Opinion Polls)

3 Perceptions of democracy

3.1 The importance of becoming a fully functioning democratic country (Opinion Polls)

3.2 It's possible for a western-style democracy, including acceptance of diversity and inclusion (minority rights, LGBTI rights, migrants' rights, etc.) to function in your society (Option Polls)

3.3 Statements: (a) Democracy is more important than quality of life, (b) Democracy and quality of life go hand-in-hand, (c) Quality of life is more important than democracy (Opinion Polls)

3.4 Statements: (a) Regardless of many challenges, democracy is the most preferred political system for our country; (b) The best option for our country is to have a strong leader followed by everyone, because only a "strong hand" can lead our country in the right direction" (Opinion Polls)

3.5 Democracy is a failed governing system used by the West to impose on countries in transition certain values aimed to masquerading their geopolitical interests (Opinion Polls)

4 Trust in institutions

4.1 Ranking of the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted institution
President 1-5 / Parliament 1-5 / Government 1-5 / Prime Minister 1-5 / Political Parties 1-5 / Army 1-5 / Judiciary 1-5 / Police 1-5 / Media / Civil Society / Independent Institutions (Opinion Polls)

ANNEX III

Code Book

The following is an overview of the data utilized to develop the inaugural (2022) version of the Kosovo Vulnerability Index. It is focused primarily on three broad dimensions of vulnerability, which are further broken down via indicators containing survey and aggregate data relevant to the dimensions in question. Specifically, the three dimensions included in the assessment are (1) the Media Environment, (2) the Political Landscape, and (3) Public Perception. For the majority of the included data points data was taken from the most recent year available for each source, with the year of all data sources and surveys detailed next to each included question. Each dimension is further divided among four additional indicators, which each total a score of 100. Total scores among these indicators are added together and divided by the four indicators to get the final output for each dimension.

The two primary inputs are surveys conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which serve as the basis for the Public Attitudes indicator, as well as D+ Expert Surveys conducted by researchers at Democracy Plus, which serve to bolster the Political Landscape and Media Environment indicators. Additional data is sourced from several other indices and reports. Data taken from these alternative sources are similarly labeled next to each included question.

Public Attitudes

The Public Attitudes dimension is drawn entirely from survey data procured by the NDI. The two surveys relied upon for this inaugural version of the Index are the questions included for citizens of Kosovo in the NDI's 2021 Regional Poll and the 2021 version of the NDI's Kosovo Country Poll. The Public Attitudes dimension is divided into four equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each variable is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100. The specific questions asked are below.

1 Citizen perceptions of foreign countries and entities

Question One: What is your opinion about China?
   Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
   Scale: 1/5 – (1 is Very Favorable and 5 is Very Unfavorable)

Question Two: What is your opinion about Russia?
   Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
   Source: 1/5 – (1 is Very Favorable and 5 is Very Unfavorable)

Question Three: What is your opinion about the European Union?
   Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
   Scale: 1/5 – (1 is Very Unfavorable and 5 is Very Favorable)

Question Four: What is your opinion about the United States?
   Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
   Scale: 1/5 – (1 is Very Unfavorable and 5 is Very Favorable)

Question Five: What is your opinion about NATO?
   Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
   Scale: 1/5 – (1 is Very Unfavorable and 5 is Very Favorable)

Question Six: If the referendum for EU membership of your country was held this Sunday, how would you vote?
   Source: NDI Regional Poll
   Scale: 1-4 – Absolutely in Favor/Probably in Favor/Probably Against/Absolutely Against

Question Seven: If the referendum for NATO membership was held this Sunday, how would you vote?
   Source: NDI Regional Poll
   Scale: 1-4 – Absolutely in Favor/Probably in Favor/Probably Against/Absolutely Against

2 Belief in Conspiracy Theories and Disinformation

Question One: Do you think some online news websites/portals ever report false information or not?
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: 1-3 – No, they do not do it/Yes, occasionally/Yes, regularly*

Question Two: Do you believe the following statement: "Coronavirus is a virus but it is just a regular flu"
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: True/False – 1/2*

Question Three: Do you believe the following statement: "People who get vaccinated will not be able to have children"
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: True/False – 1/2*

Question Four: Do you believe the following statement: "Coronavirus was developed by Chinese scientists"
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: True/False – 1/2*

Question Five: Do you believe the following statement: "Coronavirus was developed by US scientists"
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: True/False – 1/2*

Question Six: Do you believe the following statement: "Coronavirus was created to cause deaths and reduce the global population"
> *Source:* NDI Kosovo Poll
> *Scale: True/False – 1/2*

3 Perceptions of Democracy

Question One: How important is it to you that your country becomes a fully functioning democracy?
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – Very Important/ Important/Neither Important nor Unimportant/Unimportant/Very Unimportant

Question Two: To what extent do you agree that Western democracies, which assume acceptance of diversity and inclusion (minority rights, LGBTI rights, migrants' rights and similar), are possible to function in your society?
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – Fully agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree nor don't agree/Somewhat don't agree/Absolutely don't agree

Question Three: Which statement do you agree with most – 1. Democracy is more important than quality of life – 2. Democracy and quality of life go hand-in-hand – 3. Quality of life is more important than democracy.
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-3 – Statement 1/Statement 2/Statement 3

Question Four: To what extent do you agree with the following statements: "Regardless of many challenges, democracy is the most preferred political system for our country"

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – Absolutely don't agree/Somewhat don't agree/Neither agree nor don't agree/Somewhat agree/Fully agree

Question Five: To what extent do you agree with the following statements: "The best option for our country is to have a strong leader followed by everyone, because only a 'strong hand' can lead our country in the right direction"

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – Fully agree/Somewhat agree/Neither agree nor don't agree/Somewhat don't agree/Absolutely don't agree

4 Trust in Institutions

Question One: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: President

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Two: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Parliament

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Three: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Government

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Four: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Prime Minister

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Five: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Political Parties

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Six: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Army

    Source: NDI Regional Poll

    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Seven: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Judiciary
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Eight: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Police
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Nine: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Media
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Ten: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Civil Society
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Question Eleven: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Independent Institutions
> *Source:* NDI Regional Poll
> *Scale:* 1-5 – (1 is Very Dissatisfied and 5 is Very Satisfied)

Political Landscape

The Political Landscape dimension utilizes data from several sources, including the Varieties of Democracy Index, Corruption Perceptions Index, and Expert Surveys conducted by the Democracy Plus research team. The Political Landscape dimension is divided into four equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each variable is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100.

1 Attitudes and Behavior of Political Leaders

Question One: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
Serbia
> *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
> *Scale:* 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very
> normalized

Question Two: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
Russia

    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very normalized

Question Three: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
China

    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very normalized

Question Four: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
USA

    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very normalized

Question Five: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
NATO

    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very normalized

Question Six: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and:
EU

    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – Very tenuous/Somewhat tenuous/Neutral/Somewhat normalized/Very normalized

Question Seven: To what extent have the actions of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizen's democratic ideals?
    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Less Democratic and 5 is More Democratic)

Question Eight: To what extent have the statements of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizen's democratic ideals?
    Source: D+ Expert Survey
    Scale: 1-5 – (1 is Less Democratic and 5 is More Democratic)

② Institutional Capacity

Question One: Country Rating on the Corruption Perception Index
    Source: Transparency International 2021[58]
    Scale: 0/100

Question Two: Horizontal Accountability Score (To what extent is the ideal of horizontal government accountability achieved?)
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2021[59]
    Scale: 0/1 – (Low to High)

Question Three: Executive Oversite Score (If executive branch officials were engaged in unconstitutional, illegal, or unethical activity, how likely is it that a body, other than the legislature, such as a comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman, would question or investigate them and issue an unfavorable decision or report?)
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2021
    Scale: 0/4 – Unlikely/Very uncertain/Likely/Certain or nearly certain

Question Four: Compliance with the Judiciary Score (How often would you say the government complies with important decisions by other courts with which it disagrees?)
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2021
    Scale: 0/4 – Seldom/About half the time/Usually/Always

Question Five: Legislative Constraints on the Executive Score (To what extent are the legislature and government agencies, comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman capable of questioning, investigating, and exercising oversight over the executive?)
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2021
    Scale: 0/1 (Low to High)

Question Six: Deliberative Democracy Score (To what extent is the ideal of deliberative democracy achieved?)
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
    Scale: 0/1 (Low to High)

Question Seven: Equal Distribution of Resources Score
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
    Scale: 0/1 – (Low to High)

Question Eight: Exclusion by Socio-Economic Group Score
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
    Scale: 0/1 – (Low to High)

Question Nine: Social Group Score
    Source: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
    Scale: 0/1 – (Low to High)
Question Ten: Political Group Score

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58 https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/ksv
59 https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/codebookv111.pdf

Source: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
Scale: 0/1 – (Low to High)

(3) Vulnerability During Everyday Politics/Elections

Question One: How prevalent are disinformation narratives during elections in Kosovo?
>   *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>   *Scale: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/ Common/Very Common*

Question Two: How prevalent are disinformation narratives during everyday politics in Kosovo?
>   *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>   *Scale: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/ Common/Very Common*

Question Three: Polarization in Society Score (How would you characterize the differences of opinions on major political issues in society?)
>   *Source: Varieties of Democracy*
>   *Scale: 0/4 – Serious Polarization/Moderate Polarization/Medium Polarization/Limited Polarization/No Polarization*

Question Four: Party Dissemination of False Information: Domestic (How often do major political parties and candidates for office use social media to disseminate misleading viewpoints or false information to influence their own population?)
>   *Source: Varieties of Democracy*
>   *Scale: 0/4 – Extremely Often/Often/About half the time/Rarely/Never, or almost never*

(4) Institutional Capacity to Manage Foreign Disinformation

Question One: How prepared is the government of Kosovo to respond to foreign disinformation?
>   *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>   *Scale: 1/5 – Very Unprepared/Unprepared/Neutral/Somewhat Prepared/Very Prepared*

Question Two: If foreign disinformation efforts to destabilize Kosovo were ramped up tomorrow, how well would you expect Kosovo to perform in managing the threat?
>   *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>   *Scale: 1/5 – Very Poor/Poor/Acceptable/Good/Very Good*

Question Three: How well defined are Kosovo's legal and political institutions to manage cyber threats?
>   *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>   *Scale: 1/5 – Very Poor/Poor/Acceptable/Good/Very Good*

Question Four: When compared to the other challenges facing Kosovo, how significant is the threat posed by fake news/disinformation?

      Source: D+ Expert Survey

      Scale: 1/5 – Very Unsignificant/Unsignificant/Undecided/Significant/Very Significant

Question Five: Are resources (governmental, private, or non-profit) widely available for citizens to check the veracity of potentially misleading claims?

      Source: D+ Expert Survey

      Scale: No/Yes – 0/1

Media Environment

The Media Environment dimension utilizes data from several sources, including the Varieties of Democracy Index, World Press Freedom Index, PISA literacy scores, Eurostat survey, census data, and D+ Expert Surveys conducted by the research team. The Media Environment dimension is divided into four equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each indicator is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100.

1   Media Freedom

Question One: World Press Freedom Index Country Score

      Source: Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2021[60]

      Scale: 0/100

2   Prevalence/Availability of Disinformation to the Public

Question One: How prevalent is disinformation in the Kosovo media environment?

      Source: D+ Expert Survey

      Scale: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/ Common/Very Common

Question Two: How serious an issue has disinformation been in Kosovo?

      Source: D+ Expert Survey

      Scale: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

Question Three: How impactful has disinformation been in shifting attitudes in Kosovo?

      Source: D+ Expert Survey

      Scale: 1/5 – Very Unimpactful/Unimpactful/Neutral/Impactful/Very Impactful

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60 https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries

Question Four: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo: Private Television Channels
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

Question Five: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo: Public Television Channels
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

Question Six: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo: Social Media
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

3 Capacity to Manage Disinformation

Question One: Does the government have sufficiently technologically skilled staff and resources to mitigate harm from cyber-security threats?
     Source: Government Cyber Security Capacity – Varieties of Democracy Index 2021
     Scale: 0/4 – No/Not Really/Somewhat/Mostly/Yes

Question Two: What type of content is covered in the legal framework to regulate the Internet?
     Source: Internet Legal Regulatory Content – Varieties of Democracy Index 2021
     Scale: 0/4 – 0: The state can remove any content at will. 1: The state can remove most content, and the law protects speech in only specific, and politically uncontroversial contexts. 2: The legal framework is ambiguous. The state can remove some politically sensitive content, while others are protected by law. 3: The law protects most political speech, but the state can remove especially politically controversial content. 4: The law protects political speech, and the state can only remove content if it violates well-established legal criteria.

Question Three: How effective have the government's efforts to combat disinformation been?
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 - Not Effective/Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very Effective/Extremely Effective

Question Four: How effective is Kosovo's current legal framework for dealing with disinformation?
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 - Not Effective/Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very Effective/Extremely Effective
Question Five: Are Kovoso's institutions currently capable of effectively managing the threat of disinformation?
     Source: D+ Expert Survey
     Scale: 1/5 - Not Capable/Somewhat Capable/Capable/Very Capable/Extremely Capable

Question Six: How effective has Facebook (or other social media companies) managed the threat of disinformation on their platform in Kosovo?

> *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>
> *Scale: 1/5 - Not Effective/Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very Effective/Extremely Effective*

4 Public Resiliency to Mis/Disinformation

Question One: How well does the education system prepare Kosovar citizens to differentiate between real and fake statements online?

> *Source: D+ Expert Survey*
>
> *Scale: 1/5 - Very Poor/Poor/Acceptable/Good/Very Good*

Question Two: Freedom House Country Score

> *Source: Freedom House 2021[61]*
>
> *Scale: 0/100*

Question Three: PISA Reading Score

> *Source: PISA Reading Score 2018[62]*
>
> *Scale: 0/600*

Question Four: PISA Scientific Score

> *Source: PISA Scientific Score 2018*
>
> *Scale: 0/600*

Question Five: PISA Math Score

> *Source: PISA Math Score 2018*
>
> *Scale: 0/600*

Question Six: Domestic population with a university degree

> *Source: 2011 Kosovo Census[63]*
>
> *Scale: Original Scale 0/600 – Rescaled to 2014 max country value (S. Korea – 86%)*

Question Seven: Trust in others (substituted with "how much do you trust people in your neighborhood?"

> *Source: Wollcome Global Monitor 2020[64]*
>
> *Scale: 0/100*

Question Eight: Level of E-Participation among Kosovar population[65]

> *Source: United Nations E-Participation Index – Substituted with mean value of neighboring states: Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia*
>
> *Scale: Original Scale 0/1 – Rescaled to 0/100*

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61 https://freedomhouse.org/country/kosovo/freedom-world/2022
62 https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_KSV.pdf
63 http://esk.rks-gov.net/rekos2011/?cid=1,92
64 https://wellcome.org/reports/wellcome-global-monitor-covid-19/2020
65 https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Participation-Index

Survey Controls

Education: How many years of school did you take to graduate?
>*Source: NDI Kovoso Poll*
>
>*Scale: 1/10 – No Education/Some years of elementary school/Elementary school/Some years of high school/High school/Student/Faculty/Master/Doctorate*

Age: Binned Age Variable
>*Source: NDI Kovoso Poll*
>
>*Scale: 1/6 – 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+*

Gender: Binary Gender Variable
>*Source: NDI Kovoso Poll*
>
>*Scale: 1/2 – Male/Female*

Ethnicity: Recoded Ethnicity Categories
>*Source: NDI Kovoso Poll*
>
>*Scale: 1/3 – Albanian/Serbian/Other*

Region: Country Regions
>*Source: NDI Kovoso Poll*
>
>*Scale: 1 – Pristina, 2 – Mitrovica, 3 – Prizreni, 4 – Peja, 5 – Ferizaj, 6 – Gjakova, 7 – Gjilani*

ANNEX IV

List of Expert Interviews[66]

1 Abit Hoxha, University of Agder in Norway

2 Blerim Rexha, University of Pristina

3 Dren Gërguri, University of Pristina

4 Demush Shasha, Epik Institute

5 Ehat Miftaraj, Kosovo Law Institute

6 Getoarbë Mulliqi, Association of Journalists of Kosovo

7 Fitim Gashi, Journalist

8 Jovana Radosavljevic, New Social Initiative

9 Kreshnik Gashi, Fact-Checker and Editor of Kallxo.com

10 Lulzim Peci, KIPRED

11 Rrezarta Delibashzade Krasniqi, Democracy for Development

12 Shpat Balaj, Kosovo Center for Security Studies

13 Shkëlzen Osmani, Fact-Checker

14 Visar Ymeri, Musine Kokolari Institute for Social Policy

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66 Alphabetical list of experts interviewed