



facebook

Meta



Pre-election Monitoring of Facebook in Slovak Information Space

What are this week's most popular posts
in the four bubbles across the Slovak Facebook?

Just three and a half years following the previous parliamentary elections, Slovakia finds itself on the precipice of a critical moment in its political trajectory. SMER-SSD party, which is, under the leadership of Robert Fico, leading as the frontrunner in pre-election polls, is surrounded by substantive concerns about the party's members entanglement in corruption,¹ disseminating disinformation and spreading pro-Kremlin narratives,² all while endorsing the suspension of military aid to Ukraine.³ Simultaneously, there's a surge in the popularity of extremist parties that in past harbored inclinations aligned with fascist ideologies.⁴ Within this complex landscape, prodemocratic parties that came to power in 2020 elections also maintain presence. Their tenure in power, however, can be characterized as tumultuous – marked by political battles and governmental crises resulting in changes in key government positions including the prime minister, finally resulting in a care-taker government named by the President in May 2023. The political instability further catalysed the feeling of insecurity among the population, fuelled by the Russian war against the neighbouring Ukraine.

As the nation inches closer to September 30th, a date set for the upcoming preliminary elections to the Slovak National Council, the political scene is anything but dormant. Even amidst the summer, where political discourse often takes a lighter tone, the campaign trail is in full swing.

While the political candidates fight hard for the voters, they are not the only ones shaping voters' decisions. Equally influential are the narratives that echo within the online information bubbles, in which citizens actively navigate on a daily basis. This is even more important to monitor and study given the increasing influence of disinformation narratives that have taken hold in the minds of the Slovak public.⁵

Leading up to the election date, GLOBSEC has committed to releasing a weekly *Pre-election Monitoring of Facebook in Slovak Information Space report*. This weekly update dissects key themes, influential actors, and notably, the most resonating posts in terms of reach across four distinct groups within Slovakia's most frequented social media platform - Facebook. These groups encompass Problematic Sources, Prodemocratic Actors, State Institutions, and the Hungarian Minority (for a comprehensive insight into the methodology, please refer to the Methodology section below).

During the week of August 5th to August 11th, 2023, the "Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Frauds - Police SR) along with the satirical site "Zomri" (Die) once again dominated the number of popular posts. Sources from the problematic spectrum rallied around a singular theme - the relationship between investigative journalist Monika Tódová and judge Pamela Záleská, disseminating various misinformation and manipulative narratives. Conversely, the Hungarian Minority group was dominated by cultural and historical themes from politicians, as well as posts centered around Christian themes.

All editions of the Facebook pre-election monitoring can be found on the [website](#).

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1 <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/23204019/police-detain-ex-top-cop-gaspar-again-fico-claims-his-party-is-victim-of-attack.html>,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/former-interior-minister-of-slovakia-charged-with-corruption-again/>
<https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/154892>

2 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-02/eu-diplomats-warn-on-slovakia-s-opposition-as-election-nears?in_source=embedded-checkout-banner

3 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/25/slovakia-russia-ukraine-robert-fico/>

4 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/slovak-far-right-with-neo-nazi-origins-eyes-government/>

5 <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publication/globsec-trends-2023-united-we-still-stand>

What is the extent of the reach achieved by the monitored Facebook groups?

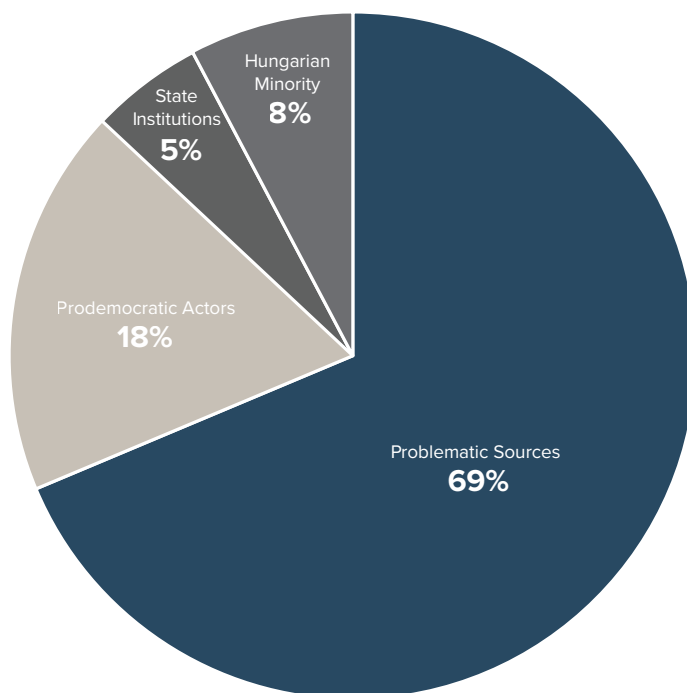
Over the course of the past week, it is evident that posts within the Problematic Sources group have once again garnered the highest level of engagement in terms of interactions, which include reactions, comments, and shares. An analysis of the reach of the most popular posts across the groups reveals a compelling trend: the top three posts originating from the Problematic Sources group collectively constitute a substantial 69% of the total engagement across all groups.

In stark contrast, the group with the lowest reach is that of State Institutions, accounting for a mere 5% of the overall engagement, despite substantial improvements in strategic public communication in recent years. A similar situation unfolds with the Hungarian minority's most popular posts,

registering an 8% reach, largely attributable to its narrower target audience. Prodemocratic actors represent the second most popular group, constituting 18% of the total interactions. However, this group is largely propelled by the satirical website "Zomri" (Die) which holds a significant role in shaping opinions within the group. Interestingly, despite their respective popularities, there is a substantial discrepancy, of up to 51 percentage points between the Problematic Sources and Prodemocratic Actors groups.

Intriguingly, the Problematic Sources group witnessed a slightly higher reach during the observed week compared to its usual performance. The uptick can be attributed to the coordinated communication of primarily one topic. Nevertheless, what remains consistent is their dominant influence, owed to their adeptness at capturing the attention of their target audience. They achieve this through discussions of polarizing subjects, utilization of simplified language, and strategic prompts to encourage content sharing.

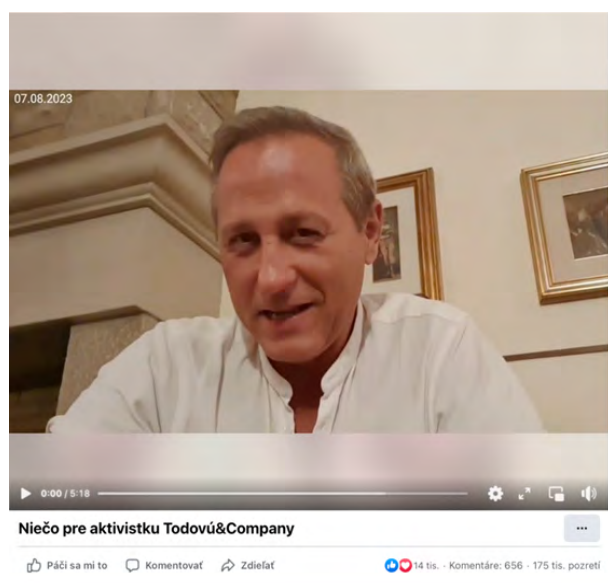
Share of each group in the total number of interactions



The graph was prepared by summing up the interactions of the top 3 posts in each monitoring group and then calculating the group's portion on the total number of interactions from all top posts in the monitoring

Problematic Sources

A video, released this week by former controversial investigative journalist Martin Daňo, has ignited discussion across various problematic sources. The paparazzi-like video revolves around shared holiday and the relationship between the well-known investigative journalist - Monika Tódová and the judge of the Specialized Criminal Court - Pamela Záleská, both of whom have dealt with corruption cases in their work. This video, alongside the narrative of a conflict of interest due to their relationship, which predominantly spread through the disinformation networks, were commented on by the journalist herself,⁶ as well as by the Editor-in-Chief of Tódová's home newspaper Denník N, Matúš Kostolný.⁷ The subject found its way into 12 of the 20 most popular posts this week (including the top 3 posts described below), amassing a total of over 87k interactions. Notably, a quarter of this engagement is attributed to the most popular video of the week shared by the page *Hrica Lubos*, generating nearly 22k interactions and making it the most viral video of the entire monitoring period. The privacy of journalists has gained heightened attention and importance particularly in the case of investigative journalists. The topic has become especially sensitive following the murder of Ján Kuciak, who had been involved in exposing corruption cases within the highest echelons of politics.⁸



1. Hrica Lubos

7th august 2023 – 21 749 interactions, 14 626 reactions, 655 comments and 6 468 shares.

In the video titled “Something for the activist Tódová&Company” the author endeavors to draw parallels between the work of Martin Daňo and that of investigative journalist Monika Tódová from Denník N. Allegations put forth in the video include claims of unfounded legal transgressions by Tódová and exploitation of the topic of Ján Kuciak’s murder, all while undermining her professional work. The video asserts that Tódová’s activities pivot predominantly on manipulating electoral outcome. Additionally, it seeks to depict her as an “elite” or a “protected person” who is “usurping a certain form of power.” Accusations are made regarding Tódová’s influence on shaping public opinion, particularly in favor of Judge Záleská. Throughout the video, he is asking her to respond to questions, in what he calls public interest, that insinuate manipulative narratives about her and the media. In a reaction, the Editor-in-Chief of Denník N, wrote an article explaining that Monika Tódová had long ago tried to resolve the conflict of interest by quitting a significant part of investigative journalism that could have related to corruption scandals or cases that might have potentially ended up in court.⁹ The video’s content falls in line with the patterns observed across several problematic sources, with the apparent intent of eroding public trust in the media. Slovakia’s media landscape, when compared to counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe, ranks among the lowest in terms of public trust, a context that lends significance to the ongoing debates.¹⁰

6 <https://dennikn.sk/3513406/newsfilter-co-by-ste-mali-vediet-o-vztahu-todova-a-zaleska/>
 7 <https://dennikn.sk/3514800/ako-som-sa-rozhodoval-v-pripadoch-konfliktu-zaujmov/?ref=list>
 8 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/slovakia-remembers-five-years-since-journalists-murder/>
 9 <https://dennikn.sk/3514800/ako-som-sa-rozhodoval-v-pripadoch-konfliktu-zaujmov/?ref=list>
 10 <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GLOBSEC%20Trends%202023.pdf>

2. Matovičov cirkus (Matovič's circus)

6th august 2023 – 16 591 interactions, 8 743 reactions, 1 527 comments and 6 321 shares.

The second most popular video in the group of Problematic Sources, as well as across the entire monitoring, is a segment from the aforementioned video by Martin Daňo. The post's accompanying caption, "LET JOURNALISTS FEEL THEIR OWN MEDICINE AND EXPERIENCE IT PERSONALLY WHEN THEY INTRUDE INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S PRIVACY!!!" seeks to justify the intrusion into an investigative journalist's personal life. The post embarks on a comparison between Daňo's video and the mainstream media's coverage of corruption scandals involving political figures. This endeavor seeks to establish parallels in the approach to exposing such matters.

3. Eduard Chmelár

7th august 2023 – 10 089 interactions, 7 395 reactions, 438 comments and 2 256 shares.

Eduard Chmelár, delving into the same subject matter as the preceding posts, notably designates the video in question as a "The most significant journalistic scandal since the "Skupinka" case." In his discourse, Chmelár without evidence asserts that Judge Záleská is involved in unauthorized information leaks from confidential court files to the journalists, mainly to Tódová. He further critiques the media for what he perceives as a lackluster response, and urges them to "to distance themselves from the whole scandal and clear their names". The author positions himself as an advocate for justice, drawing comparative insights from the circumstances surrounding former journalist Peter Tóth. Among Tóth's notable involvements, he had accepted financial transactions from oligarch accused in Kuciak's murder - Marián Kočner and was embroiled in the surveillance of journalists through the Slovak Information Service (SIS).

Prodemocratic Actors

During the past week, a series of posts originating from the satirical page Zomri (Die) have yet again claimed the spotlight as the most widely favored content within the Prodemocratic Actors group. All three of these posts concern the intricacies of Slovakia's domestic political landscape. Notably, one post casts a spotlight on the inner workings of the Slovak judiciary, scrutinizing the perceived equity, or lack thereof, in penal repercussions for violations of the law. The remaining two posts are centered on key figures within the Voice – Social Democracy (HLAS-SD) party.

1. Zomri (Die)

9th august 2023 – 4 750 interactions, 4 075 reactions, 161 comments and 514 shares.

The most widely circulated post within the prodemocratic group over the past week engages in a comparison of penalties for various categories of law violations within Slovakia. The post notably accentuates the contrast between the severity of sanctions imposed for possessing and cultivating marijuana, and the reception of bribes, including unconventional forms like vegetables, chocolate, and wine. The comparison is made to inadequately lower penalties imposed for high-profile cases of political corruption, theft of state property, and other significant violations of the law. The post also addresses the contentious paragraph 363, which has previously been employed by the General Prosecutor Maroš Žilinka to mitigate sentences in corruption cases for several Slovak politicians.



2. Zomri (Die)

13th august 2023 – 4 517 interactions, 4 203 reactions, 296 comments and 18 shares.

The second most widely endorsed post is a screenshot that originates from the Facebook page of Erik Tomáš, MP for the Voice – Social Democracy (HLAS-SD) party. In his post, he asserts that senior citizens across Slovakia have conveyed their gratitude for the rise in pensions. He is alluding to the support for the pension indexation put forth by Voice – Social Democracy (HLAS-SD) party in Parliament. Accompanied by the caption “Thank you Erik and now shut your...,” Zomri refers to Erik Tomáš’s consistent reiteration of this particular theme.

3. Zomri (Die)

12th august 2023 – 3 642 interactions, 3 254 reactions, 358 comments and 30 shares.

In the post with the third highest number of interactions, the website Zomri compares the photo of the leader of the HLAS-SD party Peter Pellegrini with a shot from the movie *Gladiator*. The caption accompanying the post, “When you order *Gladiator* from Wish,” is satirically portraying Pellegrini as someone who is just endeavoring to emulate the original character.

State institutions

In this week's monitoring, the trio of most favored posts originated from the "Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Frauds - Police Slovak Republic) and Ministry of Interior pages. Within the broader category of 20 extensively circulated posts featuring an election-oriented narrative, a substantial 14 were credited to "Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Frauds - Police Slovak Republic). Among the pages garnering the highest number of interactions, Police of the Slovak Republic also stood out prominently. One of their posts centered on an ongoing corruption case.

1. Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR (Hoaxes and Frauds – Police Slovak Republic)

6th august 2023 – 1 347 interactions, 1 232 reactions, 81 comments and 34 shares.

Within the State Institutions group, the most widely circulated post during the monitored week was attributed to the "Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Frauds - Police Slovak Republic) page which satirically responds to instances of disinformation spreading in the online space, particularly through Facebook statuses of political parties or their representatives. Several of these politicians were sued for spreading such narratives. The post primarily points out the absurdity of individuals' and politicians' defenses in such cases, blaming someone else for regular sharing of the content on the pages under their names.¹¹ Similarly, the post underscores the nonsensical nature of conspiracy theories that are increasingly proliferating in the information landscape. Furthermore, it serves as a reminder that the freedom of speech, which disinformation actors use as a defense, cannot be regarded as boundless and the boundaries are firmly rooted within established legal frameworks.



2. Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR (Hoaxes and Frauds – Police Slovak Republic)

7th august 2023 – 1 275 interactions, 1 154 reactions, 78 comments and 43 shares.

The second notable post, equally originating from the "Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Frauds - Police Slovak Republic) page, centers on an online interaction characterized by a seller's realization of a scam orchestrated by a fabricated profile. The seller informs the scammer that their account will be reported. In response, the spurious buyer surprisingly answers by showcasing sympathy and support for Russian President Vladimir Putin, while presenting themselves as a "whole army" and pledges to liberalize everyone as they did in 1945. The message alludes to April 4, 1945, when Czechoslovakia was liberated from Nazi occupation by the Red Army. In reaction to this incident, the police page issues a cautionary advice and emphasizes the importance of enhanced vigilance, particularly when sharing personal information online. The post also implicitly points out the absurdity of Russian propaganda in the Slovak information space, along with the activities of "trolls" who are known for coordinating the spread of Pro-Kremlin narratives.

¹¹ <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23187061/uhrik-sa-na-sude-vyhovaral-ze-nema-kontrolu-nad-statusmi-republiky-spor-s-lekarom-nekonci.html>

3. Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic

5th august 2023 – 1 113 interactions, 730 reactions, 269 comments and 114 shares.

Securing the third position in terms of interactions, a post surfaced on the Ministry of the Interior's official page reminding the upcoming deadline for individuals residing outside the Slovak Republic to apply for overseas voting. The deadline for submissions, whether by mail or electronically, was set for August 9, 2023. The applications were intended to facilitate the registration process for expatriates eager to cast their votes. A record-breaking number of nearly 73 000 voters have shown interest to take part in the upcoming elections, according to the official data. Such large turnout is expected to make a noticeable difference in the election's outcome as it is believed that these voters are likely to support prodemocratic political parties.

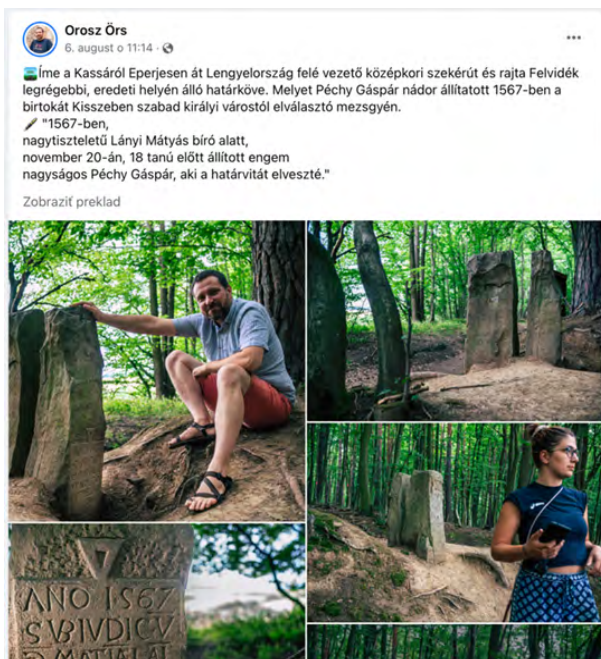
Hungarian Minority

Throughout the previous week, the Hungarian Minority group has been primarily influenced by politician Örs Orosz, whose engagements during this period predominantly encompassed cultural and historical subjects.

1. Orosz Örs

6th august 2023 – 1 897 interactions, 1 482 reactions, 60 comments and 355 shares.

The most widely circulated post within the Hungarian Minority group this week is credited to a politician from the Alliance (Aliancia) party. This particular post draws attention to a medieval road traversing Slovakia towards Poland. The post also highlights the presence of the oldest border stone situated in southern Slovakia (in Hungarian Felvidék - “Uppland” meaning Upper Hungary), built by the Hungarian nobleman Gáspár Péchy. The post underscores the cultural and historical significance of the Hungarian minority within the Slovak territory.



2. Felvidék.ma

6th august 2023 – 1849 interactions, 1 732 reactions, 93 comments and 24 shares.

The article sourced from Felvidék.ma, a media outlet anchored in southern Slovakia, informs about the Christian Festival of the Holy Crown (Szent Korona Ünnepet) in Balog nad Ipľom. In the past week, posts that delve specifically into Christian traditions have been the most popular content from this source. The post also carries a subtle undercurrent of patriotism, as it reports that the words: “In Balog nad Ipľom, today the heart of the nation beats” were heard during the festival mass.

3. Orosz Örs

5th august 2023 – 1 706 interactions, 1 581 reactions, 43 comments and 82 shares.

The third post can be attributed to the Facebook page of politician Orosz, who, in a video, details the visit of Slovak Minister of Culture, Silvia Hroncová, to a significant historical and cultural monument in the Nitra region. As the elections approach, the politician consistently cultivates his image as an “active political figure”. On the candidate list of the Alliance (Aliancia) party, Orosz is occupying the 6th position.

Methodology

The monitoring outcomes comprise data gathered from August 5 to August 11, 2023, using the CrowdTangle and Gerulata monitoring tools, encompassing four categories of observed Facebook pages.

The “Problematic Sources” group encompasses 158 Facebook pages identified by organizations *konspiratori.sk*¹² and Gerulata Technologies¹³ as sources of problematic content (sharing disinformation, conspiracy theories, extremist, or pro-Russian content). This collection of pages has been expanded to include those consistently disseminating such material and maintaining significant reach among users, thereby rendering them relevant within the context of Slovak-language content on Facebook.

The “Prodemocratic Actors” group comprises 90 Facebook pages associated with non-profit organizations, NGOs, think tanks, fact-checking platforms, influencers, movements, or satirical platforms that have consistently shared political content aligning with fundamental democratic values and principles. Such content includes endeavors such as voter mobilization, advocacy for core rights and freedoms, support for minority rights, initiatives against extremism and fascism, endorsements for education and media literacy, and more. All pages within this group were required to have a minimum of 1,000 followers, apart from the “Vol'by 2023” and “Chcem tu zostať” pages, given their relevance to pre-election monitoring.

In the groups “Problematic Sources” and “Prodemocratic Actors”, in addition to pages publishing in the Slovak language, the list also includes pages publishing in the Czech language, as they are regularly consumed by the Slovak audience.

Simultaneously, these two groups intentionally exclude any political parties, entities, or individuals participating in the upcoming Slovak parliamentary elections in September 2023. Furthermore, they do not encompass standard mainstream media sources, as both categories of actors will undergo monitoring by other organizations during Slovakia's pre-election phase, notably MEMO98. The objective of these analyses is, therefore, to complement each other and encompass the broadest conceivable spectrum of actors possessing the potential to shape public opinion during the pre-election period in Slovakia.

The “State Institutions” group brings together 34 Facebook pages of ministries and other relevant central government bodies, state institutes and other state authorities publishing in the Slovak language, which share content with the aim of raising regular public awareness and trust in the institutions, as well as content promoting democratic values, justice, media literacy and historical education. All sites in the group had to meet the requirement of at least 1,000 followers.

The last group, “Hungarian minority”, consists of 38 Facebook pages of media, political parties and political representatives who publish in the Hungarian language and whose target audience is the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The condition for inclusion in the sample was a minimum number of 1,000 followers. Since Hungarian minority actors are not monitored by other organizations in Slovakia, we also included media, political entities and actors in this monitoring group. In the case of the media, the 10 media Facebook pages popular and consumed among Hungarian minority in Slovakia are included. Political parties include the top 3 parties representing the Hungarian minority according to the surveys, namely the Alliance (Szövetség/Aliancia), the Hungarian Forum (Magarské Fórum) and Bridge (Most-Híd), on the joint candidate list of the Blue Party (Modrí). Among the political actors, sample includes politicians who have a public Facebook page and are among the

12 <https://konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok>

13 <https://blog.gerulata.com/russian-propaganda-network-in-slovakia/>

20 top candidates on the Alliance's candidate list, the top 10 candidates of Most-Híd and the top 10 candidates of the Hungarian Forum. This results in 18 politicians, whose list is supplemented by four political names relevant in terms of outreach - politician György Gyimesi from the Alliance party list, Pál Csáky, former chairman of the Slovak Hungarian Coalition (SMK) party, Dávid Nagy, former politician and supporter of the Alliance, and László Gubík, former politician for the SMK and Fidesz candidate for the European Parliament. The website of the Új Egység Mozgalom movement is also included in the group in terms of relevance, due to its exclusive focus on the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia and its regular political content.

Within every category, Facebook posts were ranked based on the total number of interactions (combining reactions, comments, and shares, without distinction among interaction types) during the monitoring period. Top 20 posts were then chosen from the sample of each category. These selections were filtered to exclude posts unrelated to the pre-election period. Additionally, the chosen posts were subjected to a qualitative evaluation in regard to their reach and the subjects they conveyed. Subsequently, three highest-ranking posts from each category's sample were subject to discursive analysis and comprehensively discussed in the content of the weekly report.

The graphical representations use data from the same monitoring period, showing which sites in each sample added the largest number of posts or comparing the structure of interactions (reactions, comments and shares) between the different groups analyzed. In the case of the analysis of the number of mentions of individual political parties in the posts, keywords in the form of the name of the political party (e.g. SMER - SSD, Progresívne Slovensko...) and its variations and abbreviations (SMER, PS...) were used.

The purpose of this analysis is to provide a qualitative insight into the posts and actors that across groups are gaining the most attention from

Facebook users in Slovakia during the pre-election period and to offer a picture of which pages, actors and narratives are having the greatest impact..