

Pre-election Monitoring of Facebook in Slovak Information Space

What dominated the Slovak political
and problematic scenes in August?

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Introduction

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 is 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. Those are equally important to monitor and study, given the increasing influence of disinformation narratives that have taken hold in the minds of the Slovak public.⁵

In this critical juncture, GLOBSEC has committed to delivering a series of insightful reports in the run-up to the elections. These reports delve into the core of Slovak online discourse, dissecting the key narratives, themes, and influential figures shaping the pre-election conversation within Slovakia's most frequented social media platform - Facebook. In the first two reports of our election monitoring initiative, the focus was centered on an array of subjects, namely problematic sources, prodemocratic actors, state institutions, and the Hungarian minority.

The present report plunges deeper into two groups - problematic sources and political actors (more on the selection of sources in the methodology on page 15) - and examines the information landscape that encapsulated the month of August with a time period spanning from July 29th to August 25th, 2023. Analysis was conducted on the top 20 most popular posts of each week, from both problematic sources and political actors, resulting in a comprehensive evaluation of 160 posts—80 from each category.

Previous editions of election monitors and related case-studies are available on the [GLOBSEC 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>

Summary

In terms of virality of posts, political actors have long dominated the information space on Facebook. However, problematic sources gained an equally non-negligible reach in the monitoring period. In terms of the popularity of posts, Robert Fico was the dominating politician, along with party members from the Direction – Slovak Social Democracy (SMER-SSD) party. They were followed by politicians of the Republika party and Slovak National Party (SNS) on a joint candidacy list with the Life – National Party (Život – NS).

The main themes spread in the viral posts were manipulative claims about the alleged decline of the rule of law in Slovakia or more extreme claims suggesting existence of the police state under the leadership of President Zuzana Čaputová, Prime Minister Ľudovít Ódor and Police President Štefan Hamran. Connected to such topics, the alleged “coup d’état”, the war in the police, and the arrest of former police president Tibor Gašpar also resonated among the posts. However, the “scandal” of conflict of interests due to ties between judge of Specialized Criminal Court Pamela Záleská and investigative journalist Monika Tódová was also heavily addressed. The topic initially gained traction as a result of a commentary by Robert Fico and subsequently dominated across problematic sources.

Within both topics and across all actors, narratives undermining trust in state institutions, the judicial system, and media independence, as well as victimization of the opposition, questioning the fairness of the upcoming elections and convincing potential voters of the alleged pandering of senior political figures to “progressive parties”, have emerged. Irreverent attacks on various political leaders or LGBTI+ were found in many of the posts. With elections looming, this deepening of the already alarmingly high levels of distrust in democratic processes, state institutions and the media may contribute to the information chaos and stirring of emotions on which populist parties effectively score political points and votes.



Dominant Actors

Within the realm of political actors, the SMER-SSD party and its members took center stage, with 45 posts that accounted for over half of the entire political actor sample. Their collective efforts garnered an impressive total of nearly 300 thousand interactions, underscoring their significant reach and influence in the virtual sphere. SMER-SSD’s communication was dominated by the chairman and former PM Robert Fico, both in the number of posts and in the popularity of the posts themselves. Out of 45 posts by the party, he accounted for 21. Other popular party members included, for example, Erik Kaliňák, former Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák, and the official SMER-SSD party Facebook page which also made waves in the digital discourse, adding to the party’s formidable online presence.

Beyond the confines of the SMER-SSD party, the Republika party politicians emerged, contributing 14 posts to the conversation. Among these politicians, the chairman of the Republika, Milan Uhrík, stood out with his highly successful posts, solidifying his position as a key player in the online political landscape.

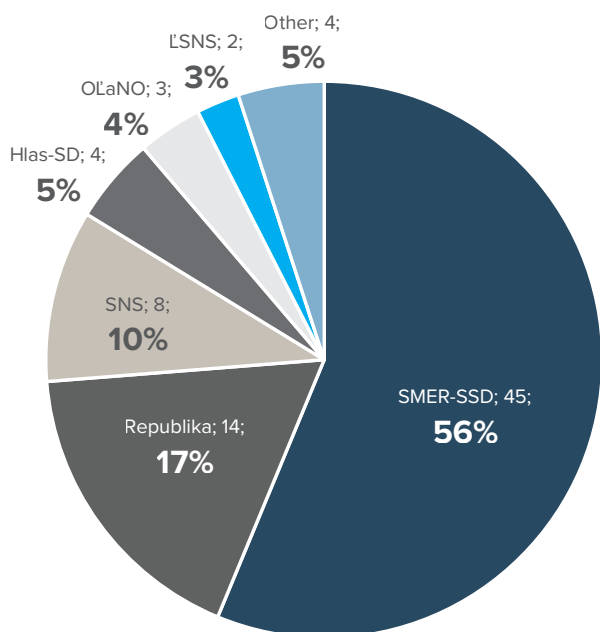
In the third spot, we find the members of the SNS and Život-NS coalition, who made their mark with a total

of 8 contributions in the monitored sample. Among these, Tomáš Taraba, ex-member of far-right party People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS),⁶ emerged as a prominent voice.

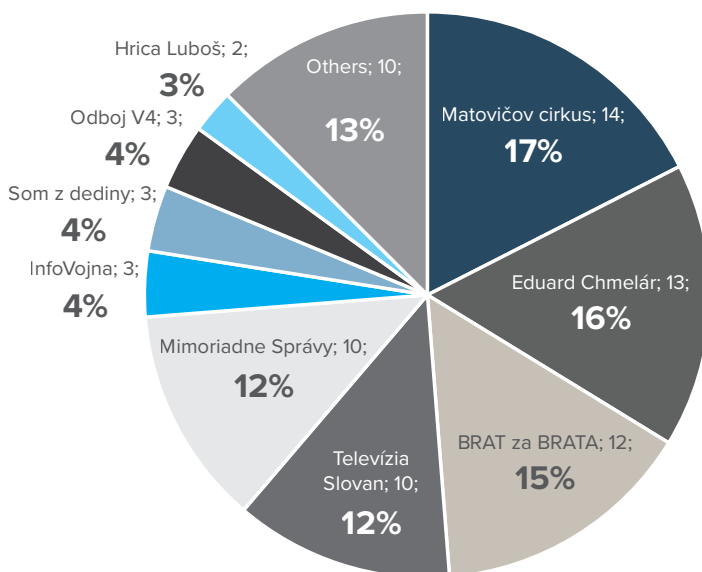
In the realm of problematic sources, we observed a greater diversity of pages compared to political actors. Among these sources, Matovičov Cirkus (Matovič’s Circus) page stood out as the top contender, wielding a significant influence. Close behind were Eduard Chmelár, advisor to the SMER-SSD’s Deputy Speaker of the National Council Juraj Blanár and BRAT for BRAT, openly pro-Russian source, both making notable waves within the digital landscape. Televízia Slovan (Television Slovan) also garnered attention for its regular broadcasts featuring guest appearances of controversial figures of disinformation spectrum such as former journalist Martin Daňo and former Justice Minister Štefan Harabin, amplifying their reach and engagement.

A page named Hrica Lubos also secured a spot in the sample, with just two posts, albeit one of these posts emerged as a viral sensation, becoming the most popular post of the monitored week with a tally of over 22 thousand interactions. The content that received most interactions among the online audience was closely tied to a prevailing theme among political actors—the so-called “scandal” involving a journalist Tódová and a judge Záleská.

Political parties with the largest number of posts in the monitored sample



Problematic sources with the largest number of posts in the monitored sample



6 <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/24/slovakias-far-right-lsns-party-saved-by-its-perceived-irrelevance/>

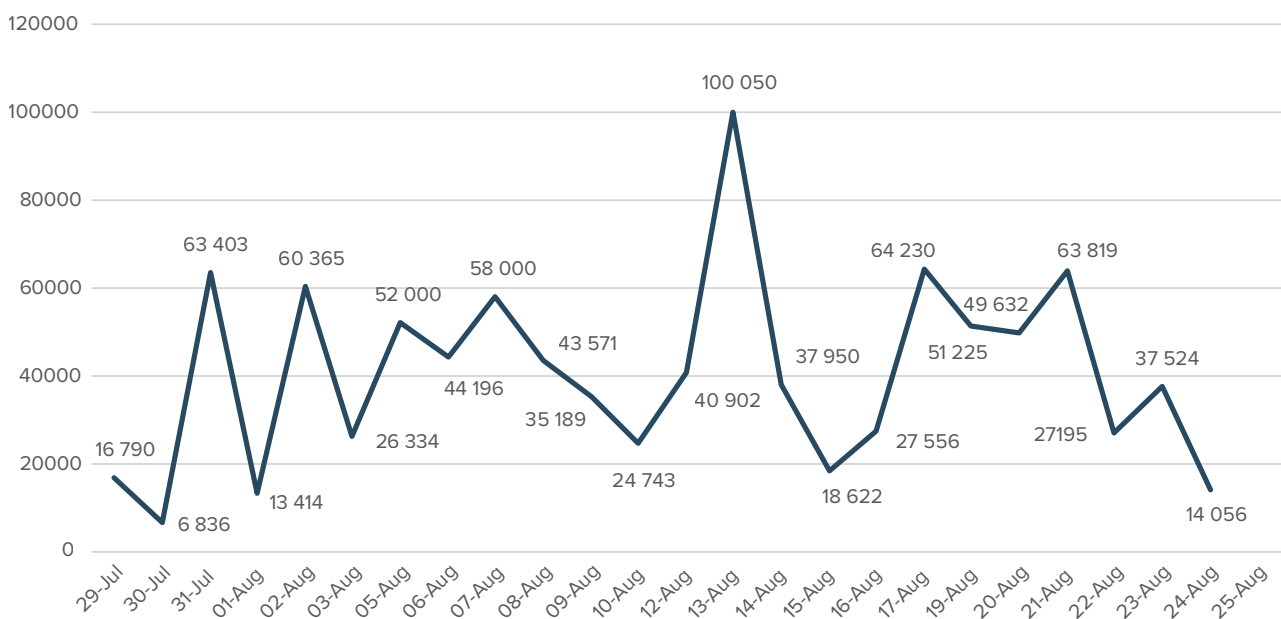
Political Actors

Noteworthy surge in interactions on August 13th owed its fervor to three highly-interacted with posts from the SMER-SSD Facebook page. These posts delved into the contentious subject of the release of former police president and nominee of the SMER-SSD government, Tibor Gašpar, whose detention had transpired just two days prior, courtesy of the National Criminal Agency (NAKA). Gašpar's apprehension was linked to suspicions of involvement in corruption-related offenses associated with the Ezekiel 7 case.

The trio of posts collectively amassed nearly 60 thousand interactions out of the day's total of 100 thousand interactions. The most widely embraced post **chronicled** Gašpar's release, accompanied by a photograph featuring him alongside former Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and Gašpar's legal counsel closely connected to the SMER-SSD party, Marek Para. Both Kaliňák and Gašpar are controversial political figures as they were accused of involvement of corruption cases in the past, whereas also in office during the murder of investigative journalist of Ján Kuciak who specialized in high-profile corruption cases.

The second post, a video **hosted** on the SMER-SSD Facebook page, portrayed the former police president with a caption: "Without you, I wouldn't see the sky again today..." The post branded NAKA and the Special Prosecutor's Office as "criminals." In a third post, a recording of a press conference by the SMER-SSD party, Robert Fico **asserted** that the entire case had been "fabricated" with the intent to damage the SMER-SSD party. The video repeatedly underscored the alleged objective of "liquidating the opposition." The party's chairman cast corruption allegations as manufactured, framing them as part of a pre-election struggle orchestrated by the prosecutor's office and the police.

Number of interactions of 80 monitored posts of political actors for the period 29.7. to 25.8. 2023



TOP 3 Posts of Political Actors in August

1. Robert Fico: TWO LESBIANS ON A TRIP. THE MEDIA-JUSTICE MAFIA IN ACTION. (28.9k interactions)



2. SMER-SSD: Marek Para: TIBOR GAŠPAR RELEASED!! (25.2k interactions)



3. SMER-SSD: Tibor Gašpar: WE'LL PREVAIL (20.5k interactions)



Problematic Sources

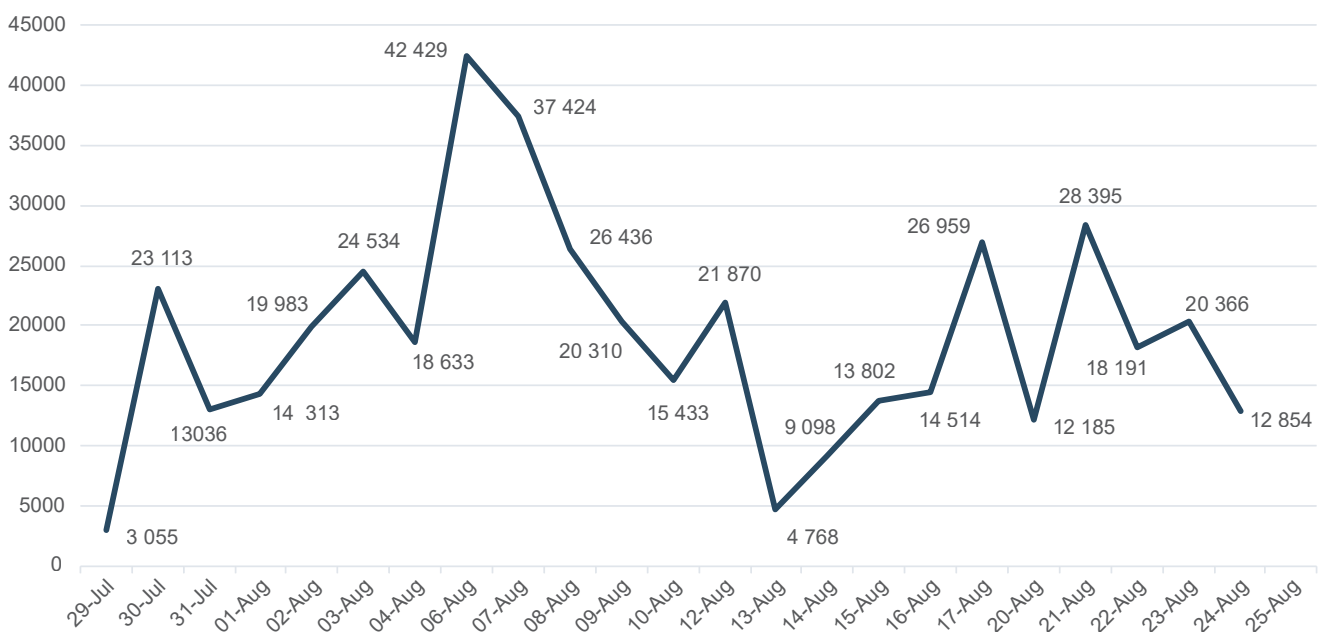
The problematic actors gained the highest reach on August 6th due to another prominent theme in our monitoring period, a video made by the former controversial journalist Martin Daňo, in which he published footage from the joint holiday of Denník N's investigative journalist Monika Tódová and the judge of the Specialized Criminal Court Pamela Záleská. Both women occupy prominent positions in the arena of uncovering and adjudicating high-profile corruption cases connected to the political figures. Robert Fico's Facebook page also reacted to the case of an alleged conflict of interest between the two publicly known women; his video received the highest number of interactions among all monitored posts in both groups of pages.

Within the realm of problematic actors, the standout post on August 6th was a snippet of Daňo's video featured on the **Matovičov cirkus** page, accompanied by a bold caption, "LET JOURNALISTS FEEL THEIR OWN MEDICINE AND FEEL ON THEIR OWN SKIN WHEN THEY ARE INVOLVED IN OTHER PEOPLE'S PERSONAL BUSINESS!!!" Similar to the political actors, this

narrative predominantly centered on eroding trust in independent media and the judiciary.

In addition to the **Matovičov cirkus** page, which generated 16 thousand interactions, the topic found resonance on the same day through posts by the **Infovojna** (InfoWar) and **Som z dediny** (I come from the village) pages, amassing an additional 4.7 thousand interactions. InfoVojna further spread the narrative by delving into the alleged misuse of the judiciary, casting doubts on its independence. They quoted SMER-SSD politician Ľuboš Blaha, who said, "...she sent the innocent Milan Lučanský to prison - the Milan Lučanský whom Tódová attacked in Denník N in a disgusting way. Coincidence? Záleská sent Dušan Kováčik to prison for 14 years without hearing the witnesses of the opposing side - the same Dušan Kováčik whom Tódová slandered for years in Denník N. Coincidence?" Blaha's references to the two men, former Police President Milan Lučanský, who succeeded Tibor Gašpar in the position, and former Special Prosecutor Dušan Kováčik, draw parallels as both held their positions during the SMER-SSD government. Both individuals faced legal action related to corruption charges. Lučanský passed away in December 2020, following a suicide attempt in a prison cell.⁷

Number of interactions of 80 monitored posts of problematic sources for the period 29.7. to 25.8. 2023



⁷ <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22564514/ex-police-chief-lucansky-has-died.html>

TOP 3 Posts of Problematic Sources in August

1. Hrica Lubos: Something for the activist
Todová&Company (22.3k interactions)



Niečo pre aktivistku Todová&Company



2. Otevři svou mysl: Ukrainian President
Volodymyr Zelensky. How did he come to
power, what are the forces that are really
behind him and that have helped him to power?
(16.7k interactions)



Agent Zelenskyj (1. část)



3. Televízia Slovan: Concerning the sexual
education in schools... (16.4k interactions)



K sexuálnej výchove na školách...



Narratives that undermine trust

Throughout August, a prevailing narrative emerging in both political and problematic sources concerned an endeavor to erode trust in Slovakia as a democratic state governed by the rule of law. Within this period, various posts and actors continue to cast doubt on the independence of critical pillars such as the media, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and key state institutions, as well as President Zuzana Čaputová and the interim Prime Minister Ľudovít Ódor.

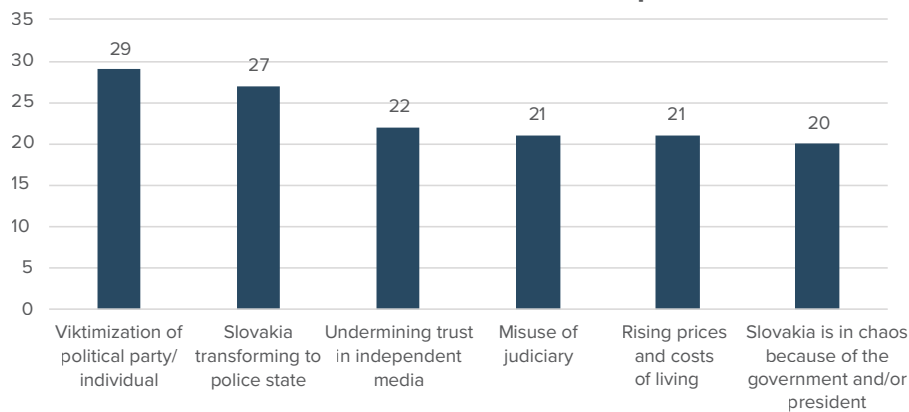
As the elections approached, many of these narratives were linked to the alleged persecution of the opposition, allegations of election manipulation and the prioritization of interests of foreign powers over the national interests of Slovakia and its people. While the narratives associated with the police state and the war between the security forces resonated the most among political actors, the “scandal” surrounding Monika Tódová and Pamela Záleská found the greatest resonance among the problematic ones.

Slovakia as the police state and war between the security forces

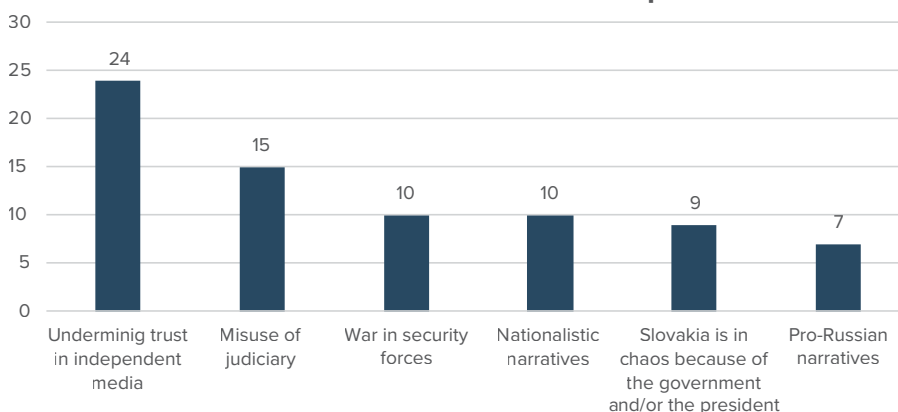
A web of manipulative claims weaving narratives of Slovakia’s purported transformation into a police state and ongoing war between the security forces, serves as the nexus of the multifaceted narratives outlined above. These narratives collectively endeavor to persuade the public of an alarming erosion of the rule of law in Slovakia which is to be replaced by the police state headed by President Čaputová and Prime Minister Odor, who, with the help of the police, their chief Štefan Hamran, NAKA and the Special Prosecutor Office, are to try to liquidate the opposition, protect progressive political entities and influence the outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In addition to the police, NGOs, the media, the judiciary, foreign powers, and George Soros are said to be involved in achieving these goals. Foreign interests are allegedly more important to the president and the government than their own citizens and the good of Slovakia. These manipulative claims wield a potent influence, further **eroding** the already

The most popular narratives disseminated by political actors in the monitored sample



The most popular narratives disseminated by problematic actors in the monitored sample



fragile trust in state institutions, media freedom, and the principles of liberal democracy—a decline that has been palpable in Slovakia year after year. Simultaneously, these narratives serve as fuel for political parties, enabling them to mobilize the electorate by invoking a sense of impending threat to civil liberties, electoral fairness, and the national interests that these parties promise to safeguard if entrusted with power.

The narratives surrounding a potential police state began surfacing within the Slovak information landscape during the latter half of July. The catalyst for their resurgence was the dismissal of Ivan Šimko, the Interior Minister under the technocratic government. Šimko's ouster from his office stemmed from ill-advised comments regarding the role of politics in law enforcement, ultimately eroding the trust between him and the police leadership.⁸

The topic, however, gained momentum only after the arrest of Tibor Gašpar, the former police chief under the government of Robert Fico and the current candidate for the SMER-SSD party. The narrative as such goes back several years and repeatedly surfaces in connection with new cases. In 2021, for example, this narrative **was revived** after the launch of the investigation into the former director of the Slovak Information Service, Vladimír Pčolinský. Allegations were already **circulating** at the time about the alleged persecution of the opposition by the government of Igor Matovič, which aimed to rid Slovakia of the mafia and corruption.

Rumors about the alleged decline of the rule of law and an emerging war in the security forces were also present. The current situation underscores the adeptness of problematic actors in recycling narratives to suit changing circumstances. Simultaneously, it highlights a persistent vulnerability in Slovakia's ability to withstand hybrid threats—distrust in state institutions. Presently, 46% of Slovaks lack confidence in the police, while only 22% express trust in the government.⁹ Unless this trust deficit is effectively addressed and remedied, it will remain a fertile ground for exploitation by various actors seeking to influence public opinion and shape the nation's discourse.

In the month of August, as the narrative surrounding the notion of a police state gained momentum, it was predominantly championed by the SMER-SSD party and its members, particularly in light of Tibor Gašpar's association with the party. Among the political actors who delved into this theme in our monitored sample, 20 out of 26 posts emanated from the ranks of SMER-SSD and its representatives. The foremost advocate of this narrative was the party's chairman, Robert Fico, who contributed to half of these 20 posts. Furthermore, Robert and Erik Kaliňák, both affiliated with SMER-SSD, played important roles in effectively conveying this narrative. Beyond the confines of SMER-SSD, the concept of a police state also found voice in the utterances of Tomáš Taraba from the SNS – Život - NS coalition, Matúš Šutaj Eštok from Voice – Social Democracy party (Hlas-SD), and Milan Mazurek from Republika.

Notably, the narrative of a police state failed to gain substantial traction among the problematic actors. Within our sample of 24 contributions referencing the police state or internal police strife, only five actively addressed the theme. Among these, two belonged to Eduard Chmelár, who **serves** as an advisor to Juraj Blanár, member of SMER-SSD.

Within the sphere of SMER-SSD and its representatives, the narrative of a police state predominantly revolved around allegations targeting the President and the technocratic government. Specifically, it centered on accusations of “criminalizing” the Slovak opposition and purported attempts to “eliminate” it. This particular narrative featured in a significant majority, appearing in 19 out of 26 posts. For instance, in one of his videos, Robert Fico **asserted** that President Čaputová and Prime Minister Ódor must have been privy to the actions taken against Gašpar, “thus endorsing the criminalization of the Slovak opposition.” Fico went on to characterize the entire affair as “an official attack on the opposition by the official state power.” Accusations have also emerged, alleging that Čaputová and Ľudovít Ódor orchestrated a “police coup” while purportedly aiming to “eradicate the opposition.”

8 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/slovakias-interior-minister-dismissed-over-spat-with-police-leadership/>

9 <https://www.startitup.sk/prieskum-ukazal-katastrofalnu-nedoveru-slovakov-v-stat-vynimkami-su-hasici-a-prezidentka/>



Facebook page Robert Fico

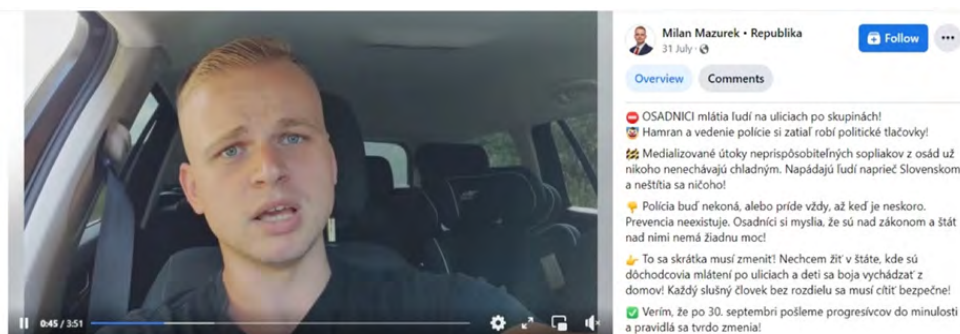
President Čaputová was also repeatedly linked to foreign actors. In a series of popular videos, epithets like “Soros’s Čaputová” have been **wielded**, along with assessments **claiming** that “Soros’s organizations mandated Šimečka.” These claims, monitored proponents argue, are the reason behind the persecution of the opposition and protection of the “progressives”. Given the Slovak presence of a fairly robust belief in conspiracy theories, these assertions clearly resonate with certain segments of

the population, while also exacerbating susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking.¹⁰

In his video, Milan Mazurek from Republika party raised the topic of the alleged targeting of the opposition and the perceived constraints placed on the police by political leaders and the police chief. He also **cautioned** against placing undue faith in the “progressive Čaputová’s government,” advising people not to be swayed by what he characterized as “political progressive promises and media agendas.”

Among the problematic actors, Eduard Chmelár took a prominent role in propagating the narrative of a police state aimed at persecuting the opposition. He contributed two out of a total of five posts addressing this theme. In one of these posts, he firmly **asserted** that the arrest of Gašpar amounted to nothing less than “the persecution and intimidation of the opposition.” He drew a stark parallel between the Slovak justice system and that of Belarus. In another post, Chmelár **placed** blame for the entire situation, along with allegations of the “dismantling of the state,” on President Čaputová.

As the parliamentary elections draws nearer, many political actors from the opposition camp began intertwining the police state theme with alleged attempts at election manipulation. Concepts like the “police coup” and the “criminalization” of the opposition were portrayed as evidence of such endeavors. For instance, Robert Fico, in one of his posts, **responded** to the current developments in the police force by asserting that “the state is crumbling under President Čaputová’s watch, and concerns about election result manipulation are growing within the public.”



Facebook page Milan Mazurek - Republika

„Scandal“ of judge and journalist

The second most prominent theme revolved around the “scandal” of a conflict of interest stemming from the relationship between Specialized Court Judge Pamela Záleská and investigative journalist Monika Tódová, who works for Denník N. This controversy unfolded after the release of a video by the former journalist Martin Daňo, who shared paparazzi-like footage from a joint vacation taken by these two women.

Allegations of a conflict of interest were **addressed** both by Tódová herself and Judge Záleská, who **sought** a meeting with the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic to counter the disinformation circulating in the public sphere. Both individuals vehemently denied any conflict of interest. Notably, Tódová had already scaled back her investigative work before the “scandal” garnered social media attention, a decision was also **communicated** by Denník N’s editor-in-chief, Matúš Kostolný.

Two central narratives emerged in connection with this theme: the alleged manipulation of the judiciary and the undermining of trust in independent media, with the aim of further eroding the already fragile credibility of these institutions. Problematic sources tackled this theme in a more coordinated way, often sharing statements from political actors who gained significantly more traction on the topic. The most popular post in the entire August monitoring, amassing 28.9 thousand interactions, was a video by Robert Fico, in which he **popularized** the subject further in the information space.

The subversion of Judge Záleská’s independence unfolded on multiple fronts, with the primary focus being alleged leaks from various corruption cases’ files, which journalist Tódová was purportedly set to cover in her reporting (for instance, Štefan Harabin, in a broadcast on **Televízia Slovan**). **Luboš Hrica** claimed in a published video that Záleská “as a judge has access to the files [Tódová] wrote about the next day.” He then asks how it is possible that, “on a daily basis... information from the investigation files was leaked directly to Denník N”. Marek Para, the lawyer of Tibor Gašpar, also according to problematic source **Veci Verejné** (Public Affairs) and **InfoVojna** contended that

“there were never leaks from files until Záleská arrived at the Specialized Criminal Court.” Based on these claims, he filed a disciplinary complaint against the judge.

The independence of Judge Záleská’s decisions came under repeated attack, particularly in connection with well-known and highly publicized corruption cases. The Specialized Criminal Court’s main objective is in prosecuting corruption, organized crime and crimes committed by constitutional officials. The judge, as already mentioned, **faced** criticism from politicians, primarily for her rulings in the cases of former Police President Lučanský and former Special Prosecutor Kováčik, both of whom served during the tenure of the SMER-SSD party. Another video shared on Erik Kaliňák’s page **suggests** that Judge Záleská was alleged to have “instructed the mafia figure Zemák, who obediently served to manufacture political scandals on SMER.”



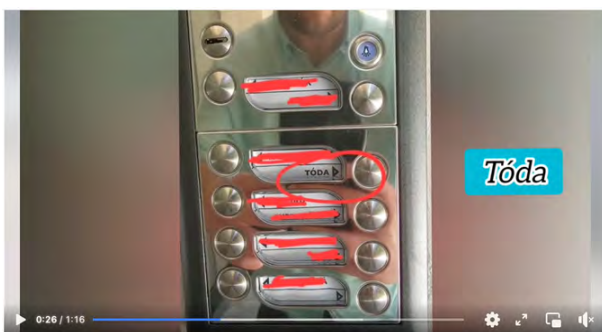
Facebook page Erik Kaliňák

While a pertinent discussion about potential conflicts of interest would be reasonable, narratives from both the problematic and political spectrum have shifted into the realm of conspiracy theories and attacks on the journalist and judge. Their aim is to cast doubt on verdicts that have, in many cases, been confirmed by higher courts, and to instil the perception that corruption cases never occurred in the past. Among these narratives, alongside attacks, are again victimization of political parties or individuals and portraying liberalism as a threat. For instance, Judge Záleská **was referred** to by Robert Fico as the “elite opposition-jailing judge” or a “judicial ogre,” while journalist Tódová was labelled as an “elite liberal

journalist” or a “journalistic monster.” Tomáš Taraba **utilizes** a different narrative, suggesting political influence and referring to the journalist and judge as “Čaputová’s girls.”

The discourse, in addition to attacks on the justice system and Judge Záleská, has also focused on the media, a recurring theme in political discourse. In a video, **Erik Kaliňák** portrays alleged contacts that supposedly span and function various judicial institutions such as courts and prosecutor offices, with the “marketing department” provided by the journalist Tódová. Her articles, he claims, “SME.sk and Aktuality newspapers took in uncritically like docile sheep.” **Lubos Hrica**, on the other hand, attacks the journalist and states that she is “too far from objective journalism but very close to manipulative election influencing.”

Allegations of corruption have also emerged, particularly concerning an apartment in downtown Bratislava, owned by Tódová and her ex-husband. This narrative was seized upon by ĽSNS candidate **Miro Heredoš**, who, in a video, stands in front of the journalist’s home and asserts, “It’s time for Ms. Tódová to start explaining. Who is she? Who pays her? Who bought her housing? Whether Denník N pays finances or salaries in any other ways. In envelopes. And how is it possible that they found housing just a few meters from the American Embassy?” Aside from unfounded attacks on the journalist and common anti-US narrative, this video primarily involves a significant invasion of the investigative journalist’s privacy. The privacy of journalists, particularly those currently or previously involved in investigating high-profile corruption cases, has become an increasingly sensitive topic after the murder of Ján Kuciak.



! TÓDOVÁ, JE ČAS VYSVETLOVAŤ ! Takže priatelia, bol som to osobne pozrieť a odchodiť na Slavine - na vlastné oči, aby ste to so mnou všetci...

Facebook page Miro Heredoš

Media outlets have been accused in the discussion of delays and insufficient responses to this “scandal”. According to the SMER-SSD page, Ľuboš Blaha **claims**, “liberal media hushed it up for three days,” “they cover the mafia that controls the judicial and police systems,” and directly implies mistrust in independent media when he says, “they’ve shown the whole of Slovakia that they can’t be trusted. None of them.” Similar criticism and distrust in the media **has been voiced** by Eduard Chmelár and controversial lawyer Laššáková, as **quoted** by the InfoVojna page. The Prinášame nádej (We bring hope) page **uses** a parodied video of Judge Záleská and, in the description, labels “LIES as the working method of so-called influential media.” Regarding media objectivity, Televízia Slovan’s moderator Šimkovičová **states**, “It hasn’t been here for a long time... There was no objectivity of the media and there probably won’t be any after this case, even though it reveals a lot.”



Facebook page InfoVojna

Many posts in the sample described the relationship between the judge and the journalist as romantic, leading to the emergence of inappropriate anti-LGBTI narratives. For example, Robert Fico **suggests** that “everything can be arranged in bed” and asks, “How are the judgments of Judge Pamela Záleskej formed? Who writes them? Do they happen in bed? In the same bed?” According to the SMER-SSD page, Ľuboš Blaha **refers** to coming-out as “awkward,” but after “Tódová’s coming out,” he says, in his words, “the lid blew off.”

Who is being targeted with verbal attacks?

While negative mentions in the posts of political actors most frequently targeted President Čaputová, Police Chief Hamran, and Prime Minister Ódor, among problematic sources, it was Monika Tódová and Pamela Záleská who were negatively portrayed. This distribution aligns with the popularity of narratives about the police state and the theme of Tódová and Záleská’s relationship across political and problematic sources. The first theme resonated more among politicians, while the latter found greater traction among problematic actors. One of the reasons is the stronger political charge associated with narratives related to the police state and their greater mobilization potential as the elections draw near.

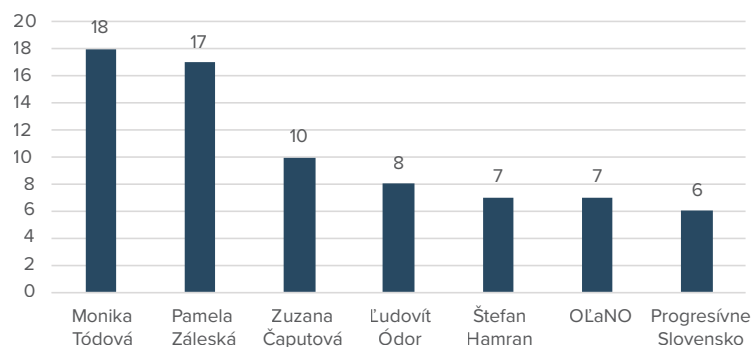
Negative mentions in the posts of political actors also frequently included the Progressive Slovakia (PS) party and its leader Michal Šimečka. Just as in previous elections, they become the target of negative campaigns and a means through which

opposition parties distance themselves from liberalism and progressivism.

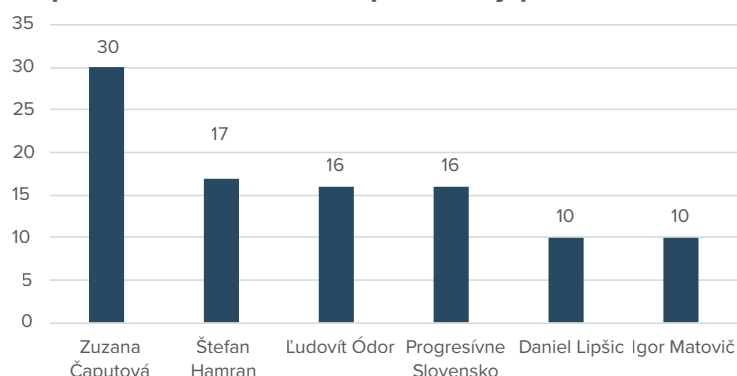
Although the case of Monika Tódová and Pamela Záleská is not entirely devoid of political implications and was mentioned by political actors, it resonated more among problematic sources. This may have been due to the lower complexity of this topic compared to the narrative about the police state and the internal police conflict. At the same time, previous GLOBSEC monitoring reports have shown that problematic actors often focus on the topic of media freedom and its (im)partiality.

A common thread between both groups of actors is the highly negative discourse surrounding President Čaputová, who has faced attacks from a wide range of actors since being elected. This was also evident in GLOBSEC’s monitoring of the elections conducted in two months period just before she announced she would not seek re-election. Even after this announcement, she continues to be a regular target of gender-based insults, hateful speech, and accusations of prioritizing the interests of foreign powers, “NGOs,” “progressives,” or George Soros.

Number of negative mentions towards the following political actors and/or parties by problematic sources



Number of negative mentions towards the following political actors and/or parties by political actors



Methodology

The monitoring outcomes comprise data gathered from July 29 to August 25, 2023, using the CrowdTangle and Gerulata monitoring tools, encompassing two categories of observed Facebook pages – Problematic sources and Political Actors.

The “Problematic Sources” group encompasses 158 Facebook pages identified by organizations *konspiratori.sk*¹¹ and *Gerulata Technologies*¹² as sources of problematic content which they define as, among other things, content spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories, pro-Kremlin narratives, extremism etc. 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. In addition to sites publishing in the Slovak language, the list also includes sites publishing in the Czech language with an outreach to the Slovak audience. However, there are no political entities in the group.

The group “Political Actors” is a collection of all political entities, politicians as well as political parties that are currently represented in the National Council of the Slovak Republic or running for the seats in the early parliamentary elections. The monitored accounts also include political actors who were constitutional officials of the Slovak Republic or are members of the European Parliament for the Slovak Republic during the monitoring period. As the tool from *Gerulata Technologies* does not monitor private profiles, the report focuses exclusively on public Facebook pages of political actors. Solely posts published in the Slovak language are monitored in the group.

During the monitoring period, the posts published on Facebook were sorted in the “Problematic sources” group according to the number of interactions (sum of reactions, comments and

shares, regardless of the type of interaction). From the sample, the top 20 posts were selected, filtered from posts not relevant to the topic of elections and subsequently qualitatively assessed in terms of reach and topics disseminated. In the “Political Actors” group, all posts on Slovak Facebook during the period under review were ranked according to the number of interactions, and then the top 20 posts posted by political actors and related to the social, political or economic situation in Slovakia or directly to the elections were selected. The posts from the sample of each group were discursively analysed and described in the content of this report.

The graphical representations use data for individual posts from the same monitoring period. This data includes the number of interactions, reactions, comments or shares obtained from the monitoring tools. At the same time, data on the number of mentions of different actors, political or non-political, obtained by discursive analysis of individual posts are used for the graphical representations.

In the case of posts where a URL to a third-party website is present, the post is analysed as it is displayed on the Facebook social network without examining the content of the URL in question. In the case of Facebook videos, the first 5 minutes of the video content is discursively analysed. In the case of a record of a live stream, the first 5 minutes from the start of the content of the stream or discussion are monitored.

The goal of this analysis is to offer a comprehensive view of the most influential posts and actors on Facebook in Slovakia in the lead-up to the elections. By examining both the quality and quantity of engagement, it aims to shed light on the pages, individuals, topics, storylines, and assertions that are capturing the most public attention.

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

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