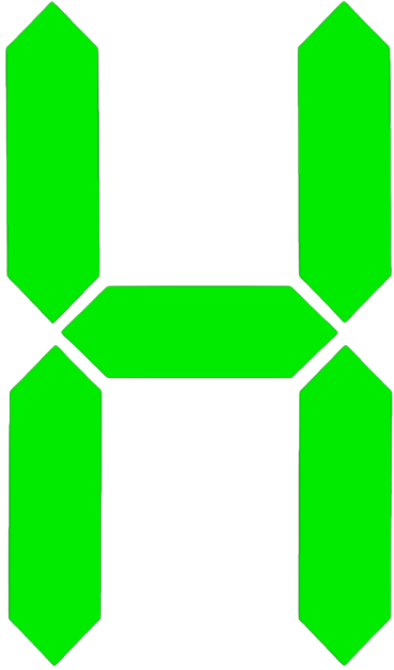


Report on information disorder during the 2025 local elections

(First round)





Report on information disorder during the 2025 local elections (First round)

Publisher: ADS/hibrid.info

© All rights reserved by ADS/hibrid.info. Intellectual property rights are protected under Law No. 04/L-065 on Copyright and Related Rights and Law No. 05/L-047 on the Amendment and Supplementation of Law No. 04/L-065 on Copyright and Related Rights.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in electronic retrieval systems, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents

01	Introduction	5
<hr/>		
02	Methodology	6
<hr/>		
03	Key findings	7
<hr/>		
04	Information Disorder during the local elections	9
<hr/>		
05	Tactics and phenomena of information disorder	11
<hr/>		
06	Foreign influence and narratives	12
<hr/>		
07	Conclusion	18
<hr/>		

introduction

Hibrid.info monitored the information environment, analysing the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and influence operations on social media in the period before and during Kosovo's local elections. This report presents a summary of the principal findings from research conducted in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 12 October 2025 elections, identifying the tactics and actors that shaped the dissemination of misleading content and divisive narratives across the digital space.

The local elections in Kosovo were held on 12 October 2025, with numerous candidates contesting local offices. The electoral process unfolded in a highly charged political atmosphere: citizens turned out to vote while media outlets and monitoring organisations observed developments to ensure transparency and integrity.

However, the elections were also marked by a substantial wave of information disorder, particularly on social media and other online platforms. Unreliable content, fake

news and unfounded narratives shaped public perceptions of candidates and political parties, distorting debates on issues of public interest.

This report examines the spread of these mis/disinformation campaigns, the mechanisms used to construct narratives, and the roles played by both domestic and external actors, in order to understand their impact on local democracy and citizens' trust in institutions.

methodology

This report is based on a systematic process of monitoring and analysing media content related to the local elections held on 12 October 2025 in Kosovo. The primary aim of the research is to identify, categorise, and interpret content containing elements of misinformation, narrative manipulation, and organised disinformation, in order to assess their impact on public perception and the electoral process.

Monitoring was conducted between 13 September and 15 October 2025, covering the pre-election phase, election day, and the post-election period. This timeframe was selected to enable a comprehensive view of how information circulates and transforms throughout the entire electoral cycle.

The analysed sources were divided into three main categories:

- (1) Social media – including platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram, where public pages, groups, and individual profiles sharing political content were monitored;
- (2) Domestic online media – news portals and websites publishing content with direct influence on public opinion; and
- 3) Serbian and Russian media and officials – primarily Serbian-language

media platforms such as RT Balkan and Sputnik Serbia, as well as Serbian officials, with a focus on identifying external narratives influencing political discourse in Kosovo.

Within this monitoring framework, a total of 131 pieces of content were examined: 37 in Albanian, 20 originating from Serbian media and officials, and 74 from Russian media outlets publishing in Serbian.

The analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitatively, around 100 public sources were monitored daily, including news portals, pages, and social-media accounts, to identify content containing inaccurate or manipulated information. Once identified, a qualitative analysis was conducted to assess how narratives were constructed, reinforced, and disseminated across different contexts, including cases with direct or indirect influence from external actors.

This combined approach enabled the measurement of frequency, platform-specific distribution, and types of information disorder, providing a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms behind the production and spread of disinformation during the electoral process.

key findings

The key findings of this report focus on two main areas: the dominance of domestic information disorder, particularly through fabricated opinion polls, and a coordinated foreign influence campaign (FIMI) led by Belgrade and Moscow, which sought to portray the electoral process as an existential national struggle for Serbs.

- Out of the 37 Albanian-language pieces analysed, domestic information disorder was clearly dominated by the category of fake news, which accounted for 81% of the assessed content (30 cases). The remaining categories - disinformation, conspiracy theories, and fact manipulation - each represented only 5%. The most frequent and dominant form of information disorder consisted of false or non-credible polls directly linked to the mayoral races. Between 13 September and 12 October, a total of 28 fake pieces of content were identified, all purporting to present opinion polls or exit polls. These materials were disseminated with the intent to distort public perception of voter preferences, and were characterised by a complete lack of transparency and scientific methodology.
- In terms of distribution channels, a strong dependence on digital platforms was observed. Social media served as the primary publisher in 89% of cases (33 pieces of content). Within these platforms, Facebook was dominant - accounting for 73% (24 pieces) - followed by TikTok with 27% (9 pieces). The most frequently mentioned figures were mayoral candidates, while political parties were most often referenced in relation to institutional contexts.
- During the period from 13 September to 12 October 2025, the main information disorder phenomena included false opinion polls (28 cases), headlines favouring specific candidates, and the activation of social media pages created to promote particular contenders. Most of this content was disseminated through Facebook, TikTok, and a news agency, without any transparency or scientific methodology. These materials often employed visual elements and fictitious logos to create an illusion of credibility. The favourable headlines typically framed ordinary campaign activities as indicators of mass public support, while the active social media pages were linked to political parties or their supporters and ceased posting after the elections, later shifting to non-electoral content.

- Serbian officials — including President Aleksandar Vučić and the Director of the Office for Kosovo, Petar Petković – together with Serbian media outlets, constructed a narrative framework portraying the Serbian community as a victim of “repression” by the Government of Kosovo, while positioning the Serb List (Lista Srpska) as the “sole protector of survival.” The main narratives promoted by Belgrade sought to strip the elections of their local character, reframing them as an existential struggle; to equate voting for the Serb List with loyalty to the Serbian state and President Vučić’s leadership; to depict Kosovo’s institutions as a repressive regime; and to portray Serbia as the only guarantor of security and the future of Kosovo Serbs. These messages were amplified by Serbian and Russian media platforms publishing in the Serbian language, effectively serving as megaphones for the Serbian state narrative.
- Russian state media outlets publishing in Serbian, such as Sputnik Serbia and Russia Today Balkan, released a significant number of articles between 13 September and 15 October 2025 (43 by Sputnik and 31 by RT Balkan), amplifying Belgrade’s messaging and portraying the elections as an existential struggle. On 17 October 2025, the spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, stated that the Serb List had participated in the elections “under difficult conditions and great pressure,” describing its victory as a step toward “regaining control” over the northern areas. She explicitly linked the Serb community’s support for the Serb List to its trust in President Aleksandar Vučić.

information disorder during the local elections

The key findings across the assessed categories reveal a clear dominance of fake news. This category accounted for 81% of the analysed content (30 cases). Other categories were far less represented: disinformation, conspiracy theories, and fact manipulation each comprised 5% of the cases (2 items each), while clickbait content made up 4% (1 item). This distribution highlights that the primary form of information disorder encountered during the monitoring period was the straightforward dissemination of false information, with clickbait playing a negligible role.

Regarding publishers, there was a strong reliance on digital platforms. Social media served as the main source and distributor in 89% of the cases (33 items), followed by traditional media with 8% (3 items), and web domains with 3% (1 item). Within social media, Facebook was the dominant platform, accounting for 73% of cases (24 items), followed by TikTok, which represented 27% (9 items).

The topics that have dominated and been most frequently used in information disorder are related to the manipulation of public opinion through polls and fake news about local candidates. The most frequent and dominant category is that of fake or non-credible polls directly related to the mayoral race. Many headlines referred explicitly to “fake” or “non-credible” polls, including candidates and various municipalities such as Kaçanik, Deçan, Podujeva, Gjakova, Ferizaj, Lipjan, Vitia, Mitrovica, Prizren, Pristina, Gjilan, and Suhareka. This dissemination was massive, also including claims about polls related to local elections.

The topics that have dominated and been most frequently used in information disorder are related to the manipulation of public opinion through polls and fake news about local candidates.

Another dominant topic is the targeting of specific candidates and personalities through fake news, including claims about Alban Hyseni, the false portrayal of Baton Haxhiu's position, the misrepresentation of Shpejtim Bulliqi's actions using old photographs, and the attribution of false statements to Arian Tahiri, the candidate for mayor of Mitrovica. Furthermore, cases of conspiracy theories were also encountered, such as claims of Serbian military interference after local elections and the spread of conspiracy theories by the Russian network "Pravda".

The personalities and institutions mentioned were mainly political figures and entities, in line with the theme of local elections. The largest group of mentioned personalities were mayoral candidates, who appeared in 74% of cases (23 contents). Regarding institutions, political parties such as LVV, PDK, LDK, AAK, etc., were mentioned in 11 cases, mostly within content presenting fake polls.

Social media was the main publisher, serving as the source and transmitter in 89% of cases (33 contents).

tactics and phenomena of information disorder

Fake polls

During the period from 13 September to 12 October, which also included the day of the local elections in Kosovo, a total of 28 fake contents claiming to present polls or exit polls of public opinion were identified. Of these, 26 were published during the campaign claiming to represent polls, while two others were shared on election day as exit polls. The overwhelming majority of these contents circulated on Facebook (23 cases), followed by TikTok (4 cases) and a single case on a local news agency.

Such contents were published by social media pages and accounts and were characterized by a lack of transparency and scientific methodology, as they did not provide data on sample selection, the number of participants, or measurement criteria. In some cases, elements mimicking genuine polls were used to create an illusion of credibility, such as professionally designed graphics, logos of fictitious companies, or mentions of “research institutions” that, after verification, were found to be nonexistent or unregistered.[1][2]

Favorable headlines in the media

In some media, articles with headlines favoring mayoral candidates were observed, claiming large public support without factual evidence to support the claim. These contents report ordinary campaign activities, but the headlines interpret them as indicators of massive support. A common feature is that the claims in the headlines are not backed by facts, figures, or concrete statements, creating a false perception of electoral advantage for the promoted candidate.[3]

Activation of social media pages.

On social media, mainly on Facebook, pages were created using city names with suffixes such as “news,” “press,” or “net,” which promoted specific candidates and influenced public perception. Based on their contents, it can be said that these pages had connections with political parties or their supporters. After the conclusion of the local elections, these pages stopped election-related publications and continued with other topics.

[1] <https://hibrid.info/fushata-zgjedhore-rikthen-sondazhet-e-rreme/>

[2] <https://hibrid.info/26-sondazhe-e-dy-exit-polle-te-rreme-gjate-fushates-dhe-dites-se-zgjedhjeve-lokale/>

[3] <https://hibrid.info/tituj-favorizues-ne-media-gjate-fushates-zgjedhore-lokale/>

foreign influence (FIMI) and narratives

The coverage of the October 12, 2025 local elections in Kosovo by Serbian media and officials from Belgrade, as well as by the Russian state media outlets Russia Today Balkan and Sputnik Serbia, portrayed the process as an existential battle for the Serbian people. Within this discourse, the Serb List (Lista Srpska) was depicted as the sole defender of the Serbs against the “terror” and “repression” of the Pristina authorities, while Belgrade was

presented as their legitimate protector. The victory of the Serb List in nine municipalities was interpreted as a “regaining of control” and as a failure of Kosovo’s policies. These narratives were reinforced by Russian diplomacy through statements made by spokesperson Maria Zakharova, reflecting a coordinated strategy between Moscow and Belgrade aimed at challenging the legitimacy of Kosovo’s institutions.

The narrative framework of Serbian media and officials

In the analysis of 20 pieces of content from Serbian media and statements by state officials, it was found that they were framed to create unfounded narratives about the local elections in Kosovo, portraying developments as a confrontation between two sides.

On one side, the Serb List, the candidates and elected Serbian mayors, the Serbian community in Kosovo, as well as Serbia and President Aleksandar Vučić, were portrayed as guarantors of the survival, unity, and rights of Serbs. On the other side, Prime Minister Albin Kurti, the Government of Kosovo, state

institutions, and non-Serb parties in Serb-majority municipalities were presented as obstacles and threats to this community. Within this framing, the elections were described as a process with an identity and political character, where Serb participation was interpreted as an expression of loyalty to Belgrade and a rejection of Kosovo’s institutions.

During the election campaign period, Serbia and Serbian political leaders ran an intensive propaganda campaign to mobilize the Serbian community in Kosovo. The Serbian public discourse was built on:[4]

[4] <https://hibrid.info/narrativat-e-serbise-per-zgjedhjet-lokale-ne-kosove-nga-mobilizimi-etnik-te-viktimizimi-politik/>

Narratives of Serbian media and officials during the election campaign:

- **Existential and national issue:** The elections were presented as a battle for the survival of Serbs in Kosovo, not merely as a democratic electoral process.
- **Loyalty to Serbia and Vučić:** Voting was interpreted as an act of loyalty to Belgrade and to Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.
- **Victimization of Serbs:** The Government of Kosovo and the incumbent Prime Minister Albin Kurti were portrayed as a threat to the existence of the Serbian community.
- **Legitimacy of the Serb List:** The Serb List was presented as the sole representative of the “will of the Serbs,” creating a narrative of political monopolization and unity under a single Serbian banner.

After the announcement of the election results, Serbian officials and media developed new narratives presenting the victory of the Serb List as evidence of the political unity of Serbs and their loyalty to Belgrade. [5]

These narratives interpreted the outcome as a strategic victory for Serbia and as a “failure” of Kosovo’s institutions to integrate the Serbian community.

Narratives of Serbian media and officials after the election results:

- **Victory as a guarantee of survival:** The results were presented as ensuring that the Serbian community would maintain control over Serb-majority municipalities.
- **Abolition of “Kurti’s apartheid”:** The participation of Serbs in the elections was portrayed as an act of opposition to Kosovo’s discriminatory policies.
- **Unity of Serbs and support from Belgrade:** The victory was interpreted as a result of the community’s unity and direct support from Serbia.
- **Referendum on Serbia’s legitimacy:** The vote for the Serb List was presented not merely as a local outcome but as an endorsement of Belgrade’s policy in Kosovo.
- **Record participation:** The high turnout of Serb voters was used to justify the political power and legitimacy of the Serb List.
- **Warning regarding Kosovo’s actions:** A narrative portraying Kosovo’s institutions as potential obstacles to Serb local governance.

[5] <https://hibrid.info/narrativat-serbe-pas-zgjedhjeve-lokale-ne-kosove-fitonja-e-listes-serbe-dhe-mesazhet-politike/>

The narrative framework of Russian media and officials

The Russian-language media platforms RT Balkan and Sputnik Serbia reported on the local elections in Kosovo by publishing dozens of articles within a short period. Their coverage reflected the claims of Serbian authorities and presented them as indisputable facts, reinforcing the narrative constructed by Belgrade. The reporting of these media outlets employed the same language and framing later adopted by Moscow's official diplomacy.

During the period from 13 September to 15 October 2025, Sputnik Serbia published a total of 43 articles reflecting Belgrade's official positions. Media coverage intensified in the days

before and after the elections, focusing on promoting the Serb List as the main political actor and portraying Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Kosovo's institutions as opposing parties in the electoral process.

In the same period, RT Balkan published 31 articles that reinforced the same messages, emphasizing the "battle for survival," "institutional pressure" from Kosovo, and the "risk of ethnic change." The articles included specific accusations, such as the alleged registration of 4,500 new Albanian voters in Gračanica, portraying the Serbian community as surrounded and under threat.

Main narratives of "Sputnik Serbia" and "RT Balkan" [6]:

- **Existential struggle and national survival:** The elections were portrayed as a "battle for the survival of the Serbian people against assimilation," giving the vote a national rather than merely local significance.
- **Institutional pressure and censorship from official Pristina:** Emphasis was placed on the idea that the elections were held under "terror" and "pressure" from Kurti's government, including claims of obstruction of accreditation for Serbian-language media and the banning of Serb List campaign spots.
- **Risk of ethnic change and assimilation:** The narrative of demographic threat was used, with accusations of the registration of Albanian voters in Serb-majority municipalities and the formation of Albanian coalitions, as a tool for mobilization.
- **Restoration of control and dignity:** The victory of the Serb List in nine municipalities was glorified as a triumph of "Serbian unity" and as an essential opportunity for "returning the northern municipalities to Serbian hands after a difficult period".
- **Belgrade as protector and guarantor:** Serbia's role—particularly through Vučić and Petković—was emphasized as the sole guarantor of the rights, well-being, and survival of Serbs in Kosovo.

[6] <https://hibrid.info/narrativat-e-mediave-ruse-russia-today-balkan-dhe-sputnik-serbia-lidhur-me-zgjedhjet-lokale-ne-kosove/>

The issue of local elections in Kosovo was addressed during a press conference by the spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova. In her appearance before journalists on October 17, she was asked about the local elections held on October 12 in Kosovo. Journalists requested that she comment on the possible impact of the

fact that the Serb List won in nine municipalities without a runoff on the political situation, asking whether this result could signify a restoration of Serbian control over northern Kosovo.

Zakharova's statement can be deconstructed into four main narratives, which were in full alignment with the previous information campaign:[7]

The four main narratives of Maria Zakharova regarding the elections:

- **Elections under pressure and censorship:** Zakharova began her response by emphasizing that the Serb List participated in the elections under “difficult and harsh conditions and great pressure.” She specifically mentioned “attempts to deny its registration.” Zakharova condemned the non-accreditation of Serbian journalists for the local elections, deliberately omitting the crucial fact that the initial CEC decision, which was later annulled, also included an Albanian media outlet — thereby turning a procedural issue into an instrument of ethnic disinformation. This framed the Serbian community as the victim of a repressive system.
- **Restoration of “usurped” control:** She described the Serb List's victory in nine municipalities as an “important step” that would help Serbs regain control over the northern areas, where, according to her, power had been “usurped” by Albanian mayors. Zakharova's use of the specific term “usurped” is not coincidental; it represents the culmination of a campaign in which this term was first propagated and normalized by RT Balkan and Sputnik, transforming a media claim into an official diplomatic position.
- **Albin Kurti as a threat and source of instability:** Zakharova directly identified the incumbent Prime Minister Kurti as the source of tensions. She accused him of promoting a “Serbian puppet” in parliament and warned of “new provocations” on his part. This portrayal potentially preemptively assigns responsibility to Kosovo for any future escalation, absolving Belgrade of blame.
- **Legitimization of Vučić and Belgrade:** Significantly, Zakharova concluded her statement by directly linking the massive support for the Serb List with the “high and stable trust that the Serbs of Kosovo have in Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.” This assertion effectively gives Moscow's endorsement not only to the Serb List but to Belgrade's entire policy toward Kosovo, legitimizing Vučić's role as the sole defender of Serbian interests.

[7] <https://hibrid.info/narrativat-e-zakharovas-per-zgjedhjet-ne-kosove-ne-sinkron-me-ato-te-mediave-ruse/>

Table 1: Comparative analysis of narratives

Portrayal of the elections	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p> <p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p> <p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>An 'existential battle' and 'decisive for survival'. A referendum for loyalty to Belgrade, not a local democratic process.</p> <p>Elections were portrayed as a 'battle for the survival of the Serb people' and an act of 'national resistance'.</p> <p>Elections were conducted under 'difficult conditions', implying that they were not a free and fair process.</p>
Status of the Serb community	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p> <p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p> <p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>A 'heroic' community that faces 'ongoing terrorism' and 'institutional violence' from Pristina.</p> <p>The Serb community is presented as a constant victim of 'terror', 'persecution', 'violence' and 'discrimination' from the 'Kurti regime'.</p> <p>Serbs faced 'great pressure', reinforcing the description to deny registration and representation.</p>
Role of Kosovo's institutions	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p> <p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p> <p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>Accused of 'institutional violence' and attempts to 'eradicate the Serbs'. Led by a 'discriminatory' and 'nationalist' regime.</p> <p>Institutions portrayed as 'usurpers', repressive and illegitimate, which apply 'censorship' and 'terror' towards Serbs.</p> <p>Institutions acted by 'seriously violating' legal procedures and 'usurped' power in the northern municipalities.</p>
Legitimacy of the Serb List	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p> <p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p> <p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>Represent the sole and legitimate [representative] of the 'will of the Serbs', symbol of 'Serb national unity' and 'legitimate power'.</p> <p>'Absolute protagonist', the only force that protects the existence of Serbs and 'defender of unity'.</p> <p>Acted with 'dignity' despite pressure and won convincingly, representing the true will of the Serbs.</p>

Table 1: Comparative analysis of narratives

<p>Role of Belgrade and Vučić</p>	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p>	<p>The sole protector and guarantor of the survival, well-being, and rights of the Serbs. A vote for the Serb List was an expression of loyalty to Vučić.</p>
	<p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p>	<p>Belgrade and Vučić were emphasized as the ‘sole guarantors’ of survival, offering jobs and financial support as evidence of the state’s ‘care.</p>
	<p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>Support for the Serb List reflects the ‘strong and enduring trust’ that Kosovo Serbs have in President Vučić and Belgrade’s policies.</p>
<p>Interpretation of the results</p>	<p><u>Serbian officials and media</u></p>	<p>A ‘triumph of Serb national unity’, which includes the legitimization of ‘institutional violence’ from Pristina.</p>
	<p><u>RT Balkan / Sputnik Serbia</u></p>	<p>Return of control’ to Serbian hands, ‘liberation of the usurped municipalities,’ and ‘failure of Albin Kurti’s government.</p>
	<p><u>Maria Zakharova</u></p>	<p>A ‘significant step’ to ‘regain control’ over the ‘usurped’ areas, undermining Kurti’s efforts</p>

conclusion

The local elections of October 12, 2025 in Kosovo were held in an environment deeply influenced by the narrative of information disorder and politically constructed narratives, which served from within the country to external influences from Belgrade and Moscow. The analysis of 131 media contents showed that the electoral process was accompanied by a construction of internal information disorder - mainly through fake polls and manipulative headlines - and by a coordinated propagandistic campaign from external actors who aimed to frame the local race as an existential battle for the Serb community.

In this context, Serbian media and those Russian in the Serbian language (Sputnik Serbia and Russia Today Balkan) deliberately amplified Belgrade's political messages, giving legitimacy to the narrative of the Serb List as representative of the "survival" of the Serb community in Kosovo by linking support for it with loyalty to President Aleksandar Vučić.

HIBRIDO.INFO