

2nd Vulnerability Index of Information Disinformation in Kosovo

June, 2024



**2ND VULNERABILITY INDEX
OF DISINFORMATION
IN KOSOVO**



Visit our website
www.dplus.org

Learn more about our latest publications, news, and infographics online.



Find us on Facebook
[@democracyplus](https://www.facebook.com/democracyplus)



Find us on Facebook
[@democracy-plus](https://www.facebook.com/democracy-plus)



Find us on Twitter
[@democracy_plus](https://twitter.com/democracy_plus)



Find us on Youtube
[@DemocracyPlus](https://www.youtube.com/DemocracyPlus)

Our Offices:

Street Bajram Kelmendi, Nr.92, Floor V
Prishtina, 10000
Kosovo

+383 (0) 38 749 288
info@dplus.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without prior permission of Democracy Plus.

Key Concepts

07

Executive Summary

08

Overview of Findings

13

Inter-ethnic relations domain main findings:

14

Gender-based disinformation domain main findings:

16

Political landscape domain main findings:

18

Media landscape domain main findings:

20

Public landscape domain main findings:

22

Implications for Policy Changes

24

Analytical Implications of Findings

25

ANNEX I – Methodology

33

ANNEX II - Codebook

42

Key Concepts

→ **Vulnerability Index:** A vulnerability index is a measure of the exposure of a population to some hazard. Typically, the index is a composite of multiple quantitative indicators that via some formula, delivers a single numerical result.¹

→ **Vulnerability:** In the context of a state, this represents a susceptibility to harm from malign state or non-state actors, which can be domestic or foreign, based on the presence of either a single or multiple deficiencies that can be exploited.²

→ **Information Disorders:** The sharing or developing of false information with or without the intent of causing harm, including misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.³

→ **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological or social motivations.⁴

→ **Misinformation** is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. For example, individuals who do not know that a piece of information is false may spread it on social media in an attempt to be helpful.⁵

→ **Malinformation** is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.⁶

→ **Gendered disinformation** is the use of false information to confuse or mislead by manipulating gender as a social cleavage to attack women and/or to sway political outcomes.⁷

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

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

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

1 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Available at <https://archive.unescwa.org/vulnerability-index>

2 GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index 2021. Extended Methodology. November 2021. Available at www.vulnerabilityindex.org

3 Wardle, C. and Derakhshan, H. (2017) "Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making" Council of Europe report.

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Ibi

7 CEPPS Strengthening Democracy Through Partnership. (2021) "Countering Disinformation Guide Launch" Available at <https://counteringdisinformation.org/complete-guide>

Executive Summary

During the two-year period 2022-2023, the prevalence of disinformation surged, posing a serious threat to Kosovo's democracy and security interests. Several factors contributed to this: foreign malign influence from Russia, China, and their proxy in the region, Serbia; as well as through media in other regions; lack of critical thinking skills as a result of poor education and correspondingly limited media literacy among the population; political polarization, especially during election periods; and lack of capacities in the administration to combat disinformation from malign foreign influence and poor-fact checking capacities. These factors undermine citizens' ability to access impartial and fact-based information, hindering their capacity to make informed decisions, including voting during elections. Overall, disinformation in Kosovo is recognized as a significant issue for the nation, permeating all forms of media, including traditional outlets.

The rapid dissemination of disinformation may exacerbate tensions with Serbia and even incite violence. A recent example of this is the Banjska attack⁸ in Zvečan Municipality during which the spread of disinformation reached its peak. According to National Democratic Institute (NDI) analysis and monitoring of social media engagement (Facebook and Twitter) surged on the day of the attack, from 924 engagements prior to the attack, to 33,785 engagements on the day of attack where disinformation narratives related to coordination conspiracies, the role of West, and photos of the dead spread with high intensity.

Democracy Plus published the first Vulnerability Index of Disinformation in Kosovo in 2022. This study generated significant attention and sparked an important conversation within Kosovo society about the impact of disinformation on the country's democracy and security. Building on this, Democracy Plus is continuing with the second edition of the Index to further raise awareness among the public and policymakers about the challenges Kosovo faces with disinformation.

This Index provides an assessment on a measurable scale of Kosovo's vulnerability to disinformation, evaluating the current situation and identifying key contributing factors. The purpose of this Index is to serve as a policy tool for decision-makers, but also as a source of information for understanding the dynamics within Kosovo's media landscape and the attitudes of its citizens toward information disorders and foreign influence, gendered disinformation and interethnic relations.

The Index assesses five priority thematic areas: 1. Media Environment, 2. Political Landscape, 3. Public Perceptions, 4. Gender Based Disinformation, and 5. Inter-Ethnic Relations. These domains are assessed from the perspective of foreign malign influence in Kosovo. These thematic areas were selected to examine the current situation and map out key factors. The Media Environment domain highlights the role of independent media in combating disinformation. The Political Landscape domain assesses the impact of disinformation on political stability and governance.

⁸ Evropa e Lire. "Sulmi në veri: Kosova bën përgjegjëse Serbinë, Serbia serbët e Kosovës" 25 September, 2023. Available at <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/sulmi-veri-kosova-pergjegjies-serbine/32607210.html>

The Public Perceptions domain examines societal attitudes and resilience to information disorders. The Gender-Based Disinformation domain focuses on how disinformation targets women, undermining gender equality and democratic participation. Lastly, the Inter-Ethnic Relations domain explores how disinformation exacerbates ethnic tensions and conflicts, affecting social cohesion and peace-building efforts. In the coming years, Democracy Plus plans to expand the Index and include other thematic areas, to deepen the comprehensive assessment of Kosovo's vulnerabilities towards information disorders.

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

The second edition of the Vulnerability Index of Disinformation (2024) compared to the first Vulnerability Index of Disinformation (2022) shows that:

- The Political Environment domain saw an increase in its vulnerability score from 45 in 2022 to 56 in 2024, signifying a higher vulnerability to disinformation and foreign influence in political matters.
- Similarly, the Media Environment domain vulnerability score rose from 46 to 55, indicating an increased vulnerability in media-related contexts.
- The Public Perception domain also experienced a notable increase, rising from 32 to 45, suggesting heightened vulnerability among the general public to disinformation and foreign interference.
- The introduction of Gender-based disinformation domain as a new domain in this Index reveals it to be the second most vulnerable domain, scoring 59 out of 100.
- The Inter-ethnic relations domain, also newly included in this Index, emerges as the most vulnerable domain, with a score of 69 out of 100.

Considering these trends, the overall vulnerability score increased from 41 in 2022 to 57 in 2024, as shown below, reflecting higher vulnerability across various domains to disinformation and foreign malign influence. This indicates a pressing need for targeted interventions and strategies to address and mitigate these risks effectively.

1

Inter-ethnic relations



69 / 100

2

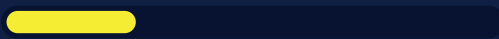
Gender based-disinformation



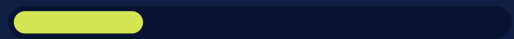
59 / 100

3

Political



56 / 100



45 / 100

4

Media



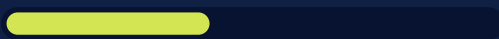
55 / 100



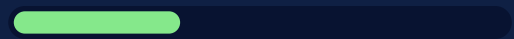
46 / 100

5

Public



45 / 100



32 / 100

TOTAL INDEX SCORE

INDEX 2024



57 / 100

INDEX 2022



41 / 100

0

Less Vulnerable

Vulnerable

100

More Vulnerable

The Vulnerability Index of Disinformation shows that Kosovo is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence on a scale of 57⁹ out of a 100.¹⁰



57
/100

⁹ Numbers rounded up for simplicity.

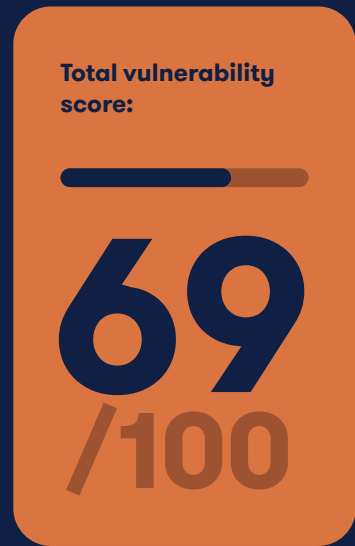
¹⁰ This shows that vulnerability to disinformation and foreign malign influence in Kosovo has increased by 14.6 points as compared to the two previous years. In the First Vulnerability Index, INDEX Disinformation and Foreign Malign Influence (2022) scored 41/100, see https://dplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ENG_Index-of-Disinformation.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3TPQ9i011wcVv60SuhTKGMYD8OU3z1yICmN6Z8PC-QPVTmjCkU18W_qE

The Index revealed that Kosovo's inter-ethnic relations represent the most vulnerable indicator, with gender-based disinformation following closely behind. Scoring behind this as the third, fourth and fifth most vulnerable indicators are the Public Perception; Media Environment; and Political Landscape indicators respectively.



Overview of Findings

1 Inter-ethnic relations domain main findings:



The Index revealed that Kosovo's inter-ethnic relations represent the most vulnerable indicator, with gender-based disinformation following closely behind, which also represents the level of salience of Kosovo's internal divisions.

The Index reveals that the Inter-ethnic relations is the most vulnerable dimension to disinformation and foreign malign influence of all the five index domains, scoring 69/100. This domain includes assessment of three

components of the inter-ethnic relations landscape: Kosovo-Serbia relations (50/100), inter-ethnic tensions (68/100), and targeted foreign disinformation (88/100).



Foreign malign influence in particular poses a significant challenge to inter-ethnic relations, given that Serbia, and to a degree Russia, count on the loyalty of the Serb community to challenge Kosovo's consolidation as a member of the international community of states. It is no surprise that while the vulnerability to disinformation in politics and media has increased generally since the last report, vulnerability in the field of inter-ethnic relations is significantly higher.

The Kosovo Serb community gets informed almost entirely by Serbian media outlets, the most influential of which are fully controlled by the increasingly authoritarian government in Serbia. Serbia's government has radicalized its stance towards Kosovo, and this has manifested itself in the Serbian media accordingly.

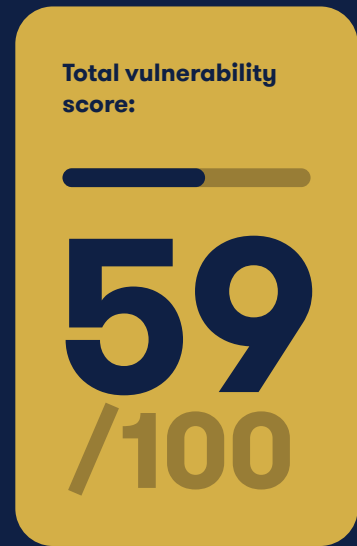
European and American diplomatic efforts led to a negotiated document package ("Normalization Dialogue with Serbia.") aiming for normalization as de facto recognition of Kosovo in exchange for self-management by the Kosovo Serb community and formalization of the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Serbia has not agreed with the package, but the EU considers it as binding and expects Serbia to abide by it as part of Serbia's EU integration process. The whole process was followed with increased tensions, where Kosovo Serbs withdrew from Kosovo institutions, with encouragement from Belgrade. In the meantime, Kosovo has increased its control over the North. As the Government of Kosovo intensified its efforts to consolidate sovereignty in the northern part of the country, the reduced presence of Serbia's illegitimate institutions inside Kosovo has also increased the mistrust vis-à-vis the Serbian community.

Tensions have erupted a few times, including major incidents in 2023, when close to 100 KFOR members were injured, and three Kosovo police officers abducted from Kosovo and were taken into Serbia.¹¹ Overall, during the last two-three years, relations between Kosovo and Serbia deteriorated which instigated a major mediation process.

¹¹ Koseev.info "KFOR recalls the largest number of injuries of mission's members in Zvecan one year later" 29 May, 2024. Available at <https://koseev.info/kosovo-news-kfor-injuries-memers-zvecan/>

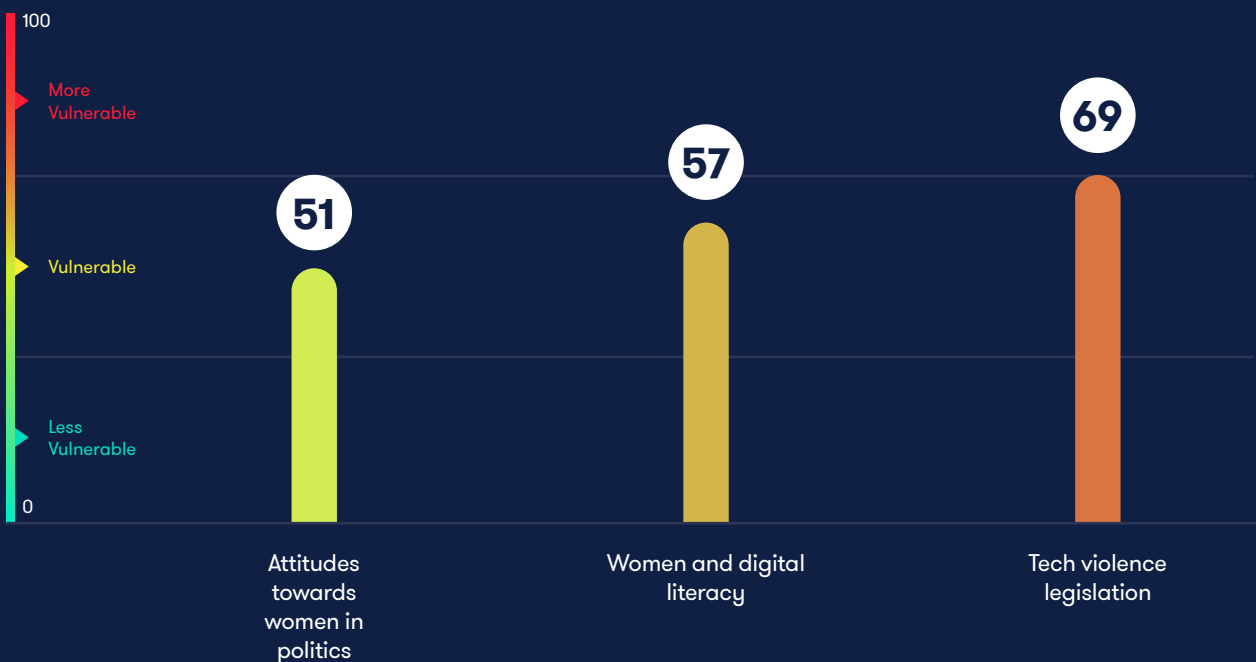
2 Gender-based disinformation domain main findings:



The Index reveals that the Gender-based Disinformation Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring

59/100, making it the second most vulnerable among the five Index domains assessed. This domain assesses attitudes towards women in politics,

women and digital literacy, and how technology is used, mainly by men, to amplify violence against women.



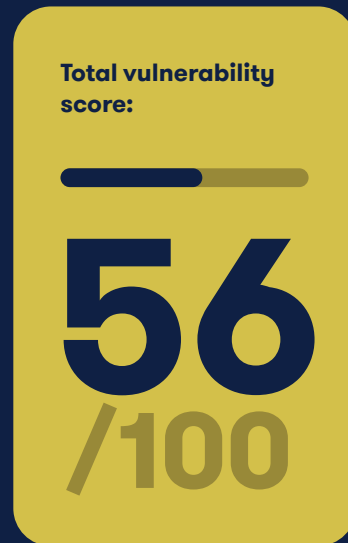
The lack of adequate national legislation that directly combats and punishes the use of technology to amplify on-line violence against women, including gender-based disinformation, remains a major challenge. In this context, gender-based disinformation involves the deliberate spread of disinformation targeting women due to their gender. The most recent case is the “Albkings” group, a platform in Telegram social network, that intimidated and shared intimate photos and phone numbers of women and girls.¹²

Citizen attitudes towards women in politics are less vulnerable compared to the assessment of legislation. However, a significant gap is revealed between the individual readiness to elect women and individual’s the belief that other citizens are ready to elect women. These perceptions suggest that citizens perceive women candidates as very hard to be elected. In particular, Index data shows that 45% of citizens stated that they are ready to elect women, while they think that only 20% of other citizens are ready to elect women.

Women and digital literacy scores 57/100, showcasing vulnerability towards disinformation and foreign malign influence. On average, women have moderate tendencies to believe in conspiracy theories. Index data shows that they also perceive themselves as not confident in identifying what is advertising and what is not, and on how to identify emails or messages in social media that contain suspicious links and addresses or names that they do not know.

¹² Koha.net. “Albkings” group is closed” 30 May 2024. Available at <https://www.koha.net/en/lajmet-e-mbremjes-ktv/421332/mbyllet-grupi-albkings>

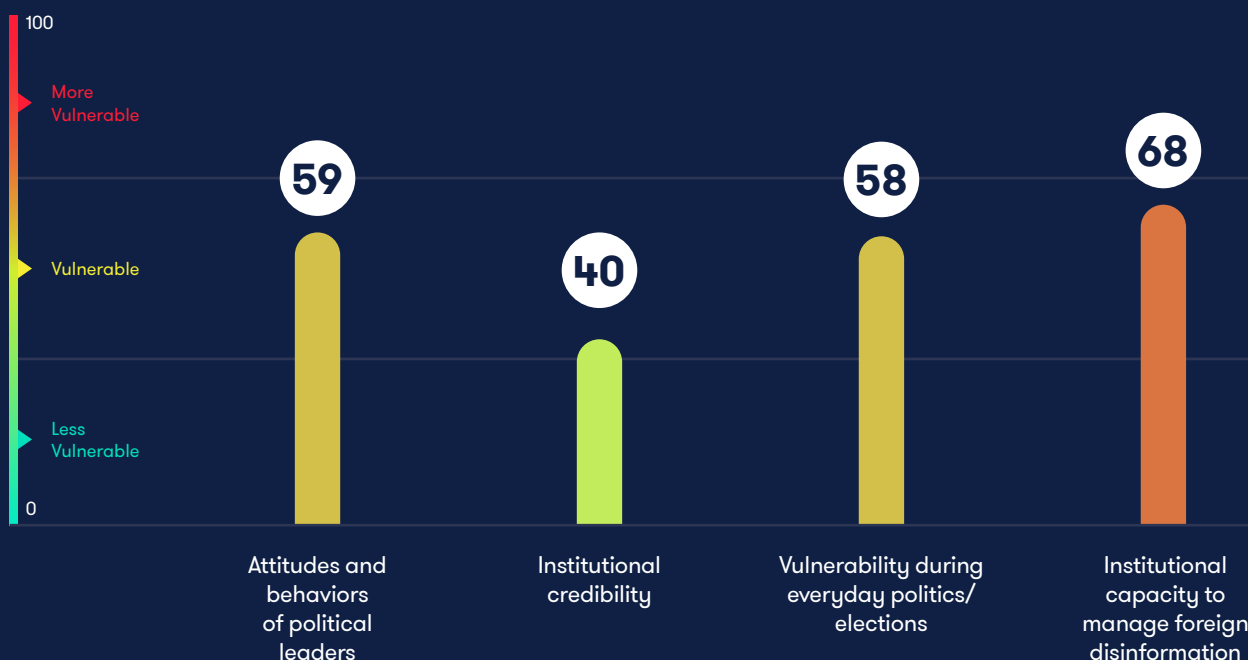
3 Political landscape domain main findings:



The Index reveals that the Political Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring 56 /100, making it the

third most vulnerable among the five Index domains. This domain includes attitude and behaviors of political leaders, institutional

credibility, vulnerability during everyday politics/ elections, and the institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation.



The institutional capacity to manage foreign disinformation is the most vulnerable indicator in this domain. Despite efforts by the Kosovo government to enhance institutional capacity in this area, such as implementing the Law on Cyber Security¹³ and establishing the National Training Center on Cyber Security¹⁴, there is a notable deficiency in administrative capabilities to effectively combat cyber threats. The Law on Cyber Security foresees the establishment of the Agency on Cybersecurity, although, it has still not been established. Thus far, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has one department responsible for cyber security and system administration, the Department on Cyber Security and System Administration.¹⁵

Similar to the results of the 1st edition of the Vulnerability Index published in 2022, disinformation narratives during elections and everyday politics remain common. This includes exploitation of the societal rifts and polarization through digital content. Some of the most polarized issues in Kosovo include the Normalization Dialogue with Serbia, the Association of Kosovo Serb-majority Municipalities, and the use of misogynistic language, especially during electoral periods. It is important to highlight that in contrast to other neighboring countries like North Macedonia where disinformation during elections is focused more on inter-ethnic relations and is sponsored from foreign malign actors, in Kosovo disinformation narratives during elections are mainly domestically driven.¹⁶

Furthermore, political leaders' attitudes and behaviors are more vulnerable to foreign malign influence, scoring 59 out of 100, compared to institutional credibility, which scored 40 out of 100. This indicates that political leaders' actions and stances are more vulnerable compared to the trustworthiness of institutions. It is important to highlight that attitudes and behaviors of political leaders' vulnerability has increased from 35 (1st Index 2022) to 59 in this second edition of the Index, showcasing a significance increase in vulnerability towards disinformation and foreign malign influence. This is due in part to the government's uncoordinated actions with the West, in particular those related to the North of Kosovo.¹⁷

13 See Law 08/L-173 on Cyber Security Available at <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=70933>

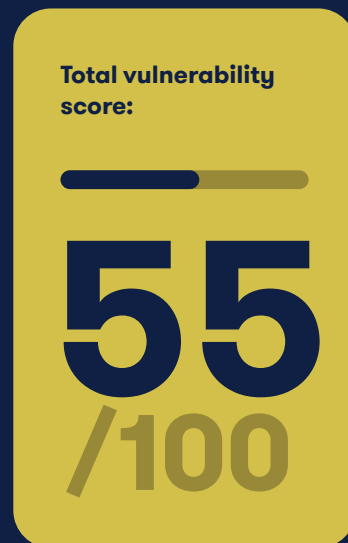
14 Klan Kosova. "Inaugurohet Qendra Trajnuese për Siguri Kibernetike, Kurti: Arritje domethënëse në këtë rrugëtim. 12 March 2024. Available at <https://klankosova.tv/inaugurohet-qendra-trajnuese-per-siguri-kibernetike-kurti-arritje-domethenese-ne-kete-rrugetim/>

15 Ministry of Internal Affairs. Department on Cyber Security and System Administration responsibilities. Available at <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/f/23/Departamenti-per-Siguri-Kibernetike-dhe-Administrim-te-Sistemeve>

16 Interview with the Executive Director of the Kosovo Journalist Association, Getoarbe Mulliqi. 30 May, 2024.

17 Online survey with experts from civil society and academia.

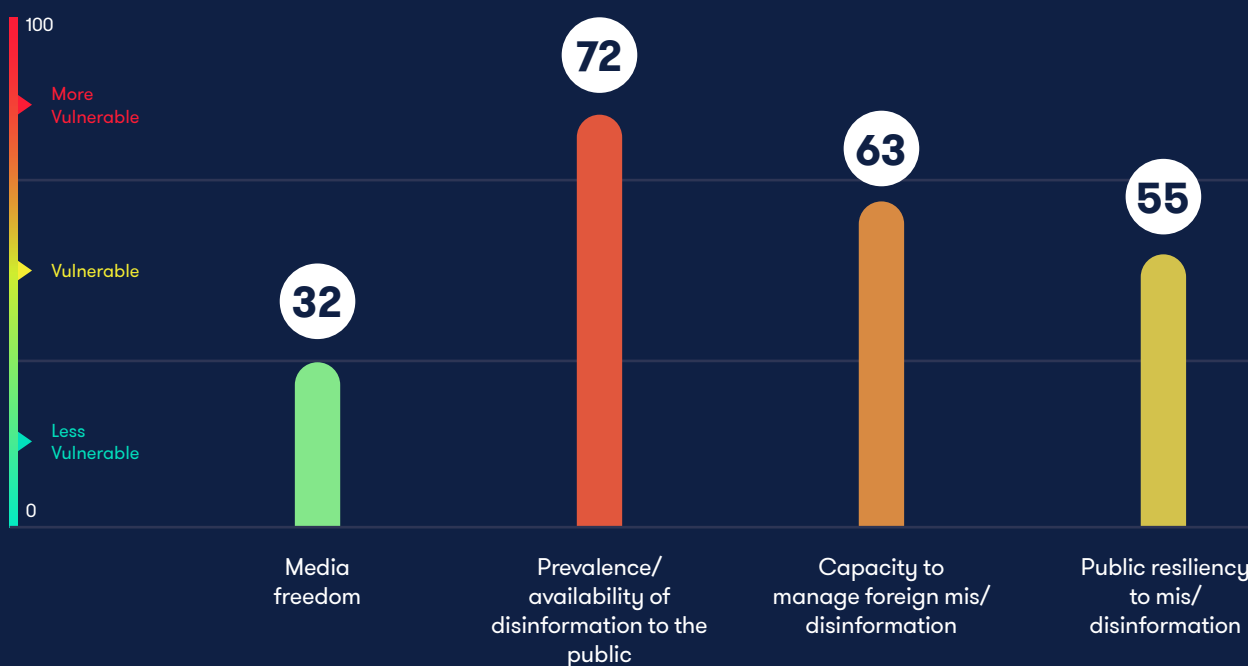
4 Media landscape domain main findings:



The Index reveals that the Media Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring 55/100, the fourth

most vulnerable among the five Index domains. Media landscape assesses media freedom, prevalence/availability of disinformation

to the public, capacity to manage foreign mis/disinformation, and public resiliency to mis/disinformation.



All four indicators covered in this domain show increased vulnerability compared to the assessment in 2022, the first edition of the Index. Prevalence/availability of disinformation to the public and capacity to manage foreign mis/disinformation are the most vulnerable indicators. This showcases that disinformation is perceived as prevalent in social media, and in private and public media, with particularly weak institutional capacities to manage these threats, both among these media actors but also on the part of the government.

Due to the presence and efforts of the factchecking partner in Kosovo¹⁸, Facebook appears to have become more effective in controlling disinformation compared to previous years. Yet, the current factcheck partners are not enough, considering the high intensity of mis/disinformation circulating on the platform.

Moreover, public resiliency to mis/disinformation remains low and weak, while citizens do not factcheck. At the same time, at particularly high risk to disinformation are Kosovo-Serb citizens, who read and believe Serbian government sponsored news portals; while the latter engages in wide spread disinformation on various topics related to Kosovo with the aim to portray the country as instable, amongst others.

Overall, and despite continuous requests from civil society organizations, the education system has not undergone any reforms such as the introduction of a media literacy/critical thinking course in primary and secondary education, contributing to low level of understanding of the news and weak individual resiliency to mis/disinformation. Similar to two years before, the least vulnerable indicator remains media freedom scoring 32/100. This suggests that, despite potential challenges and vulnerabilities in other areas, media freedom in Kosovo has remained relatively resilient or less prone to external influences or manipulation over the two-year period.

18 Facebook factchecking partner in Kosovo is Krypometër in www.kallxo.com

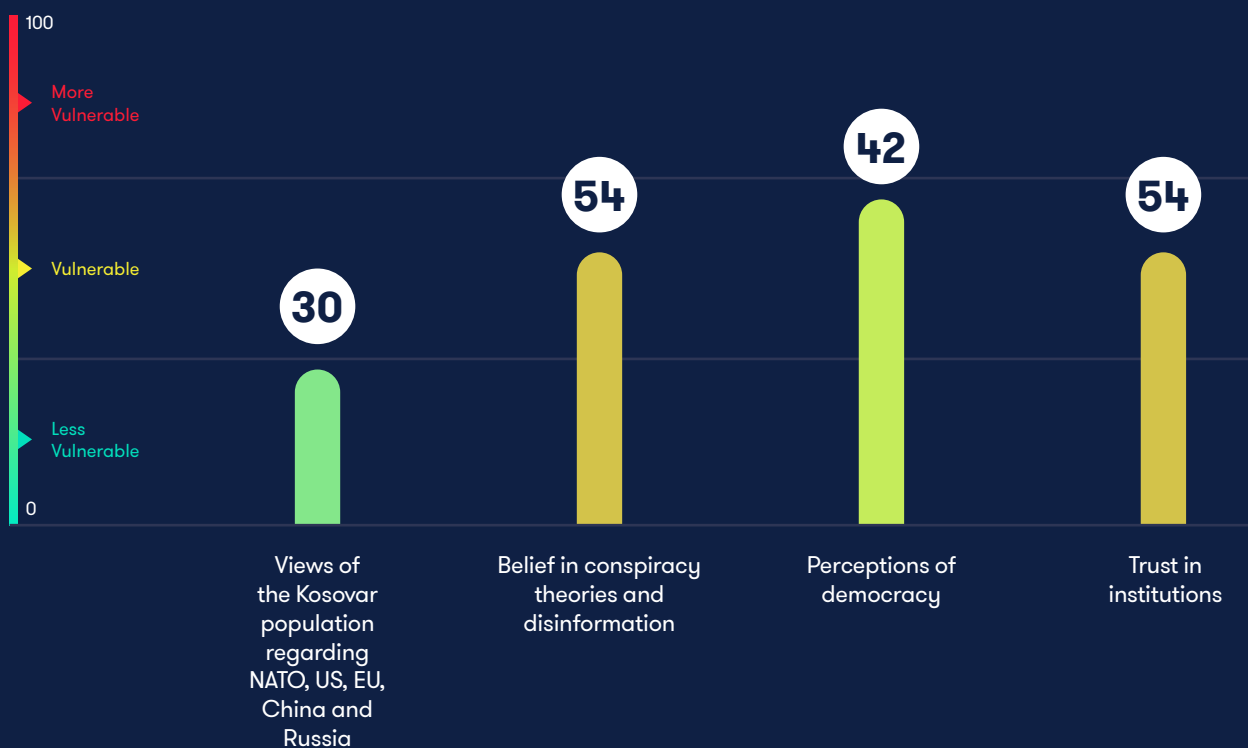
5 Public landscape domain main findings:



The Index reveals that the Public Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence, scoring 45/100, although it is the least

vulnerable among the five Index domains. This domain includes views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, the US, the EU, China, and

Russia; belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation; and perceptions of democracy and trust in institutions.



Similar to the first Index assessment, the public landscape domain remains the least vulnerable domain achieving a score of 45/100. The domain on the favorability of the Kosovar population towards NATO, US, EU, and China has remained the same, and the least vulnerable indicator throughout all five domains. However, the data reveal major differences in views among ethnicities in Kosovo's population, with Kosovo Albanian citizens viewing NATO, US, EU more favorably, while Kosovo Serb citizens view Western powers less favorably, and hold positive opinions about Russia and China.

Regarding beliefs in conspiracy theories and disinformation, no significant differences are evident based on age and gender. However, substantial disparities emerge among ethnicities concerning these conspiracy theories. For instance, according to NDI polls, more than half of Kosovo Serb citizens subscribe to the conspiracy theory attributing blame to NATO and the EU for tensions in Northern Kosovo, in contrast to a very small number of Kosovo Albanian citizens who hold such beliefs. The key factor influencing these and related conspiracy theory views is the large number of Kosovo Serbs who read and believe news portals like Sputnik, sponsored by Serbia. According to NDI polls, Kosovo Serbs neither read nor trust Kosovo-based media, and mostly turn to Serbian-based media to get informed.

Moreover, institutional trust scores 54/100, covering citizen confidence in seven major public institutions: Government, President, Media, Judiciary, Police, Kosovo Security Forces, and Political Parties. Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs hold significantly different views towards Kosovo Security Forces and Police, with the latter showing lower trust levels and heightened vulnerability to disinformation and foreign malign influence. This can be largely explained due to continuous disinformation in Serbian owned media about police operations in North Mitrovica as ethnic cleansing operations and operations against Kosovo Serbs, although these police operations are purely aimed at preventing and fighting corruption and organized crime.

Implications for Policy Changes

The Index vulnerability score increased from 41 in 2022 to 55.6 in 2024, indicating increased vulnerability across different domains to disinformation and foreign malign influence. This underlines the urgent institutional need for focused interventions and strategies to effectively tackle and ease these risks towards democracy. It is also important to note that

there is no single solution to disinformation, but rather that effective institutional responses require a multi-dimensional approach including policy measures, cooperation with media and CSOs and coordination with international actors.

What are the implications of this analysis?

1 Membership or an advanced level of cooperation in/with both NATO and the EU will empower Kosovo to enhance its institutional resilience against foreign interference from countries like Russia, China, their proxy in the region Serbia, and others.

2 Introduction of media literacy/critical thinking courses in all levels of education including primary, secondary, and university will equip pupils and students with basic knowledge on how to identify any type of information disorder. Alongside, raising awareness among various social groups who are not part of the education system is essential for a comprehensive approach towards combating any form of information disorder be it misinformation, disinformation, or misinformation.

3 A legal framework that recognizes and punishes all forms of violence against women in the digital space is essential and urgent to combat gender-based disinformation.

4 International community should intensify its efforts to close the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. Efforts should be made to identify groups that are willing to engage towards a common interest, across the ethnic divide (women, green agenda, businesses). Practical outreach to the Serb community should improve, both in terms of the government outreach and in terms of the demand by the Serb community to seek services it is entitled to.

5 Increased capacities of the Press Council in Kosovo (PCK), self-regulatory entity that oversees online media, is crucial for facilitating swift responses to all complains received. This given, PCK will be able to proactively monitor online media content serving as a preventive measure against information disorder.

6 Partnerships among various actors including the government, civil society, media, and private sector will result in stronger and more consolidated efforts towards preventing and fighting any form of information disorder.

Analytical Implications of Findings

1 Inter-ethnic relations domain

Total vulnerability score:



69/100

The 2nd edition of the Index shows that interethnic relations domain is the most vulnerable domain, scoring 69 out of 100. This domain mainly covers relations between Kosovo and Serbia, interethnic related tensions, and targeted disinformation from foreign actors. The latter is the most vulnerable indicator across the 18 indicators of the Index.

Disinformation is often perceived as a new phenomenon given the advent of technology and AI. But old-fashioned disinformation propaganda has been around for decades, including in the Western Balkans. “Ethnic entrepreneurs” (leaders who have appealed to ethnic divisions) of the 80s and 90s in the former Yugoslavia intensively utilized techniques to demonize the other side in order to portray them as an ethnic group posing an existential threat. Technology has merely amplified and increased the ability of propaganda to be much more

powerful given new technological tools. While the assumption has been that growing digitalization will democratize media, it turns out that technology has made it easier for authoritarian governments to control media outlets. Digitalization has democratized the media in many ways and has contributed to the deconcentration of media ownership; but it has also provided an open space for alternative content producers and citizens to produce news-like content that is mistakenly identified as media production.

Technology now offers the ability to target specific communities and in Kosovo, and Serbia has sought to undermine Kosovo’s image among Kosovo Serbs, discourage them from participating in institutions, and get them to believe that Kosovo institutions want to expel them from Kosovo – all to mobilize them against Kosovo. Independent media tend not to resort to propaganda, but most Kosovo Serbs watch media controlled by Serbian government outlets and most media in Serbia are under control of the government.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine strikes numerous similarities with the wars of the Balkans. Serbia and Russia’s justifications of attacking neighboring countries were both based on: (a) negating the history of the other side, (b) portraying the other side as inferior, and (c) portraying the plight of minority Serb/Russian populations as threatened by ethnic cleansing, and (d) choreographing the image of an uprising even when it is in fact state-sponsored actions.

There are reasons to see Serbia as Russia’s proxy but also there is ample evidence to conclude that in many cases, Serbia acts in its own agency. For instance, Serbia’s plans for a “Serbian World” have gradually materialized with the All-Serbian Assembly. The adoption of the same national day by Republika Srpska as Serbia is another signal, posing a major security threat to regional peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

Russian influence has also increased public mistrust on vaccines and generally eroded trust in the West. It is interesting to note that Russian media, such as Sputnik, do not promote anti-vaccine narratives within Russia. However, their affiliates in Serbia and other EU countries have done so, highlighting the magnitude of the malign intent behind the spread of disinformation by the Russian state.

The terrorist attack in Banjska, Kosovo in September of 2023, was covered very differently by the media in Kosovo and those in Serbia, and other countries of the region. In Kosovo it was treated as Serbian state-sponsored paramilitary terrorism, while in Serbia the attackers enjoy the status of heroes. This shows how disinformation is utilized by the state, to manipulate and radicalize the public along ethnic lines. The strategy of disinformation is not to misrepresent facts but to utilize the undercurrents and the level of dissatisfaction among groups in order to pit them against other groups and enlarge existing social grievances and rifts.

Public support for authoritarian leaders has increased in all countries of WB except Kosovo and Albania where the appeal for non-western orientation is also decreasing. Support for Vladimir Putin and Tayyip Erdogan is high in WB, while Biden tops the list only in Kosovo. Even in NATO members like Macedonia and Montenegro, the

pro-EU mood is barely over 50%.¹⁹ Anti-EU feelings are generally displayed by ethnic Serbs in most WB countries, reflecting the level of anti-European feelings that are openly advocated by its leadership.

The foreign malign influence in inter-ethnic relations is a greater problem than in other fields, given that Serbia, and to a degree Russia, count on the loyalty of the Serb community to challenge Kosovo's consolidation as a member of the international community of states and international organizations. It is no surprise that while the vulnerability to disinformation in politics and media has regressed since the last report, the vulnerability in the field of inter-ethnic relations has worsened / increased.

Serbia's frequent scrambling of its forces to the border with Kosovo and the encouragement to instigate dissent inside Kosovo have also increased the risk of armed clashes. Numerous countries that contribute to the Kosovo Force have beefed up their presence, especially in the northern part of the country (Germany, UK, Turkey, Bulgaria, Italy, etc.). Serbia justifies such moves by portraying Kosovo Serbs as being under threat, and the fears are that it seeks a moment when actual entry of its troops – possibly disguised as dissatisfied citizens who took up arms – venture into Kosovo's north.

The presence of Kosovo's police in the north and the efforts to crack on Serbia's illegal presence have been heavily utilized by Belgrade's media seeking to erode Kosovo's image among Kosovo Serbs. Relations among ordinary people have not suffered significantly but overall trust in Kosovo institutions has fallen.

There is a general assessment that disinformation from malign foreign actors' target Kosovo Serbs more than Albanians.

Government-sponsored media outlets in Serbia engage in widespread disinformation on various online platforms. The policy to show Kosovo as failing portrays it as risky, presenting a climate of instability and suspicion between communities. Misrepresenting incidents and manipulation of facts aim to exacerbate interethnic tensions and undermine trust in law enforcement. As quoted by Prishtina Insight (3 June 2023), "on May 17 that these types of reports exploit interethnic relations by republishing fake news, making it seem as though the situation is always unstable."²⁰ Reliable sources of news usually get low readership, but Kosovo Serbs enjoy more access to independent news than most of their fellow Serbs across the Western Balkans.

19 International Republican Institute. Western Balkans Regional Poll. February to March 2024.
20 Prishtina Insight. "Disinformation stoking inter-ethnic tensions in Kosovo" 23 May 2024.

2 Gender-based disinformation domain

Total vulnerability score:

59/100

The 2nd edition of the Index reveals that the gender-based disinformation domain is the second most vulnerable domain, scoring 59/100. This domain captures attitudes towards women in politics, women and digital literacy, and tech violence legislation.

It is important to note that the spread of gendered disinformation, sexist behavior and gender stereotypes harm not only targeted individuals/groups, but also democracy. It is used as a tool to silence women, to dissuade their engagement in the online political discourse, to shape gender perceptions, and influence the role of women in democracy.²¹ This leads to the discouragement or exclusion of the half of population from exercising their right of public participation, thereby posing a serious threat

to democracy. In particular, sexist behaviors and gender stereotypes continue to prevent further progress in achieving effective equality between women and men in Europe and beyond.²²

Facebook and Instagram are the platforms where women most commonly encounter online violence amplified by technology. Specifically, one out of every three women who experienced such violence reported that it occurred on either of these two platforms.²³

According to the same report, in Kosovo, 43.3% of women have experienced at least one form of technology-facilitated violence.²⁴

An example of how women are endangered is the recent and shocking case of the “Albkings,” a group of people, most of whom are men, who share personal images and numbers of young women and girls on the Telegram network platform. Online violence scored the highest / most vulnerable amongst the three indicators, showcasing an urgent need to improve legislation in order to protect women from disinformation and other forms of gender-based violence in the digital space.

Coming in second in terms of vulnerability are citizen attitudes towards women in politics. A major gap is revealed between individual readiness to elect women and the belief that other citizens are ready to elect women, suggesting that this perception makes women candidates appear unelectable. In particular, 84% of citizens stated that they are ready to elect women, although they think that only 20% of other citizens are ready to elect women.

Moreover, although, 56% of people agree or strongly agree that online harassment and negative portrayal of women politicians discourages their political participation, online violence against women is present on a daily basis and it intensifies during elections. Around 90% of hate comments in digital space are from men towards women and they generate a higher inter-prime compared to general news.²⁵ These misogynist comments increase during important political processes and election campaigns.²⁶

21 The U.S. Department of State. “Gendered Disinformation: Tactics, Themes, and Trends by Foreign Malign Actors.” March 27, 2023. Available at <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>

22 “Council of Europe. (2021) “State of democracy and human rights and the rule of law: a democratic renewal for Europe” pg. 100

23 UN WOMEN. (2023). “The dark side of digitalization: Technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Research Report. https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/research-tf-vaw_full-report_28-november.pdf?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAROKAdFwujVTu712vDJee1yLwjxVW8q7BzJlZ4vEBN4nev6vLLVAaK05J5c_aem_AXRNP7_Mgw8avibPVhc5DL6N6MLr3lN6aToiC_C7iu4cRto2zB95HFU8cgXroUOQcKZasH62bJ8H5pOOx2YJzb

24 The most prevalent forms of TF-VAW include receiving unwanted or offensive content or messages, hacking women’s account and web-pages, receiving sexual advances or inappropriate content. Cyber stalking and surveillance/tracing, identify theft are also other forms of TF-VAW or Cyber VAWG.

25 Democracy for Development (2023). “Mediat jo-sociale. Hulmtimi dhe ekspozimim i dezinformimit gjinor në Kosovë.” Media monitoring report. Prishtinë, Kosovo.

26 Evropa e Lirë. “Urrejtja e shprehur në internet: Gratë bartin peshën kryesore” 12 February, 2024. Available at <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/grate-te-pasigurta-online-gjuha-e-urrejtjes-/32815422.html>

Scoring in third place in terms of vulnerability is women and digital literacy, at 57/100, suggesting that, on average, women have moderate tendencies to believe in conspiracy theories. They do not feel confident in recognizing what is advertising and what is not when they

read online. Also, they are more vulnerable (63/100) in identifying email-s or messages in social media that contain suspicious links and addresses or names that they do not know.

Overall, gender-based violence amplified by technology, including online harassment such as misogynistic language, stalking, disinformation, and hate speech targeting women in politics and public discourse, is widespread and requires legislative action.

3 Political landscape domain

Total vulnerability score:

56/100

The 2nd edition of the Index indicates that the Political Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence on a scale of 56 out of 100. This places it as the third most vulnerable domain among the five index categories. This domain captures attitudes and behaviors of political leaders, institutional credibility, vulnerability during everyday politics/elections, and institutional capacity manage foreign disinformation.

First, vulnerability during everyday politics and during electoral periods is significant. In particular, disinformation generated by domestic and foreign malign actors (primarily Russia, China and its proxy in the region-Serbia) about issues of a political nature, including the dialogue with Serbia and government decisions over the north of Kosovo, is high and shows a continuous increase.²⁷ One stark example is the Banjska attack which took place on 24th of September,

in Banjska, Kosovo. NDI monitoring reports show that information disorders were highly widespread throughout all social media and were aimed at inciting mass panic and violence in that part of Kosovo. AI was also utilized to create pictures from other conflicts as if they were taking place in Banjska. Similarly, a government decision on reciprocity measure on identity cards produced the second most recorded information disorders.²⁸ Moreover, hate speech and disinformation is also widely spread during electoral periods. According to NDI monitoring, elections in the Serbian majority municipalities, held on April 23, 2023, were accompanied with a high number of information disorders including language promoting political division, harassment, harsh and sexist language, hate speech and ethnic hatred, and manipulated and misleading content.

Second, the ability of institutions to handle foreign disinformation has proven to be the most vulnerable aspect of this domain. This is of paramount importance for a number of reasons including national security, public trust in institutions, economic stability, democratic processes and international relations. The latter can strain diplomatic relations

and weaken alliances. Yet, despite the government's efforts to bolster institutional capacities in combating disinformation - especially cyberattacks from foreign entities, through measures like enacting the Cyber Security Law²⁹ and setting up the National Training Center on Cyber Security³⁰ - experts still perceive these capacities as inadequate, with vulnerabilities persisting at a high level. Additional enabling factors to vulnerability from disinformation and foreign malign influence include the uncoordinated government decisions with the West, lack of capacities in the administration to combat disinformation from malign foreign influence, lack of financial media independence and poor fact-checking capacities.³¹

Third, the vulnerability of political leaders' attitudes and behaviors is slightly higher than that of institutional credibility. It's worth mentioning that compared to two years ago, the vulnerability of political leaders' attitudes and behaviors has increased slightly. The absence of coordination in foreign policy and disjointed government actions concerning Serb-majority municipalities are seen as contributing factors to this vulnerability.³²

27 For more related to specific cases of disinformation from malign foreign influence in Kosovo, "Vorbulla e Renave" in 2023, by Kallxo.com, available at <https://kallxo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/VORBULLA-E-RRENAVE-FINALE.pdf>

28 Democracy for Development (2022). "Information Disorder: Its Impact on the Information of Citizens" Policy Report. Available at https://d4d-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/D4D_Q3report_Final_ENG_WEB.pdf

29 See Law 08/L-173 on Cyber Security Available at <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=70933>

30 Klan Kosovo. "Inaugurohet Qendra Trajnuese për Siguri Kibernetike, Kurti: Arritje domethënëse në këtë rrugëtim" March, 2024. Available at Klan Kosovo. <https://klankosova.tv/inaugurohet-qendra-trajnuese-per-siguri-kibernetike-kurti-arritje-domethenese-ne-kete-rrugetim/>

31 Online survey with experts from academia and civil society.

32 Online survey with experts from academia and civil society.

4 Media landscape domain

Total vulnerability score:

55/100

The 2nd edition of the Index shows that media is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence on a scale of 55 out of 100. This places the media domain as the fourth most vulnerable among the five Index domains. Media landscape assesses media freedom, prevalence/availability of disinformation to the public, capacity to manage foreign mis/disinformation, and public resiliency to mis/disinformation.

Prevalence/availability of disinformation to the public is the most vulnerable indicator of this domain, scoring 72/100. This indicator is also as the most vulnerable indicator among all other indicators (18 in total) throughout five domains. Disinformation is recognized as a significant issue for the nation, permeating all forms of media, including traditional outlets,³³ although, traditional media still remains a more trusted source compared to online media. While there are slight disparities in

vulnerability levels across online media and public and private television, there's a somewhat brighter aspect: the vulnerability toward altering public attitudes is slightly lower compared to the prevalence of disinformation and lack of media literacy.

Capacity to manage foreign disinformation remains the second most vulnerable indicator in this domain. According to expert opinion, the capacity of institutions, in particular the media, to manage the threat from disinformation is perceived as low.³⁴ Similarly, the effectiveness of Facebook, although better than compared to 2022, is considered weak. As of early 2024, there were 855.9 thousand Facebook users in Kosovo.³⁵ Facebook has one third-factchecking partner³⁶ in Kosovo, but compared to the level of information disorder spread, it is difficult to manage all of it. Moreover, the proliferation of online platforms and the lack of institutional capacities has made it more difficult to ensure the safety of online users. Online media are self-regulated through the Press Council of Kosovo.³⁷ However, the capacities of the Press Council of Kosovo to conduct ex-ante monitoring of online content and to

review all complaints received are deficient. Additionally, the Council does not have binding powers on its decisions; thus, limiting its functionality. Given this context, spread of disinformation becomes easier.

Public resilience to disinformation scores 55/100, being the third most vulnerable indicator of this domain, whereas media freedom scores 32/100, being the least vulnerable indicator. This points firstly to the education system, which does not prepare Kosovar citizens to identify any type of information disorder; thereby, contributing to weak public resiliency to information disorder. Primary and high schools do not have media literacy/critical thinking classes as part of their syllabus. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year olds' ability to read, ability in mathematics and science knowledge, students in Kosovo scored less than the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science and a smaller proportion of students in Kosovo were top performers (Level 5 or 6) in at least one subject, or achieved a minimum level of proficiency (Level 2 or higher) in all three subjects, as compared to the on

33 Online survey with experts from academia and civil society.

34 Ibid.

35 Digital 2024: Kosovo. Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-kosovo>

36 This third-fact checking party is Kryptometri. Additionally, internationally recognized certified fact checking partners by IFCN (International Fact-checking Network) in Kosovo are: Kryptometer and Hybbrid.

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

average across OECD countries,³⁸ Second, although media freedom scores best in comparison to other indicators, it should be noted

that the Association of Kosovo Journalists has recorded 74 cases of attacks on journalists and media during 2023 and this number

of attacks has increased by 41 in comparison to 2022.³⁹ These numbers raise concerns about the freedom and safety of journalists.

38 PISA 2022 results. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/kosovo-1f99d575/#section-d1e17>

39 Interview with the Executive Director of the Kosovo Journalist Association, Getoarbe Mulliqi. 30 May, 2024.

5 Public perception landscape domain

Total vulnerability score:

45/100

The Second Index indicates that the Public Perception Landscape is vulnerable to disinformation and foreign malign influence on a scale of 45 out of 100. This scoring showcases that this domain remains the least vulnerable, as was the case two years before (INDEX 2022). The public landscape domain captures the views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, US, EU, China, and Russia, belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation, perceptions of democracy, and trust in institutions.

The views of the Kosovar population regarding NATO, US, EU, China, and Russia remain the least vulnerable. Yet the Index indicates significant differences in views remain between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities. Similar, to First Index data, Kosovo Albanian citizens view NATO, the US and the EU more favorably, while Kosovo Serb citizens view Western powers less favorably and hold a positive opinion about Russia and China. Thus, the level of vulnerability to disinformation and foreign malign

influence is significantly higher among the Kosovo Serb community compared to Kosovo Albanian community. Data segregation by gender reveals no differences in views and voting among women and men on this indicator.

Second, citizens are vulnerable to conspiracy theories and disinformation on a scale of 54/100. Substantial disparities emerge among ethnicities concerning conspiracy theories belief, while no differences are shown based on age and gender. For instance, 55% of Kosovo Serb citizens subscribe to the conspiracy theory attributing blame to NATO and the EU for tensions in Northern Kosovo, in contrast to only 16% of Kosovo Albanian citizens who hold such beliefs. However, other domains show no significant differences in citizen vulnerability to disinformation, no matter ethnicity, for example, the view that homosexuality is a disease (60% of citizens). Additionally, perceptions of democracy (scoring 42/100) show no major differences among ethnicities, age, or gender. Overall, polls indicate that Kosovars have a high degree of support for democracy overall.⁴⁰

Third, trust in institutions is vulnerable on a scale of 54/100. This domain captures citizen trust

toward seven major institutions including: government, president, media, judiciary, police, Kosovo security forces, and political parties. Significantly, differing perspectives emerge between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs regarding Kosovo Security Forces and Police, with the latter displaying lower trust levels and greater vulnerability to disinformation and foreign interference; while both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs hold similar poor views with regard to trusting political parties.

⁴⁰ NDI Report. (2022). "Information Integrity in Kosovo: Assessment of the Political Economy of Disinformation" Available <https://www.ndi.org/publications/information-integrity-kosovo-assessment-political-economy-disinformation>

ANNEX I – Methodology

Overarching Sources of Information

Vulnerability Index of Disinformation is based on 11 overarching data sources:

1 NDI Public Opinion Research

Representative opinion national and regional polls were conducted in the Republic of Kosovo in 2021, 2022, and 2023 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). A number of questions from the NDI surveys were used for the Index.

2 Expert Online Surveys

Democracy Plus developed a list of experts from civil society, academia, journalists and government officials. Each expert group (e.g., civil society, academia, and journalists) had at least 20% representation in the interviews. The list included 15 experts, 11 of whom were men and 4 of whom were women. A total of 12

were from the Albanian community and 3 were from the Serbian community.

3 Desk Research

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

4 V-Dem Index

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) is a research project conceptualizing and measuring democracy, based at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.⁴¹

5 UN Pulse Survey⁴²

6 Corruption Perceptions Index developed by Transparency International⁴³

7 World Press Freedom Index developed by Reporters Without Borders⁴⁴

8 Media Literacy Index developed by Open Society Institute Sofia and European Policies Initiative⁴⁵

9 PISA Scores⁴⁶

10 UN Women's Report⁴⁷

11 UN E-Participation Score⁴⁸

⁴¹ Varieties of Democracy. Available at <https://www.v-dem.net/>

⁴² UN Public Pulse. Available at <https://www.undp.org/kosovo/projects/public-pulse>

⁴³ Corruption Perception Index. Available at https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021?gclid=EALalQobChMlyJbMhpjkAlVz49oCRI17OTrFAAYASAAEgI_M_D_BwE

⁴⁴ World Press Freedom Index Available at <https://rsf.org/en/rsf%E2%80%99s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0>

⁴⁵ Media Literacy Index. Open Society Institute Sofia. Available at <https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en>

⁴⁶ PISA Score results on Kosovo. Available at https://www.oecd.org/pisa/OECD_2022_PISA_Results_Comparing%20countries%E2%80%99%20and%20economies%E2%80%99%20performance%20in%20mathematics.pdf

⁴⁷ UN Women Report: "The dark side of digitalization Addressing technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia" https://www.oecd.org/pisa/OECD_2022_PISA_Results_Comparing%20countries%E2%80%99%20and%20economies%E2%80%99%20performance%20in%20mathematics.pdf

⁴⁸ UN e-participation. Available at <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Participation-Index>

ANNEX II - Codebook

Codebook

The following is an overview of the questions involved in the 2024 version of the Kosovo Disinformation Vulnerability Index. It is focused primarily on five broad dimensions of vulnerability, which are further broken down via indicators containing survey and aggregate data relevant to the dimensions in question. From the inaugural version of the index, the prior three dimensions included in the assessment are (1) Public Attitudes, (2) the Political Landscape, and (3) Media Environment. In addition, we have added two now dimensions. These are: (4) Gender Based Disinformation, and (5) Inter-Ethnic Relations. For the majority of the included datapoints data was taken from the most recent year available for each source, with the year of all data sources and surveys detailed next to each included question. Each dimension is further divided among four additional indicators, which each total a score of 100. Total scores among these indicators are added together and divided by the four indicators to get the final output for each dimension.

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

Public Attitudes

The Public Attitudes dimension is drawn entirely from survey data procured by the NDI. Depending on the question, the most recent version of each question was taken from two main NDI surveys, including NDI's Regional Poll and NDI's Kosovo Country Poll. In addition, for perceptions of democracy, data is taken from the United Nation's April 2023 Pulse Survey. The Public Attitudes dimension is divided into four equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each indicator is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100.

1 Views of the Kosovar Population Regarding NATO, EU, US, China and Russia

QUESTION ONE: What is your opinion about China?

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: 1/5 – (1 is Very Unfavorable and 5 is Very Favorable)

QUESTION TWO: What is your opinion about Russia?

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: 1/5 – (1 is Very Unfavorable and 5 is Very Favorable)

QUESTION FOUR: What is your opinion about the United States?

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: 1/5 – (1 is Very Favorable and 5 is Very Unfavorable)

QUESTION FIVE: What is your opinion about NATO?

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: 1/5 – (1 is Very Favorable and 5 is Very Unfavorable)

QUESTION SIX: If the referendum for EU membership of your country was held this Sunday, how would you vote?

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: 1-4 – Absolutely in Favor/ Probably in Favor/Probably Against/Absolutely Against

QUESTION SEVEN: If the referendum for NATO membership was held this Sunday, how would you vote?

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: 1-4 – Absolutely in Favor/ Probably in Favor/Probably Against/Absolutely Against

2 Belief in Conspiracy Theories and Disinformation

QUESTION ONE: Do you think some online news websites/portals ever report false information or not?

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: 1-3 – No, they do not do it/ Yes, occasionally/Yes, regularly

QUESTION TWO: Do you believe the following statement: “Homosexuality is a disorder or a disease”

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION THREE: Do you believe the following statement: “Association of Serb Majority Municipalities will become the new Republika Srpska in Kosovo”

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION FOUR: Do you believe the following statement: “NATO and EU are to blame for the tensions in the north of Kosovo”

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION FIVE: Do you believe the following statement: “International partners are wrongly punishing Kosovo”

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION SIX: Do you believe the following statement: “US and EU envoys for Western Balkans are trying to overthrow Kurti”

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll

SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

3 Perceptions of Democracy

QUESTION ONE: Regardless of daily politics and looking forward to the future, do you agree that the democratic processes in Kosovo are instituted and are going in the right direction?

SOURCE: UN Pulse Survey

SCALE: (0-1) Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/Neutral – 0; Agree/ Strongly Agree – 1

QUESTION TWO: Are the elections in Kosovo democratic and in accordance with international standards?

SOURCE: UN Pulse Survey

SCALE: (0-1) Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/Neutral – 0; Agree/ Strongly Agree – 1

QUESTION THREE: Do you think that your vote will change the situation in Kosovo?

SOURCE: UN Pulse Survey

SCALE: (0-1) Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/Neutral – 0; Agree/ Strongly Agree – 1

QUESTION FOUR: Do you believe that decision-making in Kosovo institutions is inclusive and responsive?

SOURCE: UN Pulse Survey

SCALE: (0-1) Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/Neutral – 0; Agree/ Strongly Agree – 1

4 Trust in Institutions

QUESTION ONE: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: President

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

QUESTION THREE: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Government

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

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

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

QUESTION SEVEN: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Judiciary

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll

SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

QUESTION EIGHT: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Police

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll
SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

QUESTION NINE: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Media

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll
SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

QUESTION ELEVEN: Please rank the following institutions from 5 as the most trusted and 1 as the least trusted: Kosovo Security Force

SOURCE: NDI Regional Poll
SCALE: (1-4) Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor

Political Landscape

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

1 Attitudes and Behavior of Political Leaders

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - Very tenuous / Somewhat tenuous / Neutral / Somewhat normalized / Very normalized

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - Very tenuous / Somewhat tenuous / Neutral / Somewhat normalized / Very normalized

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - Very normalized / Somewhat normalized / Neutral / Somewhat tenuous / Very tenuous

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - Very normalized / Somewhat normalized / Neutral / Somewhat tenuous / Very tenuous

QUESTION SIX: Considering the Government of Kosovo's activities and statements over the last few years, how tenuous would you consider relations between Kosovo and: U

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - Very normalized / Somewhat normalized / Neutral / Somewhat tenuous / Very tenuous

QUESTION SEVEN: To what extent have the actions of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizen's democratic ideals?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - (1 is Less Democratic and 5 is More Democratic)

QUESTION EIGHT: To what extent have the statements of Kosovo's political leaders lived up to citizen's democratic ideals?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1-5 - (1 is Less Democratic and 5 is More Democratic)

2 Institutional Capacity

QUESTION ONE: Country Rating on the Corruption Perception Index

SOURCE: Transparency International 2023
SCALE: 0/100

QUESTION TWO: Horizontal Accountability Score (To what extent is the ideal of horizontal government accountability achieved?)

SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 - (Low to High)

QUESTION THREE: Executive Oversight Score (If executive branch officials were engaged in unconstitutional, illegal, or unethical activity, how likely is it that a body, other than the legislature, such as a comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman, would question or investigate them and issue an unfavorable decision or report?)
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2023
SCALE: 0/4 – Unlikely/Very uncertain/Likely/Certain or nearly certain

QUESTION FOUR: Compliance with the Judiciary Score (How often would you say the government complies with important decisions by other courts with which it disagrees?)
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2023
SCALE: 0/4 – Seldom/About half the time/Usually/Always

QUESTION FIVE: Legislative Constraints on the Executive Score (To what extent are the legislature and government agencies, comptroller general, general prosecutor, or ombudsman capable of questioning, investigating, and exercising oversight over the executive?)
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Checks & Balances Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 (Low to High)

QUESTION SIX: Deliberative Democracy Score (To what extent is the ideal of deliberative democracy achieved?)
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index
SCALE: 0/1 (Low to High)

QUESTION SEVEN: Equal Distribution of Resources Score
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 – (Low to High)

QUESTION EIGHT: Exclusion by Socio-Economic Group Score
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 – (Low to High)

QUESTION NINE: Social Group Score
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 – (Low to High)

QUESTION TEN: Political Group Score
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy Civil Liberties & Non-Discrimination Index 2023
SCALE: 0/1 – (Low to High)

3 Vulnerability During Everyday Politics/Elections

QUESTION ONE: How prevalent are disinformation narratives during elections in Kosovo?
SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/ Common/Very Common

QUESTION TWO: How prevalent are disinformation narratives during everyday politics in Kosovo?
SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/ Common/Very Common

QUESTION THREE: Polarization in Society Score (How would you characterize the differences of opinions on major political issues in society?)
SOURCE: Varieties of Democracy
SCALE: 0/4 – Serious Polarization/Moderate Polarization/Medium Polarization/Limited Polarization/No Polarization

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

4 Institutional Capacity to Manage Foreign Disinformation

QUESTION ONE: How prepared is the government of Kosovo to respond to foreign disinformation?
SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unprepared/Unprepared/Neutral/Somewhat Prepared/Very Prepared

QUESTION TWO: If foreign disinformation efforts to destabilize Kosovo were ramped up tomorrow, how well would you expect Kosovo to perform in managing the threat?
SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Poor/Poor/Acceptable/Good/Very Good

QUESTION THREE: How well defined are Kosovo's legal and political institutions to manage cyber threats?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

SCALE: 1/5 – Very Poor/Poor/Acceptable/Good/Very Good

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

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

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

SCALE: No/Yes – 0/1

Media Environment

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

1 Media Freedom

QUESTION ONE: World Press Freedom Index Country Score

SOURCE: Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2023
Scale: 0/100

2 Prevalence/ Availability of Disinformation to the Public

QUESTION ONE: How prevalent is disinformation in the Kosovo media environment?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Uncommon/Uncommon/Neutral/Common/Very Common

QUESTION TWO: How serious an issue has disinformation been in Kosovo?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

QUESTION THREE: How impactful has disinformation been in shifting attitudes in Kosovo?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unimpactful/Unimpactful/Neutral/Impactful/Very Impactful

QUESTION FOUR: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo:

Private Television Channels
SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

QUESTION FIVE: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo:

Public Television Channels

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

QUESTION SIX: For the following channel of news, please rate how serious a threat disinformation is to Kosovo:

Social Media

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 – Very Unserious/Unserious/Neutral/Serious/Very Serious

3 Capacity to Manage Disinformation

QUESTION ONE: Does the government have sufficiently technologically skilled staff and resources to mitigate harm from cyber-security threats?

SOURCE: Government Cyber Security Capacity – Varieties of Democracy Index 2021

SCALE: 0/4 – No/Not Really/Somewhat/Mostly/Yes

QUESTION TWO: What type of content is covered in the legal framework to regulate the Internet?

SOURCE: Internet Legal Regulatory Content – Varieties of Democracy Index 2023

SCALE: 0/4 – 0: The state can remove any content at will. 1: The state can remove most content, and the law protects speech in only specific, and politically uncontroversial

contexts. 2: The legal framework is ambiguous. The state can remove some politically sensitive content, while other is protected by law. 3: The law protects most political speech, but the state can remove especially politically controversial content. 4: The law protects political speech, and the state can only remove content if it violates well-established legal criteria.

QUESTION THREE: How effective have the government's efforts to combat disinformation been?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 - Not Effective/
Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very
Effective/Extremely Effective

QUESTION FOUR: How effective is Kosovo's current legal framework for dealing with disinformation?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 - Not Effective/
Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very
Effective/Extremely Effective

QUESTION FIVE: Are Kosovo's institutions currently capable of effectively managing the threat of disinformation?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 - Not Capable/
Somewhat Capable/Capable/Very
Capable/Extremely Capable

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 - Not Effective/
Somewhat Effective/Effective/Very
Effective/Extremely Effective

4 Public Resiliency to Mis/Disinformation

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

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey
SCALE: 1/5 - Very Poor/Poor/
Acceptable/Good/Very Good

QUESTION TWO: Freedom House Country Score

SOURCE: Freedom House 2023
SCALE: 0/100

QUESTION THREE: PISA Reading/Literacy Score

SOURCE: PISA Reading Score 2022
SCALE: 0/600

QUESTION FOUR: PISA Scientific Score

SOURCE: PISA Scientific Score 2022
SCALE: 0/600

QUESTION FIVE: PISA Math Score

SOURCE: PISA Math Score 2022
SCALE: 0/600

QUESTION SIX: Level of E-Participation among Kosovar population

SOURCE: United Nations E-Participation Index 2023 - Substituted with mean value of neighboring states: Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia

SCALE: Original Scale 0/1 - Rescaled to 0/100

QUESTION SEVEN: How confident are you in recognizing what is advertising and what is not, when you see or read things online?

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Not at all, Not very, Neither, Fairly, Very

QUESTION EIGHT: Do you know how to identify emails or messages in social media (for instance Facebook) that contain suspicious links and addresses or names that you don't know?

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (0-1) Yes, always - I don't know what these emails and messages are/No, I don't know how to/It's difficult for me to identify such emails and messages

Gender Based Disinformation

The new Gender Based Disinformation dimension utilizes data from several sources, including NDI Polls, UN Women Reports, and PISA Scores. The Gender Based Disinformation dimension is divided into three equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each indicator is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100.

1 Attitudes Toward Women in Politics

Question One: Violence against women in politics is defined as encompassing all forms of aggression, coercion, and intimidation against women as political actors because they are women. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: Online harassment and negative portrayal of women politicians discourages their political participation

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

QUESTION TWO: I am ready to elect women

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

QUESTION THREE: People of Kosovo are not ready to elect women

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION FOUR: There should be equal representation of women and men in national government

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

2 Gender Literacy Gaps

QUESTION ONE: Do you believe the following statement: "Homosexuality is a disorder or a disease" (Female Respondents)
SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll
SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION TWO: Do you believe the following statement: "Association of Serb Majority Municipalities will become the new Republika Srpska in Kosovo" (Female Respondents)
SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll
SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree,

Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION THREE: Do you believe the following statement: "NATO and EU are to blame for the tensions in the north of Kosovo" (Female Respondents)

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll
SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION FOUR: Do you believe the following statement: "International partners are wrongly punishing Kosovo" (Female Respondents)

SOURCE: NDI Kosovo Poll
SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION FIVE: Do you believe the following statement: "US and EU envoys for Western Balkans are trying to overthrow Kurti" (Female Respondents)
Source: NDI Kosovo Poll
SCALE: (0/1) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral – Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION SIX: PISA Reading/Literacy Score (Female Respondents)
SOURCE: PISA Scores 2022
SCALE: 0/600

QUESTION SEVEN: How confident are you in recognizing what is advertising and what is not, when you see or read things online? (Female Respondents)
SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (1-5) Not at all, Not very, Neither, Fairly, Very

QUESTION EIGHT: Do you know how to identify emails or messages in social media (for instance Facebook) that contain suspicious links and addresses or names that you don't know? (Female Respondents)
SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023
SCALE: (0-1) I don't know what these emails and messages are/ No, I don't know how to/It's difficult for me to identify such emails and messages – Yes, always

3 Legislation Related to Women's Equality

QUESTION ONE: Criminal Code Legislation on TF VAW
SOURCE: UN Women Dark Side of Digitalization Report
SCALE: (1-4) There is no such law or strategy, law and policy at best only indirectly address some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses TF VAW in majority of forms

QUESTION TWO: Specialized Law on GE, VAW/DV
SOURCE: UN Women Dark Side of Digitalization Report
SCALE: (1-4) There is no such law or strategy, law and policy at best only indirectly address some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses TF VAW in majority of forms

QUESTION THREE: Gender Equality Strategy on TF VAW

SOURCE: UN Women Dark Side of Digitalization Report

SCALE: (1-4) There is no such law or strategy, law and policy at best only indirectly address some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses TF VAW in majority of forms

QUESTION ONE: Specialized VAW/ DV Strategy

SOURCE: UN Women Dark Side of Digitalization Report

SCALE: (1-4) There is no such law or strategy, law and policy at best only indirectly address some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses some forms of TF VAW, Law and policy directly addresses TF VAW in majority of forms

Inter-Ethnic Relations

The new Inter-Ethnic Relations dimension utilizes data from several sources, including NDI Polls, NDI Staff Ratings, and the DPlus Expert Survey. The Inter-Ethnic Relations dimension is divided into three equally weighted indicators. Each is listed below alongside the questions (and their sources) used to create each output. Each indicator is rescaled so that totals are calculated out of a total of 100.

1 Kosovo/Serbia Relations

QUESTION ONE: Which of the following statements is closest to your views, when talking about relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023

SCALE: (0-1) “I believe that there is no interest and appetite from neither Kosovo nor Serbia to start an armed conflict”/ “NATO presence is sufficient to pre-empt any return to violent conflict between Kosovo and Serbia” – “I believe that the armed conflict between Kosovo and Serbia could return soon”

QUESTION TWO: Over the last year, how have relations between the Kosovo and Serbian Governments changed?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

SCALE: (1-5) Much Better, Better, Same, Worse, Much Worse

QUESTION THREE: Looking ahead a few years from now, do you expect ethnic relations within Kosovo to improve, worsen or remain the same?

SOURCE: NDI Poll 2023

SCALE: (0-1) Improve/Stay the same – Worsen

2 Inter-Ethnic Tensions

QUESTION ONE: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Russia is supportive of Kosovo Serbs

SOURCE: FCDO Poll 2023

SCALE: (1-4) Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

QUESTION TWO: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? EU is supportive of Kosovo Serbs

SOURCE: FCDO Poll 2023

SCALE: (1-4) Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

QUESTION THREE: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? USA is supportive of Kosovo Serbs

SOURCE: FCDO Poll 2023

SCALE: (1-4) Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

QUESTION FOUR: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? UK is supportive of Kosovo Serbs

SOURCE: FCDO Poll 2023

SCALE: (1-4) Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

QUESTION FIVE: Do you believe that a war in the Balkans is likely to happen?

SOURCE: FCDO Poll 2023

SCALE: (1-3) Not Likely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely

QUESTION SIX: How would you rate the level of harmony and understanding between different ethnic groups in Kosovo, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents very poor relations and 5 represents very good relations?

Source: DPlus Expert Survey

Scale: (1-5) Very poor, poor, neutral, good, very good

3 Targeted Disinformation

QUESTION ONE: Over the past year, how prevalent have foreign disinformation narratives targeted Albanian speaking populations in Kosovo?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

SCALE: (1-5) Very Unpopular, Somewhat Unpopular, Neither, Somewhat Popular, Very Popular

QUESTION TWO: Over the past year, how prevalent have foreign disinformation narratives targeted Albanian speaking populations in Kosovo?

SOURCE: NDI Staff

SCALE: (1-3) Neutral/Somewhat Prevalent/Very Prevalent

QUESTION ONE: Over the past year, how prevalent have foreign disinformation narratives targeted Serbian speaking populations in Kosovo?

SOURCE: DPlus Expert Survey

SCALE: (1-5) Very Unpopular, Somewhat Unpopular, Neither, Somewhat Popular, Very Popular

QUESTION TWO: Over the past year, how prevalent have foreign disinformation narratives targeted Serbian speaking populations in Kosovo?

SOURCE: NDI Staff

SCALE: Neutral/Somewhat Prevalent/Very Prevalent

This report has been published by the Democracy Plus (D+) as part of the project "Vulnerability Index of Disinformation", which is supported by the National Democratic Institute - NDI and the United States Agency for International Development - USAID. The content of this report belongs to the D+ and does not necessarily reflect the position of NDI and USAID.



USAID
NGA POPULLI AMERIKAN
OD AMERIČKOG NARODA

