Slovak Election Summary Report 2023

Over a four month period, TikTok wide cross functional taskforce worked together to prepare for the recent election in Slovakia held on 30 September.

The European Commission (EC) made it clear that social media platforms will be tested on their COPD and DSA commitments during the Slovak election. Furthermore, online platforms were summoned to Bratislava on 12 September for an in-person meeting with the Commission to discuss election risks and preparedness. Also, TikTok participated in COPD elections working group dedicated cross-platform, EC and civil society organisation meetings held to discuss risks, developments and actions taken by platforms.

Timeline

* 30 January 2023: Slovak Parliament announced a general election scheduled for 30 September 2023. As part of TikTok Election Integrity Programme, Slovak election is added to the TikTok's internal Elections Calendar and initial planning work commences as part of the global programme.

* 12 June: Cross-functional (XFN) Slovak Election Working Group convened for detailed planning purposes.

* 30 June: Meeting between Slovak Council for Media Services and members of TikTok's Slovak Election Working Group.

* July-August-September: Ongoing intensive election preparations, scenario-planning and engagement, policy and product work.

* 30 September: Scheduled election day for Slovak general (parliamentary) election.

* 2 October: Election results announced

Partnerships

* We have considered the local risks identified by key stakeholders and experts including the Slovakian Council for Media Services, the Slovak Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats and DigiQ Slovak civil society organisation focused on online safety. We have actively cooperated with them on other elements, including on the development of our in-app interventions and review of concerning content via Community Partner Channel.

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- In partnership with DigiQ we developed our media literacy strategy with the objective of educating users on how to detect misinformation and verify information they are seeing online. DigiQ s educational videos were available from our in-app Election Hub and also redirected users to authoritative information on their website. Videos were created on DigiQ TikTok account and will remain available to Slovak users.

- Fact-check partner Lead Stories supported our election integrity efforts in Slovakia by proactively flagging potentially violating content on TikTok as well as by reviewing escalated videos through our dedicated Slovak fact-checking queues.

Product

- The Slovak election voter information center (Elections Hub) was launched on 4 September in collaboration with The Slovak Centre of Media Services. Users had access to essential voter information and media literacy videos produced by our partner DigiQ. Elections hub was accessible from special labels (notice tags) on elections-related videos and from search banners (Search Guide) which appeared when users were searching for elections-related videos. Please find graphical examples in the Appendix of this document.

  - Election Hub visits: 67,390 views by 46,083 unique users
  - Election-related videos labelled: 7371

Election Hub Stats	
Visits to Election Hub (all features)	67,390
Unique user visits to Election Hub (all features)	46,083
Users on average stayed at Election Hub (seconds)	13,8
Media Literacy and Official sources of Information	
Button 1 minv.sk clicks	2,990
Button 2 minv.sk clicks	257
Button 3 DigiQ.sk clicks	90
Text Hyperlink je zapisany clicks	56
Text Hyperlink hlasovacieho preukazu clicks	66
Video 1 play count	188
Video 2 play count	79

Video 3 play count	23
Video 4 play count	35
Video Notice tags	
Number of election-related hashtags used for tagging	85
Number of videos with election notice tag for the time period from 1st June to 20th October	7,371

Proactive work

Mitigating risk of deepfake

* Based on CMS deepfake escalations, the T&S team performed continuous media monitoring which resulted in early identification of deepfakes on peer platforms. This enabled us to catch a range of deepfakes before they had a chance to proliferate on TikTok. Deepfakes were published on the platform gradually on Friday, one day prior to the election. Content was targeting Šimečka, leader of Progressives and Čaputová, Slovak president.

* While these deepfakes were widely reported in media a few days after the election, by Bloomberg (paywalled, copy here), another one here or Wired. Thanks to swift actions taken on our side, deepfakes did not get a chance to engulf Slovak TikTok, unlike in the cases of Meta and Youtube.

Proactive elections content monitoring and sampling

Proactive review was conducted based on a specifically designed keywords list. Between 14/09 and 30/09 we proactively reviewed 1870 pieces of content (highest VVs, highest V growth & videos reported for Election Misinformation, with the action rate of 6%. This speaks both to great moderation quality, as well as effective removal of proactively surfaced violating content.

Escalations

Throughout September we have received and reviewed four external escalations from our partners. Please find the comprehensive rundown below or refer to the escalations tracker.

Escalation 1

* During our meeting in Bratislava, ███████ mentioned 40 accounts that they believe are in the breach of our CGs.

- In total, they sent 63 accounts, featuring two duplicates = 61 accounts in total. Of these, 10 were already banned by the time we received this report. 8 of which were banned prior to the meeting in Bratislava.
- Detailed review ▦ Slovak elections further accounts review

Review results:

- 19 accounts banned; of these:
  - 7 of these were found to be spreading RU misinformation. Of these, 3 had additional focus, one was also found to be spreading hate against LGBTQ, 1 was found to also spread general hate and 1 was found to spread hate against immigrants and UA refugees); the other 4 were general Russian misinformation
    - 1 more specific ban focuses on videos concerning the Great replacement theory
    - The rest were banned due to various array of violation
  - 16 accounts were found not violating and therefore were not banned. The reason for this ranged from none or very low violations, through satirical accounts focused on politics, to openly pro-Russian accounts, which, however, have no violations at all.
  - The last 12 accounts were not banned but remain on our watchlist. This can be due to having a few violations. A couple of these are specifically Russian misinformation leaning.

Escalation 2

Deepfake of the leader of Progressive Slovakia - Michal Šimečka.

- Reported by CMS and immediate action from our side. We prevented reuploads and performed platform sweep to remove already published duplicates.

Escalation 3

- CMS have reported a number of videos still live on the platform, of which most were in breach of our CGs. Unfortunately, most were approved by the machine because they didn t reach a moderation threshold (not enough vvs, weren t reported, there are no visual violations, it is unlikely that any SK audio violation would have been caught by the machine, etc.), only one was mismoderated - we are following up on this now. These videos also include 3 already user deleted ones and 3 who are currently appealing for their bans.

Escalation 4

- Deepfake of Šimečka and Tódová. Tódová is a journalist and one of the subjects of LGBTQ hatred. Escalated by CMS among their video reports, once we saw what it was, the video was subject to the HRL library — prevents reuploads, platform sweep and content actioning.

Elections Content Trends

- Hate speech toward migrants

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- Degrading speech concerning how illegal migrants are dangerous to people and Slovak society as a whole; Documenting the arrival of illegal migrants oftentimes accompanied by derogatory remarks.
- *Trigger*: An increasing flow of migrants coming across the border from Hungary, mostly from Syria, to Slovakia. Small Slovak towns on the southern border were seeing some refugees rest or sleep over in their parks and sports grounds, which started discussions around citizens and border safety.

- Protecting "Traditional values" against LGBTQ+ people and gender ideology
  - Degrading speech concerning 1) the absurdity of the existence of more than two genders and the forced inclusive language (example: Progressive Slovakia party and their followers were attacked by using the term pregnant people instead of pregnant women); 2) the need to stop gender ideology from schools to protect minors; 3) LGBT described as plague (or other diseases) by politicians as well as users. Moreover, many videos showed clips/compilations from different Pride parades or other LGBTQ+-related events taken out of context, which position LGBTQ+ people as abnormal or even dangerous.
  - *Triggers*: 1) The terrorist attack in Bratislava on Tepláreň LGBT bar in October 2022 - two men died after shooting, which started a public conversation on anti-LGBT hate and LGBTQ+ rights. 2) Hungary passed a law (2021) banning LGBT content in schools or kids TV while outlawing sharing information deemed as promoting homosexuality with minors, which started a conversation about whether a similar law should be replicated in Slovakia. 3) The Progressive Slovakia party (*Progresívne Slovensko*) created a liberal political program which argues for giving LGBTQ+ people the same rights regarding marriage and adoption of children, which received backlash from many conservative parties and users.

- Election misinformation

  Misinformation concerning that:
  - Elections are about to / will be stolen (for example, Progressive Slovakia party or Eset, Slovak IT company, will manipulate election results);
  - Voters need to bring their pens because when they use pens from voting stations, their votes will be erased, and other parties/politicians will be selected;
  - The votes by mail (from Slovaks living abroad) will be manipulated or miscalculated.

- Deepfakes uploaded onto the platform close to election day
  - Čaputová, the Slovak president, stated that she is going to vote for the Republika party

- Šimečka, the leader of the Progressive Slovakia party, is planning a drastic increase in the price of beer █████████████████████████
  - Šimečka and Monika Tódová, the journalist, are planning election manipulation (ex. ████████████████████████

- Conspiracy theories related to George Soros
  - Zuzana Caputova [or another high-profile Slovak politician in these elections] is regularly paid by Soros, works directly for Soros or is Soros agent;
  - Claims mentioning George Soros + nefarious agendas; e.g. Soros wants to bring immigrants or LGBTQ+ agenda to destroy Europe/Slovakia, Christian culture/values, destabilise countries...

- Physical altercation depicting high-profile politicians
  - A physical fight between Matovič (former PM) and Kaliňák (ex-interior minister);
  - Tomáš Holkovič (OĽANO politician) punching a man who spat onto his face.
  - The footage of the fights remains on the platform as it was mainly posted to document/criticise the low standards of current Slovak politics. In relation to that, another trend emerged: Mortal Kombat editions (example here), which represented political satire (displaying different politicians as fighters in a PC game).

Monitization Integrity

- TikTok took a number of actions to mitigate the risk of political advertising in Slovakia for the election period, including building a war room, and implementing keywords related to political figures and misinformation trends in local languages as well as Russian and Ukrainian. TikTok saw no political ads on the market for September and the days following the election into October and the Monetisation Integrity team received no escalations for the Slovakian elections

Influence Operations

- Please reach out to ████████████████████████ for any CIO disruption information during this period.

Public Policy ████████████████

Cooperation with Council for Media Services

TikTok started cooperation with Council for Media Services in February 2023. CMS has competencies in monitoring illegal content online and cooperating with online platforms according to Slovak Media Law no. 264/2022. The CMS was onboarded to TikTok CPC program in

March and subsequently sent various requests for removals as well as for additional information regarding our polices. In June, GR facilitated the meeting between CMS and members of TikTok's Slovak Election Working Group. As a CPC program member, CMS obtained access to the TSET system in October. During the election period, GR maintained ongoing contact with CMS and handed over CMS requests and reports.

GPPPA accounts identification and verification

GR identified political accounts on the platform and conducted labeling process. All major political parties in Slovakia were contacted and informed about account verification procedure as well as on no-political adds TikTok policy.

Contacts with Slovak Interior Ministry

TikTok contacted Slovak Interior Ministry to agree on the best possible sources of authoritative electoral information for our users. We also extended an offer to join the educational and awareness raising campaign on election disinformation run by the Ministry.

Appendix

Election Hub