


DISRUPTING DEMOCRACY

POINT. CLICK. TRANSFORM.

 VOLUME II

About the Bertelsmann Foundation

The Bertelsmann Foundation (North America), Inc., established in 2008, was created to promote and strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Through its research, debate forums and multimedia tools, the Foundation provides analysis and solutions to the most pressing economic, political and social challenges impacting the United States and Europe. As the analog era gives way to the digital revolution, the Foundation must also adapt to a changing environment. By looking at the Euro-Atlantic partnership through a digital lens, the Foundation will explore how technology is shaping the globe, and will use innovative approaches to highlight developments in a rapidly-evolving world.

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Introduction

In 1992, American author Gore Vidal prophetically wrote in *The Decline and Fall of the American Empire*, "As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate, action: you liberate a city by destroying it. Words are to confuse, so that at election time people will solemnly vote against their own interests." At that time, there were a total of 10 websites on the internet. Today, there are nearly two billion, and counting. With infinite information available at one's fingertips, in the digital era, words are as likely to mislead as they are to inform. This phenomenon is not a uniquely American challenge, but a global one, that is magnified exponentially when voters go the polls.

In this volume of *Disrupting Democracy*, we turn our attention to questions about how technology is impacting elections around the world. This journey begins in Italy, where insurgent parties relied on digital platforms to level the playing field against a political establishment that had dominated traditional means of communication for decades. Then to Mexico, where technology helped a one-man movement break the ruling elite's century-long grip on power. From there, we venture to the eastern edge of the European Union to explore how foreign influence shaped the electoral landscape in the Baltic state of Latvia. Finally, we return to the United States to analyze the far-reaching influence of technology in the midterm elections. A key element of our mission is to learn from the world, and these cases offer plenty of instruction.

This publication is divided into five chapters, one for each case study plus a chapter of polling data. Within each chapter, you'll find two parts: the first provides an "outsider's" perspective on the case study through background research, on-the-ground interviews, and open source data; the second, written by a local expert, provides an analysis and potential solutions to the challenges highlighted in part one. It should be noted that each of these elections took place at various points in 2018. As a result, they are a snapshot of a moment in time, which may have subsequently been overtaken by developments on the ground.

On an average day, activity online can run the gamut from inspiring and inventive to disturbing and destructive. During election campaigns, the stakes are high, amplifying politics' best and worst features in the digital age. But when all the votes are counted and the dust settles, citizens in countries across the globe are left to confront shifting norms, broken taboos, and new standards of behavior. How they deal with this new environment will not just shape their respective national identities; it will define the meaning of democracy in the 21st century.

ITALY



When Stars Align: The Digital Era and the Rise of Italy's Third Republic

By Anthony Silberfeld

"The amateurs are the ones conquering the world and I'm rejoicing in it because the professionals are the ones who have reduced the world to this state."

- Beppe Grillo, co-founder of the Five Star Movement

Introduction

In Italy, the "V" sign no longer means victory. Today, it stands for *Vaffanculo* (*f*ck off*), a rallying cry led by Beppe Grillo, one of the country's most popular comedians and co-founder of the Five Star Movement — and it succinctly represents the anger, frustration and contempt many Italian voters have for their political establishment. The wave of discontent built by years of corruption and financial mismanagement crested with the elections of March 4, 2018. But the story of how populism triumphed in Italy isn't just about disillusionment with the political class. It's more complicated than that. It's a story of how a confluence of people, technology and global events combined to turn Italian politics on its head.

For those who are new to this series, *Disrupting Democracy* is a project that explores how technology impacts politics and society around the world. It identifies micro-trends unique to the place and time of each country studied, and macro-trends that can herald challenges to come that transcend boundaries, language and economic status. To date, the Bertelsmann Foundation has conducted extensive research in five countries: Germany, India, Israel, Cuba and the United States. The macro-trends that emerged from those cases — accountability, voter apathy, digital divide, media literacy and demographic change — will serve as the lenses through which we approach the Italian case. On an average day, these macro-trends might manifest themselves in subtle ways. In the cauldron of an active election campaign, they become magnified, and their impact has the potential to increase exponentially.

As this chapter goes to print, the voting is over, but negotiations to form the next Italian government have just begun. The

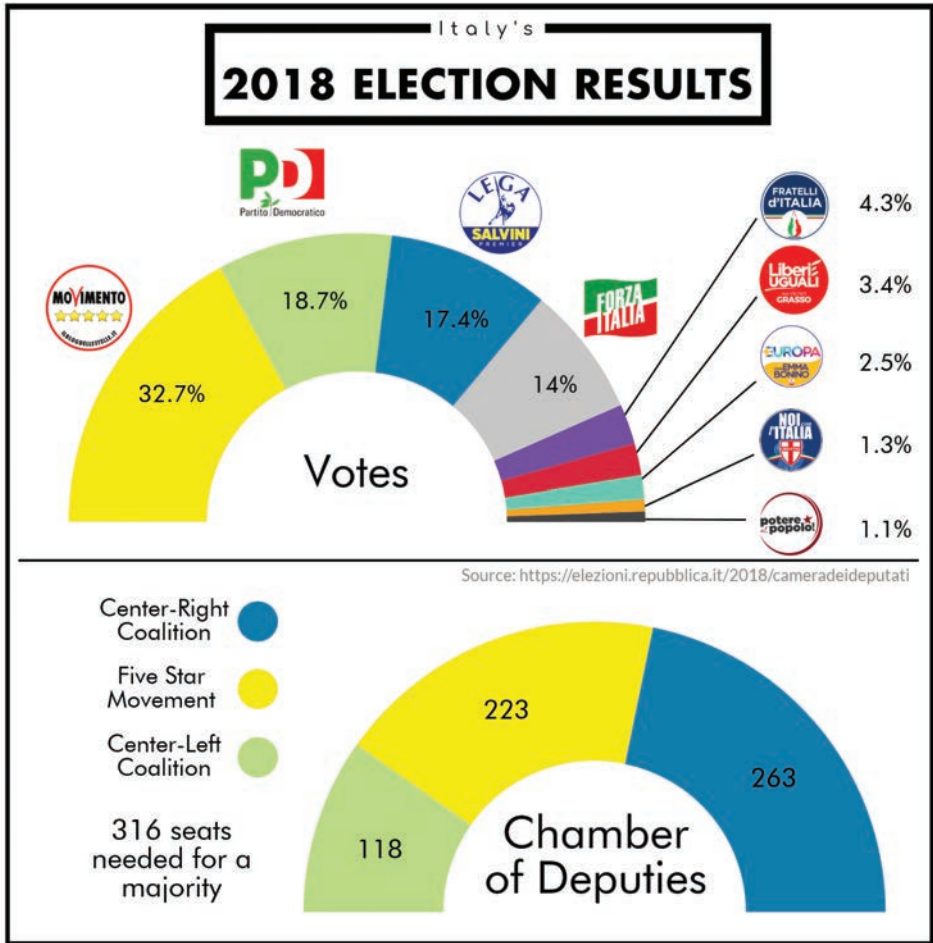
Five Star Movement emerged from the election as Italy's largest party, while Lega (League) surprised many by overtaking the pillar of the center-right, Forza Italia. The results were a disaster for the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, or PD) and a death knell for former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi; they will be doing much soul-searching in the months and even years ahead.

In the pages to follow, we aim to explain the results of the Italian election with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. The outcome

may have been shocking to some, but it should not have come as a surprise. There were predictive signs all along, which ought to give hope to countries with impending elections. With a greater understanding of the factors buffeting democratic systems, policymakers and citizens will be better equipped to maximize the benefits and mitigate the consequences of navigating politics in a digital era.

First Consensus, then Chaos

The current state of Italian politics didn't come to be overnight. It is the product



of decades of post-war inventing and reinventing of the Italian political system. Before delving into where we are today, it is instructive to take a glimpse at the modern democratic history of *il bel paese*.

The First Republic

In the aftermath of World War II, Alcide De Gasperi and his Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC) led an all-party government that included Socialists, Social Democrats and Communists. The decision to establish a coalition of all major parties was a deliberate repudiation of the experiment with authoritarian rule that brought bloodshed and economic ruin to Italy. The early focus of this government was to build a consensus around rebuilding the country and repairing relations with other nations, primarily the United States and the Soviet Union.

As tensions rose between the Americans and the Soviets, the centrist DC and the Communist Party — each eager to curry favor with the superpower with which it identified ideologically — came into conflict as well. In May 1947, following an attack at an International Workers' Day event in southern Italy that left 11 people dead, De Gasperi expelled Communist and other left-wing ministers from government.

The following year's elections ended the immediate post-war era of all-party governance and established the political framework that would define Italy for the next four decades: a so-called blocked parliamentary system, with the DC always in government through a coalition with smaller parties and the Communists in opposition. Although DC domination made for relative continuity in policy, the party's reliance on junior partners created political instability, leading to dozens of short-lived governments throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Coalition experimentation with the Socialists in a center-left configuration helped broaden

the parliamentary base for DC but failed to yield long-term stability.

The 1970s brought political and social upheaval. Internal dissension, waning public support and the rising popularity of the Communist Party rendered a series of coalition governments virtually powerless and made policy stability almost impossible to achieve. The combination of political upheaval and the prospects of communist leaders in other Western countries set the stage for the "historic compromise"² of 1976: DC Prime Minister Aldo Moro struck a deal with the Communist Party to create a cabinet of national solidarity. In the years that followed, Italian Communists began to distance themselves from Moscow to gain greater domestic appeal and influence, and that ideological shift resonated with voters.

The 1980s brought the first post-war Italian governments led by parties other than DC: first the center-left Italian Republican Party, and then the Socialists, led by Bettino Craxi. Craxi was highly critical of the Communist Party, which began to lose public favor after its charismatic leader, Enrico Berlinguer, died in 1984. The Socialists continued to move toward the center, attracting reform-minded Communists and cultivating better relations with other Western powers. But by the late '80s, global events and domestic scandals had cast a shadow over Italian politics. The end of the Cold War, combined with the *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) corruption investigation — the moniker speaks for itself — effectively brought the First Republic to an end.

The Second Republic

Widespread corruption, skyrocketing public debt, poor leadership and the open influence of organized crime broke the major parties into unsustainable factions, which gave way to a new

cadre of politicians. One of the defining characteristics of this period was the prevalence of caretaker governments, appointed by the republic's presidents rather than elected by voters.

Silvio Berlusconi also arrived on the political scene that year as an outsider who promised to translate his business acumen into good governance and institute political, economic and ethical reforms.

By the mid-1990s, political volatility in Italy was the norm. Voters were in no mood to countenance business as usual, as evidenced by the 1994 elections, which sent 452 new deputies (out of 630) and 213 new senators (out of 315) to Parliament.³ Silvio Berlusconi also arrived on the political scene that year as an outsider who promised to translate his business acumen into good governance and institute political, economic and ethical reforms. His first tenure as prime minister lasted only a year, however, as a major coalition partner, Lega Nord (now Lega), withdrew support for his government.

Center-left parties grouped as the Olive Tree governed from 1996 to 2001, when

Berlusconi returned to power as head of a center-right coalition, House of Freedoms, headed by the newly created Forza Italia. House of Freedoms remained in power until 2006, when it was replaced in a general election by a center-left coalition.

Romano Prodi, who led the first Olive Tree government from 1996 to 1998 and then served for five years as president of the European Commission, returned as prime minister in 2006. His new coalition, *L'Unione* (the Union), was similar to the Olive Tree but, unlike its predecessor, included radical leftist elements. Prodi lost a vote of confidence in the Senate in 2008 but stayed on as prime minister for four months pending early elections.

The 2008 campaign became a contest between two new political forces: PD, founded the year before by the Democrats of the Left and centrist party The Daisy, and the center-right People of Freedom coalition, made up principally by the reincarnated Forza Italia and the National Alliance. Although not part of the coalition, Lega Nord allied itself again with Berlusconi, who won the election and claimed the mantle of prime minister for a third time.

Berlusconi resigned in 2011 in response to mounting political pressure over multiple scandals and his failure to manage the financial crisis. Mario Monti, who represented the centrist Civic Choice party, was appointed by President Giorgio Napolitano to form a technocratic government to serve until the next scheduled general election in 2013. A week prior to becoming prime minister, Monti was appointed senator for life; Italy's debt had reached 116 percent of GDP,⁴ and only someone with job security could implement the necessary but politically damaging reforms the grave situation required. The economic and labor-market policies Monti put in place increased taxes

and reformed pensions, which would become key issues in the 2018 election.

The 2013 vote resulted in a grand coalition of PD, People of Freedom, and Civic Choice — the first governing alliance in Italian history to include representatives of all major parties that had competed in a national election. PD Secretary Pier Luigi Bersani, in line to become prime minister, initially tried to form a government with the nascent Five Star Movement, but his bid failed and he resigned as party leader. Napolitano stepped in again and offered the reins to Enrico Letta, PD's vice secretary, who forged the grand alliance.

With the wily and indefatigable Berlusconi sowing discord within the coalition, Letta lasted less than a year as prime minister. Forza Italia pulled out of People of Freedom when Berlusconi, facing corruption and tax-evasion charges, was ejected from Parliament, and many lawmakers resigned on his orders over disagreement with PD leaders about value-added-tax (VAT) reform. Letta also faced challenges from the left wing of his party, led by Matteo Renzi, the young former mayor of Florence, who called for a radical program of reform and had the support of a large faction within PD. After the party backed Renzi's call for a new government, Letta resigned in February 2014. At Napolitano's request, Renzi formed a new government with cabinet members from PD, the New Center-Right, the Union of the Center, and Civic Choice.

While in office, Renzi oversaw an aggressive reform campaign encompassing taxes, the electoral system, labor law (making it easier for employers to hire and fire employees), social policy (same-sex civil unions were legalized), and public administration. He resigned in December 2016 after a referendum on constitutional reform he championed was roundly rejected by voters. PD voted the following

year to retain him as secretary and support him as their prime ministerial candidate in the 2018 general election.

2018 Elections

The outcome of the 2018 elections was decades in the making. The rise and fall of the First and Second republics produced a political class in disarray and a disillusioned electorate ready to make a statement in protest of years of sacrifice. The vacuum created by irresponsible and ineffective leadership was filled with a mix of populists and extremists prepared to weaponize wedge issues like economic inequality and immigration to their political advantage. The flashback box (see pages 6-7) provides a glimpse into the choice that voters faced on the eve of the election.

The history and the present have collided in Italy to create an unstable environment in which anything is possible. In an era when traditional parties controlled all means of communication, the consequences of such volatility could be held in relative check. In the digital age, the playing field has been leveled and information channels are cheap, pervasive and under-regulated. While access to information under the best of circumstances should bring order, introducing the internet to politics in Italy has, in many ways, exacerbated the chaos.

In the pages to follow, we will try to bring some order to the chaos. By analyzing the Italian elections through the lens of *Disrupting Democracy's* macro-trends, we can begin to understand the positive and negative effects of technology on our democratic systems of government.

Accountability and Transparency

The notion of maximizing accountability and transparency in government is one of the hallmarks of a modern democracy. Technological innovation has created unlimited ways for governments to pull back the veil on legislative and executive

FLASHBACK – MARCH 3, 2018 – Party Profiles

Democratic Party

(Partito Democratico, PD)

It has been a shocking fall from grace for the party that leads the current center-left coalition government in Rome under Paolo Gentiloni. Just a few years ago, Matteo Renzi was a popular prime minister with the potential to provide long-term stability to a country still struggling to recover from the economic crisis. But a series of missteps, including a failed gambit to reform the constitution and a corruption scandal, dimmed Renzi's star power ahead of the election. In speaking with voters in Italy, it was clear that those shortcomings could be forgiven, but the PD's move to the center is driving its left-wing base to search for alternatives.

Forza Italia (FI)

Just when you thought Silvio Berlusconi's political career was finally over, the media magnate and three-time prime minister has found a way to resurrect his image. Despite being banned from holding office due to his conviction for tax fraud, Italy's "Teflon Don" remains the driving force behind its predominant center-right party. Mixing far-right positions on contentious issues like migration — Berlusconi recently called migrants a "social time bomb" — and more

moderate economic stances, the party hopes to attract enough centrist and conservative voters to win leadership of the next coalition. There remains the question of who would take the helm of an FI-led government, but it is clear Berlusconi would be pulling the strings.

League (Lega)

Having transformed the former Northern League from a secessionist movement into a potential kingmaker in national politics, Matteo Salvini is leading his party into the next election as the anti-immigrant, Euroskeptic, nationalist alternative to Forza Italia, with which it is currently aligned in a center-right coalition. Given that migration is one of the primary issues on the minds of Italian voters, the environment is ripe for the League to make electoral gains à la the National Front in France and Alternative for Germany. The party would also stand to be the biggest beneficiary of any Russian intervention in the Italian election. The League maintains a cooperation agreement with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, so keeping an eye on its finances and activity across digital platforms may offer clues into how the party will perform on Election Day.

Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S)

The Five Star Movement, conceived by Internet entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio and brought to prominence by comedian Beppe Grillo, has sprinted to the top of the most recent pre-election polls. Political analysts across Italy have used a variety of adjectives to describe M5S, including “fascist,” “extremist” and “populist.” A look at the Five Star platform — with its planks on environmental protection, universal connectivity and economic inclusivity — might lead one to conclude its ideological home is on the left, but opposition to migration casts an extremist shadow over the party. This contradiction produces the chief criticism of M5S: Since it stands for everything, it really stands for nothing. But speaking with voters from factory towns in Umbria or the gritty streets of Naples, it’s apparent that this doesn’t bother them. Disillusionment with the established parties far outweighs the perceived lack of depth and consistency in Five Star’s approach to politics. The notion of a party created on the internet that trumpets direct democracy is appealing to Italians who feel the established parties have failed to deliver. With Grillo having distanced himself from politics and party affairs in recent months, the face of M5S is now 31-year-old Luigi Di Maio, who must

figure out a way to ride voter apathy to victory in March.

Free and Equal (Liberi e Uguali, LeU)

A perception that the Democratic Party under Renzi sold out the left in pursuit of the Blairite center created a schism in the progressive wing of Italian politics. LeU broke from PD to form a party dedicated to the core values of the traditional left. While it may find support among the working-class voters in Italy’s industrial heartland, the party’s best outcome will be to reach the three percent threshold to enter parliament and serve as a junior partner in a left-wing coalition. Most analysts believe, however, that the more consequential outcomes of the splintering of the left will be a weakened PD and a stronger Five Star Movement.

Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d’Italia)

There are parties that are hyperbolically derided as “fascist,” and then there are actual fascist parties. Brothers of Italy is the latter. Anti-migrant, anti-Europe, and nationalist, it is the modern-day successor of Mussolini’s National Fascist Party. Despite its extreme views, party leader Giorgia Meloni, a minister in the fourth Berlusconi cabinet, has signaled that she would be prepared to sign on to a coalition of the right.⁵

processes and allow voters to see how the proverbial sausage is made. With Italy's history of corruption and the absence of trust in institutions, the digital era provides both opportunities and risks. Digital tools can be used to show how every penny is spent, but also to shine the spotlight on every penny misspent. It is the latter that has caused an uproar in Italy and had a clear impact on the 2018 election.

Familiar Hands in the Cookie Jar

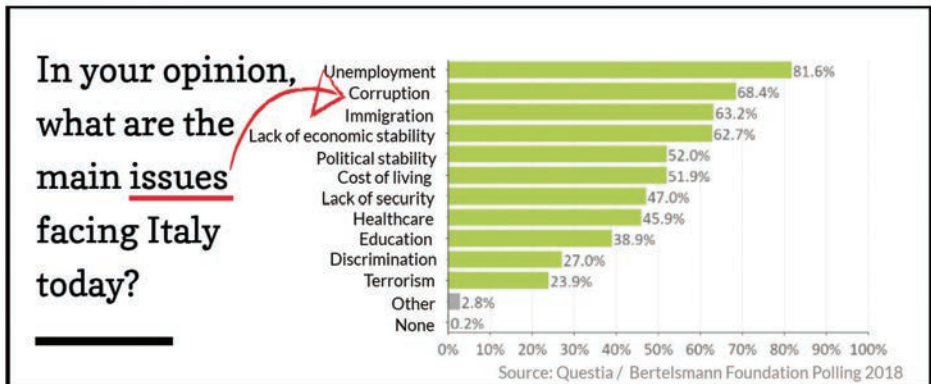
There is almost an accepted level of corruption in Italy. Raise the topic with Italians and one is often met with a shrug that seems to say, "That's just the way it's always been done." But with broader access to information, the public's tolerance for overt graft has clearly waned. Recent examples involving the main center-right and center-left parties illustrate this.

In 2011, Berlusconi was accused of paying for sex with a 17-year-old Moroccan belly dancer nicknamed "Ruby the Heart Stealer" and abusing his office, allegedly phoning a police station where she was being held on theft charges to get her released.⁶ Convictions arising from the matter were overturned in 2014, but that year Berlusconi was found guilty of tax fraud, and in 2015 he was convicted of giving a senator a \$4 million bribe nine

years earlier in a bid to undermine the then-center-left government.⁷ Widely shared on electronic and social media, the stories eroded Berlusconi's and Forza Italia's credibility and made them a difficult sell to voters.

All this should have played into the hands of the Democratic Party, a successor to one of the few national parties to survive the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) scandal of the 1990s, which resulted in the arrest of more than 3,000 government officials on corruption charges.⁸ Renzi and his party did indeed capitalize on the tainted reputation of Forza Italia, for a time. By 2016, however, PD was engulfed in its own corruption scandal. The economic-development minister, Federica Guidi, was compelled to resign amid accusations that she had pushed energy legislation that would benefit her boyfriend's business interests.

Renzi defended Guidi, despite damning audio recordings, opening the door to up-and-comers ready to highlight PD's hypocrisy after it campaigned on a promise to eliminate corruption. (Among them, it's worth noting, was Luigi Di Maio, who would go on to lead the Five Star Movement. "This matter calls into question the whole government," he said. "It always puts people in charge who are in



the pay of the lobbies or who are looking out for themselves.”⁹) Renzi survived this episode with his government intact but did not appear to learn any lessons. Amid further scandals over banking and public contracts, the narrative that PD had become everything it once condemned seemed to write itself, and the voters were watching.

In an October 2015 statement, Transparency International termed the level of corruption in Italy “unbearable.”¹⁰ The organization’s 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Italy 54th in the world, tied with Mauritius and Slovakia.¹¹ And just after Election Day in March, the Bertelsmann Foundation, in partnership with the Questia Group, conducted its own survey in which 68.4 percent of Italians cited corruption as the principal challenge facing Italy.

Turning the Tide?

Public officials have made numerous efforts to restore trust in government institutions, but have largely fallen short. Technology provides lawmakers with another avenue for bridging the gap between the government and its people. At the national level, the PD government established a website (www.governo.it) that provides general information on who runs the government and how it works. A more useful initiative was launched by the Renzi government in 2014, as part of its digital strategy, with the Open Government Partnership which aims to increase transparency, addresses the legacy of corruption and uses technology to accelerate the repair of a badly broken system. Through government platforms such as *Soldipubblici* and *Opencatieri*, citizens now have a window into the use of public money.¹² The creation of a single digital identity platform called SPID (<https://developers.italia.it/en/spid/>) that facilitates access to public services has provided an additional avenue for holding government accountable for its

commitments. This is a work in progress, but Italy’s action plan is a step in the right direction.

Though progress is being made in utilizing digital platforms to rebuild public trust in institutions, there is a long way to go.

Local governments across Italy are also implementing public-service tech initiatives, most notably in the northern town of Turin. Mayor Chiara Appendino, a member of the Five Star Movement, is driving a smart-city strategy that has put Turin far ahead of the curve in Italy, from the presence of innovation hubs to the provision of responsive government services, transparent procurement processes and accountability in the virtual and physical spaces. Turin’s public-service portal, offering downloadable data sets for everything from public spending to the maintenance of the city’s restrooms, is the best example of the philosophical change M5S is forging in the public sphere.

Though progress is being made in utilizing digital platforms to rebuild public trust in institutions, there is a long way to go. According to the Questia/Bertelsmann survey, 63 percent of Italians report little or very little trust in political parties, making them the least trusted institution in Italy. The Five Star Movement, however, has put considerable effort into turning the tide of public sentiment, and seeks to turn local success into national credibility.

Rousseau's New Social Contract

One of the founding principles of the Five Star Movement was that traditional political parties have failed Italy and a new political paradigm was required. No longer would candidates be chosen and key decisions be made behind closed doors by the country's elite; M5S declared it would conduct its business in the open for all to see. With that in mind, under the leadership of the late Gianroberto Casaleggio, the party created an online platform called Rousseau that connects directly with voters in an almost utopian form of digital democracy. Candidates for office would be nominated and selected in online primaries through this portal; key planks of the party platform would be

determined by the advice and consent of voters.

Five Star has been criticized for using Rousseau as window dressing for anti-democratic decision-making practices by the party's senior leadership including restricting engagement with media, and summarily dismissing party members. Voters seem unfazed by this critique. When Italians were asked what words they associate with the M5S, the most popular response was "transparency." Another word, "*basta*" — enough — was the sentiment we heard most often when speaking with Italian voters about corruption in politics. The Five Star Movement caught this wave of discontent and rode it to national popularity. As we

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- [Violazioni ai Regolamenti Comunali](#)
- [Elezioni politiche 4 marzo 2018](#)

Tra i dataset del mese

Linked OpenData in formato .ttl pubblicato in Toponomastica - formato Comma Separated Value (CSV) + Terse RDF Triple Language (TTL)

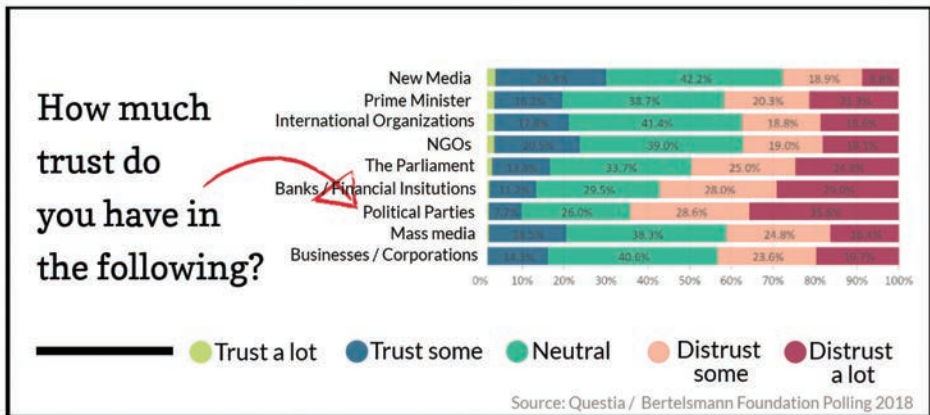
Risultati elettorali, politiche 2018:
<http://www.comune.torino.it/elezioni/2018/politiche/>

Dataset totali

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move into the second macro trend, the question remains whether voter anger can be converted into support at the ballot box.

Voter Apathy

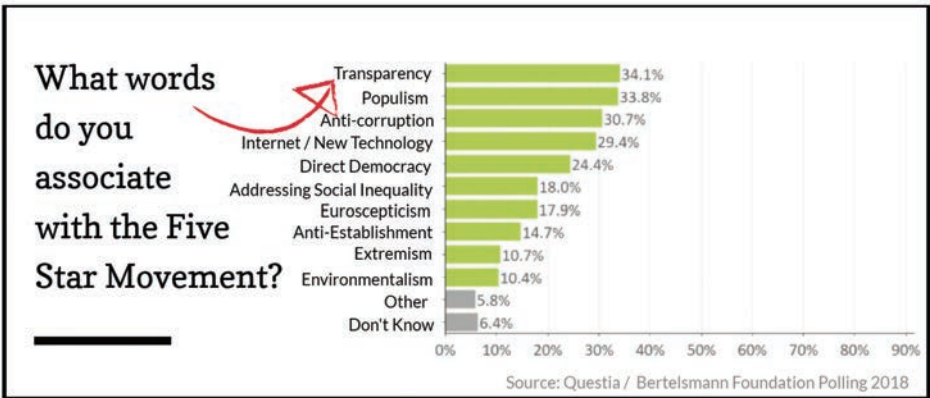
In the previous *Disrupting Democracy* case studies, voter apathy took one of two forms: depressed turnout or a surge to the polls for a protest vote. Italy is a particularly interesting case since voter turnout in the country typically outpaces that of many Western democracies, including the United States. In the 2018 race, more than 73 percent of Italian voters went to the polls, compared to approximately 58 percent of Americans in the 2016 general election. In the case of Italy, it's clear that the latter scenario prevailed — a high turnout that boosted anti-establishment parties.

The two parties poised to ride the wave of public disenchantment were the Five Star Movement and Lega. Notwithstanding being lumped together in this section for their anti-establishment orientation, they have little in common. We spent significant time in the run-up to the election with Five Star candidates and at campaign rallies, and there was one clear takeaway: Voters have no idea what the party stands for. There may not be an Italian word for

“pandering,” but M5S has mastered the art. Its manifesto is a collection of generally benign and superficial pronouncements. The one firm stance party leaders were forced to take, via a vote in Parliament, related to the migration crisis, putting them in the precarious position of being labeled “fascists” and “racists.” The party is far more comfortable occupying the inoffensive middle ground that many populist parties prefer, so as not to offend any prospective voter. But it is difficult to discern the movement’s ideological North Star.

There may not be an Italian word for “pandering,” but M5S has mastered the art.

Lega, for its part, has no such identity crisis. The party began as a secessionist movement in northern Italy, agitating to separate from the economically sluggish south. In this election campaign, it has reinvented itself as a national, nativist,



"Italy First" party, appealing to those frustrated by the country's prolonged economic crisis and fear of "the other," as represented by migrants. It has been described as fascist, and it does not shy away from that epithet.

So, with GDP growth projected to hover around one percent for the foreseeable future¹³ and a youth unemployment rate of more than 37 percent,¹⁴ voters who were angry at a system that had failed to deliver over the past decade would have two options on Election Day: a far-right, anti-migrant, anti-European party, or one that cannot be pinned down on the ideological spectrum and has no experience in governing at the national level. The electorate found itself in the unenviable position of selecting the "least bad" option. Once the votes were counted, both parties would claim victory. M5S would emerge as Italy's biggest party, while Lega would outperform expectations and overtake Forza Italia to become the leading party on the right.

At the same time, the establishment parties were severely punished at the polls. Renzi's PD fell from about 30 percent in the 2013 election to 19 percent in 2018; Berlusconi and Forza Italia, at 14 percent, lost their stranglehold on leadership of the center-right.

Digital Divide

The digital divide — in many countries around the globe, a chasm — can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It can be geographic — an urban/rural or north/south split. It can be economic, pitting the "haves" against the "have nots." It can be segmented by age and/or education. Italy, once again, presents a unique case. According to the 2017 edition of Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR), "Italy's slow performance is mainly driven by the usage side: low levels of digital skills translate into low levels of a range of indicators," including broadband uptake, number of internet users, engagement in online activities such as e-government and e-commerce, and a dearth of STEM degrees and IT specialists.¹⁵

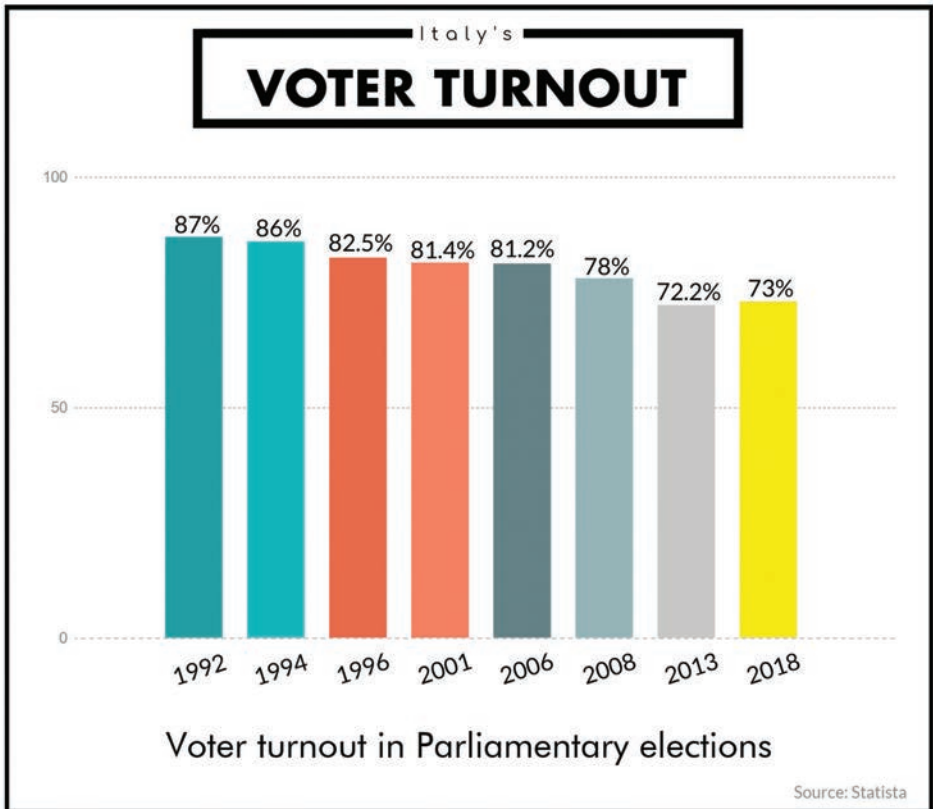
Only 55 percent of Italian households use fixed broadband, the lowest penetration of the 28 EU countries.

In other words, with the exception of marginal differences in usage related to geography, access and cost are not the culprits in Italy, as they often are elsewhere. Rather, Italians are unprepared to leverage the technology already available to them, due to tech-related behavioral patterns (covered in part II of this chapter) and lack of opportunities for science and tech education.

Regardless of their domestic cause, Italy's digital-divide indicators are relatively disturbing on the European level. Only 55 percent of Italian households use fixed broadband, the lowest penetration of the 28 EU countries. In Cuba, subject of a previous *Disrupting Democracy* report, the explanation is that the Internet is

restricted by the authorities and cost-prohibitive. But in Italy, which ranks ninth in the EU in the cost of fixed broadband, access is relatively cheap, so that hurdle does not apply. More telling is that only 44 percent of Italians have basic digital skills, the fourth-lowest level in the EU.

The lack of digital building blocks creates a significant ripple effect. A population that is not connected has fewer avenues for information, fewer points of access to government services and fewer levers by which to hold officials accountable. This also extends into the economic realm, as Italy becomes less competitive in the digital economy and slips down the global value chain relative to its place as one of the world's largest economies.



Italy's		
CONNECTIVITY		
	Percent	EU-28 Rank
Fixed Broadband Coverage Percent of Households	99%	12
Fixed Broadband Take-up Percent of Households	55%	28
Mobile Broadband Take-up Subscriptions per 100	85%	11
Fixed Broadband Price Percent of Income	1.1%	9

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/europes-digital-progress-report-2017>

The result is a vicious circle. Lack of information, disconnection from the political elite and waning competitiveness in the global economy create a noxious cocktail that results in the unease and volatility we now see in Italy. Rome has a national Digital Agenda Strategy that aims to address these deficiencies, but the EDPR concludes that, while Italy is taking the right approach to outfitting the next generation of voters with digital skills, there is a “shortage of strategic planning for addressing the digital skills’ gap of the older generations.”¹⁶ How Italian governments address this need in the years ahead may dictate Italy’s democratic prospects for a generation.

Media Literacy

In speaking with Italians about politics, the concept of *dietrologia* frequently comes up. This is the notion that what one sees on the surface is rarely the whole story; the truth can only be found *dietro*, or behind, the façade. It’s particularly relevant in

the current era, in which fake news and conspiracy theories go viral in an instant.

While Italians use social media less than Americans or other Europeans because of the dominance of television, the fake-news phenomenon still poses a challenge for Italy’s electorate. Several high-profile examples, including stories about the supposed danger of vaccines and the future viability of pensions, struck at the core of Italian society.

Perhaps the most absurd example was circulated around the Italian body politic for the sole purpose of stoking fear and bolstering the fortunes of xenophobic and anti-establishment parties. In August 2017, amid an outcry over public assistance for migrants who were rumored to be getting a state stipend of €35 per day (the figure actually reflected what the government was giving local organizations that provide food and basic services to migrants, according to UNHCR), an image was widely circulated on social media of

two brown-skinned men lounging on a bench in the Tuscan town of Forte dei Marmi with shopping bags from high-end boutiques, ostensibly confirming Italians' worst fears about how African arrivals were spending their money. It was actually a photo of movie star Samuel L. Jackson and Hall of Fame basketball player Magic Johnson on vacation.

While Italians use social media less than Americans or other Europeans because of the dominance of television, the fake-news phenomenon still poses a challenge for Italy's electorate.

Thus did an easily verifiable item about two of the most famous black men on the planet enflame a serious debate about benefits for migrants — and reveal the necessity for a plan to combat fake news in Italy. Fortunately, some progress is being made on that front. In October 2017, Laura Boldrini, the president of the Italian Parliament, led the charge to create a media-literacy curriculum in Italy.¹⁷ In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, a pilot program was established in 8,000 high schools around the country to prepare the next generation of voters to discern fact from fabrication online.

During our visit to Milan, we stopped by the Liceo Manzoni and heard firsthand from teachers and students. One of the central elements of this curriculum is the students' hands-on experience at the Sky Academy Studios, in which practicing journalists lead a master class in identifying news sources, controlling search engine results and verifying photos for authenticity. Once they've captured the basics, students work side-by-side with journalists to check sources on news items that arrive in the studio in real time. When asked about the stakes involved in this curriculum, one student replied, "Many times fake news are a threat to democracy. They are really unpredictable, and fake news, unfortunately, spreads easily because people share anything in an irresponsible way." She continued, "The fact that young kids are conscious of the risk...in my opinion is a good result. It is a starting point."

Perhaps learning the lesson from the exploitation of Facebook during the 2016 U.S. election, organizations in Italy have made a concerted effort to ramp up capacity for flagging fake news on the social-media platform. Pagella Politica (<https://pagellapolitica.it/>) an Italian fact-checking project founded in 2012, was modeled after PolitiFact in the United States. Pagella Politica started as a student blog, but in 2013 it signed a cooperation agreement with the national Italian broadcaster, RAI, and developed a comprehensive system for separating fact from fiction that included hiring journalists to spot and correct fake news.

Most people would consider this work a public service, but Pagella Politica often faces critics who accuse it of being biased toward one political party or another. The project's leaders take comfort that such critiques come from parties across the ideological spectrum: "That's how

we know we're balanced," co-founder Giovanni Zagni says. Their efforts to hold politicians accountable for the truthfulness of what they say has helped decrease the number of outlandish claims. Zagni recounts examples of politicians who have been exposed through Pagella Politica; while they rarely acknowledge the mistake, they do drop the false claims from their speeches and pronouncements.

The project has discerned patterns in particular politicians' casual relationship with the truth. Berlusconi, according to

Pagella Politica's research, tends to make very precise claims using numbers that turn out to be incorrect or entirely fabricated. Renzi is also fond of using data in his prepared remarks at campaign events, but he sometimes interprets those figures in ways that stretch the limits of credibility. But Pagella Politica goes to great lengths to distinguish between misstatements and lying. It has five ratings for accuracy: *vero* (true), *c'eri quasi* (almost true), *ni* (yes and no), *Pinocchio andante* (Pinocchio growing) and *panzana pazzesca* (the equivalent of "pants on fire"). The verdict

Italy's
MEDIA LITERACY



Comedian Luca Bottura created a meme, joking about the spending habits of

"MIGRANTS"

knowing full well they were American celebrities.

Many didn't realize it was a joke.



system has resonated with the electorate, but its impact cuts both ways. On one hand, it gives readers an instant measure of veracity. On the other, readers tend to fixate on the verdict rather than delve into the underlying facts of the matter. Nevertheless, the reach of this work has been amplified through daily articles and videos each day appearing on the national broadcaster's website, highlighting factual and fictitious statements in the public domain.

Italians' susceptibility to fake news is not solely a reflection of the need to

improve their digital literacy. It is also a reflection of the volatile environment in which they live. On issues ranging from economic stagnation to the migration crisis, the political establishment has failed to offer adequate solutions or explanations, leading voters to look for answers elsewhere. Sometimes they find those answers online in posts that sound perfectly reasonable but are false. Lega and the Five Star Movement seem to have benefited most from the prevalence of fake news, the nature of which is to sow division and foster discontent.

Demographic Change

It is not just the virtual world that is evolving; the actual world is changing, too, and Italy cannot escape this metamorphosis. This is an aging country in the midst of a prolonged economic malaise, lacking the resources to address an influx of migrants, which exacerbates the economic challenges, which inevitably opens the door to nationalistic tendencies.

...the parties without a record of failing the voters have a distinct advantage at the ballot box over those that had myriad opportunities to get the house in order and did not deliver.

The politics of age are becoming increasingly complicated in Italy. Those over 65 now make up 21.5 percent of the population. To put this into perspective, only 7.5 percent of Turkey's population is above retirement age.^{18 19} Why is that significant? It means a greater share of the population, now and in the years ahead, will likely face pension cuts as the government struggles to keep the nation financially afloat. This could have dangerous consequences as an increasing number of disgruntled retirees (who tend to be active participants in democracy) align politically with a growing population

of un- and under-employed youth. Once again, the parties without a record of failing the voters (e.g., Lega and Five Star) have a distinct advantage at the ballot box over those that had myriad opportunities to get the house in order and did not deliver (e.g., PD and Forza Italia).

Immigration, too, represents the changing face of Italy. Migrants, primarily from Africa, have made the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean to seek refuge in Europe from war or poverty at home. For these men and women, Italy is often the first point of entry on the European continent, and a dysfunctional EU immigration system has left Italy to shoulder a disproportionate burden. Despite the number of refugees reaching a four-year low in 2017, public sentiment retains a virulent xenophobic strain.

In this environment, immigration became a wedge issue in the 2018 election, dividing parties into two camps: those who welcome migrants and those who want to turn them away. The Democratic Party and others on the left offered relatively permissive policies toward new arrivals. By contrast, Lega offered a dystopian view of what Italy would become if it continues to allow an influx of migrants. In a campaign rally, party leader Salvini claimed Italians "are the victims of the only racism in this country. It is the racism of the left that chooses the exact opposite: First the rest of the world, then Italians. Those choosing Lega on March 4 say the opposite. We come first." So as not to be outflanked, Berlusconi cynically drifted to the right on immigration, at one point likening his policy toward migrants to how one should treat an intruder in one's home in the middle of the night. For Lega, at least, this pernicious and anything-but-subtle appeal translated into electoral gold.

Disrupting Democracy: Italy's Third Republic

In the five previous *Disrupting Democracy* reports, it was technology that was the primary disruptor of a country's political system. In Italy, digital tools gave oxygen to upstart parties like the Five Star Movement and amplified divisive messages to the benefit of Lega, but the combination of economic stagnation, austerity, migration and suspicion of European institutions has rivaled technology in its ability to induce chaos. Still, the five macro-trends that cut across the previous case studies — accountability, voter apathy, the digital divide, media literacy and demographic change — have also found a home in Italy. Individually, they have had varying degrees of impact, but in sum, they help explain the results of this election and serve as a cautionary tale for those countries next in the electoral queue.

Given the circumstances, it should have come as little surprise that the Five Star Movement emerged as Italy's largest party, prompting M5S head Luigi Di Maio to declare the birth of the Third Republic. As this publication went to print, he was flirting with forming a government with Matteo Salvini and Lega but ruling out any alliance that involves Berlusconi. The center-right coalition the League now heads, lacks the numbers for a majority, and the center-left is a shambles. Renzi, lauded only four years ago as the savior of Italian politics, resigned as Democratic Party leader at a funereal press conference

the day after the election. The horse trading will likely continue for some time, until all efforts to form a coalition have been exhausted, at which point there will be a call for new elections that Italy cannot afford from neither a financial nor a political standpoint.

Italy is the fourth-largest economy in the European Union, but its value must be measured by more than GDP. At a time when the European project is being torn asunder from the north by Brexit and from the east by a revanchist Russia, Italy needs a reliable government that believes in stability and is pro-European in orientation. The anti-democratic turns of Poland and Hungary make the prospect of a Euroskeptic Italy led by Five Star or Lega even more dangerous.

The story of Italy is not just an Italian tale. It is a warning for democratic nations around the world that are coping with rapid and unsettling changes in the virtual and physical dimensions. Taking note of the *Disrupting Democracy* macro-trends is an important first step. Devising policies and electing responsible leaders to effectively implement them will be required to stem the tide of disruption that has begun to define politics in the 21st century.

Anthony Silberfeld is the Director of Transatlantic Relations at the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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The Social Media Populists: How Salvini and Di Maio Leveraged the Internet

By Roberta Carlini

"We thank God for the net.
We thank God for social
networks. We thank God for Facebook."

- Matteo Salvini, Leader, Lega

Thank you, Mark

On the morning of March 5, 2018, the day after the elections, Matteo Salvini was the first politician to give a press conference. Dressed in a blue suit without a tie, his thumbs up, and showing a radiant smile, the 45-year-old leader of the League (Lega) solemnly thanked the Internet, social networks and Facebook. He spoke to journalists, who reported his speech to press agencies, on websites, to TV and radio broadcasting stations, and in dailies the day after, as well as – in real time – to viewers connected to the Facebook live stream. The video of the press conference garnered 4.1 million views. Salvini's final campaign rally, which took place in Piazza Duomo in Milan, was followed by 1.7 million people through the Facebook live stream. These figures can be compared only with the other major social media event of the election campaign, whose

protagonist was Luigi Di Maio, the prime ministerial candidate of the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle, M5S). Three days before the elections, in an unconventional move with no basis in the Italian constitutional order, Di Maio posted a list of ministers he would appoint if M5S were to win; the live stream of that announcement was followed by 1.5 million people.

What happened? Was the 2018 Italian election campaign the first to be won on the web and social media, by the party that was best at using these tools, Lega, and by the one that was created by them, M5S? Is it possible that, in the country where TV became part of government – with the birth and rise of Berlusconi's political party as a business enterprise model – the scepter of political communication and election campaign spin has been passed to a new king? Or is it that social media prowess is a sign (rather than a cause) of electoral success? These are questions we can try to answer by focusing on facts and figures of the election campaign, both in virtual and real environments.

But there is another question we must address, one that reflects Italy's peculiar political history. One of the most significant anomalies of Western democracy took place in Italy, when a media tycoon with considerable economic power seized the highest political office. This break from conventional democratic patterns, which began in 1994 and continues today, has been watched by the world, and has proven not to be a one-off occurrence. In 2013, another anomaly exploded onto the political scene: a movement born of the collaboration of a very popular comedian, Beppe Grillo, and a then-unknown digital media entrepreneur, Gianroberto Casaleggio. This movement, organized on a web platform, grew within the Internet and unexpectedly became the leading party in Italy. It represents an experiment, the success of which has no equal anywhere in the world. Can we say that this second anomaly offsets the first one, and that digital democracy has improved the health of the Italian democratic system?

At the Ballot Box and on the Net

The elections of March 4, 2018 did not establish a parliament with a clear majority that could form a government. The shift from a political race characterized by two large alliances (center-right and center-left forces) to a tripartite race (center-right coalition, M5S, and – on a smaller scale – the center-left forces) instead created a hung parliament. However, from a political point of view, the voters' choice was clear. The Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD), led by Matteo Renzi, obtained 2,613,000 fewer votes in 2018 than in the previous political elections of 2013. In percentage terms, it lost almost one in three of its voters. Forza Italia (FI, which literally means "forward Italy"), Silvio Berlusconi's party, performed even worse, losing 2,796,000 votes, or four

in 10 loyalists. Conversely, Salvini's Lega gained 4,223,000 votes, an increase of 300 percent. And M5S alone obtained a total of 1,817,000 votes, up 20 percent from 2013.

The two winners of the election are also popular on social networks, and on Facebook in particular, which boasts 30 million active users in Italy. During the month of the election, Salvini's personal page was followed by 2.1 million people, and Grillo's and Di Maio's were followed by 2 million and 1.5 million, respectively. Matteo Renzi's and Silvio Berlusconi's personal pages were followed by 1.2 million and 1 million people, respectively. But it wasn't just a question of followers. Throughout the entire election campaign, the initiatives, discussion topics, threads, and watchwords that would become trending topics and spill over into other media, originated in Salvini's and Di Maio's accounts – and, in this latter case, in those of M5S and Grillo as well. In other words, the two social media superstars set the agenda, and the others followed behind.

The two winners of the election are also popular on social networks, and on Facebook in particular, which boasts 30 million active users in Italy.

With that said, Renzi and Berlusconi have proven to be formidable masters of communication in their own right.



Beppe Grillo closes the Five Star campaign in Rome

The former was the secretary of the governing party, which in its turn bears full responsibility for the governance of RAI, Italy's national public broadcasting company. The latter leads Mediaset, the main operator of the private television broadcasting system. The Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom defines this situation as "high risk" in relation to media pluralism,¹ because of the government's direct and indirect control of RAI and the conflict of interest it creates between private economic and political power. Furthermore, because of his age and style, Matteo Renzi is by no means a dinosaur when it comes to communication. He became the leader of his party precisely by breaking with traditional schemes of external communication, as well as with the rules of internal politics. Silvio Berlusconi – whose name was printed on the ballot even though he was prohibited by law to stand as a candidate – had ambition to return to the center of the political scene at the age of 81, and in the last two years has been described as the protagonist of a communications and political resurrection miracle. Finally, until

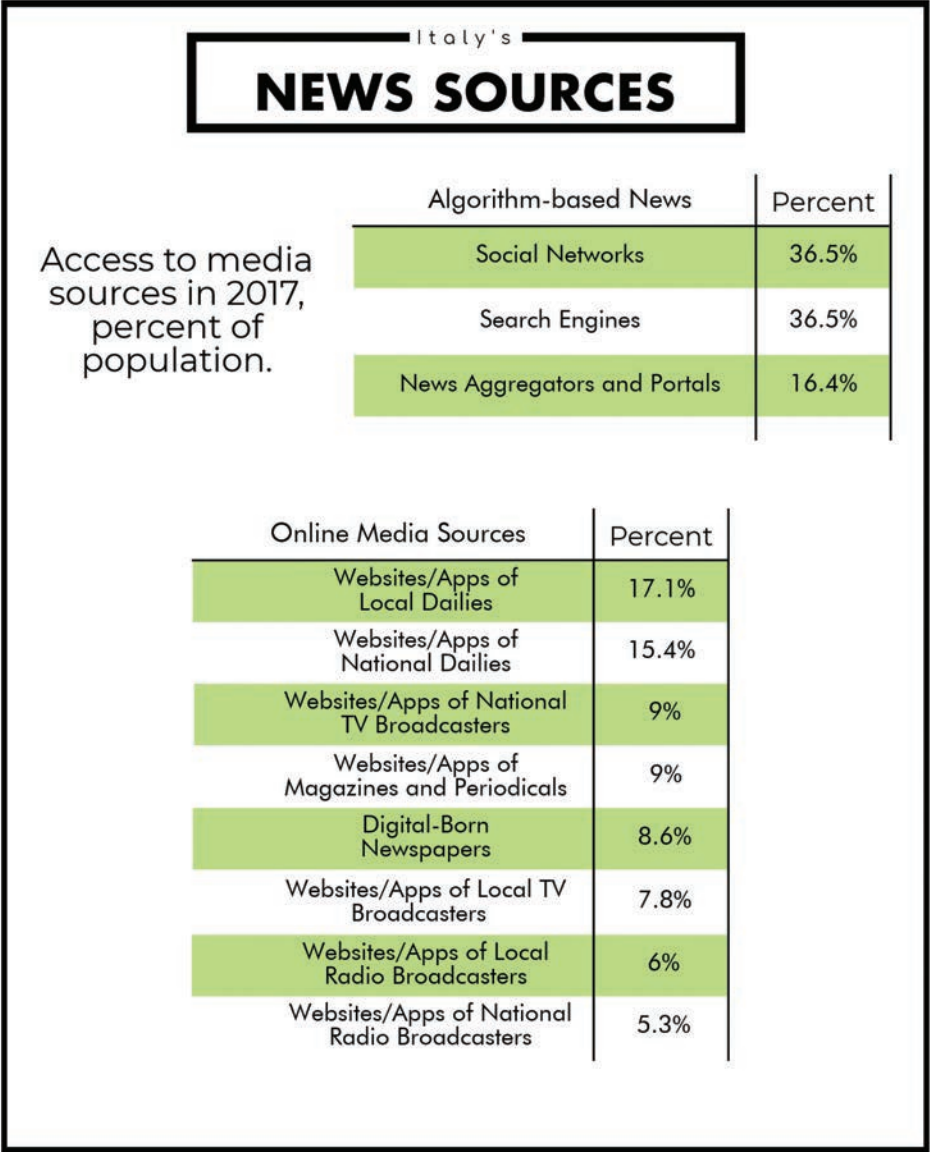
the eve of Election Day, polls had not forecast Berlusconi's defeat or the extent of Renzi's loss, and political actors and traditional press alike were speculating about a possible grand coalition between Forza Italia and Partito Democratico as a possible counter to anti-establishment forces in parliament. Something of the sort had been attempted after the 2013 elections, which had similarly resulted in a hung parliament. But many things have changed between 2013 and 2018. This is true in media and especially in politics – as the five-year experience of center-left government with various prime ministers significantly eroded popular support for the PD.

The New Mediterranean Media Diet

Between 2013 and 2018, Italy's media landscape changed significantly. From an industry point of view, the media sector was struck by the double blow of the economic crisis and technological innovation. The economic model underlying print media has always been on shaky ground in Italy, as the country

has a far more limited number of readers than other industrialized countries because of the population’s relatively late move to mass literacy. Newsstand sales of the two main daily newspapers, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*,

have nearly halved over the past five years.² The development of digital sales did not make up for this decline, and the publishing industry’s economic model was put under further strain by the analogous downturn in the advertising



market. This decline affected general television broadcasting services – facing competition from pay-TV broadcasters – and the radio industry as well. Radio and TV remain fundamental ingredients of the Italian population's media diet though, with newspapers playing an increasingly smaller role and web-based information becoming more and more important. On this front, algorithm-based sources such as social networks and search engines are surpassing other online media outlets such as websites and apps of dailies, radio and TV broadcasters, and digital-born newspapers.

During this same period, the digital divide shrank in Italy. According to European Commission reports, broadband coverage reached 99 percent, and high-speed broadband coverage rose from 20 percent in 2013 to 72 percent in 2016. In recent years, internet access through smartphones – which are used by almost four-fifths of Italians with mobile phones – has increased significantly. All of this has not eliminated or notably reduced the role played by TV and radio broadcasting. It has certainly redefined the role played by newspapers and, above all, has created a new media diet that a report by the National Communications Authority (*Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni*, Agcom) defines as “a distinct phenomenon of cross-media storytelling, which by now concerns over three-quarters of the Italian population.”³

But how does this trend, which is common to all industrialized countries, fit into the Italian media scenario, already handicapped by a private and public television system with a low degree of pluralism and a relatively weak press sector? Italian traditional media, which has neither invested nor innovated in the new technological environment, did not manage to change its business model in

the digital age; they instead drew news, sources, and topics from the wealth of information available online. Focused on the frantic pursuit of clicks, they adapted to what Massimo Mantellini, one of the most renowned digital experts in Italy, has defined in a recent book as the “low resolution” of the Internet.

“Problems arose when the economic model of the media industry declined, and when the bad faith of print press shifted to the dictatorship of the web audience.” The few newspapers that had invested in reliability and high-quality content have continued to do so, facing greater and greater difficulties. All of the others – motivated by readers' preferences that are made clear by web-based statistics – have had to remove the mask, revealing the mechanism that underpins their work. No longer do we strive towards “all the news that's fit to print,” as the famous *New York Times* claim states, but rather, “all the news that we manage to sell,” a more prosaic variant fitting to a business model in decline.⁴

But if the website
of my serious
newspaper is just
like my Facebook
timeline, why should
I bother to visit it?

All of this has led to the birth of what Mantellini calls the dictatorship of the “morbid box,” the right-hand column on news websites that was initially dedicated to sex scandal stories and titillating content, and has expanded to include “strange but true” stories, kitten videos,



A crowd gathers at an anti-establishment rally in Rome's Piazza del Popolo

terrible accidents, and horrors. But if the website of my serious newspaper is just like my Facebook timeline, why should I bother to visit it? The “morbid box” model has proven not to be very productive, and unsuitable as a means of saving an industry in crisis. On the contrary, it contaminates all traditional media, rendering them unable to effectively counter the fast spread of disinformation through the web. According to Luca Sofri, an Italian blogger, publisher and founder of *Il Post*, who has written a fierce and meticulous analysis of fake news published by newspapers,⁵ this type of news is not specific to the web. Moreover, there are no effective tools to control or combat its spread, especially in election campaigns, as the Italian traditional media have failed to acquire the necessary authoritativeness to play this role, particularly within the new digital environment.

But all of this – Italians’ new media diet and the mutual feedback loop pattern of the web, television, and newspapers – does not explain why, through this diet, new entrants, i.e. the anti-establishment parties, have fattened up, whereas the formerly powerful ones have slimmed down. Neither does it explain why Renzi – the leader who broke traditional rules of etiquette in 2014 by joyfully tweeting “I’m coming!” from within the austere rooms of the Quirinal Palace while discussing the formation of his first cabinet with the President of the Republic – lost more than half of the electoral support he had had four years earlier (40 percent of ballots cast in the European elections). Nor does it tell us why Berlusconi, a media tycoon who entered the political arena in 1994 by sending a videotape to TV newsrooms, and today is assisted by a vast network and social media strategy, has been cannibalized by his ally Salvini.

The Mainstream Discourse

On Monday mornings, the Frecciarossa high-speed train from Rome to Milan is very crowded. Luca Caruso, one of the passengers on board, takes a picture with his smartphone and posts it on his Facebook page. The picture shows a boy with dark skin. Caruso's post begins as follows:

"The man in the picture, whose face I'm not bothering to hide, sat down next to me without any piece of luggage.

He only had a phone and a piece of paper in his hand; he boarded the Frecciarossa with an interregional train ticket. He was talking on the phone, but as soon as he saw the train inspector, he pulled on his hood and pretended to be asleep."

The remainder of Caruso's post recounts that the train guard asked the boy to show his ID documents and that the boy – who spoke neither Italian nor English – did not have them. As a consequence, no fine could be imposed, so he would travel to Milan with a ticket worth €4, instead of paying €86. The post concludes with a link to a story about a dreadful incident that had occurred in Macerata, a small town in the center of Italy, where Nigerian migrants allegedly killed a girl, Pamela Mastropietro, and chopped up her corpse.

"Pamela was slaughtered and her body defiled by people who – unlawfully and without reason – have crossed our doorstep because our doorstep was and remains wide open..."

They speak of integration. Of understanding. Of welcoming. They're making fools of us and we're putting up with it. And now, go ahead and fight over 'racists' and 'do-gooders'..."

Caruso's outburst immediately spread through Facebook. In a few hours, it received over 120,000 likes and more than

70,000 shares. Thousands of comments followed, many of them openly racist. No one questioned Caruso's story, except for the journalists of a news website, *Valigia Blu*,⁶ who crosschecked the news item and discovered it was not true.

"Trenitalia, which we contacted to verify the news item, sent us the official report by the train inspector, which contradicts the account that Caruso posted on Facebook: it's true, the passenger couldn't speak Italian, his English was very poor, and he was without ID documents. But he had two tickets, the one shown at the beginning, which was not valid for a Frecciarossa train, and a second one, presented after, which was valid for train no. 9608. Caruso's account was therefore untrue."

Almost all engagement peaks on Facebook and other social media in the run-up to Election Day were linked to the immigration issue, which was at the core of the electoral debate.

Of course, the correction of this piece of news received much less publicity than the fake story itself. As *Valigia Blu* editor Arianna Ciccone stated, however, "the real news is racism," with which that

post was fraught, regardless of whether it had been true. The other real news regards the speed and circulation of news that concerns migration – including true and false information and “grey-zone” news. Almost all engagement peaks on Facebook and other social media in the run-up to Election Day were linked to the immigration issue, which was at the core of the electoral debate. The key incident was the one in Macerata. When, following the discovery of the murdered girl’s body, investigators identified a Nigerian drug dealer as the alleged offender, the first public figure to react on Facebook was the leader of the right-wing Brothers of Italy party (*Fratelli d’Italia*, FdI), Giorgia Meloni, who linked the incident to the allegedly pro-immigration policy of the center-left government. Immediately thereafter, Matteo Salvini published a far more successful post – with 58,000 reactions and 19,000 shares in a short time – stating that “leftists’ hands” were “stained with blood.”⁷ The following day, a 28-year-old man shot randomly at a group of black people on the street in Macerata, wounding six. The offender, Luca Traini, had a clean record and had stood as a candidate for Lega in the local elections. When the police arrested him, he was wrapped in the Italian flag and gave the fascist salute.

A few hours later, Salvini commented on Twitter:

“Whoever shoots is an offender, no matter the color of his skin.”

However, he continued,

“It is clear and evident that uncontrolled immigration, an invasion like the one planned, promoted, and funded in recent years, leads to social conflict.”

Salvini did not show embarrassment for Traini’s past as a Lega candidate, while

the PD decided not to emphasize the connection and postponed a planned anti-racist demonstration, in order to “lower the temperature” of the clash. They played a defensive game. In the March 4 elections, Salvini’s (and Traini’s) party obtained 21 percent of votes in Macerata, up from 0.6 percent in 2013.

These episodes are just a couple of examples of a general trend: the immigration issue pervaded social media communication during the election campaign. Salvini always managed to dictate its agenda and to ride the biggest wave in its wake. Of course, expertise played an important role. He used social media personally, without any mediation by his staff. He often made use of Facebook live streams and created a contest, “Win Salvini,” wherein the first user to like a new post of his would be rewarded with a meeting with the candidate. (This was a strategy aimed at boosting the ranking of his posts within Facebook’s algorithm, and maybe, to collect personal data as well). But above all, Salvini focused on a theme that was popular in a social context shaped by the migration crisis, with irrational fear that went well beyond the reality of the situation, particularly in the broad peripheries of urban centers and society. It was a theme that lent itself perfectly to effective social media communication: identification of a single target for criticism (foreigners), and simplification of the message (enough is enough, get out).

And what about M5S? Its politicians did not need to conquer social media, because they were born within it. They kept a low profile on what happened in Macerata. However, they were not playing a defensive game; their policy shift on immigration dates back to the last parliament, first in relation to illegal immigration crime, then concerning the

campaign against NGOs that carried out save-and-rescue operations at sea, and finally, in opposition to citizenship for children born in Italy to foreign parents. In his book *L'esperimento*,⁸ the journalist Jacopo Iacoboni recalls that the shift developed in response to data that the Casaleggio Associati firm – the owner and manager of M5S's web platform – had collected on M5S supporters' negative opinions about irregular immigration. Di Maio's peaks on social media were linked to other events – a waggish car journey with Orietta Berti, a well-known pop-folk singer, a sardonic response to PD politicians' criticism about his fellow party members' irregular accounting practices, and the presentation of his government team. (On that day, he achieved his highest level of engagement on social media.) Whereas Salvini's social media strategy deploys just one very aggressive tactic, M5S's digital presence is pervasive and covers all bases.

"Let us not forget that before becoming a political movement, M5S was established as an alternative information network, a project that was implemented over eight

years through the creation of websites, blogs and Facebook pages," states David Puente, a blogger who worked with Casaleggio at the very beginning and – no longer a team member – now carries out debunking activities privately. M5S's social media community does not need to be coaxed or prodded; supporters activate immediately, mainly to spread news in favor of M5S or against its opponents. Thus, M5S currently enjoys the best possible conditions to take advantage of the new cross-media storytelling loop, which features a mutual back and forth exchange between traditional media – which M5S leaders, after an initially hostile stance, now use assiduously – and digital media. They set the agenda, re-launch posts, amplify news, and dominate the field. In a recent interview,⁹ Alessandro Di Battista, one of M5S's most popular leaders and active social media users, commented that "it's like a small TV broadcaster." With a bit of naivety, he has said that Grillo and Casaleggio's initial dream – to break the monopoly on media and politics through digital democracy tools – has partly been realized. But at the same time, he shows



Migrant tent city in Rome



Lega supporters fill Piazza Duomo in Milan

the implications of such a dream – “all this, just to have a little TV?”

More Social than Digital

It is possible to claim that the run-up to the 2018 election was the first proper social media campaign in Italy. It saw voters’ unprecedented, massive presence on social media, and what happened on social networks foreshadowed the election outcome. However, stating that “the winners are social media” is an exaggeration, and could be an overestimation of the role of communication vis-à-vis politics. It is not by chance that the two winners on social media were those who held the most crowded rallies. The final party rallies before Election Day provided a concrete image of the electoral campaigns: Salvini and Di Maio before full, open piazzas, under the marvelous parapets of Milan’s Duomo and Piazza del Popolo in Rome, and Renzi in a theater, in his hometown of

Florence, something of a political fortress for him. It is not easy to determine whether social networks were simply an indicator that proved more accurate than standard surveys, or whether Salvini and M5S’s ability to navigate more effectively within that environment made the difference on March 4, 2018.

“We are still a TV-centric country; it’s a matter of digital culture and data culture...”

Although we can speak of a proper social media campaign, we cannot say that it was a digital campaign planned

in detail through the use of mass data, the coordination of activists via the internet, and the establishment of data-driven communication machinery. This partial evolution can be explained by the structural and legislative features of the Italian system. As noted by digital expert Stefano Quintarelli, the very small size of electoral constituencies, on the one hand, and the constraints imposed by data protection legislation, on the other, make it extremely difficult to use data in a manner similar to the way it is used in the United States.¹⁰ The use of data in Italy is furthermore curbed by cultural limitations.

"We are still a TV-centric country; it's a matter of digital culture and data culture," states Christopher Cepernich, a media sociologist.¹¹ The latest elections completely lacked the active mobilization of people, wherein they might have transformed "click democracy" into relationships, events, discussions, and initiatives at the local level. In other words, no new forms of collective action have emerged in this election period similar to those that rose from crises of 20th century. Drawing on an observation

Cepernich makes in his latest book, "the viewer individual" seems to have shifted from television to the PC and smartphone, without becoming a "player individual" in the new digital world."¹²

"Mark Zuckerberg is a bigger threat to democracy than Donald Trump."

It remains to be seen whether the lack of a digital strategy and scientific use of data protects Italian democracy from the dark side of the web, vulnerability to external attacks, the huge power imbalance between those who hold data and those who do not, or from the possibility that voters might be influenced by propaganda hubs and fake news that limit or eliminate information pluralism. In this regard, David Runciman states in *How Democracy Ends*, "Mark Zuckerberg is a bigger threat to democracy than Donald Trump."¹³ In



Matteo Renzi speaks to the Democratic Party faithful in Florence

the 2018 election campaign, this threat was perceived but never materialized. Salvini is a friend of Putin, but this friendship seems to have helped him gain support among Italian exporters affected by sanctions against Russia, rather than funding or decisive support in technological terms.¹⁴ The relationships between Casaleggio Associati and the Farage-Breitbart-Bannon-Cambridge Analytica circle have reportedly been more political than operational in nature. This does not mean that threats are non-existent or that they do not affect other parties. Following revelations about Facebook sharing data with Cambridge Analytica, Agcom extended the list of requests for information and access to data that it had already submitted to Zuckerberg's group.¹⁵ As stated by Antonio Nicita, an Agcom commissioner, "The fight against fake news is important, but it's not our responsibility to assess whether news is true. It is more important (and our responsibility) to identify and prevent disinformation. To do so, it is necessary that platforms provide data allowing us to understand whether and when automatic news circulation mechanisms come into play."

Threats to Democracy

Not all problems come from abroad or from bots. There are other threats that the 2018 election campaign has brought to light. The first one is fully internal, and, as is the case with Berlusconi's TV broadcasting services, pertains to the ownership of mass media. If M5S's power lies in the huge number of its supporter-agents, the movement's internal life and direct democracy are exercised through its Rousseau platform. Compared to other internet figures, the reach of this platform is still rather limited; around 70,000 people voted in the primary elections to identify M5S candidates. Davide

Casaleggio has set a goal of obtaining one million subscribers and, in an article that appeared in *The Washington Post*, he extolled the role the Rousseau platform plays in the organization.

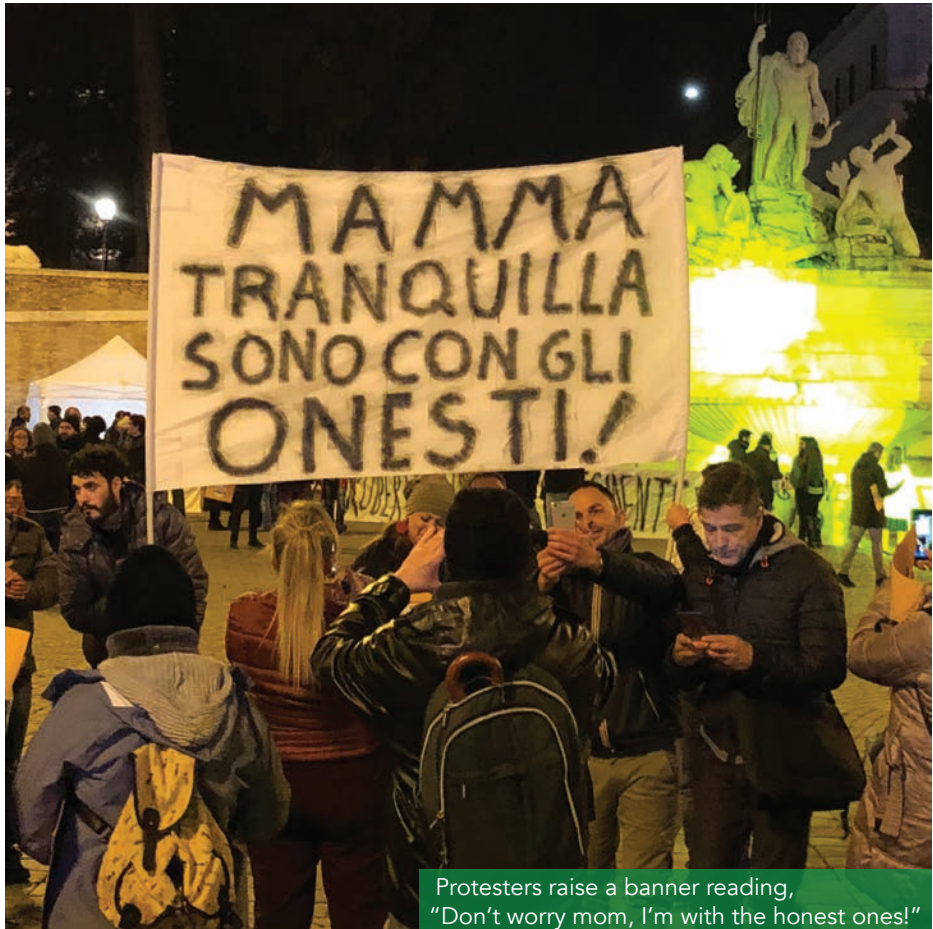
"The platform that enabled the success of the Five Star Movement is called Rousseau, named after the 18th century philosopher who argued politics should reflect the general will of the people. And that is exactly what our platform does: it allows citizens to be part of politics. Direct democracy, made possible by the Internet, has given a new centrality to citizens and will ultimately lead to the deconstruction of the current political and social organizations. Representative democracy – politics by proxy – is gradually losing meaning. Our parliamentarians who stood for election were chosen through online voting on the Rousseau platform – not inside a smoke-filled room like the established parties."¹⁶

But the Rousseau platform is owned by Casaleggio Associati. No one elected Davide Casaleggio, neither in Parliament nor on the Internet; he was chosen by his father, Gianroberto Casaleggio. After his father's death, he inherited – as was the case in medieval dynasties – the tool, data, and the machinery: the party. Moreover, the mechanism is anything but transparent. The codes and criteria of the platform are unknown, but several hackers have demonstrated its vulnerability. From an economic point of view, Casaleggio Associati benefits from M5S's political success – directly, thanks to fees paid by the elected parliamentarians, and indirectly, thanks to the proceeds from advertising sales and potential relationships with economic lobbies, on which there is very little information since Italian law does not regulate lobbying activities. Berlusconi, who is at the top of a gigantic network of media, entertainment,

sports, real estate, and politics, was given the nickname, "The Caiman," after the title of a film by one of the most famous Italian film directors, Nanni Moretti. Is a Five Star sequel about to come out, "The Caiman 2.0?"

The second threat has already been outlined in the discussion on immigration. There are themes that are likely to stir up hot debate on the internet, and the topic of immigration did just that in the context of the Italian election campaign. It was not the only issue, but, due to

its features, it dominated the scene of "media populism." Stories on immigration very often bear out readers' convictions, replicate stereotypes, and fuel fears. They attack vulnerable people, many of whom are victims of discrimination and violence, who are unlikely to react effectively on the internet because of language barriers or lack of access to legal defense. All of this also held true in old media, but the digital environment strengthens and amplifies it. Readers become writer-authors, often without understanding or verifying what they have read, or refusing more in-depth



Protesters raise a banner reading, "Don't worry mom, I'm with the honest ones!"

information because of how fast the environment operates.¹⁷

At this point, we must shift from the media situation to the social and cultural landscape. Italy ranks low in the Survey of Adult Skills by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),¹⁸ which deals with functional illiteracy. The Media Pluralism Monitor identifies media literacy as one of the principal risk factors for information pluralism. Without media literacy, one is more prone to clicking without reading, sharing without gaining further knowledge, but, at the same time, adopting a cautious approach to news while sticking to whatever corroborates one's own worldview. And according to many Italians in 2018, immigration is a threat to their living standards and safety, and is the reason for their lost prosperity. Immigration poses complex challenges, but the "information downgrading" created by the echo chamber of the Internet and traditional media rejects complexity. And this undoubtedly poses a bigger challenge for policymakers, who – by definition – must deal with complexity. This presents an aggravating situation for the Italian center-left coalition – the refusal or inability to share a simple, opposing message in support of reasonable reception policies and diversity in an open society, for fear of losing political support. In the aftermath of the elections, once his work was complete, Dino Amenduni, who was in charge of PD's digital campaign, published a Facebook post with some reflections on this very issue. Commenting on the Cambridge Analytica case, he invited his readers to abstain from exaggerating "the role of communication as a referee and gauge of all things pertaining to politics and the election campaign."

"In my role as a communicator who would have the utmost interest in selling himself

as a problem-solving guru, I say, it's all bullshit, please stop! Trump, Lega, right-wing parties in general win all over the world, first of all at a cultural level, thanks to their ability to impose their dominant view concerning immigration, the economy, the idea that building walls is the right response to globalization without solid rules and social protection. Left-wing parties stutter on these issues. They don't have the courage to say openly to their opponents that their proposed solution is wrong, and don't offer an alternative narrative. Nor do they dare admit that, in relation to some issues, they shouldn't have treated everybody as uncivilized barbarians (both positions are legitimate: I agree with the former theory. But, anyway, the important thing would be to choose a course of action). It is evident that, if one communicative actor has clear ideas and the other one doesn't, some will have an easier task, and others will struggle; but (and I'll never get tired of saying it), politics comes before communication, and the role of communicators is therefore as pivotal as it is marginal – luckily."

Conclusions

The 2018 election campaign in Italy was its first proper social media campaign. Compared to previous elections, citizens' presence on social media increased alongside the availability of online information, the role of newspapers declined significantly, and that played by TV and radio broadcasting services changed. We are witnessing an information loop between old and new media, in which social networks have become pivotal hubs. The protagonists and winners in this context have been Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio, with their respective parties – Lega and M5S. This correlation goes both ways. The core issue of the social media campaign was immigration; both winners relied on

the spontaneous involvement and web activity of a broad community of fans and supporters, and the alleged presence of bots and automatic dissemination strategies did not play a decisive role or wield much influence.

The shadows and threats of this new scenario are diverse, and all of them have more to do with internal risks than with any concrete danger of external manipulation of the Italian political ecosystem. Among these risks are functional illiteracy, which increasingly weakens a democracy in which voters themselves become the protagonists or media hubs; the weakness of traditional media, in particular the press, which struggles to survive in the new digital environment; and the conflict of interest between private property and public good, which could turn the anomaly of Berlusconi's "political party as a

business enterprise" into a new paradigm dominated by Casaleggio's "platform-based party." Bottom-up digitalization of political action, through the use of technology to mobilize, activate, and build new networks, could curb these risks and augment and improve the spaces for democracy.

Roberta Carlini is a journalist and a writer. She is a consultant with the Rome-based Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini.

Note: The views of the author do not necessarily reflect those of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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MEXICO



The Reckoning: Tech, Truth, and Democracy in Mexico

By Anthony Silberfeld

Just before 8 a.m. on Election Day, a white sedan pulled up to the National Water Commission in Mexico City. When the back door opened, a figure emerged, obscured almost entirely by a throng of cameramen and voters. They all were eager to capture the image of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) making history. As AMLO made his way to the entrance of the polling station, he was peppered with questions about the campaign, the spike in violence across Mexico and just how big his margin of victory would be. The candidate, who was often regarded as a firebrand, responded to each question in the measured tone of a statesman and the cautiousness of someone who knows that nothing in Mexico can be taken for granted.

AMLO had been running for president for much of the previous 12 years, and now he would have to wait just a bit longer before taking the next step on his journey. The appointed time to open the polling station came and went. After 15 minutes, AMLO's conversation with the media carried on unimpeded. After 30 minutes, other voters

began to express their discontent, hurling insults at the functionaries who refused to open the gates. At the 45-minute mark, a voter sought to calm the anxiety that had begun to fill the air, wryly offering a uniquely Mexican explanation for the delay: officials simply needed some extra time to fill in the ballots before letting voters in.

Finally, the gates swung open, and the presumptive leader of Mexico was ready to cast his vote. After placing the paper ballots in each of the designated boxes, AMLO emerged with an ink-stained finger and a broad smile on his face. He waded through the assembled crowd of press and well-wishers back to his car to the rhythmic chants of *pre-si-dente, pre-si-dente, pre-si-dente!*

As AMLO departed, the biggest election in Mexico's history, with 20,000 candidates and 3,400 positions up for grabs, was underway. Left in his wake was a long line of enthusiastic voters waiting to play their role in this democratic process. But their enthusiasm was tempered by a question

that hung over this campaign: would the establishment “let” AMLO win?

Democracy’s False Starts

Mexicans have had good reason to question the legitimacy of their democracy. For seven decades, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) dominated Mexican politics. That dominance was put to the test in 1988, during a campaign which featured the PRI’s Carlos Salinas against Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who broke away from the PRI to lead a coalition of leftist parties into the election. As the votes were counted in the capital on election night, the PRI began to panic. Salinas had fallen behind by a significant margin, and there was widespread concern within the party that this trend was indicative of the national result. According to the memoirs of incumbent president Miguel de la Madrid, there was only one option: “As in any emergency, we had to act because the problems were rising fast. There was not a moment for great meditation, we needed agility in our response to consolidate the triumph of the PRI.”¹ The solution was to declare that the vote tabulation systems had malfunctioned, and the PRI claimed victory nonetheless. Fraud had often played a role in preserving the PRI’s stranglehold on power, but the 1988 election marked an inflection point for voters and their relationship with the establishment. One year later, the first opposition candidate at the state level was elected governor of Baja California, representing the National Action Party (PAN). However, it would take another dozen years for the PRI to finally vacate the presidential residence at Los Pinos, when in 2000 the PAN’s Vicente Fox upended 70 years of one-party rule.

Though it remained flawed, Mexican democracy began moving in the right direction. This first peaceful transfer of power between political parties injected a cynical electorate with a dose of optimism.

As with many delicate transitions, the 2000 election represented one step forward, while the subsequent race in 2006 brought the nation two steps back. The frontrunners that year were Felipe Calderón from the conservative PAN party and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). AMLO effectively used his term as the chief executive of Mexico City as a springboard to national renown. He left office in 2005 with an 84 percent approval rating,² and positioned himself to turn Mexico’s political landscape on its head.

AMLO effectively used his term as the chief executive of Mexico City as a springboard to national renown.

But it was not yet to be. When the votes were tallied on election night on July 2, 2006, AMLO had lost to Calderón by a margin of just 0.6 percent. In another sign of Mexico’s democratic fragility, AMLO contested the results, claiming that the election had been stolen. An investigation by the national election authority ensued and concluded that there was no evidence of fraud. Rejecting these findings, AMLO declared himself president, setting off a series of protests. The democratic institutions, however, stood by their decision, the opposition by AMLO petered out and Mr. Calderón assumed the presidency.

This analysis is not meant to recount the ins and outs of Mexican political history, but the elections in 1988 and 2006

provide an important foundation for the pages to follow. These races planted the seeds of mistrust and disillusion that have contributed to the schism between the Mexican people and its government. A Pew Research Center 2017 survey confirmed that Mexico appeared to hit rock bottom as only 6 percent of those polled indicated that they were satisfied with the way democracy was working.³

But for readers of previous chapters of *Disrupting Democracy*, you know that the state of democracy is only part of our focus. The central questions we will ask here are: what role did technology play in defining Mexicans' view of the political landscape, and did that new perspective lead to the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador?

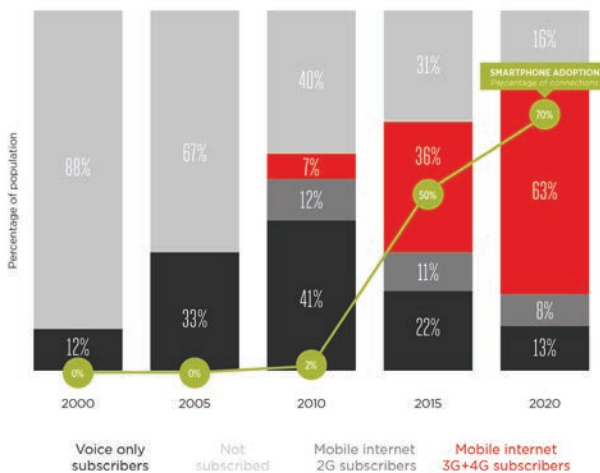
Getting Connected

Any attempt to generalize online usage in Mexico is an exercise in futility. In Mexico

City's upscale neighborhood of Polanco, for example, residents can be found strolling past the Gucci and Louis Vuitton storefronts without lifting their eyes from their cell phones as they surf along a 4G network. By contrast, in the Oaxacan countryside, it can be difficult to find a mobile signal at all, much less people with sufficient means to purchase a smartphone. This disparity in connectivity tracks with the staggering economic inequality that exists in Mexico. It is still worth noting that, despite disparities in online access and usage, the connectivity trend lines in Mexico are moving in the right direction.⁴

During the first decade of this century, the mobile phone sector was evolving in two ways. First, it was consolidating a variety of providers into two primary players: Movistar and Telcel. Second, it was investing in its infrastructure,

Growth of Mobile Internet Users in Mexico



Source: <https://www.gsma.com/latinaamerica/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/report-mexico2016-EN.pdf>

moving from 3G networks in 2005 to 4G in 2012. In the same timeframe, connections doubled from 50 million to 100 million. By 2013, the new Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto added to this momentum by spearheading a telecommunications reform plan that aimed to increase competition, reduce prices, and encourage more Mexicans to connect online via mobile phones.⁵ These reforms also opened the door to foreign competition like AT&T, which has aggressively priced its plans and devices, forcing Telcel and Movistar to offer more competitive rates to its customers. In fact, Mexico now has the lowest mobile phone rates in Latin America. As a result, there has been a dramatic spike in smartphone adoption, from 2 percent of total domestic online connections in 2010, to 50 percent in 2015, with an estimated increase to 70 percent by 2020.⁶ These are impressive numbers, by what does it mean for democracy in Mexico?

This disparity in connectivity tracks with the staggering economic inequality that exists in Mexico.

For generations, the Mexican government dominated the public sphere. It shaped the messages consumed by the electorate and concealed information that could be damaging. With more and more Mexicans gaining access to online services, the playing field for political discourse and availability of information has become broader and deeper in transformative ways. Through the lens of innovative digital platforms, we will focus next on three

pillars that are fundamental to reshaping Mexico's democracy: transparency, media, and citizen participation.

Democracy Dies in Darkness

In Mexico, the relationship between corruption and violence is an intimate one. According to Maria Amparo, CEO of Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity, "Heading into the 2018 presidential elections, there are 14 current or former governors under investigation for corruption." As a consequence, approximately 80 percent of Mexicans see corruption as a major problem, citing it as the second-most significant challenge now facing the country (behind only violence). A decade of increasingly severe and widespread corruption scandals has left the population with the sense that their political system is beyond repair.⁷ With many of those same government officials colluding with organized crime groups, including the drug cartels, the correlation between corruption and the body count in Mexico is disturbing. In 2017, Mexico saw more than 29,000 homicides, its most murderous year on record, with countless more kidnappings, assaults, and other violent crimes. During the same period, Transparency International ranked Mexico last among OECD countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index, and in the ignominious company of Russia and Kyrgyzstan in the global standings. The result of these plagues on Mexican society is most pronounced in the area of public trust in government and institutions.

The need for action to address the twin scourges of corruption and violence is widely recognized. In 2016, the National Anti-Corruption System was created to combat these challenges directly. Most importantly, it created an independent Office of the Attorney General tasked with initiating and executing corruption investigations without intervention from

Corruption Perceptions Index

Ranking	Country	2017 Score	2016 Score	2015 Score
130	Iran	30	29	27
130	Myanmar	30	28	22
130	Sierra Leone	30	30	29
130	Ukraine	30	29	27
135	Dominican Republic	29	31	33
135	Honduras	29	30	31
135	Kyrgyzstan	29	28	28
135	Lao PDR	29	30	25
135	Mexico	29	30	31
135	Papua New Guinea	29	28	25
135	Paraguay	29	30	27
135	Russia	29	29	29
143	Bangladesh	28	26	25
143	Guatemala	28	28	28
143	Kenya	28	26	25
143	Lebanon	28	28	28

Source: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table

the executive branch. At least that was the intent on paper. According to a report from the Washington Office on Latin America, “While President Enrique Peña Nieto’s administration has not demonstrated the political will needed to make this system effective (having attempted to block several important anti-corruption probes

from moving forward), the next Mexican government will be able to build upon this existing framework.”⁸ Peña Nieto’s other efforts at improving transparency included putting government services online (www.gov.mx), increasing availability of data (datos.gov.mx) and pulling back the veil on public spending (<http://www.>

transparenciapresupuestaria.gob.mx/en/). In spite of these efforts, Mexican confidence in the president plummeted. The President's approval rating, by the end of 2017, dwindled to 28 percent, with only 20 percent supporting his handling of corruption and 23 percent favoring his approach to fighting crime.⁹ With nowhere to go but up, individual activists and civil society organizations took to the web to shine a light into the darkest corners of Mexican politics.

Fifth Element

Quinto Elemento (Fifth Element), an online platform comprised of investigative journalists, vows in its mission to stick its nose where it doesn't belong. It came into existence in response to a traditional media industry fixated on generating ad revenue, often at the expense of robust journalism. Through the use of investigations, digital databases, and educational seminars, Fifth Element specializes in uncovering corruption in the public sphere. From mismanagement of government funds to money laundering, the scope of corruption revealed by this network has reinforced what many Mexicans already believe about their government and business leaders. It uses a variety of media including social channels (primarily Facebook and Twitter), online videos and visualizations to detail complicated financial crimes and breaches of the public trust.

Contratobook

In October 2016, a group of Mexican hackers got together to develop a digital solution to the often opaque public procurement process. Given that the awarding of contracts is a critical component of the broader corruption pandemic that has infected Mexico, openly publicizing these contracts created a necessary path toward transparency.

On this platform, anyone can view the details of every contract that has been awarded by the government since 2002. Users can conduct searches by date, company or responsible government department.¹⁰ The results of these searches provide the amount of the contract, a description of the project and the details about the management and timeline of the agreement. It is not intended to make a political statement or to allege wrongdoing on its own, but has become a useful tool for those investigating wrongdoing in the public procurement process, which for decades went largely unchecked.

Dinero Bajo La Mesa (Money Under the Table)

"The big problem of Mexican electoral democracy is called money."¹¹ This was the opening line of a report released in May 2018 titled "Money Under the Table: Illegal Financing and Spending of Mexico's Political Campaigns." As discussed above, corruption in politics has persisted for generations in Mexico, and election campaigns provide fertile ground for graft and influence peddling. According to this report, the average campaign for governor spends ten times the legal limit (approximately \$2.4 million divvied up by 32 states depending on population) on its race. In many western democracies these funds would be spent on additional advertising, "get out the vote" strategies and opposition research. In Mexico, most of this "extra" cash is spent on "*Día D*" (D-Day) operations – the practice of paying voters for their vote and election officials for their influence.

Given the magnitude of this problem, *Dinero Bajo La Mesa* created a digital portal to make its findings easily searchable and digestible by the public. Through videos, infographics, and databases, users are able to follow the money from its likely donor

to its destination. The depth and breadth of information highlighting graft at every level of government is staggering, and it is sufficient to give voters pause as they go into the voting booth on Election Day.

By almost any measure, Mexico has fallen short when it comes to combatting corruption, but it has laid the foundation to improve on its abysmal record to date. Between the enactment of anti-corruption



Illustración de José Quintana

La #FalsaFilantropía de Salinas Pliego

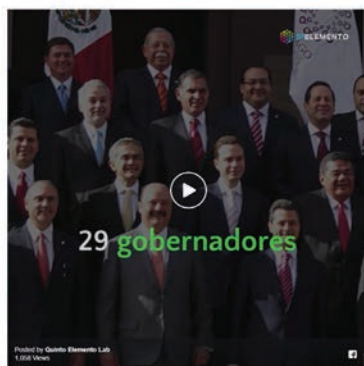
5th Element Investigation

Aunque el empresario Ricardo Salinas Pliego las presume con orgullo en México y el extranjero, las Orquestas Infantiles de TV Azteca no son un ejemplo de filantropía corporativa. Constituyen un modelo en el que el Estado aporta la inmensa mayoría de recursos para un programa privado.

Desde 2009 y hasta el primer trimestre de 2018, se han entregado al menos mil 689 millones de pesos de recursos públicos a ese proyecto de Grupo Salinas. Y el dinero le llega desde muchos lados: Congreso, la SEP, Conaculta, la CFE y 29 gobiernos estatales.

Mientras tanto, los programas oficiales de cultura, festivales y compañías artísticas independientes de teatro, cine, danza, literatura, han pasado malas y oscuras horas porque invariablemente reciben una respuesta: no hay recursos, no hay dinero.

It's microvideo #FalsaFilantropia



Produced by Quinto Elemento Lab
1,000 Views

www.quintoelab.org

Contrato Book

CONTRATOS | RESULTADOS DE BÚSQUEDA

Dependencia

Unidad responsable

Empresa

Filtrar por año

Desde 2003

Hasta 2019

EMPRESAS

BUSCA ANALIZA Y COMPARTE
LOS CONTRATOS DEL GOBIERNO

Resultados de la búsqueda

Página 1 de 216338

\$ 3,975,745,070,000 MXN

RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA CARRERA DE PAGAMENTO DE LA CARRERA ESTATAL No. 10 TRAMO PUE. ZACAMETU. 0000 MAYABIT DEL KM 0+000 AL KM 0+000.60 Y RECONSTRUCCIÓN TOTAL DE LA ESTRUCTURA DE PAGAMENTO DEL KM 0+000.60 AL KM 0+000.8

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 3,778,416,580,000 MXN

RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA ESTRUCTURA DE PAGAMENTO DE LA CARRERA ESTATAL No. 81 TRAMO ENLACE PUE. BENITO JARAMILLO CAMPAÑA DEL KM 0+000 AL KM 0+000 AL KM 0+000

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 2,655,564,400,000 MXN

RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA ESTRUCTURA DE PAGAMENTO DEL KM 10+000 AL KM 0+000 Y SOBRECARPEA DEL KM 0+000 AL KM 0+000 EN CARRERA ESTATAL No. 38 TRAMO ENLACE 0000-SAGUACA-PUE. GUADALUPE VICTORIA

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 2,133,923,730,000 MXN

Sobrecarpea de la Carrera Estatal No. 7 del km 30+100 al km. 40+000 tramo Ejido Delta en carretera Carrera Estatal No. 1 y No. 40

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 2,106,468,790,000 MXN

SOBRECARPEA DE LA CARRERA ESTATAL No. 9 DEL KM 0+000 AL KM 0+000 TRAMO PUEBLO LOS ALICORNOS. 0000 ISLAS AGUAZUL

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 1,879,448,850,000 MXN

SOBRECARPEA DE LA CARRERA ESTATAL No. 2 DEL KM 20+000 AL KM 30+000 AL TRAMO COL. BATAQUEZ COL. PUE. MARIANA

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 1,504,968,130,000 MXN

RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE ESTRUCTURA DE PAGAMENTO DE LA CARRERA ESTATAL No. 83 TRAMO CARRERA ESTATAL NO. 2 0000-00-000000 DEL KM 10+000 AL KM 10+000

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

\$ 985,000,000,000 MXN

Asignación

ASIGNACIÓN DIRECTA FEDERAL NACIONAL

\$ 138,945,760,000 MXN

FORMAS VALORADAS DE ALTA SEGURIDAD

UNIDAD PÚBLICA NACIONAL

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

UNIFICADORA DEL SEGURO DEL NOROCCIDENTE S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

1/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

CONSTRUCTORA DIAL S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

05/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

CONSTRUCTORA EPOCA S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

05/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

ACQ. CONSTRUCTORA, S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

01/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

CONSTRUCTORA EPOCA S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

01/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

CONSTRUCTORA GALILEO S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

01/04/2003

PROYECTO PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES Y POPULARES MEXICANA

Unidad responsable

Departamento de Servicios Técnicos

Empresa

CONSTRUCTORA DIAL S.A. DE C.V.

Fecha de inicio del contrato

05/04/2003

DEPENDENCIA CORRESPONDIENTE NO CORRESPONDA

Unidad responsable

Presidencia

Empresa

ASQ OF 000000

Fecha de inicio del contrato

00/00/0000

SECRETARÍA DE FINANZAS, PLANEACIÓN Y ADMINISTRACIÓN DEL ESTADO DE MÉXICO

Unidad responsable

Coordinación Administrativa

Empresa

IMPRESORA OLIVERO S.A. DE C.V.

legislation on the government side and the non-profit sector's efforts to increase transparency and accountability there is some cause for hope, but in the short term,

hope is not enough. Speaking to voters waiting in line at various polling stations, the word *impunidad* (impunity) came up again and again. People were fed up with

DISRUPTING DEMOCRACY



DINERO BAJO LA MESA

FINANCIAMIENTO Y GASTO ILEGAL DE LAS CAMPAÑAS POLÍTICAS EN MÉXICO

En las elecciones se mueven grandes cantidades de recursos e influencias ilegales para **corromper la democracia**.

Por cada \$1 que se ve en el gasto de campañas



hay \$15.3 que se mueven bajo la mesa

En 2018 los partidos políticos recibirán

15% más que en 2012



gracias al incremento de presupuesto en los estados

Cada estado pone sus reglas sobre cuánto puede gastarse como tope de una campaña
Quintana Roo puede gastar:

\$4.44 por persona

esto incentiva que el gasto real se esconda o que no importe porque el tope es muy alto

Sonora puede gastar:

\$65.01 por persona

De acuerdo con el reporte de los candidatos ellos sólo gastan: 32.8% del tope de campañas

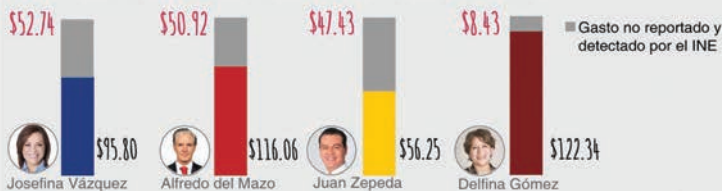
Tope de gastos de campaña

Pero en 2016 y 2017 el INE detectó 1.9% extra del gasto de los candidatos, el cual no había sido declarado



Por ejemplo, en el Edomex el INE detectó 170 MDP* que fueron gastados por los candidatos y no fueron reportados

Tope de gasto de campaña en el Edomex \$299.92 MDP



Millones de Pesos*



Esto es la punta del iceberg: por cada \$10 que el INE encuentra de gasto ilegal



sólo se conoce el origen de \$1.1

¿Cuánto dinero se mueve por debajo de la mesa?

Revisa la página: dinerobajolamesa.org

Illegal Money Spent in the 2018 Mexican Presidential Election

State	Reported spending by the winner	Reported spending by 2nd place	Avg. reported spending by 1st and 2nd place	Illegal pesos for each visible peso
Aguascalientes	\$8.19	\$11.76	\$9.98	\$15.3
Chihuahua	\$15.76	\$33.58	\$24.67	\$15.7
Coahuila	\$19.21	\$20.12	\$19.67	\$18.4
Durango	\$10.90	\$19.84	\$15.37	\$15.7
Hidalgo	\$20.55	\$7.75	\$14.15	\$27.8
Mexico	\$166.97	\$130.77	\$148.87	\$10.3
Nayarit	\$20.00	\$13.74	\$16.87	\$8.8
Oaxaca	\$27.69	\$18.16	\$22.92	\$16.3
Puebla	\$28.02	\$35.53	\$31.78	\$19.0
Quintana Roo	\$4.25	\$4.22	\$4.24	\$46.7
Sinaloa	\$25.01	\$17.18	\$21.10	\$15.2
Tamaulipas	\$9.62	\$32.02	\$20.82	\$26.0
TLaxcala	\$3.67	\$6.62	\$5.14	\$27.6
Veracruz	\$49.18	\$59.28	\$54.23	\$14.6
Zacatecas	\$11.38	\$5.67	\$8.52	\$22.9
Avg.	\$28.03	\$27.75	\$27.89	\$15.3
Total	\$420.41	\$416.22	\$418.32	

Note: Numbers in millions of pesos (MEX\$)

Source: Casar, Maraia Amparo & Ugalde, Luis Carlos, *Dinero Bajo La Mesa: Financiamiento y Gasto Ilegal de las Campañas en Mexico*. May, 2018.

politicians, police, and criminal organizations figuratively and literally getting away with murder, and they were prepared to make that point at the ballot box.

Mexico's Media Muddle

Mexico has a vibrant and diverse media landscape, but one which faces a trio of challenges that, if not remedied, will continue to degrade public trust in the nation's democracy. First, the traditional media in Mexico is struggling to survive. Print journalism, TV, and radio, like elsewhere in the world, have had to adapt their business models to compete for limited financial resources and against online platforms that are cutting into their market share. This shift has forced media outlets to make some difficult choices between maintaining journalistic integrity and keeping the lights on. Mexico presents a unique case in one sense among western democracies: it maintains an unhealthy relationship between government and

media that effectively undermines the credibility of both institutions. Case in point, between 2012 and 2017, President Peña Nieto's administration spent almost \$2 billion on advertising.¹² This sum buys a great deal of influence in newsrooms across the country. According to *The New York Times*, editors are routinely asked to promote certain presidential priorities and soften (or quash) any criticism of the administration. This quid pro quo became so widespread that "two-thirds of Mexican journalists admit to censoring themselves" for fear of crucial funding being withheld from their news outlet.¹³

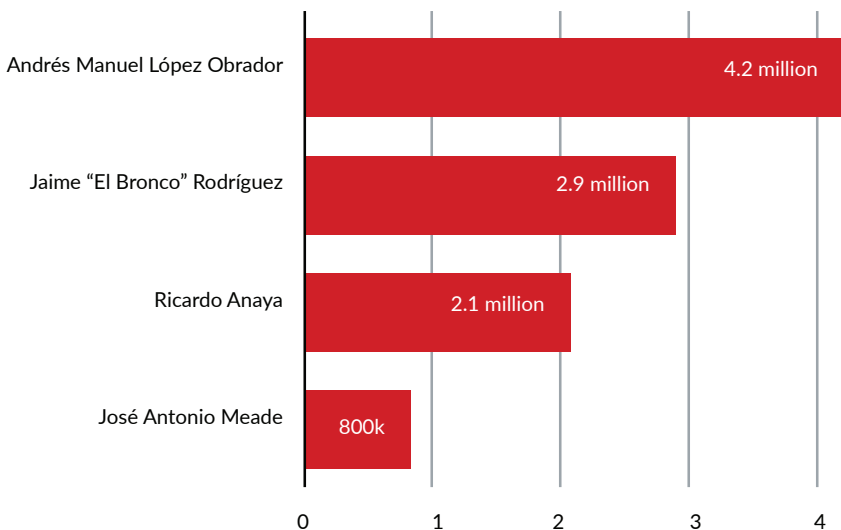
Second, outside of Syria and Iraq, Mexico is the deadliest place on Earth for journalists.¹⁴ Those who write about the culture of corruption and violence find themselves vulnerable to retaliation with little recourse. Despite having established a government-sponsored journalist protection program, reporting

on sensitive issues in Mexico can be a deadly proposition. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, by mid-2018 five reporters had been murdered. In country where only a fraction of murders are solved, there is little hope that these perpetrators will ever be brought to justice. Covering an election campaign in which political corruption and security are central narratives increases the level of risk for those seeking to inform the public exponentially.

Third, the global scourge of fake news has not spared Mexico, nor any of the top candidates for president. AMLO spent significant energy during the campaign fending off charges that he would transform Mexico into the next Venezuela, an economic and social dystopia. José

Antonio Meade and the governing PRI party, likewise, failed to escape unscathed. In a news item produced by HispanTV (reportedly backed by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), the PRI was accused of conspiring with the disgraced Cambridge Analytica to destroy the image of AMLO.¹⁵ And Ricardo Anaya of the PAN was featured in a story that suggested he wanted to help U.S. President Donald Trump build the proposed wall between the North American neighbors. Each of these damaging news items was amplified online by both actual users and bots. According to a report conducted by Catherine Nisson and Leighton Turner on behalf of Sandtable, a consultancy, bots were responsible for 15 percent of online engagement during the Mexican election. And the bots had some help.

Mexico Presidential Candidates Facebook Followers



Source: Facebook

Perhaps the most notorious helping hand came from a Mexican entrepreneur named Carlos Merlo, who runs a political advisory firm called the Victory Lab. Some of the

services provided by Merlo’s operation included “bot management, containment, cyberattacks, creation of ‘fake news’ sites, crisis management and others.”¹⁶

Verificado

#ObvioPhotoshop: El permiso de residencia de Estados Unidos que circula en redes NO es de Anaya

Por: Yuriria Ávila Fecha: 2 de junio, 2018



The United States Green Card that is circulating on social networks is NOT Anaya's

 Facebook  Twitter  Correo  WhatsApp  Messenger

Si la tarjeta de residencia en Estados Unidos (*greencard*) del **candidato** Ricardo Anaya fuera cierta, su verdadero nombre sería Test V Specimen, no podría ser presidente de México por haber nacido en Utopia, tendría 98 años y sería mujer.



Malinches hijos del ahizotfe, apoyar a un pendejo q vive en la extranjero es ser un imbecil

#DaleMiGustaAlaPágina

legal residente Atlanta, usa

residente en Atlanta usa, busca ser presidente de México

With Merlo's self-proclaimed "army" of 10 million bots waging online warfare alongside other bad actors, technological innovation clearly had the capacity to create chaos, and perhaps even move the needle in this election.

There is no question that the media environment generally in Mexico, and in this election campaign in particular, faces significant threats. It is worth highlighting, however, several examples of digital platforms that stepped into the fray to provide a service to combat the status quo.

Facebook

The most prominent digital platform in Mexico is Facebook. With more than 85 million active users per month, the social network has a disproportionate influence on the political discourse in the country. From the beginning of the presidential campaign on March 30 until June 12, there were 920 million interactions about the election on Facebook. Its role was not just limited to providing a forum for discussion among voters, but became part of the infrastructure of the candidates and institutions.

All four of the top candidates in this election supplemented their campaign activity using this digital platform through paid advertising and generating conversation online to boost their name recognition and support. Some to better effect than others. López Obrador, for example, led the way with 4.2 million followers, which is to be expected by an election frontrunner. Perhaps more surprising was the online presence of Jaime Rodríguez who, as an independent candidate, relied almost exclusively on leveraging social networks to compete.

In addition to providing avenues for connecting with prospective voters, Facebook provided transparency tools to show who was responsible for ad

content. On the institutional front, Facebook enhanced the efforts of the National Election Institute (INE), which has jurisdiction over running the Mexican national elections, by streaming all of the presidential debates through Facebook Live in an effort to reach a greater share of the electorate.

Despite some constructive uses, the platform was still a popular tool to spread fake news. One of the more egregious examples originated with a post by the Mexican comedian Jorge Roberto Avilés, who posted a video purportedly from Venezuelan state television which suggested that AMLO was taking his instructions from the Maduro government in Caracas. This allegation, which, after some rudimentary sleuthing by attentive users, was discovered to be false, was viewed on Facebook more than 630,000 times. While this episode demonstrated how pernicious unverified news reporting in social media echo chambers could be, an organization called *Verificado* (Verified) set up shop in Mexico City to tackle that specific problem.¹⁷

Verificado 2018

As the presidential campaign officially got underway, Facebook and Google (among others) funded a team of journalists who set out to combat disinformation in the 2018 election. Focusing primarily on fact-checking political speeches and shining the light on fake news, these journalists, along with more than 50 academics, undertook the herculean task of keeping the 2018 Mexican presidential race honest. Over the course of four months, *Verificado* created tutorials to verify images, videos, and explanatory documents on disinformation campaigns, and held politicians accountable for misstatements and falsehoods. Its methodology included a verification spectrum ranging from "true" to "misleading" to "ridiculous."

El Sabueso: The Hound

CATEGORÍAS

El Sabueso



Al haber sido contrastada con las fuentes oficiales y/o las de mayor rigor, se sostiene o se refuerza lo expresado.



Si bien las fuentes consultadas sostienen la afirmación, se omiten datos o contexto que introducen un matiz.



La veracidad de la afirmación depende de la metodología que se utilice para comprobarla.



Cuando los datos oficiales disponibles o las investigaciones independientes no son suficientes para determinar si la sentencia es verdadera o falsa.



La afirmación puede coincidir con ciertos datos, pero intencionalmente o no, ha sido manipulada para generar un mensaje en particular.



De los datos que contiene la afirmación, todos salvo uno son falsos.



La afirmación no se comprueba tras ser contrastada con fuentes oficiales y otras investigaciones.



La afirmación no sólo es falsa, sino que se aleja exageradamente de lo que indican los datos.

www.verificado.mx

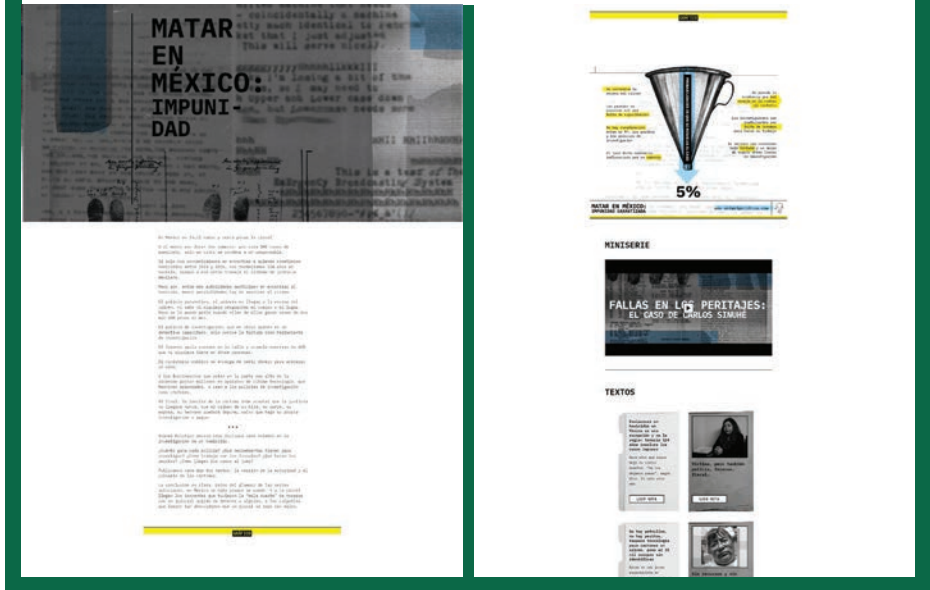
Along the way, *Verificado* created 400 notes and 50 videos that were disseminated by its 80 partners across the media, civil society, and academic sectors. Its Twitter and Facebook pages attracted more than 200,000 followers and its online portal received 5 million visits.¹⁸ While it is difficult to quantify the impact a platform like *Verificado* can have on an election, it is clear that adding a layer of accountability to hold candidates to greater scrutiny provided much-needed guardrails in this campaign.

Animal Político

The loss of trust in the traditional media has opened up opportunities for online platforms across Mexico. Arguably the most influential digital publication during this election season was *Animal Político* (Political Animal), which was created by a group of journalists who aimed to cover politics, corruption, security, and civil society using simple language and multimedia tools not typically found in established media outlets. In addition to the accessibility of the articles themselves, *Animal Político* generated a library of content that also includes investigative exposés, videos and infographics.

While there is tremendous value in the work of *Animal Político* to act as a check on ethical lapses by government officials, the most significant achievement of the publication was creating a reliable media outlet that was not subjected to state influence.

Animal Politico



In fact, the code of conduct that serves as the foundation for the platform reads like a manifesto directly challenging the status quo. It emphasizes that journalists should adhere to the truth, avoid conflicts of interest, and preserve credibility. These core values, according to the manifesto, are antidotes for the disillusionment that plagues Mexicans who seek facts that will help inform their vote.¹⁹

Animal Político's desire to build a bond of confidence with its readers is bolstered further by the transparency with which the platform highlights its funding sources. With financial support from the likes of the Open Society Foundation and the Ford Foundation, along with donations from civil society organizations and individuals, *Animal Político* has far greater independence to write the stories that need to be written. For example, it recently published a special multimedia feature called "*Matar en Mexico: Impunidad*

Garantizada" (To Kill in Mexico: Impunity Guaranteed). This is a highly sensitive topic that often gets soft-peddled in the Mexican press, but was a pivotal concern to voters across the demographic and socio-economic spectrum in this election campaign.

Nación 321

And while *Animal Político* connected with Mexicans through the strength of its thematic coverage, *Nación 321* burst on the media scene by targeting millennials who had previously been disengaged from the national political dialogue. In the 2018 election, it was estimated that 42 million millennials – or nearly 50 percent of the electorate – were eligible to vote. With a potentially decisive demographic at stake, *Nación 321* created a multiplatform approach to connect with its audience, and it seemed to hit the mark. According to its own metrics, collected by ComScore, the platform received 8 million page

visits and 1.9 million unique users in May 2018.²⁰ Of those users 67.7 percent were between the ages of 18 and 34. And while the news items it produced, providing a millennial perspective on the issues of the day, began on its home portal, it quickly found additional pathways to go viral, Facebook being its preferred avenue. In fact, between January 1, 2018 and Election Day on July 1, *Nación 321* received 684 million impressions via social networks. As the election in Mexico was all about change, it was only fitting that a platform with the tagline “The Generation of Change” would play an integral part in creating a new media ecosystem.

As in many other countries, the proliferation of new media sources cuts both ways. On the one hand, it has the ability to democratize information to provide the public with wider access to facts and a diversity of viewpoints. On the other hand, it creates space for bad actors whose only objective is to cast doubt over all information in the public domain. Voters indicated that by Election Day, they weren’t sure what to believe. There is an asymmetry here between publishing speed and user attention spans. While false stories circulated around the internet and into the political bloodstream in seconds, the fact-checkers were just recognizing that there was a problem. As actual fake news becomes more pervasive – in Mexico and around the world – it will become increasingly difficult for consumers to distinguish between fact and fiction, thereby undermining an important pillar of any healthy democracy.

Getting Citizens Engaged

Through the 20th century, voter turnout in Mexican elections was driven by the PRI political machine. Using incentives and, in some cases, disincentives, the party was successful in mobilizing enough of the electorate to remain in control. Though Mexico saw a peaceful transition of power between the PRI and the PAN in 2000, the

toolbox of dirty tricks remained in play. In a fascinating article in *El Pais* in 2016, the paper went so far as to provide readers with a glossary of these well-entrenched practices.

Typical factors like a charismatic candidate, economic peril and the desire for change don’t seem to move the needle in Mexico.

To combat the perceived and actual flaws in the election procedures, the National Election Institute (INE), took important steps to bolster the integrity of the process. First, it created a voter identification card that contained biometric information and a reported 16 security features to prevent fraudulent voting. Second, the ballots were printed with multiple anti-counterfeiting features and were transported to voting sites under escorts facilitated by the Secretary of National Defense. Finally, in response to viral videos on social media which suggested that the pens provided to voters at the polls contained disappearing ink, INE officials went to great lengths to demonstrate the reliability of the writing utensils used in the country’s polling stations.

Despite these well-known tactics to dissuade voter participation, Mexican turnout for presidential elections tends to hover around 60 percent, and reached 63 percent in the 2018 race. It is difficult to assess what drives Mexicans to go the polls. Typical factors like a charismatic

candidate, economic peril and the desire for change don't seem to move the needle in Mexico. Roughly the same percentage of voters show up each cycle, with the numbers dipping during by-elections. One potential wildcard was whether the estimated 13 million Mexicans who were new voters would participate on Election Day 2018. With so many young, new voters in the mix for this election, several digital platforms sprung up to encourage more voters to engage in Mexico's democratic process.

Abre Más Los Ojos (Open Your Eyes More)

The brainchild of the digital gurus in the AMLO campaign, *Abre Más Los*

Ojos is a portal specifically targeting the millennial vote in Mexico. It takes complex policy initiatives proposed by López Obrador, and presents it in formats that are attractive and consumable for this demographic. It is deliberately devoid of government jargon, and relies heavily on simplifying complex ideas by converting them into highly visual devices. From economics to education, this platform clearly has its finger on the pulse of this demographic, and pushes out messages on mobile and PC-based versions of the site, and through various social media channels reaching hundreds of thousands of young people on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

Glossary of Electoral Dirty Tricks

Acarreo (Haulage) – The practice of rounding up voters with enticements of food, drinks, movies and cloths, and transporting them directly to the polling stations.

Mapache (Racoon) – Manipulate voting machinery and sometimes burning ballot boxes.

Urna Embarazada (Pregnant ballot box) – Stuffing the ballot box or replacing it entirely.

Ratón Loco (Crazy Mouse) – In this case the mouse (voter) will be deliberately confused by creating a maze of bureaucracy at the polling station until he or she ultimately gives up.

Carrusel (Carousel) – A group of voters rotates through various polling stations with false credentials to cast multiple votes.

Mesa que Más Aplauda (Table that Applauds Most) – Bribing polling station officials to help facilitate the work of the Mapache.

Catafixia – There is no simple translation, but this is the act of replacing one thing for another. In this case, voters are given an empty ballot and substitute it with a pre-filled ballot provided by the Mapache.

Uña Negra (Black fingernail) – In this scheme, ballot counters surreptitiously mark up a ballot in order to spoil it and disqualify it from the final tally.



PRI Strategy

Seeking to capitalize on the technological revolution ushered in by President Peña Nieto, the PRI party embarked on a concerted campaign to leverage online resources to bolster its potential in this election. Beginning with the use of data mining, the party developed targeted profiles for the likely swing voters in Mexico. According to their data, the biggest “fans” of the PRI online were working class women over the age of 35. This group was followed closely by working class men over the age of 55 and then new voters between 18 and 24 years of age. Once identified, the PRI took a multi-pronged approach to reach the electorate. It used its YouTube channel to run national ad spots, highlight rallies, and feature debate clips. It connected with millions of followers through Facebook and Twitter. The party also embarked on less conventional tactics by creating

automated citizen petition submissions to quickly respond to constituent concerns, and engaged further with voters through the use of chat bots. Finally, it relied heavily on an app created in-house called Digital Impulse, which took various types of PRI content and disseminated it through the vast array of online channels. Despite the traditional and institutional advantages enjoyed by the PRI, it recognized the increasing value of executing a comprehensive digital strategy.

Wikipolitica

From one end of the institutional spectrum to the other, it is worth noting an example of how individuals can compete with national juggernauts from the bottom-up. Until 2014, only candidates affiliated with established political parties could run for national office. A change to the federal constitution that year opened the door to the participation of independent

candidates. The deck remained stacked, however, against these new entrants as public funding was only accessible to parties who had won a minimum threshold of the vote in the previous elections. With the barriers to entry high, a group of activists looked to the internet to level the playing field. They created and launched *Wikipolítica* in ten Mexican states to compete for mayoral and council seats at the local level and in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies at the federal level. This grassroots initiative leveraged online resources to crowdfund campaigns, gather signatures to get on the ballots, and organize rallies for candidates.

The digital impact on citizen participation during this election was significant. With increased access to information online, a greater share of the electorate was prepared to vote than ever before. First-time voters and millennials, who comprise

the most digital savvy segment of the population, were able to access new sources of information and were exposed to new candidates in a way that distorted the once-predictable behavior of the electorate. The political debates that used to take place exclusively in ornate Spanish colonial squares migrated in large part to cyberspace. Both the frequency and intensity of these discussions revealed that a transformation in how Mexicans consume and engage in politics was well underway.

The Election

As the campaign drew to a close, the four main candidates crisscrossed the country to make their case to voters: José Antonio Meade, Ricardo Anaya, Jaime Rodríguez, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

The incumbent PRI was led by José Antonio Meade, a technocrat who has held four cabinet-level positions in both



PRI and PAN governments including Energy, Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Social Development. In addition to his bureaucratic credentials, Meade was seen as a candidate who was relatively insulated from the PRI's record of corruption and failure to address the upsurge in violence in Mexico. He was also deemed acceptable to the party stalwarts since he would likely continue the important economic reforms initiated by the Peña Nieto government.

Ricardo Anaya, the candidate on the *Por México al Frente* (Forward for Mexico) ticket, cobbled together a coalition of the PAN on the right of the political spectrum and the PRD on the left. These unlikely bedfellows seemed to offer Anaya the best opportunity to both unseat the PRI and elbow out AMLO. Anaya was the former president of the PAN, and began his political career at the age of 21, giving him the moniker "wonder boy." Now at age 38, he offered himself as a young and vibrant alternative to a decaying political class in Mexico. His party platform offered a 200-page catalogue of policy proposals ranging from combatting corruption to creating a system for universal basic income, but the variety of ideological views under his coalition's umbrella would make governing a challenge.

Then there is Jaime Rodríguez, the man affectionately known as "El Bronco." A former member of the PRI, Rodríguez broke with the party citing his frustration with a never-ending string of corruption scandals. As a law-and-order mayor of a town in his home state of Nuevo Leon, El Bronco earned accolades for his independence and competence, as someone prepared to confront the twin challenges of corruption and crime in Mexico. This reputation cost him dearly. In 2009, he declared an end of impunity for the cartels, and one group, *Los Zetas*, retaliated against Rodríguez harshly.

The cartel twice attempted to murder El Bronco, including firing almost 3,000 rounds of ammunition at his bullet-proof car,²² and later abducting and murdering one of his sons. That episode became the turning point for El Bronco. Recognizing the unwillingness or inability of his party to address these challenges head on in 2015, he became the first independent candidate to win the gubernatorial race in the state of Nuevo Leon. Through his work at the state level, Rodríguez came to national prominence running a campaign to rid Mexico of corruption and organized crime.

He represented the hope for a Mexican government that would look after average Mexicans first.

And finally, we have Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his National Regeneration Movement, known by its Spanish acronym *Morena*, a coalition of left wing parties and even the right-wing, evangelical Social Encounter Party. It is worth mentioning the *Morena* coalition since candidates throughout the country at all levels ran under this banner, but in the context of the presidential race, the only one that mattered was AMLO. Having been running for president nearly non-stop since the 2006 campaign, as a champion of the poor and disaffected, he managed to visit every electoral district in the country, fine-tuning his message along the way. He represented the hope for a Mexican government that would look

after average Mexicans first. Accusations that he is a leftist in mold of Hugo Chavez are grossly overstated. It is fair to say he is a populist and a pragmatist, and one can point to his record as the governor of the Federal District of Mexico City for evidence confirming that assessment. While the ideological orientation and his policies mattered to voters, the most attractive characteristic he possessed was that he was neither PRI, nor PAN, nor PRD.

Forgone Conclusion?

In the months leading up to the Election Day on July 1, every credible poll had AMLO leading the field by a double-digit margin, but the party was not content. In interviews with party officials and supporters, there was a common belief that AMLO would have to win by more than 15 points in order to account for fraud built into the system. Although this theory may seem conspiratorial to our readers, the belief was widespread across the country. With that in mind, AMLO and his supporters would have to keep the pressure on through the final day of campaigning.

While digital platforms successfully amplified all of the candidates' messages throughout the 90-day campaign, the final push in Mexico would require old-fashioned politicking. In Mexico, that means big rallies, fiery speeches, and plenty of live music. On the evening of June 27, Messrs. Meade, Anaya and Rodríguez closed their respective campaigns in party strongholds across the country. But it was AMLO who made the strongest closing statement. On the final night of the election campaign, AMLO supporters filed into the historic *Estadio Azteca*, the largest stadium in Latin America. By the time the seats were filled, 95,500 people were in the stands, with thousands more on makeshift seats on the field. When Morena organizers couldn't squeeze another body into this

massive venue, supporters assembled before large projection screens in the parking lots surrounding the *Azteca*. With a full house on hand, the event branded as "AMLOfest" was ready to begin. For hours, a procession of local and national politicians rallied the crowd, with international recording artists interspersed to maintain the energy level as the campaign reached its crescendo. Once everyone else had had their say, AMLO strode to the stage, completing a journey that had lasted more than a decade. As white Morena flags billowed throughout the stadium, AMLO began his speech by emphasizing the historic nature of his run. "We are at the starting point of the fourth transformation in the history of Mexico [after independence in 1821, civil war in the 1850s, and the revolution in 1910], and of converting into reality the dreams of many Mexicans before and in our time." His emotional speech appealed to both the hearts and minds of the party faithful urging them not to be complacent, and to turn out in large numbers on Election Day. There were those in the crowd who had supported AMLO from the beginning, the true believers. His final plea, however, was for those still making up their minds: "I will not fail you. I am a man of conviction and principles. My honesty doesn't have a price." He continued, "Together we will make history." But would they?

Time to Vote

Election law in Mexico calls for a quiet period during the three days before voters go to the polls, but this period was far from quiet. Just before Election Day, armed gunman in the southern state of Oaxaca captured and burned 8,000 ballots. Elsewhere, in AMLO's home state of Tabasco, 11,000 ballots were stolen. The National Election Institute acted quickly to ensure that these attacks and others like it would not disrupt the election. This period of quiet was disrupted further by gunfire.

Since campaigning officially began on March 30, more than 130 politicians had been assassinated, a breathtaking increase over the already-troubling nine murdered candidates in 2012.

As the doors opened in polling stations across the country, a mixture of fear, nervousness and excitement filled the air. At one polling station in Mexico City, prospective voters waited in queues extending 10 city blocks and exceeding four hours in duration. The regular patrols of federal police provided a constant reminder of the possibility that the day would be plagued by violence. Nevertheless, voters and election officials pressed on. Despite reports of irregularities at some polling stations, long lines and ballot shortages at others, Mexico's 2018 Presidential Election concluded promptly at 7 p.m.

The Waiting Game

As the polls closed, journalists and camera crews from around the world gathered in the cavernous ballroom at the Hilton Reforma Hotel in Mexico City. Talking heads filled the flat screen TVs scattered about the room making predictions about who would be the next president, while party officials nervously awaited the results. Given the wide margin in pre-election polls, most expected the race to be decided early in the evening. Reporters received a briefing from Morena campaign staff on the significant gains they had made at the state and local levels throughout the country, but as the hours went by there was still no word on the presidential results.

With no definitive signal coming from the Morena party, or AMLO himself, the first source of news would come from an unexpected locale, PRI headquarters. José Antonio Meade walked apprehensively to the podium and declared what everyone

knew, but needed to hear: that Andrés Manuel López had won the election and that the PRI would not contest the result. An audible gasp emanated from Mexicans in the Hilton ballroom who seemed unable to comprehend that the PRI would willingly concede without a fight. Shortly thereafter, Ricardo Anaya followed suit wishing AMLO luck in addressing the challenges facing Mexico, but vowing to press Morena in opposition as expected in any democracy.

Given the wide margin in pre-election polls, most expected the race to be decided early in the evening.

Shortly after 11 p.m., the Mexican flags were assembled on stage, the spotlights came alive and the president-elect of the United Mexican States came to the podium. Flanked by his wife and children, AMLO reiterated the promises he had made during the campaign and expressed appreciation to the Mexican people for their confidence in him. While delivering his remarks, chanting could be heard outside the hotel on the street below. He wrapped up his statement to the press, and AMLO was whisked out of the building to celebrate this historic day with the Mexican people in the *Zócalo*, the capital's central square.

On the street, an impromptu parade began with tens of thousands of Mexicans making their way to join AMLO for his victory speech. Along the way, chants of

"Sin PRI Mexico (Mexico without PRI)" and "Es un honor estar con Obrador (It's an honor to be with Obrador)" bounced off the colonial buildings along the Avenida Francisco Madero. Upon arrival at the Zócalo, marchers found their compatriots celebrating the end of an era. For the first time, a non-establishment candidate would be president of Mexico. AMLO's triumph was punctuated in a speech that was indicative of the connection he made with Mexicans during this particularly dark period. He concluded, "I have nothing more to say to you, just to hug you a lot, to tell you that love is paid with love."

Conclusion

Mexico has gone through a technological and political transformation in recent years, and the former made the latter possible. For decades, the establishment parties, in the form of the PRI and PAN, dominated all levers of power in Mexico. As we have seen in this chapter, the introduction of new technology has opened up new avenues that have increased the democratic capacity in Mexico. The focus of this case study centered on platforms impacting media, transparency, and citizen participation. Each of the examples

contributed in a small way to pulling back the curtain on how things are done in Mexico. The persistent corruption, violence, and political mismanagement are troubling, but the greater degree of transparency provided by technological innovation allowed voters in 2018 to enter the polling booth with their eyes wide open.

Mexico decided that it had had enough. Almost a century of establishment politics has delivered a country struggling with over 40 percent of the population still living in poverty, drug cartels acting with impunity, and political institutions that the people don't trust. AMLO promised an alternative to the status quo and Mexicans are prepared to give him a chance. Whether he delivers or not will be determined at a later date. For now, we can say that tech, truth, and AMLO have disrupted Mexico's democracy, and that is a step in the right direction.

Anthony Silberfeld is the Director of Transatlantic Relations at the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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Independent Candidates, the Morena Tsunami, and Blockchain: Mexico's New Democracy

By Rodrigo Hernández Gallegos and Pedro Saez Williams

Mexico has had a troubled and peculiar history with democracy. The Mexican people still remember the revolution of 1910 as a struggle in which a marginalized majority stood up and ultimately determined their collective future, the essence of democracy. Nevertheless, it took almost 90 years for the PRI – the political party of the revolution, which had ruled ever since – to lose its majority in the Chamber of Deputies. It took another three years for the country to elect a president of a different party.

On July 1, 2018, almost a century after the revolution, and 18 years after the first transfer of presidential power from one party to another, Mexico held its largest election in history, the largest ever of a Spanish speaking country.¹ Over 3,000 officials were elected, and more than 50 million Mexicans participated. There are many ways to explain Mexico's particular process of democratization; however, in our view, the main enabling factor has been a change in the way we communicate. As our structure of communication has evolved, Mexican society has been able to

have a greater say in how the country is run. Furthermore, the advances in communication technology are starting to reshape the political structure of the country. In this section, we will explore where this shift might lead us.

Today, we have a capacity to communicate without precedent in history. With a device the size of our hands, we have become producers and consumers of information to an unparalleled degree. Like-minded individuals can interact immediately. Information can reach millions in a matter of minutes, and the public can act in real time. In the age of social media, the dynamism of communication – or the ease with which people can produce and consume information – has increased dramatically. A clear example can be found in the way thousands of Mexicans reacted after one of the most devastating earthquakes in modern history. On September 19, 2017, minutes after buildings collapsed, information about affected areas spread through social media, and desperately needed medical and food supplies appeared

soon thereafter. In an instant, even before official authorities could arrive to bring relief, thousands of citizens were already providing assistance. Such a relief effort would have been impossible without our new means of communication.

According to Leobardo Hernández Audelo, a researcher at Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM), Mexico ranks fourth in the world in terms of hours spent on social networks.² This high usage has had an important impact on the way information is being used to both deceive and empower society. Nevertheless, Mexico is a great example of how a dramatic increase in our dynamism of communication is slowly but steadily reshaping our political landscape by changing how we organize.

How is technology being used to change how Mexicans participate in democratic processes? In this section, we will focus on how citizens are using our new structure of communication to have a greater say in the public decision-making process, or, more precisely, in the determination of collective outcomes. We will not

explore in detail how government uses technology, but rather how we as Mexican citizens are being empowered by new technologies. We will explore three main topics: first, how technology impacts the way we organize ourselves; second, how state-of-the-art technology is being used in Mexico for political purposes (including the platforms that we the authors are developing at República Cero) and, third, where this might lead us.

People's perspectives are intrinsically linked with social and political innovation at the grassroots. While there have been cases, such as in Estonia, in which governments have taken the lead in providing innovative ways for social participation, in most cases, organized citizens are the ones pushing political innovation forward from the bottom up.

How Does Communication Impact Our Society?

We usually take for granted the makeup of the societal structures around us, such as governments, companies, or NGOs, and believe that these organizations are



Mexicans line up to vote on Election Day

a manifestation of our values. Rather, it is useful to understand democracy and its accompanying institutions as a byproduct of how we communicate. Following this logic, it would have been impossible for us to have a nationwide electoral democracy in Mexico in 1917 (when an important phase of the Revolution ended with the drafting of the Mexican Constitution), due to the high material, temporal, and spatial constraints on communication during that period. Allow us to explain.

Our ability to communicate with each other depends on the strength of our technology. Once technological constraints are lowered – through the invention of the printing press or the telegraph or the internet – the way we communicate changes, thereby changing the framework of our society. Technology, therefore, impacts the way we organize ourselves and make decisions together.

Consider the following scenarios for a demonstration of how communications guide us as we develop organizations.

Scenario A: A boat carrying 12 German tourists crashes onto a deserted island. As they assess their surroundings they discover evidence that in one month a swarm of locusts will invade the island. Given the low material (they all speak the same language), temporal (they have 30 days to come up with a solution), and spatial (they are located within meters of each other) constraints, they would be pretty well-equipped to propose ideas and deal with the threat based on everyone's participation. In this scenario, everyone has a chance to participate, so no hierarchical organization is needed.

Scenario B: A boat carrying 12 tourists of as many nationalities crashes onto an island inhabited by fierce jaguars who live on the rocks overlooking the beach. Since this group only has a few minutes before the predators descend upon them, they

would be unlikely to go around the circle and listen to each other's ideas (which will have to be translated by the few bilingual members). Instead, they will likely either run away and fend for themselves individually, or select a leader whom they grant the power to decide how to deal with the threat on behalf of the whole group. The constraints would not allow the group to participate in the decision-making process, and therefore a hierarchical organization would be required.

Scenario C: Peasant X resides in the Kingdom of Wessex and grows potatoes, but also needs carrots to survive. Peasant Y resides in the Kingdom of Northumbria and grows carrots, but also needs potatoes to survive. The two cannot communicate directly with each other, so they rely on a network of feudal lords who can use their power to facilitate the trade of their goods, eventually allowing the peasants to eke out a meager existence. In this scenario, hierarchical organizations are created and sustained by constraints on communication.

The structure of our representative democracy can also be understood in terms of Scenario C. Parliaments serve as a network of intermediaries of communication because there is no space for the people they represent to participate and directly determine their collective outcomes, and because not everyone has enough time to become an expert in legislative topics. In this sense, we can understand our political structure as a network of intermediaries, like the feudal lords, that represent several interests. The process of democratization is one in which members of a society increase their ability to participate, thus diminishing the role of intermediaries.

The next logical step of democratization is scrutiny. Once everyday people have the power to influence what happens in their



Supporters celebrate AMLO's win in the Zocalo

society, they naturally begin to scrutinize the hierarchical organization that governs them.

Because some internet platforms like social media, allow decentralized, direct and immediate human interaction, they are a powerful tools for members of society to use to scrutinize their leaders and hold them accountable. It is another example of how technology enhances communication, which creates a new framework for us to operate in.

A similar democratic framework, as we mentioned a bit earlier, would have been impossible in 1917 Mexico, despite the republic's newly penned Constitution. At that time, only 17 percent of the Mexican population could read and write (material constraint), meaning that they could not access the necessary tools of communication or understand the dynamics of a democratic system enough to participate. Furthermore, Mexico was going through a tough time in 1917, as the revolution had devastated communities, severed trade links and increased poverty and starvation (temporal constraint).

Urgent decisions favored stability, rather than democracy. Finally, the mere size of the country and the competing factions of territorial control in the post-revolution era (spatial constraint) made it impossible to build a countrywide organization in 1917 without centralizing power in an undemocratic way.

Present-day Mexico looks much different, and an important proportion of the Mexican population is using the tools of communication to reshape their country and its democracy.

The #YoSoy132 Movement

Social networks, with their decentralized production and distribution of information have rearranged the structure of public discourse in Mexico. Information is now produced and distributed in ways that challenge the monopoly of traditional media.

Traditional media's lack of neutrality in Mexico has always been an issue, since, as we saw in the previous section, governmental budgets have always been an important source of revenue

for commercial television networks and newspapers.

One of the best examples of how social media has clashed with traditional media is the birth of the #Yosoy132 movement. Back in 2012, the then PRI-candidate, and, later, President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, was scheduled to hold a conference at Universidad Iberoamericana, a top university in Mexico. The former governor of the most populous state in the country, he was leading in the polls by more than 10 points.

As he arrived at the university on May 11, 2012, Peña Nieto was met by a mass gathering of students. Some of them were his supporters; many others were critical of his actions as governor, and of his close relationship with traditional media.

Inside the conference hall, the situation got complicated when many students began reporting that they were not being let in if they held anti-Peña or anti-PRI placards. The university authorities intervened, and the students gained access. As he spoke, Peña Nieto was both

cheered and booed. When he finished, students asked the candidate about the role he had played when he was governor in the violent repression against peasants in San Salvador Atenco, where many were killed and tortured by the authorities.³

He replied that he had decided to use force to restore order and argued that being governor meant he had the legal authority to do so. Those who had committed crimes, he continued, had been punished. Many students were unsatisfied with future president's response and cornered him as he was leaving the hall. The then-candidate ducked into a bathroom and stayed there until his security detail was finally able to extract him from the university.

Mexican media downplayed the incident. In an interview immediately following the conference, Peña Nieto said that he respected the protests but suggested that not all the protesters were independent. Rather, they were part of some sort of organized political sabotage. This view was shared by his campaign coordinator, future Secretary of Foreign Affairs Luis



AMLO addresses the crowd in Mexico's central square

Videgaray, who also questioned the independence of the protest and argued that Peña Nieto's performance was strong. Many other commentators echoed this perspective throughout the Mexican airwaves that evening.

Outraged by the coverage on the main television networks in Mexico, the students launched a short video in which 131 students participated on the same day. The video showed students, with their university card, replying to the news coverage by saying "no somos porros, somos estudiantes," which roughly translates to "we are students, not political infiltrators." The video went viral, and in a matter of hours it was trending in Mexico and Latin America. It also created a powerful bottom-up alternative discourse, challenging the way in which the event at Universidad Iberoamericana had been portrayed. It ended up prevailing as the narrative.

In the following days, the group outgrew its original members and became an inter-university movement called #YoSoy132 (I am 132), referring to the original 131

students who appeared in the video. The student movement had an important impact on the 2012 elections, setting the electoral agenda in Mexico City and other internet-connected urban areas, holding protests against Mexico's largest TV network, Televisa, and organizing a presidential debate.

This student-led movement also created a wave of internet-based news outlets. In the long term, the movement both challenged the dominance of traditional media over news dissemination and also highlighted the important market for this new form of media. Furthermore, according to a report that the Mexican Internet Association released last year, news consumption online has increased significantly in the country, and, in general, Mexicans now believe that the internet brings them closer to democratic processes.⁴ Finally, #YoSoy132 laid the foundation for activism and political participation among a new generation of Mexicans, many of whom went on to compete as independent candidates in the 2015 and 2018 federal elections.



AMLO closes his campaign at Estadio Azteca

Independent Candidates and the #YoSoy132 Movement

#YoSoy132 is a great example of how organized actors, in this case a group of students, used social media to challenge traditional channels of communication and scrutinize the predominant political narrative. The movement also became a platform for political projects, since many university leaders, such as Pedro Kumamoto and Tlalok Villanueva, ended up running for office as independent candidates.

Tlalok Villanueva, founder of Proyecto Bengala, an organization that trains and offers legal assistance to citizens who want to become independent candidates, tried to run in 2018 as a local representative for Azcapotzalco, a municipality in Mexico City. He confirms that the #YoSoy132 movement played a crucial role in politicizing a large number of young students: "Proyecto Bengala has members who were leaders in #YoSoy132 and wanted to translate the enthusiasm of the movement into real politics."

Other political organizations that support independent candidates, such as Wikipolitica (mentioned in the previous section) also trace their roots back to members of the #YoSoy132. Wikipolitica is a political organization that gives citizens an opportunity to regain political control over the issues that matter the most to them. The organization also played a crucial role in helping Pedro Kumamoto become the first independent local deputy in history. After his successful run, Kumamoto became a national symbol for independent candidates, as he represented a young alternative with a fresh political agenda.

Both Proyecto Bengala and Wikipolitica help citizens use institutional channels, like running for office themselves, to change politics.

Mexico is a Federal Democratic Republic constituted by 31 states and a federal district, now legally called Mexico City, in which the three branches of the federal government, the executive, legislative and the judiciary, reside. Each state including Mexico City has its own local congress which is renewed every three years just like the lower chamber of the federal congress, the Chamber of Deputies. In the last few years most independent candidates have, like Kumamoto and Villanueva, tried to run as members of local congresses.

The story of independent candidates in Mexico began with Jorge G. Castañeda. A former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Castañeda was unable to compete for the presidency in 2006 because Mexican electoral law did not stipulate how independent candidates would run. Castañeda took the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The court decided that by not allowing Castañeda to participate in the election as an independent candidate, the electoral authorities were violating his human right to political participation, which was protected by the Mexican Constitution, and were also acting against the American Convention on Human Rights. As a result, independent candidates were allowed to compete in the Mexican political system for the first time in 2014.

In the 2014-2015 general elections there were 22 independent candidates at a federal level and 27 at the local level. Only one independent candidate succeeded in getting elected at the federal level, and one (Pedro Kumamoto) at the local level. In 2018, of more than 600 registered independent candidates only 18 obtained victory, all of them as local mayors. Some have described this low success rate as a failure of the independent movement. However, compared with the 2014-2015 electoral process, there were 20 times more independent candidates. And the



2018 election was different in another way: a new, non-establishment party, Morena, gained a majority in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in more than 15 local congresses and won the presidential race by more than 30 percentage points. Morena, short for National Regeneration Movement, is a political party that started as a political movement to support the failed candidacy of the now President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2012. Morena now commands the largest electoral majority in Mexico's democratic history. Its name also has religious connotations as it makes reference to the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is known as the "brown-skinned virgin" or *virgen morena* in Spanish. The "Morena tsunami," as some have described this political phenomenon, took a toll on the largest political parties in Mexico – some of which had their worst election results in their history – as well as independent candidates.

Even before the "Morena tsunami," it was difficult to be an independent candidate in Mexico. Each political party has its own method for selecting their candidates, some more democratic than others.

However, once that internal process is completed, the party simply needs to register their selected candidates with the electoral authorities in order for them to be eligible to run for office. The situation is very different for independent candidates. First, they need to collect a large number of signatures, equivalent to one percent of the people eligible to vote in their district. For example, in order to be an independent presidential candidate, you would need more than 800,000 signatures, and to be an independent candidate for the mayor of Mexico City, you would need more than 70,000. If you overcome the signature hurdle, you would still need to campaign under competitive circumstances with almost no public funds and against the overwhelming advantage of political parties who, officially, had a combined budget of 12.7 billion pesos (668 million dollars) in 2018,⁵ and, unofficially, at least double that amount if not more.

Technology helped hopeful independent candidate Villanueva fulfill the requirements to run, and it gave him the opportunity to organize a competitive campaign. Platforms such as WhatsApp and

Facebook allowed him to reach at least 60 percent of his supporters. For the signature collection process, he created virtual groups to find supporters. He started with family and friends, and then the network grew organically from there. Once he reached his target number of 3,000 supporters (double the required 1,500), he arranged brigadas — groups of campaign volunteers — to collect the signatures. He compares this strategy to traditional brigadas, where the candidate would need a large network of volunteers to go door-to-door finding signatures of supporters or to public spaces convincing people to sign. In contrast, through technology Villanueva was able to find people who already supported him through social media, and then all he needed to do was collect their signatures.

Villanueva also notes that during many meetings there were more people watching the event through live stream than were physically in the room. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that it is necessary to have a political structure on the ground, too, especially in competitive electoral districts where political parties have a strong presence.

Villanueva's experiences were not unique to him, but exemplify how other independent candidates across Mexico ran their campaigns without the resources of political parties to support them. Social media and new online means of communications allowed them to compete in an arena to which they had historically been denied access.

Technology and Direct Participation

For Villanueva, technology was also at the center of his campaign platform. He had two campaign proposals: to create a system of e-governance and to introduce a direct democracy platform. The system of e-governance would provide a platform for a direct interaction between citizens and government with regards to government procedures and complaints, both of which would be made online. The direct democracy platform would allow him to consult his constituents before key votes in the Mexico City Legislative Assembly, and allow him to decide how to vote based on their will.

Villanueva's was the first attempt by any candidate to introduce digital direct



Marchers chant slogans of support for AMLO through the Mexican capital

democracy to the realm of politics in Mexico. It is an example of how Mexican society is using its enhanced ability to participate politically to challenge traditional structures of representation.

In most cases, social media platforms are still used for similar means, but they lack mechanisms to register and verify their users. We usually take these methods for granted in the offline world, but they lay at the core of our social, political, and economic organization. For instance, each new Mexican citizen needs to be registered in the civil registry in order to have the rights and obligations awarded by the Mexican Constitution. This also applies to acquiring property, which should be registered in the land registration system, otherwise it is not possible to verify who it belongs to.

In an online platform, registration and verification are essential in order to create effective alternative ways to participate in politics. Registration ensures members of the platform's online community that every user belongs there. Verification allocates rights and obligations to each member. Once users are registered and verified, only then are they able to work together to achieve complex societal goals.

The use of bots by governments and political campaigns, among others, to shape public opinion through spreading fake news is an example of how the lack of these mechanisms can allow external entities to infiltrate and corrupt a community. As a new report by the Oxford Internet Institute highlights, there is evidence that manipulation campaigns of this sort exist in at least 48 countries. In the 2018 election in Mexico, the federal government, all political parties and private contractors made use of technology to manipulate public opinion.⁶

This problem of outside manipulation, which disappears if users are registered

and verified, presents an important challenge that we at República Cero are trying to solve. So far, we have created two blockchain-based platforms to create actual organizations out of Mexico's dynamism of communication. The first platform, called La República Despierta or The Woke Republic, aims to empower small groups of people to make local decisions. The second, Simulacro Elección Blockchain México, explores the question of how we could use blockchain technology to change how elections are held in Mexico.

Blockchain has the potential to become a revolutionary technology in the political field because it enables the creation of secure, decentralized platforms that are not controlled by any one authority and allow ownership to be distributed across the platform. Blockchain can be understood as a decentralized registry of transactions, where no single user has the registry and every user has the registry. Every transaction is recorded permanently in each of the network's servers, thus creating a system in which transactions are stored permanently and in a distributed manner. All information regarding the system's memory, specifically the transaction ledger, is distributed among hardware belonging to the system's users. These blocks are sent to every other server in the network and the new information connects to previous blocks, creating an encryption key in relation to them, forming a chain. This blockchain becomes extremely secure because to hack it you would have to break not only the encryption within and between each block, but you would have to hack before any other transaction can be registered. Although blockchain technology has been mainly used for financial purposes, we believe it can serve as the key to transforming the social media-fueled dynamism of communication into a



structure which enables a robust process of verification and registration.

At República Cero we are currently conducting a pilot program of The Woke Republic in a neighborhood in Mexico City called La Colonia Juárez. Our long-term goal is for Juárez's neighbors to use the platform to make decisions about how to spend public resources. Mexico City's constitution has an element called a "participatory budget," which is managed in a corrupt and inefficient way at present. In the near future, we plan to make it possible for members of this neighborhood to have a direct say in how these resources will be spent. Our platform has a robust verification and registration process. Each new user needs to upload their electoral information and their picture. Then, two elected verifiers review the information to make sure that this person belongs to the community. Once the verifiers agree that this applicant belongs there, she can then vote. We are working on ways to improve the platform and expand it to other neighborhoods in Greater Mexico City. We are certain that

if we manage to build institutions out of our new means of communication, we can reshape our society in the long term.

We also created Simulacro Elección Blockchain México, a platform that is a first of its kind experiment in Mexico. We made a nationwide simulation of how blockchain technology could be used in an electoral process. First and foremost, it would be much less expensive than what we have now: in 2018, the National Electoral Institute (INE), which administers the electoral process, spent more than 22 billion pesos (1.1 billion US dollars), an unprecedented figure that reflects the high cost of organizing elections in Mexico.

Although the 2018 electoral process was exemplary in many ways, and citizens participated in record numbers, we believe that our electoral system is highly inefficient in how it allocates resources. Therefore, two weeks before the elections we launched an experiment to see how blockchain could create more secure and cost-efficient elections.

- The cost of elections to administer in Mexico is extremely high, more than 22 billion pesos in 2018 (1.1 billion US dollars).
- The current citizen electoral verification system in Mexico requires very complex logistics and, despite its robustness, still contains vulnerabilities that can be avoided with new technologies.

In the 2018 elections more than 1.4 million citizens worked as poll workers and the INE needs to cover the cost of their food for the day, in some cases transportation costs are covered and a modest honorarium is also provided. Furthermore:

- There is no anonymous and personalized mechanism that allows citizens to verify that their individual votes were counted.
- In certain places, people still lack confidence in our electoral institutions.

Our goal with Simulacro Elección Blockchain México was to demonstrate that there are already technological tools that can help us transform our electoral system by fixing the problems described above in the medium term. Furthermore, we tried to take the first step toward having a serious discussion about the advantages that blockchain could have for our electoral system and how to implement it. Here is what we found:

- According to our initial calculations, a federal blockchain election would be approximately 90 percent cheaper than the federal election of 2018.
- The technology would make most of the polling station staff redundant since the distributed domain system, which is one of the pillars of the blockchain, makes electoral fraud

impossible. Users become verifiers, and the system as a whole has immediate access to all transactions being made.

- We could have a system that would allow each of the citizens to verify anonymously that their vote was counted accurately. In turn, we could build a system in which some users could vote from their cell phones or, if they wished, in polling stations adapted to the use of these technologies.
- Distributed domain technology would give the public reason to trust that their vote gets counted and that the elections are transparent, thus increasing confidence in Mexican democracy.

To ensure that only Mexicans would vote in our experiment, we asked each user to enter the electoral data found in her voter ID card. Then we created an automated system to link our platform to the <https://listanominal.ine.mx/scpln/src/> page of the National Electoral Institute (INE) to verify that the electoral data of the person was correct and up to date. This is an official website in which any Mexican citizen can enter her data to see whether she is registered to vote and if she needs to replace her voter ID card. Once this process was completed, the user could vote, and once she chose her candidate, she would receive a transaction receipt, which she alone could use, to verify that her vote went to her chosen candidate.

Our sample was not representative, and it was never our goal to predict the result of the official election. Nevertheless, the candidate who won in our experiment, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, was also the official winner of the Mexican presidential election, though he won by a much larger margin than in our platform.

Only 10 percent of all users of the platform completed the voting process. While we are very happy with the number of users who were interested in the project, the voting percentage was low. We attribute this to several reasons.

- The registration and verification process were not simple enough. We put a strong emphasis in the robustness of our verification process. In doing so, users had to enter their electoral data manually and we had a few compatibility problems with certain browsers. This led some to be unable to vote. The process took more than 5 minutes in some cases, which also may explain why many did not complete the process. To solve this, we are evaluating different options, such as allowing the user to take a photo of the voter ID so that the data can be identified automatically.
- Many users do not feel comfortable giving their electoral data in Mexico. We believe that many users decided not to follow the process once they

knew that they had to provide sensitive information to the system. This problem is tricky, but we will explore new ways to reassure users that their information is safe and will not be used for other purposes.

Finally, and even though we are not aware that anything like this occurred during our simulation, our registration process would theoretically allow anyone with a copy of someone else's electoral information to enter data and vote for other people.

In Mexico, the electoral data of citizens is widely distributed. Our voter ID card is also our personal ID card, which means that it is easy to access or buy this information. For instance, until a few years ago, political parties received an official copy of the electoral database of every Mexican citizen. One way to solve this problem of ID vulnerability permanently is to link electoral data with biometric data, but this would require a strong push from the Mexican State, which is unlikely. In addition, some might resist this effort because in Mexico our personal



information is not secure and is often used for illegal purposes. We strongly believe, however, that blockchain could help individuals take back control of their information and keep it secure.

Our Simulacro Elección Blockchain México experiment confirmed that blockchain can be used in elections, so we are actively seeking to create partnerships so we can have more pilot programs. Our goal is for an official election in the near future to use blockchain to assist in administering the election.

Building on our experience from the two experiments, The Woke Republic and Simulacro Elección Blockchain México, we have learned that before we can use blockchain to build apps that address the issues that Mexico faces, we must first create a system of registration and verification. We need to build tools that allow users to be active, express what they want, create contractual agreements with each other, etc., in the digital world. They need an online extension of their legal identity: a digital identity.

New Accountability through Digital Identity

Mexico has deficient structures of accountability. Using new technologies, Mexican citizens and society have been able to increase the country's ability to scrutinize their leaders' actions by informal means, as opposed to simply relying on the judicial system or another formal complaint system. As we have argued, however, for individuals to continue to hold their government accountable through social media, it is imperative to create platforms where no one person controls the flow of information, and which adhere to a process of registration and verification. The group knows that each member belongs, because each citizen's legal identity extends into the digital realm.

This registered and verified digital identity is a necessary first step if we want to take full advantage of the great advances in communication that we have experienced in the past 30 years. If we understand our current structures of representation as a network of intermediaries (like the feudal lords mentioned earlier, or present-day members of parliament), then we can expect them to evolve and progress. The example of the #YoSoy132 movement shows how technology can be used to make "middle men" of communication, such as traditional media, obsolete. Furthermore, independent candidates have used technology to challenge the monopoly that political parties have in the Mexican system. In a world in which we each have a digital identity, it is not hard to envision that people-controlled domain technology can replace current structures of representation.

A few examples exist of where this is already happening. For instance, the Democracy Earth project is working on a blockchain-based platform to enable the creation of a global democracy, while Horizon State wants to use this technology to create a decentralized decision-making platform for every organization. Furthermore, the Avoin Ministeriö, a crowdsourcing legislation tool in Finland, is an excellent example of how governments are starting to take advantage of the disruptive power of the internet to increase their democratic legitimacy. In the case of Mexico, these technologies could help not only to improve our elections by making them more cost-effective, secure and transparent, but also to fight corruption at all levels of government through increased transparency.

If our structures of communication create a framework in which a society organizes differently, as has happened in the past with the invention of things like the

printing press and the telegraph, we are at the dawn of an organizational change that we can only begin to envision. We believe that this change has the potential to be overwhelmingly positive. However, the future is not written in stone; therefore, governments should work alongside academia, civil society and businesses to fund the appropriate research and the pilot programs to achieve this goal and make it a priority. While around the world some politicians glorify the past through nostalgic rhetoric, technology promises

a more democratic, transparent, and inclusive world, which is, in our opinion, an optimistic counterproposal.

Rodrigo Hernandez is the Public Policy and Theory Officer and Pedro Saez is the Chief Evangelist Officer at República Cero.

Note: The views of the authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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LATVIA



Singing Out of Tune: Latvia's Divided Democracy

By Anthony Silberfeld

"We are a calm nation. We like to sing and dance and criticize each other."

-Guna Šnore, Office of the Latvian Prime Minister

The streets of Latvia have a story to tell. The wide, tree-lined avenue connecting old Riga to new was previously known as Hitler Street, and, later, Lenin Street, reflecting the sequence of powers that occupied the Baltic nation for much of the 20th century. Today, this main thoroughfare in the Latvian capital is called *Brīvības bulvāris*, or Freedom Boulevard, and it symbolizes the nation's long road to independence.

Along *Brīvības bulvāris*, the mélange of Russian and Latvian languages are readily audible in storefronts, restaurants, and in the cacophony of conversations that emanate from Riga's leafy parks. If you follow this path, you will pass a generation of young people with eyes glued to their smartphones, and pensioners who sidestep them on their way to the central

market to buy their fish and produce for the week. On the surface, these are the signs of a healthy, modern, and vibrant society; beneath this idyllic veneer, however, lie cleavages that put in peril the democracy for which Latvians so courageously fought.

The combination of the technological revolution and an imposing next-door neighbor have created a complex picture that defines Latvian politics in 2018.

Old enmity resulting from the Soviet occupation has divided the political landscape along ethnic and linguistic

lines, and new economic, geopolitical, and social challenges have further fragmented the electorate. None of this takes place in a vacuum. The combination of the technological revolution and an imposing next-door neighbor have created a complex picture that defines Latvian politics in 2018. In this chapter, we'll explore the sources of friction in Latvian politics and society, the factors that exacerbate these challenges, and what can be done to correct course — all against the backdrop of the country's October 2018 parliamentary elections.

At the Crossroads of History

In order to fully grasp the history of Latvia, first look at a map. Its strategic location on the Baltic Sea made Latvia an important trading post and economic hub connecting East and West for centuries. That's the good news. The bad news is that its privileged position has subjected the region to a series of foreign actors seeking to control this valuable plot of land. Going back to the Middle Ages, Germans, Poles, Swedes, and Russians have all occupied what would later become Latvia at one point or another. In the aftermath of World War I, the country launched a war of independence from Russia, and by 1920, for the first time in history, it was officially recognized as a sovereign state. This hard-earned autonomy, however, was short-lived.

In 1939, the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany went beyond codifying the principle of non-aggression; it carved up Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence, effectively turning over the Baltic countries to Josef Stalin. By 1940, Adolf Hitler had abrogated the terms of the Soviet-German pact, launching Operation Barbarossa with the Nazi Army's march east toward Russia. Along the way, the Nazis overran the Soviet army

in Latvia, replacing the Russian occupation with a German one. This marked the beginning of a particularly difficult period for the Latvian people, one which would leave behind physical and emotional scars that are still visible to this day. As World War II came to a close, the Soviet Army was left to gobble up as much of Eastern Europe as possible. Latvia was annexed once again and became known for the next four decades as the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic.

During this period of Soviet occupation, any resistance from the local population was dealt with harshly. As the decade turned to 1950, more than 230,000 Latvians and Estonians had been killed or deported to other parts of the Soviet Union in an effort to change the demographic composition of the Baltic states.¹ This effort coincided with a period of rapid industrialization in the Soviet Union that drove many workers from Russia into places like Latvia, creating a chasm between the ethnic Latvian and ethnic Russian populations. Over the years, Soviet authorities attempted to erase most remnants of Latvian cultural and linguistic identity, but they would eventually discover that their efforts were futile, and Latvian voices could not be silenced.

Throughout the Soviet occupation of Latvia, the people found strength in song. Despite severe restrictions on free speech, Latvians were permitted to hold choir festivals, during which pro-Soviet songs dominated. Every so often a choir would try to push the envelope of Soviet tolerance by incorporating a tune from Latvian culture into the programs. Since these songs were not explicitly anti-Soviet in nature, they were allowed. These seemingly innocuous anthems planted the seeds of the Latvian independence movement, however, and in the mid-1980s Soviet leader Mikhail

A Brief Timeline of Latvia



1918

Following World War I, the Republic of Latvia declares its independence.

1920

With the Latvian-Soviet Peace Treaty, Russia recognizes Latvian independence and is followed by the international community the following year, with the entry of the state in the League of Nations.



1940

Despite a Mutual Assistance Treaty, Latvia is invaded and forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union after a mock election.

1941

Latvia is invaded by Nazi Germany, which occupies the state and starts to eliminate Jewish and Romani populations.



1944

After battles between German and Soviet troops, Latvia is annexed by the Soviet Union.

1989

In the 1980s, the Soviet-driven liberalization movements *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* lead to the creation of several independence movements such as the Singing Revolution and the Baltic Way, where two million people form a human chain through Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius to show Baltic solidarity.



1994

Russian armed forces permanently leave the Latvian territory.

2014

Latvia joins the Eurozone.



1918-1920

The Latvian War of Independence starts a few days later when the Soviet Union launches an offensive to regain the territories. Riga is captured and a Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic is declared.



1922

The first Latvian Parliament, the *Saeima*, is elected.

1941

First mass deportations of anti-Soviet Latvians to Siberia and Central Asia during the "Year of Terror." During one night in June 1941, more than 15,000 Latvian residents are deported, including more than 2,000 children.



1945

The Yalta Conference, gathering the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom, concedes the Baltic States to the Soviet Union. Under Soviet influence, Latvian inhabitants are repressed and deported, the use of the Latvian language is hindered and Latvia forcibly adopts Soviet economic and agricultural principles. Immigrants from Soviet Union's Republics are sent to Latvia, reducing the share of ethnic Latvians in the state.

1991

The independence of Latvia from the Soviet Union is restored.



2004

Latvia joins NATO and the European Union.

October 6, 2018

The 13th *Saeima* elections are held.



Gorbachev's proclamation of greater openness (*Glasnost*) created the space for Latvian nationalists and others across the Baltics (Lithuania and Estonia) to exploit. In what became known as the "Singing Revolution," festivals across the region sprang up, and folkloric hymns were supplanted by songs calling for independence. Rather than smashing these peaceful protests with violence, Gorbachev opted to release the grip Moscow had had over the Baltics for most of the previous half century.² When anti-independence factions in the Soviet Union, against Gorbachev's wishes, authorized the use of tanks in the streets of Riga to suppress the uprising, the citizens stood together and sang until the Soviets left Latvia for good.

This is an uplifting story to be sure, but why does it matter today? The relationship between Latvia and the Soviet Union began as an international conflict but morphed over time into a domestic one. The Russification of Latvia during the 20th century effectively created a country that is politically and culturally bisected into Russian- and Latvian-speaking camps. According to 2017 demographic figures, 62 percent of the population is ethnic Latvian and 25 percent is ethnic Russian, with 56 percent speaking Latvian and 33 percent speaking Russian as their primary language.³ Despite estimates that approximately one-third of marriages in Latvia are "mixed," the electorate remains tribal (as we'll see later) in their preferences at the ballot box. Perhaps a more disturbing trend is the lengths to which politicians will go to stoke ethnic divisions in order to win.

Wedge Politics

In countries with divided or polarized electorates, politicians often focus their campaigns on issues that are likely to drive a wedge between communities and

voting blocs. As cynical as it may be, and it is certainly that, stoking division is also a staggeringly effective political tactic. This strategy mobilizes voters to turnout en masse and leaves no room in the middle for voters susceptible to crossing party lines. In Latvia, there are three main issues that touch voters' most sensitive nerves: language, education, and identity.

As cynical as it may be, and it is certainly that, stoking division is also a staggeringly effective political tactic.

Given the history of Latvia, it is understandable that there would be some nationalistic backlash following fifty years of foreign occupation. After independence in 1991, Latvian became the only official language in Latvia, creating a deep fault line with the sizable Russian-speaking community. By the time Latvia joined the European Union in 2004, lawmakers had passed legislation giving primacy to the Latvian language in schools. Under the new law, at least 60 percent of public school classes would have to be taught in Latvian, regardless of the ethnic composition of the school. In response, on the day marking Latvia's accession to the EU, more than 20,000 people marched through the streets of Riga wearing tags that said "alien"⁴ in protest of legislation they perceived as discriminatory. The dispute didn't end there.

In 2012, a Russian-speakers' movement called Native Tongue initiated a referendum to make Russian an official

language in Latvia.⁵ With high voter turnout, 75 percent of Latvians rejected the referendum, leaving the organizer of the plebiscite to lament that “over the past 20 years Russian residents of Latvia have been humiliated by authorities, by endless attempts to either assimilate or make them second-class citizens.”⁶ Ethnic Latvian politicians argued that the government already funded Russian language schools for minority groups and that there were no restrictions on speaking Russian or any other language at home or elsewhere. The law exists, they asserted, to facilitate the integration of all Latvians to create the sense of a shared community.

Wedge issues in Latvia are highly interconnected and have the potential to inflame partisans on both sides of the ethnic divide.

As the elections of 2018 rolled around, the language issue surfaced once again to drive a wedge between the Russian- and Latvian-speaking communities. In March 2018, parliament approved legislation that would raise the Latvian language requirement in schools to 80 percent of instruction, thereby dominating all core content.⁷ This legislation was met with a swift rebuke from the Russian-speaking community, many pro-Kremlin politicians, and even Russian President Vladimir Putin himself. Putin said, “I hope they are ashamed because they pay special

attention to human rights violations outside the European Union, but they themselves violate human rights within the EU.”⁸ As the back and forth continued for months, one thing was certain: politicians would try to score points on the back of the language issue come Election Day.

Wedge issues in Latvia are highly interconnected and have the potential to inflame partisans on both sides of the ethnic divide. Language and education are virtually impossible to decouple, and identity is a closely related matter. In short, what does it mean to be Latvian? That is a complicated question that yields many different replies. According to the state, a person who is an ethnic Latvian born in Latvia, is a Latvian citizen. If a person is an ethnic Russian born in Latvia, but declines to take the requisite citizenship exam, that person is considered a non-citizen. An ethnic Russian born in Latvia has a path to citizenship if he or she passes the necessary exams in Latvian. This is the bureaucratic definition of what it is to be Latvian. Identity is as much an emotional question as a legal one. The vast majority of Latvians, whether Russian- or Latvian-speakers, are patriots with a strong sense of national identity. They are active supporters of NATO and the EU, and they view their Russian neighbors to the east with suspicion, particularly after the 2014 annexation of Crimea in neighboring Ukraine. Yet, on balance, the issues that divide the populations have greater traction during election campaigns than those that unite.

Identity-based voting patterns are prevalent, and have been since the restoration of Latvian democracy in 1991. Perhaps it is too simplistic to say that all Latvian-speakers vote for ethnic Latvian parties and all Russian-speakers vote for ethnic Russian parties. Clearly there are exceptions, but the overall

Non-Citizen Passport



numbers suggest that there is validity to this generalization. Remember, in the 2012 Russian language referendum, the pro-Russian vote was 25 percent. In the 2014 parliamentary election, the ethnic Russian Harmony Party won 28 percent of the vote. With the Russian-speaking minority between 25 and 30 percent of the population, these numbers suggest very little crossover to the “other” ethnic parties.

By the time the election campaign for the Latvian Parliament began in 2018, the battle was more ideological than ethnic in nature. Since the ethnic Russian parties would largely keep their base, as would the ethnic Latvian parties, parties couldn’t simply rely on the crutch of nationalism. They had to do what parties in democracies all around the world do: focus on the day-to-day issues that matter most to voters.

Bread, Butter, and Bribery

In 2008, Latvia exhibited all of the worst symptoms that contributed to the global economic crisis. A real estate bubble, financed largely on foreign credit, increased six-fold in a five year period, while wages failed to keep pace with the high cost of living; it was a recipe for disaster. Perhaps worst of all, Latvia was hamstrung in its policymaking decisions out of a need to stay close to the EU, primarily to keep the Russian threat at bay. Its failure to devalue its currency – and instead maintain its peg to the euro (which it ultimately adopted in 2014) – led to a calamitous 17 percent GDP loss in 2009.⁹ These circumstances, combined with inflation running at 15.4 percent without commensurate productivity growth, consigned Latvians to years of IMF-imposed austerity.¹⁰

A decade later, the Latvian economy has recovered, though it still has its

weaknesses. In the first quarter of 2018, Latvian GDP grew at 4.3 percent. Per capita income is about \$20,000 per year in urban areas, while rural Latvia income hovers around a paltry \$5,000.¹¹ Unemployment is at 8.7 percent, but that number would be far worse if unemployed Latvians actually stayed in Latvia. Economic woes in the past ten years have sent many Latvians packing in search of job opportunities in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and elsewhere. These macroeconomic numbers trickle down to public sentiment. According to an October 2018 Bertelsmann Foundation/Questia survey, only 13.6 percent of Latvians think that economic conditions are heading in the right direction. For young people, this translates into brain drain. For some pensioners, there is nostalgia for the Soviet period when they had less economic anxiety, even though it came with less freedom. For everyone in between there is a general discontent with how the political class has dealt with the country’s economic challenges. This group is forced to weigh whether to roll the dice in this election with untested entities, or to simply stick with the status quo.

Unfortunately for the political elite, corruption in Latvian institutions is also high on the list of concerns for voters. While petty corruption, such as bribing traffic cops or doctors for preferential treatment, has declined in recent years, political graft remains pervasive. It touches virtually every political party across the spectrum, even the anti-establishment party, Who Owns the State (KPV LV), the leading figures of which are all under investigation for campaign finance violations, but ironically seem exempt from the widespread electoral condemnation.

Then there is the question of Latvia’s three oligarchs: Aivars Lembergs, Ainārs Šlesers, and former Prime Minister Andris

Skele. Lambergis, the incumbent mayor of the western city Ventspils since 1988, has been closely associated with the Farmers and Greens Party (who currently occupies the Prime Minister's office), despite having been accused of bribery and money laundering.¹² Šlesers, who has been linked to Russian business interests and the KPV LV, has also been the subject of multiple corruption investigations. In 2017, a Latvian media outlet released a transcript of conversations initiated by Šlesers with the other oligarchs and multiple Latvian business leaders dating back to 2009-2011. The recordings pulled back the veil on the degree of influence a handful of people in Latvia have over the direction of policy, and the extent of corruption and abuse of power that goes on with impunity. It is, therefore, unsurprising that fewer than 5 percent of Latvians have trust in political parties.¹³ Despite the low esteem in which the public holds them, we should, nevertheless, turn our attention to the key parties that contested this election.

Who's Coming to the Party?

The Latvian parliament, or *Saeima*, is comprised of 100 seats elected on the basis of proportional representation in five electoral districts around the country. In order to enter parliament, a party must obtain a minimum of five percent of the vote. If a single party obtains a simple majority of seats (51), it may form a new government on its own. If no party secures a majority of seats, parties scramble to cobble together a coalition that will allow them to govern. One unique facet of the Latvian political landscape is that the party that has since 2011 taken the largest share of the votes (Harmony) has been excluded from each and every the governing coalition. More on that later, but for now, here is a brief snapshot of the eight most important parties (of the 16 competing) in the 2018 Saeima election, and what they offered voters on the eve of the election.

Harmony

Trying to characterize Harmony is a tricky business. A balance must be struck between what people say about them and what they say about themselves. Party officials will tell you that over the last four years, the party has evolved. While it was once viewed as a pro-Kremlin party that catered exclusively to the needs of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia, it has taken important steps to broaden its base. According to one of the party's chief strategists, Anna Vladova, Harmony is a traditional social democratic party in the European mold. It is pro-NATO, pro-EU, and has no ties to Russia or the Kremlin. It recently joined the Socialists and Democrats political family in the European Parliament, and has diversified its candidate list to feature more ethnic Latvians. The face of the party is Riga Mayor Nils Ušakovs, whose image is plastered on billboards and ads all over the country, despite not being on the parliamentary ballot. Harmony rests its political fortunes on retaining the roughly 90 percent of the Russian-speaking vote it captures every election, combined with perceptions that the party has pragmatically governed Riga, and that its connection to Russia is relegated to the past, thereby attracting ethnic Latvian votes as well.

However, that strategy seems like a long shot after speaking with voters and politicians from the Latvian-speaking community, who paint a very different picture of Harmony. On that side of the ethnic divide, Harmony is a Trojan horse for the Kremlin. Skeptics point to the party's formal alliance with Putin's United Russia party, which was only recently severed; its support for the Russian language referendum; and its opposition to condemning Moscow for the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. For this bloc, providing support for Harmony at the ballot box or in a governing coalition is a "red line" that few are willing to cross.

Who Owns the State (KPV LV)

As the name suggests, KPV LV is an anti-establishment movement that aims to overturn the existing power structure in Latvia. Founded by actor Artuss Kaimiņš, the party purports to tackle corruption and political elites, who, they claim, fill their pockets while keeping the rest of the population in poverty. Ironically, Kaimiņš himself has been the target of a high-profile corruption investigation. In June 2018, the Latvian anti-corruption agency (KNAB) detained Kaimiņš in the parliament on allegations of illegal party financing.

Kaimiņš is the closest thing Latvia has to a Trumpian character. He is a provocateur who uses online platforms to create controversy and friction whenever possible. In spite of Kaimiņš' name recognition and enthusiastic following, KPV LV tapped attorney Aldis Gobzems as a more moderate prime ministerial candidate, even though his approach to politics is similar to that of his party colleague. During the campaign, Gobzems specialized in making Facebook videos that accused the media and government of ignoring graft and criminality at all levels of government. Adopting some of the rhetoric of the current American president, Gobzems has threatened to fire journalists, and he traffics in unsubstantiated claims to fire up voters who are disgruntled with business as usual. Beyond claims of cleaning up government, KPV LV has several policy priorities in its platform that may resonate with voters. The party is supportive of NATO, the EU, and tax and judicial reform, and it has promised to initiate a referendum to legalize gay marriage. In short, the party seems to offer something for everyone that is consistent with its populist ethos.

New Conservative Party

In 2014, the New Conservative party failed to gain any seats in the *Saeima*,

but has since gained some traction in the Riga City Council. The addition of former KNAB senior officials Juta Strīke and Juris Jurašs to its candidate list has given the party an injection of support ahead of the elections. The New Conservative's platform distinguishes itself by focusing on a handful of economic issues that it believes will connect with voters. Most notably, the party made headlines by calling for the closure of most casinos, which are prevalent throughout the country, citing their correlation with crime and poverty. The party has also proposed to reform the public sector, in which 20 percent of Latvians are employed. A rebalancing of the job market has also come with their pledge to protect workers by raising the minimum wage from 430 euros to 500 euros per month and increasing other welfare benefits.

It is worth noting, given the digital orientation of this publication, that the New Conservatives have focused their attention on migrating more public services online with the objective of reducing bureaucracy. Following the example of Estonia, it has trumpeted a new online tax payment system, and the party would like to use existing applications to encourage microenterprises in order to cut through red tape and handle licenses and payments digitally.

For Development/For

The awkwardly named For Development/For was created just months ahead of the elections through an alliance among The Liberal For, For Latvia's Development, and Growth parties. Funded primarily by business interests, the party has put forward a platform that is socially and economically liberal and promotes equality and inclusivity. Its economic plan matches the minimum wage increase pitched by the New Conservatives, but goes further by doubling pensions and salaries for nurses.

For Development/For has attempted to cultivate a new and youthful image to separate itself from the politics of the past that many voters regard as sclerotic. Despite their intent, the most prominent figures in the party are drawn directly from the Latvian political elite. Its candidate for prime minister, Artis Pabriks, for example, is a former foreign minister and defense minister from what was the Unity Party. It remains to be seen if the worthwhile proposals for attracting investment and rooting out corruption in its party manifesto will supersede the more frivolous, but not inconsequential, matter of image.

National Alliance

In a political landscape where ethnic divisions are often the defining feature, the National Alliance embraces this brand of politics with both hands. This right-of-center, nationalist party caters exclusively to the Latvian-speaking community — and is not shy about doing so. It purports to be the strongest defender of the rights of ethnic Latvians and leans on the official language debate to secure its electoral base. Like many conservative-oriented parties, it emphasizes “traditional family values” in opposing gay marriage and offers incentives to families that have more children.

On the geopolitical front, the National Alliance is staunchly pro-NATO and treats its Russian neighbor with utmost suspicion. It has been particularly vocal on the illegal intervention of the Russians in Ukraine and on the sovereignty of Crimea. Its hawkish position vis-à-vis Russia has also yielded calls to prevent the dissemination of Russian disinformation through its news channels, while demanding a permanent NATO presence in Latvia.

Union of Farmers and Greens (ZZS)

The main appeal of the ZZS in this election campaign was that it is a safe pair of hands

in turbulent times. The leading party in the current administration, ZZS has been part of governing coalitions since its founding in 2002. A stark contrast to KPV LV, party leader Maris Kučinskis takes a decidedly moderate, civil, and non-confrontational approach to politics. The party strategy in the 2018 election was to tout the achievements of the current government: its controls, with a particular focus on tax reform, digitizing the healthcare system, and a growing economy.

The party, however, has its problems. Fatigue with the incumbent party during what many observers note is a “change” election would work against the party’s fortunes. It also struggles to shed its connections to oligarch and Mayor of Ventspils, Aivars Lembergs, who was recorded referencing the extent of his influence on the sitting government. This undoubtedly factors into the minds of voters as they consider what role a “clean” government will play in their selection at the ballot box. ZZS’s commitment to defend ethnic-Latvian interests, and to draw a red line that would preclude any coalition with Harmony should help stem the tide of voters who might leave the party for greener pastures.

New Unity

Three years ago, the Unity party was running Latvia. But after a combination of scandals and palace intrigue that led to the resignation of its prime minister, the party, which was once a big tent for centrist-liberal minded voters, fell apart. New Unity is now a party of six regional parties plus the surviving core of the former Unity loyalists, and this election was an opportunity for the party to restore its reputation for technocratic competence. New Unity candidates attempted to play the role of the “adults in the room” in an election campaign that grew increasingly heated and contentious.

Its program for government commits to advancing policies that are favorable to businesses and residents, with an emphasis on modernizing and adequately funding an e-government system. New Unity also touts an economic plan that will reform the shadow economy, make necessary investment in artificial intelligence, and advance a national security plan with an increase in NATO spending to 2.5 percent of GDP. Despite internal turmoil in recent years, the 2018 election gave New Unity the chance to resurrect itself as a force in Latvian politics.

Latvia's Russian Union (LKS)

Until now, this section has focused on the parties that would ultimately reach the five percent threshold to get seats in the *Saeima*. Latvia's Russian Union did not make the cut, but their role in this election makes them worthy of at least a brief mention here. Led by former Member of the European Parliament Tatjana Ždanoka, the LKS is not just a defender of the ethnic Russian community in Latvia, it is unabashedly pro-Kremlin in its policies and its rhetoric. Some parties are accused of being tools of Moscow for political gain, but the LKS is the real deal. Anti-NATO and anti-EU, the party deliberately stokes ethnic and linguistic tensions, hoping to siphon votes from Harmony on Election Day.

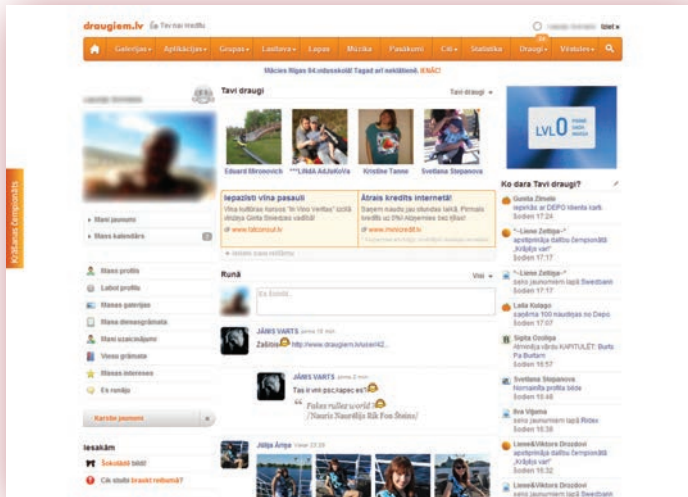
This chapter is not the place for conspiracy theories, so I won't get into suspicions about whether LKS exists simply to make the Harmony Party seem more moderate, reasonable, and palatable by comparison to Latvian voters. I can say that whether the intent is there or not, the effect is the same. LKS gives Harmony the opportunity to claim the mantle of the social-democratic left that represents all Latvians, while pointing to the LKS as the only pro-Kremlin extremist threat in this election.

Tools of the Trade

This was the first parliamentary election in Latvia in which the vast majority of the action was online. In a country with an internet penetration rate of 75.2 percent,¹⁴ Latvia ranks in the top 50 globally. The widespread availability of 4G networks, a digitally literate population, and relatively inexpensive service plans mean that campaigning online gives parties the biggest bang for their buck. In 2004, Latvian users got their first taste of social networking through the homegrown site Draugiem.lv. Boosters of the site describe it as Facebook without troublesome algorithms, while its detractors liken it to the outdated American social media platform Myspace. Regardless of the side you take, everyone can agree that Draugiem opened the door for the widespread use of social networks in Latvia. Today's undisputed king of social media in Latvia, however, is Facebook. With nearly 64 percent of online users active on Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg's behemoth dwarfs other platforms, including Twitter, which is seen as a tool for elite debate, and YouTube, which is mostly viewed as an entertainment vehicle.¹⁵

Given the prevalence of online usage, political parties across the spectrum have made ample use of this medium for advertising, mobilizing the electorate, and creating interest group pages to amplify their messages. Some parties have become extremely sophisticated in exploiting loopholes in Facebook's guidelines in order to connect with as many voters as possible. In one case, the Harmony Party created an official party Facebook page to attract followers, while simultaneously creating a second page called Riga Online that appeared to be apolitical and featured beautiful images of Riga. After Riga online fulfilled its role as a magnet for unwitting Latvian followers, the administrator of the Harmony page

Draugiem: Latvia's Social Network



notified Facebook that it would be merging Riga Online with Harmony. The purpose of this tactic was to delete the Riga Online Facebook group while the Harmony page held onto the followers from both pages. Other parties, like KPV LV, have mastered the art of dissemination across all of their online channels. They have also taken the unusual step of decentralizing their online campaign, allowing each individual candidate to craft his or her own message. For example, KPV LV party member Beata Jonite, a 24-year old candidate from Riga, parlayed her already existing YouTube popularity into a run for the *Saeima*. Though this decentralized approach can create some problems with message discipline for the party, the benefits of personality-driven campaigning outweigh the costs.

The recent emphasis on digital campaign tools to compete in national elections is only partly due to the availability and accessibility of online platforms in Latvia; there are also four structural reasons for this shift. First, the steady decline of domestic, Latvian-language print media has redirected ad revenue, primarily to Facebook. Second, Latvian law calls for a 30-day moratorium on television political ads before any election. Parties seeking to maintain momentum during this quiet period on the airwaves simply move their activities to cyberspace. Third, since the 2014 race for seats in the *Saeima*, the postal rates for mailings have doubled. Connecting with voters by sending pamphlets to their mailboxes is no longer a sensible use of resources. Finally, the reform of campaign laws has set official limits on financing political races. Each

party has a ceiling of 533,000 euros to cover all races for the *Saeima* across the country. Individual spending is capped at 30 percent of one's salary, with a ceiling of 20,000 euros. In sum, this means that there is simply less money in campaign coffers, so parties must be more efficient with their limited funds. Online, many have figured out how to do more with less.

Despite the clear advantages of conducting an online campaign in Latvia, old habits are hard to break. As in many countries, older voters in Latvia tend to be politically engaged and turn out to vote on Election Day. Generally speaking, they also tend to be less digitally savvy than their millennial counterparts. With that in mind, parties still spend resources on billboards and other static posters seen all over the country. There is also a reliance, to a lesser degree, on radio advertising,

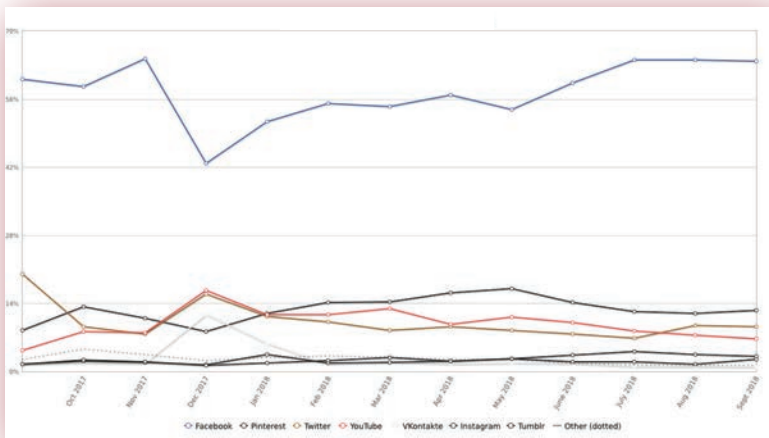
though this is largely relegated to more rural areas. If you are looking for clues as to which avenue each party prefers, the most reliable path is to follow the money. The larger parties in parliament, like Harmony and the Greens and Farmers, can avail themselves of the full menu of options. Upstarts like KPV LV, on the other hand, rely heavily on digital platforms, not just out of necessity, but because it is the surest way of reaching their target demographic.

Oh Russia, Where Art Thou?

In Latvian politics, the elephant in the room is actually a bear – a Russian one to be exact. Moscow's influence in Latvia over the past century has left a wound that has not fully healed. Russia's recent adventurism in Ukraine, a war in the east and the annexation of Crimea, has validated fears that many Latvians have

StatCounter Global Stats

Social Media Stats Latvia from Sept 2017 - Sept 2018



harbored for years. In the crucible of an election campaign, parties on both sides of the ethnic divide have sought to use Russia to gin up votes. For ethnic-Latvian parties, that means portraying parties like Harmony and Latvia's Russian Union as Putin's puppets, ready to sell Latvia out to the Russians the moment they take the reins of power. For ethnic-Russian parties, Russo-phobia becomes a rallying cry to motivate the base against a Latvian majority committed to violating the cultural and linguistic rights of nearly one-third of the population.

No party with ties to or sympathy for Russia will ever be allowed to govern Latvia.

The reality in Latvia, however, is that the actual influence of the Russian Federation seems to be decreasing. The Harmony Party, for example, has gone to great lengths to distance itself in recent months from the Kremlin. It has officially severed its alliance with Putin's United Russia party, has explicitly stated its support for NATO and the EU, and has even wobbled on previous signals that it would relax sanctions on Moscow for its revanchist policies in Ukraine. Hardline ethnic-Russian voters will punish Harmony at the polls for those stances, but this is certainly a sign that there is an evolution underway that reflects the political reality in Latvia. No party with ties to or sympathy for Russia will ever be allowed to govern Latvia.

Following alleged Russian influence in western campaigns around the world in

Italy, Mexico, UK's Brexit referendum, and, most notably, in the United States, Latvian officials were on high alert for Russian intervention in their elections. But the nightmare scenario never materialized. According to Latvian cybersecurity and media monitoring analysts, in 2018 there was no demonstrable spike in Russian online activity to swing the election in one direction or another. With the exception of a cyberattack on the Draugiem platform that had little impact, all was relatively quiet on the western front. So why would the Russians, who have a track record of destabilizing elections around the world, miss a chance to disrupt a frontline EU and NATO member on its doorstep? The answer is simple: they didn't. But in Latvia, Russian interference is distinct from what we've seen elsewhere, though no less pernicious.

Moscow also exerts its influence through local "activists" who find multiple avenues to oppose the pro-EU Latvian government.

As mentioned earlier, native Russian speakers make up about a quarter of the Latvian population. Within this community, 82 percent watch Kremlin-linked TV channels that operate without restriction in Latvia.¹⁶ That means that a significant minority receives a dose of state-driven propaganda from Russia on a daily basis. Add to that number those who get their information from websites whose

content is dictated by Moscow, and you have what amounts to two information bubbles – one Russian and one Latvian – in one country. Case in point is the story uncovered by the local investigative journalism outfit Re:Baltica. Drawing from exhaustive research gathered from Skype logs and freedom of information requests, Re:Baltica tells the tale of Baltnews, created in 2014 in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to advance the Kremlin's twin objectives of shaping a positive narrative of the Russian Federation and undermining western institutions. The scheme which was funded by one of Russia's largest state media agencies through third party companies in Serbia and Cyprus dictated content and editorial lines to be followed by these news outlets that falsely claimed to be independent. From prescribing mandatory topics to be covered, such as social tensions inside

the US, to soft-peddling the Russian occupation of Crimea, the site fed viewers a steady diet of disinformation. This content was supplemented by surveys that sought to add credibility to the Kremlin's agenda. Two examples highlighted in this investigation included one survey that claimed that "almost half of [the] people in the UK, France, and Germany wanted the EU to be more independent from the US," and another survey that pointed to alleged American distrust of its own police forces.¹⁷ Both instances further the Russian objective of negatively influencing perceptions of the West.

Moscow also exerts its influence through local "activists" who find multiple avenues to oppose the pro-EU Latvian government. These actors seek to inflame the Russian-speaking population by disseminating misleading interpretations of policy



decisions, which, they hope, will translate into support for Latvia's Russian Union. Opposition to diluting the presence of Russian language in schools and to the banning of party leader Tatjana Ždanoka, for instance, have ignited partisan passions. These activists took this tactic to another level in 2018 by spreading false rumors through social media channels, suggesting that the Latvian government sought to establish a concentration camp in Riga's main stadium for the purpose of rounding up and detaining ethnic Russians.¹⁸

The widespread availability of Russian language news and cultural content has enabled the Kremlin to weaponize its soft power to great effect.

So while there were no notable spikes in nefarious Russian cyber-activity during this election, Moscow was not dormant. The Russian government has opted to influence Latvia the way it has since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The widespread availability of Russian language news and cultural content has enabled the Kremlin to weaponize its soft power to great effect. Even the Latvian language space is subjected to messaging from Moscow. Through popular Russian movies and soap operas that have been dubbed into or subtitled with Latvian,

there is at least a subconscious effect on ethnic Latvian viewers as well: during periods of economic anxiety, seemingly benign images of healthy and prosperous Russians on TV have an impact.

The Changing Face of Media

In spite of the distinct media bubbles created for Russian and Latvian speakers, the overall media climate in Latvia is positive and dynamic. According to the World Press Freedom Index, Latvia ranked 24th in the world, not an insignificant achievement for a divided society less than 30 years after its independence from the Soviet Union. This environment was reinforced by Latvia's Media Policy Guidelines, enacted in 2016, that set five key priorities for the sector: media diversity, media quality and responsibility, professionalism, media literacy, and resilience. With the size of the Latvian media market dwindling, there has been an emphasis on supporting domestic outlets, but the private sector business case for doing so is unsustainable. The 2008 economic crisis marked the beginning of the end for the printed press. In 2007, the media market for newspapers was 37 million euros. By 2013, that number had plunged to 10 million euros. As a result of the closures of several print outlets, media consumption patterns across the country generally mirrored the phenomenon seen elsewhere around the world. While print newspapers were in rapid decline, internet portals quickly filled the void.

The consequences of this shift are not limited to the financial losses of old media. Trust in information has also been a casualty. According to the 2018 Bertelsmann Foundation/Questia survey, fewer than 10 percent of Latvians expressed trust in either newspapers or internet news websites. Nevertheless, digital media is on the rise in Latvia, led by Delfi.lv. Latvian public broadcaster LSM is

also competing in the online news space in English, Russian, and Latvian, in order to capture the boom in new smartphone use and a population gravitating toward online content.

It is also worth mentioning the stubborn survival of radio and television in the Latvian media landscape. Radio has historically played a critical role in Latvia going back to the 1920s as a “window to the world, and remains the country’s most trusted source for news.”¹⁹ This medium, via Radio Latvia, was used by the Soviets and Nazis as a propaganda tool. By 2014, there were 69 radio stations in Latvia, with Radio Latvia still leading the way in listeners. When it comes to politics, it is primarily those of retirement age who still rely on radio for news. Other demographic groups turn first to the internet, then to television, to stay up-to-date on the latest

developments in Latvia. The average Latvian is watching approximately five hours of TV per day, and the offerings in both Latvian and Russian provide viewers with ample content in news and entertainment. Latvian TV is a mix of private networks like TV3, public channels such as LTV, and Russian-language programming at PBK TV, among others.

There are ostensibly two information spaces in the same country.

For a country of its size, Latvia has a wealth of media options across all

Media Landscape in Latvia



platforms. The hidden reality, however, is that this landscape is highly fragmented by language. There are ostensibly two information spaces in the same country. The same story can be told in two completely different ways, and often is. With that in mind, what impact does this have on social cohesion? What impact does this have on political polarization? And, perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, what impact does this have on voters preparing to cast votes on Election Day?

Election Day

On the morning of October 6, 2018, a gusty wind from the Baltic Sea picked up speed over the Gulf of Riga, clearing out the grey, misty weather that had hung over Latvia for the previous ten days. Perhaps this was a metaphor for a campaign period that became dark and particularly contentious during its final days, as 16 parties vied for the 100 seats up for grabs in the *Saeima*. There was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Just after sunrise, election officials and volunteers made their way to 1,078 polling stations in schools and other public buildings, and prepared for the throng of voters who would set the course for Latvia in the years ahead. By 8 a.m., the doors were open, and Latvia's latest experiment with democracy was underway.

At one of Riga's largest precincts, a high school called *Valasts 1. Ģimnāzija*, the anticipated wave of voters turned out to be no more than a trickle. Campaign officials spread across two floors and half a dozen check-in points dutifully attended to Latvian citizens presenting their passports on arrival.

Once the voter's identity is verified, he or she receives a stack of 16 sheets of paper – one page for each political party. From there, voters make their way to a private

booth behind a blue curtain, where they are left to ponder their aspirations for Latvia. The voter decides on a party preference, then has the opportunity to peruse the list of candidates in a system decided by proportional representation. The voter then moves individual candidates up the ranking list by adding a "+" beside their names, or demotes them by striking their name from the list. Once that process is complete, the voter places only one party list into an envelope, seals it, and deposits the envelope into a transparent ballot box in the middle of the room for all to see.

Though this may seem like an antiquated system, particularly in a neighborhood that includes Estonia, which has pushed the limits of electronic voting, it is a deliberate choice in Latvia. Eschewing e-voting, touch screen terminals, and electronic voter rolls gives election officials and citizens confidence in the electoral system — in terms of preventing both corruption and foreign meddling.

By the time the doors closed at 8 p.m. at polling stations throughout the small Baltic republic, only 54 percent of eligible voters had cast their vote.²⁰ The low turnout was a surprise to many political observers who had detected both anger at the establishment parties and momentum to effect change. On Election Day, that sentiment wasn't sufficient to motivate people to go to the polls.

After a long day for election officials, a longer night was still ahead. Following the departure of the last voter, the doors of *Valasts 1. Ģimnāzija* swung shut and were bolted closed with a railroad spike. With the building secure, the ballot box was taken to the school's conference room in which a group of eight officials would help determine the election results from that precinct. Ballot counters began by pushing three tables together, taking great care to seal the gaps between each

Election Ballot

13. SAEIMAS VĒLĒŠANAS 2018. gada 6. oktobrī

Jaunā konservatīvā partija

2

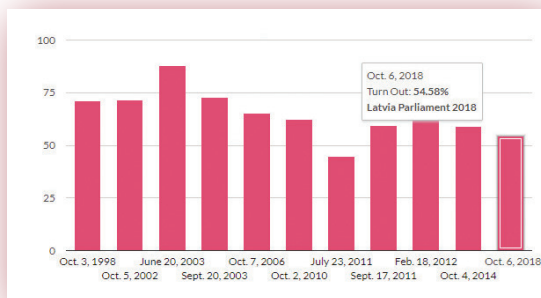
- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Jūta Striķe | <input type="checkbox"/> | 20. Ilze Zilgale | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Ģeitis Egītis | <input type="checkbox"/> | 21. Kaspars Kalnmeiers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Linda Ozola | <input type="checkbox"/> | 22. Edgars Horns | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Tālis Linkaits | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 23. Māris Kaijaks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Reinis Znotiņš | <input type="checkbox"/> | 24. Dace Austra Balode | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Linda Medne | <input type="checkbox"/> | 25. Daiga Kalnbērziņa | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Marija Balcere | <input type="checkbox"/> | 26. Inese Posse | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Jānis Butāns | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 27. Aiga Aizpuriete | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Anita Svece | <input type="checkbox"/> | 28. Aija Stepanova | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Santa Suhaka | <input type="checkbox"/> | 29. Edgars Kāpa | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Jānis Ozols | <input type="checkbox"/> | 30. Uldis Melkšis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Līva Kreituse | <input type="checkbox"/> | 31. Ģeitis Karlsons | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Eva Mārtuža | <input type="checkbox"/> | 32. Jānis Liberts | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Ilgars Brakoveks | <input type="checkbox"/> | 33. Dainis Čapkovskis | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Vilis Bārtulis | <input type="checkbox"/> | 34. Inese Simsone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Marita Klikiča | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 35. Jānis Kņazs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Guntars Vaivars | <input type="checkbox"/> | 36. Raimonds Strauss | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Andris Greis | <input type="checkbox"/> | 37. Konstantīns Zorins | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Arita Ūdre | <input type="checkbox"/> | 38. Indulis Tupesis | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5000102

Rīgas
vēlēšanu apgabals



Voter Turnout in Latvia



Source: www.electionguide.org

table with packing tape to ensure that no votes could slide through the cracks. Envelopes were opened and sorted by party preference, then officials began to count the paper ballots one by one. Once the hand count was complete, the first interaction with technology in this entire process commenced with an electronic scanner. The ballots were scanned for two reasons: to double-check the result of the hand count, and to highlight the pluses and minuses that would determine which candidates would ultimately take up seats in the *Saeima*. By the small hours of the morning, chocolate, energy drinks, and coffee were fueling the final stages of this election in precincts all over the nation. The results were transmitted to the central election commission, and moments later, the Latvian people received the news.

The Results

In the words of one political analyst, Latvian elections produce “no winners, only losers, losers, losers.”

And yet, in 2018, this prediction proved only partly true. One clear winner was KPV LV, which outperformed all pre-election polling to finish second with 14.3 percent of the vote. The anti-establishment sentiment domestically, combined with a significant share of the sizable expatriate vote, put Artuss Kaimiņš’ populist KPV LV party in a potentially pivotal position when it comes to coalition politics. There were also two clear losers in this election: (New) Unity and the Farmers and Greens, who had led the past two Latvian governments, respectively, each failed to capture a double-digit share of the vote. While the fragmentation of the electorate among 16 parties made gaining a majority

impossible, this result was a repudiation of the status quo in Latvia. It should also be noted that the Kremlin's preferred party, Latvia's Russian Union, failed to reach the five percent threshold, so it will have no representation in the 13th Saeima.

In the category of "always the bridesmaid, never the bride," the Harmony Party, for the third straight parliamentary campaign, finished with the largest share of votes, and yet, will be kept out of government. Though it has lost nearly 10 percent of its support since the 2014 election (a good deal of it to KPV LV), in 2018, Harmony maintained the lion's share of its base in the Russian-speaking community despite an extensive and expensive rebranding campaign. The prospect of being included in any governing coalition was already dubious, but with this lackluster performance, Harmony will, once again,

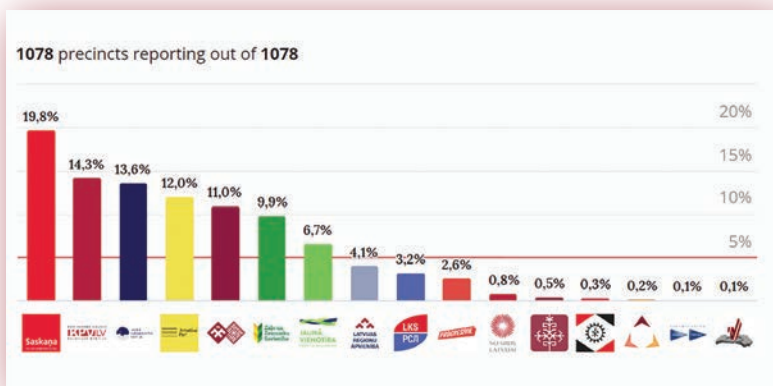
have won an election only to remain on the outside looking in.

Stuck in the middle of a crowded race were the New Conservatives, For Development/For, and the National Alliance. These parties may ultimately form the core of the next Latvian government, though at the time of publication no coalition deal had yet emerged. But one thing is for sure: the coalition government will be created along linguistic lines with some combination of Latvian-speaking parties joining forces to maintain power.

Final Word

The story of Latvia is one of resilience and survival. In the days before it became an independent republic and after, it has endured shocks and stresses that few countries of its size could withstand. From Nazi and Soviet occupation to economic

2018 Latvian Election Results



crises, the Latvian people have figured out a way to carry on. The technological change that is sweeping across every corner of the globe poses a new challenge. In Latvia, this challenge is compounded by the rise of anti-establishment, populist parties, and homegrown fake news, and it has created new avenues for malign foreign actors to make mischief.

Despite some of the adverse consequences that have buffeted Latvia during this election, there have been some notable bright spots. In a country where corruption of the campaign finance system has become endemic, the national anti-corruption agency, KNAB, has created an app called ZINO KNAB, which provides a level of transparency and accountability in campaign spending that should bolster public confidence in the political system. On the theme of greater transparency, Latvia continues to make progress toward meeting its commitments to the Open Government Partnership, which focuses on using e-government platforms to improve efficiency of government services that respond to public needs. It is also worth mentioning the tremendous efforts that Latvian authorities have made by working

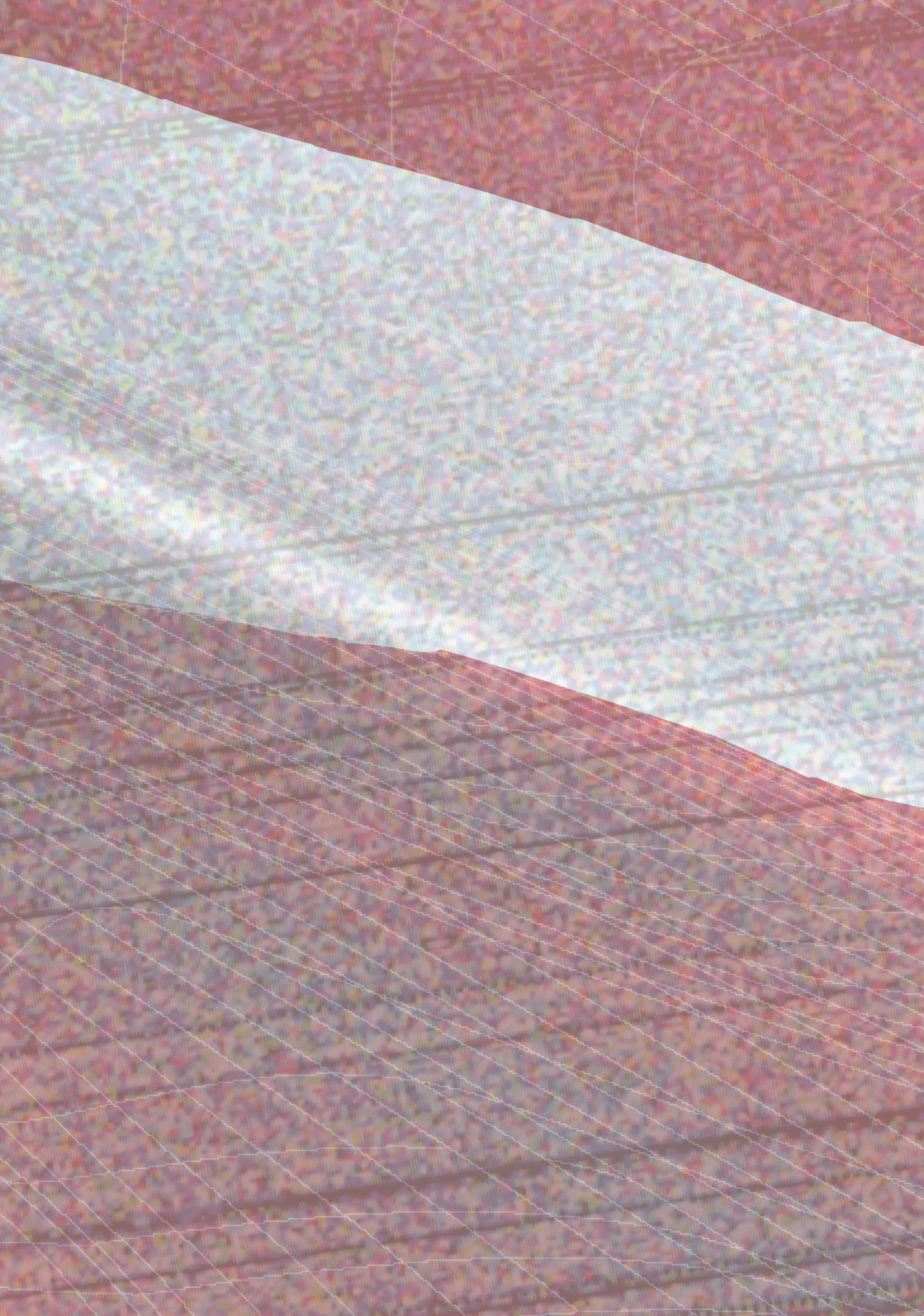
in a coordinated fashion across several government departments to proactively prevent cyber-threats from disrupting its democracy. Executing a fair, free, and secure election in 2018 didn't happen by accident; it was the result of time, effort, and skill of a large number of public and private officials from across Latvia.

In the years ahead, Latvia will continue to face challenges from within and without. It will be tested by its partners in the European Union, as economic pressures across the continent impact social welfare services at home. It will be confronted with constant provocations from Russia, which is committed to the idea of protecting Russian speaking people everywhere. And it will certainly have to contend with populism and polarization, which have tainted politics the world over. Latvia has always been strongest when its sings with one voice. In order to capture that unity again, a divided Latvia will need to change its tune.

Anthony Silberfeld is the Director of Transatlantic Relations at the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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Train Hard, Fight Easy: Foreign Influences on the Latvian 2018 National Elections

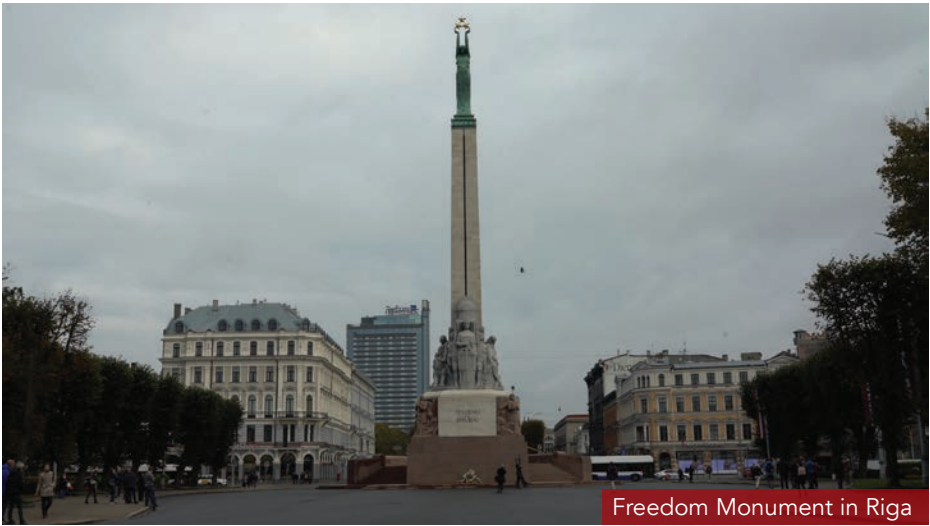
By Karlis Bukovskis

As a small country, Latvia is used to other powers trying to influence its politics. Since Latvia regained freedom from the Soviet Union almost 30 years ago, the country on the Baltic Sea coast has been part of geopolitical game between the West and the Russian Federation. Since the end of the Cold War, the small Latvian state has been building preventive mechanisms against unwanted influences from outside, and reorienting itself towards transatlantic political, economic, and defense structures as a matter of security. At the eastern border of the Western civilization, Latvia finds itself in a challenging environment. The struggle for the hearts and minds of the Latvian people, i.e. the country's geopolitical orientation, is prominent in political discourse. The national parliament (Saeima) elections on October 6, 2018, were considered a watershed moment, with expectations of high intensity of foreign meddling. But, to the surprise of most, no significant activities with long-term effects were observed. This section will focus instead on the specifics of the political process in Latvia, previous experiences of the

country in dealing with external influences, and, finally, the situation during the 2018 national elections.

Breakdown of Politics in the Republic of Latvia

After almost 60 years of domestic authoritarian and foreign totalitarian rule, in 1990, Latvia recovered its previously discarded 1922 Constitution and reestablished free elections. Latvia, where at least two generations had lived under an undemocratic system, has been relearning liberal democracy, freedom of speech, good governance, checks and balances, universal human rights, rule of law, and many other essential principles of a democratic state. Little of this would have happened without external influences – in this particular case from the West. Latvia's geopolitical situation and the ethnic aspect of the country's politics are important trends to analyze in order to understand Latvia's political landscape and the logic behind it, so we will spend time looking at those two aspects, before examining Latvia's current political party system and how the first two elements shape it.



Latvia's geopolitical/geostrategic situation

has been among the core advantages and disadvantages of the Latvian state and its society for centuries. Latvian territory has been considered both economically important from a trade perspective – especially during times of the Hanseatic League – and militarily essential from the defense point of view – especially during the Soviet period. The idea of Latvia as a bridge between the East and the West was popular in the 1990s and even during the first years of the 21st century, particularly due to the close proximity of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania to two of Russia's most important cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Latvia recognized the considerable challenge that its geographic positioning bares when it started reckoning its geopolitics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Latvia had had a catastrophic experience with neutrality policy during the interwar period, which ended with the loss of its independence in 1940 and its territory becoming a battlefield for foreign armies yet again. Cozying up to Russia was not seen as an option, so leaders

searched for alternatives.¹ The other option was a strategic partnership with the United States of America and integration into transatlantic political and security structures. NATO membership and eventual integration into the European Union were seen as guarantees for Latvia's independence and economic prosperity.²

Latvia's path towards the European Union, and especially NATO, was not always easy. There were both internal adjustment challenges and external factors. Internally, transition from a totalitarian, communist planned economy to a free, open-market capitalist economy was the first major undertaking of the newly liberated country during the first half of the 1990s. Change in economic ideology, economic structures, and legislation meant a comprehensive adjustment for Latvian society. It affected the labor market, wage system, price setting and stability, taxation principles, as well as education and healthcare possibilities, and the pension system. Harnessing this inertia of transformation, Latvia also applied for European Union membership in October 1995. That meant continued adjustment

of state structures, legislation, and political and social relations in order to fit into the coveted Western club. Meanwhile, it was clear that EU accession would be crucial if Latvia wanted to join NATO.³ The first external influences on Latvia's politics, society, and overall shape of the political system came through Western technical assistance and politicians. Latvia's path toward Europeanization⁴ resulted from Western partners who closely followed the country's elections and convinced domestic decision makers and politicians to become closer to the West.⁵ It was a dance where both parties occasionally slipped, but which ultimately resulted in an engaged and well-designed performance.

The second source of external influence and struggle over Latvia was the Russian Federation. Although Russia accepted Latvia's path towards membership in the European Union with relative silence, it was less complacent with Latvia's membership in NATO. Russia did not welcome NATO's expansion to its border, even though the relations between the West and Russia, between Germany and Russia, and between the United States

and Russia were at one of their highest points at the turn of the millennium.⁶ After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the switch from traditional military security threats towards a common goal of fighting terrorist organizations internationally improved the relationship between the U.S. and Russia. This period was a historical window of opportunity for Latvia and its two Baltic neighbors to join NATO, because Russia was relatively weak, the West was strong, and the Baltics had undertaken a transformation process to increase their chances of EU membership. In 2004, therefore, Latvia historically became part of NATO and the European Union.

Membership in the European Union and NATO opened a new chapter in Latvia's foreign and security policy, providing new political and economic opportunities, and reshaping the geopolitical situation of Latvia. The country's 2015 Presidency of the Council of the European Union, its 2016 OECD membership, and increased military integration between the Baltic States and NATO has cemented Latvia in transatlantic structures. The EU trade



Latvian-Russian border checkpoint

agreements provide significantly larger market and global reach for Latvian products and companies. Membership in the Eurozone provides previously unexperienced influence on the global financial system. And, being part of the EU has changed Latvia's image in global politics and marketplaces. But it is Latvia's NATO membership that matters the most when it comes to geostrategic positioning and defense against unwanted foreign influence from Russia.

Russia sees NATO, the main pillar of Western unity, as threatening; therefore, weakening the military alliance is a key interest to Moscow. In addition to taking the divide and conquer approach to the European Union and NATO countries, Russia has attempted to weaken the transatlantic institutions and political ties. Logically, it looks for the weakest link in the Western defense system. Latvia's proximity, its complicated ethnic structure and political party system, as well as its limited resources and experience facing hybrid threats makes it a convenient target for external meddling. Since 2014 Latvia has hosted permanently stationed NATO military personnel on its soil, it has begun physically reinforcing its border with Russia and Belarus, it has increased military expenditure to the NATO standard of two percent of GDP, and it has increased its own military personnel and improved its equipment. In addition, it has started investing in civilian defense and societal security, while examining all paths of potential external influence. Although these ongoing preparations to address vulnerabilities have reduced the perception of Latvia as the weakest link (and partially explains the low recorded levels of Russian engagement in recent Latvian elections), issues remain and Latvia's situation is not completely safe.

Latvia's geopolitical situation has had a direct imprint on its **political party system**. Since Latvia regained independence, its

political parties have been positioning themselves in relation to Russia, and geopolitics has been an important element in election debates. Growing out of the popular movement of the 1980s and early 1990s, since 1995 many Latvian political parties have been positioning against Russian influence and physical presence,⁷ while openly emphasizing orientation to the West. During the rebirth of the Latvian political party system in 1990s, economic ideologies tended to determine the geopolitical orientations of the various parties. Socialist and social-democratic politicians tended to be less critical towards the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, while economically-liberal political parties were strongly Western oriented. With anti-Soviet and anti-Russian attitudes gaining dominance, liberal open-market leanings and pro-EU, pro-NATO positioning also increased in popularity. Gradually, geopolitical positioning and ethnic balancing became the basis of Latvia's left/right spectrum instead of economic ideologies.⁸

The frequent emergence and death of political parties in the country has been simultaneously a weakness and a strength of Latvia's democracy.

Despite predictable party cleavages along geopolitical and ethnic lines, the party system in Latvia has remained relatively

turbulent.⁹ The frequent emergence and death of political parties in the country has been simultaneously a weakness and a strength of Latvia's democracy. Before every national election, new political parties and alliances are forged, with politicians frequently changing their party affiliations and aligning with new ones; political metamorphosis has become a visible characteristic of Latvian political life. As a result, all Latvian political parties can and should be regarded as catch-all parties that seek to address voters' expectations rather than leading political thought.¹⁰

Political turbulence is intrinsically linked with voters making their choices based on personalities. Voters tend to seek capable, charismatic, interesting, and well-established politicians in the political parties they vote for. After voters have chosen a party along geopolitical/ethnic lines, they must choose a candidate from that party's list, which consists of diverse political characters. To gain popularity and distinguish themselves, politicians use existing, practical issues, or go with a more traditional approach and promise government reforms.

To a significant extent, these voter behaviors and politician strategies stem also from the voting system. Latvia has semi-open party lists, proportional elections with a five percent electoral threshold. As the party lists are chosen by geopolitical predispositions, voters select and reshuffle candidates by adding pluses to preferred candidates and/or striking through unwanted ones. As a result, this system and the turbulent character of the Latvian political party environment creates a twofold effect: first, there is a lack of stability and predictability; second and simultaneously, this flexibility decreases the chances of state capture by a single party or politician. Turnover

in the parliament is significant; in the 2018 elections, which elected the 13th *Saeima*, 51 new members of parliament were elected without previous political experience.¹¹ Evidence suggests that even the most experienced politicians and party leaders are not guaranteed a place in parliament. For instance, Solvita Aboltina, leader of governing party, Unity, was not elected into the 12th *Saeima* in the 2014 elections, and longtime leader of the Greens and Farmers Union, Augusts Brigmanis, failed to get popular support in the recent 2018 elections.

All of the remaining parties emphasize their ethnic Latvian predisposition and characterize Harmony as something like the "Kremlin's Trojan Horse."

For a complete account of the Latvian political system, we need to mention the fact that the largest political party, which has won the three national elections since 2011, has been left perpetually in the opposition. This party, the Social-democratic party Harmony (officially, Concorde) and its predecessor, the National Harmony Party, have traditionally been affiliated geopolitically with the Russian Federation and the Russian ethnic population in Latvia. The coalitions of right-wing pro-Western parties have always chosen to leave Harmony out of

the national government, even though it was victorious at the polls. This rejection has pushed Harmony to strengthen its pro-EU position, adopt a pro-NATO position, discontinue official cooperation with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, join the pan-European Party of European Socialists, and generally transform itself from an ethnic party to an economically left-leaning, centrist party with relatively strong EU-federalist position. At publication of this section, it appears that Harmony has yet again won the elections, with 23 seats out of 100, but no other political party has been eager to work with them in the coalition.¹² All of the remaining parties emphasize their ethnic Latvian predisposition and characterize Harmony as something like the "Kremlin's Trojan Horse."

Finally, Latvia's **ethnic situation** sheds light on fears of Russian meddling in the Latvian political processes. The ethnic situation in the country is considered to be a traditional instrument of Russian foreign policy. Balancing between the 62.2 percent of ethnic Latvians, 25.2 percent of ethnic Russians and about 12.6

percent of other ethnic groups¹³ has been an uneasy undertaking for Latvia. Both Russia and the West have closely watched the successes and failures of a more than two decades-long ethnic policy.

After World War II, the Soviet Union facilitated immigration to the Baltics from other parts of Soviet territory, substantially altering the ethnic composition of Latvia. This new demographic makeup created integration challenges when Latvia finally gained independence. In 1989, only 52 percent of Latvia's population were ethnically Latvian. In order to limit potential anti-Latvian political activities and preserve the Latvian language in the newly independent state, Latvia installed the controversial non-citizenship institution in 1991 (and updated it in 1995). Though, overall, non-citizens of the Republic of Latvia have the same social, economic, and political rights as citizens of Latvia, they do not have the right to vote or work as public officials until they naturalize. More than 20 years and many heated discussions later, in 2018 non-citizens of Latvia constitute 11.1 percent of population. Only about one-third of



all non-citizens are ethnically Russian. The remaining 56,000 (2.6 percent of the population) Russians living in Latvia are either full citizens of the Republic of Latvia or Russian Federation citizens permanently residing in Latvia.

In this ethnic setting, political parties and also the Russian Federation have actively used mass media and political communication to denounce the Latvian state and its integration program. Moreover, in the 1990s, Moscow unilaterally introduced visa-free travel for Latvian non-citizens. Still, despite its attempts, Russia has generally failed to prevent integration of non-Latvian population into Latvian population. Approximately 35 percent of Latvia's population are in ethnically mixed marriages, and in 2016, 90 percent of the non-Latvian population knew the Latvian language.¹⁴ It is evident that in spite of political protests and objections, the integration program of Latvia has been relatively successful. Both the overall proportion and the absolute numbers of non-citizens have been decreasing, and the Russian population is increasingly integrated economically, socially and politically in the Latvian society. This trend also correlates with the Harmony party's transformation from an ethnic party to a more mainstream one, and the fact that the Latvian Russian Union, the most radical pro-Russian party, lost the October 2018 elections once again, this time reaching only 3.2 percent of voter support.

Nevertheless, fears in Latvia of unwelcome external influence by Russia are realistic. They are based on the geopolitical interests of the Eastern neighbor, the ethnic situation in the country, and the unique Latvian political party system. Russia has never fully disguised its geopolitical interest in former Soviet Union countries; notably, Vladimir Putin

announced in 2005 that the collapse of the USSR was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century.¹⁵ Taking this sentiment into account, the Latvian institutions have traditionally been more cautious,¹⁶ or even slightly paranoid, about the potential paths and instruments of Russian influence that could result in domestic problems, or, in an extreme scenario, loss of independence for the small Baltic country that celebrates its centenary in 2018.

Earlier Experiences and Challenges

Indeed, Russian foreign influence on Latvian politics is well documented, from ethnic and party politics to mass media and technological intervention. But the Latvian state has created defense mechanisms and responses against external meddling. Research on Latvia's resilience against disinformation, however, indicates that it is the most susceptible of the three Baltic states due to its ethnically divided political environment, a media space and education system divided by language principles, and its unsophisticated media literacy.¹⁷ These problems require complex solutions which are time-consuming and cannot be solved immediately.

The ethnic question, as mentioned, is a deep-rooted challenge that the country has been dealing with; it has also resulted in two parallel information spaces and a divided **schooling system**. Education reforms were enacted in 2004 and 2018 in an effort to reduce the number of public school subjects taught in Russian and to switch to predominantly Latvian language education in all secondary, and most primary, schools by 2022. Both times, the reforms, managed by Minister of Education Karlis Sadurskis, have been met with protests from domestic Russian NGOs and politicians. The main opposition came from the Latvian Russian Union party and the Russian School Defense Staff, an NGO.

Another traditionally pro-Russian party, Harmony, did not actively participate in the protests; instead, they used political rhetoric¹⁸ to criticize a specific reform: the closure or merger of both Latvian and Russian speaking schools with less than 800 pupils. This proposal, understandably, was met with steep opposition in a country that suffers from low birth rates. The schooling system and its reforms are seen as the primary way to facilitate integration of ethnic communities in Latvia and, consequently, to avoid external meddling from Russian. Yet, the education system only addresses the issue at the grassroots level and focuses on integrating and preparing the younger generation.

Public attitudes and ideas are manipulated in an attempt to alter geopolitical sympathies and Latvia's progress through democratic means of information.

School reform does not automatically address the **information space**, media literacy, and propaganda issues that affect both the non-Latvian and Latvian population in the country of all ages. Media consumers are exposed to manipulation of newspapers, TV channels, radio channels, and internet portals alike. Public attitudes and ideas are manipulated in an attempt to

alter geopolitical sympathies and Latvia's progress through democratic means of information. Abuse of constitutional rights – freedom of information, freedom of speech, prohibition of censorship – in Latvia is a widely available opportunity for bad actors. Andis Kudors at the Center for East European Policy Studies, for instance, has indicated five sources of external influence through media that could be used against Latvia.¹⁹ The first is spreading information that attacks the idea of the state and its capacities. Second is the divided media, political, and educational environment that lessens resilience against misinformation. Third is the online conflict between the Latvian ruling elite and Russian-speaking population that is exacerbated by Kremlin-controlled media. Fourth is the need to teach the difference between quality journalism and propaganda. Fifth is the misuse of social media with the goal of creating unfair competition before an election.

The divided information space between Latvian- and Russian-speaking readers has been a challenging situation for several decades. Since Russian, unlike English, is spoken, or at least freely understood, by an absolute majority of the country, popularity of Russian media has been stable in Latvia. Especially after the start of the war in Ukraine in 2014, Latvia became more cautious regarding the opinions expressed via Latvian media. Multiple times over the last four years, the Latvian National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) has fined the media outlet *Pervij Baltiskij Kanal*²⁰ or temporarily banned the retranslation of, for instance, RTR Rossija network by Latvian TV providers. Each time, the NEPLP provided detailed evidence of hate speech or war mongering as an explanation for the sanction. Further, the Kremlin propaganda channel Sputnik was banned from registering with a Latvian internet domain,²¹ and the website was

temporarily shut down before it successfully registered with an international domain out of Latvia's reach. Naturally, a short-lived debate took place about whether a liberal democratic country should be banning information sources.

But more importantly, these situations led to discussions about international collaboration between Latvian institutions and partner institutions in other NATO and EU countries. For example, many Russian TV channels are registered outside of Russia and, as a result, require more complex legal and institutional treatment.²² As policy expert Janis Lielpeteris concludes, sufficient legal instruments exist to counter hate speech from domestic sources and legal norms define procedures to limit retranslation of pan-European television channels inside the European Union. The most notable examples are the Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of March 10, 2010, on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive).

Still, it is important to keep in mind that, in Latvia, Russian media is universally, cross-ethnically popular. So, the information and positions it spreads via television – and, to a lesser extent by radio and internet – is consumed by more than just ethnic Russians. Many political positions are expressed via “entertainews,” and, as it happens, several Russian entertainment shows tend to popularize Vladimir Putin's and Russia's position on global issues. Among the most prominent examples are the sketch shows *Krivoe zerkalo*, *Comedy Club*, and the improvisation show *KVN*. These shows are highly popular, not just in Latvia, but in many other former Soviet Union countries as well. While actual news shows receive scrutiny, viewers take talk shows, one-sided analytical discussions, and quasi-informative documentaries, like *Voennaja taina*, more lightly, not necessarily as propaganda. A common trend of Kremlin-controlled media is to project Russia as a powerful, capable, and often flawless country, compared with the decaying, weak, and hypocritical West. Neighboring countries, including Ukraine, are portrayed and ridiculed as incoherent, chaotic, impotent, and needy.



A panoramic view of central Riga

In the best-case scenario, Kremlin media is considered a “guilty-pleasure,” but often the lines are more blurred. Viewers tend to believe that all media are comprised of lies and propaganda; the Russians are not perceived as different from the Americans, Europeans, or even Latvian media producers. As part of the former Soviet mentality, people would prefer authoritative explanations of information, somebody who will tell them the “truth,” rather than having to spend time on analysis and considering alternative views. They seek a version they can believe in. As a result, Russian media is appealing, not only because Latvians are entertained and understand the language, but also because the Kremlin provides them with a different, coherent worldview.

Everything that has been mentioned so far fits into the overall strategy of the Russian Federation. This strategy has been codified in several documents, including the 2016 Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation²⁴ and the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.²⁵ As viewed by the Latvian Security Police: “These documents confirm the Kremlin’s readiness to use the newest information and communication technology... to strengthen its information influence abroad... The informative influence attempts of Russia, including activities of so-called internet trolls and bots, are aimed at filling the Latvian information space with manipulatively produced information.”²⁶ Thanks to these statements by the Security Police and analysis done by think tanks in Latvia,²⁷ the analytical bureau of the Latvian *Saeima*,²⁸ as well as many journalists, analysts, and researchers, Latvia is very aware of the influence of Russian “soft power.”

Latvia has been addressing hybrid warfare²⁹ threats and its own national vulnerabilities, including legally binding

requirements to combat cyberthreats.³⁰ The Latvian Journalist Association and investigative journalist portal Re:Baltica, as well as academic institutions like Riga Stradins University, have been actively engaged in improving both Latvia’s anti-propaganda defense mechanisms and the media literacy of the general population. The latter is aimed at preparing people to distinguish quality media sources from intentional misinformation. The population is taught to look at facts and trends before forming an opinion, and to regard negative views with more caution in order to not fall victim to robo-trolling.³¹ Finally, the experiences of other Soviet countries are informing the lessons Latvia is learning,³² since these nations are particularly exposed to Russian media and information campaigns.

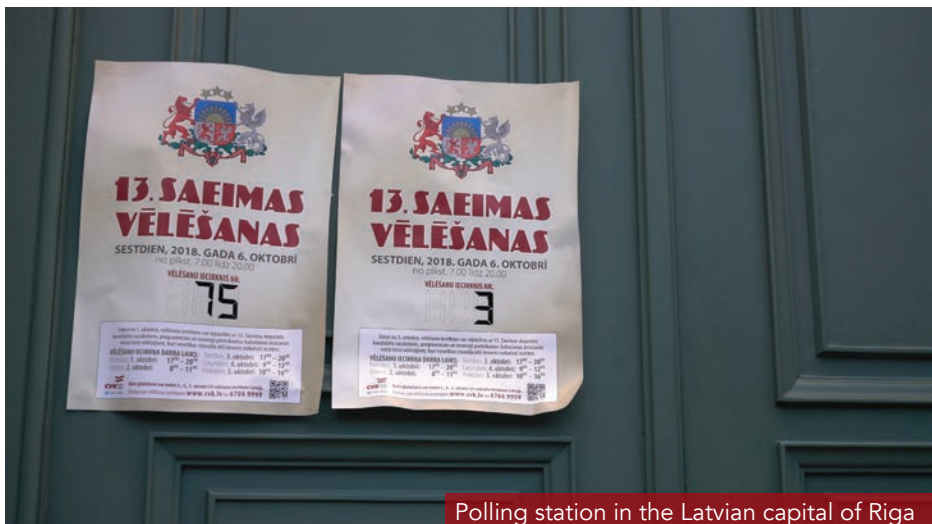
And then, in Latvia’s struggle against unwanted foreign influence, we must next examine direct political engagements, i.e. the **role of politicians**. The Kremlin’s open political support and rhetoric in favor of domestic activists in Latvia have been among the central worries of state institutions. As Harmony has become increasingly mainstream, officially distancing itself from Putin’s United Russia party, more attention is drawn to the Latvian Russian Union party. The Latvian Russian Union emerged in 2014 from the 1998 For Human Rights in a United Latvia party. It is led by three-time member of the European Parliament Tatjana Zdanoka. Ms. Zdanoka, who is legally restricted from competing in parliamentary elections in Latvia, has been an active supporter of Russia’s positions, including the annexation of Crimea. She is the most visible and prominent politician who openly supports the Kremlin and its outlook on the situation in Latvia.

But it is Aleksandr Gaponenko who is seen as the main coordinator of pro-Kremlin

activities in Latvia. Gaponenko first became visible during the referendum to introduce the Russian language as the second official state language in February 2012. He is affiliated with National Bolshevik Party Riga branch provocateur Vladimir Linderman. Allegedly, Gaponenko and some Harmony politicians have accepted money from the Kremlin's Russkij Mir (an organization that promotes Russian language worldwide) to fund book publications and other public activities.³⁴ Support for ethnic parties (Latvian Russian Union and Harmony) and their NGO satellites are the least subtle ways Russia attempts to influence election results and political processes in Latvia. Indeed, the Latvian state institutions must also be concentrating on individuals or several dozen provocateurs that could be made to appear in the media significant forces or even popular movements, rather than marginal political organizations with low levels of public support in Latvia.

Finally, it should be mentioned that, in an attempt to defend itself against external political influence, Latvia has prohibited political parties from receiving donations

from abroad for political purposes. Moreover, due to very strict regulation and transparency requirements for party donations,³⁵ politicians, and parties who earn more than two percent of the vote in a given election, still choose to accept public financing of their campaigns from the state budget. As a result, data is freely available, and voters can easily access information about party finances.³⁶ This access allows the public to see who the main donors and supporters of particular political party are, though, investigative journalists have indicated that there are shortcomings in the system and that it does not prevent exceeding the campaign expenditure limits. It also fails to address the modern channels of party communication with voters, especially social media.³⁷ In response, the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) threatened to acquire court permission to shut down access to Facebook in Latvia in case of latter's non-cooperation on disclosure of party online advertising³⁸ and introduced new tools for monitoring party activity online.³⁹ It is evident that Latvian state institutions have been actively



Polling station in the Latvian capital of Riga

building defense infrastructure to prevent political, informational and technical tools from being used for meddling in Latvia's democratic processes. Protection of information spaces by increasing media literacy within Latvian society, addressing the party financing issues and monitoring against public political provocations, as well as installing cyber-defense mechanisms with institutionalized cooperation in the National ITC Security Council⁴⁰ and Digital Security Monitoring Committee⁴¹ are evidence that Latvia takes every instrument that could be used by hostile parties against Latvia's statehood and geopolitical orientation seriously. The final subchapter will, therefore, look at the particular situation and examples of prevention of foreign influence on the Latvian political system during the 2018 national parliament elections.

The 2018 National Elections

As the Latvian economy has been growing over the past several years, and, consequently state revenues have also been increasing, Latvia has been able not only to meet the two percent GDP expenditure on national defense

(the NATO requirement), but it has also channeled funds into both hard and soft security projects. Shielding against external meddling is among the soft security projects. The Latvian Saeima elections of October 6, 2018 were considered to be a politically important moment, and external involvement was expected to be high. Therefore, an election security coordination group was established by key government stakeholders.⁴² And yet, no successful massive attacks took place, elections were not distorted, and the results do not appear to be leading to a major political change.

Two days after the 2018 elections, the Security Police of the Republic of Latvia announced that no major disruptions or criminal activity had been recorded, and that the public had been more active than ever in informing security institutions about suspicious activity.⁴³ Similarly, the Security Police, foreign sources,⁴⁴ and investigative journalists in Latvia concluded that "no persuasive evidence of foreign interference was found."⁴⁵ The fact that the election process proceeded



Vote counting begins in Riga

without major interruptions is very much tied to preventive measures that Latvia undertook.

The fact that the election process proceeded without major interruptions is very much tied to preventive measures that Latvia undertook.

In the context of the **electoral results**, we should first mention the pro-Kremlin activists and provocateurs. In the spring of 2018, the main leaders, including Zdanoka, Linderman, and Gaponenko, were criminally charged with separate counts of inciting hatred or anti-Latvian activities,⁴⁶ based on speeches they had made during a meeting against education reform.⁴⁷ And when the election rolled around, Zdanoka and her the Latvian Russian Union were unable to gather enough support with their traditional messages of protecting the Russian language and criticizing language reforms in schools. Harsher rhetoric and public protests were also insufficient. Nevertheless, losing the 2018 elections will not be the end of the party. As the party gained 3.2 percent of the total vote, it is now eligible for state subsidy for its next campaign.⁴⁸

The 2018 elections also revealed that pro-Russian politicians were not as popular as feared, as evidenced by Harmony's weak performance. Although it retains the largest presence in parliament, Harmony

lost one seat and acquired several new faces after the elections. Harmony's strategy of elevating former Minister of Economics from the now defunct Zatlers' Reform Party, Vjaceslavs Dombrovskis, as candidate for prime minister, and using the highly popular mayor of Riga, Nils Usakovs, only for "branding purposes" was a bold move that resulted in a technical win, but not at the expected level. The results for both of the openly pro-Russian political parties (Harmony and Latvian Russian Union) demonstrate that affiliation with Russia can do more damage than good at the polls. Meanwhile, the unknown factor remains those political parties that have not fully revealed their foreign policy preferences, most notably, the party that came in second place with 16 seats, KPV LV.

Overall, it is clear that the recent elections are not expected to produce geopolitical shifts in Latvia's position. The embedded Western affinity is here to stay, and pro-Russian positioning could become increasingly hard to sell to voters if Latvia's economic and social improvement continues. These gains, felt by both the Latvian and non-Latvian population equally, lead to popular support for EU membership. But that support may not last. In three years, the additional investment boost provided by the EU funding to Latvia will disappear and has the potential to create a void that some politicians could use to their advantage.

Finally, the practical problems and **distortions** that Latvia faced during the election period and the elections themselves arose when www.draugiem.lv, one of the most popular portals in Latvia was compromised. On Election Day 2018, hackers replaced the site's login page with an audio file of the Russian national anthem and a threatening message to Latvians: that the Russian border does not end

anywhere.⁴⁹ While the site restored its full operation a few hours after the incident, the sources of the hack are still unknown. Also on Election Day, someone attempted to gain access to the e-mail servers of several state institutions, including the Central Election Commission of Latvia. Again, the perpetrators remain unknown.

Although both cyber-attacks were ultimately unsuccessful, the fact that they were premeditated and targeted servers that provide internet access is a warning sign and a test. On the positive side, their failure showed the value in investing in preventive measures and defense infrastructure, as Latvian authorities have. On the negative side, the attacks confirmed that interfering with the Latvian communication system is now on the table, and hackers could repeat their actions in years and elections to come. But most importantly, it became clear that cyber-attacks are a cheap way to have a significant political return. And now there is a risk that the Latvian population will question the readiness and strength of state institutions, along with the efficiency of increased state budget expenditure on security and defense. Still, Latvia was not a priority for the Kremlin in 2018. What if it becomes one in the future?

Conclusion: What 2018 Meant to Latvia

The Republic of Latvia, whose statehood turns 100 in 2018, has become an integral part of Western civilization, but the country's geopolitical past still haunts the small Baltic nation. It is not always easy to maintain alliances and a transatlantic political orientation, to continue economic and societal development, or to cherish the democratic system, especially if your neighbors are trying to denounce you and portray you as a failure. As Latvia's history demonstrates, a sense of geopolitical

belonging should not be taken for granted. It must be fought for; it must be cemented and preserved – both in foreign and domestic policies.

The greatest risk remains that a serious misfortune or grave mismanagement – internally- or externally-induced – could lead Latvian voters and the general population to lose faith in their own country.

Latvia also democratically elected its 13th parliament in 2018, though our democracy is not only about elections; it is also about protecting ourselves against the external influences we face on a daily basis. Latvia's foes have traditionally been interested in demonstrating – both to Latvia's population and to the rest of the world – that Latvia is small and weak. The greatest risk remains that a serious misfortune or grave mismanagement – internally- or externally-induced – could lead Latvian voters and the general population to lose faith in their own country. If this were to happen, it could pave the way for new, geopolitically unpredictable politicians to emerge. Although Latvian national self-awareness and patriotism is relatively

robust, it must be constantly kept alive. Patriotism is one more phenomenon that we can never take for granted.

Finally, 2018 and its elections demonstrated that Latvia's greatest challenge is the inventiveness and out-of-the-box thinking of those who would do us harm. As long as our society fosters its intellectual resilience, however, the country will not be easily susceptible to foreign discourses, foreign ideas, and foreign selling points. If Latvia is able to realize and accept what is unique

about itself and what is to be cherished, we will continue to prevail as a strong, independent nation for many years – and many elections – to come.

Karlis Bukovskis is the Deputy Director at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs.

Note: The views of the author do not necessarily reflect those of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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UNITED STATES



Tech and Toxicity: U.S. Midterm Elections in a Digital Swamp

By Anthony Silberfeld

“When someone attacks me, I always attack back...except 100x more. This has nothing to do with a tirade but rather, a way of life!”

-Donald J. Trump, President of the United States via Twitter, November 11, 2012

Introduction

Politics in the United States has always been a full-contact sport. Over the past half century, from Nixon’s dirty tricks to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, from the “swift-boating” of John Kerry to “birtherism,” examples of politicians bloodying their opponents for electoral gain abound. Nevertheless, after previous hard-fought campaigns, there had always been an effort to repair any damage to the national fabric that had been done. Sadly, those days are over. Trump’s America has come to be defined by an “us versus them” mentality that allows no room for compromise or middle ground. This is true in the relationship between Republicans and Democrats, but it also currently applies to those within the Republican Party, also known as the Grand Old Party

(GOP). Loyalty to President Trump is prized above all else. Policy differences with the president can be forgiven; anything less than total fealty cannot.

In an analog era, what happened in Washington often stayed in Washington. Only the most significant stories made their way into national news, delivered to voters via television, radio, and print publications. In today’s digital era, every utterance, slight (perceived or actual), and movement is disseminated to tens of millions of users in an instant through a wide range of social media and other online portals. On the positive side of the ledger, the new digital normal means greater transparency, accountability, and scrutiny for government officials. On the negative side, it means there is no single arbiter of facts or truth. There is also no minimum standard of behavior. Taken together, these conditions have created a toxic ecosystem for American democracy, and it was against this volatile backdrop that the 2018 midterm elections would be fought.

The 2016 general election delivered all levers of power to the Republican Party. Donald Trump won the Electoral College

and the White House, despite losing the popular vote by more than 3 million votes. Speaker Paul Ryan maintained a solid majority with 241 seats out of 435 in the House of Representatives, and Senate leader Mitch McConnell clung to power in Congress's upper chamber.

Going into Election Day on November 6, 2018, the prospects for Republicans were mixed. The economy in the U.S. was thriving. GDP had reached a four-year high of 4.1 percent in the second quarter of 2018,¹ and the unemployment rate had fallen to 3.7 percent.² Under normal circumstances, this would have been great news for the incumbent party, but there was nothing normal about these circumstances. President Trump had an approval rating of 43.6 percent,³ though that figure reached up to 90 percent among Republican voters. In a highly polarized country, proximity to the president would be a tremendous asset in conservative Republican districts, and a liability in liberal Democratic and centrist swing districts. Following the midterm election, the president himself labeled this phenomenon "the embrace." Those who accepted the embrace, in his view, succeeded, and those who didn't failed. But Donald Trump was only part of the story.

The Senate map was extremely favorable to the Republican Party, as Democrats were forced to defend 10 seats in states where Trump had been victorious in 2016. But the Democrats still had reason to be hopeful. The president's first two years in office had provided sufficient motivation for Democrats to turn out in high numbers. From Trump's judicial nominations and policy choices to what his critics consider an erosion of democratic norms, Democrats had an opportunity to finally enforce a check on this president, something the Republican Congressional majority had been unwilling to do. Suffice it to say, the stakes were high. Though there were

468 seats (all 435 House seats, plus 33 in the Senate) up for grabs in the 116th Congress, this chapter will highlight three of the most contentious and competitive Senate races – Arizona, Missouri, and Florida – which serve as cautionary tales in American politics going forward. Through the lens of each of these races we will explore the issues that mattered most to voters, the distractions that attempted to poison the environment, and the impact of technology on America's latest democratic experiment.

Keeping It Real

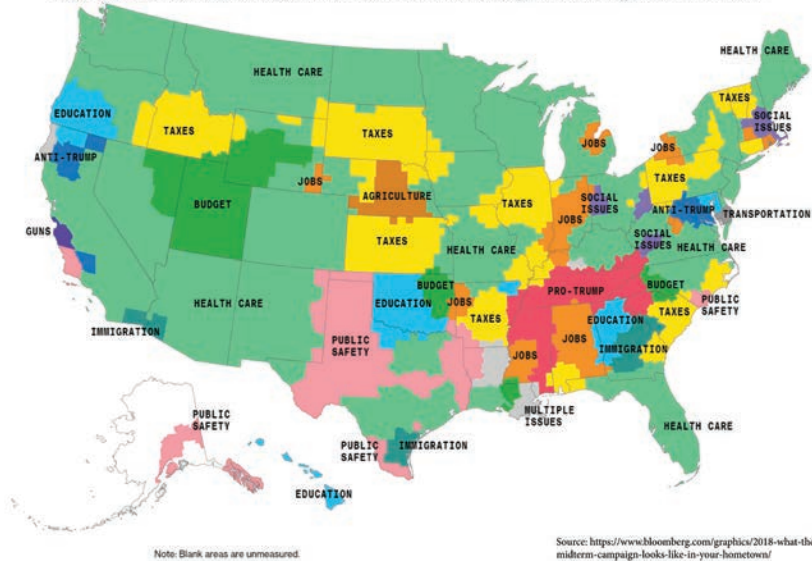
Former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill famously coined the phrase "all politics is local." For many who live and work in the Washington bubble, it is easy to lose sight of this truism in American politics. Members of Congress who forget this lesson quickly find themselves out of a job. The task of keeping an eye on the things that constituents actually care about has become more difficult in recent years. During the Trump administration, the scattershot approach to governing alongside the president's "Twitter diplomacy" could sidetrack even the most disciplined public servants. In 2018, those who focused on the issues that truly matter to voters understood that they had to address the three main priorities that were on voters' minds in this election: health care, taxes, and jobs. Everything else was just noise, but sometimes noise can be an effective electoral tool.

Health Care

In 2010, Congress passed the Affordable Care Act (commonly known as Obamacare), which overhauled the health care system in the United States, providing coverage to millions of Americans who had been previously uninsured. Obamacare also prevented insurance companies from excluding patients for having pre-existing conditions, expanded

Midterms 2018: Main Issues

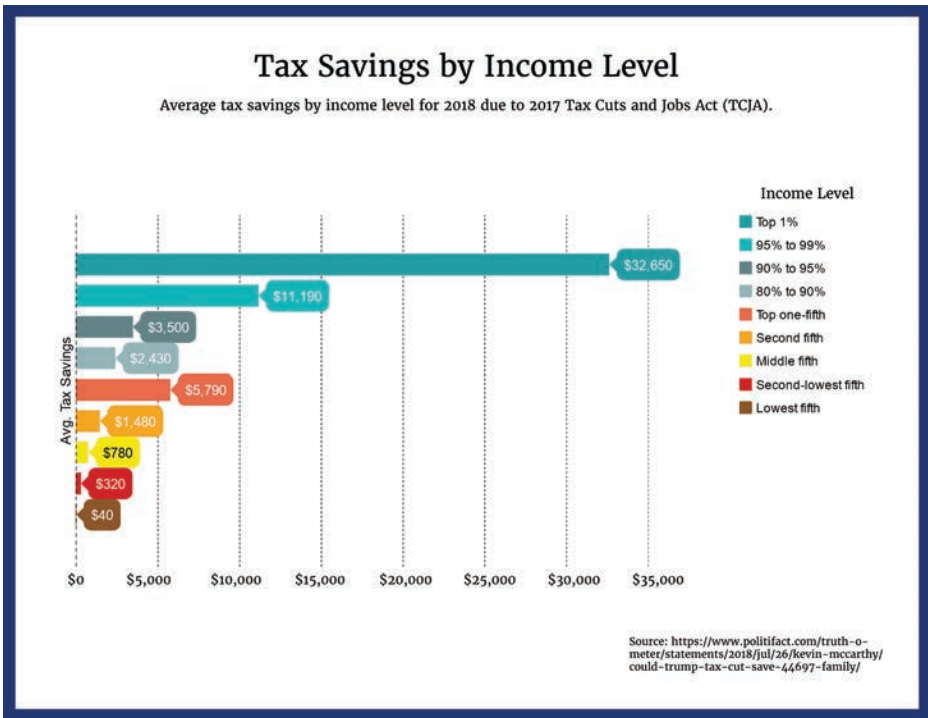
These were the most frequent topics of television ads for U.S. congressional and gubernatorial races.



Medicaid, and allowed young adults to stay on their parents' plan until the age of 26. Republicans argued that the new law would increase the cost of health care while reducing the quality of patient services. Furthermore, the GOP objected to the price tag, alleging \$570 billion in tax increases and an additional \$500 billion in national debt.⁴ When it came time to vote on final passage of this legislation, not a single Republican supported the measure. In the aftermath, Republicans would spend much of the subsequent eight years trying to dismantle Obamacare, without a suitable replacement to fill the void. Although Republicans were unsuccessful in fully repealing the Affordable Care Act, they did manage to enact a law that would eliminate one of the more contentious elements of Obamacare: the individual mandate. This was a provision that required all Americans to

purchase a minimum level of insurance coverage or risk paying a penalty. Since the elimination of this requirement, an estimated two million people might now opt for no coverage, which would result in detrimental changes to the insurance cost structure for those who remain.⁵ If Republicans are ultimately able to completely dismantle Obamacare, there will be fewer healthy Americans paying into the insurance pool that subsidizes the sick, leaving many of the most vulnerable exposed.

The fate of Obamacare was only part of the health care equation concerning voters in this election. For years both parties have argued about the need to reform entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid, but they vehemently disagree on how to do it. Democrats have looked at solutions such as raising taxes and the



retirement age, while Republicans have sought market-oriented remedies to ensure the programs' solvency. Neither has been able to cobble together enough support to move forward in either direction.

Though the two parties disagree on many issues in the health care debate, they may be able to find common ground on addressing the opioid epidemic and on reducing the price of prescription drugs. There are places in the country that are struggling to cope with the former, and constituents in every congressional district in the country care about the latter. Even if the political will exists, whether anything gets done on either issue may come down to the brutally practical question of where the money comes from.

Taxes

One way to pay for government-funded programs is to raise taxes. In every

election, taxes play a central role on the campaign trail, and the rhetoric from both sides is predictable. Democrats accuse Republican of offering tax giveaways to corporations and the rich at the expense of the poor and middle class. Republicans, for their part, allege that "tax and spend" Democrats will cripple the middle class under the weight of high taxes to fund their "socialist" programs. Regardless of the merits of these characterizations, for many this issue defines what it is to be a Republican or a Democrat. In December 2017, President Trump signed the most significant tax reform bill since 1986, when President Reagan overhauled the tax system. Trump's trillion dollar tax reform package not only provided a huge reduction in the corporate tax rate – from 35 percent to 21 percent, but it also lowered and reduced multiple income tax brackets for individuals. Republicans have

touted the tax cuts as a boon for middle class families to the tune of \$44,697 in savings per family. According to Politifact, however, the actual number is \$780.⁶ Democrats took to the hustings to make the case that the Trump tax cut was nothing more than a gift to corporate interests, and that message resonated with voters. Instead of creating new jobs or increasing wages, corporate tax savings were spent primarily on share buybacks, which benefited none of the people Republicans purported to help. Recognizing the Republicans' vulnerabilities on this issue, President Trump proposed a last-ditch effort at damage control just days before the election, proposing an additional 10 percent tax cut for middle class families. Setting aside the fact that Congress was out of session and couldn't pass such a proposal even if it wanted to, this was a rare acknowledgment by the president that failing to address the bread and butter concerns of voters could be pivotal in this election.

Jobs

Ten years after the Great Recession of 2008, the U.S. economy has roared back to life. The fact that Presidents Obama and Trump are vying for credit tells you there is universal agreement that the economy is on the right track. Building on the momentum created by Obama-era economic policies, Trump's combination of tax cuts and deregulation has given investors and corporations a positive outlook, which is spurring job creation and robust GDP growth. Other indicators such as capital investment and research and development increased in 2018 by 19 percent and 14 percent, respectively.⁷

But not all is rosy. Despite low unemployment numbers, there remains a mismatch between job vacancies and the skills required to fill those jobs. According to the Labor Department, there are 6.9

million job openings and 6.2 million people out of work. Looking at states like Missouri, where workers are struggling with the transition from a contracting agriculture sector to service industry jobs, the challenge goes beyond numbers. Where are the opportunities? And how will workers be prepared to seize them? Another potential source of friction with voters is a direct consequence of the president's trade war with competitors, like China, and allies like Canada, Mexico, and the European Union. Between agricultural exports and deeply interconnected supply chains, there are many industries and workers in the United States already adversely affected by Trump's intransigence on trade.

These are the real issues that matter to voters. Republicans and Democrats had the opportunity to engage in substantive debates on these issues and persuade voters on the merits of their arguments. Unfortunately, that is not how this campaign played out. While most Democrats attempted to stay on message, touting their plans for health care, taxes, and jobs, the president had another agenda in mind.

Digital Distractions

As candidates traveled throughout their districts to make their case to voters in the real world, there was a parallel campaign unfolding in the virtual world. This campaign surfaced humanity's worst instincts. Racism, sexism, and conspiracy theories were predominant online and seemed to have two objectives: to distract voters and to elicit fear. Had this activity been confined to fringe lunatics occupying the darkest corners of the internet, we might be able to ignore it, but these tactics were, in many cases, amplified by mainstream politicians who benefit from dividing the electorate for political gain.

Let's begin with the case of "jobs, not mobs." In October 2018, r/the_donald, a Reddit group popular among neo-Nazis and white supremacists with over 600,000 members, began promoting the slogan "jobs, not mobs" in response to recent incidents of progressive activists confronting Trump administration officials in public. Democrats were portrayed online as anarchists threatening the social fabric of the country and posing a threat to the Republic. This slogan quickly became a meme that fairly prominent conservative social media commentators began to share via Twitter. From there, "jobs, not mobs" picked up steam and found its way into the talking points on conservative mainstream media networks, who made stories about left-wing mob violence a mainstay on their evening programming. Given the number of hours

President Trump reportedly spends each day watching cable news, it was only a matter of time before he grabbed the baton and ran with it. Sure enough, later that month, President Trump tweeted a video appeal to voters defining the stakes in the midterm elections beneath the #jobsnotmobs.⁸ At that moment, a message originally created by right-wing fanatics less than a month prior reached the president's 55 million Twitter followers; it was then immediately amplified on virtually every major American media outlet who covered the president's every move. It was clear that Trump was doubling down on the demonization of his political opponents ahead of the election.

During the 2016 presidential election, then-candidate Trump had discovered that a focus on immigration gained significant traction with the Republican



base, and even some independents. He often boasts that his hardline stance on immigration and border security won him the election. With that in mind, the president went back to the well for the 2018 midterms. This time, he painted a vivid picture of thousands of immigrants in a caravan marching north from Central America preparing to “invade” the United States. The alleged composition of this caravan varied in the president’s tweets, alternating between people of Middle Eastern descent to MS-13 gang members. This false narrative – in reality the *New York Times* embedded reporters with the caravan to debunk myths circulating on social media– gave Trump the opportunity to stoke fear amongst the electorate, take a strong position on border security (by ordering 15,000 active duty soldiers be sent to the U.S.-Mexico border), and characterize the Democrats as weak on immigration and supporters of open borders. While it is difficult to measure whether and to what extent this message swayed voters, the metrics show that it quickly entered the electoral bloodstream. During the week of October 21, Google searches for “migrant caravan” spiked, and other digital platforms took it from there.⁹ Right-wing outlets such as *Circa*, *YourNews*, and *Right Now USA* bought ad space on Facebook and filled it with messaging and imagery that built on the narrative driven by the President of the United States. Some took the liberty of embellishing on this fiction by claiming that George Soros and other “globalists” were responsible for financing the caravan. This avenue is cheap, effective, and very dangerous. The *Right Now USA* ad, for example, earned more than 10,000 Facebook impressions for less than \$500.¹⁰ According to the *USA Today*, this conspiracy theory ultimately reached over 850 million people. The month of October 2018 closed with a grief-stricken country

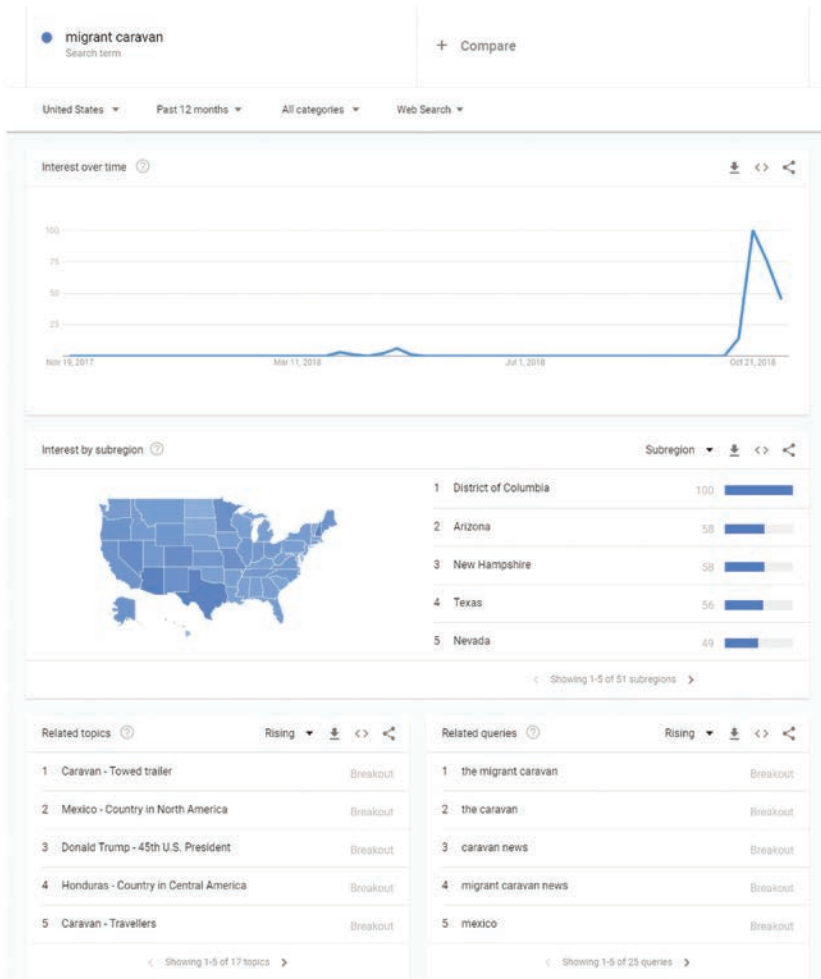
reeling from the very real consequence of poison spread in the virtual realm, when a gunman, who had spent time lurking in the darkest depths of the internet and blamed Jewish Americans for bringing in “invaders,” walked into a Pittsburgh synagogue and murdered 11 Jews.

Incitement online also became real for the people routinely targeted by the president on Twitter and in his many public rallies that are beamed around the country on TV and digital platforms. The same week as the Pittsburgh massacre, the Clintons, the Obamas, and CNN, among others, received pipe bombs in the mail in a coordinated attack by an individual whose own social media profile trafficked in Trump’s Make America Great Again ideology. Not only did the campaigns need to maintain focus, but so did voters with so much activity, real and imagined, swirling around these elections.

Incitement online also became real for the people routinely targeted by the president on Twitter and in his many public rallies that are beamed around the country on TV and digital platforms.

In the final days of the campaign, voters faced a litany of issues meant to distract them ahead of an election that was projected to be favorable for the Democrats. From a manufactured scandal,

Google Trends: Migrant Caravan



Source: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?geo=US&q=migrant%20caravanattack-ad-794337>

orchestrated by a right-wing troll, accusing Russia investigation Special Counsel Robert Mueller of sexual misconduct to the president's baseless declaration that he would end the so-called birthright citizenship – which under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

allows anyone born in the United States to automatically become a citizen – this election season closed with lots of consternation among politicians and the voting public. Tech companies, for their part, were not oblivious to the unintended consequences of the platforms they built;

they were poised to figure out how best to mitigate the damage done and to help repair American's faith in democracy and public discourse.

The Road to Redemption?

Tech companies, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have taken a beating in recent years for failing to foresee, and react to, the potential nefarious uses of their platform. This was, of course, most pronounced in the 2016 general election when Russian trolls and bots wreaked havoc on the U.S. political system. Since then, there has been justified criticism that the industry still has not done enough, but it is worth noting some of the initiatives that social media platforms and others have taken to reverse the negative trend of disinformation running rampant online.

With its reach of 2.23 billion users, Facebook has an open window into influencing voters, thereby impacting elections around the world, and in the U.S. it is no exception. The social network, whose motto was "move fast and break things," has tried to quickly implement some important fixes. Between August and October 2018, Facebook purged hundreds of accounts and pages that broke its rules pertaining to spamming and "coordinated inauthentic" behavior. It also removed accounts that were linked to malevolent actors in Russia and Iran. Facebook doubled its army of safety and security monitors to 20,000 people¹¹ who would be responsible for identifying disinformation campaigns to backstop the latest effort to weed out malicious activity on the site. An added

Facebook Ads on the Migrant Caravan

Right-wing news outlets sponsored ads about the migrant caravan echoing President Trump's views.



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Hundreds of Central American migrants from a 4,000-strong caravan winding its way through southern Mexico and toward the U.S. border.



Migrant caravan in Mexico trudges through 'route of death' Hundreds of Central American migrants from a 4,000-strong caravan winding its way through southern Mexico and toward the U.S. border. CIRCA.COM



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The article speaks for itself

<https://www.rightnowusa.org/>



Second migrant caravan, armed with guns and bombs, storms into Mexico A low-flying police helicopter hovered overhead as the migrants waded in large groups through the Buicate River's murky waters.



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"@brianna @globeat @georgeforus used @StateDepartment resources and taxpayer funds to advance his nefarious political activities, including influencing immigration policy, according to documents obtained by @udiclatwatch."

#yourNEWS #donors #Globeat

<https://yournews.com/2018/10/27/23350/documents-show-migrant-caravan-funded-by-soros-and-other-organizations/>



Documents show migrant caravan funded by Soros and other international organizations • The documents obtained through Judicial Watch's FOIA lawsuit reveal the mechanism by which Soros-YOURNEWS.COM

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Source: <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/11/the-migrant-caravan-arrives-on-facebook/>

feature to Facebook's toolkit has been the introduction of new labeling for political ads, providing increased transparency about funding sources. The jury is still out, however, on whether Facebook has done enough in light of the significant threats, which are constantly changing, in this space.

In an effort to curtail the scourge of bots on the site, Twitter eliminated a total of 70 million accounts in one fell swoop.

The other heavyweight in the social media space, Twitter, has also taken steps to clean up its act in advance of the midterm election. In the first quarter of 2018, Twitter claimed to have more than 336 million monthly active users, 21 percent of whom were based in the United States.¹² In an effort to curtail the scourge of bots on the site, Twitter eliminated a total of 70 million accounts in one fell swoop. President Trump and right-wing pundits reacted harshly to this move, accusing Twitter of censoring conservative voices. This outrage, of course, has created space for other micro-blogging platforms to grow, such as Gab, which boasts of being the site where free speech thrives. In truth, it is the site where alt-right rhetoric thrives.

Beyond the social media space, other online applications have entered the political fray to address some of the most persistent threats to the integrity of the U.S. midterm elections. In the aftermath of the Russian hacking of the Democratic National Committee servers during the

2016 campaign, messaging apps such as Wickr and Signal have partnered with Democratic political operatives to provide secure, encrypted communications for their campaigns. As some states take steps to curb voter participation, ride-sharing apps like Lyft and Uber have offered discounted and even free transportation to get voters to the polls on Election Day. Bike- and scooter-sharing outfits Lime and Skip have also aimed to facilitate greater turnout in the midterm elections, which typically drops below 40 percent.

In spite of the modest strides that tech companies have made, there remain vulnerabilities in the election security system that the Federal government needs to address. According to the Department of Homeland Security, Russians have been joined by other state and non-state actors to influence the midterm election. From the hacking of a local county website in Tennessee to spear phishing attempts against the offices of three U.S. Senators running for re-election, the range of potential attacks is broad.¹³ It is true that it is too easy for mischief-makers to hack electronic voting machines in person, but the decentralized nature of American elections help minimize the impact of isolated breaches. Nevertheless, the government needs to be more efficient about spending the resources it has already dedicated to prevent further disruptions.

Following the 2016 election, Congress approved \$380 million in funding for election security, but allocating these funds to states and municipalities moved at a glacial pace. Case in point, in May 2018, the Illinois state election board was approved for a \$13 million grant to improve its cybersecurity capacity. By September of that year, none of the promised Federal assistance had been disbursed. According to officials at the Department of Homeland Security, the problem was no

longer money, it was a problem of time.¹⁴ With elections fast-approaching, however, time was something nobody had.

Searching for the Center

The hyper-partisan climate in the United States has had a deleterious effect on many fronts, particularly the vanishing of the political center. Moderates in both parties are endangered species, and the act of crossing party lines for the sake of compromise is sometimes considered a betrayal. In this election cycle there were three Senate races featuring characters who, in different ways, attempted to buck

the prevailing trends and win as a centrist in 2018. Each of these races was distinct due to the local flavor of politics practiced in each state, but all were buffeted by the push and pull of pressure on the ground and pressure online. In the pages ahead, we'll hone in on the races in Arizona, Missouri, and Florida which encapsulate the good, the bad, and the ugly of the 2018 election.

Arizona: The New Mavericks

Arizona has a history of sending independent-oriented and colorful characters to represent the state in the

Martha McSally Attacks Kyrsten Sinema in Campaign Ad



McSally 'pink tutu' ad hammers Sinema

By ALEX ISENSTADT | 08/23/2018 11:58 AM EDT | Updated 08/23/2018 12:18 PM EDT



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Share on Twitter

Arizona Senate hopeful Martha McSally hasn't locked up the GOP nomination just yet — but she's turning to the general election with a searing new TV ad hammering Democratic candidate Kyrsten Sinema for “protesting us in a pink tutu” rather than serving in the military after 9/11.

Source: <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/08/23/martha-mcsally-kyrsten-sinema-attack-ad-794337>

Senate. From Barry Goldwater to John McCain, Arizonans have a proud tradition of rejecting convention. The race for the vacant Senate seat left by the retiring incumbent, Jeff Flake, an outspoken critic of Trump who felt his reelection was doomed, was no exception. This campaign pitted Republican Martha McSally against Democrat Kyrsten Sinema, marking the first time the Grand Canyon State would be represented by a woman in the Senate.

Martha McSally, the first female to command an Air Force fighter squadron in U.S. history, retired from the military after 26 years of service. Harvard-educated and politically moderate, she began her campaign for the Senate as a candidate in the mold of John McCain: someone who could bridge the partisan divide and strike the delicate balance between conservatism and centrism that is the hallmark of Arizona politics. During the 2016 presidential campaign, McSally did not endorse then-candidate Trump. Instead, she was critical, saying “that’s just not how leaders carry themselves.”¹⁵ A victim of sexual abuse as a teenager, and harassment during her career in the military, she expressed particular disgust during the revelations of alleged sexual misconduct and misogynistic behavior by candidate Trump. But in a state where the president won 49 percent (versus Hillary Clinton’s 46 percent) in the general election, disavowing the president seemed a losing proposition. With that in mind, the evolution of Martha McSally began. By mid-summer, President Trump tweeted his endorsement of McSally, calling her “an extraordinary woman.” For her part, McSally began to adopt some of the more unsavory features of the Trump campaign playbook. Calling her opponent juvenile nicknames like “Hollywood Sinema” and accusing Sinema of being a lefty, anti-war socialist were just some of the tactics McSally used. One particularly

impactful online attack was the side-by-side image of the two rivals: McSally in her military uniform and Sinema in a pink tutu at an anti-war rally. McSally leveraged her online presence of 80,000 likes on Facebook and 44,000 Twitter followers to amplify her message and positions on key issues. Her campaign also created a digital platform called therealsinema.com, which offered voters McSally’s interpretation of her opponent’s record.

Moderates in both parties are endangered species, and the act of crossing party lines for the sake of compromise is sometimes considered a betrayal.

On the substance, McSally supported the president’s agenda of tax cuts and job growth, emphasizing employment for veterans. McSally also echoed Trump’s rhetoric on Obamacare and immigration. In one debate, she declared that she preferred not to talk about health care, but focus on other issues, like the caravan. This was a difficult sell in a state where the most pressing issues on voters’ minds were the protection of coverage for pre-existing conditions and the future of Medicare and Medicaid.

Like McSally, Congresswomen Kyrsten Sinema had to undergo her own

ideological transformation in order to be palatable to Arizona voters statewide. On the stump, Sinema tells a compelling story about growing up in poverty and even being homeless during her formative years. She points to this experience, and her time as a social worker, as shaping her liberal political philosophy; she was once even a member of the Green Party. In 2012, after eight years in the Arizona state legislature, Sinema ran for a seat in the 9th Congressional District as a Democrat and comfortably won the seat. While in Congress, she continued to move toward the middle, joining the Blue Dog Democrats, home to the conservative wing of the Democratic Party. For Democrats looking for ideological purity, they would be disappointed by Sinema who announced that she would work with Trump if it was good for the state. She caused further dismay among the Democratic base during a radio interview in which she responded, when she was asked if she was a proud Democrat: "Gosh, it's hard to say proud. I don't know that – I'm not sure that people are even proud of parties anymore, because I feel like the parties are not doing a good job. So I would say that I'm a proud Arizonan."¹⁶

Refusing to be diverted from her core messages, Sinema put health care at the forefront of her campaign. At every campaign stop, she emphasized the need to ensure coverage for the 2.8 million Arizonians with pre-existing conditions. Her health care agenda also paid particular attention to quality and affordability in the health care market, and she vowed to protect Obamacare. Sinema's plan on jobs and economic growth focuses on gender equity; it incentivizes startups and small businesses, and seeks to ensure that the United States has the infrastructure

to compete in the 21st century. In a nod toward bipartisanship, Sinema supported Trump's tax-cut extension and was one of only three House Democrats to do so. She pointed to the benefits for small businesses and middle-class families as her rationale for supporting the measure.

A highly contentious campaign between the two women turned into an even more controversial election after the polls closed. When the votes were counted on election night, partisans in Arizona and around the country waited until the sun came up on November 7, and still no winner had emerged. At the time of this writing, Kyrsten Sinema had overtaken Martha McSally by 1.4 percent, or approximately 30,000 votes out of more than two million cast. With hundreds of thousands of absentee ballots still left to count, it may be some time before this race is decided.¹⁷ But that didn't stop President Trump from making his own determination via Twitter:



Despite the president's assertion, there has been no evidence of fraud. There is, however, a process, and election officials in Arizona are adhering to its guidelines until an outcome can be determined. Regardless of the final result, the Arizona Senate race made it difficult to discern what kind of Senator McSally or Sinema would be.* Their political fluidity throughout their careers gives pause to true believers on both sides of the

* On November 12, 2018, Kyrsten Sinema became Senator-elect of Arizona.

aisle. Will they be loyal to their party or loyal to their constituents? In the current environment the two can be mutually exclusive. But in the end, they may have to choose to continue the balancing act that got each to this point. Perhaps the best advice for the next Senator from Arizona, whoever she may be, comes from the late-Arizona Senator John McCain: "I hope we can again rely on humility, on our need to cooperate, on our dependence on each other to learn how to trust each other again and by so doing better serve the people who elected us. Stop listening to the bombastic loudmouths on the radio and television and the internet. To hell with them. They don't want anything done for the public good. Our incapacity is their livelihood."¹⁸

Missouri: Showdown in the Show Me State

Since 1904, the winner of the presidential election in Missouri went on to win the White House all but three times (in 1956, 2008, and 2012). Known as the bellwether state for its accuracy in predicting the overall preference of the nation writ large, Missouri is of great interest to political observers. In 2016, Missourians overwhelmingly delivered the state to Donald Trump by a margin of 57 percent to 38 percent over Hillary Clinton, while incumbent Senator Roy Blunt eked out a narrow victory over his Democratic opponent Jason Kander by less than three points. According to a 2017 Gallup survey, 38 percent of Missourians identify themselves as Democrats and 45 percent self-identify as Republicans, leaving a sizable 17 percent of the electorate as independent or undecided.¹⁹ This mixed political landscape made the Senate race between Democratic incumbent Claire McCaskill and Republican challenger Josh Hawley a toss-up. Would it be possible for a sitting Democratic Senator to find the precise location equidistant from both

her party and a popular president, and convince voters that she still represents their interests in Washington?

Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill has served the state of Missouri in the U.S. Senate since 2006, when she defeated the Republican incumbent Jim Talent. Since then, the former prosecutor has navigated in the hazy purple area of American politics, neither too red to be painted as a Republican, nor too blue to be called a liberal. This served McCaskill well in the Senate and during her re-election in 2012, when she thumped a fatally flawed Republican to win her second term. On the campaign trail in 2018, McCaskill walked a tightrope daily, vacillating between hardline conservative positions on border security and more progressive stances on health care. One particularly fraught example of political triangulation for her came during the confirmation process for Supreme Court-nominee Brett Kavanaugh. Following allegations of sexual assault against Kavanaugh, Republican and Democratic moderates, particularly female moderates, were under pressure to reject his nomination. Those who did pointed to the allegations as the reason for opposing the nomination, but not Claire McCaskill. Though she claimed to be troubled by the sexual misconduct accusation, she voted "no" on Kavanaugh because of his positions on campaign finance regulations. Her reasoning allowed McCaskill to give her Democratic base the "no" vote they demanded, while keeping moderate Republicans on her side by finding an alternate explanation for her decision. Her record lends an additional degree of credibility for independent and Republican cross-over voters, as McCaskill has voted for two-thirds of Trump's judicial nominees.

On the three main issues voters prioritized in this election (health care, taxes, and

jobs), McCaskill found a predictable mix of something for everyone. She is staunchly in favor of protecting the aspects of Obamacare that preserve coverage for those with pre-existing conditions. The Senator has opposed the president's imposition of tariffs (essentially a tax on consumers) due to the damaging effect they have on Missouri's farmers. And she maintains a pragmatic mix of policies to spur job and economic growth, including raising the minimum wage, providing tax credits for small businesses, and enacting bipartisan tax reform that actually benefits the middle class in a meaningful way. Even President Trump acknowledged the moderate path McCaskill has taken, but Trump's acknowledgement didn't spare her from his ridicule. In the final days of the campaign, the president parachuted into Missouri to deal McCaskill a devastating blow. He said, "The people of Missouri are going to retire far-left Democrat Claire McCaskill, who's been saying such nice things about me. But you know what? She'll never vote with me, that's the problem."

In the final days of the campaign, McCaskill attempted to distance herself farther from her party. In a radio ad, she sought to put conservative voters' doubts to rest by declaring she is "not one of those crazy Democrats." The Democratic Party faithful reacted badly, so the fatal wound to Claire McCaskill may have been self-inflicted.

McCaskill's challenger, Josh Hawley, is the 38-year old Attorney General of Missouri, who was successfully elected to that position in 2017. At the time, he railed against "ladder-climbing politicians" and vowed to stay in the position for which he campaigned. But a year is an eternity in politics. Sensing vulnerabilities in the McCaskill operation, the Republicans picked Hawley, a candidate that would represent the next generation of conservatism in Missouri. Portraying

McCaskill as an old, out-of-touch creature of Washington, Hawley claimed to be a breath of fresh air. Like many candidates in swing states, Hawley distanced himself from President Trump early on, but as the race tightened, he realized that he needed a boost to carry him across the finish line. On September 21, Trump rallied for Hawley in Missouri, touting the young Attorney General as a star, and hanging the Trump brand around Hawley's neck. The question would be whether it would prove to be an albatross or a badge of honor.

The post-mortem on this election continues, but it raises some serious questions for Democrats running in red states.

On the issues that voters claim mattered most, Hawley was fairly vague in his proposals. The one exception was his position on health care, which was crystal clear: Hawley favored the repeal of Obamacare and is party to a lawsuit that aims to do so. This became a point of friction between the two candidates since abolishing Obamacare would also eliminate coverage for pre-existing conditions, a feature that was resoundingly popular in Missouri. To defend himself, Hawley claimed that the lawsuit targeted the individual mandate but would have no impact on those with pre-existing conditions. Rather than battling with McCaskill on shaky ground,

President Trump Wades into the Missouri Senate Race



Source: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1006992524366503941>

Hawley skillfully pivoted to wedge issues – like immigration, social flashpoints, and gun control – which allowed him to define his opponent as more liberal than Nancy Pelosi.

When the votes were counted on election night, Hawley had comfortably defeated McCaskill by a six point margin. Even though McCaskill had outperformed Hillary Clinton's showing in the state two years earlier, in 2018, she could not hang onto her seat. The post-mortem on this election continues, but it raises some serious questions for Democrats running in red states. Is a strategy that hedges ideologically in order to keep more voters in play more effective than running on traditional Democratic principles, owning them, and letting the voters decide? At the end of the day, this is the central philosophical battle within the Democratic Party. It was ignited by Trump, but losses like the one in Missouri demonstrate the pressing need for Democrats to rethink their campaign playbook.

Fidelity, Firearms, and Fraud in Florida

Like a mirror image, Florida governor Rick Scott has had to pull a “reverse-McCaskill” in his race against incumbent Senator Bill Nelson. A close ally of Trump for many years, Scott has had to plot out a strategy that will allow him to win a race in a state Trump barely carried in 2016 (winning by 1.2 percent), and in which the president's popularity eroded by 17 percentage points in the first half of 2018.²⁰ This scenario put Governor Scott in the dangerous position of having to disavow Trump in order to avoid alienating potential swing voters. Yet, Scott managed to thread the needle. Tragic events such as the Parkland school shooting and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico provided Scott with an opportunity to both show independence from the White House and do what was right. In the case of Parkland, Scott advanced a measure in the State House in Tallahassee that raised the age of buying firearms from 18 to 21. While this may seem like a token gesture, it represents a historic achievement in gun control in the state of

Florida. As for Hurricane Maria, this case might be more cynical. In the aftermath of the catastrophic storm that decimated Puerto Rico in 2017, Governor Scott watched President Trump mishandle the federal government's reaction to fellow Americans affected by the storm. The president's negligent response created a flash point for Florida's Puerto Rican community, and the estimated 50,000 to 75,000 Puerto Ricans who would resettle in Florida and be eligible to vote in the state's 2018 elections would remember Trump's slight as well. Scott successfully distanced himself from the White House on both gun control and disaster relief, and managed to do so without drawing the ire of the president. It is one of the rare occasions in which a perceived betrayal of Trump got a pass, demonstrating the political importance of Florida.

Given the aging demographics in Florida, Scott took a relatively progressive position on preserving Social Security and Medicare. He also pronounced that health care is a right and vowed to oppose any removal of coverage for pre-existing conditions. Like Hawley in Missouri, the Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi is party to the lawsuit seeking to dismantle Obamacare, but the governor has indicated that the AG took this action without his knowledge or input. In the 2018 race, Scott also takes an uncharacteristically moderate position on the environmental issues that impact Florida, with a specific focus on toxic algae, which featured prominently in this race. Scott's record on environmental issues, as his opponent was quick to point out, is inconsistent with his campaign stance. As governor, he has opposed stricter water quality rules, reduced water management budgets, and repealed a septic tank inspection law – all anti-environmental positions. He was also a vocal supporter of Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord.

On television and online, Scott ran numerous ads on the issues above, but he also wasn't shy about going negative against his rival, Bill Nelson. Scott levied charges of incompetence, corruption, and being an "empty suit" on Nelson. The governor frequently insinuated that the septuagenarian Nelson is often "confused." Scott may have thought that challenging the mental acuity of an elderly man was a clever gambit, but in retiree-filled Florida, it seemed like a tactic that could backfire on the governor.

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson first came to Washington as an elected member of the House in 1979, and returned to the Capitol to take up a Senate seat in 2001. Like other Democrats in this cycle, Nelson sought to steer clear of the hot-button distractions being peddled by President Trump and his followers via social media and mainstream media. Nelson focused on his record defending the environment, protecting Medicare and Medicaid from cuts, advocating for lower drug prices, and ensuring that future tax reductions would benefit the middle class. President Trump challenged Nelson via Twitter on his environmental record:



For most of the campaign, polls had this race within the margin of error, and, therefore, too close to predict. When the final results came in, we learned just how

accurate the polling had been. With more than eight million votes cast, the difference between Rick Scott and Bill Nelson favored the governor by just 0.15 percent, which triggered a manual recount. The President was quick to respond:



And right on cue, right-wing digital platforms began circulating conspiracy theories to undermine the democratic process in Florida. In the case of *Breitbart News*, the headline combined the rare trifecta of anti-semitism, anti-Hillary, and dubious fraud accusations at once: “Soros-Tied Hillary Alumni Group Helping to Organize Volunteers for Florida Recount.” Not to be outdone, the Neo-Nazi online publication the *Daily Stormer* opted for an article featuring racist imagery and blaming the recount fiasco on “Broward Jews,” referring to the county in Florida that is home to a large Jewish community. Perhaps most disturbing is the link the *Stormer* piece makes directly to the President’s tweet alleging that this race is in the process of being stolen. As this publication went to print, the recount in Florida was underway, but with multiple lawsuits pending, it could be some time before the victor in this race is known.** But one thing we do know is that the way the president uses social media may undermine trust and confidence in American elections.

Both a Wave, and a Tsunami

In the run-up to the 2018 midterm elections, the conventional wisdom in Washington was that this campaign would end with a blue wave of Democrats sweeping House Republicans out of power. With gains of approximately 35 seats in Congress’s lower chamber, the dynamics in the U.S. Capitol are about to change. New leadership will replace the committee chairmen and rank-and-file Republicans who refused to act as a check on some of the White House’s most controversial policy choices including the Muslim travel ban and family separation of immigrants at the border. With a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and Republicans no longer controlling all levers of power, there is an opportunity to restore credibility to an important pillar of American democracy. Divided government is a good thing; it allows for the checks and balances envisioned by the Founding Fathers. Shared control over institutions gives both parties a stake in the success of the outcomes. From tax reform in 1986 to the welfare overhaul ten years later, Presidents Reagan and Clinton, respectively, presided over divided governments that yielded meaningful results. Whether that is possible, given the current toxicity in the political domain, is an open question.

While the blue wave received the lion’s share of attention this campaign season, the information tsunami that defined the 2018 election was largely overlooked. The contours of the national dialogue were initiated online and were amplified through the infinite number of digital channels disseminating information to Americans at a breakneck pace. Conspiracy theories, disinformation, and outright lies share the same space with credible journalists, honest politicians, and noble advocates,

** On November 18, 2018, Rick Scott was declared the winner of the Senate race in Florida.

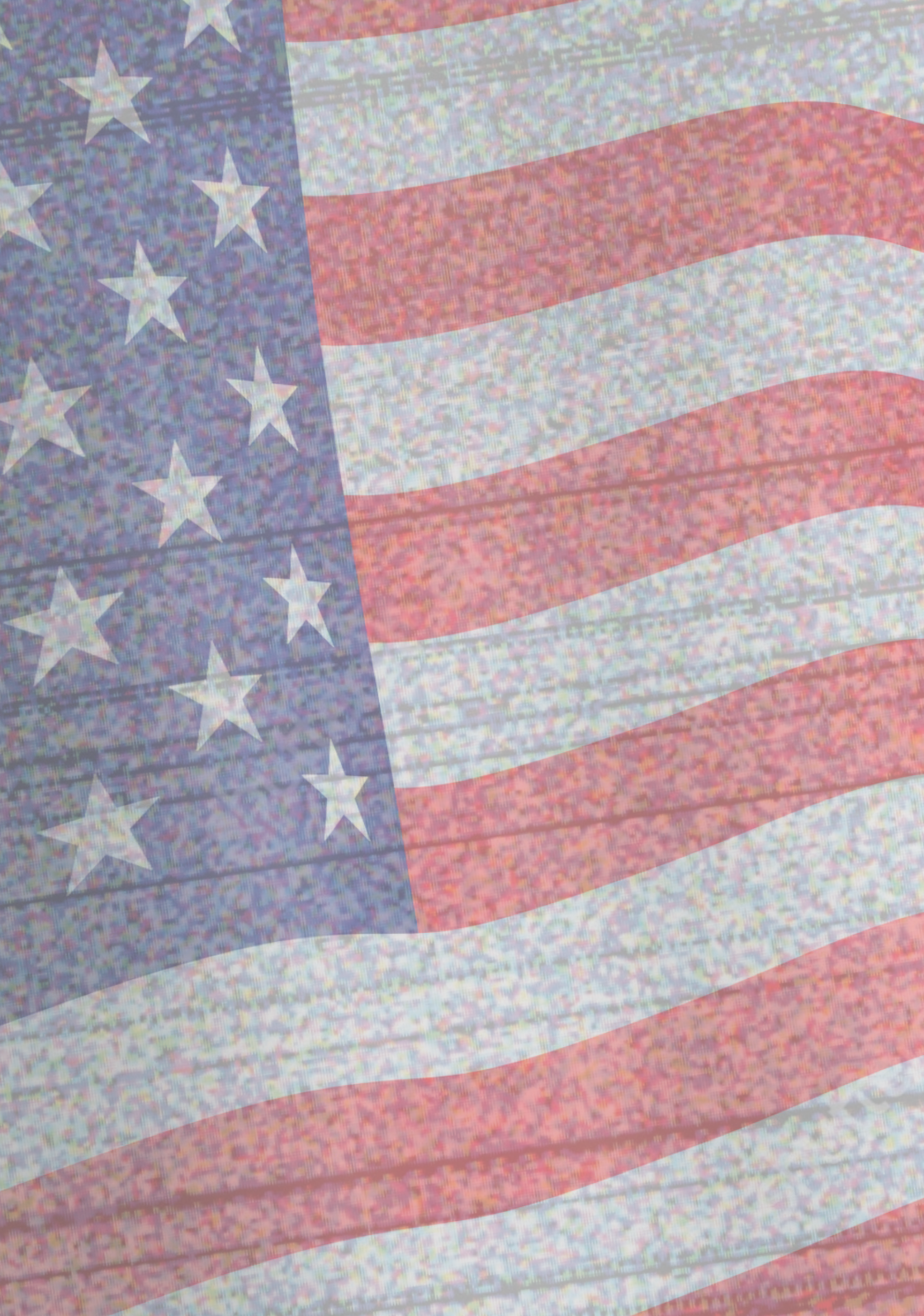
but all compete for eyeballs in the virtual arena. The most sophisticated online surfers can easily get lost in the undertow, disoriented by the volume and pace of information at hand. We saw in the 2016 general election, and again in the 2018 midterms, how well-meaning candidates

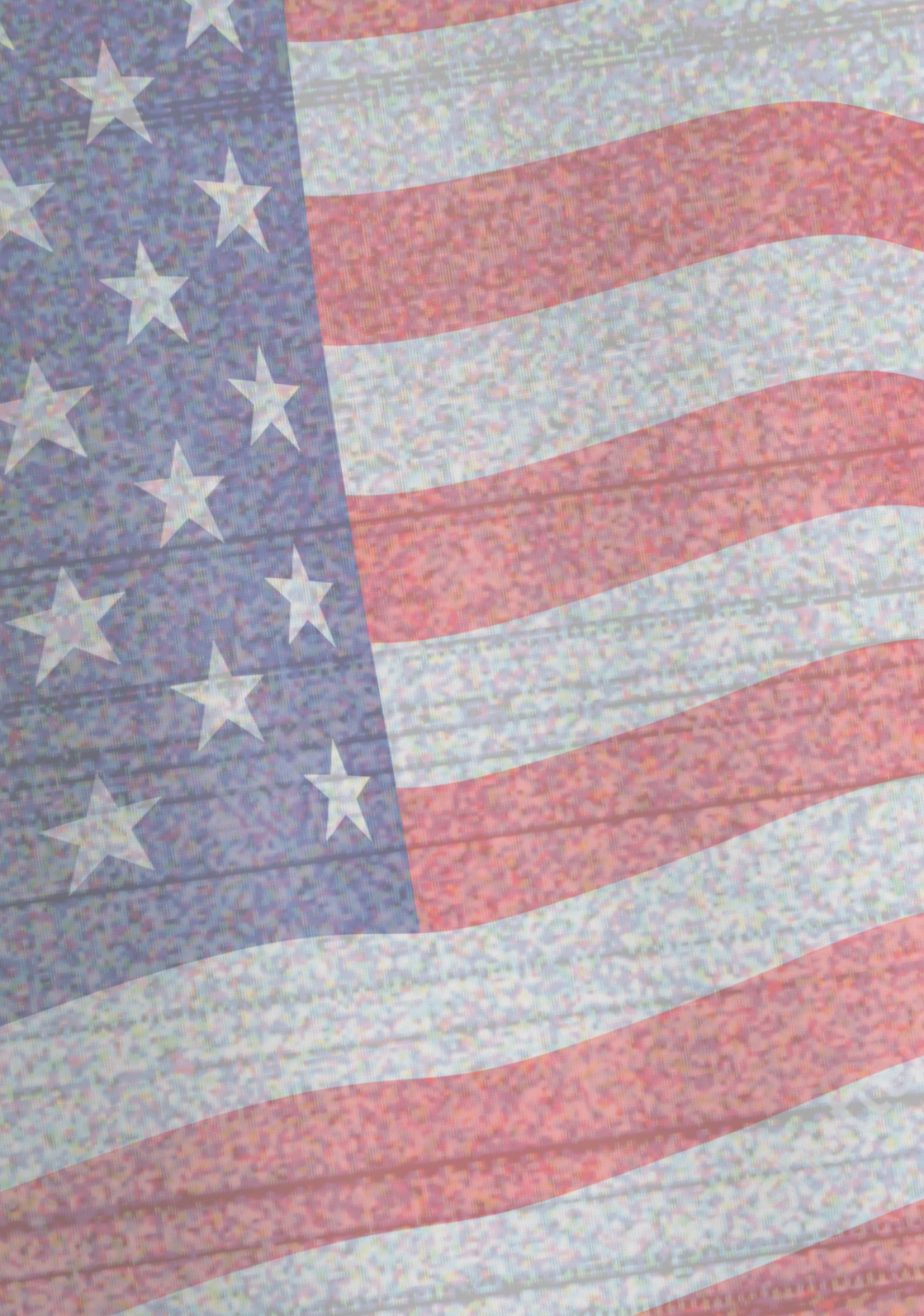
can quickly lose control of their own campaigns due to the shocks and stresses online influences create.

Anthony Silberfeld is the Director of Transatlantic Relations at the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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Technology's Impact on the U.S. Midterms

By David Becker and Jennifer Lovell

The 2018 midterm elections were like none other in U.S. history. After the documented effort by Russia to influence the 2016 elections, both through disinformation efforts and attacks on American election infrastructure, election administrators and federal officials began working more closely than ever before to secure systems in expectation of further efforts to destabilize elections. Perhaps just as importantly, the media was attuned to this issue as never before, often inflaming concerns of foreign “hacking” while failing to outline the significant cybersecurity efforts at the federal, state, and local levels.

The result was that, as some predicted, the 2018 elections were the most secure in American history.¹ Despite hysteria from the media and others, often claiming the elections had “already been hacked,”² or vastly overstating election system vulnerabilities, election officials in the U.S. did their jobs to protect the systems. Turnout was also historically high. It’s estimated that almost half of all eligible voters turned out – the highest turnout for a midterm general

election in 100 years.³ But efforts to use technology to delegitimize democracy and elections in the U.S. will continue, and it’s unclear what the long-term effects of those efforts will be.

There is also a consensus that the goal of these attacks was not to change actual vote totals, but to erode American voters’ trust in their electoral system.

In this chapter, we will explore the very real threat of interference in our election systems and the significant steps that



have already been made to fortify election infrastructure. We will also investigate the role of technology in aiding election efficiency and accuracy, as well as the way in which technology is being used to undermine the legitimacy of elections and democracy.

The Threat is Real

The threat of interference in U.S. elections is real. The Intelligence Community agrees that Russia attempted to interfere in the 2016 presidential election through cybersecurity attacks and disinformation campaigns. There is also a consensus that the goal of these attacks was not to change actual vote totals, but to erode American voters' trust in their electoral system. In order to combat future interference campaigns and regain the trust of the American people, we must be aware of past and present threats as well as vulnerabilities in the system, address these vulnerabilities in order to prevent and disable and future attacks, and effectively communicate to the public the security of U.S. elections.

A 2017 Intelligence Community assessment found with "high confidence"

that "Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the [U.S.] presidential election" and that Russia's first goal was "to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process."⁴ Malicious Russian cyber actors scanned several states' websites and voter registration databases (VRDBs) for vulnerabilities and in some instances were able to gain access to thousands of voters' information including names, dates of birth, addresses, driver's license numbers, and partial Social Security numbers.⁵

"Russian actors scanned databases for vulnerabilities, attempted intrusions, and in a small number of cases successfully penetrated a voter registration database. This activity was part of a larger campaign to prepare to undermine confidence in the voting process. The Committee has not seen any evidence that vote tallies were manipulated or that voter registration information was deleted or modified."

- U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Russian Targeting of Election Infrastructure During the 2016 Election*⁶

There was an extensive investigation of votes in 2016 – perhaps the most extensive ever – and no evidence was found to suggest any vote totals or voter information were removed or changed.⁷ However, we must remain vigilant against future interference, as it is likely to occur.⁸

More than ever before, states today are well-informed of the threat and are tirelessly working to fortify their election systems against it.

U.S. Elections Are Safer Than Ever Before

Despite some narratives to the contrary, officials have made significant progress in responding to this threat. In fact, the

2018 midterms were more secure than any elections ever before. Following the 2016 presidential election, cybersecurity and election infrastructure came to the forefront amid reports of Russian hacking efforts. The news of this Russian interference triggered an unprecedented response from election officials at the federal, state, and local levels. More than ever before, states today are well-informed of the threat and are tirelessly working to fortify their election systems against it. Furthermore, they are collaborating and forming partnerships which allow them to work together quickly and effectively.

One of the strengths of the United States' electoral infrastructure is its technical diversity and administrative decentralization. Since elections are run at the state and local levels, rather than the federal level, there isn't one single election at any given time – in fact, there are more like 10,000 local elections all being held on Election Day. This can actually strengthen the U.S.'s electoral resistance to threats, since it would be difficult for a malicious actor to attack all these diverse systems simultaneously.



After the 2016 election, election infrastructure in the U.S. was designated “critical infrastructure,” and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was tasked with coordinating the response to the threat of foreign interference in American elections.⁹ When DHS first reached out to strengthen their relationship with election officials, many were hesitant to work closely with the federal government, since election administration has traditionally been a task left to the states. Understandably, many state election officials were skeptical of federal involvement in election administration. However, as DHS expanded their partnership with the states, they proved themselves to be respectful and helpful partners. Through this partnership, DHS helps manage risk to election systems, advise on cybersecurity best practices, and facilitate information sharing among the states.¹⁰

During the 2018 midterms, over 90% of American voters lived in an area whose election infrastructure was monitored by DHS Albert sensors, a significant increase over 2016.

DHS provides advice and assistance to the states and localities in designing and implementing cybersecurity measures.

One excellent example of this aid is their Albert sensor program. Albert sensors are a network monitoring solution that provides automated alerts on network threats, allowing organizations to respond quickly when their data may be at risk.¹¹ DHS uses Albert sensors to monitor traffic to election systems and detect malicious actors and activity. During the 2018 midterms, over 90% of American voters lived in an area whose election infrastructure was monitored by DHS Albert sensors, a significant increase over 2016.¹²

But DHS isn’t just providing cybersecurity solutions, they’re also taking steps to share information directly with individual states and fostering communication channels among the states. In February 2018, the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC) was founded to act as a hub of information to be shared among DHS, election officials, and stakeholders throughout the nation.¹³ Through the EI-ISAC, election officials can share knowledge of active threats so that fellow states and localities can coordinate and develop a response to the threat in a timely and effective manner. Additionally, states and localities may share innovations and insights regarding cybersecurity and best practices in election infrastructure and administration. Today, less than a year since it was created, the EI-ISAC boasts membership of all fifty U.S. states and over 1,000 local jurisdictions.¹⁴ Through this new communication channel, election stakeholders are able to better identify, protect, and defend against gaps, vulnerabilities, and potential threats to election systems.

Outside of the EI-ISAC, there are several other ways states have improved collaboration in election security. After DHS designated election infrastructure as critical infrastructure in 2017, the

Election Infrastructure Subsector Government Coordinating Council (EIS GCC) was established.¹⁵ The EIS GCC coordinates members across all levels of government and among other election stakeholders. Their purpose is to coordinate implementation of the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) to bolster election infrastructure and further facilitate communication among election stakeholders.

States have also collaborated at various conferences and training events. In March 2018, thirty-eight states participated in the Harvard Belfer Center's training event, designed to simulate worst-case scenarios like cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns.¹⁶ Later, in August 2018, DHS held their own cyber-security training event. "Tabletop the Vote 2018: DHS' National Election Cyber Exercise" was a three-day event with forty-four states, the District of Columbia, Election Assistance Commission, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, National Institute of Standards and Technology, National

Security Agency, U.S. Cyber Command, and several private vendors.¹⁷ The event featured simulations of attacks on election systems, attacks on voting machines, spear phishing attacks, and disinformation campaigns. Participants trained to minimize the risk, protect against potential attacks, identify threats, notify the public, and respond in an effective, appropriate, and efficient manner. Through these and many other collaborative efforts between the federal government, the states, localities, and other election stakeholders, election officials are able to receive timely and important information about cybersecurity threats on the horizon, share best practices, and coordinate improvements to overall election infrastructure security.

The growing effort to bolster election security is also reflected in the increase of its funding. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 provided \$380,000,000 for distribution as Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds to "enhance election technology and make election security improvements," the first major federal funding for election



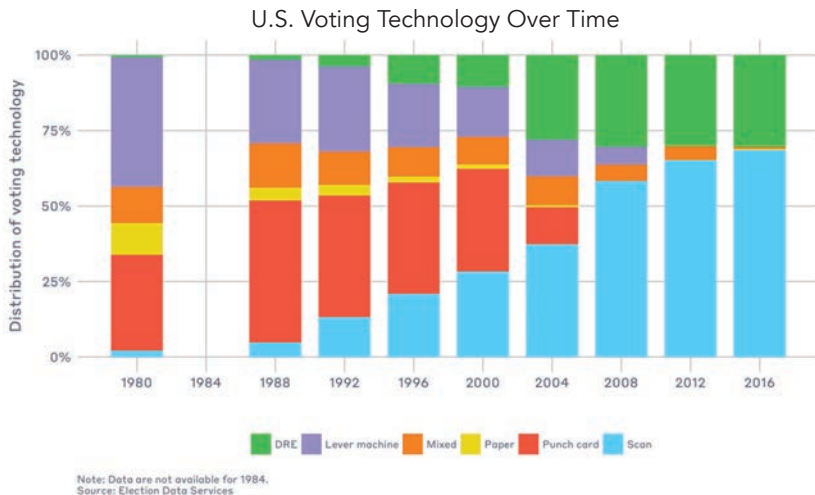
technology and security in many years.¹⁸ The EAC's instructions to states for disbursement of funds recommends that the money be distributed among the following categories: voting equipment replacement and upgrades, election audits, VRDB maintenance and security, cybersecurity, training, and communications.¹⁹

When it comes to the votes themselves, one perceived vulnerability in past elections has been the use of paperless direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting machines. These devices became popular in the U.S. following the controversial 2000 presidential election. Paperless DREs were viewed as an efficient, modern solution to the problems of lever and punch-card voting systems.²⁰ Even as early as 2004, however, computer scientists were becoming increasingly concerned about the flaws of DREs.²¹ For instance, these machines can be susceptible to tampering and do not produce a voter-verifiable, paper record, which can be audited to confirm accurate counting. These concerns were amplified over the years,

and, through training and collaboration, states became increasingly aware of DREs' vulnerabilities. As a result, the use of these machines has decreased dramatically.²²

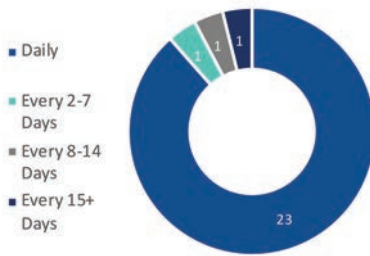
In the 2018 midterms, about 80 percent of all voters were able to vote with a paper ballot, and all states are on track to offer paper ballots to all voters by 2020.

Today, only five states (Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, New Jersey, and South Carolina) still use paperless DREs as their sole method of voting.²⁴ However, each

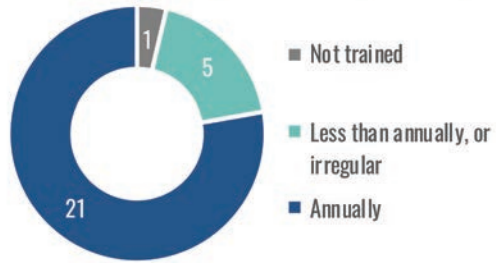


Source: MIT Election Lab, *Voting Tech*.²³

VRDB Backup Frequency



Frequency of Cybersecurity Training



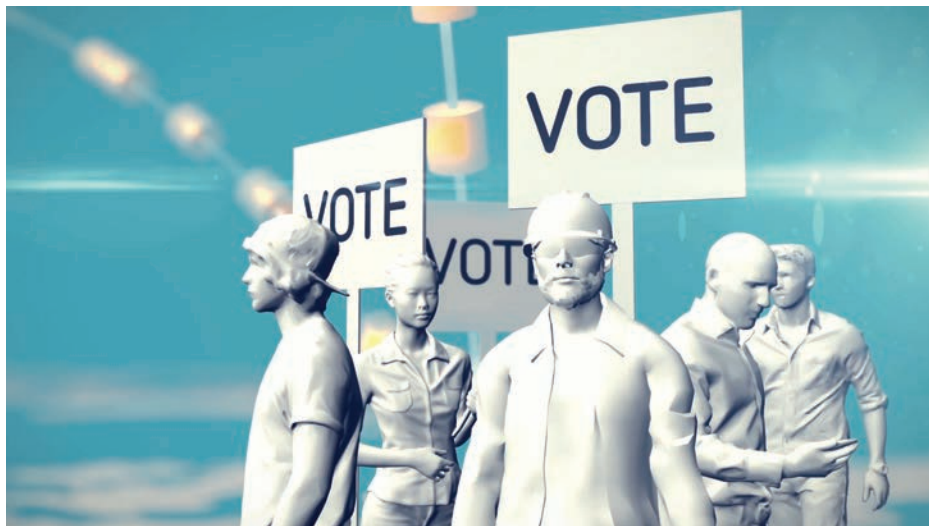
one of these states has a plan in the works to switch to a form of voting that provides a voter-verified paper audit trail.²⁵ In the 2018 midterms, about 80 percent of all voters were able to vote with a paper ballot, and all states are on track to offer paper ballots to all voters by 2020.²⁶

States are also making great improvements in the use of post-election audits. Audits verify that the vote totals reported by a vote tallying system are accurate and can identify possible machine malfunctions or other errors.²⁷ One type of audit that many jurisdictions employ is a traditional, fixed-percentage post-election audit. This requires election officials to take a certain percentage of districts or voting machines and compare the vote total to the paper record to ensure that they match. Currently, 30 states plus the District of Columbia require this type of post-election audit to be conducted.²⁸ Additionally, some states are beginning to use a new, innovative type of post-election audit called a risk-limiting audit (RLA). RLAs employ statistical principles to reduce the number of ballots that have to be audited while still ensuring with statistical confidence that the election outcome is accurate. The percentage of ballots to be audited varies depending on how close an election is. A tighter margin will mean more ballots must be counted, while a landslide result will require fewer ballots to be audited. Though this method

of post-election auditing is still relatively new to the scene, it is already being used in three states (Colorado, Rhode Island, and Virginia), and three more states (Ohio, Washington, and California) have made provisions that pave the way for RLAs in future elections.²⁹

Beyond implementation of paper ballots and post-election audits, states are taking a variety of other steps to continually improve election infrastructure security. According to Jim Condos, Vermont Secretary of State and President of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), states are regularly conducting cyber-hygiene scans, risk and vulnerability assessments, and penetration tests.³⁰ Additionally, in our 2018 VRDB Security Survey, the Center for Election Innovation & Research (CEIR) found that a large majority of respondent states were backing up their VRDBs daily and testing those backups regularly; monitoring log-in attempts and traffic; and regularly involving all VRDB users in rigorous, in-depth cyber-security training.³¹

Several states have made specific improvements to the security of their elections. Vermont, for instance, boasts a robust election infrastructure and employs a variety of best practices in election administration. The state closely monitors its cybersecurity and conducts regular vulnerability assessments. Every locality



uses voter-marked paper ballots. Since 2006, they've conducted a post-election audit following every election. Their vote tabulators are completely disconnected from one another. They back up their VRDB daily. And additionally, they allow Election Day registration (EDR) so that voters can register up to and on Election Day.³²

Colorado is another state with exemplary election security. In May 2018, the Washington Post designated Colorado as the "safest state to cast a vote"³³ – and they did so with good reason. In Colorado, every vote is recorded on paper. The state took the lead in implementing risk-limiting audits. Almost every locality uses up-to-date voting equipment. Our VRDB Security Report found that they back up their VRDB daily, monitor their systems with an Albert sensor, and require multi-factor authentication to access their VRDB. They conduct rigorous training at least annually on cybersecurity threats such as spear-phishing and employ tabletop exercises to ensure that all users are prepared for a worst-case scenario.³⁴ By nearly every measure, Colorado is excelling in election cybersecurity.

Finally, one cannot fully discuss election security improvements since 2016 without noting the progress made by Illinois. Of the states shown to have been targeted by Russian interference campaigns, Illinois was the only state in which malicious Russian actors were able to access and steal personal information of around 500,000 voters.³⁵ Illinois was quick to respond. After adding a number of fortifications to their cyber defense system, Illinois now boasts one of the most secure VRDBs in the country. According to CEIR's 2018 VRDB Security Report, Illinois reports backing up their VRDB daily and testing those backups at least weekly. They now monitor failed log-in attempts and audit traffic and API endpoints. Illinois also utilizes multiple security measures including Albert sensors and DDoS mitigation platforms. The 2016 attack on their VRDB came as a wake-up call to Illinois, and they have since taken the proper steps to bolster their systems against future attacks.

Overall, states have done a remarkable job of responding to the threat, investing resources, sharing information, and

training staff. But that's not always the story that Americans are hearing from their media.

If Russia's goal was to delegitimize democracy worldwide, and particularly in the U.S., they had help from some in the American media.

Irresponsible Coverage of Cybersecurity Concerns

Thanks to the efforts of election officials around the country, the 2018 midterms were the most secure election we've ever held. Unfortunately, however, that isn't what American voters have been hearing in recent months. Americans were fed false stories by many in the media that votes were changed in 2016 (there is no evidence of that). The media has insinuated that a child hacked a state election (he didn't), and more than one story claimed, in the weeks before the elections, that the "midterms had already been hacked."³⁶ If Russia's goal was to delegitimize democracy worldwide, and particularly in the U.S., they had help from some in the American media.

The problem with these claims isn't only that they're false. What's particularly troubling is that in an environment where citizens are constantly fed politically-driven tales that elections are rigged or that voter fraud is rampant, these stories

provide yet another reason to opt out of participating in our democracy.

Voters really should feel confident, and yet they are continually told that the states aren't ready, the midterms might be compromised, and votes might not count due to hacking. There is certainly more that remains to be done to strengthen our election system as threats to its integrity get more sophisticated – and there's no finish line when it comes to election security. However, the media's inflammatory claims about the state of our election system are not only false, they're dangerous.

Research since 2016 confirms that around half of Americans don't trust our elections to be fully fair and accurate.³⁷ The President and some other high-profile partisans are partly responsible for this, baselessly claiming elections are "rigged" and perpetuating the myth of voter fraud. In an era where at best only half of all eligible voters are voting in midterms, and 40 percent of eligible voters never vote,³⁸ Americans need to be careful not to give citizens another reason not to show up at the ballot box.

On the other hand, some media groups are doing an exemplary job by engaging with election officials and presenting the public with the full picture: the vulnerabilities, the threats, and how election officials are responding. For a good example of this, we can look to the reporting around the annual DEFCON hacking conference in Las Vegas, the largest of its kind.³⁹ In 2018, r00tz Asylum, the youth division of the conference, presented a challenge to attendees under 16: hack into simulations of state election websites.⁴⁰ Leading up to the conference, their official website described the simulations as "replicas" and "exact clones."⁴¹ However, this terminology was highly misleading at best. When the convention actually

arrived, children were presented with look-alike websites which were designed with vulnerabilities specifically for the competition. The kids were coached throughout to identify and target these vulnerabilities. The “replicas” did not have any of the security systems in place that their real-life counterparts do.⁴² Yet, as the challenge came to an end, officials touted the results, declaring that 35 kids were able to hack and exploit replicas of Secretary of State websites from six swing states.⁴³

Many media outlets latched on. Headlines following the event included “Kids as young as seven hack into election systems at DEFCON event,”⁴⁴ “Hacking the U.S. mid-terms? It’s child’s play,”⁴⁵ and “At Def Con, children show how easy it can be to hack an election.”⁴⁶ The reality of the r00tz Asylum challenge was distorted in a number of articles. One claimed it took an 11-year-old “just 10 minutes to change election results on Florida’s website.”⁴⁷ Another said the 11-year-old hacked “an exact replica of Florida’s state election website in just 10 minutes.”⁴⁸ One article went so far as to say, “Some voting systems are so easy to hack a child can do it.”⁴⁹ In a first-person account, an attendee even

claimed, “It took me around 10 minutes to crash a simulation of the upcoming midterm elections.”⁵⁰

These claims misrepresented what had actually happened, presumably to drive hysteria in a quest for more clicks. As is typical for articles of this type, they failed to reach out to election officials and experts for comment. Some in the media, however, got it right. In response to these pieces, ProPublica published an article titled “No, a Teen Did Not Hack a State Election.”⁵¹ In it, author Lilia Chang describes the false claims made by various groups surrounding the conference and the reality of the simulated websites. When media and stakeholder groups responsibly report information and rely on the insights of election officials and experts, they give Americans a fuller picture and fortify voter confidence in their election systems.

More importantly, misleading claims in our own media and social media platforms are being leveraged by foreign adversaries to sow mistrust in our elections and divide us further as a nation. An example of this was reported recently by NBC News.⁵² In 2016, a voter posted a video online, purporting to show him trying to vote for Donald



Trump, but the machine wouldn't let him, reverting his "vote" to Hillary Clinton every time. This video was a fraud, and the machine was working properly – the voter wasn't properly following instructions to change his vote. Nevertheless, Russian agents spread this video through social media, getting it retweeted over 29,000 times, with coverage by dozens of media outlets.

Russia and perhaps others will continue this tactic – finding small fissures in our society, true or not, and then widening them into a great chasm, usually through amplification of false content created by Americans on our own social media platforms. Thus, the media has an important role here, not to sugarcoat legitimate vulnerabilities and areas for improvement, but rather to contextualize the complete story – the threat and the response – so voters know that while there are very real threats to our election system, there has been a remarkable response from officials at all levels of government and from all political parties.

What's Next in American Elections

As unusual as 2018 was, we can expect 2020 to be an even bigger event. President Trump – already prone to delegitimizing our democracy with false claims of "voter fraud" or "rigged elections" when it suits his purpose – will be on the ballot seeking re-election. Foreign adversaries intent on ripping American society apart will likely seek to exploit these divisions as never before, aiming to further diminish American citizens' confidence in their own democracy.

Therefore, though excellent progress has been made so far, we have to keep improving. Some vulnerabilities still exist that must be addressed – and they largely are being addressed. It's expected that all states will offer auditable paper voting by 2020. More and more states are employing

audits and improving the rigorousness of those audits. State and local election officials are hiring more skilled technical staff and training all their workers in proper cyber hygiene. Federal agencies like DHS are bringing even more tools to bear to provide resources to state and local election offices. But it is important to remember that there is no finish line in cybersecurity. The security measures that work well today will not work forever. As the threat evolves, so too must our defense systems. Going forward, media and other stakeholder groups should be encouraged to join forces with election officials, work to set the record straight, call out vulnerabilities and problems where they exist, and report successes and progress in election infrastructure security when they occur in order to boost voter confidence.

And as we move the needle forward in election security, a steady source of adequate funding must be maintained and, when possible, increased. This will require both Congress and state legislatures to provide election officials with an ongoing stream of sufficient resources to address cybersecurity needs. Just as we rose to the occasion to make the 2018 elections more secure than those in 2016, we will need to be increasingly vigilant heading into 2020 to ensure American democracy is protected from those who oppose it.

David Becker is the Executive Director and Founder of the Center for Election Innovation and Research.

Jennifer Lovell is a Research Associate at the Center for Election Innovation and Research.

Note: The views of the authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

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- 40 <https://www.propublica.org/article/defcon-teen-did-not-hack-a-state-election>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180817023623/https://r00tz.org/2018-election-hacking-contest-for-kids>
- 41 <https://web.archive.org/web/20180817023623/https://r00tz.org/2018-election-hacking-contest-for-kids>
- 42 <https://www.propublica.org/article/defcon-teen-did-not-hack-a-state-election>
- 43 <https://twitter.com/VotingVillageDC/status/1028103170864697345>
- 44 <https://www.mynbc5.com/article/kids-as-young-as-7-hack-into-election-systems-at-defcon-event/22748250>

45 <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-45154903>

46 <https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/defcon-election-hacking/>

47 <https://www.fastcompany.com/90217635/it-took-an-11-year-old-hacker-just-10-minutes-to-change-election-results-on-floridas-website>

48 <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/8/13/17683666/florida-voting-system-hack-children>

49 <https://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/hacking-american-election-isnt-rocket-science-just-ask-kids>

50 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/08/21/i-just-hacked-a-state-election-17-not-a-good-hacker-219374>

51 <https://www.propublica.org/article/defcon-teen-did-not-hack-a-state-election>

52 <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/how-right-wing-troll-russian-twitter-account-created-2016-s-n925711>

POLLING DATA

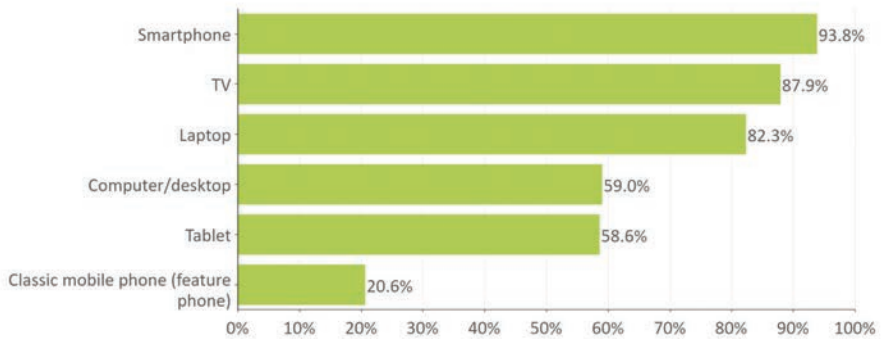
NUMBERS BEYOND THE NARRATIVES



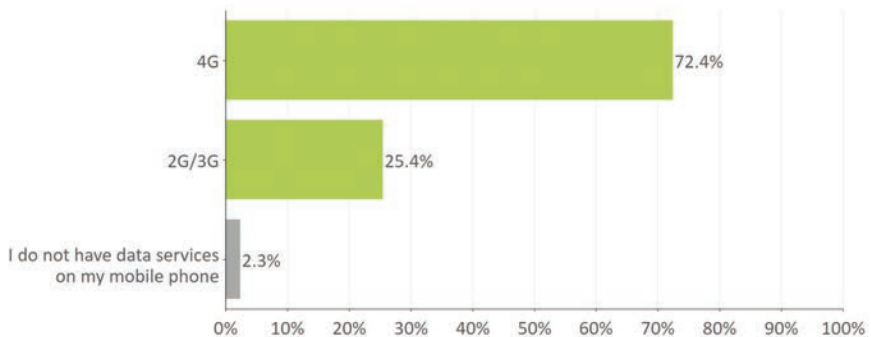
ITALY

Media Usage

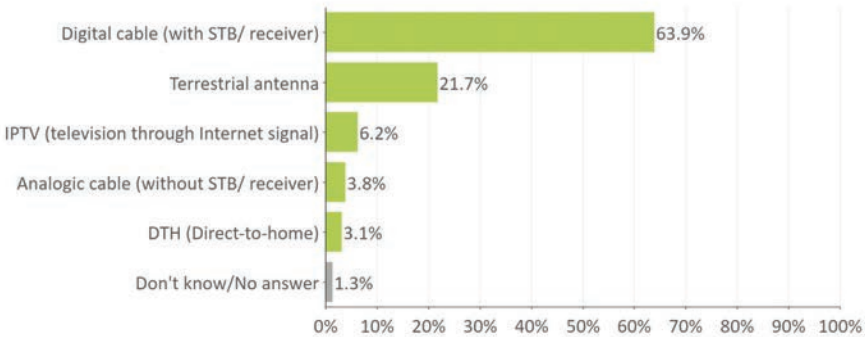
1. What types of devices do you own? (More than one answer) (N=989)



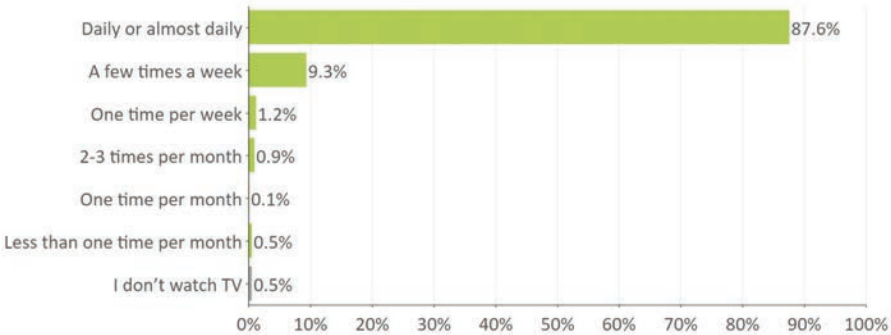
2. What type of data services (2G/3G/4G) do you have on your mobile phone? (N=927)



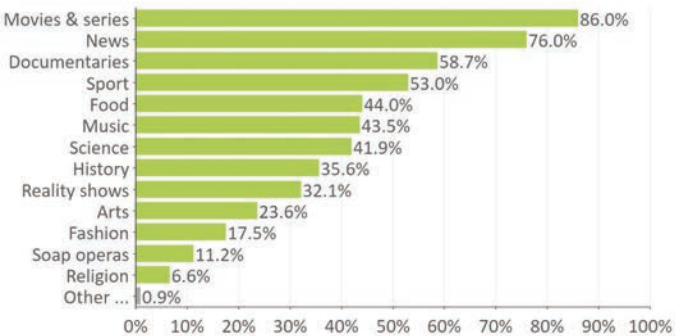
3. What type of TV services do you have in your household? (N=868)



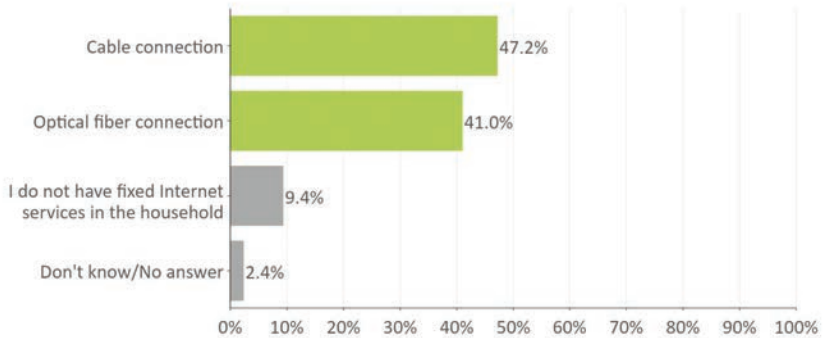
4. How often do you watch TV? (N=868)



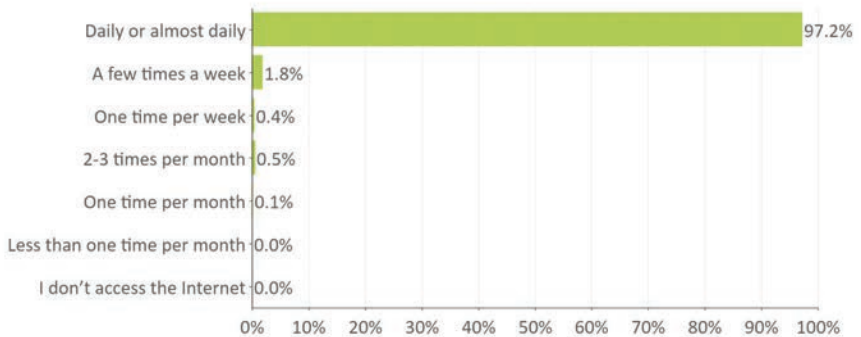
5. What types of content do you watch on TV? (More than one answer) (N=864)



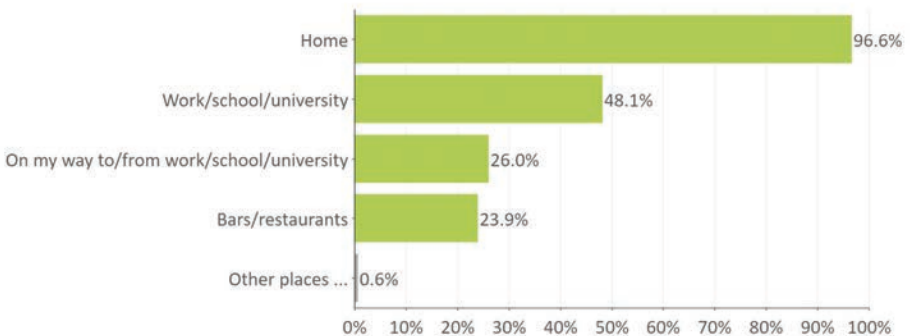
6. What type of fixed internet services do you have in your household? (N=989)



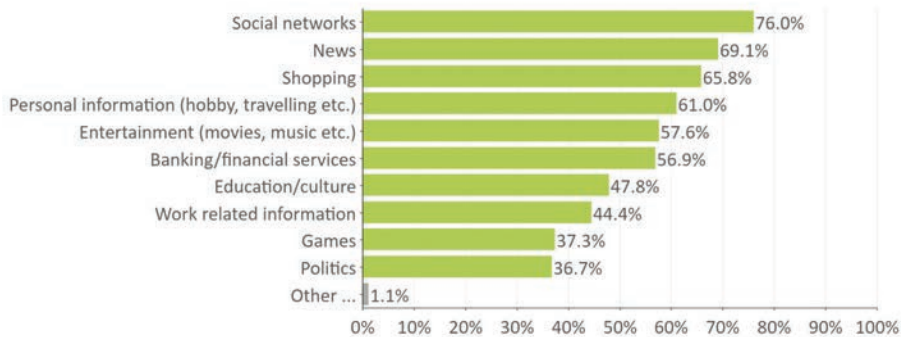
7. How often do you access the internet? (N=989)



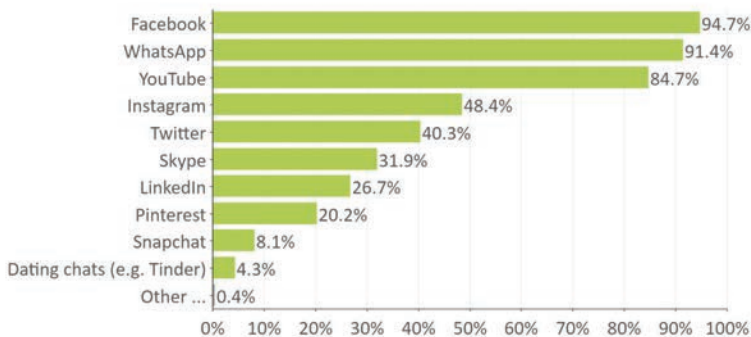
8. In general, from where do you access the internet? (More than one answer) (N=989)



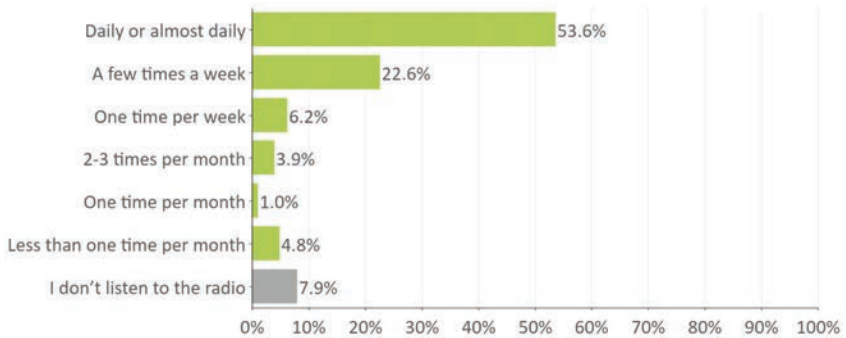
9. Which of the following types of content do you access on the internet? (More than one answer) (N=989)



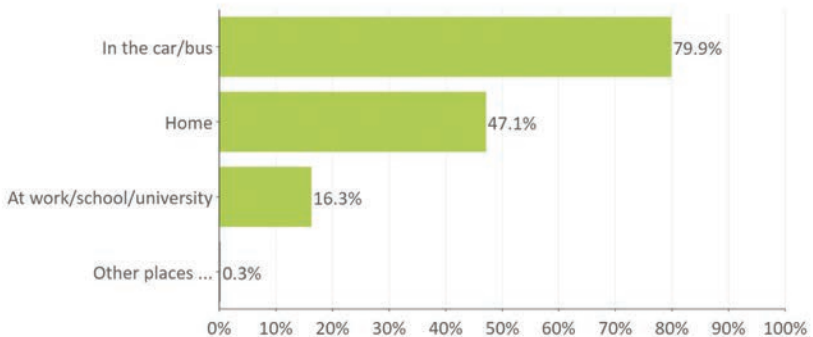
10. Which of the following websites/apps do you access? (More than one answer) (N=752)



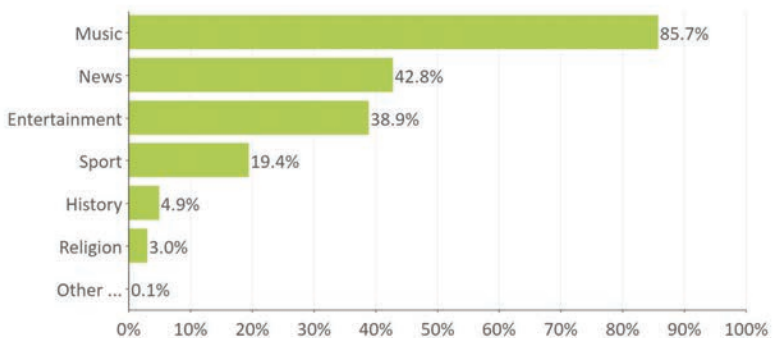
11. How often do you listen to the radio? (N=989)



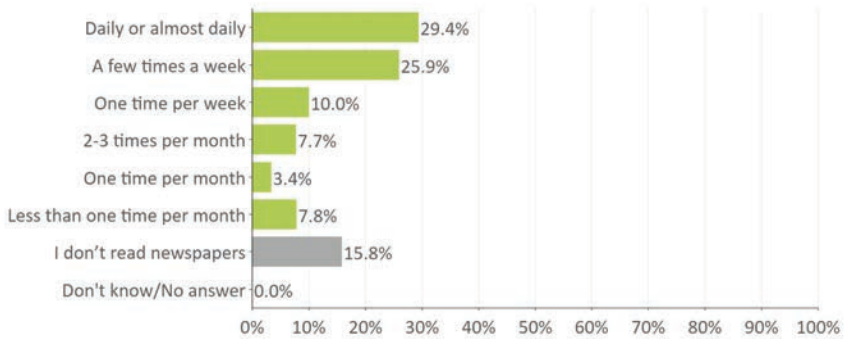
12. In general, where do you listen to the radio? (More than one answer) (N=910)



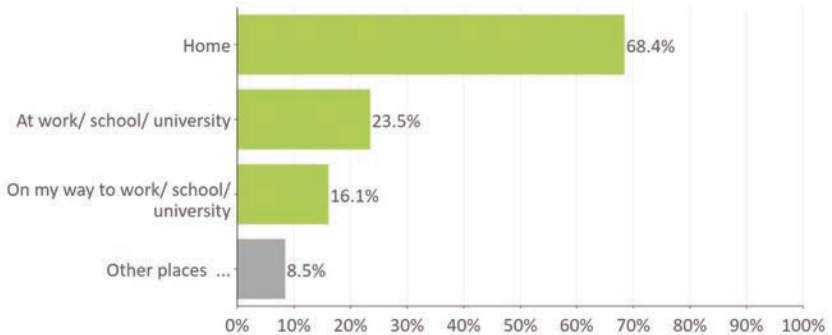
13. What types of radio shows do you listen to? (More than one answer) (N=910)



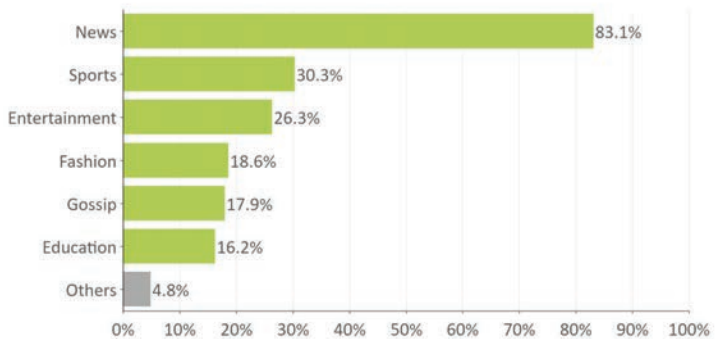
14. How often do you read newspapers? (N=989)



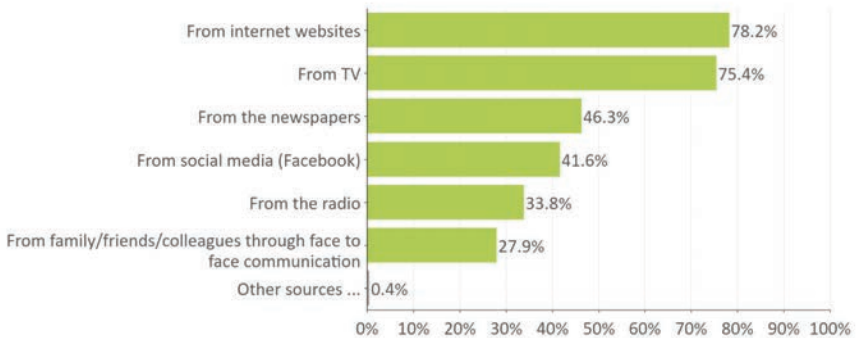
15. In general, where do you read newspapers? (More than one answer) (N=833)



16. What types of newspapers do you read? (More than one answer) (N=833)

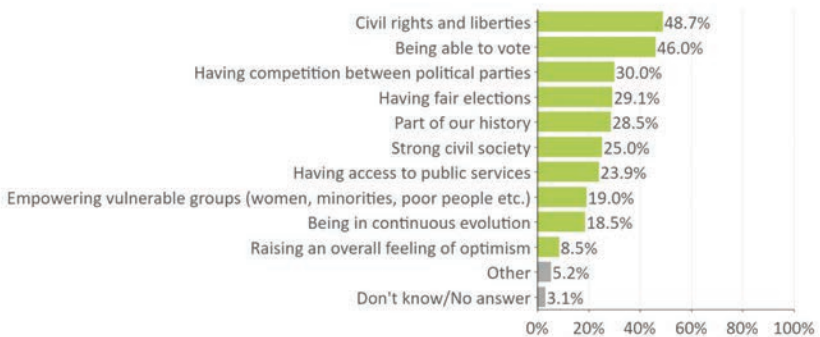


17. Generally, from which source do you get informed? (More than one answer) (N=989)

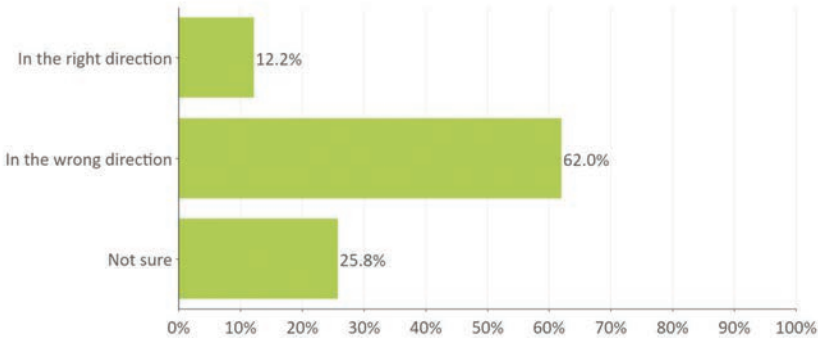


Civic and Political Engagement

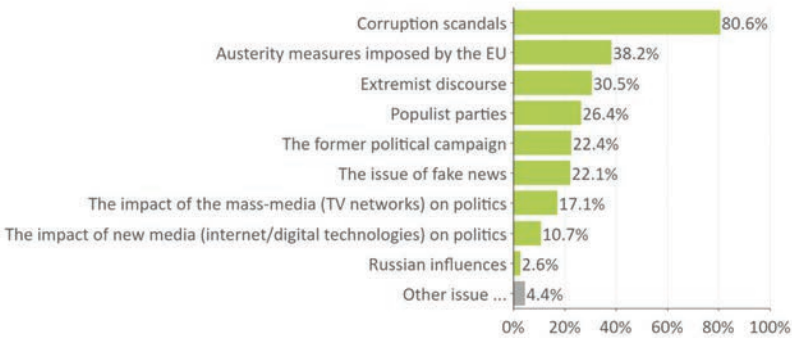
1. How would you define democracy in Italy? (More than one answer) (N=989)



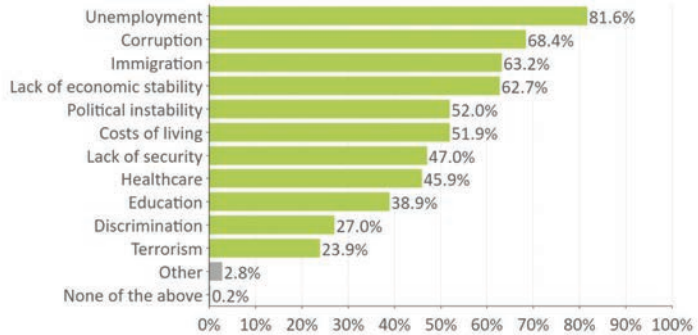
2. Generally speaking, would you say the political and economic conditions in Italy are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track? (N=989)



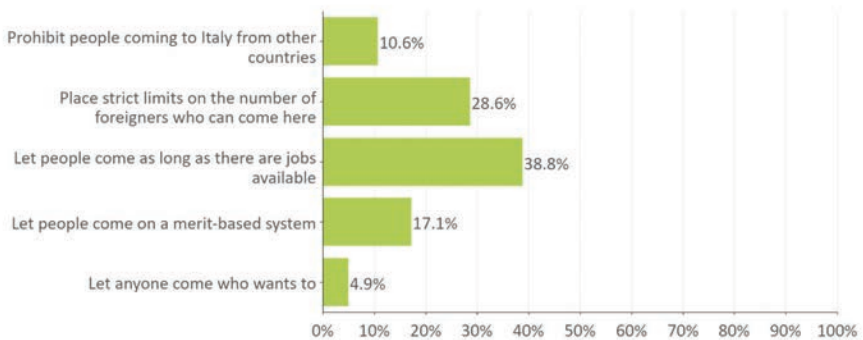
3. Why do you think that the political conditions in Italy are heading in the wrong direction? (More than one answer) (N=609)



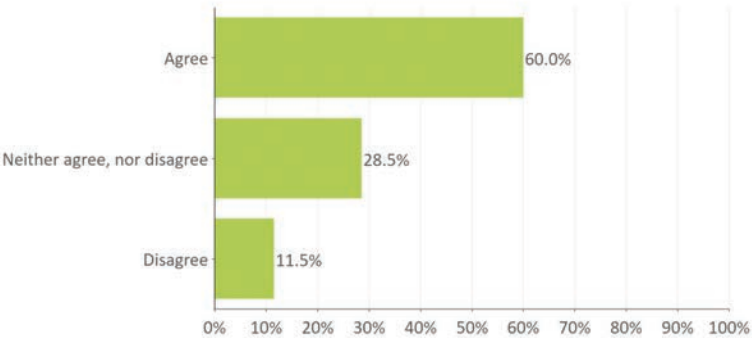
4. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing Italy today? (More than one answer)
(N=989)



5. In your opinion, which one of the following do you think the government should do?
(N=989)



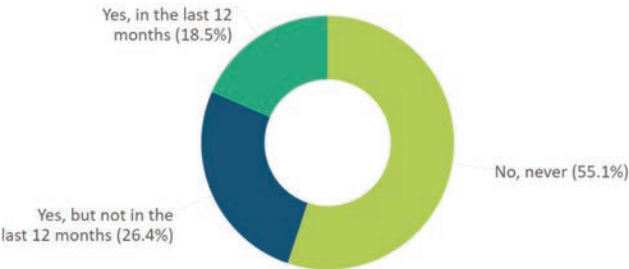
6. When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to natives over immigrants?
(N=989)



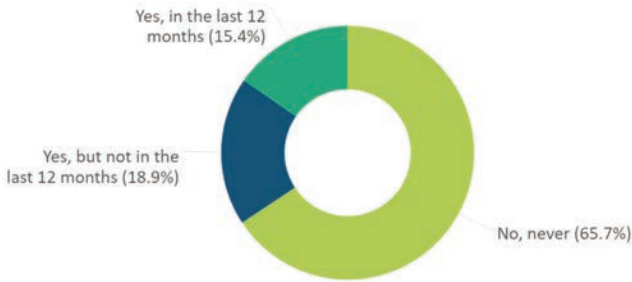
7. Would you mind having immigrants in your neighbourhood? (N=989)



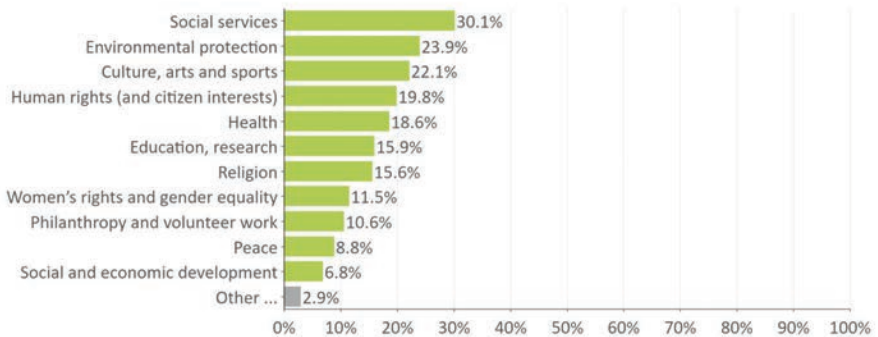
8. So far, have you been involved in solving any problems in your community? (N=989)



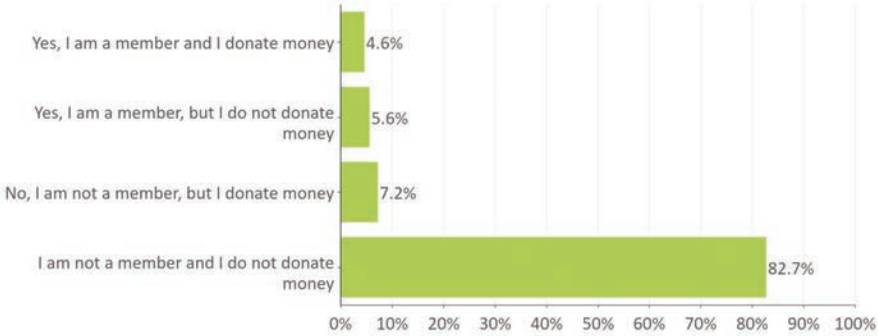
9. Have you volunteered in a group or a non-governmental organization (NGO)? (N=989)



10. In which of the following areas did you do volunteer work? (More than one answer) (N=339)



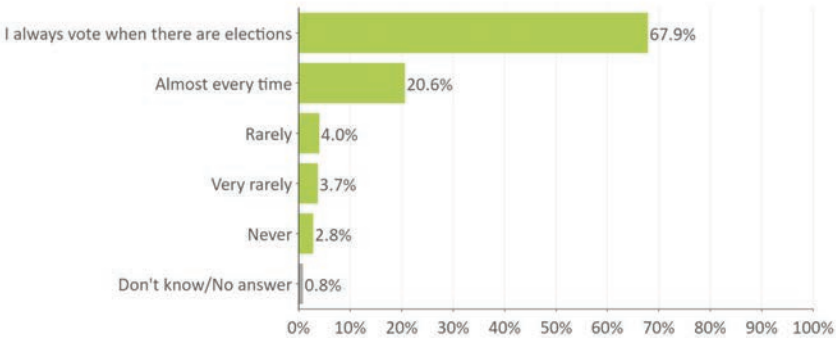
11. Some people are members of or donate money to political parties or political candidates. Are you a member of or do you donate money to such an organization? (N=989)



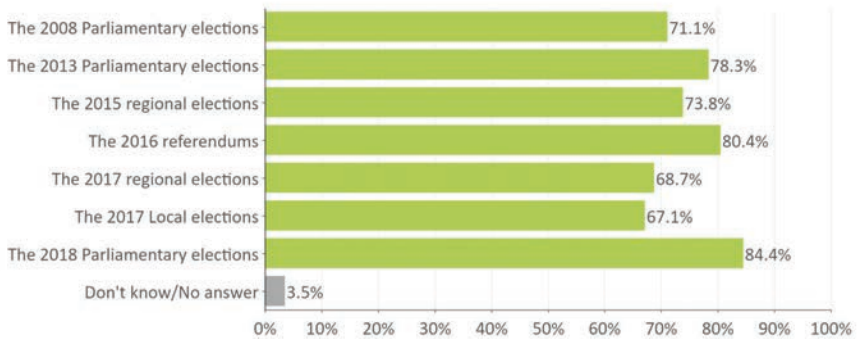
12. Are you actively involved in the organization of which you are member? (N=100)



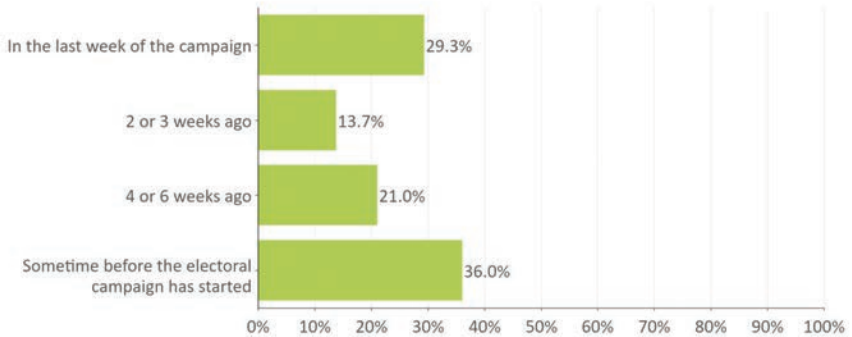
13. How often do you vote? (N=989)



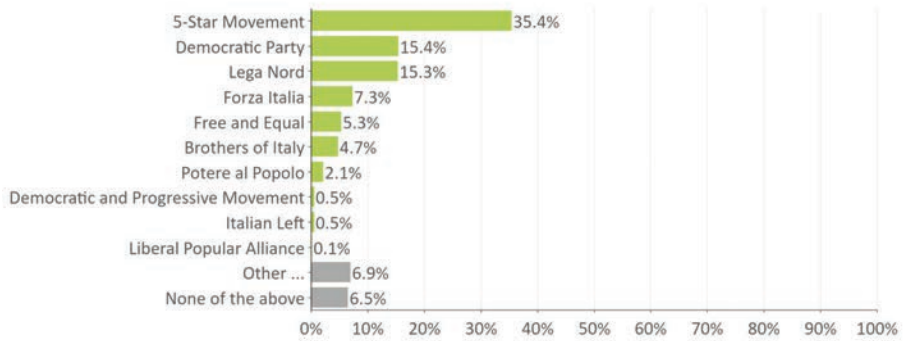
14. In which elections did you vote? (More than one answer) (N=961)



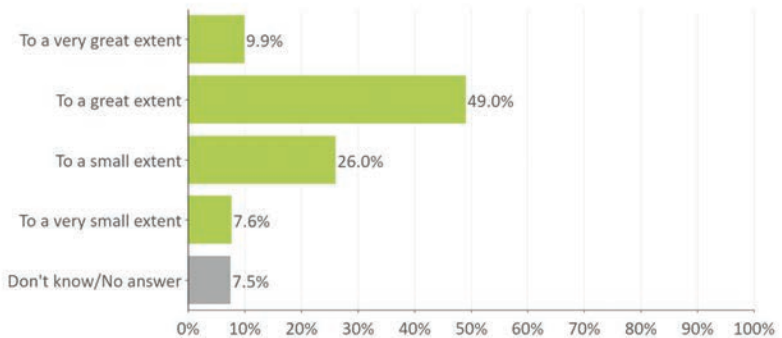
15. When did you make your decision on which party to vote for during the 2018 general elections? (N=811)



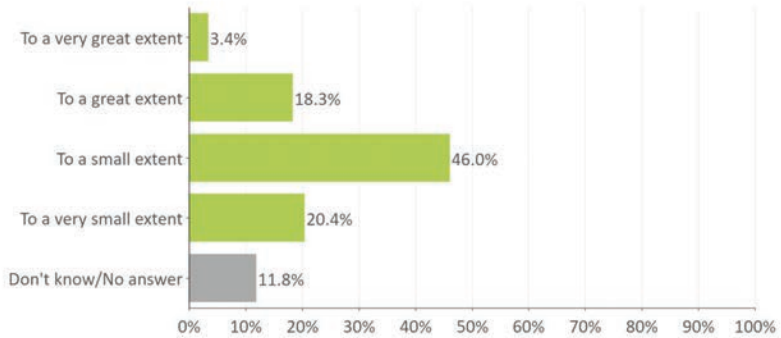
16. For which party did you vote in the parliamentary elections held on March 4, 2018?
(N=811)



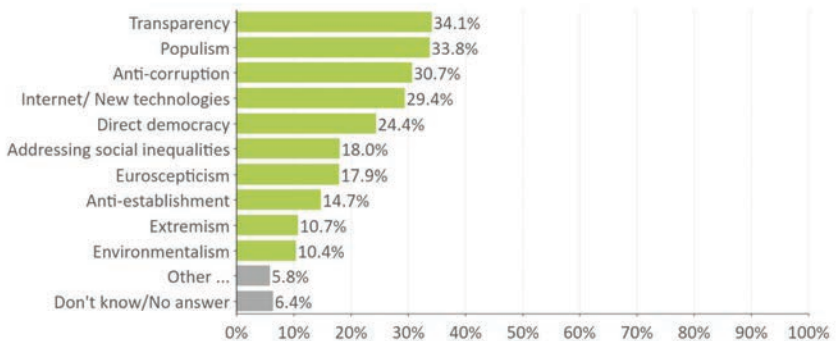
17. To what extent do you find that the voting procedures were completely fair and transparent during the 2018 parliamentary elections? (N=989)



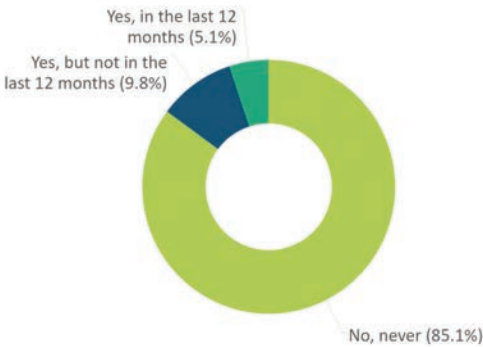
18. When thinking of the financial resources that parties have spent during the 2018 parliamentary elections campaign, to what extent do you find that the money was spent in a fair and transparent way? (N=989)



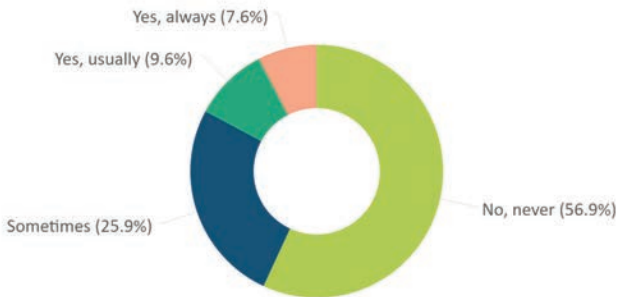
19. With which words do you associate the Five Star Movement? (More than one answer) (N=989)



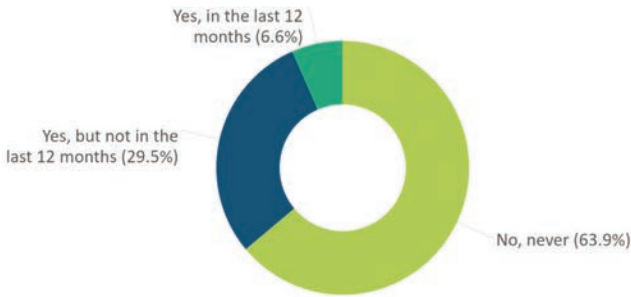
20. Have you ever volunteered for a political organization or in a campaign for a candidate? (N=989)



21. When elections take place, do you try to convince others to vote for those with whom you sympathize? (N=989)

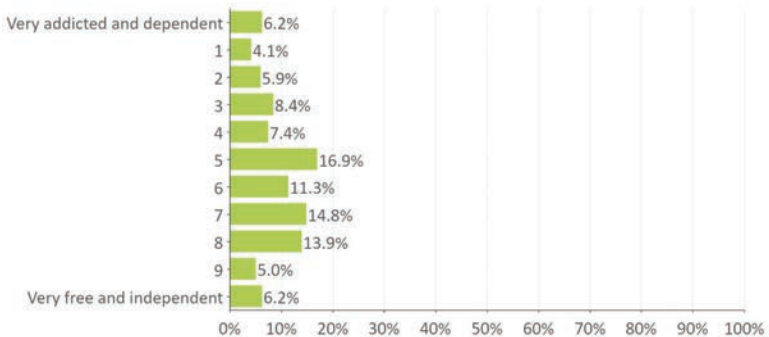


22. Have you ever participated in a protest march or demonstration? (N=989)

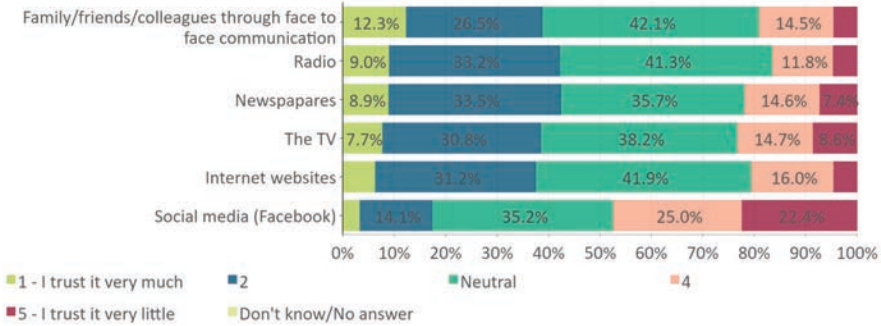


Impact of Technology on Democracy

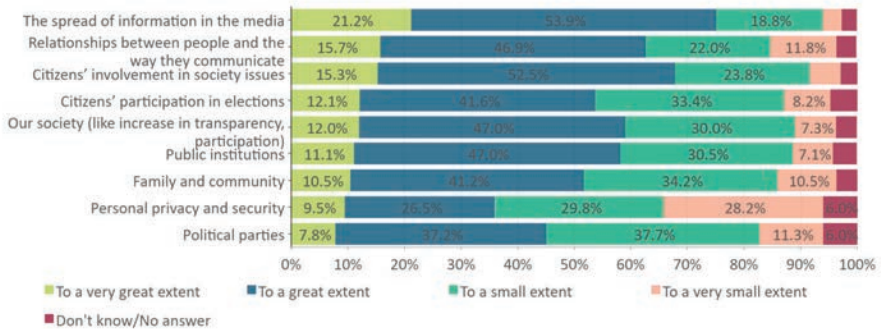
1. When thinking of your use of technology in your day-to-day life (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how would you say this usage makes you feel? Please state your answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you feel very addicted and dependent and 10 means that you feel very free and independent. (N=989)



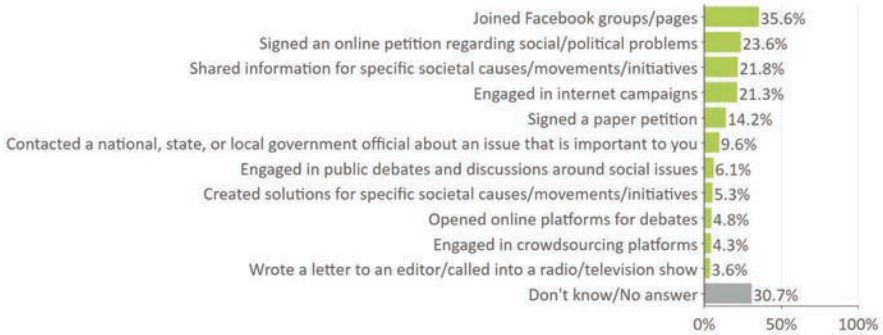
2. How much do you trust information coming from the following sources, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you trust it very much and 5 means you trust it very little? (N=989)



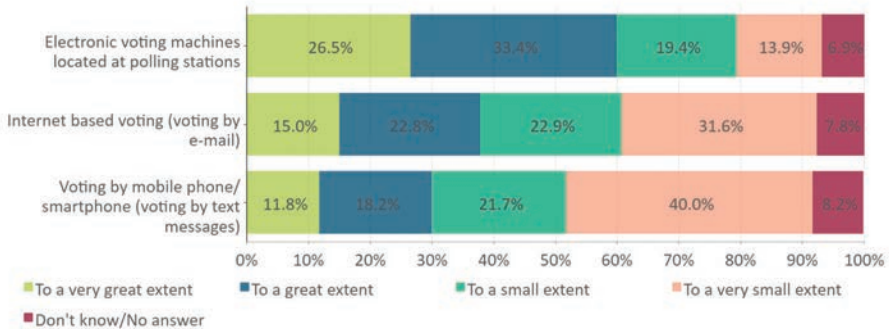
3. To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: Technology has a positive impact on.... (N=989)



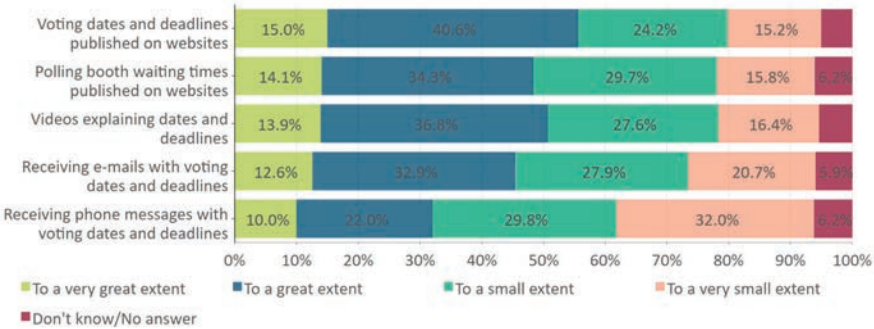
4. Which of the following actions have you performed on online platforms or social media in the last 12 months? (More than one answer) (N=989)



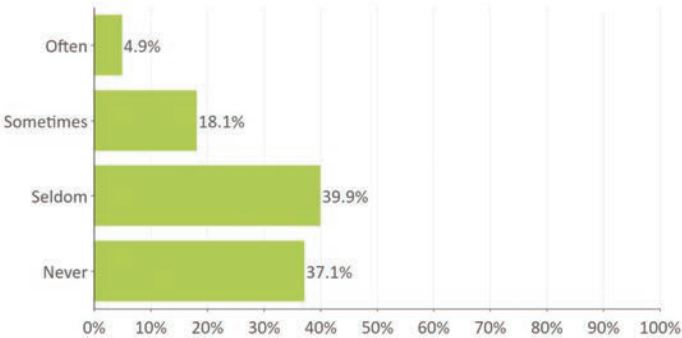
5. If possible, to what extent would you prefer...: (N=989)



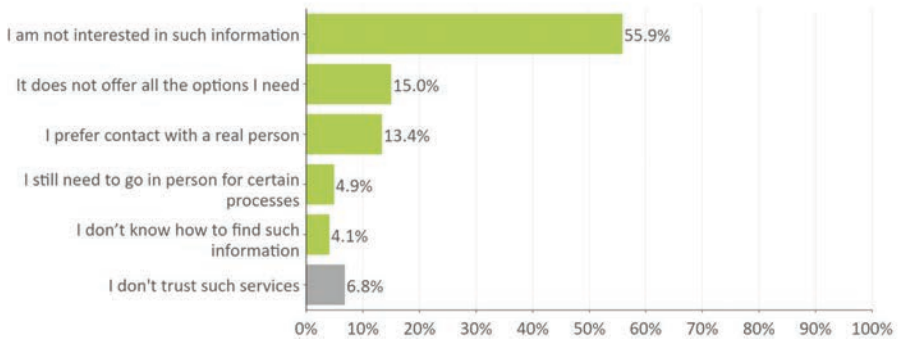
6. To what extent would you be interested in the following information regarding elections? (N=989)



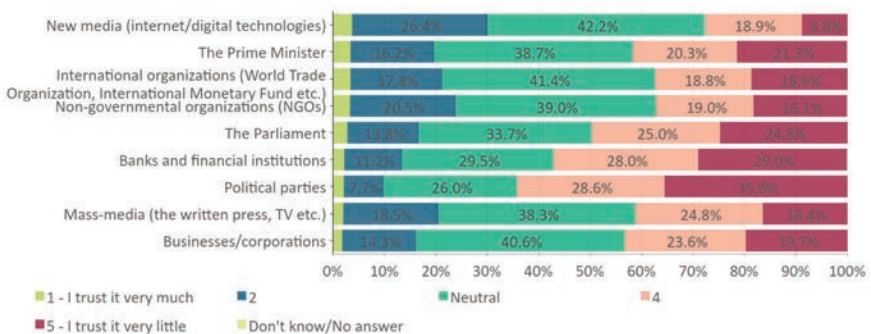
7. In an average month, how often do you go online to access government services (like www.governo.it)? (N=989)



8. What is the main reason you never access online government services (like www.governo.it)? (N=367)



9. The following list contains several institutions in Italy. Please tell us how much trust you have in each one: very much, neutral or very little. (N=989)



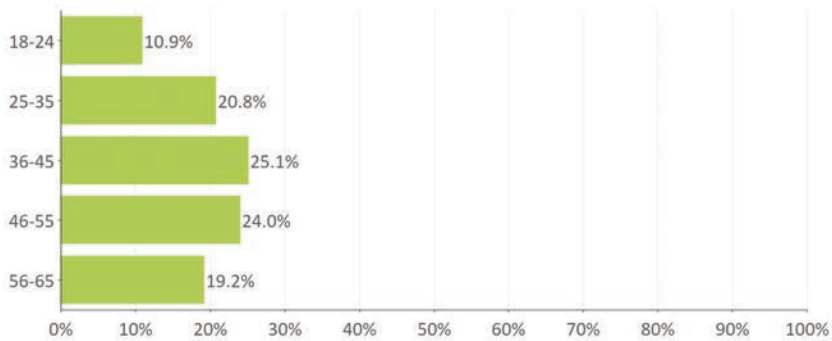
Socio-Demographic Profiling

This online survey has been conducted among 989 Italians aged 18-65. Understanding their socio-demographic profile is vital when interpreting the results.

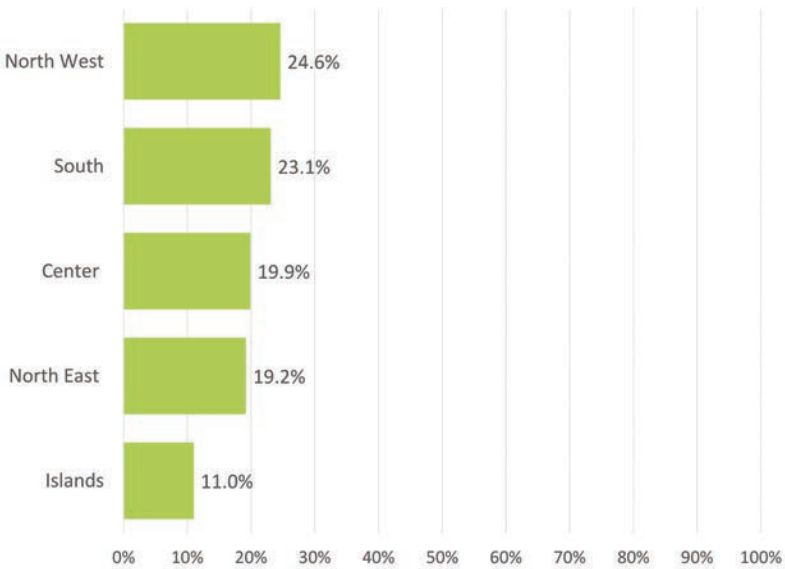
1. What is your gender? (N=989)



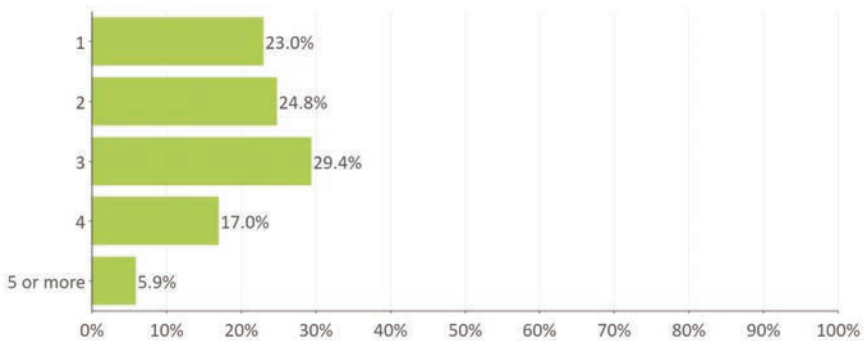
2. What is your age? (N=989)



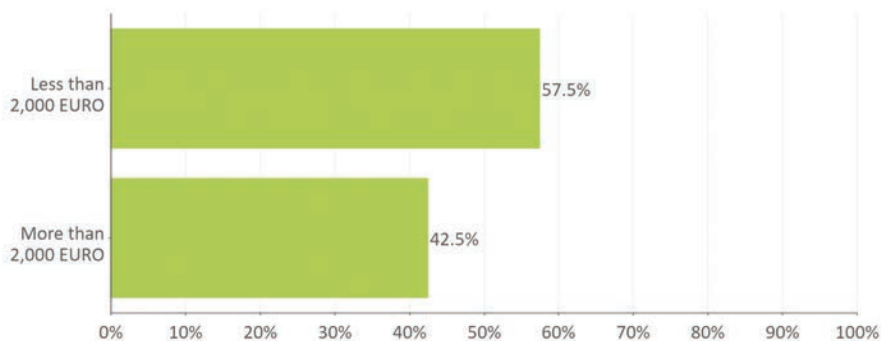
3. What is your permanent residence or the one where you spent the last 12 months? (N=989)



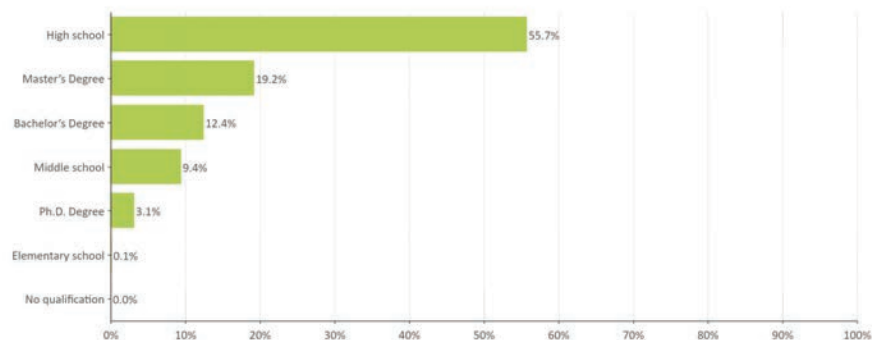
4. How many members live in your household (including yourself)? (N=989)



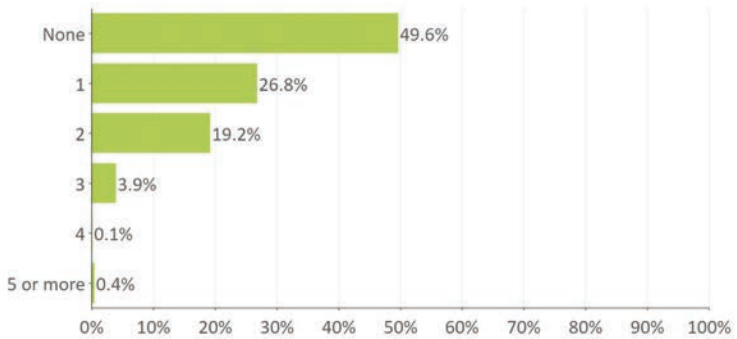
5. What is the total household net monthly income, considering all available sources of income in your household? (N=989)



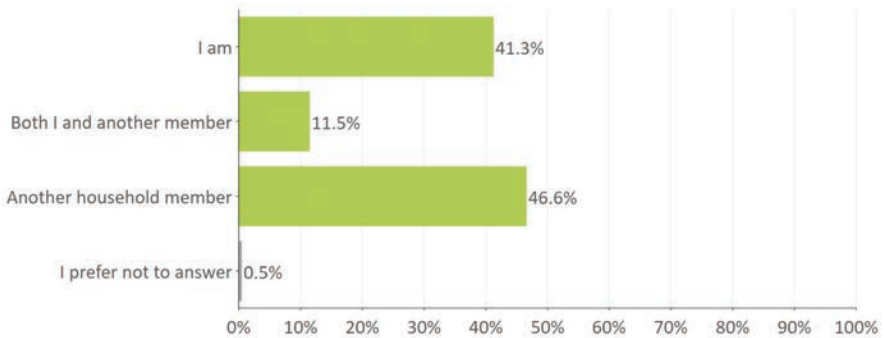
6. What is the highest degree/level of school that you have completed? (N=989)



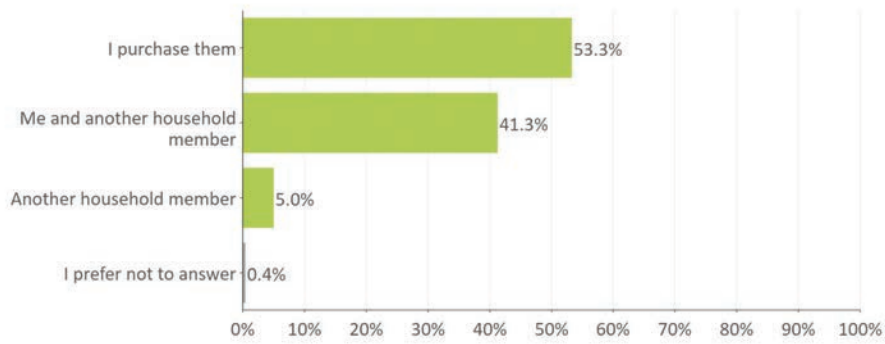
7. How many people in your household are children under 18 years of age? (N=762)



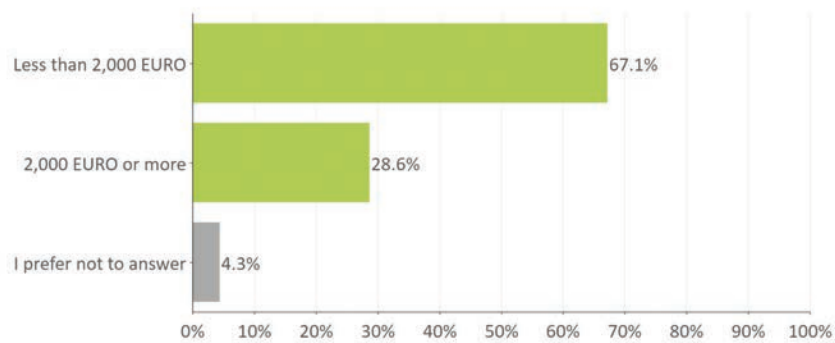
8. Who is the principal wage earner in your household? By principal wage earner in the household, we refer to the member with the highest income. (N=762)



9. Which household member is responsible for the purchases in your household?
(N=762)



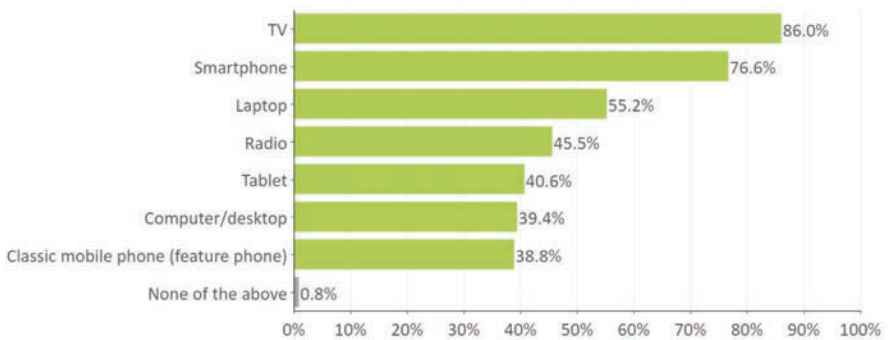
10. What is your total personal net monthly income, considering all available sources of income? (N=762)



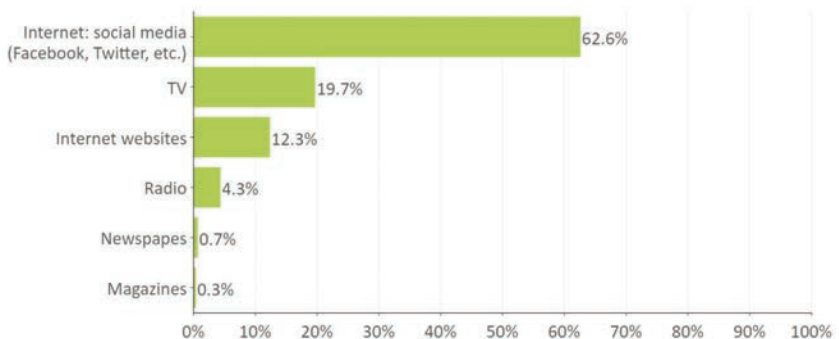
MEXICO

Media Usage

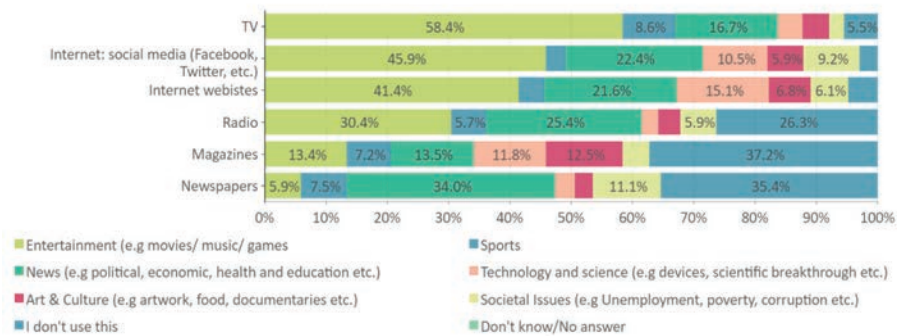
1. What types of devices do you own? (More than one answer) (N=969)



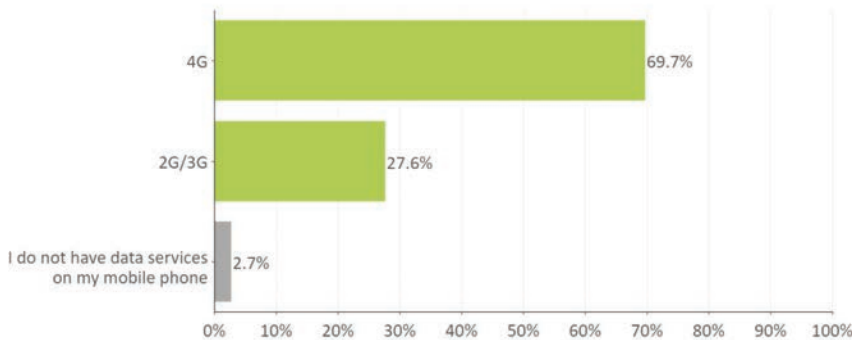
2. What type of media do you consume the most in an ordinary day? (N=969)



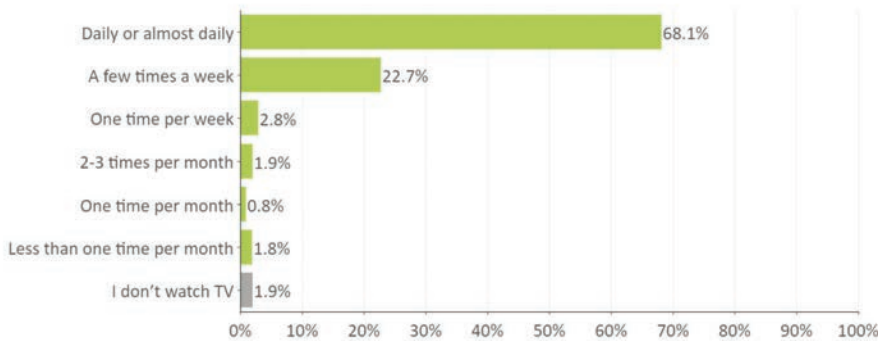
3. Please select the most common purpose for your consumption of each of the following:



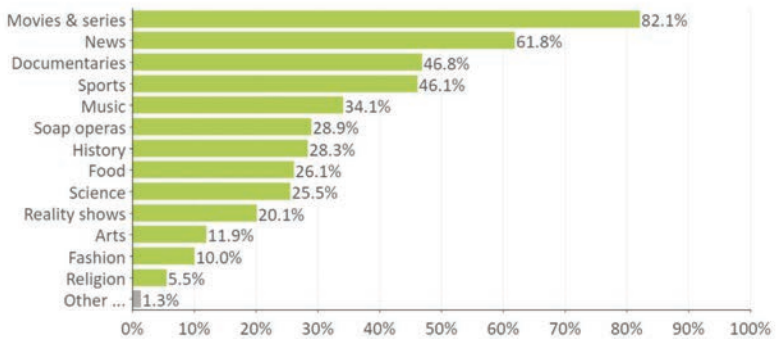
4. What type of data services (2G/3G/4G) do you have on your mobile phone? (N=742)



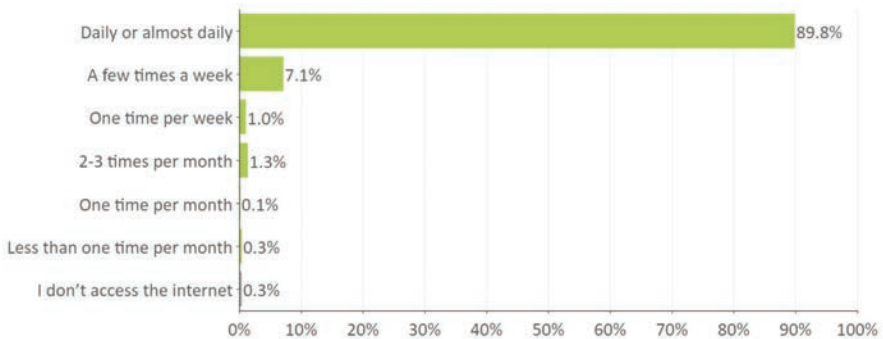
5. How often do you watch TV? (N=833)



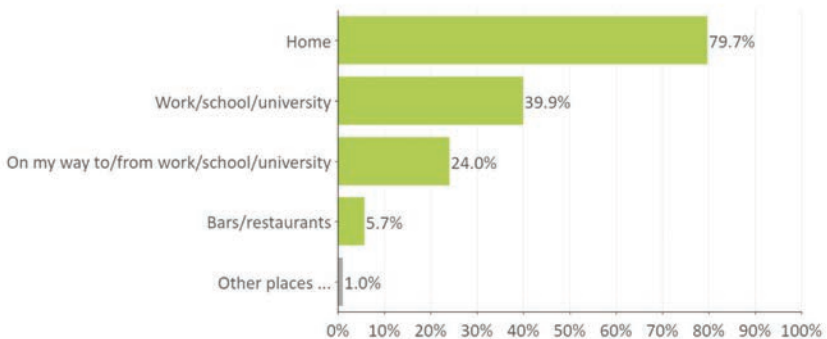
6. What types of content do you watch on TV? (More than one answer) (N=817)



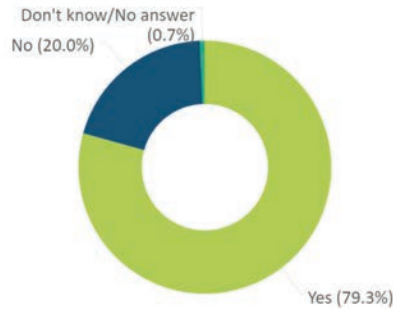
7. How often do you access the internet? (N=969)



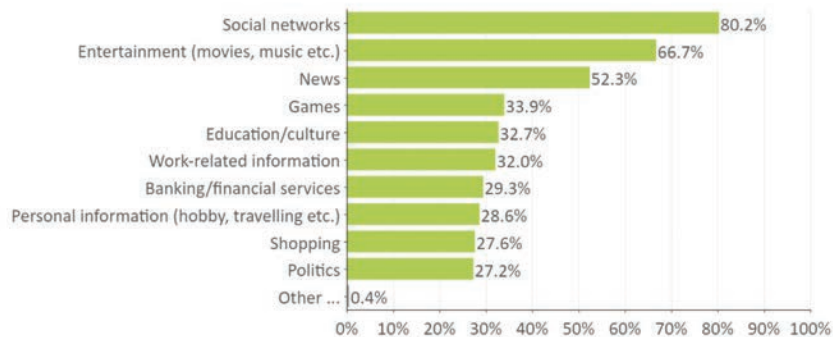
8. In general, from where do you access the internet? (More than one answer) (N=966)



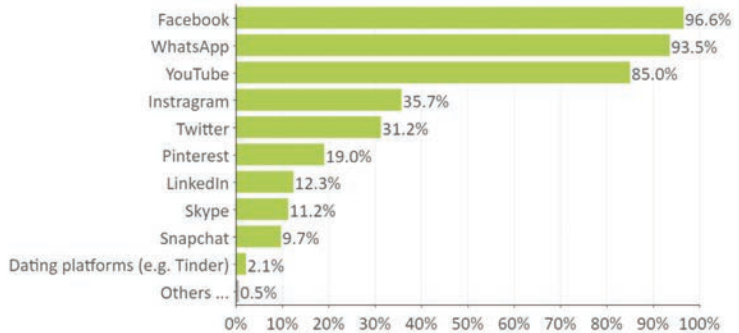
9. Are you generally online (on your mobile phone/laptop) even when watching television, listening to music, or doing other activities? (N=966)



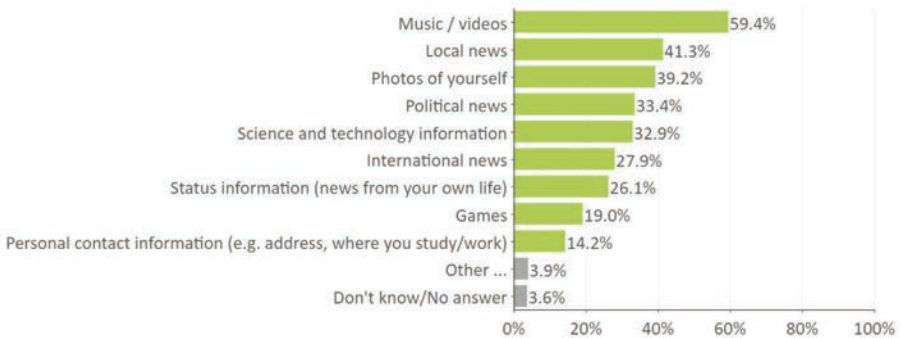
10. Which of the following types of content do you access on the internet? (More than one answer) (N=966)



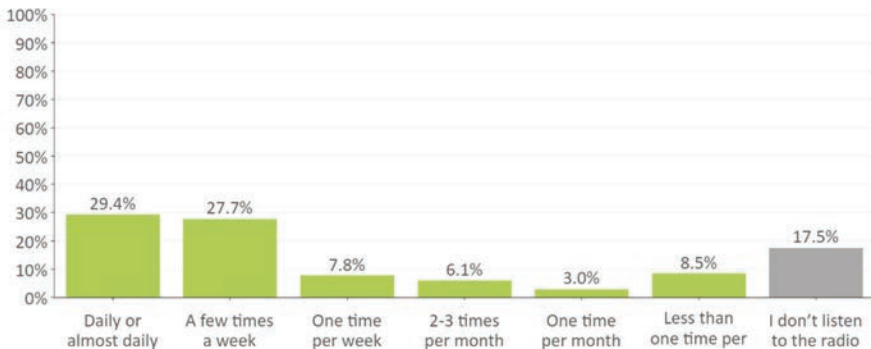
11. Which of the following websites/apps do you access? (More than one answer) (N=775)



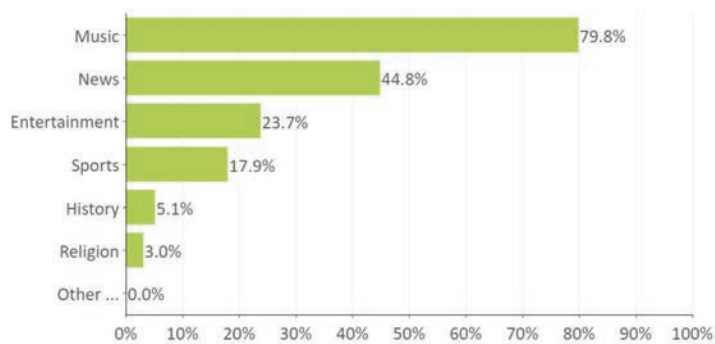
12. What type of information do you publish on your social networks? (More than one answer) (N=975)



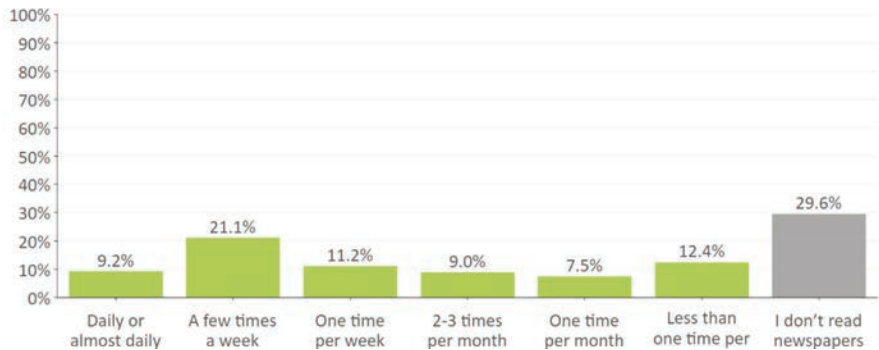
13. How often do you listen to the radio? (N=969)



14. What types of radio shows do you listen to? (More than one answer) (N=799)



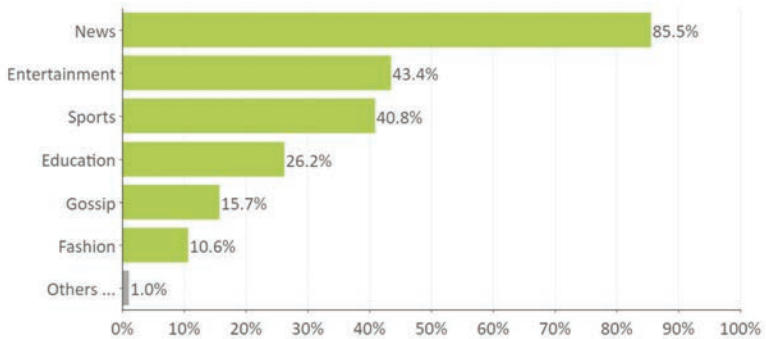
15. How often do you read newspapers? (N=969)



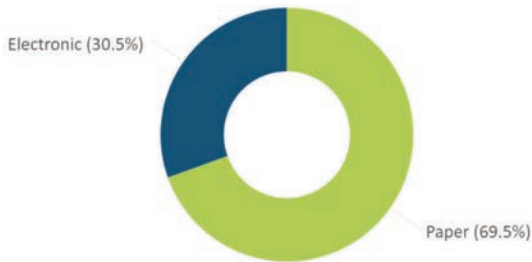
16. Do you usually read print or electronic newspapers? (N=682)



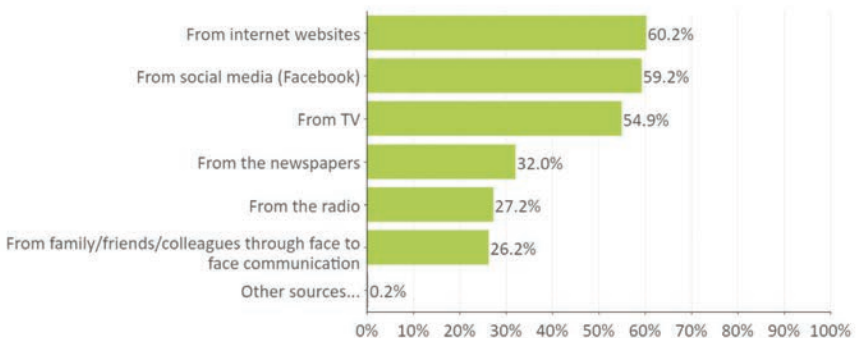
17. What types of newspapers do you read? (More than one answer) (N=682)



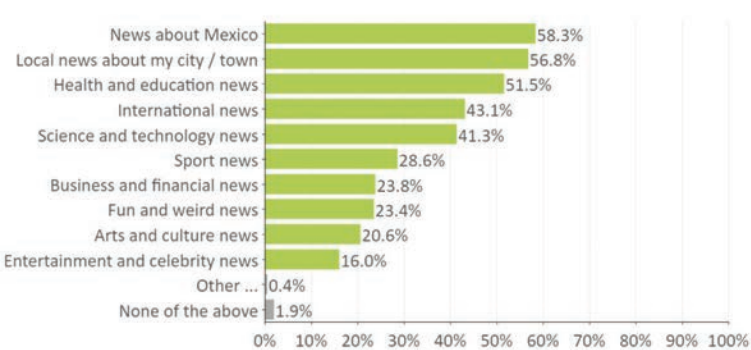
18. What newspaper format do you trust more? (N=682)



19. Generally, from which source do you get informed? (More than one answer) (N=969)

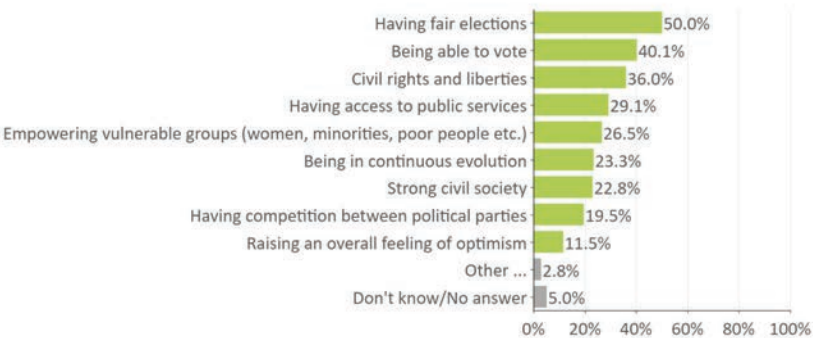


20. Which of the following types of news is most important to you? Please choose up to five. (More than one answer)

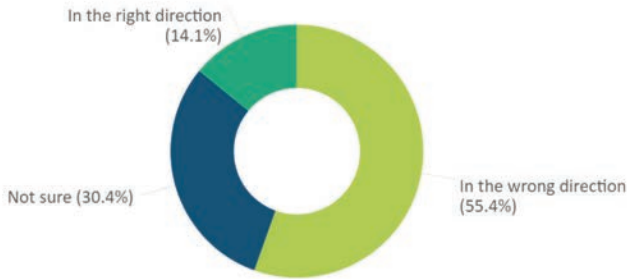


Civic and Political Engagement

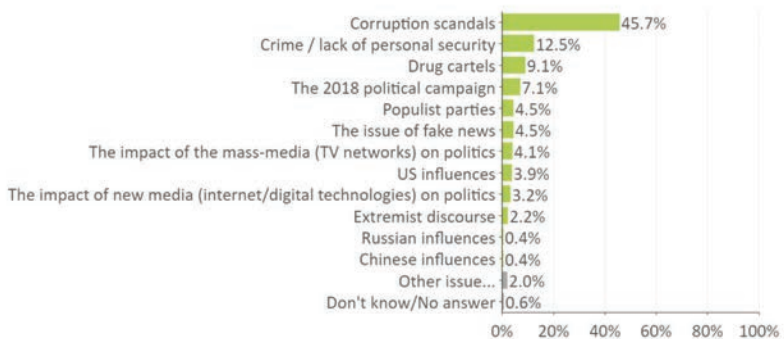
1. How would you define democracy in Mexico? (More than one answer) (N=969)



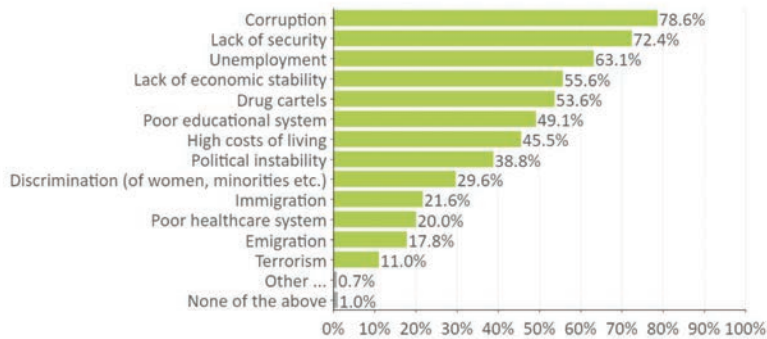
2. Generally speaking, would you say the political and economic conditions in Mexico are heading in the right direction, or in the wrong direction? (N=969)



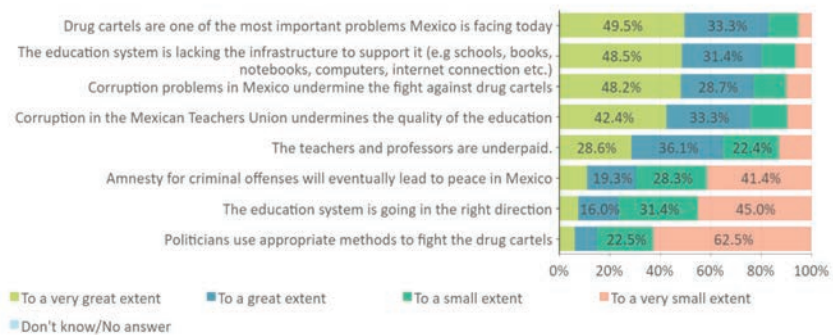
3. Why do you think that the political conditions in Mexico are heading in the wrong direction? (More than one answer) (N=538)



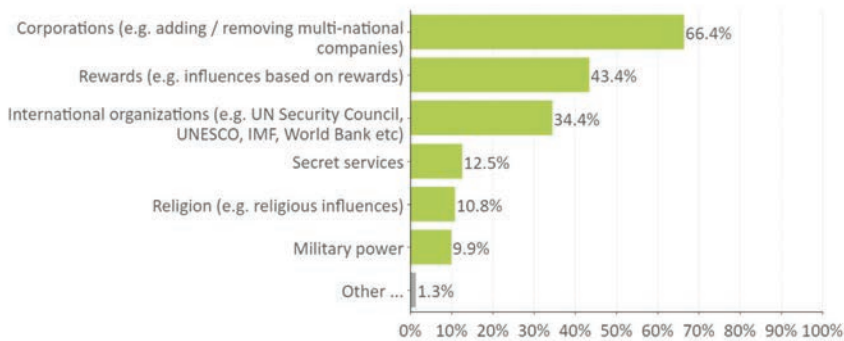
4. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing Mexico today? (N=969)



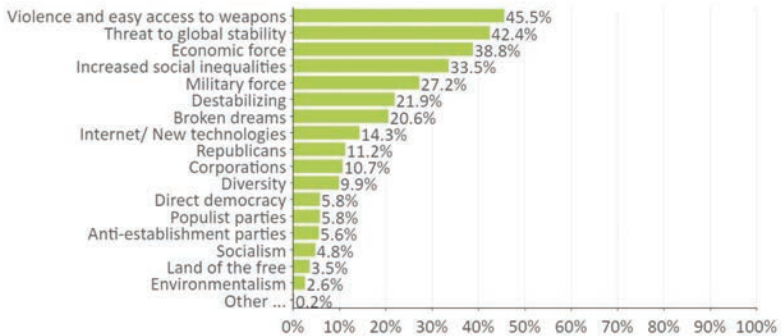
5. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=969)



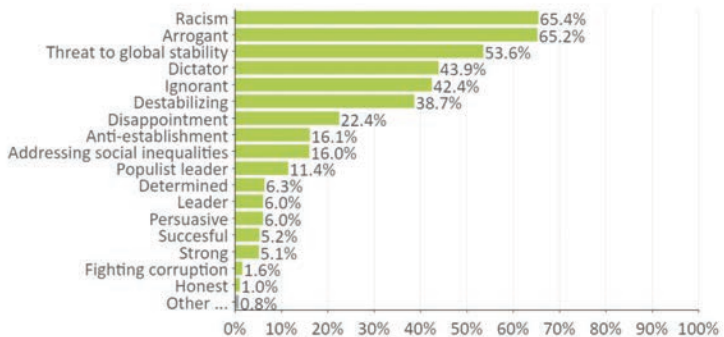
6. Through what way are foreign countries influencing the political and economic life in Mexico? (N=969)



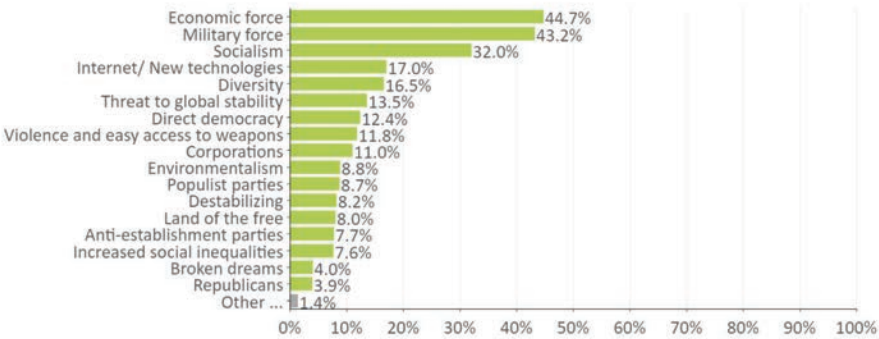
7. When thinking of the United States, with what words do you associate it? (More than one answer) (N=969)



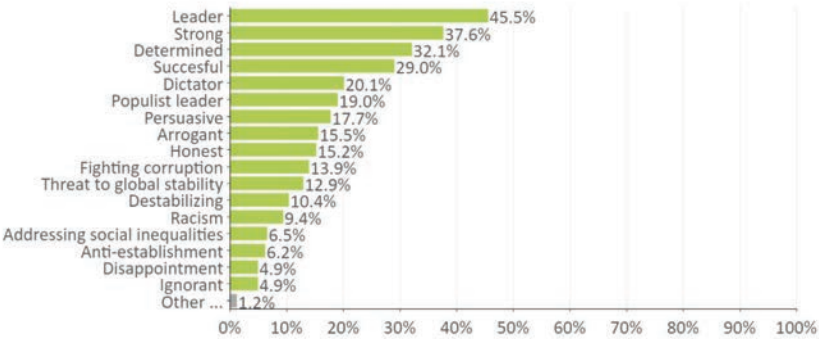
8. When thinking of the United States president, Donald Trump, with what words do you associate him? (More than one answer) (N=969)



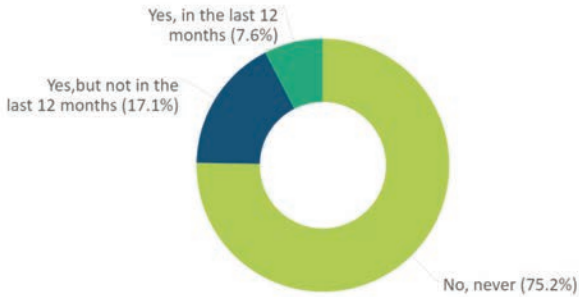
9. When thinking of Russia, with what words do you associate the country? (More than one answer) (N=969)



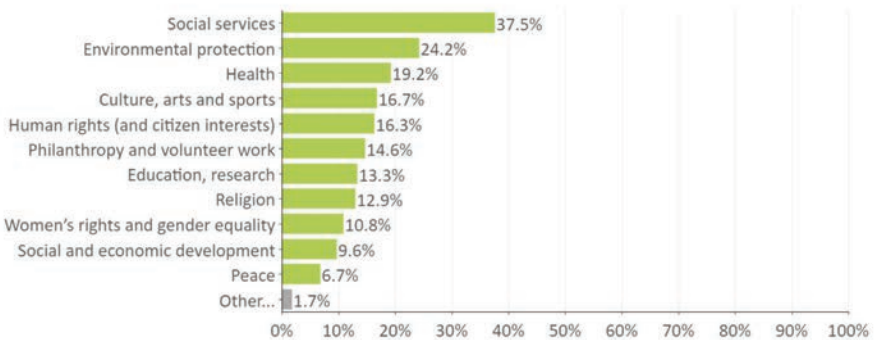
10. When thinking of Vladimir Putin, with what words do you associate him? (More than one answer) (N=969)



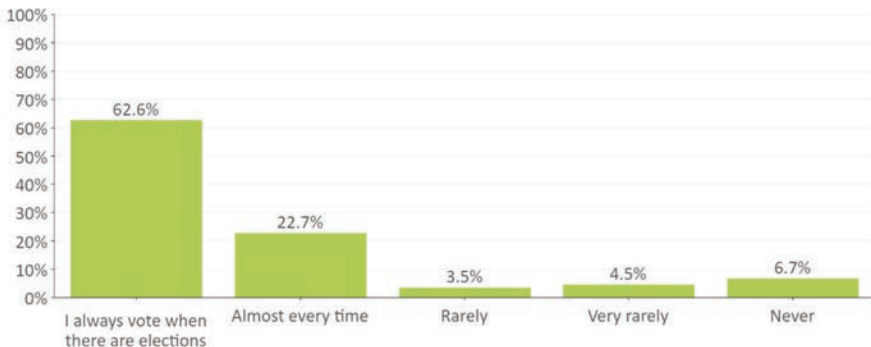
11. Have you volunteered in a group or a non-governmental organization (NGO)? (N=969)



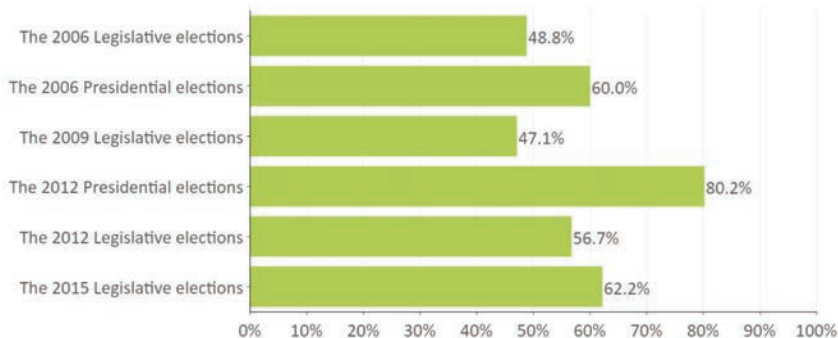
12. In which of the following areas did you do volunteer work? (More than one answer) (N=240)



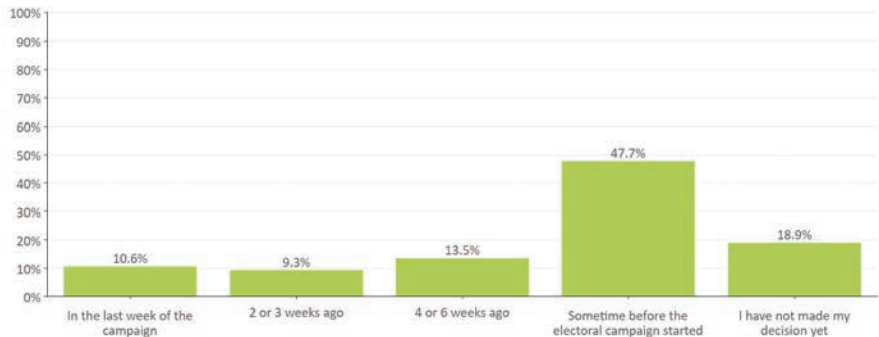
13. How often do you vote? (N=969)



14. In which elections did you vote? (More than one answer) (N=905)



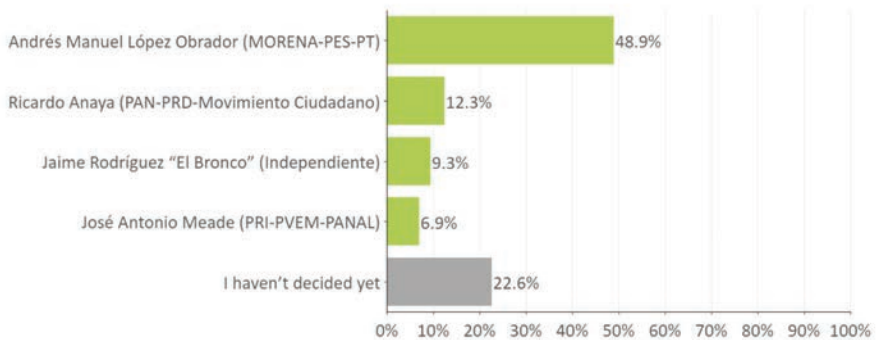
15. When did you make your decision on which candidate to support at the 2018 presidential elections? (N=905)



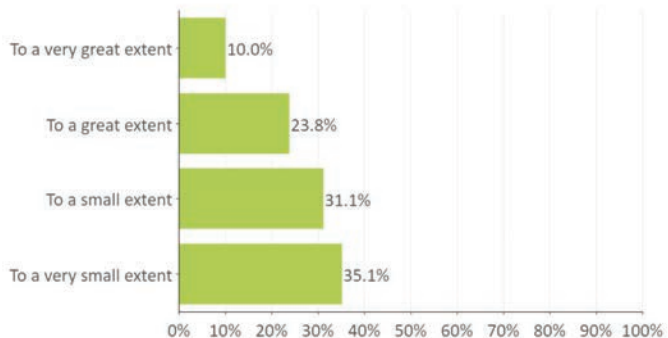
16. For which party did you vote in the legislative elections held in June 2015? (N=505)



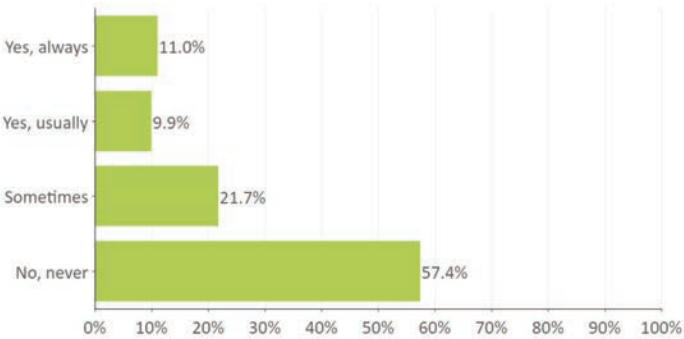
17. If presidential elections were held today, whom would you vote for? (N=969)



18. To what extent do you find that the voting procedures will be completely fair and transparent at the 2018 presidential elections? (N=969)

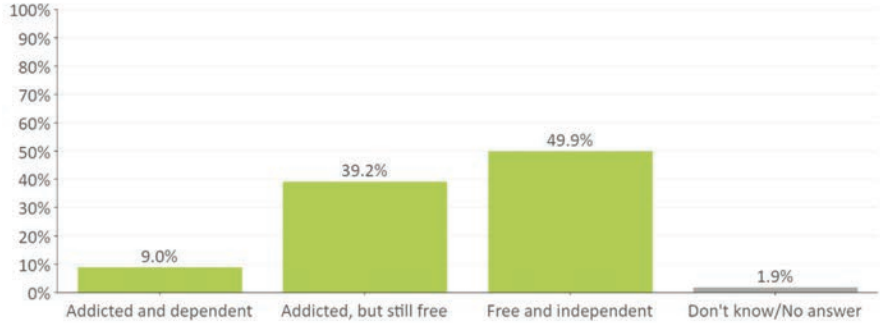


19. When elections take place, do you try to convince others to vote for those with whom you sympathize? (N=969)

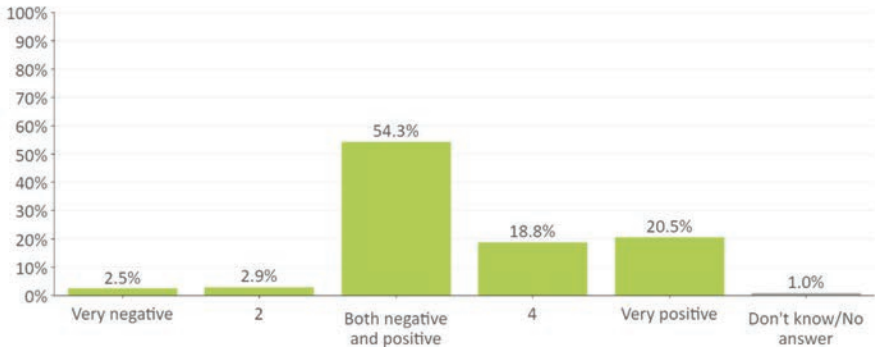


Impact of Technology on Democracy

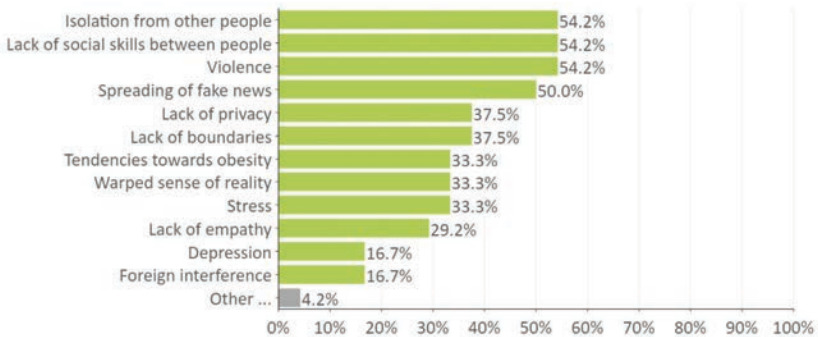
1. When thinking of your use of technology in your day-to-day life (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how would you say this usage makes you feel? (N=969)



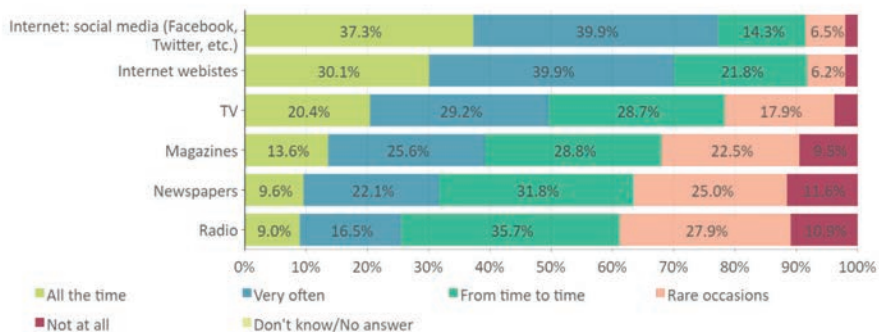
2. When thinking of the impact technology has on society (information, communication, entertainment etc.), how positive/negative would you say it is? Please state your answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means it has a very negative impact and 5 means that it has a very positive impact. (N=969)



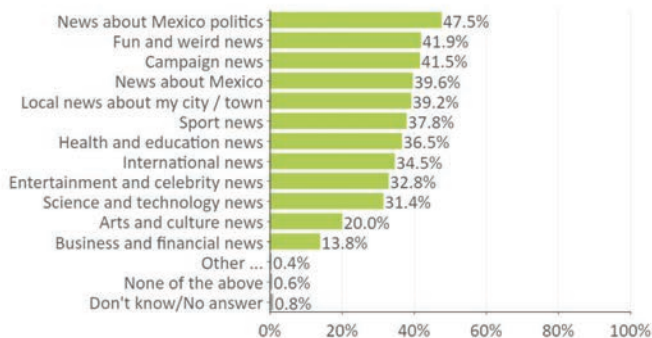
3. What do you think are the negative implications technology has on society? (More than one answer) (N=24)



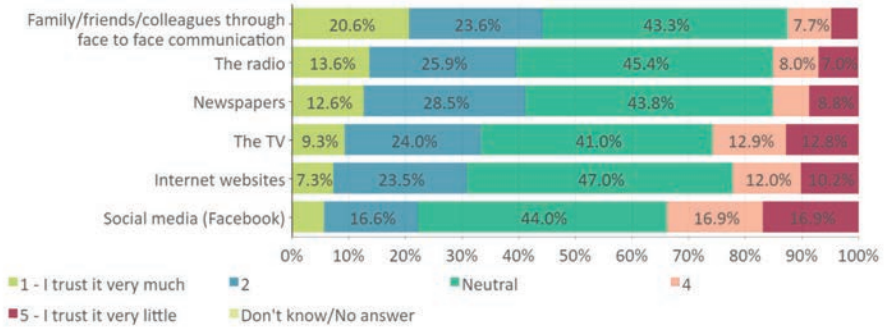
4. How often do you encounter fake news on the following media platforms: (N=969)



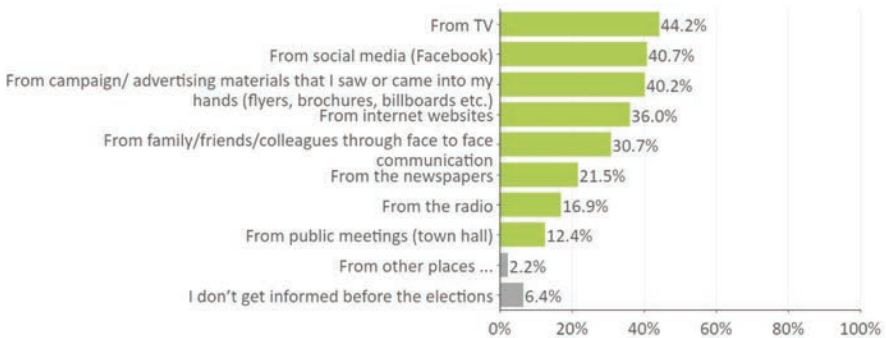
5. What are the top 5 news related topics that you usually find in your social media feeds? (More than one answer) (N=775)



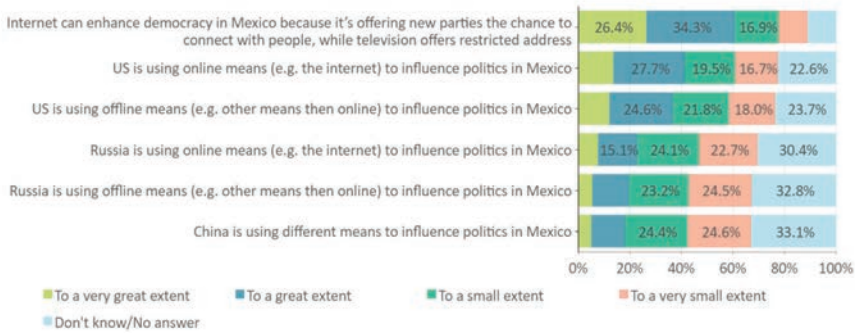
6. How much do you trust information coming from the following, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you trust it very much and 5 means you trust it very little? (N=969)



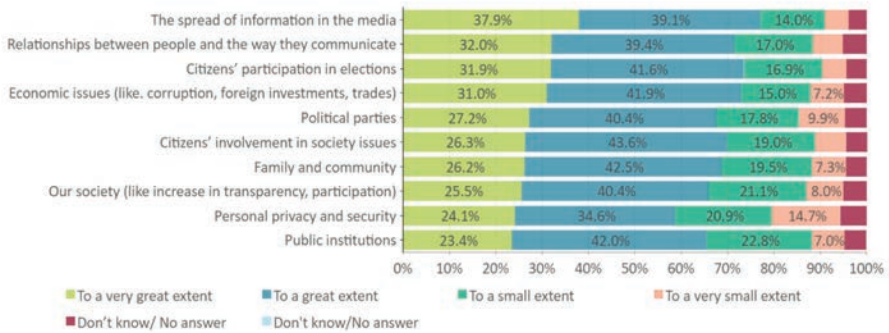
7. Before the July 2018 presidential elections, from where did you get informed in order to make a decision about whom to vote for? (More than one answer) (N=969)



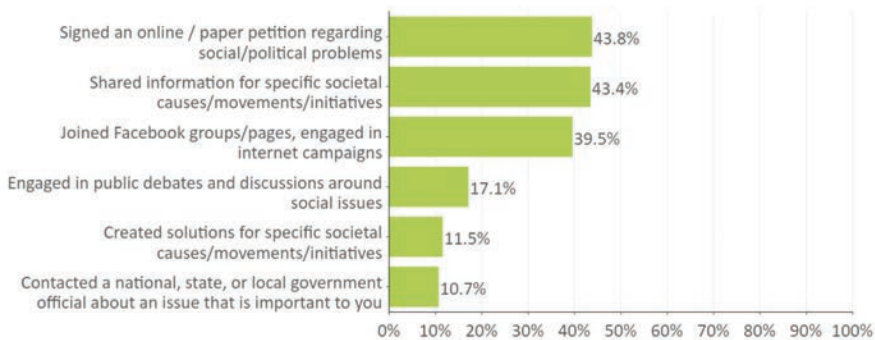
8. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=969)



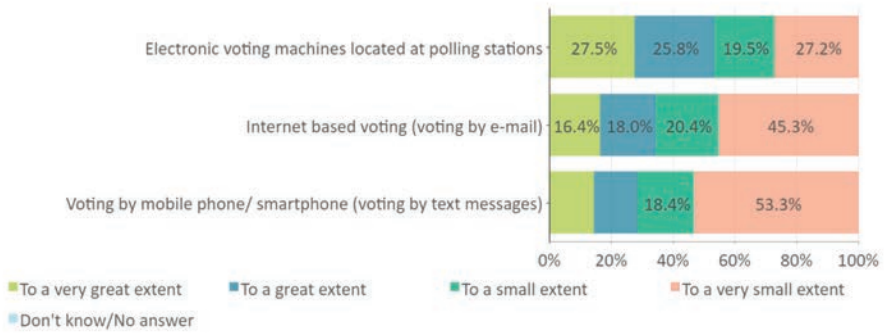
9. To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: Technology has a positive impact on.... (N=969)



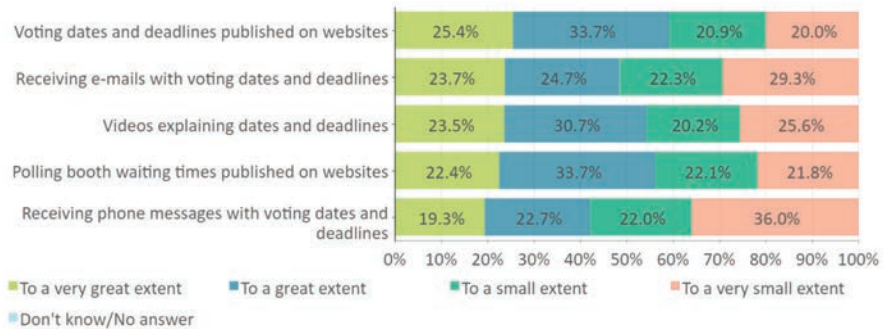
10. Which of the following actions have you performed on online platforms or social media in the last 12 months? (More than one answer) (N=969)



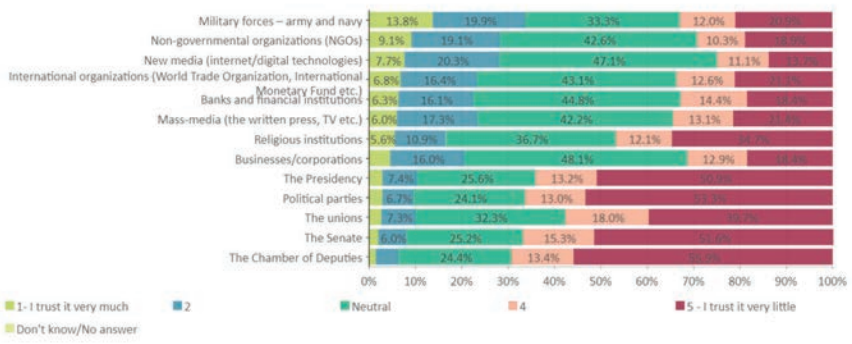
11. If possible, to what extent would you prefer...: (N=969)



12. To what extent would you be interested in the following information regarding elections? (N=969)



13. The following list contains several institutions in Mexico. Please tell us how much trust you have in each one: very much, neutral, or very little. (N=969)



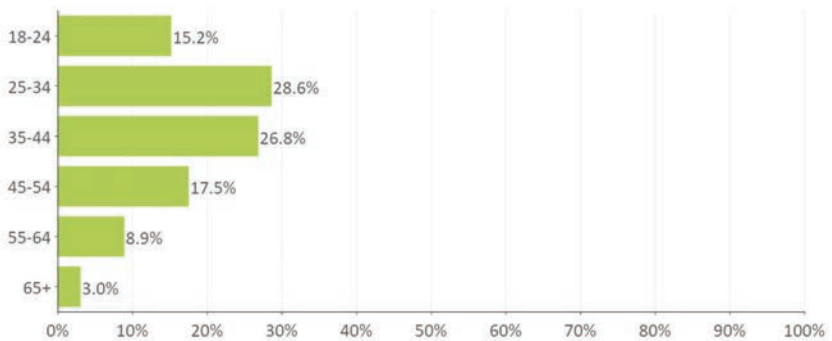
Socio-Demographic Profiling

This online survey has been conducted among 969 Mexicans aged 18-65. Understanding their socio-demographic profile is vital when interpreting the results.

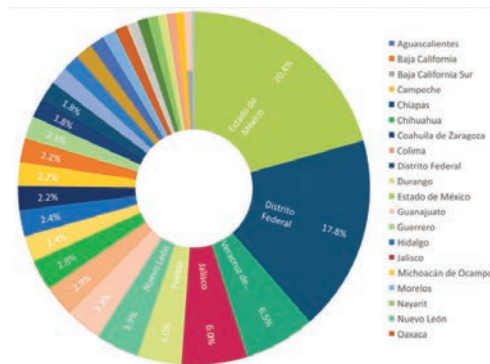
1. What is your gender? (N=969)



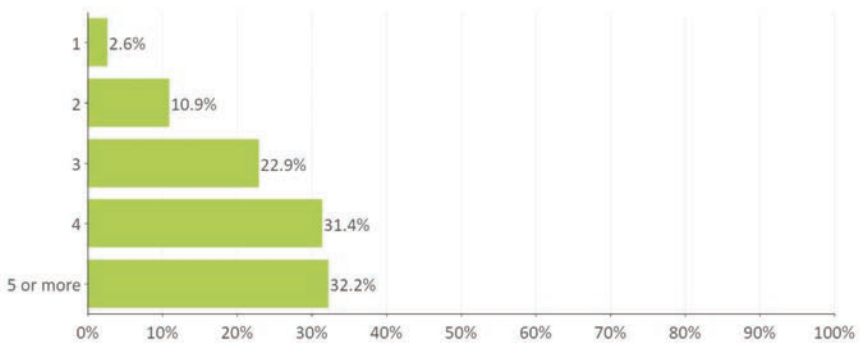
2. What is your age? (N=969)



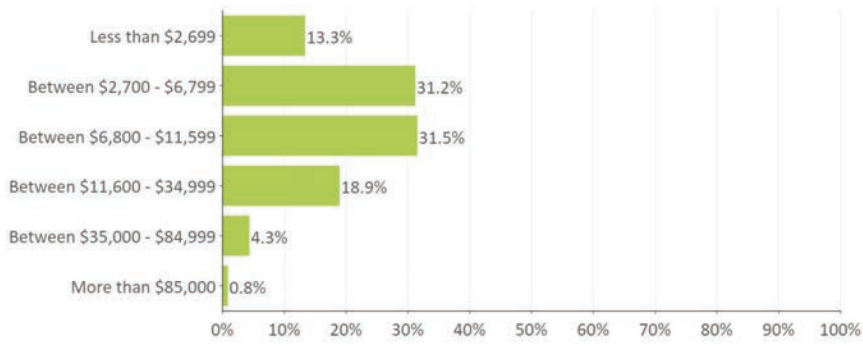
3. What is your permanent residence or the one where you spent the last 12 months? (N=969)



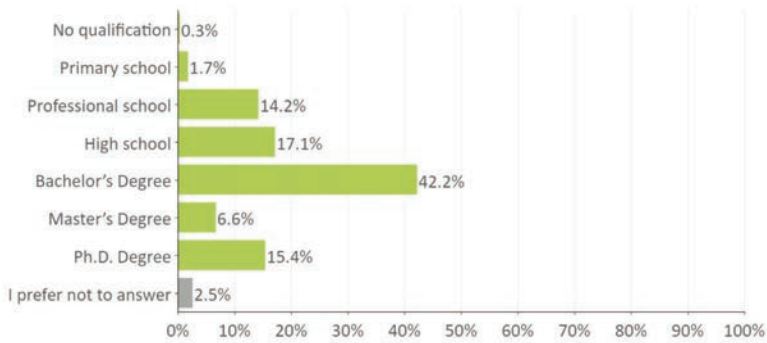
4. How many family members live in your household (including yourself)? (N=969)



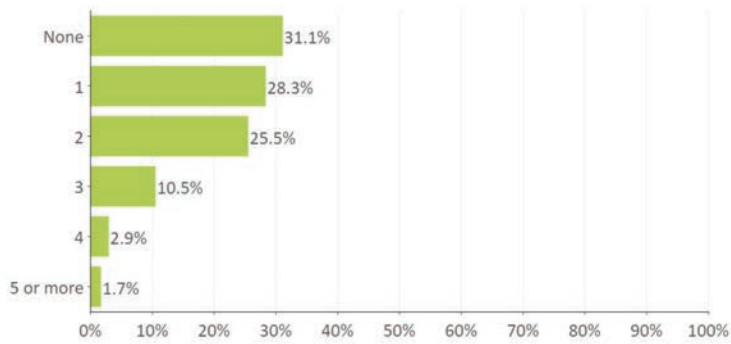
5. What is the total household net monthly income, considering all available sources of income in your household? (N=969)



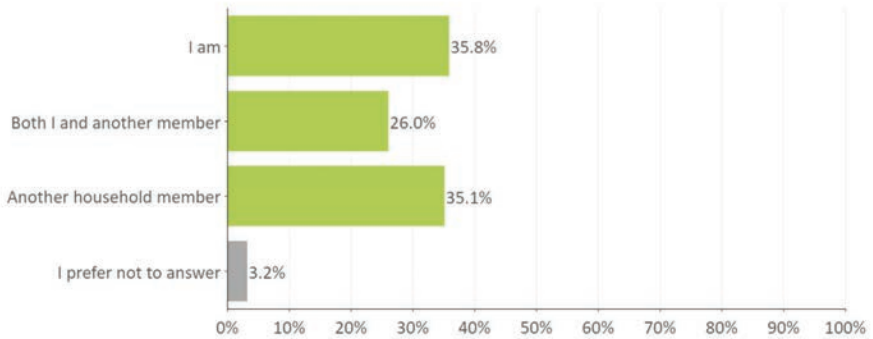
6. What is the highest degree/level of school that you have completed? (N=969)



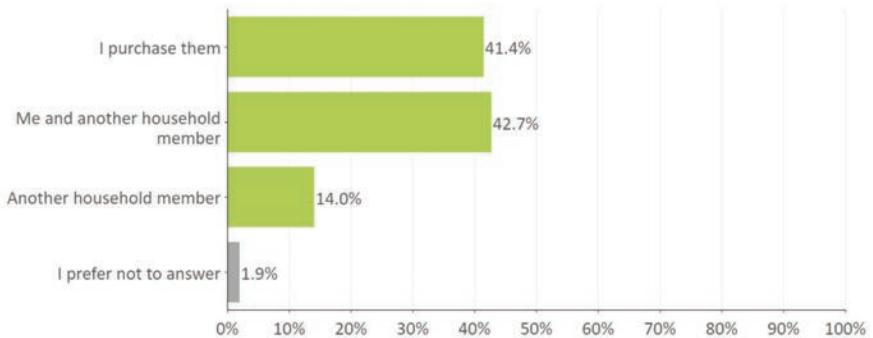
7. How many people in your household are children under 18 years of age? (N=944)



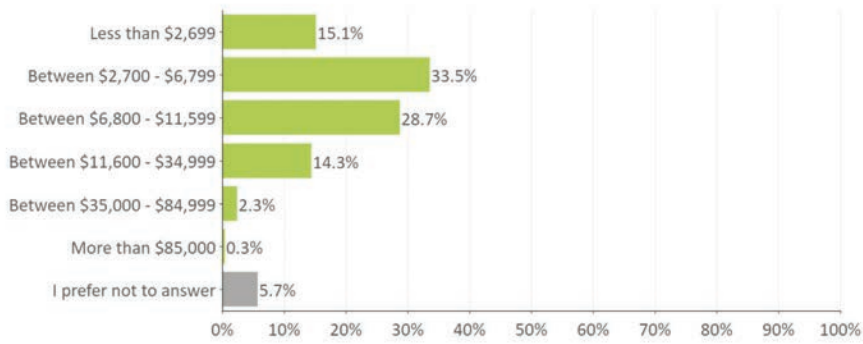
8. Who is the principal wage earner in your household? By principal wage earner in the household, we refer to the member with the highest income. (N=944)



9. Which household member is responsible for the purchases in your household? (N=944)



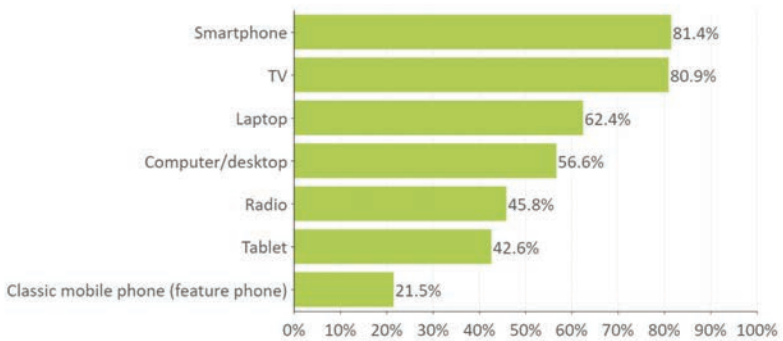
10. What is your total personal net monthly income, considering all available sources of income? (N=944)



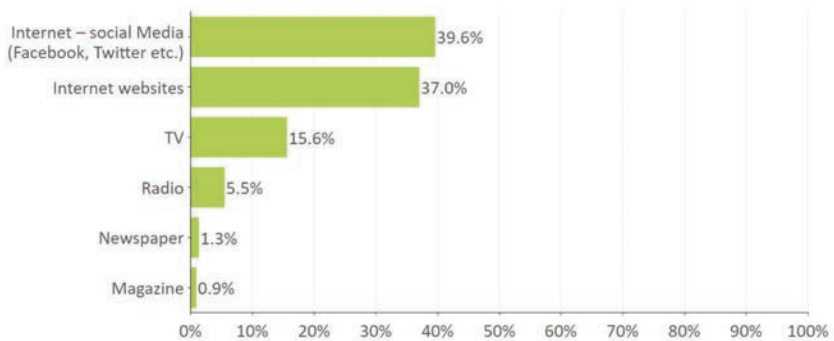
LATVIA

Media Usage

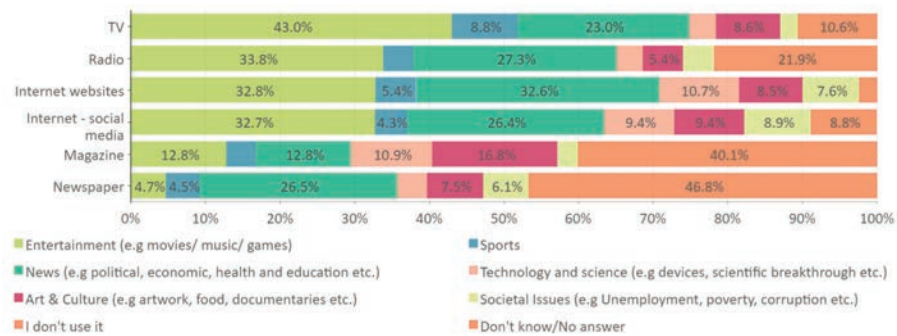
1. What types of devices do you own? (More than one answer) (N=921)



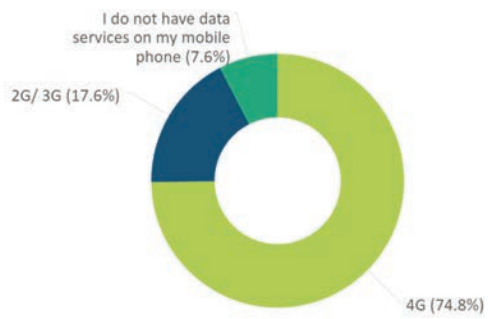
2. What type of media do you consume the most in an ordinary day? (N=921)



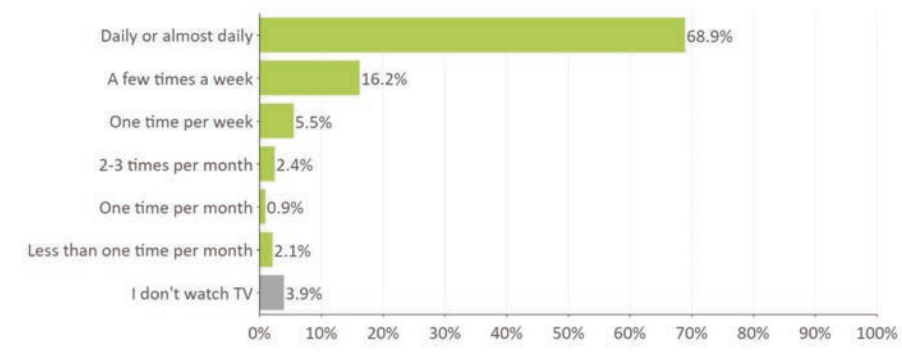
3. Please select the most common purpose for your consumption of each of the following: (N=921)



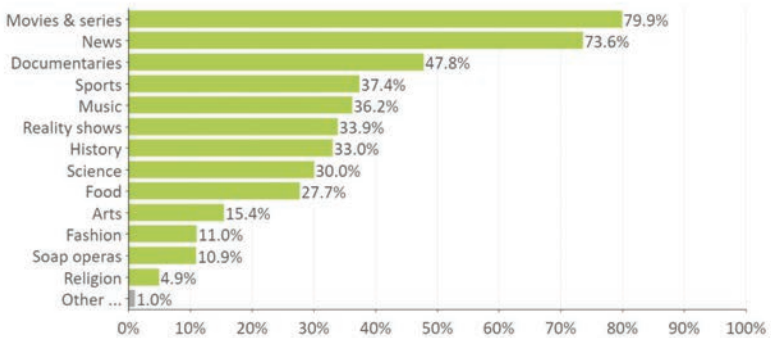
4. What type of data services (2G/3G/4G) do you have on your mobile phone? (N=750)



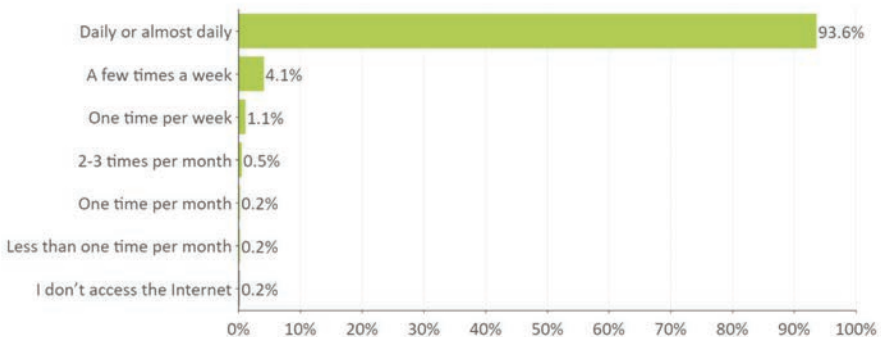
5. How often do you watch TV? (N=745)



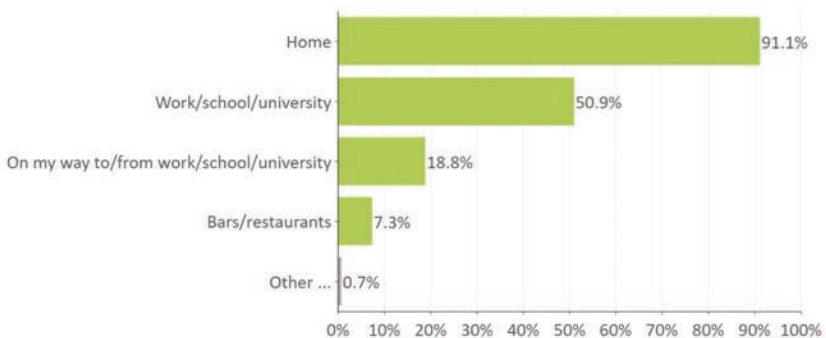
6. What types of content do you watch on TV? (More than one answer) (N=716)



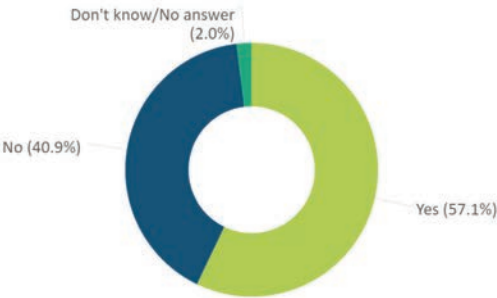
7. How often do you access the internet? (N=921)



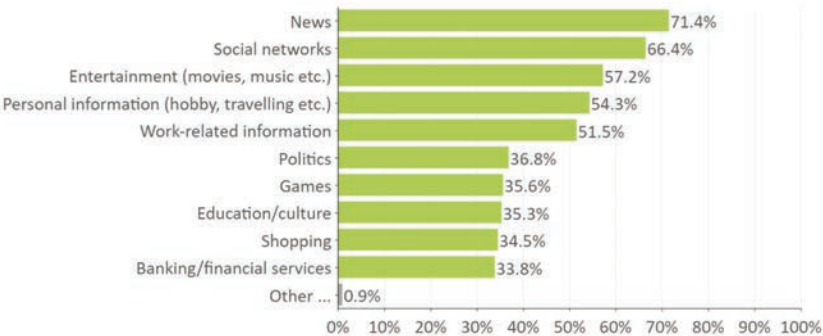
8. In general, from where do you access the internet? (More than one answer) (N=919)



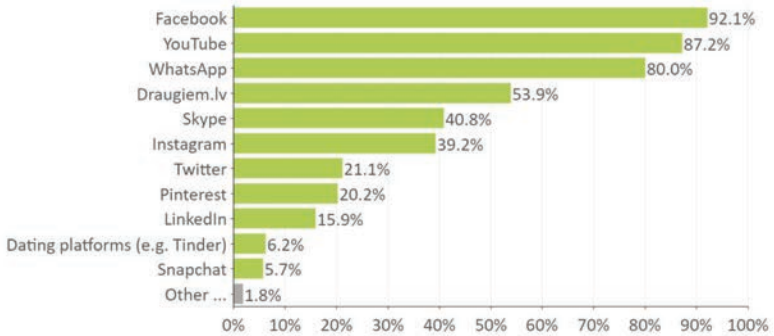
9. Are you generally online (on your mobile phone/laptop) even when watching television, listening to music, or doing other activities? (N=919)



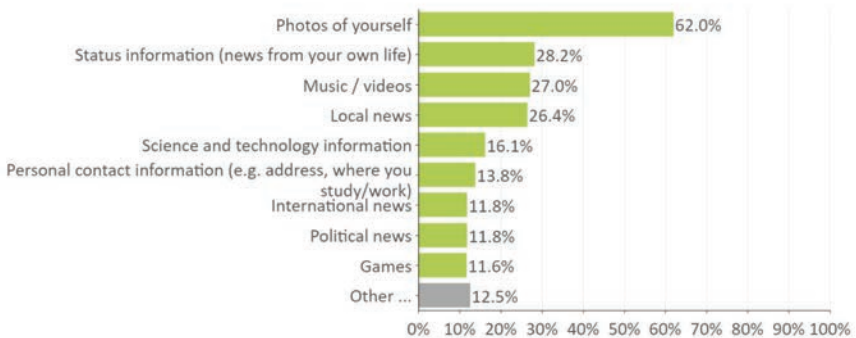
10. Which of the following types of content do you access on the internet? (More than one answer) (N=919)



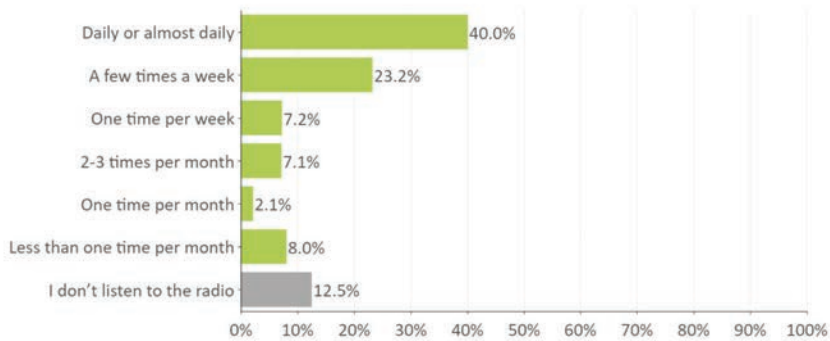
11. Which of the following websites/apps do you access? (More than one answer) (N=610)



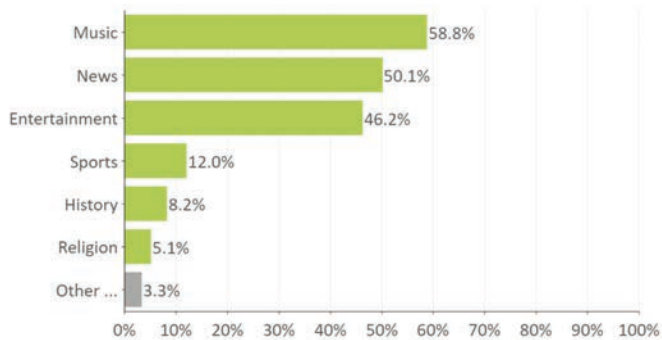
12. What type of information do you publish on your social networks? (More than one answer) (N=610)



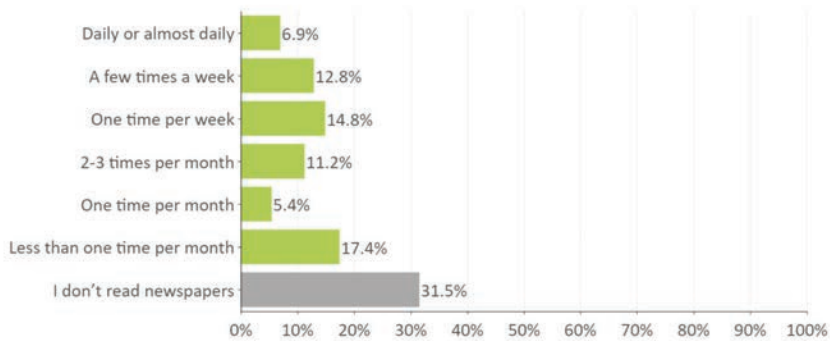
13. How often do you listen to the radio? (N=921)



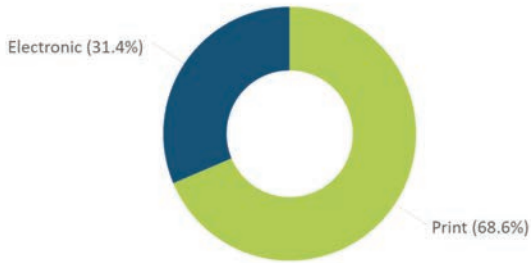
14. What types of radio shows do you listen to? (More than one answer) (N=806)



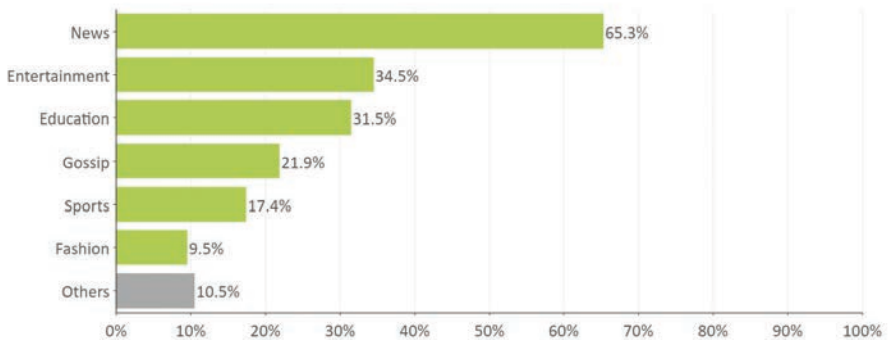
15. How often do you read newspapers? (N=921)



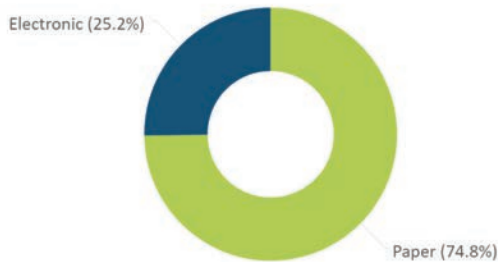
16. Do you usually read print or electronic newspapers? (N=631)



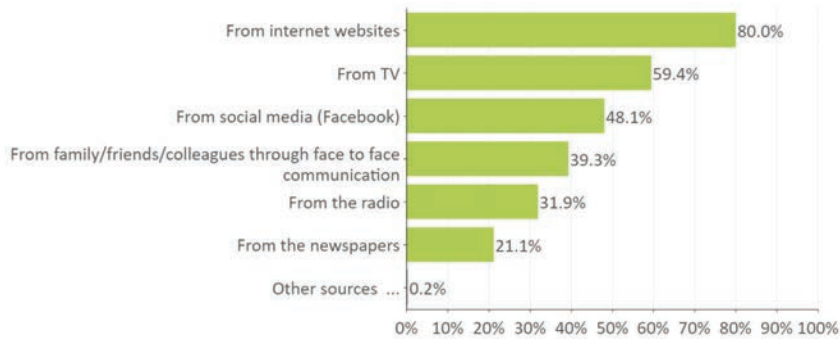
17. What types of newspapers do you read? (More than one answer) (N=631)



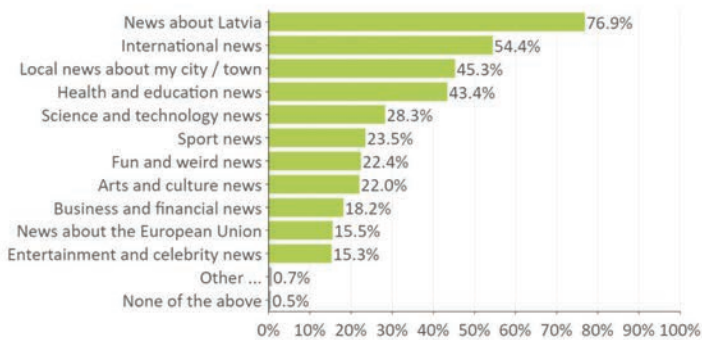
18. What newspaper format do you trust more? (N=631)



19. Generally, from which source do you get informed? (More than one answer) (N=921)

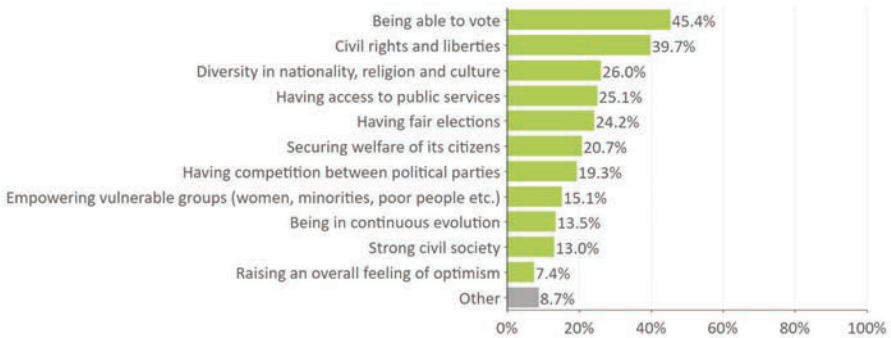


20. Which of the following types of news is most important to you? Please choose up to five. (More than one answer) (N=921)

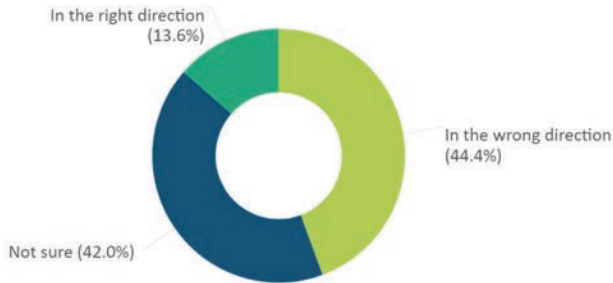


Civic and Political Engagement

1. How would you define democracy in Latvia? (More than one answer) (N=921)



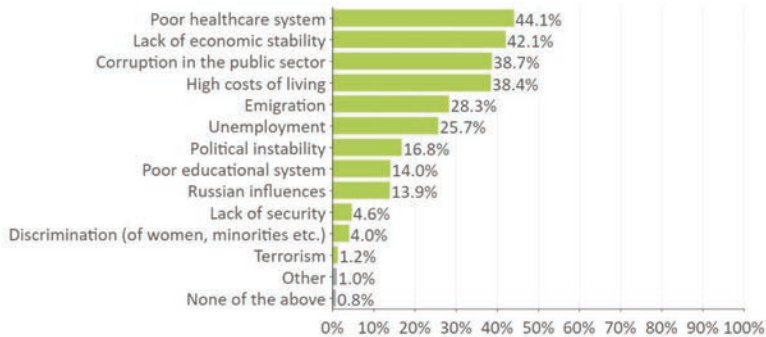
2. Generally speaking, would you say the political and economic conditions in Latvia are heading in the right direction or in the wrong direction? (N=921)



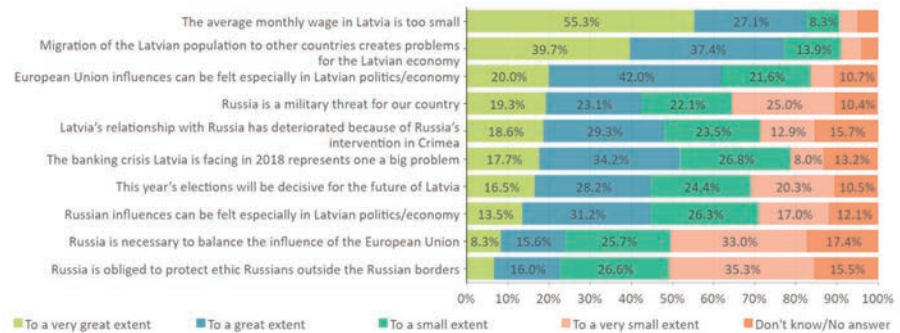
3. Why do you think that the political conditions in Latvia are heading in the wrong direction? (More than one answer) (N=409)



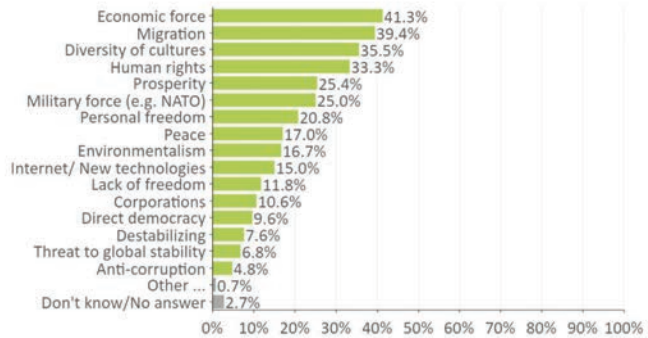
4. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing Latvia today? (N=921)



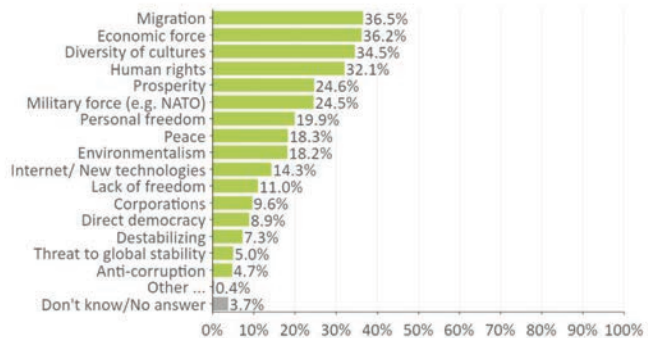
5. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=921)



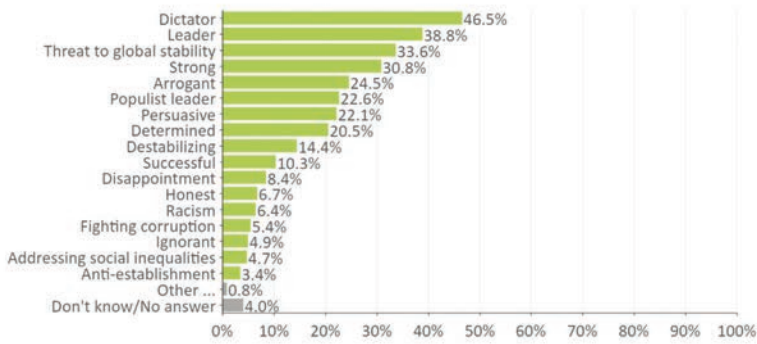
6. When thinking of the European Union, with what words do you associate it? (More than one answer) (N=921)



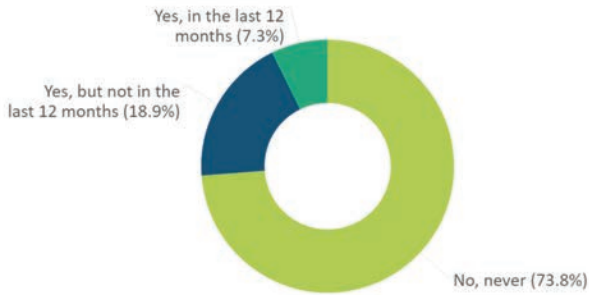
7. When thinking of Russia, with what words do you associate the country? (More than one answer) (N=921)



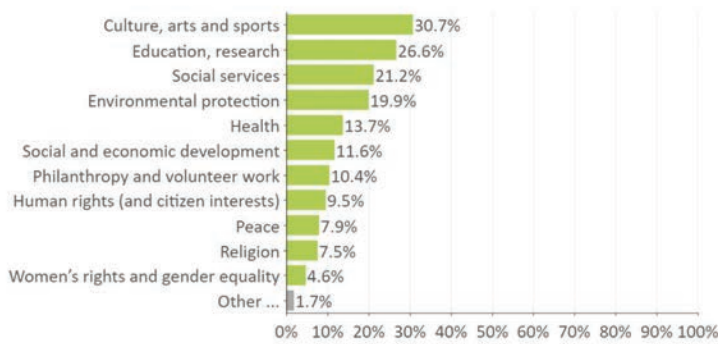
8. When thinking of Vladimir Putin, with what words do you associate him? (More than one answer) (N=921)



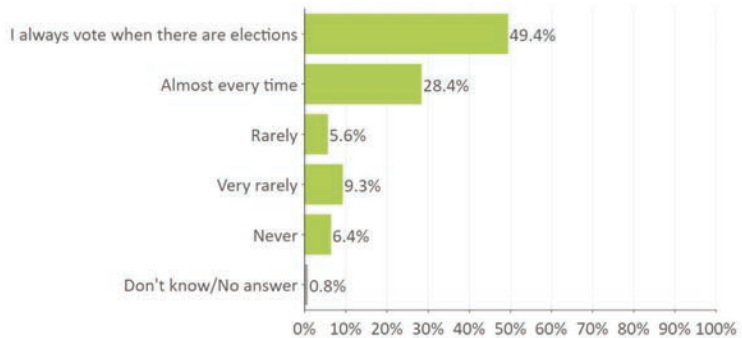
9. Have you volunteered in a group or a non-governmental organization (NGO)? (N=921)



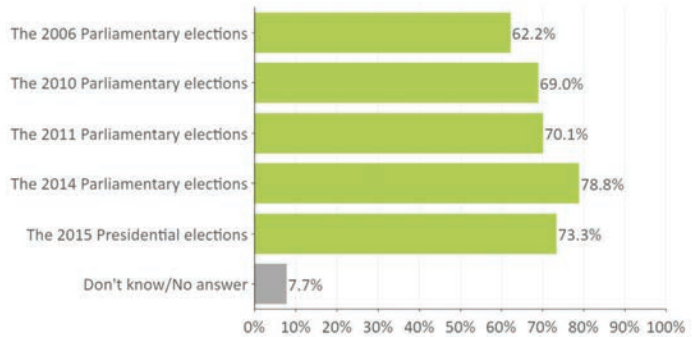
10. In which of the following areas did you do volunteer work? (More than one answer) (N=241)



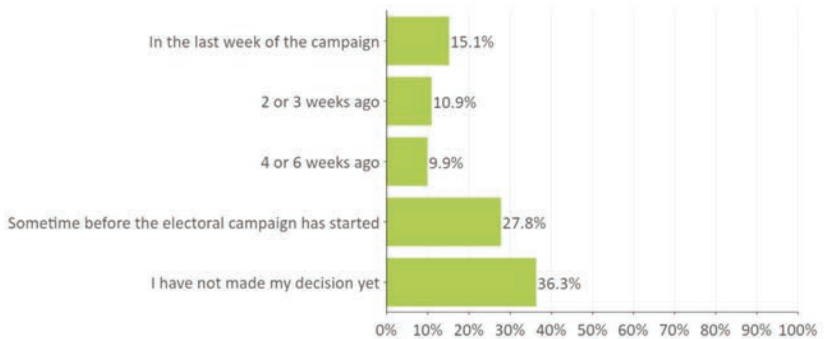
11. How often do you vote? (N=921)



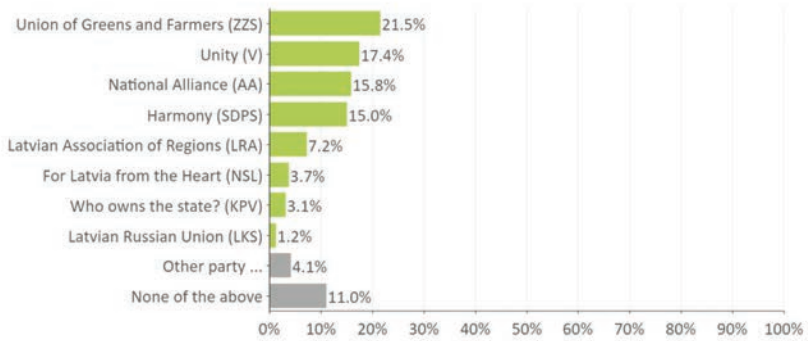
12. In which elections did you vote? (More than one answer) (N=862)



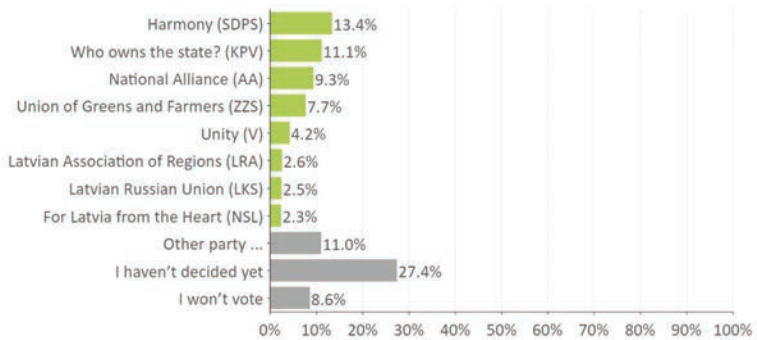
13. When did you make your decision on which candidate to support at the 2018 presidential elections? (N=862)



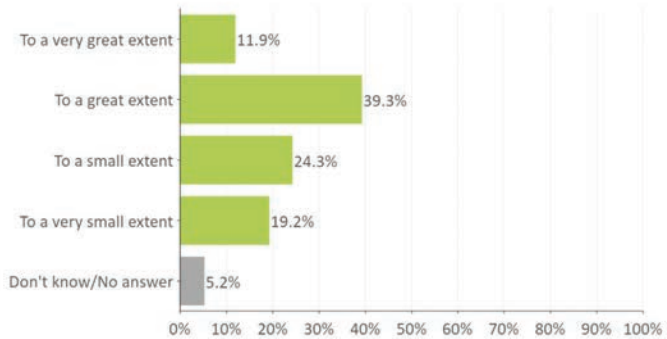
14. For which party did you vote in the parliamentary elections held in June 2014? (N=679)



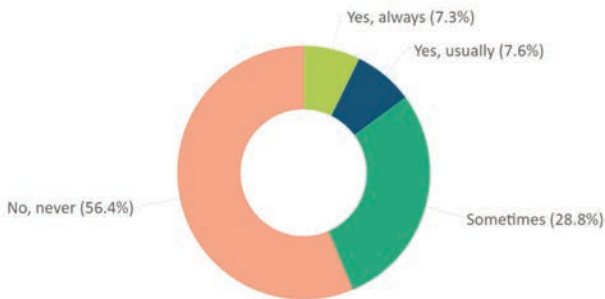
15. If parliamentary elections were held today, whom would you vote for? (N=921)



16. To what extent do you find that the voting procedures will be completely fair and transparent at the 2018 parliamentary elections? (N=921)

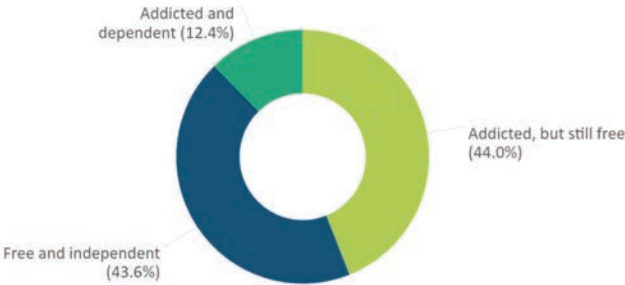


17. When elections take place, do you try to convince others to vote for those with whom you sympathize? (N=921)

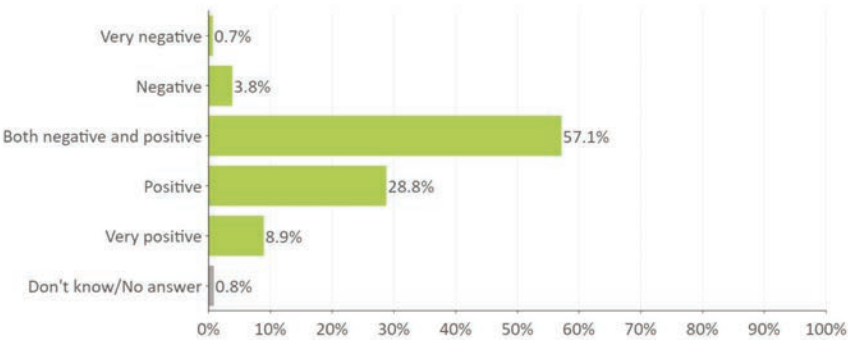


Impact of Technology on Democracy

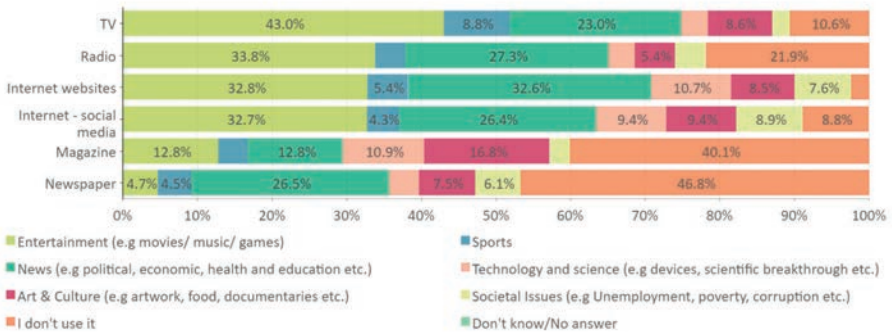
1. When thinking of your use of technology in your day-to-day life (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how would you say this usage makes you feel? (N=921)



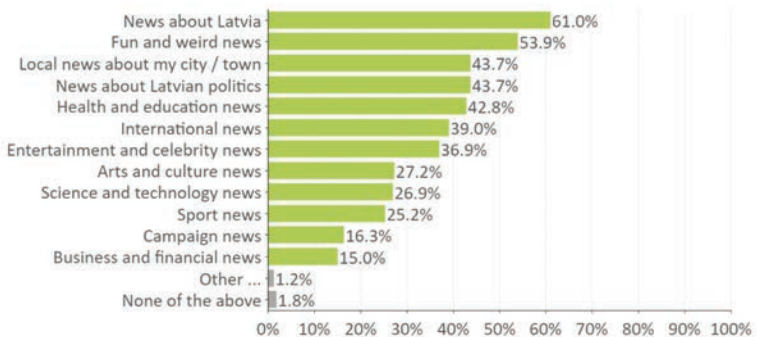
2. When thinking of the impact technology has on society (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how positive/negative would you say it is? Please state your answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means it has a very negative impact and 5 means that it has a very positive impact. (N=921)



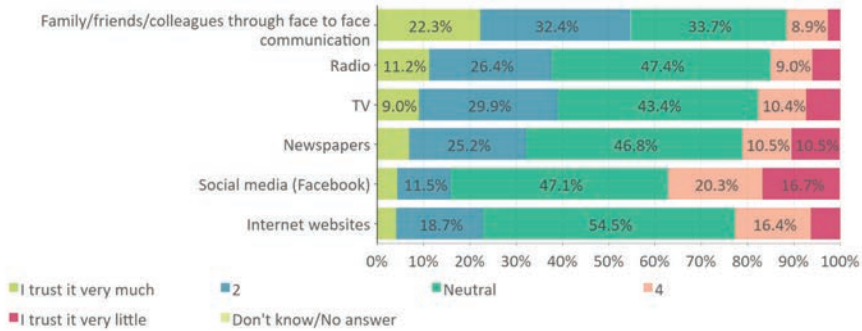
3. Where do you encounter fake news on the following media platforms: (N=921)



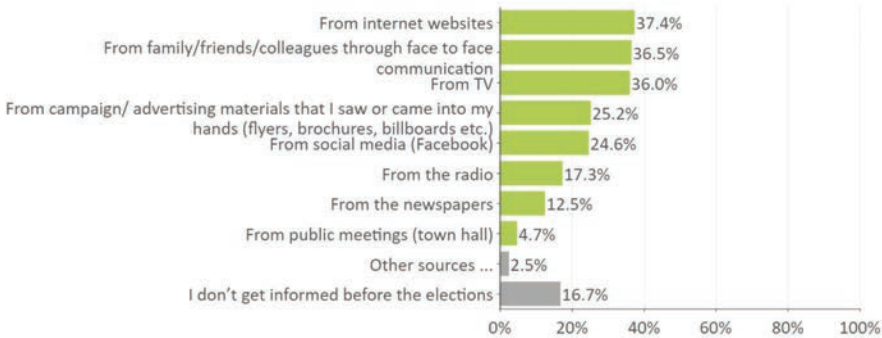
4. What are the top 5 news related topics that you usually find in your social media feeds? (More than one answer) (N=610)



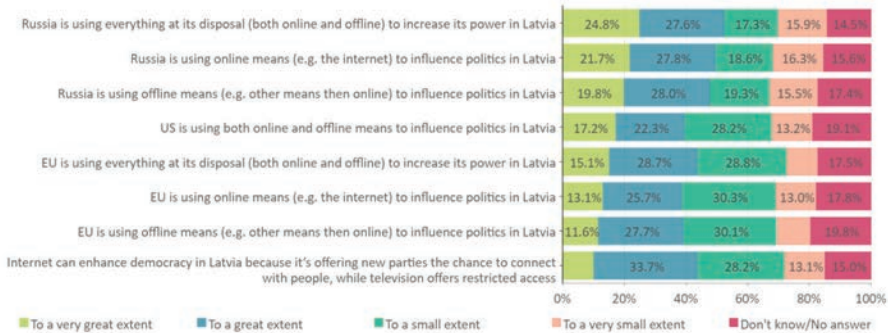
5. How much do you trust information coming from the following, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you trust it very much and 5 means you trust it very little? (N=921)



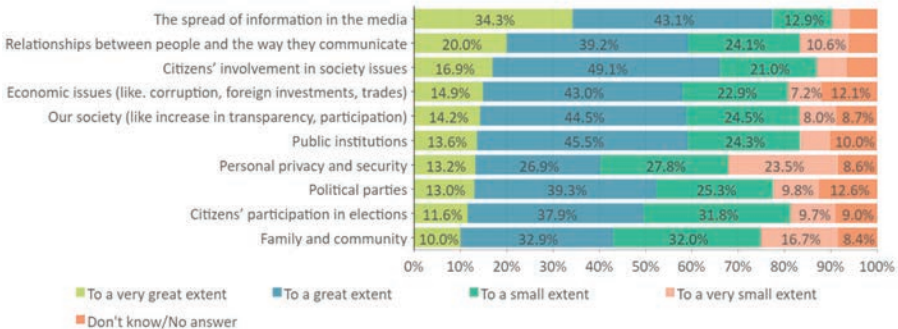
6. Before the October 2018 parliamentary elections, from where did you get informed in order to make a decision about whom to vote for? (More than one answer) (N=921)



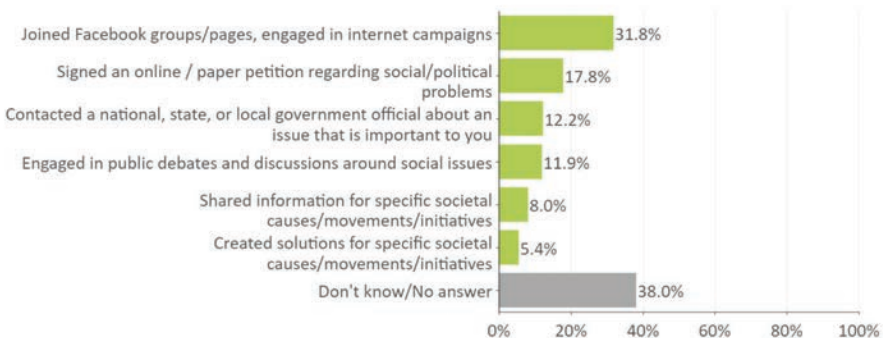
7. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=921)



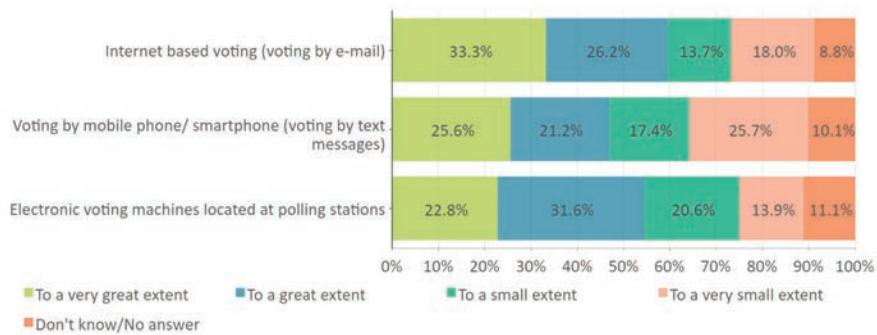
8. To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: Technology has a positive impact on.... (N=921)



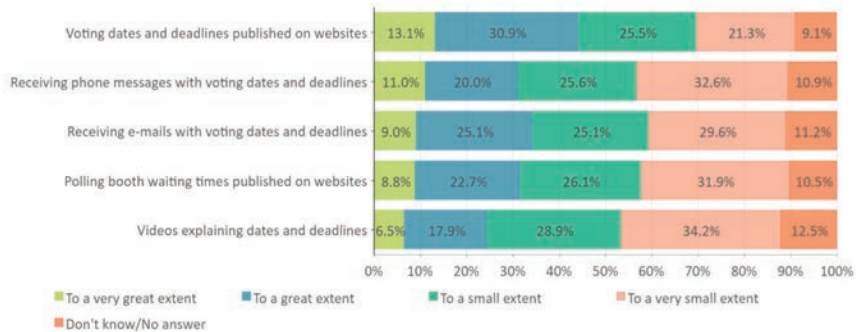
9. Which of the following actions have you performed on online platforms or social media in the last 12 months? (More than one answer) (N=921)



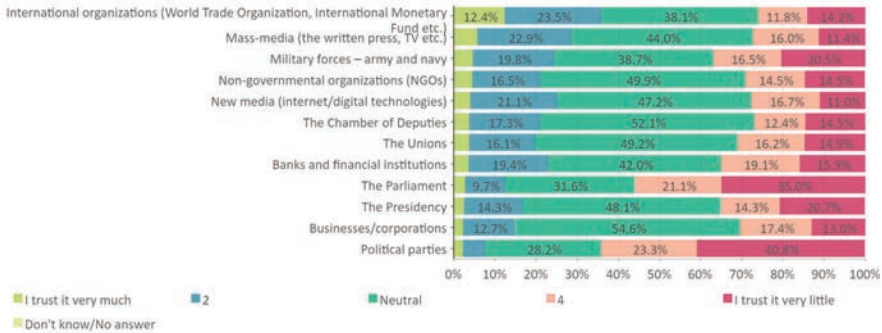
10. If possible, to what extent would you prefer... (N=921)



11. To what extent would you be interested in the following information regarding elections? (N=921)



12. The following list contains several institutions in Latvia. Please tell us how much trust you have in each one: very much, neutral, or very little. (N=921)



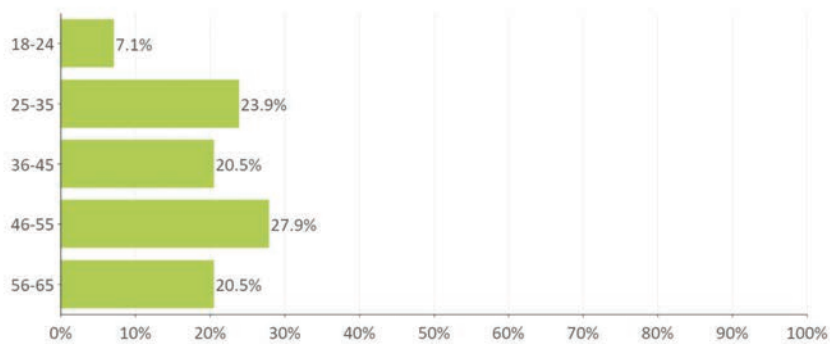
Socio-Demographic Profiling

This online survey has been conducted among 969 Latvians aged 18-65. Understanding their socio-demographic profile is vital when interpreting the results.

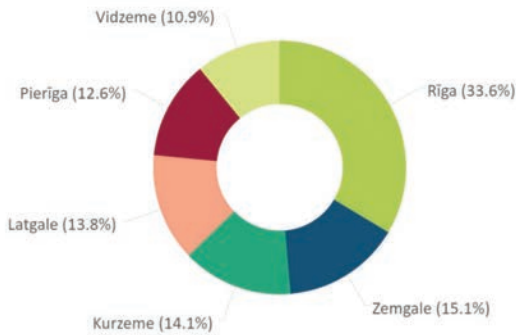
1. What is your gender? (N=921)



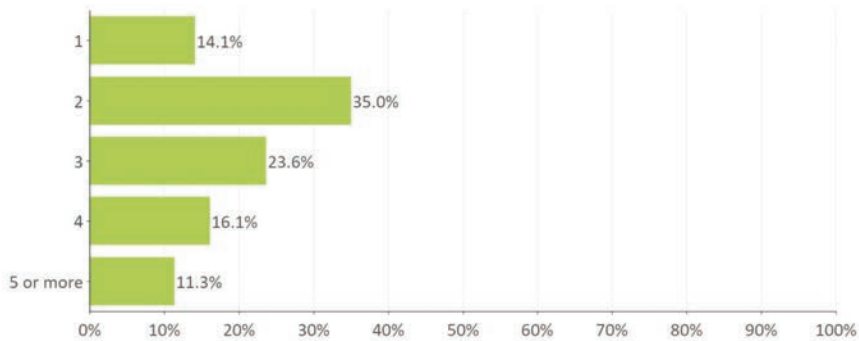
2. What is your age? (N=921)



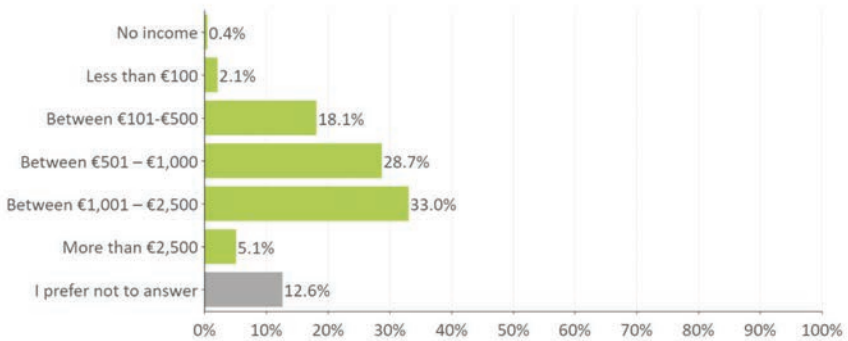
3. What is your permanent residence or the one where you spent the last 12 months? (N=921)



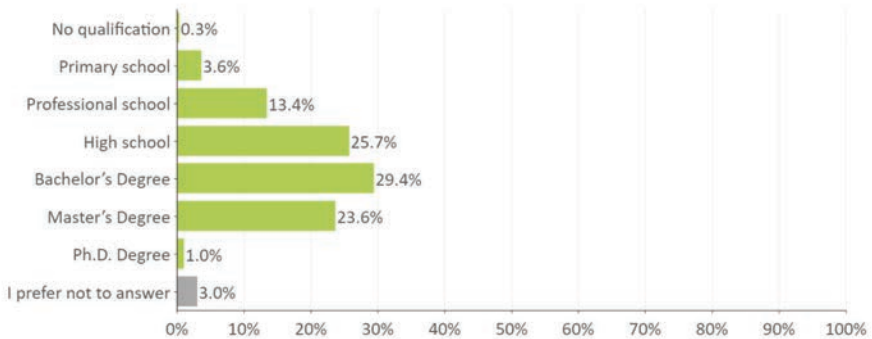
4. How many family members live in your household (including yourself)? (N=921)



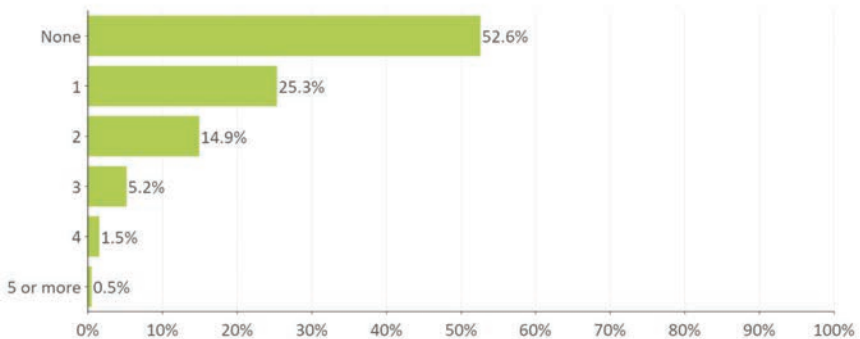
5. What is the total household net monthly income, considering all available sources of income in your household? (N=921)



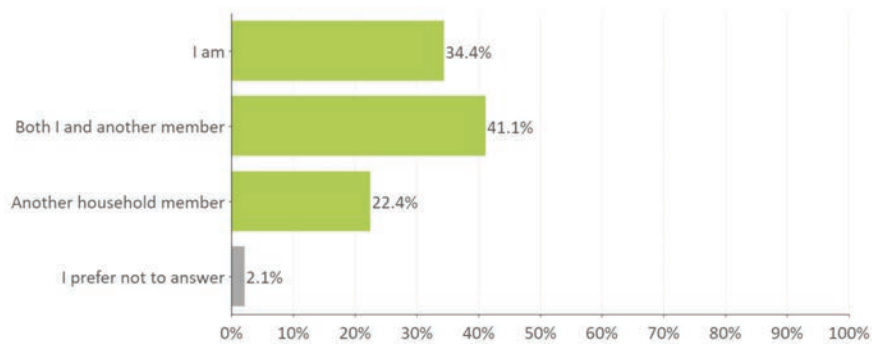
6. What is the highest degree/level of school that you have completed? (N=921)



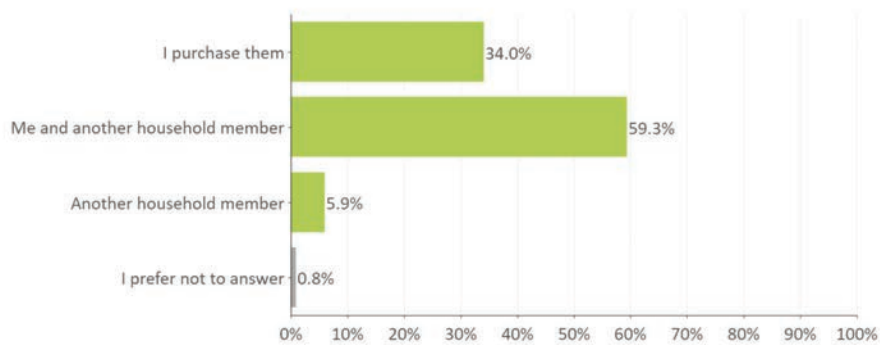
7. How many people in your household are children under 18 years of age? (N=791)



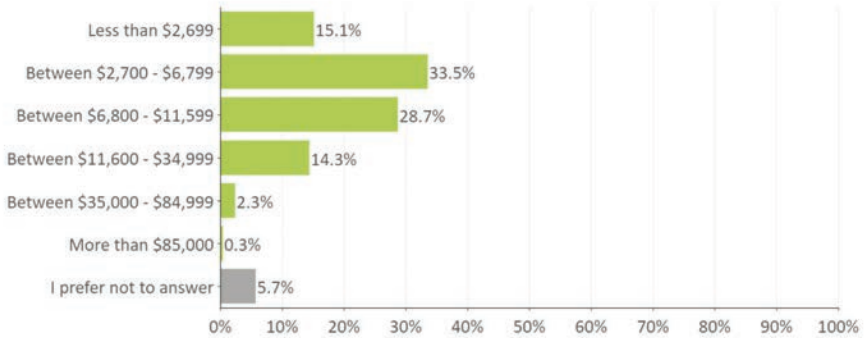
8. Who is the principal wage earner in your household? By principal wage earner in the household, we refer to the member with the highest income. (N=791)



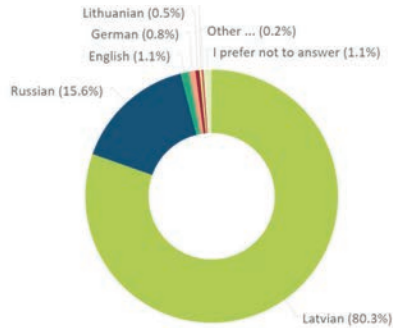
9. Which household member is responsible for the purchases in your household? (N=791)



10. What is your total personal net monthly income, considering all available sources of income? (N=791)



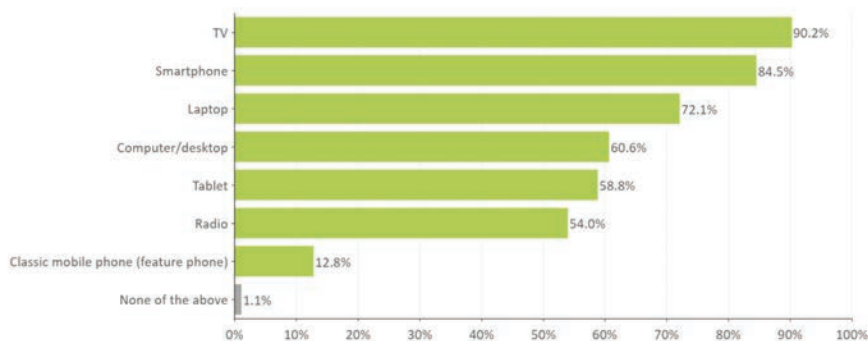
11. What is your native language? (N=921)



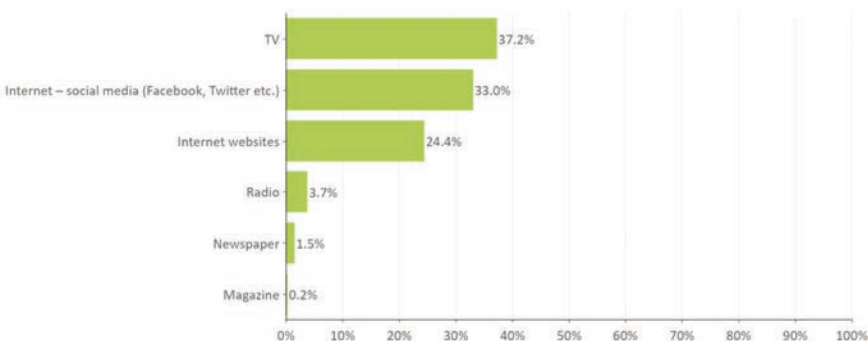
UNITED STATES

Media Usage

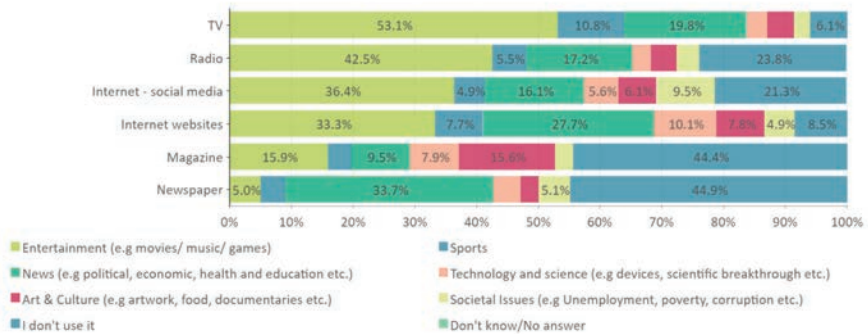
1. What types of devices do you own? (More than one answer) (N=974)



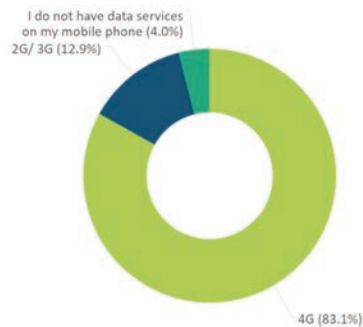
2. What type of media do you consume on an average day? (N=974)



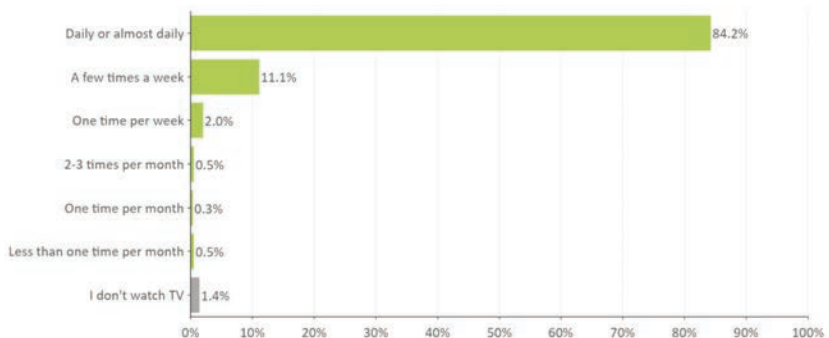
3. Please select the most common purpose for your consumption of each of the following: (N=974)



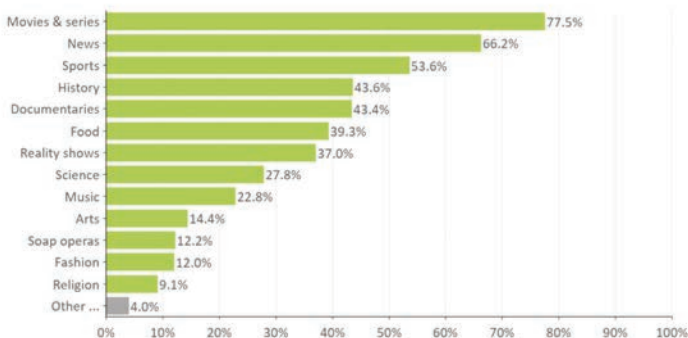
4. What type of data services (2G/3G/4G) do you have on your mobile phone? (N=823)



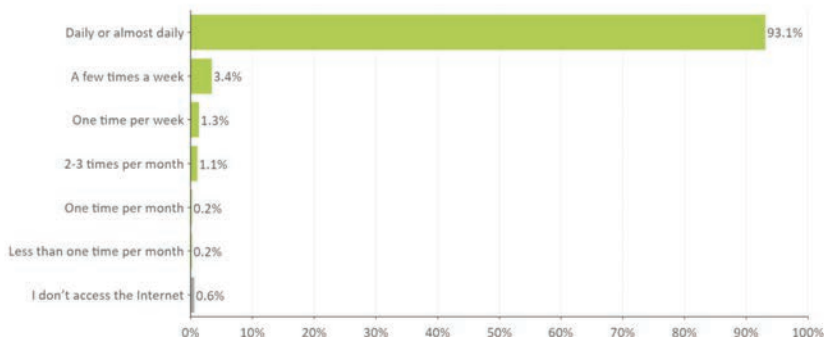
5. How often do you watch TV? (N=879)



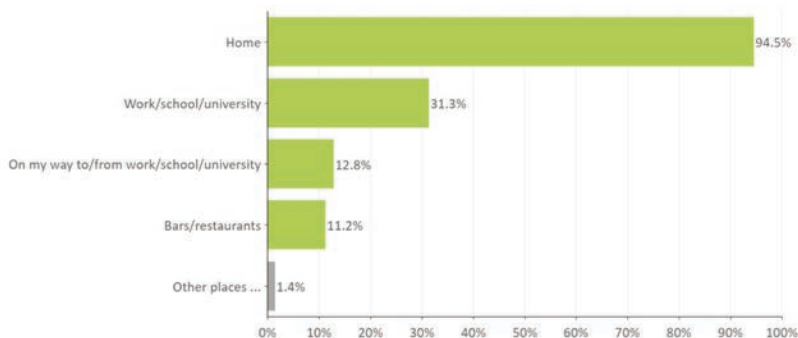
6. What types of content do you watch on TV? (More than one answer) (N=867)



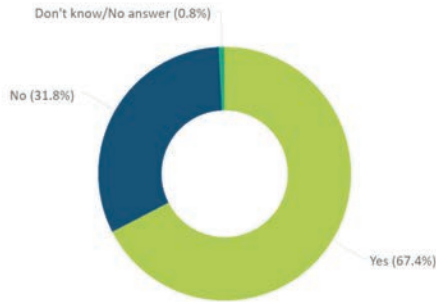
7. How often do you access the internet? (N=974)



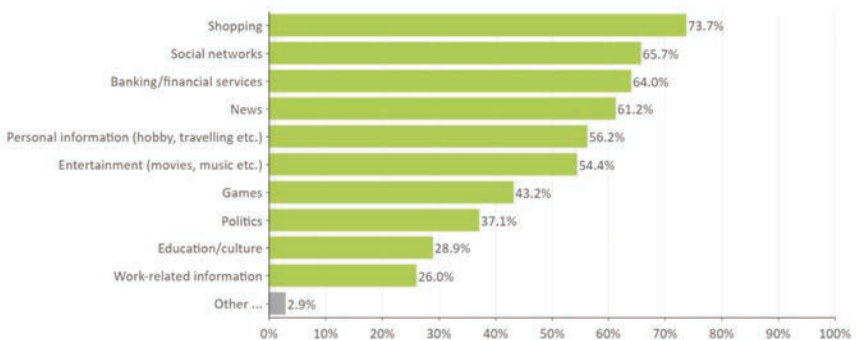
8. In general, from where do you access the internet? (More than one answer) (N=968)



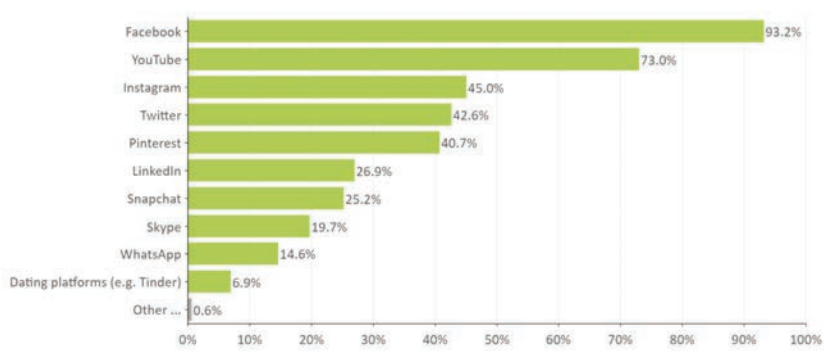
9. Are you generally online (on your mobile phone/laptop) even when watching television, listening to music, or doing other activities? (N=968)



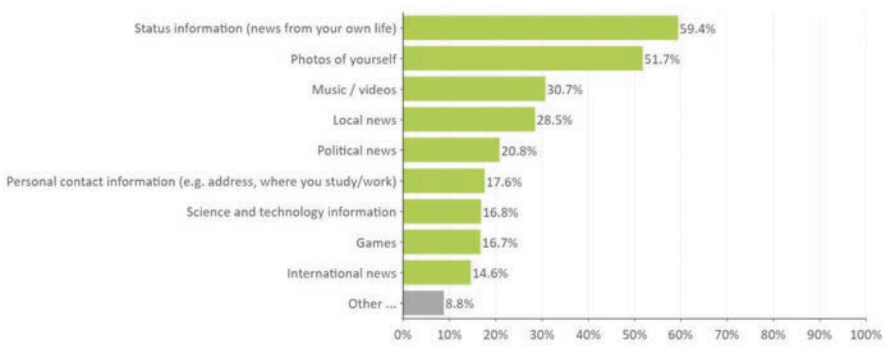
10. Which of the following types of content do you access on the internet? (More than one answer) (N=919)



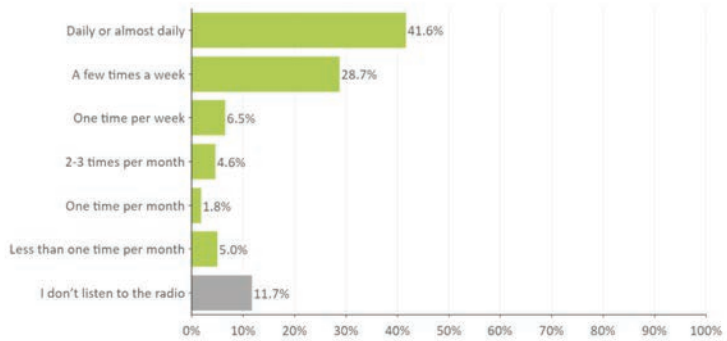
11. Which of the following websites/apps do you access? (More than one answer) (N=968)



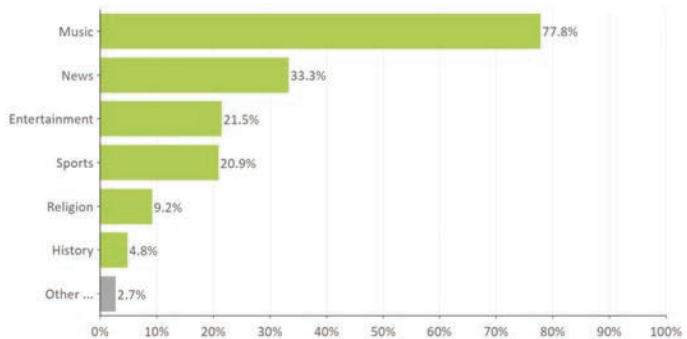
12. What type of information do you publish on your social networks? (More than one answer) (N=968)



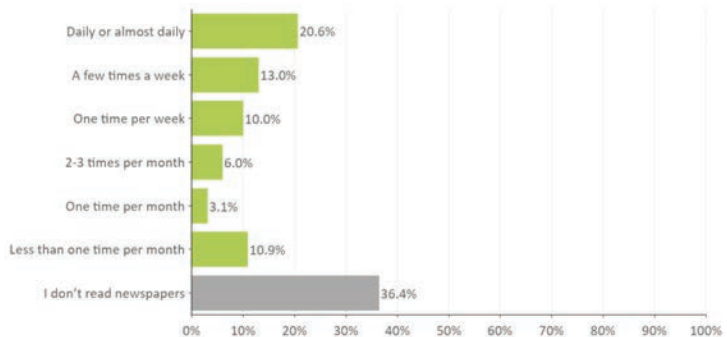
13. How often do you listen to the radio? (N=974)



14. What types of radio shows do you listen to? (More than one answer) (N=860)



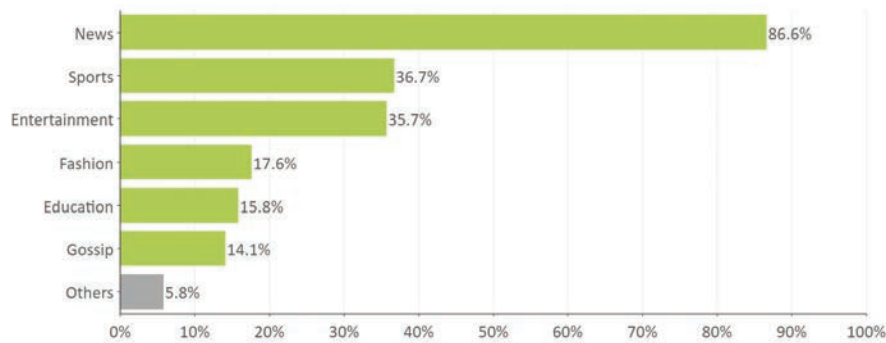
15. How often do you read newspapers? (N=974)



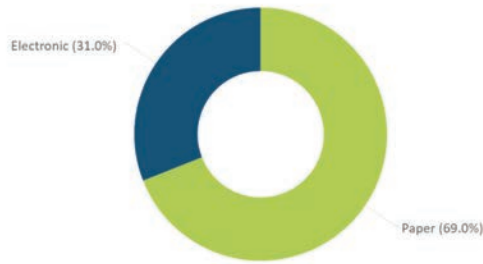
16. Do you usually read print or electronic newspapers? (N=619)



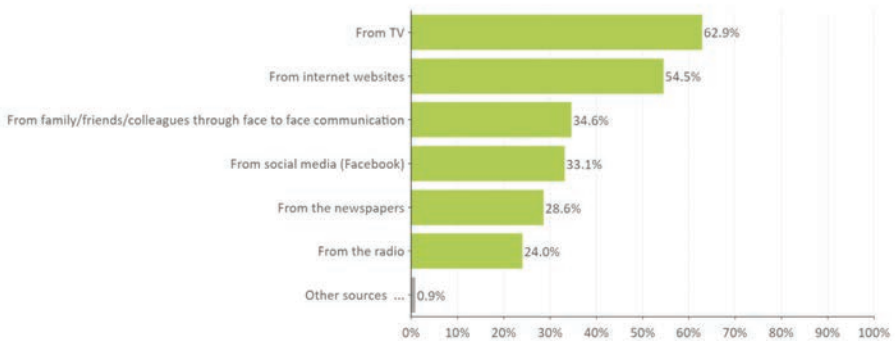
17. What types of newspapers do you read? (More than one answer) (N=619)



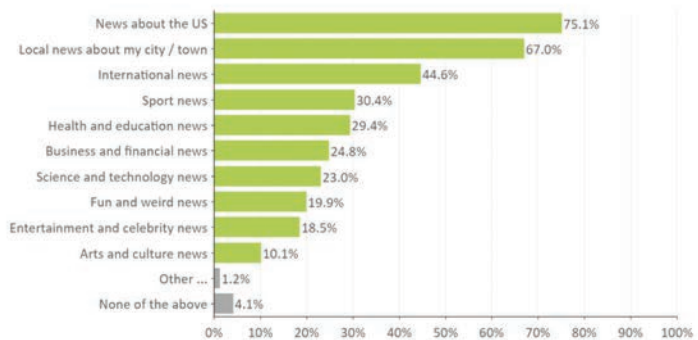
18. What newspaper format do you trust more? (N=619)



19. Generally, from which source do you get informed? (More than one answer) (N=974)

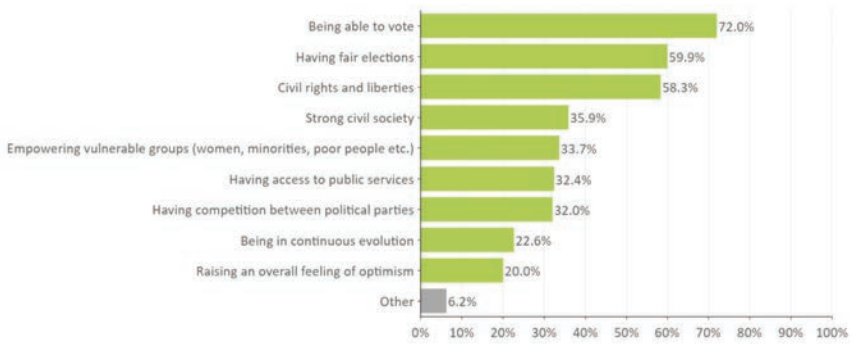


20. Which of the following types of news is most important to you? Please choose up to five. (More than one answer) (N=974)

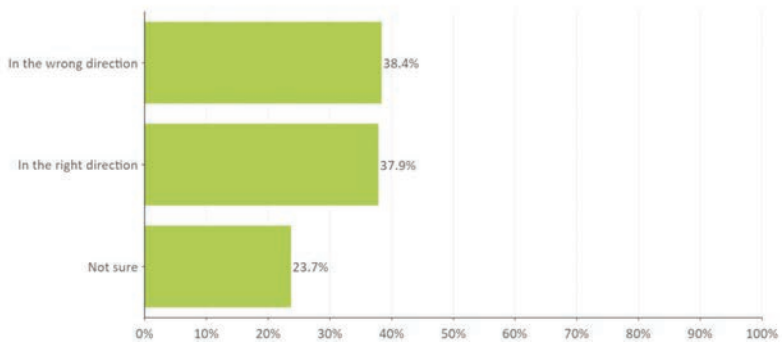


Civic and Political Engagement

1. How would you define democracy in the U.S? (More than one answer) (N=974)



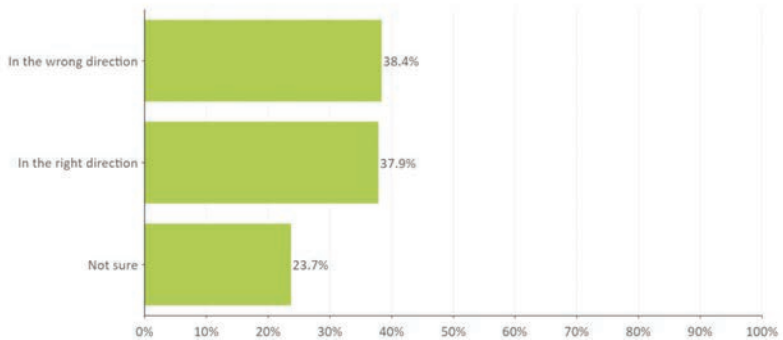
2. Generally speaking, would you say the political conditions in the U.S are heading in the right direction, or in the wrong direction? (N=974)



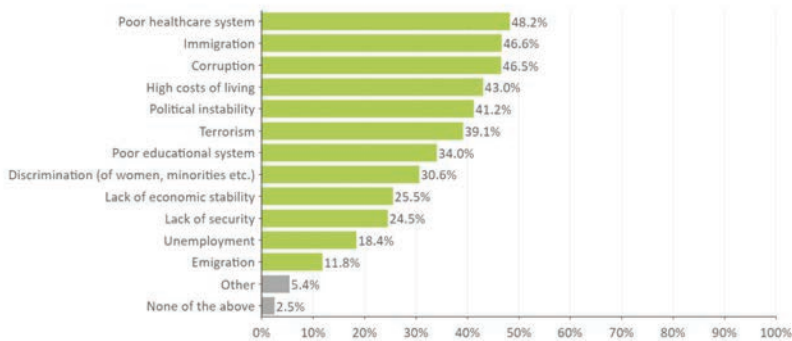
3. Why do you think that the political conditions in the U.S. are heading in the wrong direction? (More than one answer) (N=577)



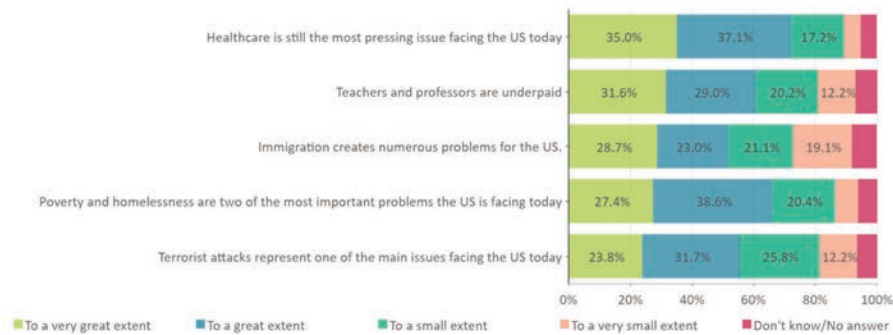
4. Generally speaking, would you say the economic conditions in the U.S. are heading in the right direction or the wrong direction? (N=974)



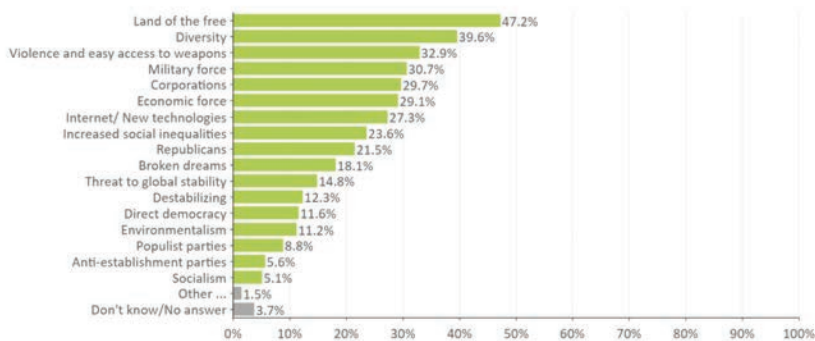
5. In your opinion, what are the main issues facing the U.S. today? (N=974)



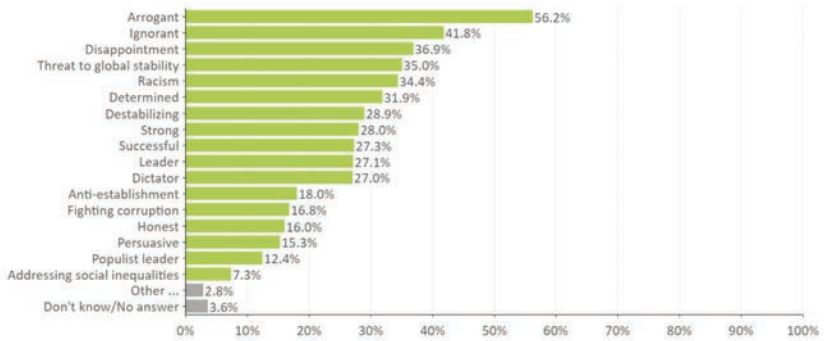
6. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=974)



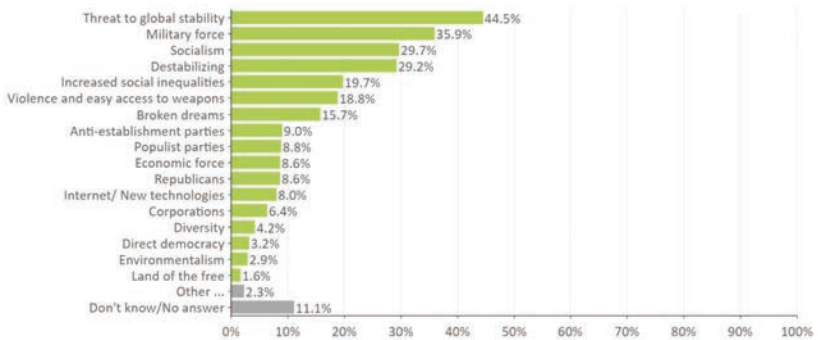
7. When thinking of the United States, with what words do you associate it? (More than one answer) (N=974)



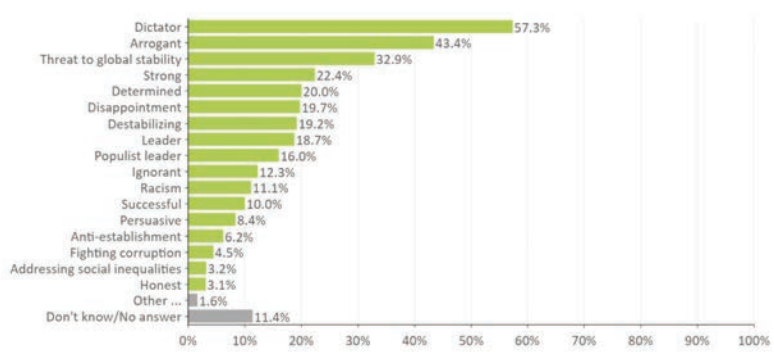
8. When thinking of the United States president, Donald Trump, with what words do you associate him? (More than one answer) (N=974)



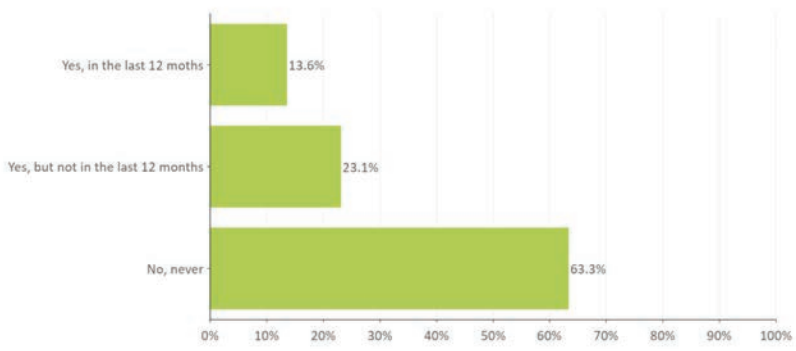
9. When thinking of Russia, with what words do you associate the country? (More than one answer) (N=974)



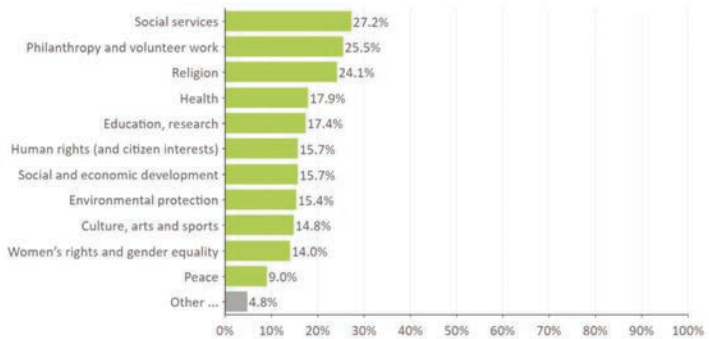
10. When thinking of Vladimir Putin, with what words do you associate him? (More than one answer) (N=974)



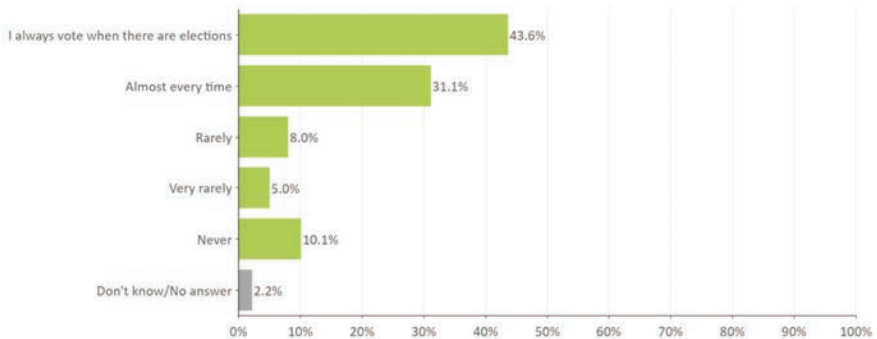
11. Have you volunteered in a group or a non-governmental organization (NGO)? (N=974)



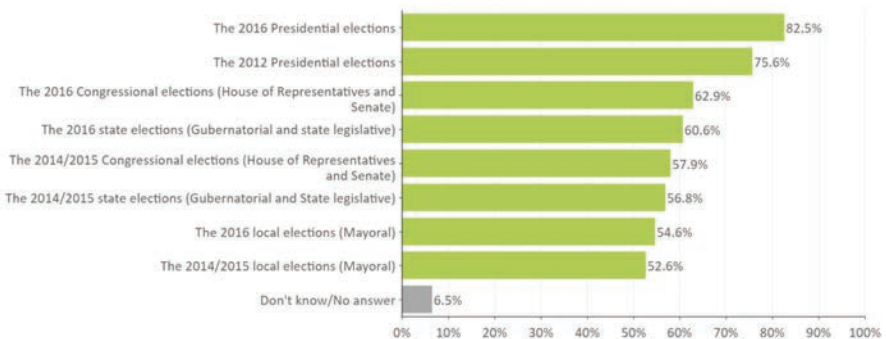
12. In which of the following areas did you do volunteer work? (More than one answer) (N=357)



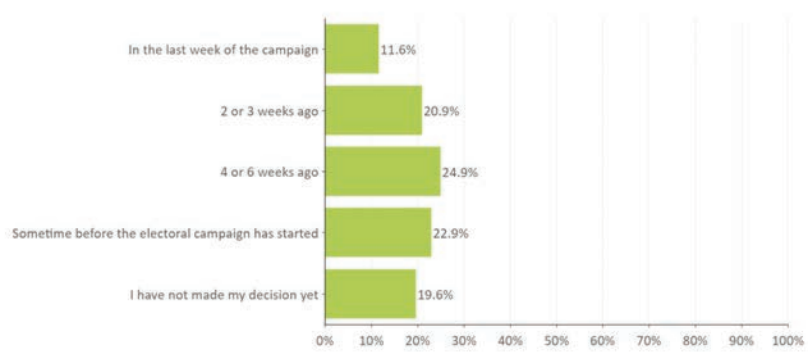
13. How often do you vote? (N=974)



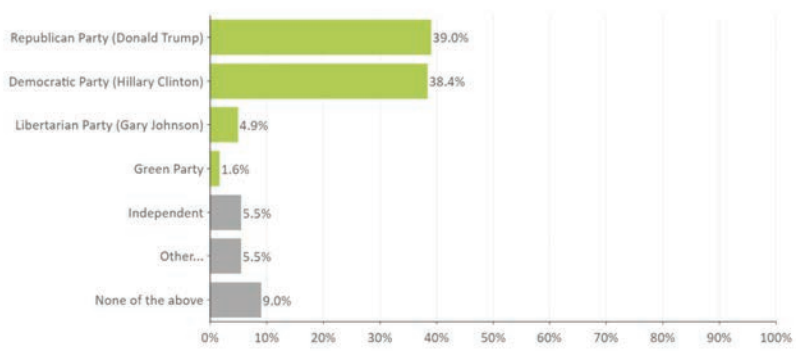
14. In which elections did you vote? (More than one answer) (N=876)



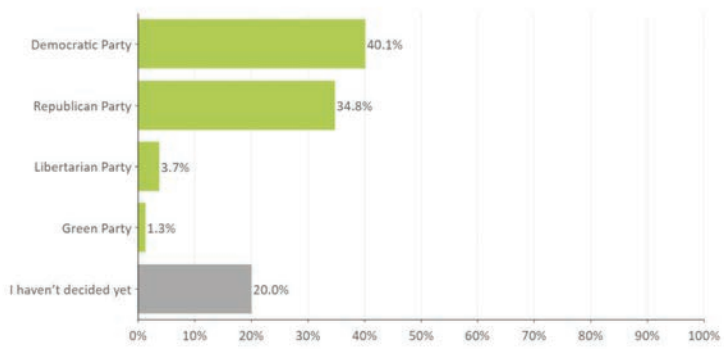
15. When did you make your decision on which candidate to support during the 2018 Midterm elections? (N=876)



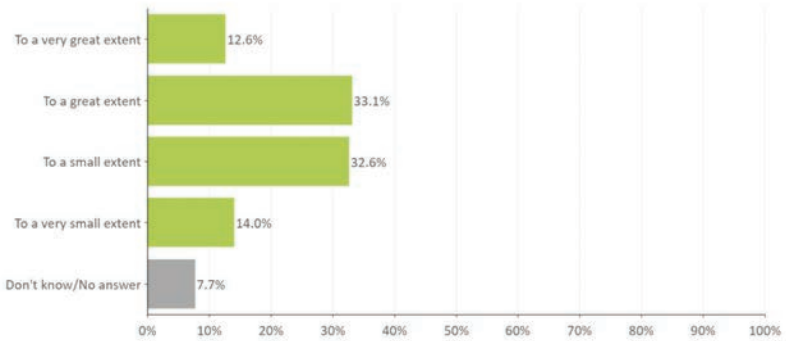
16. For whom did you vote in the presidential elections held in 2016? (N=876)



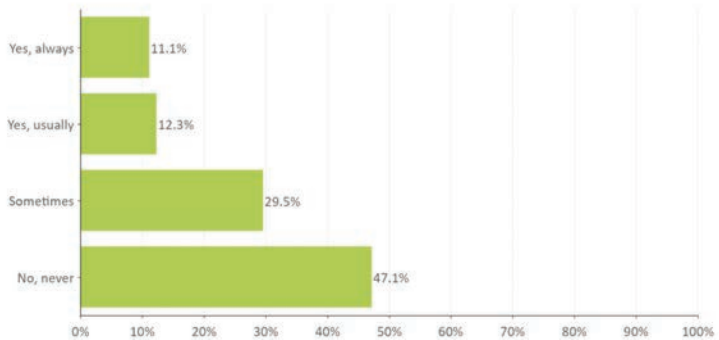
17. If congressional elections were held today, for whom would you vote? (N=974)



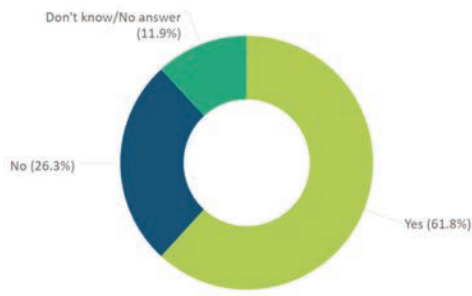
18. To what extent do you believe that the voting procedures will be completely fair and transparent at the 2018 congressional elections? (N=974)



19. When elections take place, do you try to convince others to vote for those with whom you sympathize? (N=974)

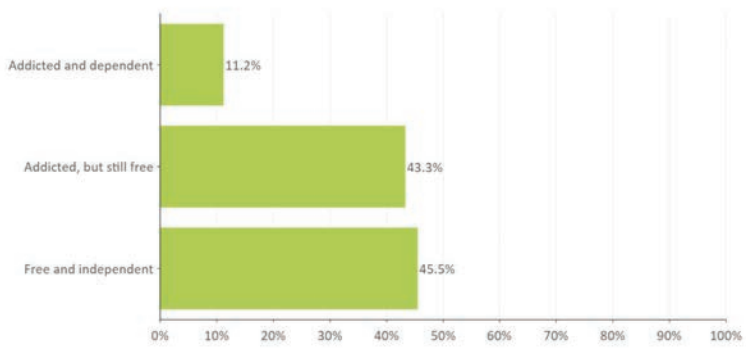


20. Do you believe that Russia has sought to undermine the U.S. elections? (N=974)

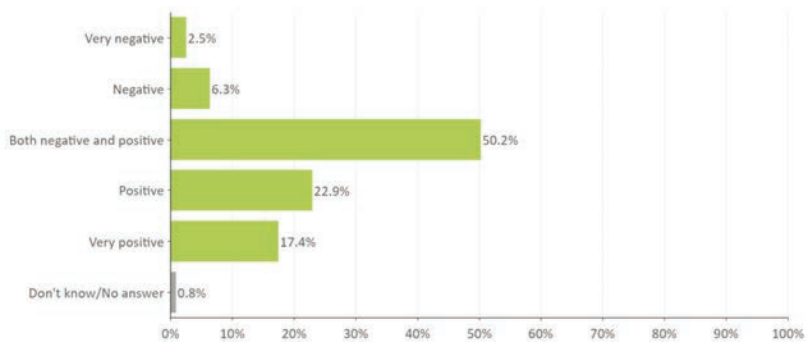


Impact of Technology on Democracy

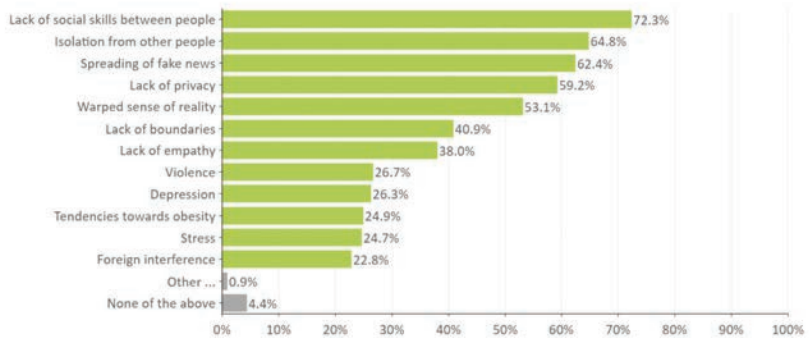
1. When thinking of your use of technology in your day-to-day life (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how would you say this usage makes you feel? (N=974)



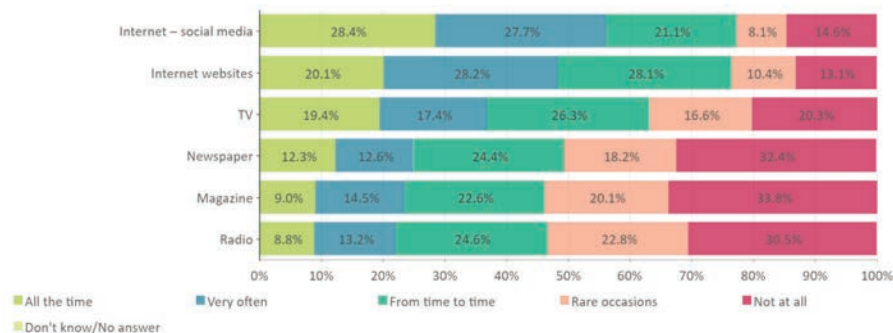
2. When thinking of the impact technology has on society (information, communication, entertainment, etc.), how positive/negative would you say it is? Please state your answer on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means it has a very negative impact and 5 means that it has a very positive impact. (N=974)



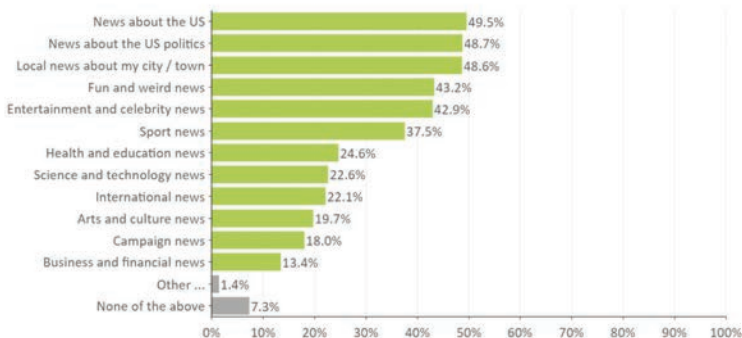
3. What do you think are the negative implications technology has on society? (More than one answer) (N=574)



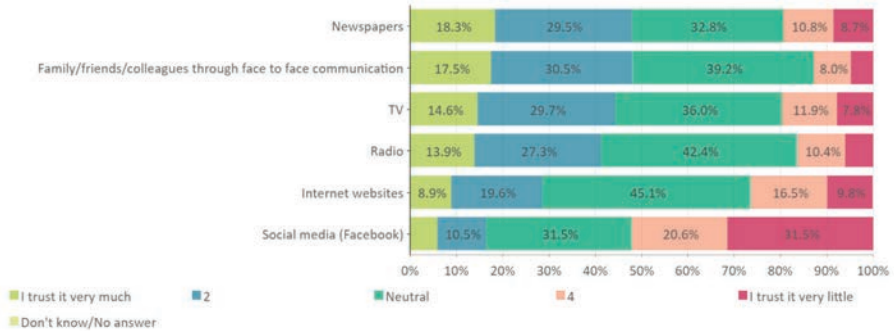
4. Where do you encounter fake news on the following media platforms: (N=974)



5. What are the top 5 news-related topics that you usually find in your social media feeds? (More than one answer) (N=610)



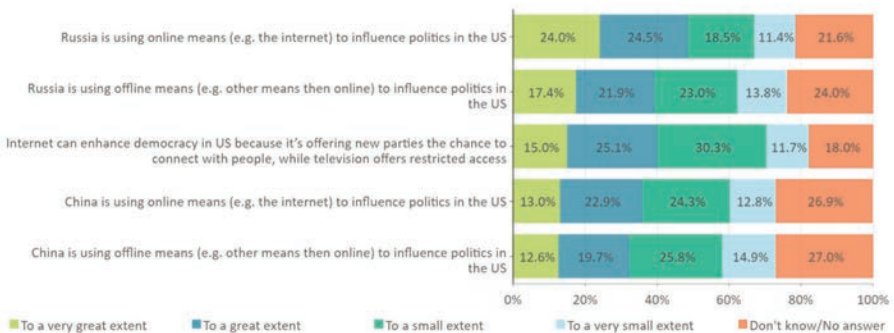
6. How much do you trust information coming from the following, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means you trust it very much and 5 means you trust it very little? (N=974)



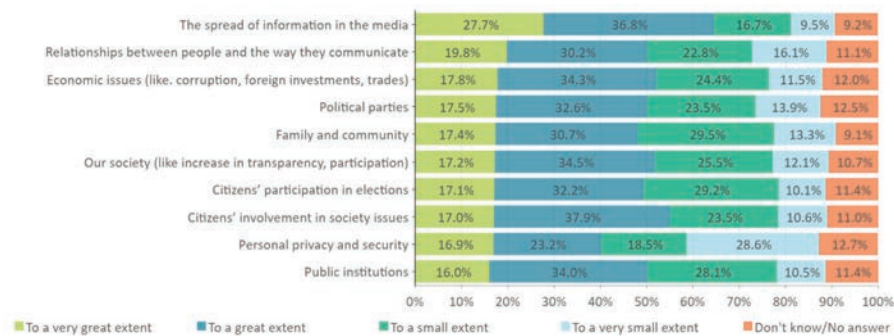
7. Before the 2018 congressional elections, from where did you get informed in order to make a decision about whom to vote for? (More than one answer) (N=974)



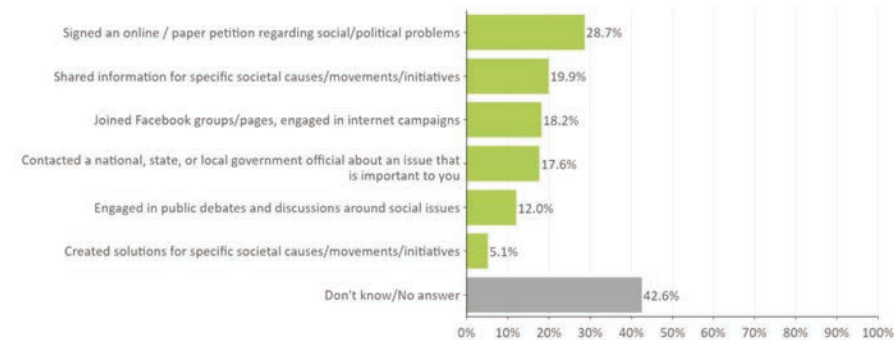
8. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? (N=974)



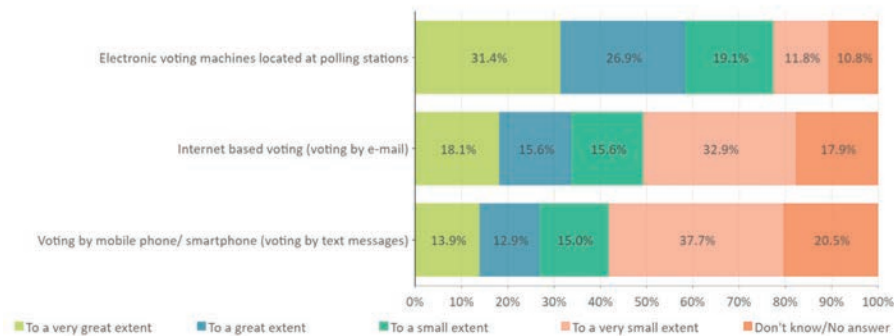
9. To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: Technology has a positive impact on.... (N=974)



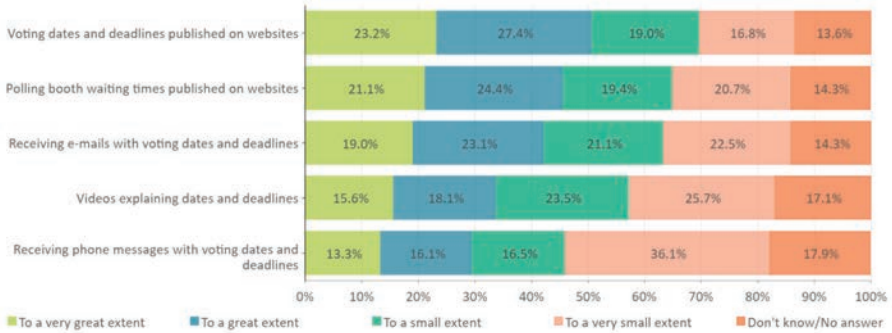
10. Which of the following actions have you performed on online platforms or social media in the last 12 months? (More than one answer) (N=974)



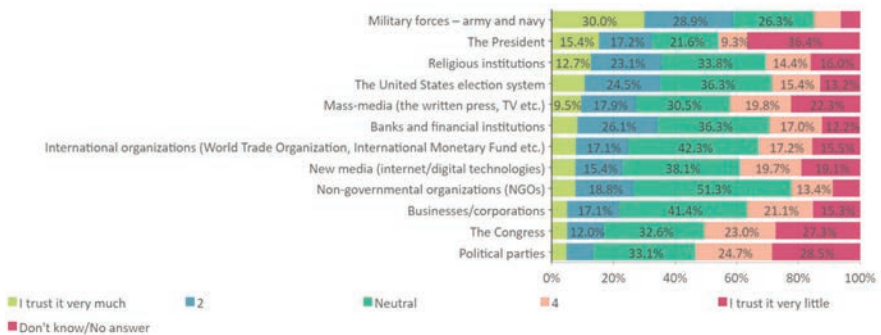
11. If possible, to what extent would you prefer... (N=974)



12. To what extent would you be interested in the following information regarding elections? (N=974)



13. The following list contains several institutions in the U.S. Please tell us how much trust you have in each one: very much, neutral or very little. (N=974)



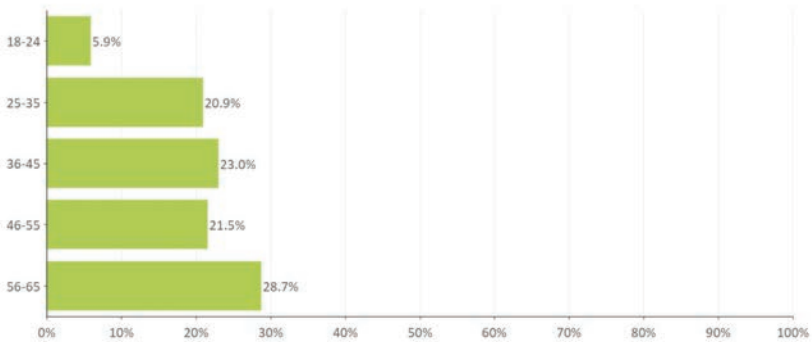
Socio-Demographic Profiling

This online survey has been conducted among 974 Americans aged 18-65. Understanding their socio-demographic profile is vital when interpreting the results.

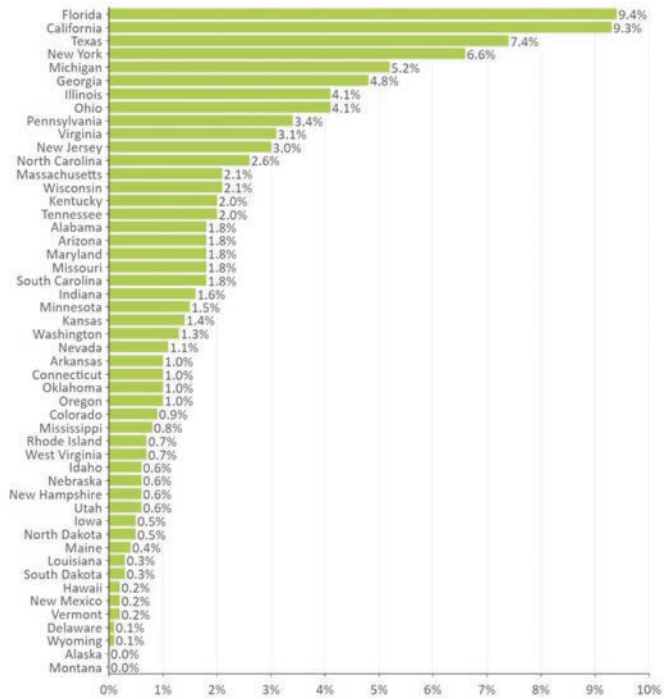
1. What is your gender? (N=974)



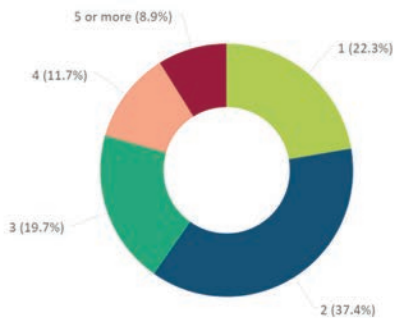
2. What is your age? (N=974)



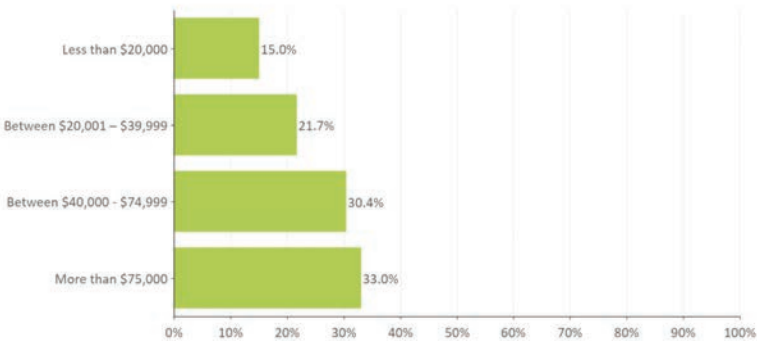
3. What is your permanent residence or the one where you spent the last 12 months? (N=974)



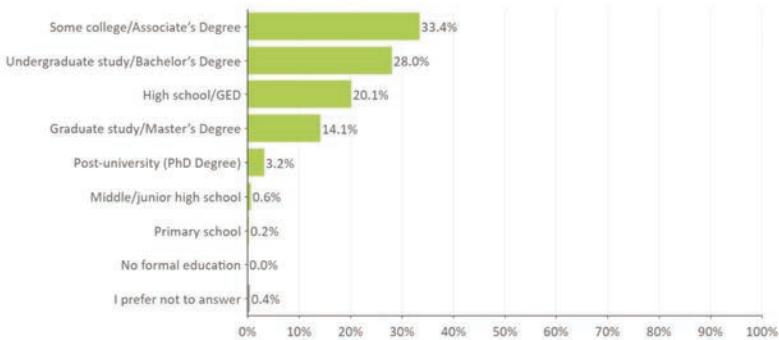
4. How many family members live in your household (including yourself)? (N=974)



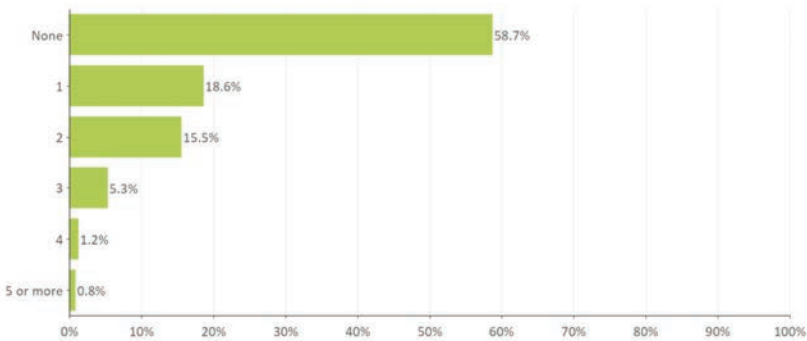
5. What is the total household net annual income, considering all available sources of income in your household? (N=974)



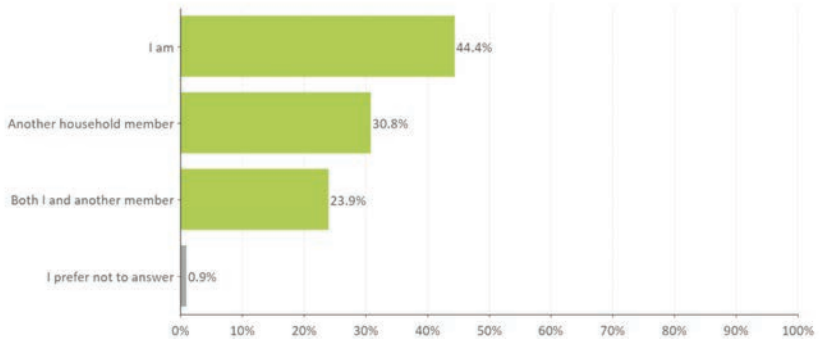
6. What is the highest degree/level of school that you have completed? (N=974)



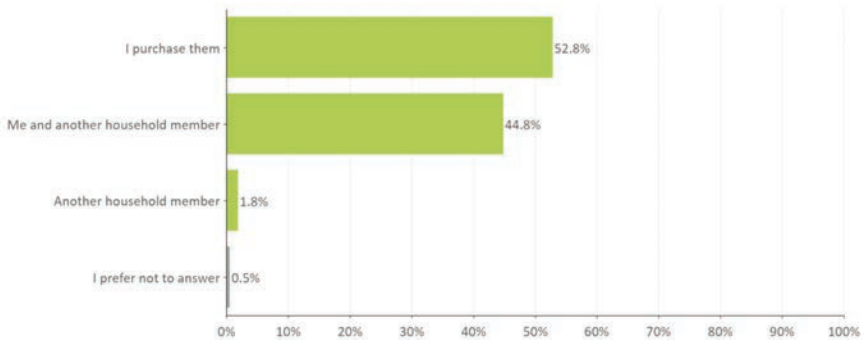
7. How many people in your household are children under 18 years of age? (N=757)



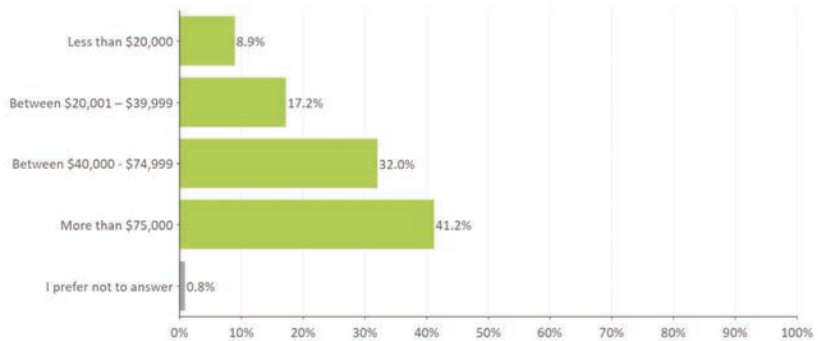
8. Who is the principal wage earner in your household? By principal wage earner in the household, we refer to the member with the highest income. (N=757)



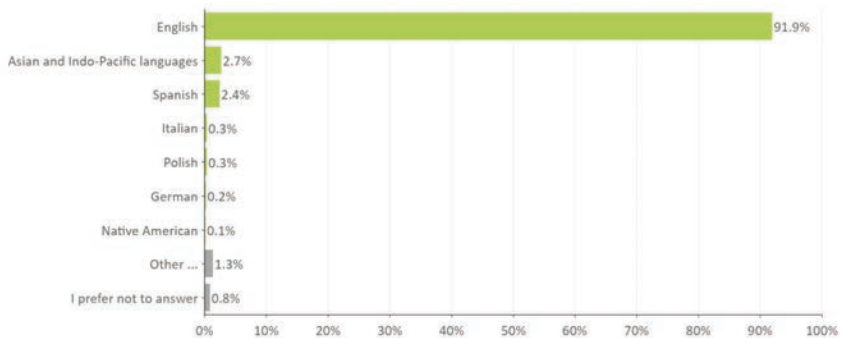
9. Which household member is responsible for the purchases in your household? (N=757)



10. What is your total personal net annual income, considering all available sources of income? (N=757)



11. What is your native language? (N=974)



Survey Methods

1) Italy Case Study, March 2018 Survey

This report is based on an online survey conducted in Italy under the coordination of Questia Group. The interviews were conducted between March 7-14, 2018, among a representative online sample of 989 persons, aged 18-64. Interviews were done in Spanish.

The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.1 percentage points. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect due to weighting. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. The margin of error is larger for results based on subgroups in the survey. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question-wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce errors or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

This report considers information available as of March 2018. The analysis and research findings are those of the contributing staff and should not be attributed to other sources. Every effort is made to ensure, but not guarantee, their timeliness, accuracy, and completeness.

2) Mexico Case Study, June 2018 Survey

This report is based on an online survey conducted in Mexico under the coordination of Questia Group. The interviews were conducted between June 25-30, 2018, among a representative online sample of 969 persons, aged 18-64. Interviews were done in Spanish.

The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.1 percentage points. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect due to weighting. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. The margin of error is larger for results based on subgroups in the survey. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question-wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce errors or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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Survey Methods Continued

3) Latvia Case Study, October 2018 Survey

This report is based on an online survey conducted in Latvia under the coordination of Questia Group. The interviews were conducted between September 26 – October 5th, 2018, among a representative online sample of 921 persons, aged 18-64. Interviews were done in Latvian – the official spoken language in Latvia - due to the focus of the study on the general online population. However, 15.6% of the respondents declare that Russian is their native language (as compared to 26.9% ethnic Russians in the general population, according to the 2011 Population and Housing Census).

The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.2 percentage points. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect due to weighting. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. The margin of error is larger for results based on subgroups in the survey. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question-wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce errors or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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4) U.S. Case Study, October 2018 Survey

This report is based on an online survey conducted in the United States under the coordination of Questia Group. The interviews were conducted October 31 – November 5, 2018, among a representative online sample of 974 persons, aged 18-65. Interviews were conducted in English.

The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.2 percentage points. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect due to weighting. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. The margin of error is larger for results based on subgroups in the survey. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question-wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce errors or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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The Bertelsmann Foundation would like to thank the people of Italy, Mexico, Latvia, and the United States for sharing the experiences and insights that have made *Disrupting Democracy* possible.

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With sincere gratitude,

Irene Braam
Executive Director
Bertelsmann Foundation

