ČESKÉ VOLBY

V ÉŘE DEZINFORMACÍ

VOLBY

Presidential election 2018

Authors: Jonáš Syrovátka, Jaroslav Hroch (PSSI)

Prague Security
Studies Institute

Contents

Introduction

"The lithium case", which appeared before the Czech Parliamentary Elections in 2017 confirmed that if disinformation is brought from the marginal platforms into the mainstream discourse by the candidates in the pre-election struggle, it can result in a significant influence on the course of events.[1] With regards to the fact that the first disinformation related to the presidential candidates appeared half a year before the election, it was to be expected that we would face this phenomenon during the Czech Presidential Elections 2018 as well.[2] The Prague Security Studies Institute thus decided to analyze, within the project "Czech elections in the era of disinformation", the way in which platforms disseminating disinformation refer to electoral campaign before the Presidential Elections.

This project monitored, during the months before the elections, how the six most important platforms disseminated disinformation referring to the presidential candidates.[3] We therefore monitored the following websites: AC24, Aeronet, Parlamentní listy, Protiproud, Sputnik CZ and the Facebook page Zprávy.cz (previously known as WeAreHereAtHome). These platforms had been selected for their occasional spreading of disinformation, having quite large numbers of followers[4] (or their content being shared by other platforms), and for creating their own original content, which, contrary to only disseminating activity, increases the possibility of discovering new disinformation during the analysis before it is spread further.[5]

The research structure, however, has its limitations. We were unable to evaluate how other, less important platforms disseminating disinformation or mainstream media, reported on the campaign. Nor was it possible to determine the weight of the contribution of the monitored platforms to creating a specific atmosphere more suitable for certain type of politicians, through either their continuous publishing of certain types of messages (such as distorted news on migration). Nor identify disinformation that was not directly linked to any of the candidates, but could ultimately help or support one of them (by, for example, highlighting the same topic as a topic in candidate's agenda). In addition, it was impossible to include evaluations of the chain emails (which significantly influenced the pre-election course of events) into the analysis.[6]

Despite these limitations, this research allows us to evaluate the way in which the most important Czech platforms spreading disinformation talked about the election campaign. It was ascertained that the platforms, which dedicated more space to the Presidential Elections, intended to support Miloš Zeman by the pattern of their reporting. The use of disinformation to this end was rare. More often, there were commentaries and interviews published in which Zeman is lauded and other candidates criticised. The question is, therefore, whether the sole characteristic of these platforms as 'spreading disinformation' is the most important one. Perhaps we should rather pay more attention to other characteristics, such as certain ideological standpoints, which they represent.

---

1   Unsubstantiated allegations of ČSSD for intend to siphon off the Czech lithium resources, originally published by Aeronet, in its result costed the party several percent of votes, events related to lithium can be found in this text – "Lithiová lekce" (http://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jonas-syrovatka.php?itemid=30604).

2   "Na prezidentské kandidáty už se lije ,špína'. Hanopisy útočí na Horáčka i Drahoše"; Lidovky.cz (https://www.lidovky.cz/na-prezidentske-adepty-uz-se-lije-spina-drahose-vini-ze-spoluprace-s-stb-1ay-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A170722_182441_ln_domov_ELE).

3   Document describing methodology in detail available at - http://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/505_metodologie.pdf.

4   Facebook pages of these websites have ten thousand followers.

5   To draw attention to disinformation attempting to influence the election campaign was one of the secondary aims of the project.

6   More about this phenomenon – Ondřej Golis; "E-mailové lži. Předvolební dezinformace psali a šířili lékař, advokát, důchodce nebo farmář"; iRozhlas.cz (https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/dezinformace-e-mail-prezident-volby-drahos-zeman_1802090600_ogo).

News reporting of the monitored platforms

During the month of December and the first four weeks of January, 1.352 articles were published on the monitored platforms mentioning at least one of the presidential candidates. Whereas in December the number of publications referring to the candidates was around one hundred per week, in January – with the approaching date of the Elections – this number increased (in the week before the second round this number reached 250 publications).

The topics of the articles varied over time. The election campaign as a topic (texts usually describing the content of presidential debates, election meeting etc.) was dominant along the monitoring period (in total 958 articles). However, as it will be described further, there were some differences between the articles dealing with the election.

Apart from the election, the articles dealt with other topics:
– The domestic political situation (especially in relation to the role of the President in the process of forming new government) was a topic in 158 of the articles.
– President Miloš Zeman was mention in 55 articles in relation to duties of his office.
– The candidates in relation to foreign political events were mentioned in 21 texts.
– A description of Miloš Zeman's career (for example, interviews with his former co-workers) was a topic in 17 of the articles.
– The candidates were mentioned in relation to past political events in 17 articles (for example, when describing some political events, it was mentioned that Mirek Topolánek was the Prime Minister at that time).

Graph n. 1 – Representation of particular topics on the monitored platforms.
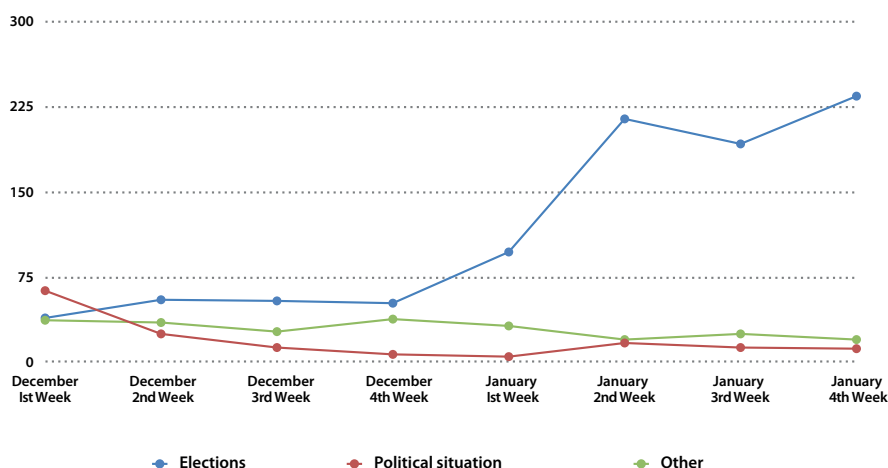
Newscast
on the election campaign

The way in which the monitored platforms were informing about the election campaign, that was dealt with by more than two thirds of all published articles, changed significantly over time. Topics that were addressed also varied.

During December, 203 articles addressing the elections were published. Quotes of statements of the candidates, which represented the main content of 57 texts, were more pronounced in December than in January. Opinion texts were also represented quite a bit—interviews (57) and commentaries (41)—as well as news on the events related to the campaign (44). Four articles were disinformative, most of them based on the belief that

the opponents of Miloš Zeman would be financially supported by an American millionaire George Soros (for more details, see chapter Disinformation).

A large number of articles quoting statements made by the candidates shows that their presentation and opinions became an important topic in December. Another, more pronounced topic was the meeting of presidential candidate Jiří Drahoš with the Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka concerning the possible influence of foreign entities on the election.[7] This meeting was mentioned (primarily negatively) in 15 articles (often in interviews, in which this meeting was referred to by the journalists of Parlamentní listy).

Graph n. 2 – Articles on the presidential election according to their type (December 2017)

- Comment
- News
- Interviews
- Statement
- Disinformation
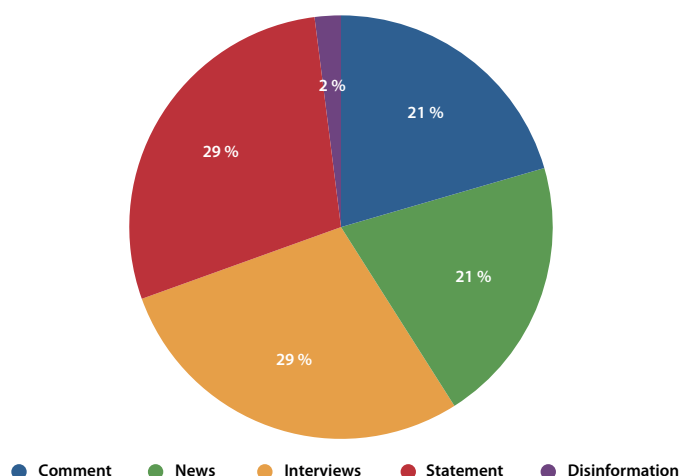
In January before the first round of the presidential election (between 1st and 12th January 2018) 234 articles on the elections were published in total. Opinion texts clearly prevailed—such as commentaries (63) and interviews (61)—and news on events related to the election campaign (61). Number of quotes of statements of the candidates decreased in this period (46). Three articles were disinformative; besides the repetition of disinformation about Soros financing some of the

candidates, the first disinformation related to migration appeared (for more details, see chapter Disinformation).

Most of the texts addressed the topics typical for an election campaign (for example, an analysis of campaigns of the candidates or their performance at TV debates, betting odds, etc.). Relatively great attention was paid to the performance of an FEMEN activist who protested in the polling place against Miloš Zeman (8

---

7   "Drahoš se obává, že Rusko ovlivňuje volby v Česku. Byl u Sobotky"; Echo24 (https://echo24.cz/a/Scp3B/drahos-se-obava-ze-rusko-ovlivnuje-volby-v-cesku-byl-u-sobotky).

articles).[8] In this period, a controversial statement by preacher Tomáš Halík appeared, marking voting for Miloš Zeman as a "moral offense against the interests of our country," which was mentioned repeatedly

particularly by Parlamentní listy (for example, in the form of questions asked in interviews) more or less until the end of the campaign.[9]

Graph n. 3 – Articles on the presidential election according to their type (January 2018 – before the 1st round)
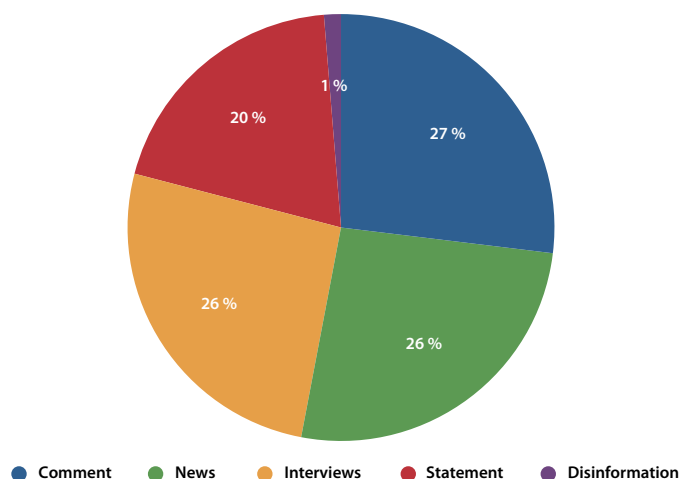

In the fourteen days between the first and the second round of elections (13th to 26th January 2018), 526 articles related to the election campaign were published. Opinion texts prevailed again—commentaries (202) and interviews (102)—and news covering real events (164). The number of texts primarily based on quotes by the candidates decreased (38). These quotes were more prominently presented in a manipulative manner (for example, taken out of context). Given that the Facebook page Zprávy.cz became active, in 14 cases new types of texts (Facebook evets, surveys or pictures) were observed. The number of disinformation increased, appearing in 6 articles.

Between the first and the second round of the elections the discourse of the monitored platforms sharpened

(as can be seen from the increase in the number of disinformative articles or texts containing negative/positive sentiment). In the published interviews and commentaries, contrary to the previous periods, recommendations for whom to vote were appearing more often. Great attention was also paid to the two televised debates which became the topic of 74 articles, with most of them marking Miloš Zeman as the winner in both cases. Also, an attempt to doubt the impartiality of the Czech Television and the Demagog project appeared, in light of the fact that Demagog, a project which fact-checked all statements of politicians (in this case the candidates) in debates and so on, got a lot of attention from the mainstream media.

---

8   "Na prezidenta se hnala polonahá žena. Zeman je Putinova děvka, křičela"; iDnes.cz (https://volby.idnes.cz/milos-zeman-prezidentske-volby-aktivistka-utok-hlasovani-mistnost-1gi-/prezidentske-volby-2018.aspx?c=A180112_151018_prezidentske-volby-2018_ane).

9   Lukáš Petřík; "Zlý a žlučovitý Jidáš, který nenávidí svou zemi a český národ. Tomáš Halík napadl Zemana a takto ošklivě ho za to zesměšnili Okamura, Keller či Foldyna"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Zly-a-zlucovity-Jidas-ktery-nenavidi-svou-zemi-a-cesky-narod-Tomas-Halik-napadl-Zemana-a-takto-osklive-ho-za-to-zesmesnili-Okamura-Keller-ci-Foldyna-519249).

Graph n. 4 – Distribution of texts on the elections according to their type (January 2018 – between the 1st and the 2nd round)

- ● Comment
- ● News
- ● Interviews
- ● Statement
- ● Disinformation
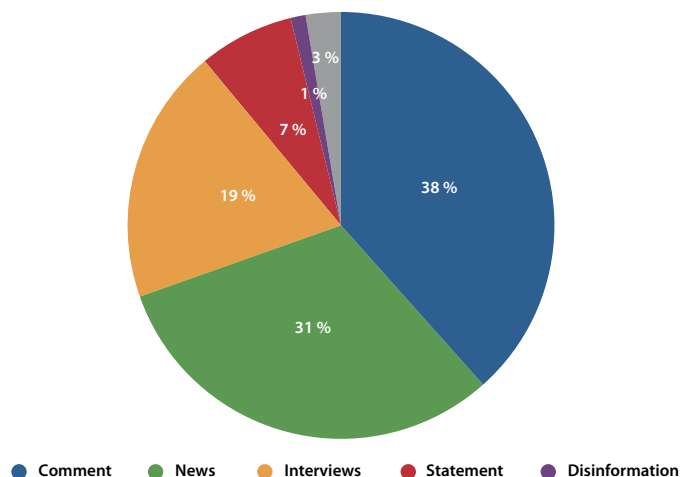
Candidates

Throughout the monitoring period, Miloš Zeman was the most frequently mentioned candidate (totally in 1080 articles). If we count simply the cases in which he was mentioned only in relation to the elections, the number decreases to 843. Even with this number, however, Miloš Zeman is still the most frequently mentioned candidate.

The second most frequently mentioned candidate was Jiří Drahoš with 784 mentions. Before the first round he had to compete with Mirek Topolánek (257 mentions) and Michal Horáček (199 mentions). Other candidates were mentioned significantly less frequently. [10]

Graph n. 5 – The number of texts mentioning candidates over time

- ● M. Zeman (president)
- ● M. Zeman (candidate)
- ● J. Drahoš
- ● M. Horáček
- ● M. Topolánek

---
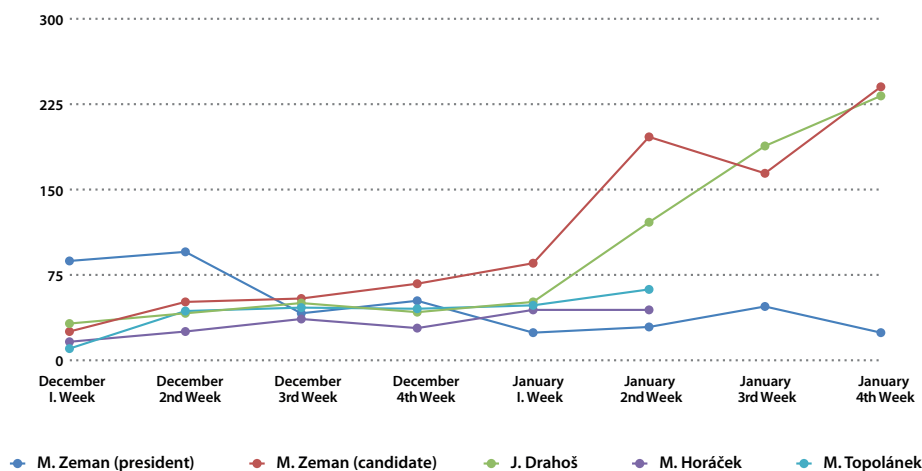
10   Pavel Fischer (104), Marek Hilšer (76), Petr Hanning (73), Jiří Hynek (64), Vratislav Kulhánek (53).
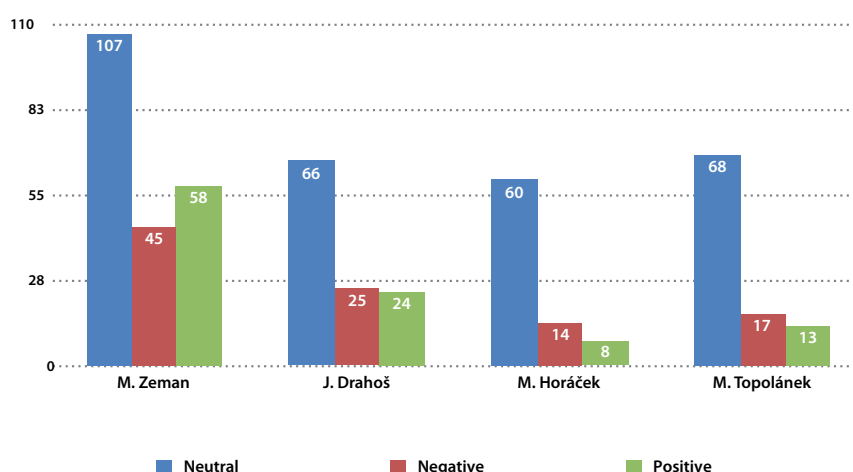
The sentiment of mentions varied significantly among the candidates.[11] While Miloš Zeman and Jiří Drahoš were more likely to be mentioned in negative or positive connotations, for Mirek Topolánek and Michal Horáček, neutral mentions prevailed.[12]

Graph n. 6 – Mentions of candidates according to the sentiment (December 2017)
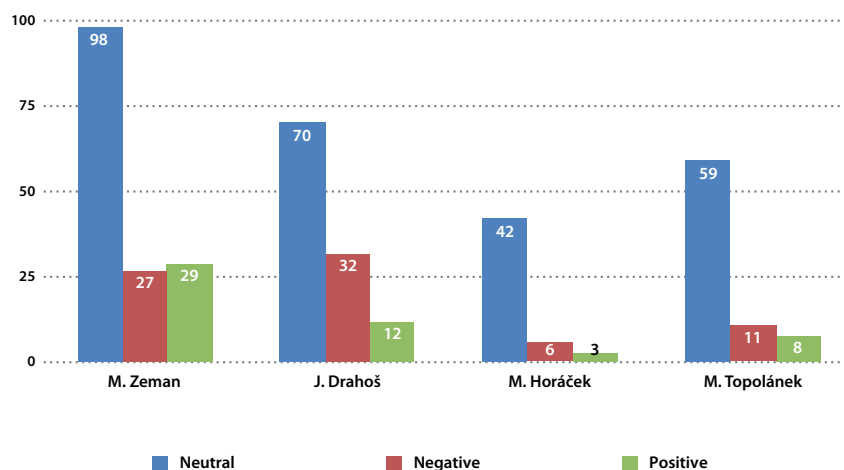
Graph n. 7 – Mentions of candidates according to the sentiment (January 2018 – before the 1st round)

The sentiment towards the candidates changed significantly right after announcing the results of the first round of the elections. In the period before the second round (between the 13th and 16th of January) not only did the number of mentions about the candidates increase in total, but mentions with negative/positive sentiment also increased (with a ratio of 1:1). Whereas Miloš Zeman was mentioned in positively two times more often than negatively, for Jiří Drahoš the ratio was the opposite. This change in sentiment can be explained not only by the general polarization of the social atmosphere, but also by the fact the Facebook page Zprávy.cz, which clearly favored Zeman and criticized Drahoš, became more active (for more details, see chapter Platforms).

---

11   When summing sentiments for Miloš Zeman only the articles in which he was mentioned as a presidential candidate were taken into consideration. In the vast majority of the other 237 texts, mostly of descriptive nature, he was mentioned without any, positive or negative, sentiment.

12   The method of sentiment evaluation is described in detail in the methodology of the project – see footnote 3.

Graph n. 8 – Mentions of candidates according to the sentiment (January 2018 – between the 1st and the 2nd round)
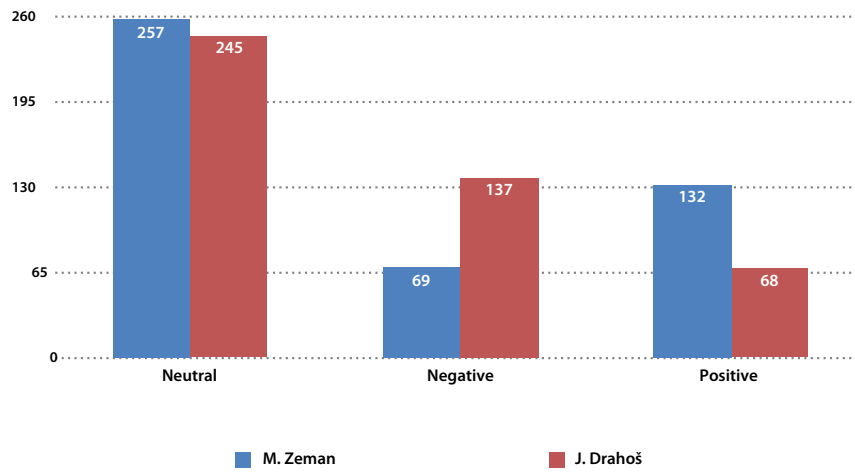
Platforms

The approach of the platforms to the Presidential Elections varied; while some of them seemed not to reflect this topic at all, others addressed it thoroughly. Some of the monitored platforms were behaving in an activist way in the pre-election period, criticizing some of the candidates and giving voting recommendations. Contrarily, others maintained a more neutral tone, and their political preferences can be only indirectly deduced (for example, by mentioning the presidential candidates or not).

Table n. 1 – Publication activity of the platforms

Platforms	Total publications	Texts mentioning the candidates	Texts mentioning the elections
AC24	358	15 (4 %)	13
Aeronet	47	18 (38 %)	18
Parlamentní listy	2279	1180 (52 %)	823
Protiproud	89	19 (21 %)	10
Sputnik CZ	2037	45 (2 %)	29
Zprávy.cz	99	66 (67 %)	60

Brief description of the publication activity of the monitored platforms:

AC24

One of the most popular websites spreading disinformation addressed the presidential elections on a limited scale (15 texts).[13] One third of these published articles contained either positive or negative sentiments. Miloš Zeman was mentioned negatively twice and just once positively. Jiří Drahoš was mentioned negatively three times (all of them appeared between the first and the second round of the elections). In a commentary from the 24th January, a membership of Jiří Drahoš in the Club of Rome was discussed and the risk of such connection was highlighted.[14]

AERONET

On this website, 18 articles addressing the topic of the elections and the respective campaigns were published. It was Aeronet that initially published most of disinformation appearing during the election campaign (6 cases in total, see chapter Disinformation).[15] In many articles, Miloš Zeman was lauded (15 positive mentions) and Jiří Drahoš criticized (12 negative mentions). Between the first and second round of the elections, an increase in the activity of the server was observed (see Graph n. 10). In this period, the website shared four articles originally published on different platforms (for example, commentaries by Petr Cvalina from Parlamentní listy) which is quite unusual for this platform. The editorial board has, apparently, an interest in promoting opinions close to their own in the public debate.

PARLAMENTNÍ LISTY

This website published the most articles of all the monitored platforms (1180). Although Parlamentní listy attempts to give the impression of impartiality, and claims to offer space to varying ideologies from a long-term perspective, its reporting on the presidential elections was not objective.

This is striking, especially when looking at the content of their Facebook page (where 272 links to articles mentioning at least one of the candidates were published), where posts favoring Miloš Zeman and criticizing his opponents (see Graph n. 9) prevailed. Administrators of the Facebook account used this editorial policy to appeal to the opinion of their readers;

---

13   The Facebook page has approximately 85 000 followers (as for 16th February 2018).

14   Jan Míka; "Jiří Míka: Drahoš, že nebyl členem Římského klubu? Stačí minuta ověření přes internety"; AC24 (http://www.ac24.cz/zpravy-z-domova/11965-mika-drahos-rimsky-klub).

15   This does not mean that disinformation thesis formulated in the texts published on Aeronet is always original; in most of the cases it is possible to observe its appearance in the internet discussions before the texts on the website.

reactions to the articles published on Facebook, in which Jiří Drahoš was lauded, were mostly negative.

Parlamentní listy not only contributed three times to the dissemination of disinformation (specifically, in the interviews, where the alleged collaboration of Jiří Drahoš with a plainclothes secret (political) police force StB in communist Czechoslovakia, or an influence of finances of George Soros on the course of election

campaign, were mentioned), but on Friday the 12th of January—the first day of the first round of the election—they published disinformation, according to which Miloš Zeman was supported by popular pop singer Karel Gott.[16] The author of this article was Radim Panenka, a journalist known for his close contacts with the inner circle of the President and for his past connections to the extremist scene.[17]

Graph n. 9 – Sentiments towards the candidates on the website and Facebook profile of Parlametní listy

Legend: ■ Not mentioned ■ Neutral ■ Negative ■ Positive
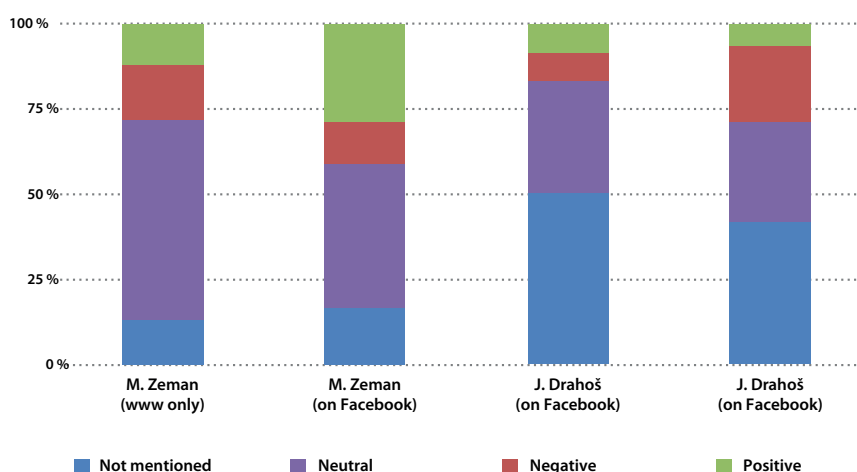
PROTIPROUD

The website Protiproud published 19 articles in which at least one of the candidates was mentioned. They were commentaries, with only one exception, where Jiří Drahoš was criticised (12 negative mentions) and Miloš Zeman praised (10 positive mentions). While Drahoš was portrayed as a weak and inexperienced candidate that would perform his office in line with the wishes of the liberal elites (domestic and global), Zeman was described as an experienced politician, capable of defending the Czech national interests.[18] On the website, a blog post by Tomáš Vyoral, originally published

on the iDnes.cz portal, was shared mentioning the disinformation that George Soros financially supports the opponents of Miloš Zeman.[19]

SPUTNIK CZ

During the monitored period, the website Sputnik CZ published 45 articles in which at least one of the candidates was mentioned. On the one hand, reporting on the election campaign was distorted (the only candidate with whom Sputnik CZ conducted an interview was Petr Hannig), on the other hand most of the articles mentioned the candidates

---

16   Lukáš Petřík; "Amok pražské kavárny. Soros jí prý na prezidentské volby poslal dvacet milionů dolarů. Trumfy drží Babiš. To nejhorší z Bruselu nás teprve čeká, varuje místopředseda KSČM Skála"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Amok-prazske-kavarny-Soros-ji-pry-na-prezidentske-volby-poslal-dvacet-milionu-dolaru-Trumfy-drzi-Babis-To-nejhorsi-z-Bruselu-nas-teprve-ceka-varuje-mistopredseda-KSCM-Skala-518501); Olga Bohmová; "Kdyby tak větší část národa ukázala těm Halíkům, lhářům z ČT a ČRo a mainstreamu zdvižený prostředníček... Režisér Václav Dvořák o nezpůsobilém Drahošovi a přátelích kultu Václava Havla"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Kdyby-tak-vetsi-cast-naroda-ukazala-tem-Halikum-lharum-z-CT-a-Cro-a-mainstreamu-zdvizeny-prostrednicek-Reziser-Vaclav-Dvorak-o-nezpusobilem-Drahosovi-a-pratelich-kultu-Vaclava-Havla-521390); Olga Bohmová; "Psychiatr sledoval Jiřího Drahoše v úterý na Primě. Bez zvuku hrůza, a když si ho pustil a poslouchal argumenty, byla to úplná katastrofa"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Psychiatr-sledoval-Jiriho-Drahose-v-utery-na-Prime-Bez-zvuku-hruza-a-kdyz-si-ho-pustil-a-poslouchal-argumenty-byla-to-uplna-katastrofa-521008).

17   Distorting title of this news "Karel Gott podpořil Miloše Zemana" was later changed to "Karel Gott se jednoznačně vyjádřil koho bude volit za prezidenta" (Radim Panenka; Karel Gott se jednoznačně vyjadril koho bude volit za prezidenta; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Karel-Gott-se-jednoznacne-vyjadril-koho-bude-volit-za-prezidenta-519701)).

18   This general tendency can be illustrated best in the text of Vlastimil Podracký: „Dva kandidáti, dva světy: Drahoš žije jinde než Zeman. Prubířským kamenem je imigrace. Bude prezident hájit národní zájmy? Příkop mezi lidmi se prohlubuje. Za všechno může Putin? Jak se žije v multikulturní bublině" (http://www.protiproud.cz/politika/3581-dva-kandidati-dva-svety-drahos-zije-jide-nez-zeman-prubirskym-kamenem-je-imigrace-bude-prezident-hajit-narodni-zajmy-prikop-mezi-lidmi-se-prohlubuje-za-vsechno-muze-putin-jak-se-zije-v-multikulturni-bubline.htm).

19   Tomáš Vyoral; "Prezidentské volby se blíží: Soros nám sem strká nos. Jak Schwarzenberg vstal a šel do banky. Proč se fake news zabývala vláda? Bakaloviny mají jasno, Drahoš sdílí Evropské hodnoty. Buďme nyní pozorní"; Protiproud (http://www.protiproud.cz/politika/3526-prezidentske-volby-se-blizi-soros-nam-sem-strka-nos-jak-schwarzenberg-vstal-a-sel-do-banky-proc-se-fake-news-zabyvala-vlada-bakaloviny-maji-jasno-drahos-sdili-evropske-hodnoty-budme-nyni-pozorni.htm).

without any, positive or negative, sentiment.[20] Miloš Zeman was mentioned positively in seven cases (mostly in interviews) and negatively in three cases. Three mentions were dedicated to Jiří Drahoš (two negative and one positive). The editors, in reaction to an ironic tweet of a deputy Miroslav Kalousek about hypothetical advertisement to support Miloš Zeman in disinformation media, refused attempting to influence the election campaign.[21]

ZPRÁVY.CZ

The Facebook website Zprávy.cz, which published in total 66 posts mentioning at least one of the candidates, became active during the first round of Presidential Elections (see Graph n. 10). The posts clearly supported

Miloš Zeman (37 positive to 4 negative mentions). On the other hand, Jiří Drahoš was criticized (4 positive to 46 negative mentions). The topics related to the elections were evolving; in the beginning the posts were attacking the integrity of Jiří Drahoš (especially, with regards to "unclear" financial background of his campaign and his personal features) and emphasizing the qualities of Miloš Zeman, whereas approximately from the 17th of January, posts linking the Presidential Elections with migration started to prevail. Zprávy.cz quite often shared articles originally published on Parlamentní listy (8 cases). The dynamics of their publishing activity clearly shows that the aim was to support Miloš Zeman before the second round.[22]

Graph n. 10 – Number of articles published on the platforms (except for Parlamentní listy)

---
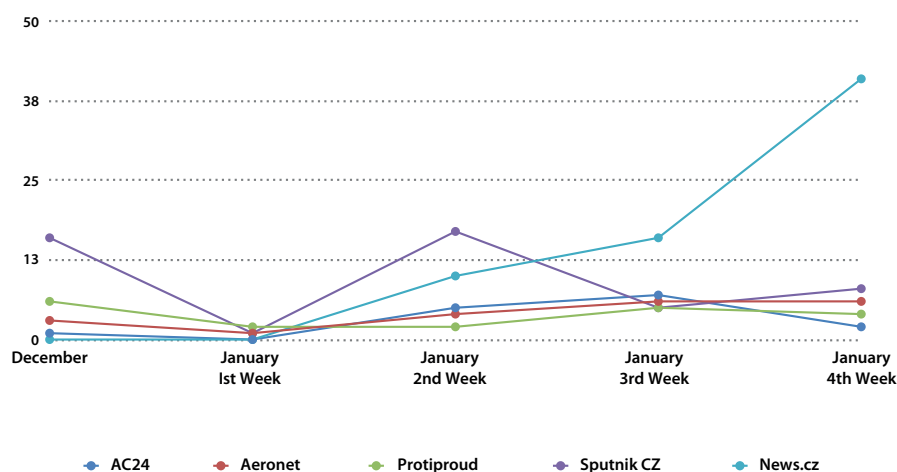
20   That could have been caused also by the fact that some of the candidates refused to communicate (4 easy questions that were not responded by Jiří Drahoš to Sputnik; Sputnik CZ (https://cz.sputniknews.com/ceskarepublika/201712066384159-jednoduche-otazky-Sputnik-Drahos/)).

21   Alena Novotná; "Kalousek chce sestřelit Zemana. Klidně kývne na spolupráci se Sputnikem"; Sputnik CZ (https://cz.sputniknews.com/ceskarepublika/201801086562572-kalousek-chtit-sestrelit-zeman-kyvnout-spoluprace-sputnik/).

22   Before the parliamentary election, 2017 this website, by similar methods, supported the extremist SPD party – see Jonáš Syrovátka;„České volby v éře dezinformací: Parlamentní volby 2017"; Prague Security Studies Institute (http://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/500_parlamentni-volby-2017-analyza.pdf).

Disinformation

During the monitoring period, 13 disinformative articles mentioning at least one of the candidates were published. Disinformation appeared throughout the monitoring period but was most frequent between the first and the second round, when half of these cases appeared (see Graph n. 4). Only some of the platforms contributed to the dissemination of disinformation, these were: AC24, Aeronet, Parlamentní listy and Protiproud.

When it became clear that Jiří Drahoš would proceed to the second round of the elections, topics related to disinformation relating about him started appearing on various websites and in discussions with higher intensity (see Graph n. 11). Usually, there was first a massive increase in the number of mentions on the topic in the internet discussions, followed by an increase in the number of articles. This trend can be observed during the process of disinformation creation; often before appearing in larger texts, the main thesis would be mentioned in internet discussions. For most disinformation, during the week following the first round of the elections, the number of mentions decreased.

THE MOST PROMINENT DISINFORMATION THEMES WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Jiří Drahoš is the puppet of power-brokers.
The first disinformation of this kind appeared on the monitored platforms already on December 8th, 2017, when the website Aeronet published speculations according to which the campaigns of opponents of Miloš Zeman are financed by a millionaire George

Soros.[23] Although the website did not specifically mention any of the candidates, the most mentioned candidate in the internet discussions was Jiří Drahoš. The disinformation about the financial influence of Soros on the election campaign did not cease to appear (in the interview for Parlamentní listy it was mentioned, for example, by deputy chairman of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, Josef Skála).[24]

On the 24th of January, AC24 published an article containing disinformation, according to which Jiří Drahoš is a member of the Club of Rome, and supports subversive plans (such as population control) in the name of this club.[25] This disinformation was not mentioned on any of the other monitored platforms.

The last disinformation based on the theme that Jiří Drahoš is manipulated by power-brokers, presented him as a political ally of deputy Miroslav Kalousek, who would allegedly be appointed as the Prime Minister after Drahoš was elected President. This disinformation was published by Aeronet on the 16th of Januray.[26]

Jiří Drahoš collaborated with communist secret police StB
This disinformation, often mentioned with other allegations doubting the integrity of Jiří Drahoš (for example, accusations of pedophilia), first appeared back in June 2017,[27] and was then published repeatedly on the monitored platforms. On a speculative level, this allegation was mentioned in the commentaries of Petr Cvalina, adopted by Aeronet,[28] or in the interviews on Parlamentní listy (these were also published on the

---

23   "Víme první! George Soros v utajení navštívil Prahu a otevřel si účet v UniCredit Bank! V polovině října převedl na svoji neziskovku Open Society v Londýně přes 18 miliard dolarů! Účet v UniCredit si otevřel i Karel Schwarzenberg! Chystá se kreditní linka pro prezidentské kandidáty proti Zemanovi? Anebo jde o přípravu na přesun Středoevropské univerzity do Prahy?"; Aeronet (https://aeronet.cz/news/vime-prvni-george-soros-v-utajeni-navstivil-prahu-a-otevrel-si-ucet-v-unicredit-bank-v-polovine-rijna-prevedl-na-svoji-neziskovku-open-society-v-londyne-pres-18-miliard-dolaru-ucet-v-unicredit/).

24   Lukáš Petřík, "Amok pražské kavárny. Soros jí prý na prezidentské volby poslal dvacet milionů dolarů. Trumfy drží Babiš. To nejhorší z Bruselu nás teprve čeká, varuje místopředseda KSČM Skála"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Amok-prazske-kavarny-Soros-ji-pry-na-prezidentske-volby-poslal-dvacet-milionu-dolaru-Trumfy-drzi-Babis-To-nejhorsi-z-Bruselu-nas-teprve-ceka-varuje-mistopredseda-KSCM-Skala-518501).

25   See footnote 14.

26   "Odhalení natvrdo: Kdo volí Jiřího Drahoše, volí ve skutečnosti Miroslava Kalouska budoucím premiérem, volí Karla Schwarzenberga jako mentálního guru, volí celou TOP09 včetně Kroměřížské výzvy a jako třešničku k tomu volíte Drahošovy poradce z Evropských hodnot, Petra Koláře a Jakuba Jandu! Známe podrobnosti!"; Aeronet (https://aeronet.cz/news/odhaleni-natvrdo-kdo-voli-jiriho-drahose-voli-ve-skutecnosti-miroslava-kalouska-budoucim-premierem-voli-karla-schwarzenberga-jako-mentalniho-guru-voli-celou-top09-vcetne-kromerizske-vyzvy/).

27   See footnote 2.

28   Petr Cvalín; "VIDEO: Antidemokrat Jiří Drahoš, alias "Bas" aneb jeho utajená minulost. O věcech jako je EU a NATO se prý nemá rozhodovat v referendech. Tečka!"; Aeronet (https://aeronet.cz/news/video-antidemokrat-jiri-drahos-alias-bas-aneb-jeho-utajena-minulost-o-vecech-jako-je-eu-a-nato-se-pry-nema-rozhodovat-v-referendech-tecka/).

Facebook of Parlamentní listy and received a lot of attention).[2930]

Jiří Drahoš intends to receive migrants according to the EU refugee quota scheme

The first disinformation linked to migration was published on the monitored platforms on the 8th of January.[31] Aeronet wrote that electing any other candidate than Miloš Zeman would lead to the "Germanization of the Czech Republic", which would result in the welcoming policy towards migrants. This message was awkwardly added to an article about a murder committed by an Afghani migrant in Germany.[32] This disinformation received more fertile ground on the 19th of January, when the election of Jiří Drahoš was linked to the announcement of a vacancy for the position of organizing officer at the Authorities for Refugee Facilities of the Ministry of Interior at Václav Havel Airport in Prague. The Ministry of Interior was allegedly preparing to receive refugees in accordance with the EU refugee quota scheme after Drahoš's election.[33]

Popular pop singer Karel Gott supported Miloš Zeman

According to a manipulative title published on the first day of the first round of the Presidential Elections on Parlamentní listy, Miloš Zeman was directly supported by Karel Gott. The singer denied such information through his spokesperson. Miloš Zeman even repeated it at a press conference held immediately after the first round, showing that even he was misinformed.[34]

The supporters of Miloš Zeman do not have to vote in the first round

The news about a disinformative flier informing the supporters of Miloš Zeman that there is no need to vote in the first round since he would automatically pass to the second one, was brought about by Parlamentí listy and Sputnik CZ.[35] Parlamentní listy did so on Thursday the 11th of January, thus being the first media platform to tackle this issue (even before the reaction by the Ministry of Interior).[36]

29   Olga Bohomová; "Kdyby tak větší část národa ukázala těm Halíkům, Ihářům z ČT a ČRo a mainstreamu zdvižený prostředníček... Režisér Václav Dvořák o nezpůsobilém Drahošovi a přátelích kultu Václava Havla"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Kdyby-tak-vetsi-cast-naroda-ukazala-tem-Halikum-lharum-z-CT-a-CRo-a-mainstreamu-zdvizeny-prostrednicek-Reziser-Vaclav-Dvorak-o-nezpusobilem-Drahosovi-a-pratelich-kultu-Vaclava-Havla-521390).

30   Olga Bohmová; "Psychiatr sledoval Jiřího Drahoše v úterý na Primě. Bez zvuku hrůza, a když si ho pustil a poslouchal argumenty, byla to úplná katastrofa"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Psychiatr-sledoval-Jiriho-Drahose-v-utery-na-Prime-Bez-zvuku-hruza-a-kdyz-si-ho-pustil-a-poslouchal-argumenty-byla-to-uplna-katastrofa-521008).

31   After being used as a topic by the presidential candidates (Mirek Topolánek indirectly portrayed Jiří Drahoš as "Gutmensch welcoming migrants" in his campaign).

32   "Afghánský migrant ubodal v Německu 15-letou dívku kvůli roztržce v obchodě! Německá Antifa potom zaútočila na smuteční průvod za zavražděnou dívku a skandovala hesla na podporu diverzity a barevného Německa! Starosta města za SPD v roce 2015 seznamoval nezletilé Němky s migranty!"; Aeronet (https://aeronet.cz/news/afghansky-migrant-ubodal-v-nemecku-15-letou-divku-kvuli-roztrzce-v-obchode-nemecka-antifa-potom-zautocila-na-smutecni-pruvod-za-zavrazdenou-divku-a-skandovala-hesla-na-podporu-diverzity/).

33   "Investigativní bomba: Letiště Ruzyně a Správa uprchlických zařízení se potají chystají na 1. migrační vlnu v ČR! České kontraktorské firmy zahájily rekonstrukce budov a staveb SUZ za účelem rozšíření ubytovacích kapacit pro očekávané uprchlíky, kteří mají dorazit do ČR po zvolení Jiřího Drahoše prezidentem! Známe veškeré detaily!"; Aeronet (https://aeronet.cz/news/investigativni-bomba-letiste-ruzyne-a-sprava-uprchlickych-zarizeni-se-potaji-chystaji-na-1-migracni-vlnu-v-cr-ceske-kontraktorske-firmy-zahajily-rekonstrukce-budov-a-staveb-suz-za-ucelem-rozsireni/).

34   "Nikoho jsem jmenovitě nepodpořil, odmítl Gott slova Zemana. Bylo to zřejmé, brání prezidentův výrok Ovčáček"; iRozhlas (https://www.irozhlas.cz/volby/prezidentske-volby-2018-karel-gott-milos-zeman_1801141214_ako).

35   "České MV varovalo před dezinformací o Zemanovi před prezidentskými volbami"; Sputnik CZ (https://cz.sputniknews.com/ceskarepublika/201801126582362-cesko-dezinformace-zeman-president-volba/); Radim Panenka; "Zákeřný útok na voliče Miloše Zemana! Internetem i poštovními schránkami se šíří lživý návod k volbám"; Parlamentní listy (https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Zakerny-utok-na-volice-Milose-Zemana-Internetem-i-postovnimi-schrankami-se-siri-lzivy-navod-k-volbam-519677).

36   "Prohlášení ministra vnitra k volbě prezidenta"; Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky (http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/prohlaseni-ministra-vnitra-k-volbe-prezidenta.aspx).

Graph n. 11 – Frequency of the occurrence of key words "Drahoš" and names representing the disinformation on the Czech news portals (searched by the tool >versus<)
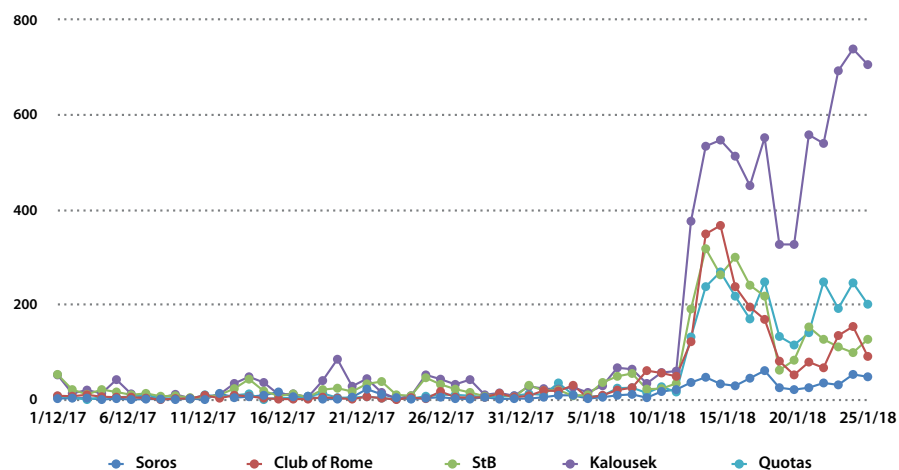
Conclusion

The platforms monitored in the research behaved very differently throughout the election campaign. The websites AC24 and Sputnik CZ had little interest in the election, and their biased information about the course of events was determined by their selective attention, rather than an attempt to shift the public discourse in a particular direction. Protiproud, contrastingly, approached the election campaign from a clearly defined ideological position and through their commentaries (often teetering on the edge of the manipulation of, and the extreme interpretation of facts) attempted to influence public opinion. It could be said that the credo of this website was not actually to support Miloš Zeman, but rather to defend ultraconservative ideological standpoints. Although Parlamentní listy tried to create an impression of impartiality and a plurality of opinions, upon closer reflection, it is clear that in various ways (for example, through the wording of their titles), they supported Miloš Zeman. Aeronet and the Facebook site Zprávy. cz were running the campaign—both by different methods—for Miloš Zeman. This is more obvious for Zprávy.cz, who became active after the announcement of the results of the first round. Therefore, it is possible to say that most of the monitored platforms supported Miloš Zeman.

This support was not necessarily carried out by illegitimate means. Disinformation only represented a small fraction of news published on the monitored platforms in relation to the election. Commentaries and interviews promoting the qualities of Miloš Zeman and criticizing his opponents clearly prevailed. In addition, these articles were not necessarily questionable in facts but "only" by use of more emotional language, and repeated themes which were also present in the mainstream discourse (for example, the belief of the ideological ambiguity of Jiří Drahoš). It would be thus more accurate to remark that the reporting of the monitored platforms was ideologically profiled rather than disinformative (with the exception of Aeronet, which represents a sui generis case among the platforms spreading disinformation).

Disinformation that appeared before the Presidential Elections should not be understood as an isolated phenomenon, but it is necessary to analyze it within the context of a pre-election course of events. In the majority of cases (except for the linkage of Jiří Drahoš with StB and similar allegations questioning his moral integrity) the disinformation campaigns were based on topics which had already been introduced and brought to the campaign by other actors (such as the presidential candidates), and not the platforms disseminating disinformation. This does not mean that disinformation did not have any impact on the pre-election course of events, its long-term effect, or spread in chain emails should be noted, but these phenomena were not addressed by this research. And even in these cases, disinformation, in order to be successful, must be based on the existing mood within society, or a population. The description of these general opinion trends that are present in society in the long term, and are capable of influencing people's behavior more significantly than disinformation, should be a topic of the utmost importance for future research.