ČESKÉ VOLBY
V ÉŘE DEZINFORMACÍ

Parliamentary elections 2021

Summary of main findings

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- The goal of the research was to map how websites known to spread conspiracy theories view current events prior to Czech parliamentary elections, and to gauge how much they try to actively engage with them and what their political preferences are. The analysis covered the four weeks before the elections (from September 13th to October 7th, 2021).

- In the monitored period, the ten selected websites published 520 articles which mentioned parties running for office. The number of articles covering political current events did not change significantly during this time period.

- The monitored portals retained a relatively passive approach; they rather only reacted to current events and repeated their long-standing claims. One of the reasons for this approach could have been skepticism about the election results.

- Around half of the texts with mentions of political parties covered the pre-election campaign. Parliamentary elections were positioned in the wider context of a supposed long-term clash between globalist forces serving the interests of external actors – mostly the European Union (EU) – and defenders of national sovereignty.

- The only significant attempt to engage with pre-election events was criticism of the mainstream media, namely Czech Television, due to their alleged efforts to manipulate the pre-election campaign through discrimination against nationalist candidates.

- Also related to the elections was persistent critique of the EU. This negative framing appeared most often in relation to candidates labelled as "Brussels' underlings". Within this critique, the topic of migration also appeared frequently – specifically accusations of welcoming refugees and concerns about the Islamization of Europe.

- Even some completely new topics appeared on the monitored websites, particularly criticism of measures aimed at tackling climate change. This criticism was most often directed at the Green Deal policy, which was described as a tool of destruction of European economies and a part of the Great Reset's strategy with the goal of enslaving the population.

- In the week prior to the elections, the Pandora Papers case resonated on the monitored websites, as in the rest of the information space. Most of the analysed texts expressed support for Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. The findings of investigative journalists were discredited as a purposeful attempt to influence the election campaign.

- The ANO movement was the most mentioned candidate (307 texts), which was also caused by the reflection of its activities in the government. This candidate was frequently criticized, which changed to a certain extent after the Pandora Papers case broke out. The coalitions SPOLU and the Pirate Party and STAN were criticized over the whole monitored time period mainly due to their supposed pro-Brussels stance.

- The relationship of the monitored websites towards nationalist parties was more complex, and these entities received support and assistance with their campaigns as well as critique of some political steps or programmatic stances. This dynamic was the most visible in the case of Freedom and Direct Democracy, perceived as the strongest nationalist candidate with a considerably untrustworthy leader.

- The election result was perceived as a catastrophe, and the monitored websites predicted that the pro-Brussels coalition of SPOLU and the Pirate Party and STAN will introduce measures attacking traditional culture and society, inspired by Western countries. The blame for this development was also ascribed to the nationalist forces unable to form a coalition. Besides criticism of the media, there were no significant attempts to question the legitimacy of the results. Despite the negative evaluation of the results, some optimistic predictions also appeared, according to which the new disparate coalition will discredit itself through its governing and the nationalist forces will live to see success in the next elections.