
MONITORING MISUSE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES DURING 2025 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

PRELIMINARY REPORT



NOVEMBER 2025

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Preliminary Monitoring Report

Summary of Key Observations and Emerging Conclusions

The monitoring of possible misuse of administrative resources (MAR) was conducted by 70 civil society monitors from 10 civil society organizations (CSOs)¹ across 26 municipalities², with a view to assessing the presence of practices involving the use of public office, activities, or resources during the 2025 local elections in ways that could influence equality and fairness of electoral competition.

Across the municipalities observed, manifestations of MAR were noted in varying forms and intensity. They were not confined to a single political force or coalition, nor to any geographical area; observations in some municipalities showed only few or no clearly verified instances. Instead, MAR prominence appeared to be shaped largely by contextual factors such as institutional-party linkages, political constellations at local and national levels, incumbency, and the degree of competition in the race. Where observed, MAR practices cumulatively contributed to uneven visibility and outreach opportunities among contestants. Those holding or more closely connected to institutional or political power benefitted more frequently from indirect promotion through public events, projects, communication support, or mobilization of public resources. In contrast, less established parties and independent candidates faced more constrained access to avenues for securing comparable levels of public appeal.

The most prominent manifestations of MAR fell broadly into two interconnected clusters. The first consisted of practices that sought to boost the profile and credibility of contestants by leveraging institutional standing, governance record, and public functions to reinforce positive voter perceptions.

These included the showcasing of completed, ongoing, and newly announced public projects and infrastructural activities; campaign involvement and endorsement of candidates by public officials; and the use of institutional communications and public office holders' social media for campaign-related messaging.

Taken together, such practices often blurred the line between public duties and political activity and appeared as strategic campaign efforts aimed at signaling that voting for particular candidates would secure continued funding, development, or other benefits.

¹ Association for home Care and Support “Assistive Center” (Assistive Center), Association for Rural Development Local Action Group Agro Lider (LAG Agro Lider), Civil Society Organization of Citizens for Strengthening Democratic Values THREE C CONSULTING Skopje (Three C Consulting), Association of Citizens for the Protection of Environment Verdevita Gostivar (Verdevita), Association of citizens for research, analysis and policy making Eurothink – Center for European Strategies – Skopje (Eurothink), Mountaineering Club Association “KAB Struga 2017” (KAB Struga 2017), Union for Gender Equality: National Network Women for Women (National Network Women for Women), Association for Social Development – “For Tetovo” (For Tetovo), Association for International Youth Cooperation INTERAKTIV – Bitola (INTERAKTIV-Bitola), and Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico (Romalitico).

² Bitola, Bogovinje, Butel, Chair, Centar Zhupa, Debar, Delchevo, Dolneni, Gostivar, Kisela Voda, Kochani, Kumanovo, Lipkovo, Makedonski Brod, Ohrid, Prilep, Saraj, Shuto Orizari, Shtip, Struga, Strumica, Studenichani, Tearce, Tetovo, Valandovo, and Vrapchishte.

The second cluster consisted of facilitative practices, most notably the use of public premises and, to a much lesser extent, public vehicles to host or support campaign activities. These practices lowered logistical and financial barriers for better-connected contestants and were often granted informally, raising concerns about equal access for all competitors.

From the regulatory perspective, findings yield a mixed picture. Some observed practices run contrary to existing legal provisions, including cases of unjustified use of public premises and vehicles for campaign purposes and the promotion or launching of public projects outside permissible timeframes. Others are not explicitly prohibited, with unclear legal boundaries between official and political activity during elections leaving space both for actual malpractice and for perceptions of misuse - particularly when the difference between the two is undistinguishable to the voters. As such, the blurring of campaigning vs governance lines is not in the spirit of principles of neutrality, professionalism, and ethical public office conduct. They are also at odds with international standards and good practice calling for a clear state and party separation and comprehensive MAR-related regulations.³

³ Paragraph 5.4 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) calls for “a clear separation between the State and political parties”. See also [Joint ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Preventing and Responding to the Misuse of Administrative Resources During Electoral Processes](#).

2. About the monitoring

Under the guidance of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) North Macedonia project team, 70 trained monitors from 10 CSO conducted the monitoring during the 2025 local elections for manifestations of MAR in a diverse sample of 26 municipalities. Carried out between 15 September and 2 November, the monitoring covered the pre-electoral and campaign periods, campaign silence, and both rounds, where applicable. It followed a comprehensive, tailored methodology informed by experiences from similar monitoring efforts internationally, ensuring impartial, independent, and non-interfering observation. Data was gathered through field work, desk research, and stakeholder inquiries, and reported through structured quantitative and qualitative tools. The initiative aimed to strengthen CSO capacity to monitor MAR and broader electoral issues, while raising awareness among political and institutional actors about the risks associated with MAR. It sought to build a body of knowledge to guide public discussion, future reform efforts, and contribute to long-term improvements in electoral integrity and good governance. Given its pilot nature, lessons learned and practical insights from the implementation of the methodology will be drawn to inform the design of future similar efforts and further enhance capacity in this field. The final report on the monitoring is expected to be published in February 2026.

Overall monitoring findings and these preliminary conclusions should not be read as an exhaustive or fully representative account of MAR prevalence during the local elections 2025. They present a snapshot based on a limited scope and sample, and thus carry inherent limitations related to first-time application, capacity, timeframes, and reliance on publicly available and directly observable information.

What is MAR?

For the purposes of this project, MAR was understood as undue advantage that parties or candidates may have through the use of official positions or access to public resources to influence the electoral process. Based on international good practice, the term covers not only financial or material resources, but also the use of staff, institutional infrastructure, and the prestige of public office for electoral gain. Effective MAR regulation and enforcement are essential to safeguarding equal competition and protect public trust in democratic elections.

Preliminary Findings

3. Thematic observations

Several forms of potential MAR are regulated by the national legal framework, and many other forms are addressed by international good practice. While the monitoring covered a broader range of MAR-relevant issues, four areas accounted for most observations and are therefore highlighted in this preliminary report. The municipal references and examples cited are illustrative rather than exhaustive, intended to provide snapshots from diverse local contexts.

3.1. Use of public premises and vehicles in campaigning

Legal framework: Under Articles 8-b and 82 of the Electoral Code, the use of public premises, equipment, and vehicles for campaign purposes is prohibited; for the latter, an exception is in place for persons covered by special protection provisions. Pre-election rallies may not be held in military, religious, or health institutions, schools, kindergartens, or other public facilities, and similarly, state or municipal offices may not be used for campaign purposes. At the same time, exceptions may be granted by the heads of the respective public institutions, if no other suitable premises are available and provided that equal conditions for all contestants are ensured.

Observations:

Use of public premises: Throughout the monitoring period, frequent use of public premises was noted. Of 1,093 campaign events and activities followed, 219 involved the use of public facilities and spaces for campaign events or candidate appearances, and 101 for other campaign-related purposes, such as campaign headquarters, coordination, logistics, or material storage. Schools and kindergartens constituted by far the largest groups of premises used, followed by cultural centers, municipal administrative buildings, museums, galleries, sports halls, stadiums, and other public spaces. The use of public premises was observed across the political spectrum; however, the highest numbers of cases was linked to candidates affiliated with the National Coalition for Integration (AKI), VMRO-DPMNE-led, SDSM-led, and VLEN coalitions (from this point forward: AKI, VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, and VLEN).⁴ Public premises use was registered across 21 municipalities, with highest prevalence in Bitola, Gostivar, Saraj, Shtip, Struga, Shuto Orizari, Tetovo, and Vrapchishte. This showed both geographical spread and concentration in key urban and multiethnic areas.

Examples:

- On 1 October, SDSM used the main hall of the Culture House "Makedonski Brod" for an event to promote mayoral candidate Ivica Stojkoski and the list of councilor candidates led by Andrej Siljanoski.
- On 6 and 8 October, the AKI mayoral candidate Blerant Ramadani held campaign meetings with the residents of villages Glumovo and Gorno Svilare (Saraj municipality) at the respective village schools.
- On 7 October, an SDSM-organized event *Local Elections 2025 Caravan "We Fight for Our Home"*, aimed at promoting the candidacy of the incumbent mayor Pero Kostadinov, was held in the cinema hall of Valandovo "25 May" House of Culture.
- On 9 October, the Tetovo Museum (former Army House) in Tetovo was used for an event to promote ZNAM's candidates for the municipal council.

⁴ See Annex 1 for the composition of the coalitions in the 26 observed municipalities.

- On 17 October, the Youth Forum of AKI organized a sports day in the sports hall of the “Gostivar” secondary school.
- On 18 October, VLEN candidate Blerim Islami held a campaign event with teachers at the Dolneni primary school.
- In Skopje, the waste collection crisis has led to a case where municipal services and resources were activated with heightened public visibility. Several municipal and central-level actors, including mayoral candidates and high-profile public officials, mobilized municipal vehicles and inter-municipal support to conduct cleanup operations, publicly framing them as campaign achievements. While the cleanup provided a needed service, the use of municipal vehicles, manpower, and logistical support raised concerns about the leveraging of institutional resources to favor specific contestants.

Despite monitors’ efforts to verify the grounds on which public venues were made available, it was often impossible to determine whether any formal exceptions had been granted or on what basis. In some cases, monitors noted seemingly authorized or paid for use of premises through documented payment slips. However, in the majority of observations, facilities appeared to have been provided free of charge, without clear evidence of publicly available formal decisions authorizing their use under the exception clause.⁵ Some interlocutors argued that such activities fell under “community engagement” by such public bodies hosting the events rather than campaign support. In multiple locations, monitors received reports of unequal contestant access to public premises.

Aggregate observations suggest that the parties in positions of power and locally well-connected parties and candidates often benefited from informally granted access to public facilities, whereas smaller parties and independent candidates faced bureaucratic or political obstacles when making similar requests. Overall, the frequent use of public premises for campaign purposes and the lack of transparency around the exception mechanism raise questions of compliance with legal restrictions and whether the current framework provides robust safeguards against this form of misuse.

Use of official vehicles: Relatively few instances of use of official vehicles for campaign purposes were reported. In total, only 26 cases were recorded across 7 municipalities, with greater recurrence in Tetovo and Bogovinje. Reported use included mostly travel by candidates or supporters but also transport of campaign materials. Most cases were noted in connection with campaigns of VLEN candidates, followed by those of VMRO-DPMNE.

Monitors’ verification efforts were at times hampered by the incomplete data in the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption’s (SCPC) online vehicle register and inconsistent implementation of the government-ordered red license-plate marking - both otherwise welcome transparency measures.⁶

While the overall number of instances was limited compared to concerns noted in past elections, the observations underscore the need for continued awareness-raising and consistent enforcement of legal restrictions.

⁵ For instance, the 9 October campaign event by VLEN at the secondary medical school “Nikola Stejn” in Tetovo was reported to the monitors as authorized, with the mayor having thanked the school principal during the meeting for providing the space.

⁶ According to the [SCPC](#), as of 29 September, only 635 institutions had submitted the required vehicle data, while 879 had not. As of 6 November, a total of 6,659 vehicles were included in the [register](#). As in several similar observations, in Kisela Voda, several administrative vehicles identified as belonging to representatives of the central government, including the Prime Minister, involved during the VMRO-DPMNE campaign rally in front of the municipality building in Kisela Voda on 09 October 2025, did not carry red license plates.

3. 2. Use of publicly funded projects and related announcements, inaugurations, and publicity to promote candidates

Legal framework: Outside the electoral legislation, the Law on Public Procurement provides the accountability framework for the use of public funds, restricting irregular or accelerated procurement or contracting that would not serve public interest. Art. 8-a of the Electoral Code prohibits the launch of new, previously unplanned public development projects, extraordinary budgetary disbursements or benefit payments, and new budget-funded employment procedures once the elections are called. Starting 20 days before the campaign period, it is also prohibited to hold public events in connection with the start of construction or use of infrastructural developments and facilities, such as roads, waterworks, transmission lines, sewage, sports fields, or social activity facilities - schools, kindergartens, and other buildings. At the same time, an explicit exception is granted to the latter rule as not covering public statements that public office holders or candidates might choose to make about such public projects during campaign rallies, interviews, debates or in response to journalists' questions.

Observations:

In practice, multiple examples of announcements of new projects, inaugurations, inspections in connection with ongoing projects, or activities promoting various public development and infrastructure projects were noted, both before and during the official campaign period. In a high number of cases, authorities at different levels, national and municipal, made extensive references to such publicly funded projects and activities during campaign events and communications of direct or implicit support of affiliated candidates and parties. Similarly, incumbent mayors and councilors seeking re-election and candidates proactively showcased such projects as achievements of the respective political force in office and linked continued improvements and investments to their election.

Many of such public projects appeared to have been ongoing, prior planned and budgeted. Promotion of such projects was reported in nearly a third of the monitoring reports, with more pronounced patterns noted in Kochani, Ohrid, Tetovo, and Shuto Orizari.

At the same time, several such projects were noted by the monitors to have been approved shortly before the legal deadline or were seemingly pre-planned to be launched during the electoral period. Such practices, while not directly contrary to the law, raised questions of strategic timing to benefit the campaign. They also offered considerable promotion opportunities to candidates that could tap into such successes in building a campaign narrative framed around demonstrated achievements, development, and efficacy. At the same time, several examples of new infrastructural project approvals were noted, such as for example for twelve projects in Tetovo related, among others, to reconstructions of several roads and of a sports field.

Examples:

- On 2 October, while attending a public meeting in Kochani in support of VMRO-DPMNE candidates, Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski highlighted past investments and pledged additional €100 million for future infrastructure projects in the municipality.
- Between 1 and 8 October, VLEN mayoral candidate in Chair and First Deputy Prime Minister Izet Mexhiti publicly announced a series of investment projects, ranging from local waste and water infrastructure to the impending start of two major prior-planned government-funded projects - the Mother Teresa University campus and the Skanderbeg Square underground parking in Skopje.
- On 10 October, a launch event for the reconstruction of the recreational stadium in Rashche was attended by the Minister of Youth and Sports Borko Ristovski and used for the promotion of VLEN mayoral candidate Muhamed Elmazi in Saraj municipality.

- On 12 October, the mayor of Butel and VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidate Darko Kostovski, accompanied by the Prime Minister Mickoski and the Minister of Transport Aleksandar Nikoloski, attended the launch of new water supply networks in Ljubanci and Ljuboten.
- On 13 October, the mayor of Tetovo and VLEN candidate Bilall Kasami, accompanied by current and aspiring councilors, visited and held a press conference from the construction site of a stadium in Tetovo.
- In a 29 October Facebook post, the mayor of Makedonski Brod and VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidate Zharko Risteski informed about the inspections of construction works at the day center for children with special needs and of a kindergarten (both previously approved projects), conducted jointly with the Deputy Minister Gjoko Velkovski and Deputy Minister of Health Jovica Andovski.
- In a series of Facebook posts on 31 October and 1 November, the mayor of Bogovinje and AKI candidate Besnik Emshiu used projects launched or planned by the municipality in his campaign, targeting voters in Pirok, Rakovec, Sedlarce, Sinican, Kamjan, and Urvic.

Overall, the extensive references to completed, ongoing, and planned public projects and investments across many monitored municipalities indirectly benefited the image of incumbents and affiliated candidates, reinforcing the narrative that electing them would ensure the continuation of improvements and investments. These projects and the communications surrounding them often appeared strategically timed and purposefully highlighted in the campaign context. Such references blurred the line for voters between regular governance and campaigning and contributed to tilting promotional opportunities in favor of contestants enjoying the support and endorsement by parties in positions of power and with past governance record that could be showcased.

3.3. Involvement of public institutions and public officials in campaigning

Legal framework: Several key principles on preventing conflict of interest and ensuring service in the public interest are embedded in the legal framework governing different categories of public officials, providing a due conduct framework also during elections. The Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest (Art. 3-4) obliges officials to act impartially, be guided by public interest, and prohibits the use of public office and position to advance personal, third-party, or political party interests.

The Laws on Public Sector Employees, on Administrative Servants (Art. 53(1) and 60), and on Civil Servants (59(1) and 64) reinforce the principles of impartiality in performing official duties and prohibit political activity in an official capacity or during working hours for different groups of public sector staff. In addition, the codes of ethics for members of government, parliament, and local officials reiterate the principle of impartiality when performing official duties/during working hours and emphasize the need to ensure a distinction between public duties and political activity.

At the same time, the legal framework does not explicitly regulate campaign activities of public officeholders, including through public appearances, endorsements, or social media.

Observations: In practice, public officials played a prominent role in promoting candidates and political parties during the campaign.

Ministers, deputy ministers, and members of parliament were the officials most frequently observed attending campaign events of candidates affiliated with their political forces, actively lending institutional visibility and credibility and creating opportunities for candidates to associate themselves with government achievements and initiatives. Mayors, councilors, and heads of public enterprises or agencies likewise often provided promotional support, including through speeches of endorsement and references to local accomplishments. The involvement of public officials was most frequently observed in relation to VMRO-DPMNE candidates, followed by those affiliated with the AKI, VLEN, SDSM, and ZNAM, with fewer instances noted for Levica, Poinaku, and the Turkish Democratic Party.

Although many campaign events took place outside working hours, as noted for instance in Centar Zhupa, and officials in some cases appeared to attend in private capacity or as representatives of political parties, monitors noted multiple cases where officials participated in their official capacity, with explicit references to their public positions made. In total, 169 campaign events observed across 19 municipalities featured active participation of public officials in official or mixed roles, most notably in Gostivar, Tetovo, Bogovinje, Kochani, Prilep, Saraj, Valandovo, and Shuto Orizari.

Examples:

- On 2 October, the Mayor of Dolneni Urim Ibeski participated in the opening event of AKI election headquarters, where he publicly pledged support for the AKI candidate, stating that the candidate would continue his work in leading the municipality.
- During the 6 October campaign event at the "Naim Frasheri" elementary school promoting VLEN mayoral and councilor candidates, members of the government, parliament and the mayor of Tetovo in attendance were named using their official titles.
- During the 8 October VMRO-DPMNE rally in Butel, attending Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski and Minister of Defense Vlado Misajlovski were referred to using their governmental positions.
- On 8 October, VMRO-DPMNE candidate Gjoko Kamchev paid a campaign visit to the city market in Valandovo, accompanied by the Director of the Public Health Centre Valandovo and the Director of the Centre for Social Work.
- During the 29 October event at the Public Enterprise Sharri promoting Tetovo Mayor and VLEN candidate Bilall Kasami, the Director of the enterprise promoted the ongoing improvements works, while criticizing past municipality leadership of mismanagement.
- On 16 October, VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidate Dejan Prodanoski paid a campaign visit to the "Borka Taleski" city hospital in Prilep, accompanied by the Minister of Health Azir Aliu, Deputy Minister Jovica Andovski, Director of the Health Insurance Fund Sašo Klekovski, and the Mayor of Prilep.
- Ahead of the first-round election, the Mayor of Tearce joined campaign events supporting the AKI candidate, using the occasions to promote earlier planned projects, including reconstructions and asphaltting of roads.
- In the run-up to the second round, the incumbent mayor of Studenichani, Azem Sadiki, engaged in a series of public events held in the municipal sports hall "Ilinden", where he met with sports clubs and announced financial support for first-grade students.

In a reverse pattern, multiple events and activities organized by central and local-level authorities or public entities featured candidates or contained other campaign elements, thus blending routine governance or community engagement activities with candidate promotion, contributing to boosting candidates' visibility and outreach. While less frequent in absolute terms, such public events blurred with campaign elements were identified in all 26 monitored municipalities, totaling 114 cases, and occurred at a relatively similar rate across locations.

- On 8 October, the government organized a Business Forum in Strumica. While formally aimed at promoting investment opportunities and support to local economic development, it also indirectly facilitated the promotion of VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidate Petar Jankov, who delivered a speech alongside Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski and other ministers.
- On 15 and 17 October, two state-organized inauguration events in the village of Radusha, the opening of the sports field “Berlin Arena” by the Ministry of Sport and the launch of a local health clinic by the Ministry of Health, featured speeches by Saraj VLEN mayoral candidate Muhamed Elmazi, who linked these initiatives to his campaign platform.
- On 17 October, Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski, acting in his official capacity, met with VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidates and the North-East Chamber of Commerce, in an event framed as an economics-focused meeting but effectively contributing to boosting party candidates’ visibility.

At the same time, the role of local authorities in some municipalities was assessed positively. For instance, in Bitola, Chair, Delchevo, Shtip, and Debar the municipal administrations were seen as acting professionally, showing awareness of the importance of neutrality during campaigns, and remained focused on their core public service duties, without notable campaign involvement or politicized communications. Other municipalities, as in Prilep, remained engaged in positive ways, for instance by hosting events that included representatives from multiple parties.

Across the monitored municipalities, the involvement of public servants and employees (subject to stricter legal regulations) in campaign events and activities, either in an official capacity or during working hours, was noted as limited. However, some instances of involvement as participants or in more active roles were recorded, including reports of subtle pressure within institutional hierarchies to attend or support party activities. For example, between the two rounds in Tetovo, the VLEN coalition organized daily coffee giveaways in the city center, where municipal and public sector employees were observed being engaged during official working hours in what appeared to be a political activity.

Overall, the frequent and highly visible involvement of public officials in campaign activities, as well as the overlap between public events and those serving campaign purposes, created a perception of a common and largely normalized practice - part of what was often seen to be coordinated efforts to promote affiliated candidates and parties. Where observed, such involvement was seen as contributing to the perception of unequal conditions between the contestants, particularly those without representation in local or national power structures. While many instances did not qualify as violations, the lack of clear legal boundaries and guidance on permissible forms of support pose challenges to upholding ethical standards of public office and the principle of separation between official duties and political activity.

3.4. Use of public institutions' and public officials' communications to promote candidates

Legal framework: Based on Art. 75-e.4 of the Electoral Code, from the announcement of elections until their completion, media outlets, including broadcasters, print, and online portals, are prohibited from publishing advertisements financed from state or municipal budgets, or from entities exercising public authority, except for those permitted under the law. Labelling requirements are applicable to all paid campaign materials, including online. However, the campaign on social media and on online portals remains unregulated. Similarly, the use of municipal websites in campaign contexts and public officials' communications, just as the overall campaign involvement of the latter, are not subject to any regulations.

Observations: Monitors carried out only limited and mostly context-based monitoring of municipal and public officials' online communications. A more comprehensive report on this issue has been prepared by IFES North Macedonia, in partnership with the Metamorphosis Foundation.⁷ The observations as part of the MAR monitoring have shown that parallel to explicit endorsements and indirect candidate support through the promotion of public projects and other achievements, the use of institutional communication channels and promotional messaging by local and central-level public officials was another notable campaign feature. Partisan information promoting candidates on municipalities' websites was noted only rarely, although markedly present in Tetovo for example.

At the same time, the use of local authorities' and public officeholders' official profiles on social media for overt candidate promotion was recorded relatively frequently. This included organic, shared, and limited paid posts promoting campaign activities or showcasing past, ongoing, or planned municipal projects and other achievements - some with overt, others with more subtle linkages to affiliated candidates and parties. Such social media promotion through institutional and public officials' official social media accounts was reported from 10 municipalities, with stronger prominence in Kochani, Tetovo, Makedonski Brod, Butel, Shuto Orizari and fewer reports from Struga, Kisela Voda, Shtip, Kumanovo and Ohrid.

Examples:

- In Makedonski Brod, the incumbent mayor's Zharko Risteski's Facebook and Instagram accounts, branded with his official title, carried series of posts promoting his campaign, referencing the implementation of a variety of public works and infrastructural projects.
- In Tetovo, the municipality's social media platforms frequently promoted content featuring the incumbent mayor and ruling coalition representatives.
- In Butel, the municipality's Facebook page posted about new infrastructure projects during the campaign and reposted campaign content from VMRO-DPMNE mayoral candidate Darko Kostovski, such as for instance from his attendance of a celebration at a Butel kindergarten.
- In Vrapchishte, the mayor and AKI candidate promoted road construction works in several locations in the municipality on his official Facebook account.
- In Gostivar, the acting mayor and AKI candidate promoted the completion of road works on one of the city streets on his official social media accounts.
- Official profiles of the incumbent mayor of Lipkovo carried several videos, featuring municipal officials and public enterprise directors and showcasing completed or ongoing infrastructural projects, such as riverbed regulation in Slupchane, water supply improvements, and local roads.
- In a paid Facebook post on 7 October, Minister Zoran Ljutkov promoted his and Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Timcho Mucunski and Skopje mayoral candidate Orce Gjorgievski's support to door-to-door activities of VMRO-DPMNE candidate and mayor of Butel Darko Kostovski.

While social media communications are not explicitly regulated under current legislation, they reflected elements of informal institutional favoritism and, taken together with other forms of support, risked undermining the equality of competition by blurring the line between legitimate institutional promotion and campaigning.

⁷ <https://metamorphosis.org.mk/en/>

4. Looking ahead

Building on the observations and findings presented above, a Final Report will be developed to provide a full picture of the MAR-related issues covered by the monitoring. In addition to an expanded analysis based on the complete quantitative and qualitative dataset, it will also cover areas that were either less prominent or not yet fully explored in this Preliminary Report.

These will include, among others:

- the conduct of police and other public security providers in light of neutrality obligations;
- the role of third parties in supporting candidate campaigns;
- the impact of MAR practices on vulnerable or underrepresented groups, including women, non-ethnic Macedonian communities, and persons with disabilities;
- MAR-related observations during the campaign silence and election day periods.

The Final Report will further assess municipality-specific and cross-municipality patterns, highlight good practices observed during monitoring, and offer recommendations on improving both legal regulation and practice. Publication is envisaged for February 2026.

5. About IFES

In supporting North Macedonia's ongoing good governance, IFES provides targeted assistance to a range of stakeholders — state institutions, political parties, civil society and citizens — to increase their knowledge and understanding of the electoral process and international good practices and advance the country's democratic reforms.

Disclaimer: As part of IFES support to the 2025 local elections, this Preliminary Monitoring Report was prepared within the *Balkans Resilient Institutions for Democratic Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project*, funded by the UK Government with the support of the British Embassy Skopje, and the *Electoral Support Programme* of the Swiss Cooperation in North Macedonia, implemented by the IFES. The content of this Report does not necessarily reflect the views of the donors, the projects, or the implementer(s).

ANNEX I: Composition of the coalitions in the 26 observed municipalities:

1. Coalition "Your Macedonia" - VMRO-DPMNE (VMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), Socialist Party of Macedonia, Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia - DPSM, Democratic Union - DS, Serbian Progressive Party in Macedonia - SNSM, Bosniak National Party - BNP, Democratic Forces of the Roma - DSR, Party of United Democrats of Macedonia - PODEM, Party of the Vlachs of Macedonia, GLAS for Macedonia - GLAS, New Liberal Party - NLP, Social Democratic Union - SDU, "Roma United from Macedonia" - ROM, Workers and Peasants Party of the Republic of Macedonia, United Party for Equality of the Roma - OPER, Dignity, Macedonian Concept - MConcept, Party of the Croats in Macedonia - PHM, Macedonian Action - MAAK, led by VMRO-DPMNE (VMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity).
2. "Coalition for Local Elections 2025" – Social Democratic Union of Macedonia - SDSM, New Social Democratic Party - NSDP, VMRO-People's Party - VMRO-NP, Party of the Movement of Turks in Macedonia - PDT, Right (Desnica), Party for Social and Economic Progress - POEN, Party of Democratic Action of Macedonia, Party for Democratic Prosperity of the Roma - PDPR, Central Democratic Union - CDU.
3. Coalition VLEN (Besa Movement, Democratic Movement, Alternativa).
4. Coalition National Coalition for Integration – AKI. (DUI – Democratic Union for Integration, ASH – Alliance for Albanians wing of Zijadin Sela, ASH – Alliance for Albanians wing of Arben Taravari, LP - People's Movement of Skender Rexhepi - Zejd)

ANNEX II: Brief Municipality Reports

2.1. Municipality Brief – Bitola

Responsible CSO: INTERAKTIV - Bitola

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: interaktivbitola@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Bitola is one of the largest municipalities and a key political and economic center in the southwest of the country. The majority of its approximately 85,000 population, about 88.7%, are ethnic Macedonians. The municipality is characterized by a highly competitive political environment and active party structures and traditionally sees strong campaign engagement from the major parties, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, as well as smaller political groups. During these elections, the incumbent mayor Toni Konjanovski (VMRO-DPMNE) sought re-election, facing Metodija Kunovski (SDSM) and several other contestants. Both parties were actively campaigning and mobilizing their bases, signaling high stakes for local leadership. Although Toni Konjanovski was widely regarded as the frontrunner, the opposition's campaign under Kunovski was significant and visibly engaged. VMRO-DPMNE was strongly represented in the local council. The election was concluded in one round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

During the monitoring period, the campaign environment in Bitola was competitive yet orderly, including a number of rallies, door-to-door outreach, and neighborhood meetings. Campaign activities, institutional communication, and appearances of public officials that were monitored did not reveal practices that clearly indicated an overlap between official functions and campaign activities. Some campaign gatherings reportedly took place in or near public premises, such as schools or cultural halls. While it remained unclear on what formal basis some of the premises were granted, no reports of discriminatory access were received and it did not appear to have been based on institutional preferences or endorsements. No instances of use of public vehicles in the campaign context were noted.

Public officials were sometimes present at candidates' campaign events. Their participation, however, appeared mostly in a private capacity or as representatives of political parties and was not accompanied by the use of official insignia or titles. Messages by public officials and during public events at times indirectly promoted candidates and linked their campaigns to various local or central-level achievements. However, no cases of new public or infrastructural projects or inaugurations of such or any other selective or preferential procurement or recruitment activities were noted. The municipal administration was seen as performing its public service duties professionally and impartially, also with no evidence of public employee involvement in the campaign while on duty or during working hours. Similarly, while municipal communication on social networks continued throughout the campaign, its content remained largely administrative in tone and did not appear to cross into promotional messaging.

Local media played an active role in covering campaigns of all political contestants, with some cases revealing political leanings.

Overall, no evident practices during the monitored activities suggesting widespread, systematic or deliberate misuse of administrative resources were brought to the monitors' attention. Heightened public and media scrutiny, institutional awareness of neutrality obligations and witnessed compliance efforts were seen as having contributed to these observations.

2.2. Municipality Brief – Bogovinje

Responsible CSO: Association for Social Development – For Tetovo

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: ramadan.murtezani1@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Bogovinje is a predominantly rural, ethnic Albanian municipality composed of several dispersed villages with a combined population of around 22,000 residents. It is characterised by close personal and social ties, which strongly shape public interaction and access to local institutions. The campaign in Bogovinje was described as highly mobilised, with visible and intensive campaigning by the two major Albanian coalitions, AKI and VLEN, both of which maintain active party structures and community networks in the area. While the outgoing mayor, affiliated with AKI, sought re-election, a candidate from VLEN ultimately won the mayoral race, while the municipal council remained dominated by AKI.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Monitors in Bogovinje reported several practices that involved or bordered on misuse of administrative resources. One set of observations related to the use of public premises, where campaign events for the AKI candidate were held in school buildings and other municipal facilities, without a transparent procedure for granting access. Monitors noted that these facilities appeared more readily accessible to AKI candidates than to other contestants. However, monitors also reported that this picture shifted later in the campaign, as VLEN structures, supported by senior party figures from Tetovo, significantly increased their presence and mobilization. This expanded the scope of concerns regarding the use of public resources across the main competitors. Monitors also reported several instances involving the use of vehicles linked to public institutions, involving mostly VLEN actors.

Another recurring pattern concerned the presence of public servants, including school staff and municipal employees, at campaign activities. Their involvement seemed informal and linked to community and political networks rather than to formal instructions. However, because this participation was concentrated mostly around AKI contestant, it contributed to perceptions of institutional proximity and uneven conditions in parts of the municipality.

Monitors also recorded several instances where local public officials attended campaign events promoting the AKI candidate and, later in the campaign, also central-level officials - in support of the VLEN candidate.

Although these officials did not explicitly invoke their institutional roles, their visibility in the campaign environment added to the impression of political alignment between parts of the administration.

In some of these appearances, public works already planned or underway were mentioned, which, although not extensive, linked political messaging to elements of municipal activity.

Institutional communication channels remained generally neutral, though several AKI-affiliated councilors and public figures promoted campaign messages through their social media accounts, including during the campaign silence period, reinforcing perceptions of blurred boundaries between institutional roles and political activity.

Taken together, these observations were assessed by monitors as having negatively affected the equality of campaign conditions. The combination of strong local party networks, close-knit community structures, and the municipality's rural character were seen as having shaped the campaign environment and MAR-related practices.

2.3. Municipality Brief – Butel

Responsible CSO: Three C Consulting

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: contact@3cconsulting.co

Municipality Profile

Butel is an urban municipality in the northern part of Skopje, characterized by its diverse ethnic composition, with a Macedonian majority and sizable Albanian, Roma, and Turkish communities. It is a politically competitive municipality, with VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM traditionally alternating in local governance, and DUI maintaining a smaller but steady voter base. The campaign in the municipality was active and visible. VMRO-DPMNE, led by incumbent mayor, ran a dynamic campaign combining door-to-door visits, rallies, and intensive social media activity. SDSM conducted smaller-scale outreach and neighborhood meetings. DUI (part of AKI coalition) focused primarily on online campaigning and community messaging but canceled some in-person activities following a security incident affecting one of its candidates. The local council is composed of a majority of councilors from VMRO-DPMNE.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The municipality's proximity to the capital contributed to strong involvement of national-level political actors from both ruling and opposition parties. Ministers, MPs, and other senior representatives attended rallies and public events in support of their respective candidates. However, the visibility of ruling-party officials and their emphasis on ongoing or planned government projects gave affiliated candidates a particular advantage, reinforcing perceptions of institutional support. The incumbent mayor's active promotion of his own candidacy further strengthened impressions of benefit derived from public office.

An additional concern stemmed from reports suggesting that some municipal and public institution employees were encouraged by their respective institutional hierarchies to attend or support certain campaign activities. Field observation directly confirmed that local public employees were at times participating in or facilitating events during working hours, particularly in connection with the incumbent mayor's campaign.

Monitoring also indicated that public facilities, including municipal premises and public spaces, were occasionally used for campaign events, most notably by VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM. While most of these uses were reported as justified and no concerns over preferential access were noted, this nevertheless contributed to a perception of uneven institutional access. There were no verified instances of official vehicle use; however, the visibility of institutional logos or vehicles at public events suggested some degree of institutional involvement in logistical support.

Political communication in Butel relied heavily on social media. Candidates and political parties used personal and party-affiliated accounts to promote their activities, achievements, and local projects.

While no misuse of official municipal pages or institutional communication channels was recorded, several campaign posts linked public infrastructure projects and services to particular party initiatives, reinforcing the impression of overlap between governance and campaigning.

Overall, monitoring revealed moderate but perceptible use of administrative resources. While not amounting to systemic abuse, these practices contributed to an uneven playing field, particularly disadvantaging less resourced or independent candidates. Contributing factors included the close interconnection between local and central political structures, the use of governance achievements in campaign narratives, and weak institutional oversight mechanisms. High political polarization and limited public awareness of MAR restrictions further reinforced a culture of tolerance toward informal overlaps between administrative and political activity.

2.4. Municipality Brief - Centar Zhupa

Responsible CSO: KAB Struga

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: kabstruga@outlook.com

Municipality Profile

Centar Zhupa is a small rural municipality (around 3720 citizens) with significant emigration and a declining resident population, which contributes to a generally calm political environment and low-intensity competition. Around 80% of citizens are Turks, the rest are Albanian and Macedonian. Local elections traditionally unfold without incidents or tensions. In this election cycle, several candidates competed for mayor Arijan Ibrahimi from TDP, Inaet Baki from THP and Alil Emrula from DNET. Political rivalry exists, but due to the size of the community and close personal or family ties among residents, campaigns are typically modest and rely on small gatherings and direct communication with citizens. The elections did not reach the required turnout threshold for electing the mayor. The local council is represented by the majority of TDP.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Throughout the monitoring period, no instances of misuse of administrative resources were observed in Centar Zhupa. Campaign events were few in number, and none took place on public premises or involved public buildings, equipment, or vehicles. All three campaign events recorded during later stages of the campaign were held on private or neutral locations, with no signs of preferential access to institutional resources.

Public officials did attend some campaign events, mainly connected to DNET, THP, and TDP gatherings, but these appearances occurred after working hours and were understood as private participation rather than institutional endorsement. Their presence was linked to personal, family, or social relationships rather than misuse of authority. No cases were recorded where officials appeared in uniform, used titles, or mixed official duties with campaigning.

Municipal or publicly initiated events did not feature campaign elements, and no public communication channels—such as official municipal websites, social media pages, or notice boards—were used to promote any candidate or political party. Monitoring of social networks and local TV appearances showed no overlap between institutional communication and campaign messaging. Public servants complied with legal obligations, and no activities occurred during working hours that could indicate preferential support for any contestant.

There were no reported announcements of new projects, benefits, procurements, or recruitment that could be linked to the campaign. No political actor used public resources to highlight ongoing projects or create advantages. Similarly, no involvement of police or security services was observed in any campaign activity.

Third-party involvement was also absent. No organizations, businesses, or informal groups were identified as providing facilities, services, or promotional support to candidates. Vulnerable or minority groups were not subject to any targeted or discriminatory practices related to the campaign.

Overall, the election environment in Centar Zhupa was characterized by strict neutrality of institutions, low campaign intensity, and high compliance with legal standards.

2.5. Municipality Brief - Chair

Responsible CSO: Three C Consulting

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: contact@3cconsulting.co

Municipality Profile

Chair is an urban, densely populated municipality within the City of Skopje, characterised by a multicultural environment where ethnic Albanians form a clear majority, alongside sizeable Romani and Turkish communities and a smaller Macedonian population. Political environment in Chair is shaped by highly mobilised party structures and strong community networks, which make it one of the more politically competitive and symbolically important municipalities in national politics. In the 2025 local elections, the outgoing mayor did not seek re-election.

The contest for the mayor's office was led by two high-profile candidates with extensive national-level experience: Izet Mexhiti, serving as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment, representing the VLEN coalition; and Bujar Osmani, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing AKI. Both candidates conducted visible and active campaigns drawing on their long-standing political profiles. At the council level, the governing VLEN coalition held a strong presence, providing it with established influence in local political structures throughout the campaign period.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Although the overall level of documented misuse of administrative resources in Chair remained low, monitors identified some practices that raised concerns about the boundary between institutional roles and campaign activity and created perceptions of advantage for particular contestants.

Monitors did not observe any partisan use of public premises. Similarly, despite several circulating claims about the use of public vehicles, monitors have not identified evidence to directly corroborate these reports, noting that both campaigns appeared to rely primarily on rented vehicles. Furthermore, no partisan activities by the municipal administration that could have been used to support any contestant, such as municipal events, services, or public-information activities, were noted.

At the same time, the monitors noted that the campaign environment in Chair was shaped by two high-profile nationally prominent candidates, whose public profiles, ongoing political roles, and references to governance achievements contributed to blurring the distinction between official functions and campaigning. In particular, VLEN candidate's public functions and profile have allowed him to extensively associate his campaign with major government projects such as the construction of the Mother Teresa University campus and the Skanderbeg Square underground parking in Skopje. AKI candidate's campaign criticized the opponent of alleged 720 politically motivated employment and procurement decisions in connection with the campaign.

Monitors' review of public records has indicated a slight increase in the numbers of contracts; however, no direct evidence of claims made was possible to obtain and the SCPC has not responded to these allegations during the monitoring period.

Campaigning in Chair also relied extensively on social media, neighbourhood-level outreach, and walk-throughs. These forms of campaigning proved difficult for monitors to track in real time and contributed to the challenge of fully assessing the extent to which institutional advantages may have influenced visibility or access.

Overall, monitors concluded that while clear-cut or systemic MAR was not documented, the campaign environment included practices and narratives that blurred the line between official roles and campaign activity, contributing to low to moderate distortion of campaign equality and fairness. Factors contributing to the limited observable misuse included the municipality's institutional inactivity, the predominance of less resource-intensive and public forms of campaigning, as well as the perceived political experience of main candidates.

2.6. Municipality Brief - Debar

Responsible CSO: KAB Struga 2017

Monitoring period: 15 September – 02 November

CSO Contact Information: kabstruga@outlook.com

Municipality Profile

Debar is a small municipality with around 15,400 citizens with mixed ethnicity, about 55% Albanian and 18% Turks, the rest are Macedonian and Roma. The municipality is characterized by a moderately competitive political environment. In these elections, Debar featured three mayoral contestants: Ilirian Fetahu from the AKI coalition, Fisnik Melja representing the VLEN coalition, and Ramadan Imeri running as an independent candidate. Neither VMRO-DPMNE nor SDSM leading coalitions fielded mayoral candidates, although both participated with councilor lists as in previous cycles. The local council is represented by VLEN coalition with only one councilor more than AKI coalition. The election was concluded in the second round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

During the monitoring period, campaign activities in Debar were conducted in an orderly and transparent manner. Observers did not record any significant cases of misuse of administrative resources. Public institutions, including municipal bodies, schools, and public enterprises, appeared to perform their duties neutrally. Neither the use of public premises for partisan purposes nor the use of public vehicles or official equipment in campaigning was detected.

Public officials were not seen participating in campaign events in their official capacity. Their conduct remained consistent with legal obligations, and no overlap between official duties and political promotion was observed. Institutional communication—both at the municipal level and by public officials—remained administrative and did not include messaging that could be interpreted as supporting specific candidates or parties.

Minor irregularities observed by monitors appeared isolated and were *not* coordinated, systemic, or institution-driven. The presence of observers, combined with general public and media awareness about neutrality rules, contributed to restraint among officials and political actors. No instances of selective procurement, project inaugurations, or preferential public spending were identified during the campaign period.

On Election Day and during the pre-election silence, the process remained calm, without signs of pressure, intimidation, or involvement of public employees in partisan activities. Local media covered the process in a balanced manner and did not exhibit patterns of institutional promotion of political contestants.

Overall, the monitoring findings did not reveal any widespread, systematic, or deliberate misuse of administrative resources. The municipality's small size, social visibility, and increased caution by institutional actors played key roles in preventing MAR, while observer presence contributed to overall transparency and accountability.

2.7. Municipality Brief – Delchevo

Responsible CSO: Eurothink

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: dimitar.nikolovski@eurothink.mk

Municipality Profile

Delchevo is a small eastern municipality with a population of around 15,000 residents, predominantly ethnic Macedonians. The political landscape is competitive, with VMRO–DPMNE and SDSM led coalitions as the primary actors, accompanied by smaller political groups such as Levica. The local campaign environment was noticeably quieter compared to larger municipalities, with fewer public events and a stronger reliance on door-to-door outreach. For these elections, VMRO–DPMNE led coalition candidate Ivan Gocevski was among the leading contestants, facing candidates from SDSM led coalition Dejan Glinarski. Although overall campaign visibility was limited, both major parties mobilized their structures, while central-level officials from VMRO–DPMNE led coalition occasionally appeared at local events, indirectly reinforcing their local candidate. The local council is strongly represented by VMRO-DPMNE led coalition. The election concluded in one round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Throughout the monitoring period, Delchevo displayed a generally orderly campaign environment with no widespread or systematic misuse of administrative resources. Campaign activities were modest in scale, with limited public gatherings and few instances of venue-based events. In most cases, public premises, equipment, and vehicles were not used for campaign purposes, and no discriminatory access to public spaces was reported.

A small number of situations involved appearances by central-level officials, often outside working hours, at events where the VMRO–DPMNE mayoral candidate was also present. While these did not involve direct use of official insignia or state resources, the presence of officials such as the Prime Minister, deputy ministers, or government representatives created an indirect promotional effect for the ruling party's local candidate. Vehicles accompanying these officials were not clearly marked, making it difficult to verify whether state resources were involved.

Local public employees were *not* observed participating in campaign activities during working hours, and no cases of public servants engaging in partisan activities in their official capacity were documented. Municipal communication channels remained neutral in tone, focusing on administrative content without promoting any electoral contestant.

Local media, particularly online portals, actively covered campaign developments. One notable incident involved publishing early results for voting by homebound and disabled voters, attributed to a page associated with VMRO–DPMNE youth structures. The post was removed shortly afterward and triggered reactions from opposition candidates and media outlets, raising concerns about misinformation but not about administrative resource misuse.

Importantly, no new public projects, inaugurations, recruitments, or budget-related decisions were identified during the campaign period. Institutions largely adhered to neutrality obligations, and increased vigilance—partly influenced by the arrest of the local police chief before the campaign—appeared to contribute to an environment of caution among public officials.

Overall, Delchevo demonstrated low levels of administrative resource misuse, with isolated concerns mainly related to the presence of senior officials at partisan events and an instance of online misinformation. Institutional reminders by the Municipal Election Commission and oversight by local monitors helped reinforce compliance and contributed to a fairer campaign climate.

2.8. Municipality Brief - Dolneni

Responsible CSO: LAG Agro Lider

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: danielacvetanoska@yahoo.com

Municipality Profile

Dolneni is a rural municipality with a mixed ethnic composition, including predominantly Albanian and Macedonian communities, and smaller Turkish and other groups. Electoral competition in Dolneni was active and mainly driven by the major parties, particularly VMRO–DPMNE and DUI (part of AKI coalition), who held the highest number of events and mobilized strong local party structures. VMRO–DPMNE focused on Macedonian-majority areas, while DUI concentrated on Albanian communities. SDSM maintained a visible but more modest campaign, and VLEN increased its outreach towards the end of the campaign, supported by central-level representatives. Independent candidates and smaller groups remained largely inactive, indicating more limited capacity and influence.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

With the local government led by the opposition DUI and some of the mayoral contenders representing ruling parties, Dolneni has displayed a specific political dynamic that was seen as conducive to potential MAR originating from different political sides.

Observation indicated that the DUI mayoral candidate and council list enjoyed support and promotion from the incumbent mayor. Public premises, municipal staff, and local resources were used to advance campaign objectives, creating a perception of institutional bias. Although not always in direct violation of the law, the visible involvement of the sitting mayor in promoting one side undermined the appearance of neutrality. A concerning practice was also reported of supervisors within public institutions exerting pressure on subordinates to attend DUI events or express support, amounting to coercion through institutional hierarchy and job insecurity.

The VMRO-DPMNE candidate received visible support from the central government, particularly during the second round, benefiting from easier access to state-level resources, institutions, and national-level officials.

The campaign featured appearances by ministers and other government representatives, the involvement of administrative employees in campaign activities, and public events that leveraged ongoing or planned government projects to strengthen political messaging. These patterns created a perception of advantage for ruling-party-affiliated candidates.

Similar trends were noted with the VLEN and SDSM campaigns, whose rallies and meetings were often held at public premises and were attended by different government officials, public entities' directors, and public sector employees.

Overall, public premises, including schools and other municipal spaces were used across parties, without a clear justification or institutional response, when unauthorized. Positively, no use of public vehicles for campaign purposes was recorded.

The monitoring revealed an overall moderate but visible resort to administrative resources, partially undermining equality and fairness of competition, especially disadvantaging smaller parties and independent candidates. A high degree of politicization within institutions, weak oversight, and lack of awareness about prohibited conduct were seen as key factors behind these practices.

2.9. Municipality Brief - Gostivar

Responsible CSO: Verdevita

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: sefedinjonuzi01@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Gostivar is a large and diverse urban municipality in the Polog region, with around 80,000 residents and significant Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Roma communities. The political landscape is traditionally competitive, shaped by strong party networks, community ties, and longstanding rivalry among the major Albanian political blocs, alongside the presence of parties with nationwide reach. During the 2025 local elections, campaign activities by multiple contestants, including VLEN, AKI, VMRO–DPMNE, SDSM, and others were observed. Events linked to the two main Albanian coalitions were most frequent, reflecting their local organizational presence and visibility, while other contestants were also active but featured less prominently.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

While the overall MAR-related findings in Gostivar remained limited, the observations pointed to a campaign environment in which the boundary between institutional roles and political activity was at times blurred, primarily through the use of public premises and the participation of public officials in campaigning.

With regard to public premises, monitors recorded several cases where publicly owned facilities were used for campaign-related activities.

These included events held in the Palace of Culture in Gostivar to promote candidates and lists, as well as the use of municipal public spaces in the city center and the sports hall of a local secondary school in connection with activities organized by the youth structures of different political forces. While such events involved more than one contestant over the course of the campaign, the reliance on publicly owned venues for electoral promotion raised questions about the neutrality of institutional spaces and the conditions under which such premises were made available.

Another recurring pattern concerned the participation of public officials in campaign events. Monitors noted several rallies and meetings where public figures, including the acting mayor, local councilors, and central-level officials, took part in promoting particular contestants.

In several of these events, many of which took place outside regular working hours, officials were introduced with their institutional titles or spoke from positions closely linked to their public roles, reinforcing the impression that official status and campaign messaging were intertwined.

Monitors also drew attention to the way municipal achievements and ongoing public projects were used in the campaign narrative. While often presented as information about municipal work, the timing and framing of such communication contributed to perceptions that public infrastructure investments were being showcased in a way that favored a particular contestant.

Overall, the findings indicate that the practices observed did not amount to fully documented, systematic misuse of administrative resources, but did contribute to perceptions of institutional proximity to certain political actors and raised questions about the equality of campaign conditions.

2.10. Municipality Brief - Kisela Voda

Responsible CSO: Eurothink

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: dimitar.nikolovski@eurothink.mk

Municipality Profile

Kisela Voda is a highly urban municipality within the City of Skopje, characterized by a dense population (around 92% Macedonian, the rest are Albanian, Roma, Turks and Serbs), active political competition, and strong party structures. As part of the capital region, its political dynamics are closely tied to national-level developments. During these elections, the situation was somewhat unique: the sitting mayor of Kisela Voda, Orce Gjorgjievski (VMRO-DPMNE led coalition), ran for Mayor of the City of Skopje, while Kisela Voda had a separate candidate for the mayoral race. This created dual monitoring challenges regarding potential use of influence at both the municipal and city levels.

The main political competition in the municipality involved candidates supported by VMRO-DPMNE led coalition-Beti Stamenkoska-Trajkoska, SDSM led coalition-Goran Trajkoski, Levica-Jane Acevski, and several smaller political actors. VMRO-DPMNE led coalition maintained a strong organizational presence and campaign visibility, while SDSM led coalition and Levica conducted active outreach through rallies, meetings, and online communication.

Although VMRO-DPMNE led coalition was considered organizationally dominant in the area, other contestants were also mobilized and engaged with local residents. The election process in Kisela Voda concluded in the first row. The local council is strongly represented by VMRO-DPMNE led coalition.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The overall campaign environment in Kisela Voda was active and competitive, with numerous rallies, meetings with citizens, and online promotional activities. Monitoring findings across all reporting periods indicates a generally cautious approach among political actors regarding direct misuse of administrative resources.

Only isolated instances raised concerns regarding possible overlap between official functions and campaign activity. In one VMRO-DPMNE led coalition rally, administrative vehicles associated with central government officials (including the Prime Minister) were reportedly present without red license plates and safeguarded by police.

Campaign materials promoting Orce Gjorgjievski as the Skopje mayoral candidate were visible at the same event, although these were not linked directly to misuse of municipal premises in Kisela Voda.

No systematic use of public premises for campaign purposes was observed, aside from a single event near a public facility. Public officials appeared at several campaign activities mostly from the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition but without using official titles, insignia, or institutional communication. Some national-level officials, including a minister, shared campaign-related content on their official social media accounts, though this did not involve municipal resources. No cases were noted of public servants campaigning during working hours, and police and security services acted neutrally. There were also no signs of new public projects, targeted procurements, or social benefits being used for electoral advantage. Municipal communication remained administrative in tone and did not promote any contestant.

Campaign materials were largely separated from public infrastructure, with only minimal and isolated concerns about unequal advertising access. Overall, no widespread or intentional misuse of administrative resources was detected in Kisela Voda. Observed issues were sporadic and mainly linked to central-level actors, while the municipal administration maintained a neutral and professional approach throughout the campaign.

2.11. Municipality Brief - Kochani

Responsible CSO: Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: info@romalitico.org

Municipality Profile

Kochani is a mid-sized municipality, with Macedonians comprising just over 93% of the population. Smaller communities include Roma, Turks, Bosniaks, Vlachs, and Serbs. The municipality serves as an administrative, educational, and economic center for the wider region, with a comparatively well-structured local administration and an active local media landscape. These features contribute to higher institutional visibility and public scrutiny than in many rural areas. The campaign in Kochani was characterized by moderate but meaningful competition. The contest was led primarily by VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, with independent candidates, including the acting mayor also playing an active role. VMRO-DPMNE maintained a strong presence in the municipal council and showed greater overall campaign visibility, while SDSM relied more on smaller, community-focused outreach.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The configuration of local political forces shaped contestants' campaign approaches and their reliance on public resources. VMRO-DPMNE benefited from its stronger party organization and broader presence in public life, which gave it more capacity to mobilize supporters and maintain higher visibility. SDSM relied mostly on smaller community-oriented meetings and informal outreach, drawing on local networks rather than institutional proximity.

The acting mayor provided a layer of administrative neutrality and was not seen as acting in ways that advantaged or disadvantaged specific contestants.

Within this context, monitors observed an overall calm campaign atmosphere without significant prominence of MAR-related concerns. While parties and candidates occasionally used public premises for campaign meetings, these were reported to have been preceded by formal requests and approvals, and no contestant concerns about preferential access were recorded.

Similarly, there were no observed cases of municipal or public-enterprise vehicles being used for campaigning, with logistics seemingly handled through parties rather than institutional resources.

Public officials were present at some campaign events; however, their participation was noted as having been in a party capacity, without official functions referenced in the framing of events. At the same time, certain high-level political actors, especially on the VMRO-DPMNE side, made references to ongoing or planned state-funded projects when addressing voters. While these references did not constitute a formal invocation of office, they created some overlap between political messaging and public policy achievements, subtly linking campaign narratives to the broader governance record.

Cases of public servants, including municipal staff and employees of public institutions, participating in campaign activities were noted. However, campaign events were mostly held after working hours, and no evidence suggested institutional coordination or pressure. Local institutional communication was reported to have remained neutral throughout the campaign, with municipal online platforms posting routine public service information without campaign-related content favoring any contestant. At the same time, the active use of public officials' social media accounts for contestant promotion was noted.

Overall, the findings from Kochani point to a low-risk MAR environment, with no practices that materially or consistently affected the equality of contestants' campaign opportunities. Monitors assessed that the balancing role of the acting mayor, the municipality's observed neutrality and focus on public service functions, and the restrained conduct of political actors were the primary factors behind these observations.

2.12. Municipality Brief - Kumanovo

Responsible CSO: Assistive Center
Monitoring period: 15 September – 02 November
CSO Contact Information: info@assistivecenter.org

Municipality Profile

Kumanovo is one of the largest and most diverse municipalities in North Macedonia, located in the northeastern part of the country and known for its multiethnic character. With a population around 100,000 residents, the municipality includes sizeable Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian, Roma, and Turkish communities.

In these elections several coalitions had candidates: SDSM led coalition Martin Kostovski, ZNAM-Maksim Dimitrievski, AKI coalition- Slever Ajdini, VLEN coalition Arben Etemi and the independent candidate Goran Stojkovski—maintaining strong local structures and active grassroots networks. While the environment remained generally peaceful, the period also included isolated tensions, including a confirmed physical incident involving party activists, as well as occasional concerns about the presence of minors in campaign activities. Overall, political competition was high, with visible mobilization efforts from all major contestants. The local council has a majority of seats from ZNAM. The election concluded in the second round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Across the observed period, Kumanovo presented a campaign environment marked by high political activity but relatively restrained use of administrative resources. Despite the municipality's size, diversity, and traditionally competitive political landscape, most institutional actors appeared cautious in maintaining a formal separation between public functions and campaign activities. This was reflected in the consistent absence of cases involving the use of municipal premises, public vehicles, official communication channels, or public officials acting in their institutional capacity during campaign events.

Monitoring teams attended more than one hundred political gatherings across multiple weeks, yet almost all campaign activities were held in private or party-managed venues, without evidence of preferential access to public facilities. Similarly, no cases were detected where municipal equipment, official emails, or communication tools were diverted for electoral purposes. This restraint contributed to a campaign atmosphere where contestants relied primarily on party structures, personal networks, and private-sector support instead of mobilizing public resources. One of the notable patterns was the limited but visible engagement of private businesses in hosting political meetings. Several cafés, restaurants, and event venues—such as “Zafir,” “Brooklyn,” “Zen,” and “Trgovski”—were used for gatherings between candidates and supporters. While these do not constitute misuse of administrative resources, they highlight the role of third parties in facilitating campaign activities, particularly in an environment where public premises were not utilized for political purposes. These instances were isolated and did not suggest systematic or orchestrated third-party involvement.

A more concerning development emerged with the inclusion of minors in campaign activities, children were observed attending rallies, holding party symbols, and wearing promotional material.

Although not directly involving the misuse of public institutions, this practice raised ethical concerns and reflected a broader trend in local campaigning where visibility and mobilization were prioritized over compliance with best practices on child protection.

Another isolated incident reported during the campaign was the physical attack on activists distributing materials, confirmed by the Ministry of Interior. While the event did not involve institutional actors, it underscored the underlying tensions within the political environment and the pressure some party structures faced on the ground. Importantly, the incident did not evolve into a broader pattern and did not result in observable institutional interference or selective treatment by authorities.

Throughout the campaign and election day, institutional communication channels remained neutral. Local public enterprises, the municipality, and other public bodies refrained from promoting candidates or publicizing ongoing projects in ways that could be interpreted as electoral messaging. No new public benefits, procurements, or recruitment processes were launched during the campaign period, further signaling institutional restraint.

Overall, the trends observed in Kumanovo suggest a campaign conducted largely without the misuse of administrative resources, with only a few isolated incidents that did not point to systematic institutional bias. The competitive political context did not translate into institutional favoritism, and public officials both at municipal and local enterprise levels maintained an overall neutral stance throughout the period.

2.13. Municipality Brief - Lipkovo

Responsible CSO: Assistive Center

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: info@assistivecenter.org

Municipality Profile

Lipkovo is a rural, predominantly Albanian municipality in the northeast of the country, with a population of approximately 23,000. The municipality traditionally exhibits strong political engagement. The political environment is competitive but marked by strong party structures and deep local networks. In these elections, the incumbent mayor Erkan Arifi from AKI coalition sought re-election, facing candidate from VLEN coalition Nexhmedin Sadiki. While campaign visibility in public spaces was relatively modest, political actors remained active through neighborhood outreach, community meetings, and intensive social media engagement. The campaign period was generally calm, though isolated incidents such as the shooting of a municipal council candidate which briefly heightened local concerns without disrupting the overall process. The election was concluded in one round, and the local council is strongly represented by AKI coalition.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

During the monitoring period, Lipkovo demonstrated a mixed campaign environment. While many practices remained within acceptable institutional boundaries, several trends indicated the use of public communication channels and municipal visibility to indirectly support the incumbent mayor's campaign. Public events remained limited, with only one notable municipal activity that featured political figures in a manner that could be interpreted as campaign-linked. No cases were observed of public servants participating in campaign activities during working hours, nor were municipal premises or public vehicles used for campaign purposes.

However, a clear pattern emerged in the area of public communication, especially near the end of the campaign. The mayor and local public enterprises published a series of videos highlighting ongoing or completed infrastructural projects—such as riverbed regulation in Slupchane, local road improvements, and water supply projects. These posts, shared during the active campaign period, included messaging with promotional tone (“Together for the municipality we love”, “Work continues as planned”) and featured municipal staff or directors of public enterprises. While formally presented as updates on public works, their timing and presentation aligned closely with campaign objectives and effectively boosted the visibility of the incumbent.

No new public investments, procurements, or recruitments outside the approved municipal program were identified. Likewise, no instances of discriminatory access to public premises, selective use of public advertising spaces, or misuse of public office equipment were reported. Except for the campaign-adjacent promotional videos, municipal communication channels maintained a generally administrative tone, and no explicit endorsements were posted on official accounts. An isolated event involving the gathering of several hundred women after working hours suggested the use of community networks and informal influence structures to mobilize support, though it could not be conclusively linked to institutional coercion. No other practices affecting vulnerable or underrepresented groups were observed. Throughout the election silence period and on election day, no violations related to neutrality of public institutions or partisan use of state resources were recorded. Voting proceeded calmly, and no campaign materials or partisan activities were detected near polling stations.

Overall, Lipkovo showed limited but notable instances of campaign-aligned institutional communication, particularly through the mayor's official platforms. These activities did not amount to systematic misuse of administrative resources but nonetheless created an environment of heightened visibility for the incumbent, contributing to an uneven playing field typical of municipalities with strong incumbent structures.

2.14. Municipality Brief - Makedonski Brod

Responsible CSO: National Network "Women for Women"

Monitoring period: 15 September – 02 November

CSO Contact Information: o.eftimovska@zenite.mk

Municipality Profile

Makedonski Brod is a small, predominantly ethnic Macedonian municipality with a rural character and close community ties. Political competition existed but was relatively modest. Four candidates contested the mayoral race: incumbent Zarko Risteski (VMRO-DPMNE led coalition), Ivica Stojkoski (SDSM led coalition), Marjan Gjureski Levica candidate, and an independent candidate, Milosim Vojneski. The incumbent entered the campaign with clear institutional visibility and support, while the others operated with fewer resources and a narrower reach.

After the first round, the independent candidate withdrew despite qualifying for the runoff, effectively leaving the second round without real competition. VMRO-DPMNE maintained strong representation at the local level, and the election was essentially decided in the first round but concluded in the second round. The local council is strongly represented by VMRO-DPMNE led coalition.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The campaign environment in Makedonski Brod was generally calm, with small-scale meetings, village visits, and party rallies. Although no major violations were documented, monitoring revealed several subtle but consistent uses of administrative resources that favored the incumbent.

The most notable pattern was the use of official municipal and mayoral social media pages to promote infrastructure works—such as water system upgrades, street reconstruction, and project inspections—accompanied by official campaign slogans and hashtags. These posts often overlapped with campaign events and were sometimes sponsored, which increased their visibility. This blending of institutional communication with campaign promotion gave the incumbent a steady advantage in public exposure.

In addition, public officials and heads of local institutions occasionally appeared at the incumbent's campaign events, including directors of public enterprises and school representatives. While not always in a formal capacity, their presence reinforced perceptions of institutional alignment with the incumbent. In isolated cases, medical staff linked to the ruling party conducted activities in the field shortly before the election, raising concerns about timing and political messaging. There were no recorded cases of misuse of public premises or vehicles, and campaign events were mostly held in private or neutral spaces. Publicly initiated events did not feature explicit campaigning, though the incumbent's presence and messaging at times blurred official and political roles.

Oversight mechanisms were minimal, with no reported institutional actions to address potential misuse. The small size of the municipality, limited media scrutiny, and acceptance of these practices as “normal” further reduced the likelihood of preventing or challenging subtle forms of administrative advantage. Overall, while there was no systematic or aggressive misuse of administrative resources, the incumbent benefited from a persistent overlap between institutional activities and campaign promotion, creating an indirect but visible advantage.

2.15. Municipality Brief - Ohrid

Responsible CSO: INTERAKTIV - Bitola

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: interaktivbitola@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Ohrid is consisted of diverse population, which includes Macedonian with 74.5% and the rest are Albanian, and Turkish communities. With a politically active local environment, the municipality sees regular competition between major leading coalitions including VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, and several smaller or community-based groups. During these local elections, the incumbent mayor Kiril Pecakov VMRO-DPMNE led coalition sought re-election, facing challengers from SDSM led coalition-Asen Shajn, and several smaller parties and independent lists. VMRO-DPMNE led coalition held strong institutional and political presence in the municipality, while opposition candidates maintained visible, though less resource-intensive, campaigns. The election concluded in one round. The local council is strongly represented by VMRO-DPMNE led coalition.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The campaign environment in Ohrid was active and competitive, with numerous rallies, visits, small neighborhood meetings, and extensive use of social media by all political actors. Monitors did not observe cases of public premises or vehicles being used for campaign events, and there were no indications of public institutions providing headquarters, storage, or logistical support for contestants. However, public officials particularly from VMRO-DPMNE led coalition were frequently present at campaign events, though usually without official insignia or formal titles. Their participation often included speeches linking municipal achievements to the electoral prospects of the incumbent, which created a blurred line between institutional communication and political promotion. Such overlaps were subtle rather than explicit, but recurrent throughout the campaign period.

Municipal social media channels (especially the mayor’s official profile, treated locally as an institutional communication channel) regularly featured project promotions, inaugurations, and public events during the campaign period. While these posts were framed as official updates, they indirectly benefited the incumbent by increasing visibility in a politically sensitive time. Promotion of contestants on official institutional accounts appeared “frequent” in later stages of the campaign, although not through the formal municipal website. No cases were identified of public servants engaging in campaign tasks during working hours at a large scale, but several instances of passive or active attendance were observed, suggesting informal encouragement rather than formal directive. Police and security agencies behaved neutrally, with no signs of selective protection or political involvement.

Public communications often highlighted ongoing projects such as road works and openings of local facilities which, although not new investments, were presented in ways that aligned with campaign messaging. Campaign materials were mostly placed on private infrastructure, and no major issues of unequal access to public advertising space were observed. Third-party involvement was limited, with some local media providing promotional coverage to candidates, mainly those from the ruling structures.

Overall, no systematic misuse of administrative resources was identified. However, indirect practices such as promotional public events, frequent appearances of public officials at campaign activities, and institutional communication benefiting the incumbent created unequal visibility among contestants. These patterns reflected structural advantages rather than direct abuse, and the campaign environment remained generally orderly.

2.16. Municipality Brief – Prilep

Responsible CSO: INTERAKTIV - Bitola

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: interaktivbitola@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Prilep is one of the larger municipalities in the Pelagonia region and an important administrative and economic center. The population is predominantly ethnic Macedonian, and the political environment is traditionally competitive, with strong party structures and active local branches. In these elections, the main contest was between the incumbent mayor from the ruling coalition VMRO-DPMNE Dejan Prodanoski, the SDSM led coalition candidate Petra Lukaroska and some other smaller parties, coalitions and independent candidates, each mobilizing significant local networks and visibility. Political dynamics were influenced by the presence of national-level party figures who maintain strong ties to Prilep, contributing to a high-engagement campaign atmosphere. The local council maintains a mixed composition, though the ruling coalition retains a stronger institutional presence. The elections in Prilep were concluded in one round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The monitoring period in Prilep showed a competitive yet generally orderly campaign environment, with public rallies, neighborhood meetings, and intensified communication by political actors. While some instances of potential overlap between official duties and campaign activities were observed, these were limited in scale and did not amount to systematic misuse. Public officials occasionally appeared at events where government projects or institutional achievements were highlighted, contributing indirectly to the visibility of certain candidates. These activities blurred the line between official and political functions, particularly when high-level state officials attended local events that had indirect campaign relevance. However, such cases were infrequent and typically did not involve explicit use of official symbols, titles, or public resources.

A few campaign events were held in or near publicly managed premises, but these occurrences did not suggest discriminatory access or preferential institutional treatment. No cases were recorded of public vehicles used for campaign purposes, nor were public servants observed engaging in political activities during working hours. Police and security institutions maintained a neutral stance throughout the period.

Municipal communication remained largely administrative and did not cross into overt promotional messaging for any contestant. Local media offered varying degrees of coverage, with some outlets displaying political preferences, though this did not translate into institutional misuse. No new public projects, selective procurements, or pre-election recruitments were reported that could influence voter behavior.

Overall, while certain practices reflected the structural advantages of political actors linked to ruling institutions such as greater visibility through official events, the monitoring did not identify deliberate, widespread, or systematic misuse of administrative resources. The municipal administration upheld a functional degree of neutrality, and the election process unfolded without major administrative interference.

2.17. Municipality Brief - Saraj

Responsible CSO: National Network “Women for Women”

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: o.eftimovska@zenite.mk

Municipality Profile

Saraj is a large, predominantly rural and suburban municipality located on the outskirts of Skopje. The population is composed mainly of ethnic Albanians (91.5%), with smaller communities of Bosniaks, Macedonians, Roma, Turks, Serbs, and Vlachs. The municipality remains politically divided, with pronounced polarization among voters and supporters of different political forces. The election campaign was dynamic and competitive, dominated by candidates from the major Albanian coalitions AKI and VLEN. Political parties relied heavily on direct voter outreach through neighborhood gatherings, door-to-door visits, small-scale rallies, and community-based interactions. In contrast, the independent candidate had limited visible campaign activity. Although the VLEN coalition secured the mayoral victory, the local council remained under the majority control of the AKI coalition.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Campaign methods in Saraj were primarily driven by community-level engagement and established party structures rather than by overt or predominant reliance on institutional support. At the same time, the locally governing coalition and the incumbent mayor benefited from easier access to public facilities and public employees, which facilitated event organization and voter outreach. Meanwhile, the central government-affiliated coalition drew visibility through government projects and appearances by public officials to indirectly promote its candidates. These practices contributed to unequal conditions, particularly disadvantaging the independent candidate, who ultimately withdrew from the race due to limited access and support.

The use of public premises, especially schools, for campaign meetings was among the most frequent MAR-related observations. Such activities were most often linked to the AKI coalition and involved current MPs and local officials. According to organizers, premises were generally used based on formal requests and approvals, citing the lack of alternative public spaces in rural areas. No cases of misuse of official vehicles were noted, with the use of distinctive license plates and an online vehicle register seen as effective deterrents.

Public officials often participated in campaign events, typically to deliver speeches in support of their parties' candidates or to highlight institutional achievements, thereby enhancing the visibility and credibility of these contestants. Candidates and officeholders frequently referred to local and government projects, with higher prominence noted in connection with the VLEN campaign.

Although direct evidence was limited, civil servants, particularly teachers and school principals, were reported to have relatively often taken part in campaign activities, including attending campaign events held at their institutions during working hours.

Political communication relied heavily on social media, where candidates and party structures used personal and party-affiliated accounts to reach voters.

Positively, no instances were recorded of official municipal pages or institutional channels being used for campaign messaging, and the allocation of advertising spaces, including billboards and digital screens, showed no indication of preferential treatment. In general, municipal administration and public bodies were seen as having largely maintained neutrality, operating in a manner that preserved a clear distinction between official duties and electoral activities.

Overall, the use of administrative resources in Saraj was assessed as having moderately affected the equality and fairness of the electoral contest. Contributing factors included the political alignment of local authorities, structural limitations within the community, and weak institutional transparency and control. Low public awareness and a general perception of party visibility as a “normal” part of election campaigns further reduced public and institutional pressure to prevent or sanction misuse.

2.18. Municipality Brief - Shtip

Responsible CSO: Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: info@romalitico.org

Municipality Profile

Shtip is a mid-sized municipality and an important administrative and educational center in the eastern region of the country. With a population of approximately 44,866 residents, the majority—around 77.5% ethnic Macedonians, while smaller communities include Roma, Turks, Vlachs, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Albanians. The political environment in Shtip during these elections was generally calm and structured, marked by moderate-active competition among candidates from both led coalitions: VMRO-DPMNE-Ivan Jordanov and SDSM-Pavel Ivanov but with orderly campaign activities. The ruling VMRO-DPMNE held strong representation in the municipal council and maintained a visible campaign presence. Political parties engaged in standard outreach efforts such as small rallies, neighborhood meetings, and social media engagement. The election process in the municipality proceeded without major tensions, and the campaign concluded in one round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Throughout the monitoring period from 15 September to 19 October 2025, the campaign environment in Shtip was active yet disciplined, showing no clear patterns of systematic misuse of administrative resources. Campaign activity intensified during the mid- and final stages, with VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM led coalitions.

Public premises were occasionally used for campaign gatherings; however, no evidence indicated discriminatory access or preferential treatment by institutions. Municipal vehicles and equipment were not observed being used for campaign purposes. Public officials were present at some campaign activities, though their attendance appeared largely in a personal or partisan capacity and without the use of official titles, symbols, or administrative authority.

Institutional communication remained largely neutral and administrative in nature, with no instances of public institutions promoting candidates or linking official functions to campaign messaging. The municipal administration and public employees were seen performing their duties impartially, with no reports of involvement in campaign activities during working hours. Campaign silence rules were respected, and election day procedures were conducted in an orderly and compliant manner, including home voting for immobile voters.

Across the monitored period, no practices suggesting deliberate, systematic, or widespread misuse of administrative resources were identified. The generally neutral conduct of public institutions, combined with adherence to legal obligations and consistent monitoring, contributed to a transparent and orderly campaign environment in Shtip.

2.19. Municipality Brief - Shuto Orizari

Responsible CSO: Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitico

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: info@romalitico.org

Municipality Profile

Shuto Orizari, a Roma-majority municipality, had seven mayoral candidates and seven council lists in the 2025 local elections. All mayoral candidates were men, but council lists met the legal gender quota requirements. The campaign was vibrant and competitive, engaging diverse Roma political actors and community groups. At the same time, unlike in previous elections, a decrease in public gatherings and rallies was noted, with about half of the candidates not organizing any public events or open rallies, indicating a shift towards smaller, targeted activities rather than mass events. The main contest was between incumbent Kurto Dudush (Union of Roma) and Erdjan Demir (VMRO-DPMNE-coalition supported). Other Roma parties and independent movements, such as the Alliance of Roma (SRM), were active but with more limited visibility. The local council composition was mixed, with no single dominant force.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Political and institutional affiliation influenced how easily candidates could mobilize support, but these connections did not appear to translate into widespread misuse of resources. Given the municipality's fragmented political landscape, where several established parties maintained comparable strength and community networks, and with the incumbent enjoying solid local approval, there appeared to be little need for contestants to draw on illegitimate leverages. A situation of mutual oversight among competing actors further helped to contain overt malpractices.

Nevertheless, central-level officials, including government ministers and deputy ministers, frequently appeared at campaign and local public events, using ongoing or planned infrastructure projects to reinforce campaign messages and to directly or subtly promote the contestants.

Although the involvement of these and local public officials was seen as mostly symbolic, it created a perception of overlap between administrative activity and party promotion, enhancing contestants' visibility, particularly of ruling party-affiliated ones. Campaign involvement by public sector employees was not registered as a concern.

The use of public venues for campaign purposes was common and, while generally accessible to multiple parties, also contributed to a sense of conflation between municipal functions and campaign promotion. A few isolated instances of public vehicle and municipal office equipment use were noted. Digital campaigning through office holders' official social media accounts was widespread, often promoting successful public projects and candidate meetings, although no partisan activity through municipalities' official communication channels was noted.

Overall, no significant or systemic misuse of resources was observed in Shuto Orizari, with the observed cases of illicit leverages seen as not significantly affecting the overall fairness of the electoral process.

The presence of observers, media, and civil society organizations, combined with the balanced local political competition and increased awareness among public servants regarding neutrality obligations, were seen as factors controlling against misuse.

2.20. Municipality Brief - Struga

Responsible CSO: KAB Struga 2017

Monitoring period: 15 September – 02 November

CSO Contact Information: kabstruga@outlook.com

Municipality Profile

Struga is a multiethnic municipality with around 50,980 citizens, 50.8% Albanian, 45.9% Macedonian and the rest are Turkish and Roma. The election period in Struga was marked by strong competition among several active candidates, yet the overall atmosphere remained calmer than in previous years due to the absence of long-time incumbent Ramiz Merko (as reported). The main contenders included AKI's coalition Arsim Dalipi, independent candidates Mendi Qyra (supported by VLEN coalition) and Besnik Asani, and Levica's Jovana Mojsavska. Monitoring findings and local polling indicated a particularly close race between Dalipi and Qyra. These dynamics created a genuinely competitive and open electoral environment, with no clear frontrunner and several candidates capable of influencing the final outcome. Public institutions—including schools, hospitals, and municipal enterprises—are prominent in community life and often intersect with political dynamics. As in previous elections, candidates relied heavily on their institutional connections, whether at the local or central level, to strengthen their outreach efforts. The AKI coalition was strongly represented in the local council. The election was concluded in the second row.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

During the monitoring period, the campaign environment in Struga was competitive and active, with frequent community meetings and local outreach by several candidates. While the atmosphere remained generally calm, monitors observed repeated use of public institutions - especially schools and, in some cases, health facilities - for campaign events. Access to these premises did not appear discriminatory but was informal and often reflected the influence of specific candidates. No widespread use of public vehicles was recorded, aside from one isolated case involving a municipal car was provided to a member of the local election commission.

Public officials, particularly school directors and local institutional staff, were involved in campaign activities, and the Minister of Health conducted politically-framed visits inside hospitals. One verified case of material inducement ("electoral asphalt") was documented in Vranishtë, linked to the campaign of an independent candidate.

Children were also observed participating in campaign events. While some ongoing public services were referenced in campaign messaging, no new projects or inaugurations were reported.

Election day proceeded calmly inside polling stations, though organized groups gathered outside several locations, and citizens reported instances of vote buying in both urban and rural areas, which monitors could not independently verify. Candidates did not respect campaign silence and continued posting promotional content online.

Overall, the monitored activities showed recurring but not centrally coordinated use of administrative resources, mainly through public premises and institutional actors, with the election-day process itself remaining orderly.

2.21. Municipality Brief - Strumica

Responsible CSO: LAG Agro Lider

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: danielacvetanoska@yahoo.com

Municipality Profile

Strumica is a diverse municipality where ethnic Macedonians constitute the majority, alongside Roma and Turkish communities. Politically, Strumica has traditionally been an SDSM stronghold; however, recent election cycles have shown increasing competition, with VMRO-DPMNE significantly expanding its organizational reach and voter support.

During the 2025 local elections, both major parties implemented intensive campaign efforts focused on mobilization, visibility, and public engagement. SDSM led coalition faced internal strategic and organizational challenges, while VMRO-DPMNE led coalition maintained a more cohesive campaign structure. Smaller candidates ensured some public presence but lacked the resources and visibility of the leading parties. VMRO-DPMNE led coalition is strongly represented in the local council. The election concluded in one round.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Throughout the monitoring period, the campaign environment in Strumica was competitive, active, and generally orderly, featuring rallies, community visits, neighborhood consultations, and a high number of candidate and party-led activities.

Monitored campaign events, institutional communications, and participation of public officials did not reveal instances of clear or systematic overlap between official duties and campaign activities. A number of events took place in or near public premises; however, no discriminatory access was observed, and it remained unclear whether the premises were granted under formal procedures or established local practice. No cases of the use of public vehicles for campaign-related purposes were noted.

Public officials were present at some campaign events, though mostly in a party or private capacity rather than in an official role, and without the use of official insignia or titles. In several instances, messaging at events involving state officials blurred the line between state and party, indirectly connecting ongoing governmental achievements to the electoral campaigns. While these appearances indicated elements of institutional alignment, no evidence was found of the launch of new public projects, infrastructure announcements, or preferential procurement or recruitment activities linked to the campaign.

Local institutions were observed operating professionally and maintaining neutrality. No cases of public employees engaging in campaign activities during working hours were reported. Municipal communication remained administrative in tone and did not appear to promote any candidate or party. Local media actively covered campaign developments, though some outlets displayed identifiable political preferences.

Overall, the monitored period did not reveal widespread or deliberate misuse of administrative resources. Instances suggesting soft forms of institutional influence—such as the appearance of national officials at partisan events or indications of informal mobilization within certain institutions—were observed but did not amount to systematic misuse. Public scrutiny, awareness of legal obligations, and visible compliance efforts contributed to maintaining an environment broadly aligned with neutrality requirements.

2.22. Municipality Brief - Studenichani

Responsible CSO: Assistive Center

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: info@assistivecenter.org

Municipality Profile

Studenichani is a predominantly rural municipality located southeast of Skopje, with a population composed mainly of ethnic Albanians (68.4%), followed by Turks (19%), and smaller Bosniak, Macedonian, Roma, and Serb communities. The area is characterized by strong community ties and longstanding political loyalties, with local governance traditionally dominated by a single political structure. The local council holds a majority of seats from the AKI coalition.

The campaign in Studenichani was calm and orderly. Political actors relied heavily on community and party networks for support, campaigning mostly through small-scale local meetings, village visits, and door-to-door outreach, while social media served as a complementary communication tool.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The campaign in Studenichani was shaped by the strong influence of local authorities and entrenched party structures, with the incumbent mayor and ruling local coalition enjoying extensive institutional control. Observation indicated that municipal facilities and public spaces were frequently used for campaign activities, often under the guise of community or cultural events. Although these activities were not always explicitly partisan, their timing and content clearly supported specific candidates, reinforcing perceptions of institutional bias.

Public premises such as sports halls, schools, and municipal spaces were among the most commonly used administrative resources. The “Ilinden” sports hall and school buildings in Studenichani and surrounding villages were repeatedly used for campaign meetings and promotional gatherings. The grounds on which these premises were provided were often unclear and not questioned by the responsible authorities, reflecting weak oversight and contributing to a perception of tolerance. No cases of official vehicle use in the campaign were noted.

The incumbent mayor’s visibility and active participation in campaign events blurred the line between official duties and political promotion.

Municipal communication channels occasionally featured content highlighting local projects and mayoral achievements, indirectly reinforcing campaign messages and pointing to overlaps between governance and campaigning.

Reports also indicated that some municipal and public institution employees faced informal pressure to attend or support campaign activities. While not amounting to overt coercion, this practice reflected the high degree of politicization within local administration and the subordination of employees to political hierarchies.

Overall, the monitoring revealed a moderate but persistent use of administrative resources that subtly favored the ruling local structure and undermined equality among contestants. The main contributing factors included the concentration of power within municipal institutions, the lack of effective oversight and sanctions, and limited awareness of legal restrictions among public officials. The rural and closely knit character of the municipality further facilitated informal politicization and clientelist relationships.

2.23. Municipality Brief - Tearce

Responsible CSO: Association for Social Development – For Tetovo

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: ramadan.murtezani1@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Tearce is a mixed-ethnicity, semi-rural municipality composed of several dispersed villages. Albanians represent around 83% of the population, with Macedonians accounting for about 12%, and the remaining 5% consisting of Turks, Roma, and Serbs. The municipality is characterized by small and close-knit communities, where personal networks and local affiliations shape public life and institutional relationships. The municipality was governed by an AKI mayor, who did not seek re-election but remained visibly active throughout the campaign, participating in meetings by the AKI mayoral candidate. At the same time, the AKI coalition held established influence over municipal structures and enjoyed a solid organizational presence. In contrast, political forces competing against AKI were aligned with parties that held influence at the national level, resulting in an intense and uneven campaign, in which locally dominant structures and nationally stronger actors confronted one another from different positions of advantage.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The extent to which administrative resources played a role in the campaign in Tearce was assessed as moderate but tangible. Several cases concerned the use of public premises, where campaign events for the AKI candidate were held in municipal school buildings free of charge and without clearly documented formal justification. Access to such facilities appeared significantly easier for the locally dominant structures than for other contestants. Strong local community ties between school staff, municipal employees, and party representatives were noted as having facilitated this. In contrast, there were only isolated observations related to the use of public vehicles, such as the use of a State Labor Inspectorate car in connection with the movement of the AKI candidate.

Apart from the outgoing mayor, only isolated instances of other public officials joining campaign activities were reported, and mostly not in highly visible roles.

References to public infrastructural projects during these appearances were infrequent and limited to highlighting previously planned works, although when they occurred, they indirectly contributed to creating a positive image of the associated candidates. At the same time, monitors noted the presence of public servants, including school and municipal employees, at several political events. While their participation did not appear to be formally coordinated, such involvement concentrated around one contestant contributed to perceptions of partiality in a setting where professional and political roles were closely intertwined due to community ties.

The municipality's official online channels remained largely neutral. However, several AKI-affiliated councilors and public figures used their personal social media accounts to urge support for their lists, including during the campaign silence period, reinforcing perceptions of blurred roles.

Overall, the observed forms of use of administrative resources were assessed as having created an uneven campaign environment, negatively affecting the overall equality and fairness of competition. The combination of local political alignment, the semi-rural setting, and the institutional dependence on established power structures were seen as key factors behind the patterns of resource use observed.

2.24. Municipality Brief - Tetovo

Responsible CSO: Association for Social Development – For Tetovo

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: ramadan.murtezani1@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Tetovo is a large and politically significant urban municipality, serving as a regional center for administration, education, and public services. It has a diverse population, with ethnic Albanians forming the clear majority and Macedonian, Roma, Turkish, Bosniak, and Serb communities also present. Political competition in Tetovo is typically intense, driven by strong party structures deeply rooted in local communities and closely connected to national-level politics. During the 2025 local elections, the campaign was among the most active and closely contested in the region, with VLEN, AKI, VMRO–DPMNE, SDSM, and the civic initiative “For Tetovo” all running visible and sustained campaigns. The VLEN-led local administration, including the sitting mayor, maintained a strong presence, while opposition actors mobilized intensively across neighborhoods and rural settlements. The overall environment was marked by strong organizational capacity, continuous grassroots outreach, and high political engagement throughout both rounds.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

The monitoring in Tetovo pointed to a high and systematic presence of misuse of administrative resources, rooted in long-standing overlap between party structures and public institutions. Monitors described a campaign environment in which the ruling VLEN-led local administration and its allies drew extensively on municipal capacities, public enterprises, and long-established networks, while opposition actors campaigned in conditions of significantly more limited institutional access.

One of the most frequent practices concerned the use of public premises. Campaign events and party meetings were repeatedly held in publicly owned facilities, including schools, municipal halls, and other state or municipal venues, often under unclear or unevenly applied access criteria. Monitors noted that premises appeared more readily available to actors linked to the incumbent structures, while other contestants struggled to secure comparable venues. In one case, the Tetovo Museum (former Army House) was used to promote candidates of the ZNAM list, illustrating how state-linked spaces also became part of the broader campaign landscape. The same venue was also made available to VMRO-DPMNE.

Misuse of official vehicles constituted another pattern. In several cases, state or municipal vehicles were seen being used in the mobilization of voters and in support of campaign activities, mostly of VLEN, but also of VMRO-DPMNE. These practices reinforced the impression that institutional logistical resources were placed at the disposal of the governing coalition. At the same time, opposition actors and civic initiatives relied largely on private or rented vehicles, underscoring the unevenness of available means.

Monitors further documented the involvement of public servants and employees of public enterprises in campaign activities. Staff from municipal structures, schools, and publicly owned companies were frequently seen attending or assisting at rallies and meetings, sometimes during regular working hours and in ways that suggested organized mobilization rather than purely individual political choice. Public enterprises were observed supporting events through logistical assistance, provision of equipment, or symbolic promotion of the incumbent leadership. In parallel, municipal communication channels and official social-media accounts regularly highlighted the work and achievements of the mayor and ruling coalition during the campaign period, blurring the line between institutional information and partisan promotion. Several high-profile campaign events were held at or around publicly funded projects, including major infrastructure works, where ongoing or recently launched projects were presented. Monitors also noted several newly approved infrastructural projects during the campaign period, including related to road reconstructions and a sports-field project, constituting activities that were at odds with legal requirements. Overall, these developments reinforced perceptions that public investments were being leveraged to support the incumbent authorities.

The campaign environment in Tetovo was also marked by a strong presence of senior national officials and party leaders from multiple political forces, but particularly from the ruling structures. Their repeated visits and joint appearances with local candidates reinforced the perception that institutional and partisan power were closely intertwined. At the same time, monitors noted weaknesses in institutional checks: no effective local or central-level measures to deter misuse were noted, while law-enforcement and oversight bodies did not play a visible or proactive role.

Overall, the monitors concluded that various MAR forms, including privileged access to public premises, the use of official vehicles, the mobilization of public servants and enterprises, and the partisan use of institutional communication and public projects, had a significant impact on the equality and fairness of the campaign. These practices were assessed as having distorted the level playing field, advantaging contestants linked to the incumbent local power while limiting the ability of their competitors to campaign on equal terms.

The lack of sanctions, combined with a long-standing political culture in which electoral victory is seen as conferring informal ownership over public institutions, was assessed as a key factor enabling these practices.

2.25. Municipality Brief - Valandovo

Responsible CSO: National Network “Women for Women”

Monitoring period: 15 September - 2 November

CSO Contact Information: o.eftimovska@zenite.mk

Municipality Profile

Valandovo is a small municipality in the southeastern part of the country, with a population composed predominantly of ethnic Macedonians (approximately 77.7%), followed by smaller communities of Turks, Serbs, and Roma. The campaign environment in Valandovo was generally calm. Despite competition between candidates from major political parties, which introduced a strong political dynamic, overall campaign activities remained limited. Compared to larger communities, there were fewer events, public gatherings, and visible campaign materials. Candidate outreach largely relied on smaller community meetings, local networks, and door-to-door campaigning. The local council was dominated by representatives of VMRO–DPMNE. In the second-round contest, VMRO-DPMNE candidate won against the incumbent mayor from SDSM.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

During the monitoring period, the use of administrative resources varied depending on contestants' political and institutional affiliations. The incumbent mayor, running for a third term, relied primarily on local resources, including human resources within the municipality and endorsements from municipal councilors, while also leveraging the promotion of past municipal projects as campaign achievements. The opponent benefited from central-level support, notably logistical assistance, greater political exposure, and showcasing of ongoing state projects. While not in breach of the law, such references to public projects blurred the line between governance achievements and campaign promotion, creating a perception of both local and central level institutional backing of respective candidates.

Public officials sometimes participated in campaign events of candidates they supported, including seemingly in official capacity. Their visibility and prominent roles, particularly those involving representatives of central institutions, contributed to an uneven playing field by enhancing candidates' public exposure and outreach. Positively, there was no evidence of public sector employees engaging in campaign activities while on duty or during working hours. Similarly, no partisan or otherwise promotional messaging through official municipal channels were noted, although isolated cases of campaign-related posts on the social media accounts of public officials were observed.

A limited number of campaign events were held in public premises, such as the local culture house. Although these were reported to have been provided based on formal requests and paid for, with no indications of discriminatory access or preferential treatment, their use still created a perception of overlap between institutional and political activities. Encouragingly, both political and institutional stakeholders appeared aware and aspiring to comply with the limitations related to public premises use, and no cases of use of public vehicles were recorded.

Overall, the use of administrative resources in Valandovo was assessed as moderate but sufficiently noticeable to affect the perceived equality of competition. The small size and closely connected nature of the community appeared to foster a degree of accountability and transparency, limiting space for overt abuse. At the same time, entrenched party structures and political loyalties within the public sector allowed for more subtle and embedded forms of campaign influence.

2.26. Municipality Brief – Vrapchishte

Responsible CSO: VERDEVITA

Monitoring period: 15 September - 19 October

CSO Contact Information: sefedinjonuzi01@gmail.com

Municipality Profile

Vrapchishte is a rural municipality in the Polog region with a diverse population: 83% Albanian, 13% Turks and the rest are Macedonian and Roma. The campaign was very active, and the period was characterized by visible mobilization from the key competitors, the Mehmet Seferi -VLEN and Isen Shabani-AKI coalitions candidates. Although VLEN coalition did not organize public events during the last campaign week, AKI coalition maintained regular outreach activities. Even though municipality entered a re-election cycle because the turnout threshold was not reached in the first round, the AKI coalition is strongly represented in the local council.

Observed Trends on the Use of Administrative Resources During the Campaign

Across the monitoring period, campaign activities in Vrapchishte were frequent but generally orderly. political outreach took place in party premises or privately owned locations, although several gatherings were reported in or around publicly owned premises. While the justification for access to certain spaces was not always formally documented, all identified cases appeared to be non-discriminatory and accessible without indication of preferential treatment by local institutions.

No misuse of public vehicles or public office equipment was observed. Public servants were not seen participating in campaign events during working hours, and no policing or security structures were reported to have acted in a politically biased or intimidating manner. Public officials were occasionally present at campaign events, but their involvement largely remained within political or private capacities. Some speeches linked institutional achievements with candidates, yet these instances did not amount to improper mixing of official authority with campaigning. A small number of municipal/public events with indirect promotional effect were recorded, including a food fair attended by AKI coalition candidate in the primary school in Gradec.

Institutional communication practices stayed mostly professional. Municipal websites and social media did not promote candidates, and no printed or digital public-owned channels were used for partisan purposes. However, the AKI coalition candidate used his official Facebook page to showcase road works and infrastructure improvements, which may be interpreted as borderline promotional content in a campaign context.

A few third-party involvements were detected, such as isolated uses of premises provided at no cost to candidates, but none suggesting systematic coordination. Local monitors reported credible information about a political agreement between AKI's coalition candidate and the Turkish Democratic Party (TDP), interpreted as a political alignment rather than misuse of administrative resources.

Overall, no systematic, widespread, or deliberate misuse of administrative resources was documented. The environment remained calm, observers had full access to events, and election silence and voting procedures were respected.