SUMMARY REPORT - MONITORING OF MISUSE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

2025 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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1.Background and purpose of the summary - Local elections were held in North Macedonia on 19 October 2025, with second-round run-off contests taking place on 2 November. During these elections, trained monitors from ten civil society organizations (CSOs) conducted monitoring of potential misuse of administrative resources (MAR) across a diverse sample of 26 municipalities. This summary presents the key findings, analytical observations, and overarching conclusions from the monitoring presented initially on the Preliminary Monitoring Report and builds up on a comprehensive final report that consolidates observations gathered throughout the pre-electoral period, the official campaign, campaign silence, and election day(s).

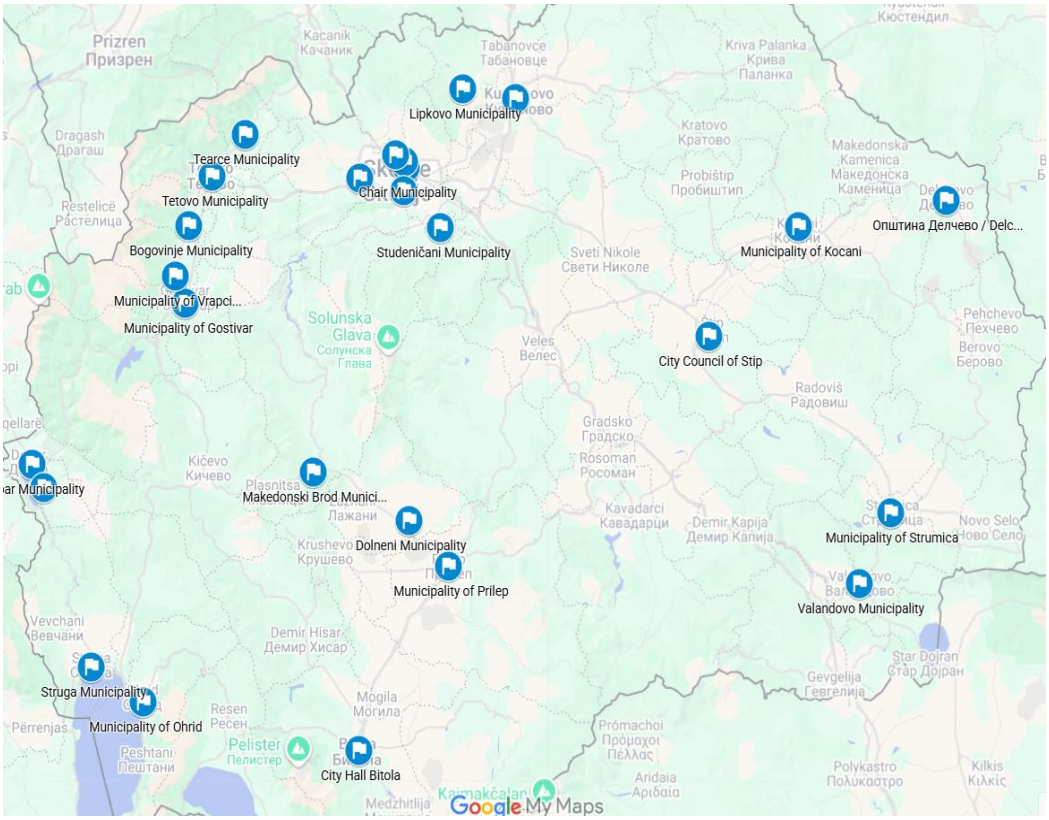


Figure no.1 Map of North Macedonia and 26 monitored municipalities

The purpose of this summary is to provide policymakers, electoral stakeholders, civil society actors, and the wider public with a clear and accessible overview of the most salient MAR-related patterns, contextual drivers, and implications for electoral integrity, while avoiding excessive operational or case-specific detail. As such, it should be read as a complementary document to the full report, not a substitute for it.

2. Context and methodology - The monitoring initiative was implemented as a pilot effort aimed at strengthening civic oversight of MAR and contributing to a more evidence-based public discussion on the separation of state and party during 2025 local elections. Under the guidance of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) North Macedonia, a total of 70 trained monitors from 10 civil society organizations conducted observation activities across 26 municipalities, selected to reflect geographic, political, and socio-economic diversity. Monitoring was carried out between 15 September and 2 November 2025.

Definition of MAR

For the purposes of this monitoring, MAR refers to **undue advantage** that electoral contestants may gain through the use of official positions or access to public resources, including material assets, institutional infrastructure, staff, and the prestige of public office.

The methodology combined field observation, desk research, and stakeholder inquiries. The focus was on identifying observable practices and recurring patterns that may confer undue electoral advantage through the use of public office, public resources, or institutional authority.

The monitoring did not assess individual intent or legality, nor did it seek to intervene in real time or produce evidence for legal proceedings. Given the pilot nature of the exercise and its limited scope, findings should be understood as a snapshot rather than an exhaustive or fully representative account of MAR prevalence.

Figure no. 2 Electoral process monitoring timeline 2025

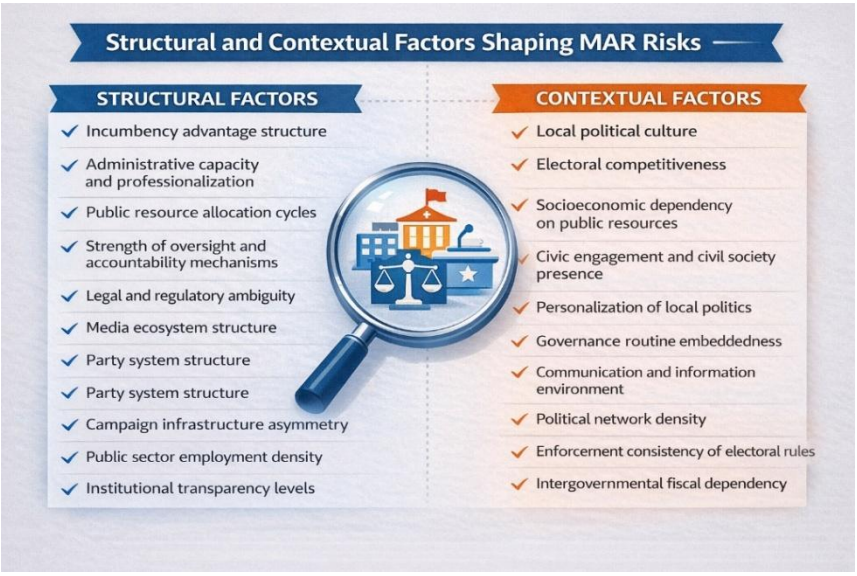


Figure no. 3 Structural and contextual factors shaping MAR Risks

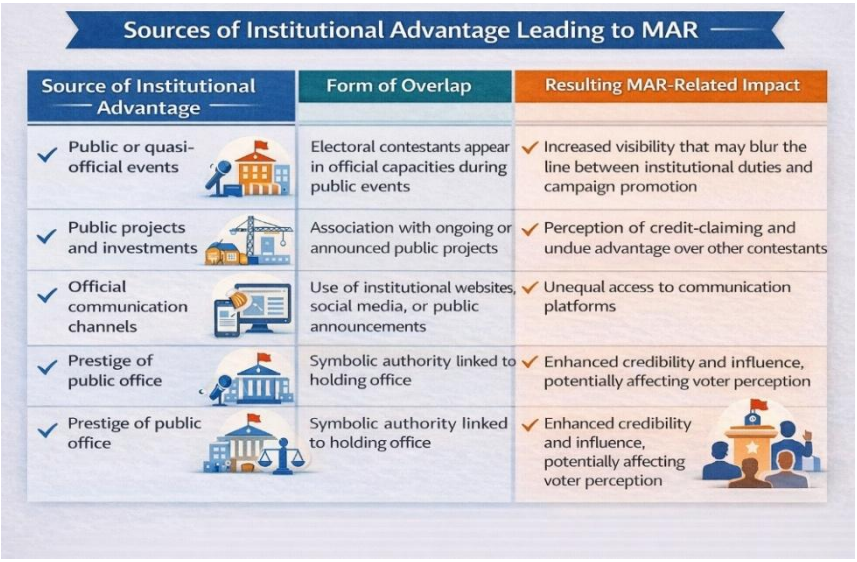


Figure no. 4 Sources of Institutional advantage leading to MAR

3. Overarching patterns and drivers of MAR – 3.1 Across the municipalities observed, MAR manifestations varied in form, visibility, and intensity. They were not confined to a single political actor, region, or electoral context. Instead, the monitoring revealed that MAR-related practices were shaped primarily by structural and contextual factors, rather than by isolated incidents or uniform nationwide patterns.

3.2 Political and Institutional overlap:

The most consistent driver of MAR manifestation was the overlap between political competition and institutional authority. Electoral contestants affiliated with, or enjoying access to, positions of public office at local or central level were more frequently observed benefiting from indirect forms of advantage. These included:

- heightened visibility through public or quasi-official events,
- association with public projects and investments,
- promotion through official communication channels, and
- symbolic leverage derived from the prestige of public office.

Such advantages were often embedded in routine governance activities rather than expressed through overt or clearly unlawful conduct, making them difficult to regulate and challenging to assess.

Another important dimension concerned the alignment or misalignment between local and central political power. In municipalities where the same political force held authority at both local government and central government, MAR manifestations tended to be subtler. In contrast, in the municipalities where there is difference between the political parties at local and

central government, MAR displayed more contested dynamics, with different political actors seeking to mobilize the levels of power available to them.

> MAR risks were most pronounced where political competition intersected with institutional authority, rather than where overt violations occurred.

4. Use of public resources and official capacity in campaigning – 4.1 Public premises and facilities: the use of public premises for campaign-related purposes emerged as the most frequently observed MAR-related practice. Over 30% of monitored campaign events took place at public premises, including schools, kindergartens, cultural centers, sports halls, and municipal buildings. While the legal framework allows limited exceptions under certain conditions, monitors often encountered difficulties in verifying whether such use was authorized through transparent and formal procedures, whether fees were paid, or whether equal access was ensured. In a significant number of cases, facilities appeared to have been provided free of charge or without publicly available documentation, raising concerns about preferential treatment and uneven competition.

Figure no. 5 Types of public premises used for campaigns

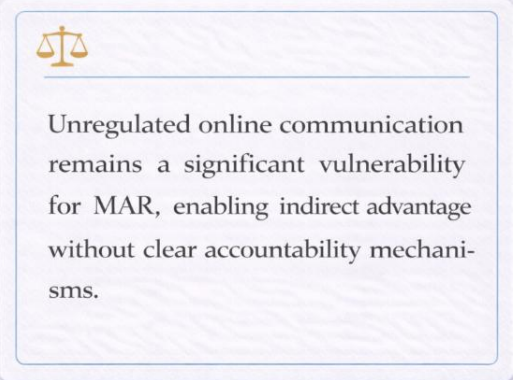
4.2 Involvement of public officials: Senior elected and appointed officials particularly ministers, members of parliament, and mayors were the most visible public actors in campaign contexts. Their involvement most commonly took the form of:

- speeches and public statements endorsing candidates,
- highlighting institutional achievements, or
- implicitly linking public service delivery to electoral success.

Figure no. 6 Involvement of public officials

Although monitors documented examples of good practice such as officials taking leave for campaigning or publicly clarifying working hours, the distinction between official and political roles remained blurred in many instances, especially when activities combined elements of governance and campaigning.

4.3 Online communication and the use of social media: The monitoring identified recurring challenges related to online communication, particularly the use of public officials' social media accounts. In the absence of clear regulation, it was often difficult to distinguish between private expression and de facto official messaging, especially where such accounts were routinely used to disseminate information about public functions and achievements. This gap continues to represent a significant vulnerability for MAR-related risks.



5. Campaign silence and election day observations - Approximately 72% of the monitors reported no MAR-related activities during the campaign silence. Where issues were observed, they were predominantly linked to residual online campaigning, including continued posting or sharing of promotional content on social media. These practices were generally described as isolated and seldom, rather than systematic.

Other potential violations such as the display of campaign materials at public premises or vote buying were rare and limited to individual instances.

Election day(s) were assessed as orderly and professionally administered. The majority of monitors reported that the process was fully or mostly free from practices undermining neutrality, fairness, or the separation of state and party.

Isolated concerns included:

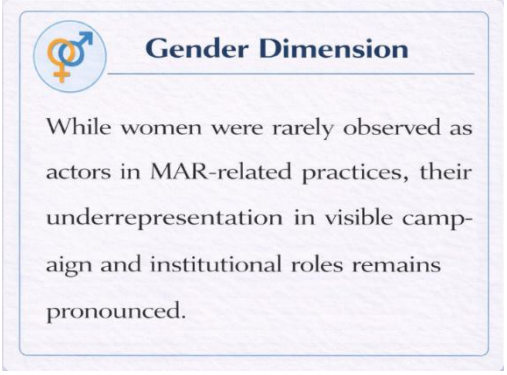
- groups of individuals gathered near polling stations,
- party-linked persons informally tracking voter turnout, and
- sporadic allegations of vote buying or pressure.

These observations did not amount to systematic patterns and largely reflected dynamics already present during the campaign period rather than election-day-specific MAR manifestations.

6. Impact on underrepresented and vulnerable groups - The monitoring examined MAR through a cross-cutting lens of inclusiveness, with particular attention to women, persons with disabilities, and non-ethnic Macedonian communities.

No evidence was found of MAR practices deliberately targeting these groups through direct pressure or inducement. However, findings highlighted how MAR intersects with existing inequalities:

- Women were significantly underrepresented in prominent campaign roles and among public officials observed engaging in non-neutral conduct.
- For persons with disabilities, challenges related primarily to accessibility and inclusion rather than MAR-specific practices.
- In non-ethnic Macedonian communities, the timing and visibility of public works and official visits during the campaign carried heightened political significance, even in the absence of overt coercion.



These observations suggest that MAR can reinforce structural imbalances in participation and visibility, even when not directly aimed at vulnerable groups.

7. MAR in connection with the role played by the third parties

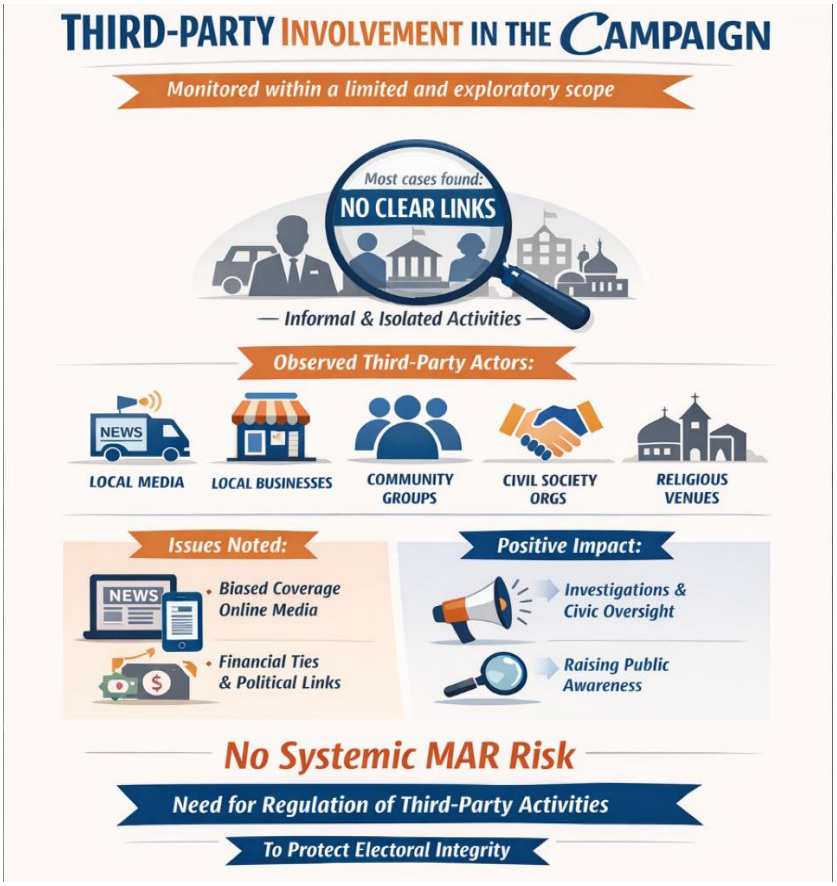


Figure no. 7 Third-party involvement in the campaign

Third-party involvement in the campaign was monitored within a limited and exploratory scope. In the majority of cases, no third-party activity was identified, or monitors were unable to reliably establish clear links between third parties, electoral contestants, and public institutions, reflecting the informal and opaque nature of such relationships. Where observed, third-party actors included local media outlets, local businesses, informal community groups, civil society organizations, and, more sporadically, religious or cultural venues. These instances were generally isolated and did not indicate systematic or sustained campaign support.

Local media, particularly online portals were the most frequently observed third-party actors. In several municipalities, monitors noted selective or disproportionately favorable coverage of certain candidates or parties, often linked to financial dependence on municipal advertising or perceived political affiliations. At the same time, independent media and civil society organizations contributed positively by exposing questionable practices and increasing public awareness. Overall, third-party involvement did not constitute a systemic MAR risk; however, the findings underline persistent vulnerabilities and the need for proportionate regulation of third-party campaign activities to safeguard electoral integrity.

8. Broader effects of the monitoring - Beyond documenting MAR-related practices, the monitoring had positive systemic effects. In several municipalities, the presence of monitors was perceived as having a deterrent effect, encouraging greater caution among public officials. Regular interaction with institutional actors and the public contributed to increased awareness and dialogue around MAR risks. Importantly, the initiative strengthened the practical capacity of participating CSOs, providing hands-on experience with structured observation tools and contributing to the development of a sustainable civic oversight base.

Figure no. 8 The value of civic monitoring

9. Conclusions and forward-looking reflections - The monitoring of the 2025 local elections confirms that MAR in North Macedonia is less about widespread or overt abuse and more about structural advantages embedded in political–institutional relationships. While the elections were largely assessed as competitive and well administered, persistent grey areas particularly regarding the use of public premises, official capacity in campaigning, and online communication continue to pose risks to equal electoral conditions.

Looking forward, the findings underscore the importance of:

- clearer and more precise regulation in key MAR risk areas,
- enhanced transparency in the use of public resources during elections,
- continued investment in civic monitoring capacity and public oversight, and
- early and realistic planning for future MAR observation initiatives
- measures to support implementation,
- enforcement-related visibility and communications and
- support to civic oversight and public awareness.

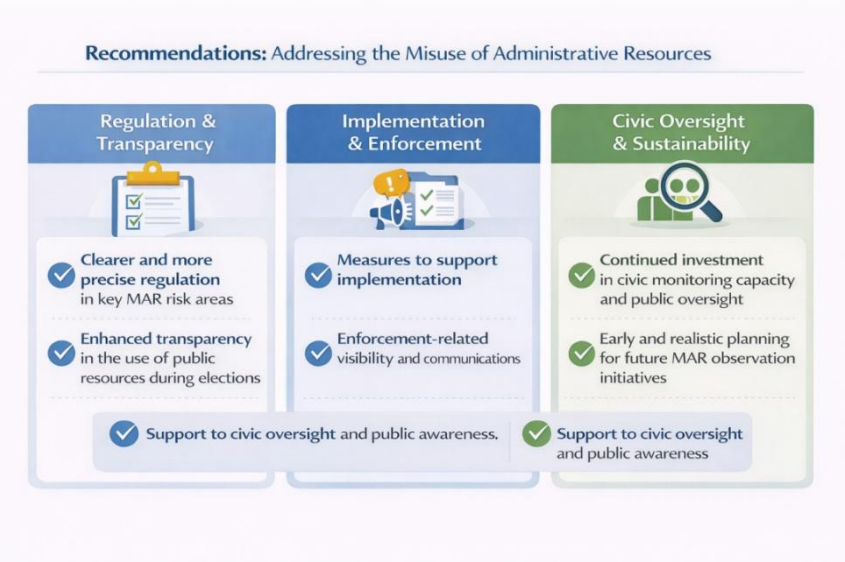


Figure no. 9 Recommendations for improving campaign regulations

Addressing MAR effectively requires not only clearer and more precise regulation in key risk areas, but also enhanced transparency in the use of public resources during electoral periods. Legal and regulatory improvements must be accompanied by concrete measures to support implementation, visible and well-communicated enforcement, and sustained efforts to strengthen institutional norms of impartiality and public accountability. In this context, continued investment in civic monitoring capacity, public oversight, and awareness-raising remains essential. Early and realistic planning for future MAR observation initiatives will further ensure that civic oversight continues to complement formal oversight mechanisms and contribute meaningfully to long-term electoral integrity.