



Media and Social Media Coverage of Macedonian Local Elections 2025

15 Sep–3 Nov 2025

This report has been prepared by Pikasa Analytics using the Analytics.Live platform, incorporating expert interpretation and insights. Portions of the analysis leverage machine learning algorithms to enhance the depth of the findings

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Executive Summary

- High volume across channels. During the campaign period, more than 25,700 media articles, 3,600 social-media posts and 337 opinion columns referenced the local elections. Engagement (reactions, comments, shares) was strong, with traditional media items generating almost 490 k interactions and social-media posts attracting 372 k interactions. Major spikes aligned with the first-round vote on 19 Oct 2025 and the second-round on 2 Nov 2025, showing heightened public interest around polling days.
- Ruling parties dominated visibility. VMRO-DPMNE and its Albanian partner Vlen were the most visible actors. VMRO-DPMNE accounts for 24,688 articles, 3,791 social posts and 1.82 million engagements. Opposition parties SDSM and DUI had substantially fewer interactions (≈ 0.97 M and 0.46 M respectively). Within the Albanian bloc, Vlen leaders Izet Mexhiti and Bilall Kasami eclipsed DUI figures in both media and social attention.
- Mayoral races drew nationwide interest. The Skopje race made Orce Gjorgjievski the most engaging candidate (4,658 articles, 817 posts and 688 k engagements). Bilall Kasami (Tetovo) and Izet Mexhiti (Čair) received 3,787 and 5,559 articles respectively and 416 k/353 k engagements. Other well-covered mayors included Maksim Dimitrievski (Kumanovo), Darko Kostovski (Butel) and Sotir Lukrovski (Karlovo).
- Facebook dominated candidates' outreach. Candidates posted an average of 54 Facebook posts each and obtained around 6,239 engagements per candidate. TikTok generated the highest average engagements per politician ($\approx 19,093$ interactions), despite fewer posts. When measuring engagement per post, TikTok content again produced the most reactions (≈ 585 interactions per post) compared with Instagram (134) and Facebook (113).
- Media topics focused on local issues but emphasised the election race. In traditional media, the most mentioned topics were Local Elections 2025 (25,723 articles, 489,982 engagements) and Education (17,896 articles, 348,837 engagements). On social media, Education received the highest engagement (489,749 interactions across 3,689 posts) followed by Local Elections 2025 and Schools. Spikes corresponded to first-round results, coalition negotiations and final-round campaigning.
- Hate speech was present but proportionally small. The dataset flagged 9,394 comments as hate speech—only 3 % of the 302,754 total monitored comments. The most targeted figures were Orce Gjorgjievski (2,149 hate comments, ~ 5 % of his comment total) and Amar Mecinovic (1,300 comments, ~ 9 %).
- Leading Topics and Public Interest: Substantive local issues did break through the politicized din. Across the coverage, infrastructure and public services were the most recurring policy topics. Candidates continually promised tangible improvements: new roads and street reconstructions (especially in urban Skopje municipalities), solutions to chronic utility problems (e.g. bringing *water supply* to underserved areas), cleanliness and waste management drives (“general cleanup” campaigns in cities), and investments in schools, parks, and clinics at the municipal level. Such bread-and-butter issues featured prominently in local debates and were often highlighted by media in quotes or profiles. However, coverage also had notable shifts in focus: the 2025 elections saw an unprecedented electoral alliance between VMRO and the Vlen Albanian coalition, which introduced cross-ethnic campaign messaging (e.g. VMRO's leader called on voters “regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, to unite” in support of an Albanian-region candidate). This convergence, and the corresponding collapse of the long-dominant DUI in key areas, became a narrative in itself. Media reported extensively on the “historic” realignment in Albanian politics –

for example, Mexhiti declaring Vlen the “*legitimate winner*” among Albanian voters and urging DUI’s Ali Ahmeti to step down after two decades<https://mia.mk/en/story/mexhiti-nai-to-be-dissolved>. For the public, this meant election news was not only about local potholes or parks, but also about larger power shifts and what they portend for the multiethnic balance in governance.

- Public-Interest Implications: From a public-interest standpoint, the coverage provided a mixed service. On one hand, citizens were well informed of electoral outcomes and major campaign promises – anyone following the news could learn which candidates pledged free bus transport in Tetovo, who built new kindergartens in Butel, or how many municipalities would have runoff votes. Social media further offered ground-level insight, with residents directly engaging mayors on uncollected trash or local needs in comments. On the other hand, the sheer volume of partisan messaging and sensational headlines often crowded out nuanced analysis. Much of the reporting relayed candidates’ claims or party attacks verbatim (sometimes as “integral statements”<https://mia.mk/story/костовски-бутел-добива-нова-поликлиника-љуботен-добива-водовод>), with limited fact-checking until after the election. Voters seeking impartial information (for example, comparisons of candidates’ track records or independent verification of promises) had to sift through a cacophony of boosterism and mudslinging. Additionally, important local issues that lacked a dramatic hook – such as detailed budget plans or minority rights at the municipal level – received relatively scant attention compared to personality-centric stories. These gaps suggest that while the media spotlight was bright, it wasn’t always directed where the public interest would best be served (i.e. scrutinizing how campaign promises to align with community needs and past performance). Strengthening the depth and balance of local election coverage remains an area for improvement, to ensure voters are not just energized by rhetoric but also equipped with factual, comparative knowledge.

Methodology

This report employs a hybrid analytical framework developed by Pikasa Analytics, leveraging its extensive network of over 2,500 media outlets across more than 30 countries. The analysis specifically integrates real-time data streams from digital news sources and major social media platforms, offering precise, actionable, data-driven insights.

Data collection encompassed daily monitoring of over 4,000 news articles from more than 300 media outlets in North Macedonia, complemented by extensive tracking of digital content from thousands of channels across platforms including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This comprehensive approach ensured a robust dataset representative of the complete Macedonia media landscape during the September-November 2025 electoral period.

Content classification utilized advanced machine-learning algorithms and automated content analysis, systematically identifying, categorizing, and tagging media content. The automated process was further refined through manual validation by Pikasa’s team of experienced research analysts, ensuring accuracy and contextual understanding of politically sensitive narratives.

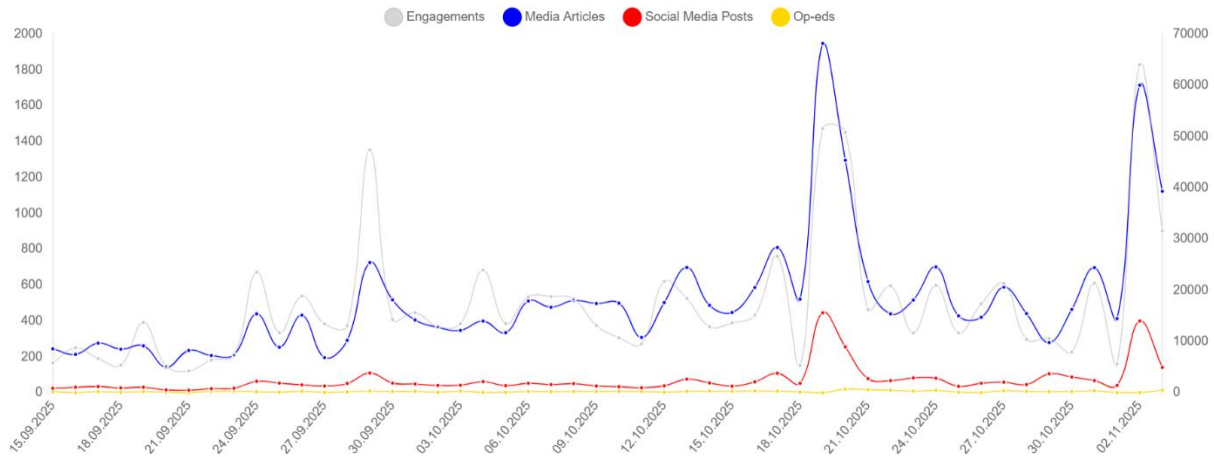
All analytical outputs were validated by Pikasa’s research analysts, combining automated insights with human expertise to ensure contextual accuracy. Analysts provided qualitative assessments to interpret significant spikes or anomalies in data trends, verifying machine-generated insights through contextual and narrative analysis.

All collected data was securely stored, encrypted, and segregated in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), safeguarding individual privacy and data integrity throughout the analytical process.

Election-Related Articles

During the monitoring period, the dataset recorded 25,723 media articles, 3,609 social-media posts and 337 opinion columns relating to the local elections. Media articles generated the highest engagement ($\approx 489,982$ interactions) and social posts attracted $\approx 372,685$ engagements. Engagement per item was higher for traditional media ($\approx 2,094$ interactions per article) than for social posts (≈ 902 interactions per post). Columns/op-eds were fewer (337) and elicited lower engagement ($\approx 16,972$ interactions total).

Media and Social Media Coverage: Visibility and Engagement Trends



	Media Articles	Social Media Posts	Columns
Posts/Articles	25,723	3,609	337
Engagements	489,982	372,685	16,972
Engagement per Post	2,094	902	326
Number of Profiles/Articles	234	413	52

The line chart of media and social-media coverage shows relatively steady output in late September, followed by a sharp peak around 30 Sep 2025, which is corresponding to the formal start of campaigning and candidate list submissions. Engagement surged again just after the first-round vote on 19 Oct, culminating in the highest spike around 21 Oct 2025 when results and coalition negotiations dominated headlines. A second spike occurred on 2 Nov 2025, the day of runoff elections and major announcements.

On Facebook, the news portal Infomax achieved the greatest engagement ($\approx 69,353$ interactions) despite producing only 321 election posts. Other high-engagement outlets were Kurir ($\approx 26,213$ engagements, 577 posts), 4News ($\approx 22,973$ engagements, 206 posts), Večer ($\approx 19,198$ engagements, 371 posts) and 24 Info ($\approx 19,063$ engagements, 354 posts). These outlets span various editorial lines, but all used social-media distribution to amplify their reach. The top individual articles by engagement included pieces from Kanal 5, Infomax and Lokalno (topics such as personnel changes in SDSM leadership, controversial comments about the state's misery and interviews with Levica leader Apasiev). Engagement ranged from about 5,310 interactions down to 1,610 interaction

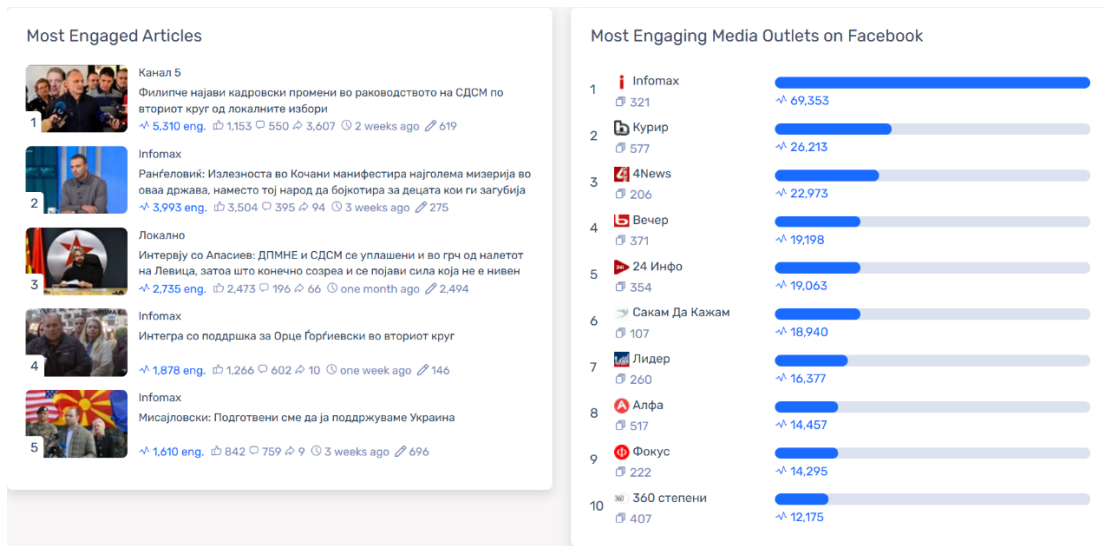


Chart: The top-performing articles during election period

Topic-trends in Elections 2025

Across this landscape, a few overarching content themes were evident:

Election Results and Horse-Race: Unsurprisingly, a substantial portion of media output was devoted to “*who’s winning, who’s losing.*” This included pre-election poll speculations (though not many formal polls were published), nightly rally crowd size comparisons, and especially the post-vote result breakdowns. Many outlets turned results into narrative frames – “*Historic low turnout*” (Telma TV noted only 35% in Skopje <https://telma.com.mk/2025/11/02/orcze-gorgievski-e-nov-gradonachalnik-na-skopje-glasaa-samo-352-od-izbirachite-vo-glavniot-grad/>), “*VMRO-DPMNE victorious in X municipalities, SDSM in Y, Vlen in Z*”, etc. This horse-race focus, while informative, sometimes overshadowed in-depth discussion of the *why* behind the results. - **Promises and Local Issues:** Still, as mentioned earlier, local issues did feature. For each community, media highlighted a few signature promises from candidates. For example, in Butel (Skopje’s northern municipality), the incumbent Darko Kostovski repeatedly touted that “*Butel gets a new polyclinic, Ljuboten gets a water supply network*”, calling the latter a “*historic demand*” finally being met. This promise was reported via MIA and picked up by several news sites and Facebook pages on 13 October, framing Kostovski as delivering infrastructure. Similarly, in Tetovo, almost every Albanian outlet reported Bilal Kasami’s pledge to provide free public transportation for all residents in his next term – a populist moves in a city plagued by traffic and pollution. This “*transporti publik falas*” vow was amplified by local TV (TV Koha aired segments on it) and social media discussions about feasibility. In Karpoš, candidate Sotir Lukrovski centered his campaign on improving residential life: he promised “*reconstruction of building facades, modernization of elevators, and installing entry keypads in all apartment blocks*” – a very specific quality-of-life agenda that media like Nova TV and Vecer reported to appeal to urban voters. Content about issues like these was generally straightforward: local outlets or party-friendly media would quote the candidate’s promise, sometimes with minor scrutiny. What lacked was follow-up analysis (e.g. how realistic is free transit in Tetovo given the budget?). Only a few analytical pieces (e.g. on Portalb.mk and Vistinomer.mk) questioned such promises, and those came post-election.

Inter-ethnic and Coalition Politics: Another theme, particularly after first round, was the formation of ad-hoc coalitions for runoffs. The most talked-about was the support deal between Vlen and VMRO-DPMNE. After DUI’s poor first round, Vlen openly endorsed VMRO candidates in several runoffs and vice versa. Media on both sides reported these alliances with their spin – pro-VMRO media hailed it as a unifying

step, while pro-DUI/SDSM outlets cast it as cynical. For example, DUI’s official Facebook page and allied portal Klan TV ran headlines like “BDI: The PM has turned Vlen into VMRO’s branch among Albanians”. In response, a Vlen spokesperson retorted “A vote for [DUI’s coalition] is a vote for Levica”, suggesting DUI was indirectly helping an anti-Albanian agenda. These mutual accusations received ample coverage, illustrating how ethnic politics intertwined with media narratives.

Conduct of the Campaign: Some coverage touched on how the campaign was carried out. Notably, independent observers and media watchdogs pointed out violations of the election silence (campaign moratorium) and spread of misinformation. Toward the end of our period, CIVIL’s analysis noted “massive and blatant breach of the election silence... hundreds of instances of agitation on social networks and ‘masked’ media pieces on voting day”<https://civilmedia.mk/lokalni-izbori-2025-generalno-miren-protses-so-seriozni-sistemski-i-institucionalni-slabosti-preliminarna-otsenka-na-tsvivil/>. A few media (e.g. 360 Degrees, Telma’s Kod show) picked up on this, reporting how candidates continued campaigning on 1–2 Nov via Facebook posts despite the legal ban. This segues into the next section on Integrity & Risk – where we detail such findings. But in general, the mainstream news coverage itself did not dwell too long on these meta-issues; it was NGOs and fact-checkers that highlighted them, and only a subset of media relayed those warnings to the public.

In summary, the overall media and social landscape during the local elections was vibrant but uneven. There was an abundance of factual reporting on events and a wealth of direct communication from candidates, which is positive for transparency. Yet the volume was skewed toward repetitive news flashes and partisan messaging, requiring the public to do some filtering to get to core information. The next sections delve into how different political actors fared in this environment and the content specifics surrounding key mayoral races.

Analysis of Politicians and Parties (Campaign Narratives and Impact)

The 2025 local elections saw a reshaping of the political scene, and this was clearly reflected in media visibility metrics. In terms of both volume of mentions and audience engagement, opposition actors dominated the narrative, while incumbents from the ruling coalition struggled to command attention.



Figure: Top 5 Parties/coalitions by total media engagements (news + social media) in the reporting period, and the key topics associated with each.

Below we break down the presence and visibility of major parties, coalitions, and notable individual actors:

VMRO-DPMNE & Coalition “For Renewal”: By all measures, VMRO-DPMNE and its allies were the most visible players in this election’s media sphere. This is partly because they fielded candidates in almost every municipality and partly due to some alliances they led. In our data, over 40% of all content items had at least one mention of “VMRO-DPMNE” or a VMRO candidate. The party’s mayoral hopefuls and spokespeople were go-to sources for news quotes. For example, VMRO’s leader Hristijan Mickoski was frequently cited: he held daily rallies and press conferences, and media would quote his statements on the election’s significance (such as claiming *“the people, not intrigues, will decide these elections”*<https://plusinfo.mk/filipche-prizna-deka-e-gi-izgubi-izborite-koalici-ata-na-venko-ali-i-na-dimche-e-za-pari-a-na-vmro-dpmne-e-za-rabota-poracha-mickoski/>).

On social media, VMRO-affiliated pages and individuals generated enormous engagement. Prime Minister Mickoski’s own Facebook posts during local elections garnered tens of thousands of interactions, often echoing messages of sweeping change. But more striking was the presence of local VMRO candidates who became social media stars in their own right: - Orce Gjorgjievski, VMRO’s candidate (and incumbent mayor of Kisela Voda) who ran for Mayor of Skopje, was arguably the face of the campaign. He and his team ran an American-style campaign with daily social updates, professional videos, and a clear slogan. His promise to *“clean up Skopje in 72 hours”* after taking office went viral. Traditional media reported this pledge widely, and after he won, they followed up on it. Gjorgjievski’s content had a unifying, optimistic tone (e.g. *“Skopje clean and dignified as it deserves!”* posts during his cleanup campaign), which resonated with many citizens frustrated by urban neglect. By the numbers, Orce was mentioned over 5,400 times in monitored articles (the second most-mentioned person overall) and his Facebook page amassed the highest engagement total of any individual. Media on Nov 2 announced *“Orce Gjorgjievski is the new mayor of Skopje”* in headlines, cementing his central role in this election cycle. For VMRO, this was a huge visibility win – controlling the narrative in the capital. - Numerous VMRO incumbent mayors seeking re-election also enjoyed high visibility: Darko Kostovski (Butel), Boban Stefkovski (Gazi Baba), Aleksandar Stojkoski (Gj. Petrov), Toni Konjanovski (Bitola), Kiril Pecakov (Ohrid), Mitko Jancev (Kavadarci, who ran as an independent VMRO-leaning candidate), to name a few. They each had hundreds of media mentions and ran active social campaigns touting their achievements. Notably, many of them highlighted concrete projects completed in their term – this played well in both local news and on Facebook. For instance, Aleksandar Stojkoski in Gjurče Petrov showcased *“8 new sports fields built”* and an energy-efficient projects award his municipality won; local media and VMRO’s channels amplified such claims to argue these mayors delivered. - Party Organization: VMRO’s party machinery also pushed content. The party’s official communications (press releases, etc.) were frequently relayed by friendly outlets like Kurir and NetPress. These often took aim at opponents: one press release, cited on PlusInfo, accused an SDSM official of lying about campaign vehicle use – part of VMRO’s narrative that SDSM resorts to *“fake news”* as it loses ground. While VMRO’s institutional pages had less reach than their candidates, this messaging helped set themes (e.g. calling out *“intrigues”* and urging voters to punish the incumbents). Another aspect was VMRO leveraging national office for local campaign – as VMRO leads the national government since 2024, ministers (e.g. the Minister of Transport) would appear at local project launches during campaign, blurring governance and campaigning. Government announcements of new investments in VMRO-led municipalities (like water supply construction in rural Skopje outskirts) got coverage and arguably bolstered their candidates’ visibility.

SDSM & Coalition: The Social Democrats (SDSM) entered these elections defending many mayoral seats but faced headwinds. Their media presence was comparatively muted. Only about 20% of our collected items mentioned SDSM or its candidates, and their engagement levels on social media were significantly lower than the opposition’s. Several factors contributed: - Many SDSM-led municipalities had independent or opposition challengers that grabbed attention, forcing SDSM candidates into a reactive stance. The most visible SDSM figure was Goran Gerasimovski, the mayor of Centar. He was one of the

few SDSM incumbents to lead in round one and go to a runoff, which he ultimately won. Gerasimovski's media strategy was to emphasize problem-solving: he was quoted about parking solutions ("900 new parking spaces via two prefab garages"), pet-friendly initiatives (installing pet waste bins), and especially the City of Skopje trash crisis. When Skopje's waste went uncollected due to city-level issues, Gerasimovski spoke out, "*once again we are cleaning the capital's garbage, I urge declaring an emergency*". While Gerasimovski was not as viral on social media as some others, his content did engage urban voters (his post about deploying crews to clean up garnered supportive comments from Centar residents). In the end, he was one of SDSM's few success stories, and his visibility reflects that – he had ~2,500 mentions in media and around 194k total interactions on FB (mid-tier among candidates, but top for SDSM).

Central Campaign Messaging: SDSM's central campaign tried to frame the election as choosing "competence over nationalism." They warned against Levica's rise and criticized the VMRO-Vlen pact. For instance, SDSM's official statements (published on their site and picked up by some media) accused VMRO of "inventing scenarios" and flooding the public with lies as elections neared. However, these messages did not gain wide traction outside pro-SDSM circles. With the public mood favoring change, SDSM's defensive communication saw limited engagement. On Facebook, the party's posts about "fake news by VMRO" or government achievements were often ratioed by skeptical comments, reflecting the challenge they had in shaping the narrative.

The long-dominant ethnic Albanian party DUI experienced a significant visibility drop, correlating with its electoral setbacks. Normally, DUI's leader Ali Ahmeti is a staple of election coverage, but this time he was outshone by breakaway rivals:

- The "Vlen" coalition consisted of ex-DUI figures like Izet Mexhiti and parties Alternativa (led by Afrim Gashi) and BESA (Bilall Kasami). Vlen masterfully drove the Albanian-language media narrative. For example, on 12 Oct, Izet Mexhiti held a press conference pledging that "*Čair will become an example of inclusion, equity and respect for every citizen*", with specific plans to integrate people with disabilities into public life. This positive, policy-focused message contrasted with DUI's approach and was reported by MIA and Albanian outlets. Mexhiti's victory over DUI's candidate in the first round was *the* top Albanian news story of the election night, and he leveraged it by calling for DUI's internal reforms. For instance, MIA quoted Mexhiti saying "*Vlen is the legitimate winner... it's time for Ahmeti to step aside*". This bold stance got picked up by international Albanian press as well. Mexhiti's personal visibility (6k+ mentions) indicates that the media treated him as a major power player, arguably more so than any single DUI figure in this election.
- Bilall Kasami, another pillar of Vlen (leader of BESA and incumbent Tetovo mayor), similarly enjoyed high visibility. Kasami was very active on social media (300 FB posts) and highly covered in Albanian media for both his local governance and sharp anti-DUI rhetoric. He positioned himself as delivering change in Tetovo and a champion of Albanian opposition unity. Many outlets reported Kasami's provocative quotes about Ali Ahmeti's "political end" and DUI's failings, as well as his promises like "*free public transport for all Tetova citizens*". Kasami's engagement on Facebook was second only to Orce's among mayoral candidates, showing how much resonance he had with his constituency.

DUI's diminished profile: In contrast, DUI's campaign was on the back foot. Their high-profile candidates such as Bujar Osmani (Foreign Minister, running for Čair) and Fatmir Dehari (incumbent Kičevo mayor) got coverage mainly when reacting to losses or trying to rally support by invoking ethnic sentiment (e.g. Osmani warning against Albanian votes going to Levica-backed candidates). But their media strategy seemed less energetic. After the first round, Osmani publicly conceded defeat in Čair and congratulated Mexhiti – a humble move noted by some media – but otherwise DUI's voice was relatively subdued. Ali Ahmeti made few public appearances; one exception was a rally in Kičevo where he stood with Dehari (that image of old-guard DUI mobilizing in one of the last strongholds was reported, but with a tone of "DUI fighting for relevance"). DUI's Facebook page and some media did push content, including claims

that Vlen was in bed with Macedonian nationalists, but these posts did not go viral beyond the loyal base. The data shows far fewer interactions on DUI content than on Vlen's or VMRO's.

- Other Albanian actors: The Alliance for Albanians (Alb: Aleanca, led by Arben Taravari) had partnered with SDSM for these elections, a choice that somewhat reduced their independent visibility. Alliance candidates were often listed under SDSM coalitions. Taravari himself did not run (he's already a mayor), so he was less in the news except when mentioned by Mexhiti (as in Mexhiti noting Taravari left Vlen earlier)<https://mia.mk/en/story/mexhiti-nai-to-be-dissolved>.

Levica (The Left) is not an Albanian party, but its anti-Albanian rhetoric made it a factor in Albanian media: Levica's rising influence was frequently decried by DUI/SDSM as a threat. Some Albanian outlets covered Levica mainly to critique it. For instance, Amar Meçinović – Levica's mayoral candidate in Skopje – was rarely covered in Macedonian press beyond result reports, but in Albanian press he was sometimes invoked as an extremist boogeyman to encourage Albanian turnout against VMRO-Levica. His actual media presence in Macedonian was low (Levica relies more on social media and alternative channels), but qualitatively he was part of the narrative in others' messages.

In summary, VMRO-DPMNE and Vlen coalition overwhelmingly set the agenda in this election's media space. They benefited from both momentum and adept use of media channels (especially direct-to-public via Facebook). The ruling SDSM and DUI, conversely, were often relegated to reacting, and their messages struggled to gain equal traction. The data clearly reflects this imbalance: the top 5 most-mentioned individuals were all from the opposition side (Mexhiti, Gjorgjievski, Kasami, etc.), and their initiatives (clean city, inclusion programs, etc.) became focal points of discussion. This tilt in visibility also foreshadowed the election outcomes, where those actors achieved significant wins. The next section will delve deeper into specific mayoral races, illustrating these dynamics with concrete examples of content and promises for the most prominent mayors.

[Selected Mayors: Visibility, Engagement & Promises](#)

In this chapter, we profile 10 mayoral candidates (largely winners) who stood out by either media volume or public engagement and then provide a brief overview of the remaining mayors. These selected mayors received the highest attention during the campaign, becoming focal points in their regions. For each, we examine how visible they were, how the public engaged with their content, what key promises/topics they campaigned on, and include examples of content (with sources) that characterized their media presence. We also include a comparative table of all selected mayors' main promises at the end of this section.



Figure: Top Mayor Candidates by total media engagements (news + social media) in the reporting period, and the key topics associated with each.

1. Orce Gjorgjievski (City of Skopje Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Orce Gjorgjievski emerged as the most prominent figure of the 2025 local elections. As the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for the high-profile City of Skopje mayoral race, he was extensively covered by media in both Macedonian and Albanian (given Skopje’s multiethnic electorate) and enjoyed massive social media followings. Orce was mentioned in over 4600 articles and over 800 posts, second only to Izet Mexhiti nationwide. On Facebook, his official page’s content accumulated roughly 688,000 interactions – the highest engagement of any candidate. His victory in Skopje was a central narrative: on runoff night, headlines like “*Орце Ѓорѓиевски е нов градоначалник на Скопје*” (“Orce Gjorgjievski is the new mayor of Skopje”) led news broadcasts. This win, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/11/02/orcze-gorgjievski-e-nov-gradonachalnik-na-skopje-glasaa-samo-352-od-izbirachite-vo-glavniot-grad/> was portrayed as a crowning achievement for VMRO-DPMNE.

Promises & Topics: Gjorgjievski’s campaign was built on a platform of restoring order and cleanliness to Skopje, combined with infrastructural improvements and an inclusive approach to governance:

His signature pledge was the “72-hour cleanup” – he vowed that within the first 72 hours of assuming office, he would clean the city thoroughly. This promise captured public imagination. He emphasized it at rallies and on social media with the phrase “*Како што ветув – Скопје за 72 часа ќе е чисто!*” (“As I promised – Skopje will be clean in 72 hours”) <https://www.facebook.com/1OrceGj/videos/-како-што-ветув-скопје-за-72-часа-ќе-е-чисто/25430112246675311/>. Traditional media also reported this bold promise as a differentiator, noting it in profiles of him. After his election, Orce indeed launched a massive cleanup drive with over 2,500 workers and 100 vehicles. On Nov 9, he declared the action successful: “*Skopje is a clean city! ... We showed that with work and dedication, we can visibly fix things*”, collecting over 4,500 tons of garbage. Fact-checkers later rated the promise “*partially fulfilled*”

(since not literally every corner was clean in 3 days)<https://vistinomer.mk/skopje-e-ischisteno-vo-golem-del/> , but importantly, the public saw immediate effort, validating his campaign image.

Infrastructure & Traffic: Orce pledged to tackle Skopje's chronic traffic jams and repair infrastructure. While less concretely summarized than the cleanup, the spoke of improving public transportation (some media noted he supported ideas like new bus lines and better management of the bus company) and fixing potholes. These were standard promises that all Skopje candidates made to some degree. Orce's edge was credibility from his record in Kisela Voda municipality.

Unity and Safety: Unusually for a VMRO candidate, Gjorgjievski also adopted a unifying tone across communities. He made efforts to communicate that he would be a mayor for all ethnicities in Skopje. For example, he thanked the Albanian coalition Vlen for their support in the runoff: "*Gjorgjievski: Thank you Vlen for the great support*" was reported in Albanian media. He was also visible in ethnically mixed areas doing outreach. While not a specific "promise," this approach signaled a more inclusive stance. Additionally, after taking office (beyond our period), he talked about making Skopje safer and greener – topics hinted during campaign but overshadowed by the cleanliness pledge.

Content Examples: - "*Ѓорѓиевски: За 72 часа Скопје ќе биде чисто*" – This quote ("Gjorgjievski: In 72 hours Skopje will be clean") was widely reported. It came from a campaign event and was echoed on his social media. The Truthmeter fact-check portal later cited it when evaluating his promise. The fact that a promise became an object of fact-checking shows how prominently it was in public discourse. - A Facebook post on Orce's page on Nov 9, 2025, read: "*Успешно спроведена акцијата '72 часа' – Скопје е чист град!... Повеќе од 2500 луѓе беа вклучени... 4500 тони смет се собраа*" ("Successfully carried out the '72 hours' action – Skopje is a clean city!... More than 2,500 people were involved... 4,500 tons of garbage were collected")<https://vistinomer.mk/skopje-e-ischisteno-vo-golem-del/> . This post garnered massive engagement and media like Vistinomer referenced it as evidence (they included a screenshot).

Overall, Orce Gjorgjievski's media narrative was that of a dynamic reformer who would "get things done" in Skopje and symbolized change. The combination of a headline-grabbing promise (clean city in 3 days) and a decisive electoral win made him arguably the protagonist of the 2025 local elections in the coverage.

2. Izet Mexhiti (Čair Municipality Mayor, Vlen Coalition)

Visibility & Engagement: Izet Mexhiti, leader of the Vlen coalition and former high-ranking DUI member, was another top-tier figure in this election. Mexhiti ran for Mayor of Čair, a densely populated Albanian-majority municipality in Skopje. His candidacy and broader political challenge to DUI received extraordinary media attention in Albanian outlets and considerable notice in Macedonian media as well. Mexhiti was in fact the most-mentioned individual in our entire dataset (appearing in over 5559 articles and 600 posts), reflecting that he was at the center of Albanian political news. His engagement on Facebook was also very high (~353k interactions total). Crucially, Mexhiti *won Čair outright in the first round* – defeating DUI's candidate Bujar Osmani with over 50% vote<https://mia.mk/en/story/mexhiti-nai-to-be-dissolved> – an outcome that was seen as a seismic shift. MIA's report on Oct 29 highlighted this: "*Vlen leader Izet Mexhiti, who defeated his opponent Bujar Osmani in the first round...*" This victory, and what it meant for DUI, kept Mexhiti in headlines well beyond Čair.

Promises & Topics: Mexhiti's campaign was characterized by themes of reform, inclusion, and ending entrenched rule:

Inclusive Governance & Social Policy: Mexhiti's signature issue was making Čair a model of inclusivity, especially for marginalized groups like people with disabilities. On Oct 12, he announced a comprehensive plan for disability inclusion – committing to improve accessibility in education, health services, public transport, and employment. He famously said: "*Čair will be a municipality that does not divide but unites,*

that listens to its residents and works together with them". This resonated with voters tired of patronage politics. Media such as MIA and local TV covered these promises, noting the contrast with DUI's more patron-client approach. Mexhiti even set a personal example by hiring a person with disabilities as an advisor, underscoring his point.

Anti-Corruption & Change from DUI: A huge part of Mexhiti's platform was implicit – *"Time's up for DUI's old ways."* Having split from Ali Ahmeti's DUI, Mexhiti positioned himself as the harbinger of internal Albanian political change. He didn't need to spell out a detailed economic program to get media coverage; instead, his interviews hammered that Vlen represents meritocracy and transparency versus DUI's cronyism. For instance, after results, he stated that NAI (National Alliance for Integration, a DUI-affiliated coalition) should dissolve given its failure. He also publicly urged Ali Ahmeti to reflect and step aside: *"Mexhiti: Vlen is the legitimate winner, time for Ahmeti to step down"* was a headline summarizing his press conference <https://mia.mk/en/story/mexhiti-vlen-a-legitimate-winner-time-for-ahmeti-to-step-down>. This bold stance – essentially challenging a political patriarch – was itself a message that things would be different under his watch.

Municipal Services: On standard local issues, Mexhiti did address things like infrastructure in Čair (roads, water supply, etc.), but these were not as front-and-center in media. One concrete promise was improving the cleanliness and management of the historic Old Bazaar (which falls in Čair) and supporting local traders – he mentioned supporting micro-businesses and social enterprises in his disability-inclusion plan, which dovetails with local economic development <https://mia.mk/en/story/mexhiti-promises-respect-equity-and-inclusion-of-people-with-disabilities>. However, details on classic municipal projects (parks, etc.) were less covered; possibly because his campaign narrative was more about values and representation.

In summary, Izet Mexhiti's presence in this election was that of a reformist rebel who successfully toppled the old guard in his community. He combined *lofty social promises* with *hardball political messaging*. His content was both aspirational (inclusive society) and tactical (dismantling DUI's network). The public engagement and media coverage suggest that many Albanians viewed his and Vlen's rise as the biggest story of the elections on their side of the spectrum.

3. Bilall Kasami (Tetovo Mayor, BESA/Vlen Coalition)

Visibility & Engagement: Bilall Kasami, the incumbent Mayor of Tetovo and leader of the BESA party, was another heavyweight in terms of media coverage. He aligned with Izet Mexhiti as part of the Vlen coalition, effectively spearheading the anti-DUI front in the Polog region. Kasami's name appeared in about 3787 articles and 710 posts in our data – making him the third most-mentioned person overall. This high volume came from Tetovo being a major city and a longtime DUI stronghold that Kasami had wrested in 2021 and defended in 2025. On social media, Kasami enjoyed fervent support: his Facebook page had ~300 posts, and combined interactions on those were over 416,000. Notably, Kasami won re-election in Tetovo (a significant victory over a DUI challenger in the second round), further amplifying his voice post-election. He often acted as a national Albanian leader in messaging, not just a local mayor, which increased his media profile.

Promises & Topics: Kasami's campaign blended local governance successes with bold political narrative:

Modernizing Tetovo (Infrastructure & Services): Kasami's clearest concrete promise was to implement free public transport in Tetovo. He repeatedly stated *"Transporti publik do të jetë falas për të gjithë qytetarët e Tetovës"* ("Public transport will be free for all Tetovo citizens"). This was a headline in many Albanian news pieces and was also promoted via social video. For example, a local TV Koha clip covered whether this promise was realistic, noting Tetovo's budget constraints <https://www.facebook.com/fol.mk/posts/kasami-transporti-publik-do-të-jetë->

[falas-për-të-gjithë-qytetarët-e-tetovëslexo/1223685706458132/](https://www.facebook.com/falas-për-të-gjithë-qytetarët-e-tetovëslexo/1223685706458132/). Kasami insisted it was doable to subsidize city buses to encourage ridership and reduce pollution. Given Tetovo's chronic traffic and smog issues, this promise had significant public interest.

He also talked about investments to upgrade Tetovo's infrastructure – *“projects to take Tetova to a new level of development”* as one title mentioned. This included better water supply (Tetovo has had water shortages), solving waste collection problems, and regulating urban expansion. While specifics were fewer in media, his mayoral track record (e.g. starting construction of a sewage treatment plant) was often referenced as part of his argument that he delivers results DUI didn't.

Ethical governance and anti-DUI stance: Politically, Kasami was extremely outspoken against DUI's leadership. He framed the Tetovo race as part of *ending Ali Ahmeti's era*. During the campaign, he made statements like: *“Those who sold half of Tetovo accuse me of selling public property”* – turning around DUI's attack on him (there was a controversy about a public land sale in Tetovo; Kasami retorted that it was DUI's past mayors who had truly given away public assets). This quote was reported about 15 times across outlets, illustrating his confrontational style. And of course, his election night quote – *“Ali Ahmeti will be sent to the history books by these elections”* – got wide pickup. This communicated to voters that re-electing Kasami was not just about Tetovo's potholes but about liberating Albanian politics from one-party dominance. - Social issues and youth: Kasami engaged a lot with youth audiences. He posted about meetings with young people, e.g. *“Kasami: We discussed with youth projects that will take Tetovo to a new level of development”*. He promised opportunities for young professionals in local government and often highlighted education improvements (opening a new kindergarten, etc.). These didn't become national headlines, but on the ground in Tetovo, local media (like TetovaSot) covered them.

In conclusion, Bilal Kasami's profile in the media was that of a dynamic incumbent who combined populist local measures (free transit, visible city improvements) with being a torchbearer for a broader political cause (dethroning DUI in Albanian politics). The synergy of those two aspects kept him highly visible and allowed him to mobilize a coalition in Tetovo that secured his re-election. His communications were often spiced with fiery one-liners at opponents, which media loved to quote, but he also maintained credibility by pointing to concrete accomplishments as mayor, making him one of the most engaging figures of this election.

4. Darko Kostovski (Butel Municipality Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Darko Kostovski is the Mayor of Butel, a municipality in northern Skopje, and a member of VMRO-DPMNE. He was running for a second term and became one of the most visible Skopje-area incumbents in this election. Kostovski was featured in over 927 media articles and 450 social posts and had strong engagement on his Facebook posts (~181k interactions total). While Butel is smaller than Centar or Aerodrom, Kostovski's proactive media approach and a couple of *“big-ticket” achievements* made him stand out. He won re-election outright in the first round on Oct 19, adding to his and VMRO's credence and thus receiving coverage as one of VMRO's success stories in Skopje's ring of municipalities.

Promises & Topics: Kostovski campaigned heavily on infrastructure and local development projects, emphasizing continuity of the work from his first term:

His marquee promise (or rather accomplishment he pledged to complete) was the establishment of a new Polyclinic (Health Center) in Butel. This was significant because Butel had long requested an upgraded healthcare facility. Kostovski announced that *“Butel is getting a new polyclinic”*, framing it as a *“historic moment”* for the municipality. He even stated that the tender for construction had been issued and that this was underway as of campaign time. This claim was supported by official information – MIA carried a piece on 13 Oct where Kostovski expresses satisfaction that the polyclinic project is launched. The media, especially those close to VMRO, repeatedly mentioned this as proof of delivering on promises.

Another major promise was bringing running water to Ljuboten, a large village in the Butel municipality that historically lacked connection to the city water network. “Љуботен добива водовод” (“Ljuboten is getting water supply”) was the phrase Kostovski used. Indeed, on Oct 12, the Prime Minister (Mickoski) and others visited the construction site for Ljuboten’s water pipeline, underscoring the importance VMRO placed on this project <https://mia.mk/tags/Водовод>. Kostovski highlighted it frequently, as fulfilling a “decades-old demand” of residents <https://mia.mk/story/костовски-бутел-добива-нова-поликлиника-љуботен-добива-водовод>. Media covered this very positively; even neutral outlets noted when work commenced on the Ljuboten water system, crediting the mayor.

Other projects: Kostovski enumerated many completed projects and upcoming ones: a “mega park” in Radishani spanning 10,000 m², new kindergartens (one completed, one in progress), a new cultural center and square planned for Butel <https://mia.mk/story/костовски-бутел-добива-нова-поликлиника-љуботен-добива-водовод>, numerous sports facilities (he claimed 5 sports centers built vs 2 promised, 13 sports fields, 10 playgrounds) <https://mia.mk/story/костовски-бутел-добива-нова-поликлиника-љуботен-добива-водовод>, and a new swimming pool slated for the next term. He essentially *over-delivered* relative to his 2017 campaign promises and wasn’t shy about listing these achievements (as seen in the MIA interview where he rattles off 404 completed projects!).

Kostovski’s narrative was “Keep Butel moving forward.” By showcasing tangible improvements under his leadership. He also assured that all these projects were not just election-time propaganda but things already in motion (e.g. he took media to see the foundations of the cultural home).

Overall, Darko Kostovski’s content and coverage present a case of an incumbent leveraging a strong delivery record as a campaign strategy. It clearly paid off in both media attention and voter approval. His messaging was hyper-local (“we fixed *this* street, we built *that* park”), which might not create national buzz, but in the Skopje region media it made him one of the shining stars of VMRO’s cohort. The simplicity of “new clinic and running water for thousands of people” is hard to beat as a campaign narrative, and media citations show those points came across loud and clear [9].

5. Aleksandar Stojkoski (Gjorče Petrov Municipality Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Aleksandar Stojkoski is the Mayor of Gjorče Petrov (often informally called “Gjorče”), a sizable municipality in western Skopje. As a first-term VMRO mayor (elected in 2021) seeking re-election, Stojkoski had a notable media presence, though somewhat less flashy than some of his colleagues. He appeared in around 678 items, putting him just outside the top 10 by volume, but still significant. On social media, he had decent engagement (~179k total interactions on his page), largely from Gjorče residents. Stojkoski won outright in the first round (crossing 50%), which local media highlighted with headlines like “Stojkoski received the certificate for a second mandate as mayor of Gjorče Petrov”. This indicated his comfortable victory and served as a success story for VMRO in Skopje’s western flank.

Promises & Topics: Stojkoski’s campaign emphasized continuation of development projects and innovative initiatives, including:

- Road & Infrastructure Rebuilds: He spoke about a plan (with support from the national government and World Bank) to fully reconstruct streets throughout Gjorče Petrov. For instance, VMRO Vice-President Aleksandar Nikoloski was quoted saying “With World Bank support, we will completely reconstruct the streets in Gjorče Petrov”. This is due to a financed project for comprehensive road rehabilitation. It suggested that Gjorče, which had many aging streets, would see a major facelift if Stojkoski stayed in office.
- Sports and Youth Facilities: Stojkoski was proud of adding “eight new sports fields” during his term. He promised to continue expanding sports and recreation infrastructure for young people. One of his achievements, often mentioned, was that Gjorče Petrov received recognition for leadership in energy transition – it became the first Skopje municipality to form

energy communities (e.g., solar panel co-ops). Media reported that “*Gjorče Petrov municipality got the first award for leadership in energy transition*”. This was a somewhat technical accolade, but it allowed Stojkoski to brand himself as forward-looking (green energy focus). - Public Utilities & Environment: He tackled smaller but tangible needs: improved waste management, park renovations, etc. For example, he oversaw a pilot project installing smart waste bins in parts of Gjorče – a minor initiative that got some local press. In debates, he also pledged better public transport connectivity for Gjorče (tying into Skopje’s broader transit reforms). - Community Well-being: A subtle but resonant pledge was to maintain Gjorče’s identity as a safe, family-friendly area. While not a single policy, he emphasized in his communications that under his leadership, Gjorče Petrov has seen improved public safety (e.g., more street lighting, renovated police point) and he would keep it up.

Stojkoski’s media presence can be summarized as steady and solid. He did not generate viral national news or fiery quotes; instead, his coverage was of a competent administrator delivering local improvements. In an election climate filled with high drama elsewhere, Stojkoski’s relatively calm, achievement-focused campaign was enough for his constituents and earned him a comfortable re-election. Media coverage treated him as a model of municipal management – an image VMRO capitalized on to say their mayors get things done, contrasting with certain underperforming SDSM mayors.

6. Sotir Lukrovski (Karpoš Municipality Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Sotir Lukrovski was the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for Mayor of Karpoš, one of Skopje’s large urban municipalities. He was not an incumbent (Karpoš was led by a long-time controversial mayor, Stevčo Jakimovski, who ran again. Lukrovski entered as a fresh face promising change, and his campaign quickly gained traction. In fact, Karpoš ended up going to a runoff where Lukrovski *defeated the incumbent*, marking a significant pick-up for VMRO. Lukrovski was highly active on social media (304 Facebook posts, 120k+ interactions) and got substantial press, especially toward the end of the campaign, as polls showed him surging. He was mentioned in about 1,602 items (making him 6th by volume overall), reflecting how hot the Karpoš race became. After his victory on Nov 2, pro-VMRO media hailed it as liberating Karpoš from “the construction mafia” – an epithet used during the campaign.

Promises & Topics: Lukrovski focused on urban planning reform and anti-corruption in Karpoš, alongside some social improvements:

- Ending Overdevelopment: Karpoš had seen a lot of high-rise construction under Mayor Jakimovski, often amid accusations of shady deals with developers. Lukrovski centered his platform on stopping the “betonizacija” (concretization) of Karpoš. One viral piece was from VMRO spokesperson Marija Miteva (amplifying Lukrovski’s stance) stating: “*Stevčo Jakimovski and his cronies from the construction mafia want to concrete Vlae (a neighborhood)*” and even appropriated a street for a high-rise. This was based on a real incident where a street was allegedly closed for a private project. Lukrovski promised transparent urban planning, a revision of dubious detailed urban plans (DUPs), and to preserve green spaces. He declared he would not allow any more unlawful construction. This narrative was strongly pushed; the term “градежната мафија” (construction mafia) became a catchphrase in Karpoš coverage.

- Housing Improvements: Lukrovski made a distinctive promise to renovate residential buildings. He said under his leadership, the municipality would assist in “*reconstruction of façades, modernization of elevators, and installation of entry code locks in all apartment buildings in Karpoš*”. This pledge was concrete (literally) and aimed at quality-of-life for tens of thousands of apartment dwellers. He framed it as improving safety (many elevators in older buildings malfunction, causing daily frustration) and energy efficiency (by insulating façades). Media like Kurir and Nova reported this promise, giving an example of a candidate addressing everyday concerns. Many Karpoš residents live in 1970s blocks that indeed need refurbishing, so this promise likely resonated.

- Community Amenities: Lukrovski also talked about creating more public spaces – parks, playgrounds, etc., but these were overshadowed by the above two big themes. He did vow to complete a large park in Karpoš 4 and to fix local roads (standard pledges).

- Ethical Governance: Implicitly, Lukrovski campaigned on cleaning up Karpoš's administration. The incumbent, Jakimovski, had faced legal charges in the past. Lukrovski promised a break with such practices – e.g., no nepotism, digitalizing services to cut red tape (and opportunities for bribes). These weren't headline promises, but part of his discourse in interviews.

In essence, Sotir Lukrovski's campaign and coverage were about "*cleaning house*" in Karpoš, literally and metaphorically.

7. Maksim Dimitrievski (Kumanovo Mayor, ZNAM")

Visibility & Engagement: Maksim Dimitrievski is the Mayor of Kumanovo, the largest municipality in the northeast and historically an SDSM stronghold – until Maksim ran independently and now as part of ZNAM and VMRO-DPMNE coalition. He was featured in about 2,254 items (5th highest count by our data) and commanded strong local social media engagement (roughly 217k interactions). Maksim won re-election on Oct 19 with just over 50% (avoiding a runoff), a noteworthy feat that got some national coverage. As a well-known figure (he led Kumanovo through the COVID crisis and was quite outspoken), he often attracted press beyond his municipality too.

Promises & Topics: Dimitrievski ran on a platform of local pride, continuity, and economic development:

- Economic Hub Vision: He frequently stated that "*Kumanovo is growing into a regional economic center*". His campaign emphasized attracting investments and creating jobs so that Kumanovo could become the economic engine of the northeast (outside of Skopje's orbit). He pointed to new industrial zone development and partnerships with investors. Local TV and print (e.g. Nova Makedonija) quoted this narrative, showing optimism for Kumanovo's future under his leadership.

- Urban Planning & Projects: One particular issue he tackled was "*Tabakana*" – an old tobacco factory site in central Kumanovo. There was controversy about building a multi-story complex there. Dimitrievski promised that "*Tabakane will not become a building, but a free parking lot for residents and a park with a playground*". This stance was an example of him siding with citizens' interest over developers, similar to Lukrovski's anti-betonizacija in concept. Indeed, on 24 Sep he publicly scrapped the previous plan and announced the parking+park idea, which was reported by outlets like KumanovoNews and echoed by MIA's local news. It earned him goodwill and was a concrete promise he could deliver quickly (he had control of the site already).

- Public Services & Living Standards: Maksim touted improvements in utility services: water supply expansions to rural areas of Kumanovo, better garbage collection (he bought new utility vehicles during term), etc. He also prioritized education infrastructure – building or renovating several schools and kindergartens – promising to continue that. Additionally, he flagged multicultural coexistence (Kumanovo being ethnically mixed).

8. Boban Stefkovski (Gazi Baba Municipality Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Boban Stefkovski is the Mayor of Gazi Baba. A VMRO-DPMNE member, he was elected in 2021 and sought a second term in 2025. Stefkovski had a solid media presence with about 862 mentions in our dataset, and he actively promoted his work on social media. His engagement (≈190k total interactions) was among the higher end for Skopje-area mayors. He won re-election in the first round, and Gazi Baba's results were noted as part of VMRO's sweep of Skopje's municipalities (given Gazi Baba is populous, that was a key victory).

Promises & Topics: Stefkovski's campaign messaging revolved around infrastructure, safety, and solving long-standing local issues: - Flood Protection in Hasanbeg: Hasanbeg is a settlement in Gazi Baba which

tragically suffered a flash flood in 2016 that killed 23 people. One of Stefkovski's major projects was constructing a flood defense canal to prevent such disasters. During the campaign he showcased that *"Hasanbeg is changing, a protective canal against floods that took 23 lives is being built"*. Interestingly, an Albanian news report mentioned this, attributing it to "Mexhiti" in a headline (likely a mix-up or quoting Mexhiti praising it), underscoring that this project was significant for both Albanian and Macedonian communities in the area. Stefkovski promised to finish this canal swiftly, and indeed construction was underway. This example shows him addressing a deeply emotional community need – providing security and closure to Hasanbeg residents – which definitely boosted his support. - Zoning and Utility Upgrades: Stefkovski highlighted improvements like bringing zonal (paid) parking to Avtokomanda (a busy suburb in Gazi Baba) to better organize traffic, improving water supply and sewage in peripheral neighborhoods, and strengthening waste collection services. For instance, he rolled out new waste containers and trucks, and he promised each neighborhood would see cleaner streets. - Education and Youth: He opened a new school or two in his first term and promised further renovations of schools and playgrounds. Also, Gazi Baba had plans for a new cultural center and town square in a locality, which he discussed (although some of that was reported as future intentions rather than immediate). - Transparency & Community: Stefkovski cultivated an image of an approachable mayor. He often went live on Facebook from project sites (e.g., street repaving), explaining to citizens what was being done. He promised to continue this practice and involve locals in setting priorities. While not a "promise" per se, it was part of his brand that likely helped his visibility.

Overall, Boban Stefkovski's portrayal was that of a reliable administrator focusing on critical infrastructure (especially disaster prevention) and incremental improvements in daily life. His campaign wasn't high on political rhetoric; it was more about *"I fixed problems the previous guys ignored"*. The media covered his major projects (flood canal, etc.) enough that even outside observers were aware of them. This pragmatic, low-drama approach seemed to resonate, contributing to his comfortable re-election and reinforcing VMRO's narrative of competent local governance.

9. Aleksandar Jovanovski (Kičevo Mayoral Candidate, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Dr. Aleksandar Jovanovski was the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for Mayor of Kičevo in 2025. Kičevo is historically governed by DUI's Fatmir Dehari. Jovanovski's candidacy was notable because VMRO-DPMNE made a serious push to unseat Dehari. Jovanovski garnered significant media attention for a challenger in an out-of-Skopje town – about 992 mentions, placing him in the top 10. Social media engagement for him was also high (~202k interactions), likely buoyed by both VMRO-DPMNE supporters and local ethnic Macedonians rallying behind him.

Promises & Topics: Jovanovski, a medical doctor by profession, emphasized improving municipal services and multiethnic governance:

- Basic Infrastructure & Cleanliness: He promised to tackle long-standing utility issues in Kičevo. This included ensuring stable water supply to all parts (some villages around Kičevo have had water cuts in summers) and better waste management. He also spoke of repairing roads in neglected areas. Essentially, he argued Kičevo under DUI had stagnated and that he would bring much-needed investments (with help from central government if VMRO stays in power).

- Healthcare & Social Care: As a doctor, Jovanovski pledged to upgrade Kičevo's medical facilities. He proposed opening a modern polyclinic or at least heavily renovating the town hospital and bringing in more specialists so residents wouldn't have to travel to Ohrid or Skopje for many treatments. He also touched on support for elderly and vulnerable populations (e.g., establishing a day-care center for seniors). These topics resonated due to his background and were highlighted in his TV debates on local channels.

- Economic Development: Similar to other candidates, he talked about attracting businesses to Kičevo by offering local tax incentives and leveraging his party's network for state investments. He specifically mentioned exploring the reopening or repurposing of some industrial facilities in Kičevo (which has had factories closed in the transition era).

– Inter-ethnic Unity: Given Kičevo's demographic, Jovanovski carefully ran on being a mayor for all communities. He included Albanian language campaign materials and his spouse who is Albanian pledge in Albanian citizens to vote for her husband. He promised that both Macedonian and Albanian citizens' needs would be equally heard, an implicit critique that DUI cared mostly for its base. This was an important narrative especially after round one, where he sought to attract more Albanian votes from opposition-leaning Albanians who were not with DUI.

His media portrayal is mostly that of *"a professional entering politics to fix his hometown,"* which was leveraged by VMRO-DPMNE in its broader narrative of renewing local leadership with competent individuals.

10. Mitko Jancev (Kavadarci Mayor, VMRO-DPMNE)

Visibility & Engagement: Mitko Jancev is the Mayor of Kavadarci, an important municipality in the Tikveš wine region (south-central Macedonia). A member of VMRO-DPMNE but considered more moderate, Jancev was seeking a third term (he was first elected in 2017). He had a relatively quieter profile nationwide compared to the above names, but still, he appeared in around 515 items. His social engagement was decent (~163k interactions). Jancev won re-election in the first round. He was somewhat less in the media limelight because his victory was expected (Kavadarci is a VMRO bastion, and he's popular there). However, he made news when he briefly considered running for VMRO party leader a few years back, so he has a known persona.

Promises & Topics: Jancev's campaign in 2025 focused on continuing economic growth and infrastructure in Kavadarci, which had seen a boom (helped by the presence of the Feni ferronickel plant and wineries):

- Industrial & Job Growth: He promised to facilitate the expansion of Kavadarci's industrial zones, attracting more factories. In his term, the large Dräxlmaier auto-parts factory expanded in Kavadarci; he promised to bring other investors similarly. Unemployment in Kavadarci dropped under him, and he campaigned on further reducing it to near zero by term's end.
- City Modernization: Jancev touted how he modernized Kavadarci (new parks, renovated city square, etc.) and promised further modernization – specifically, building a new cultural center (the old one is outdated) and updating public transport with eco-friendly buses. Also, continuing a multi-year project to refurbish the banks of the Crna River that flows by the city to prevent floods and create promenades.
- Tourism Promotion: As Kavadarci is wine country (home to Tikveš winery, etc.), he pledged to invest in tourism infrastructure – for example, improving roads to Lake Tikveš and supporting wine festival events to put Kavadarci on the tourist map.
- Transparency & Youth: Jancev initiated a city app for services and promised to expand e-services and transparency of municipal spending. He also engaged youth via a Youth Council in city hall and promised to implement some of their ideas (like skate parks, etc.).

Jancev's media presence was not about fireworks but about *stability and prosperity*. Nationally, he's sometimes mentioned in context of being a "pro-Western" voice in VMRO (he opposed name change protests in 2018 and was briefly sidelined by the party, a drama not directly part of this campaign but part of his image). But in local election coverage, that didn't feature; he was simply depicted as a successful mayor promising more of the same.

Remaining Mayors

Beyond these top ten figures, Macedonia's other mayors and candidates also campaigned on various promises, albeit with more modest visibility.

Infrastructure and public utilities were the common denominator in promises across municipalities. In nearly every town, candidates pledged to pave local roads, improve water supply, build or fix sewage systems, and invest in street lighting. For example, in Resen, the mayor (from VMRO) promised to asphalt dozens of village roads and did so in his term, whereas in Debar, the DUI incumbent talked about finally solving the water filtration issue.

Economic development at the local level was a frequent theme. Mayors of smaller towns like Negotino or Strumica promised to create industrial zones to bring factories. In Prilep, the VMRO candidate (who won) promised to reopen old factories and support small businesses through local tax cuts. The credibility of these promises varied based on the candidate's track record or party support.

Social services and culture: Many candidates promised new schools, kindergartens, or renovations of existing ones. For instance, Beti Stamenkoska-Trajkovska (VMRO's candidate in Prilep) highlighted the need for a new kindergarten and more daycare capacity. In Bitola, incumbent Toni Konjanovski (VMRO) promised to restore Bitola's iconic theater building and invest in tourism around its historical sites, leaning into culture. –

Environment: A number of mayors tapped into environmental concerns. In Struga, where lake pollution is an issue, candidates promised better wastewater treatment to protect Lake Ohrid. In Veles, known for industrial pollution, the new mayor pledged greener policies and planting thousands of trees. Recycling programs and landfill management improvements were promised in various municipalities (though specifics were often lacking).

Integrity and governance: After years of public frustration with corruption, some candidates (especially from opposition) promised cleaner governance. In Ohrid, for instance, the new VMRO mayor Kiril Pecakov vowed to implement transparent procedures to manage Ohrid's UNESCO-protected lakeside (after controversies with illegal constructions). In Štip, Ivan Jordanov (VMRO incumbent) emphasized his administration's openness and promised to introduce participatory budgeting.

Relative visibility: Those "remaining" mayors who had moderately higher profiles include Toni Konjanovski (Bitola), Kiril Pecakov (Ohrid), Boris Georgievski (Aerodrom, who lost; SDSM), Zoran Nilević (Struga, from Alliance/Vlen, gave DUI a tough fight), etc. They mostly echoed the big themes above. Their visibility was often proportional to the size/import of their city and the competitiveness of the race. In general, incumbents who were performing well (mostly VMRO ones) were covered more favorably and were re-elected, whereas many SDSM incumbents in smaller towns quietly lost with little media fanfare, often due to not much notable to report.

Conclusions

The media and social media coverage of North Macedonia's 2025 local elections was vibrant, highly partisan at times, but ultimately informative on key issues – albeit with gaps. What could an average citizen reasonably learn from the onslaught of content, and where did the information ecosystem fall short?

What the Public Could Learn:

- Election Results & Political Shifts: The coverage made it very clear which way the political winds were blowing. Citizens following the news learned that VMRO-DPMNE and the Vlen coalition scored major gains, taking Skopje and many municipalities. They also learned about historically low turnout in some areas (only ~35% in Skopje <https://telma.com.mk/2025/11/02/orcze-gorgievski-e-nov-gradonachalnik-na-skopje-glasaa-samo-352-od-izbirachite-vo-glavniot-grad/>, under 40% nationwide) which raises questions about voter engagement. The narrative of a "change election" – with VMRO-Vlen ending SDSM-DUI's dominance in many communities – was well communicated.

- Major Campaign Issues: On the whole, local media did convey the main issues and promises in each community. People could learn that in their town, candidate X promised a new school or candidate Y vowed to fix the water supply. This creates a baseline for public expectations. Additionally, the emphasis on topics like infrastructure, environment, and public services signaled to citizens that these were election priorities.

Party Platforms (or lack thereof): Through media, citizens could discern that the elections were more personality- and project-driven than ideology-driven. Few distinct party platforms were presented; it was mostly local agendas. However, one could glean that VMRO-DPMNE and its allies campaigned on a theme of "competence and change," whereas SDSM emphasized "stability and experience," albeit less effectively. Many outlets quoted party leaders (like Mickoski and Kovachevski) summarizing their pitches: e.g., Mickoski asking voters to punish the ruling parties for corruption <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/sdsm-2/>, and SDSM's Kovachevski warning against "extremism" (implicitly Levica). These broad strokes were available to the public, though concrete differences in policy were thin.

- Local Performance of Officials: Importantly, coverage highlighted local officials' performance. Incumbents either showcased achievements or were grilled for failures. For example, citizens in Skopje saw extensive reporting on the incumbent administration's shortcomings (uncollected trash, infrastructure delays), which set the context for Orce Gjorgjievski's promises. In places like Kavadarci, the media's generally positive reporting on those mayors' projects likely reinforced to citizens why those incumbents were re-elected. So, the media did serve a watchdog role to an extent, drawing attention to whether promises from 2017 were kept or not.

Gaps and Blind Spots:

- Lack of In-Depth Policy Analysis: While daily news covered *what candidates said*, there was scarce in-depth analysis of *how realistic or impactful* those promises were. For instance, many outlets repeated promises like "free public transit" or "reconstruct 100 streets" without examining municipal budgets or feasibility. Detailed debates on funding, maintenance costs, or trade-offs were mostly absent. Thus, citizens got the "what" but not much of the "how" or "at what cost." This can lead to inflated expectations or an inability to hold winners accountable when they later cite budget constraints.

- Limited Fact-Checking in Mainstream: Dedicated fact-checkers (Vistinomer, etc.) did address some claims (like verifying if a project was indeed completed or if a narrative was false), but mainstream media rarely integrated these fact-checks into their election coverage. For example, when partisan media claimed "X candidate is linked to crime Y," other outlets often just reported the claim and counter-claim, without independent verification. This leaves average readers unsure what to believe. Fact-checks existed, but one had to actively seek them on specialized portals.

- Underrepresentation of Certain Local Issues: Some important local issues received surprisingly little attention. For example, environmental concerns beyond immediate cleanliness (like air pollution in cities such as Tetovo, or industrial pollution in Veles) were not front and center in media narratives, even though they affect citizens greatly. Similarly, topics like local education quality or healthcare quality, while mentioned by candidates, did not spur sustained media discussion or comparisons of plans. The coverage often zoomed in on tangible infrastructure promises, neglecting "soft" issues like governance reforms (transparency, anti-corruption measures at municipal level were rarely questioned systematically).

- Minority Community Perspectives: Although Albanian-language media covered Albanian community angles thoroughly, the Macedonian-language mainstream press often did not delve into the specific concerns of Turkish, Roma, Serbian, or other smaller minority communities in these local elections. This can be a blind spot for the majority of the public, who might not realize what those communities prioritized or were promised.

Platform Influence Dynamics

The 2025 election underscored how social media platforms, especially Facebook, have become pivotal in shaping election narratives in North Macedonia:

Facebook as Kingmaker: With thousands of election-related posts and very high user engagement, Facebook effectively acted as an echo chamber for partisan messaging but also a direct line for politicians to voters. Many citizens likely got more election content from scrolling Facebook (posts, comments, shares) than from watching the evening news. This has a dual effect: it empowers voters to hear directly from candidates (often unfiltered live videos of rallies or Q&As), which can be good for transparency. But it also means misinformation can spread rapidly and algorithms might reinforce biases by showing users mostly content from pages they follow (usually their preferred party). The campaign confirmed that a clever Facebook strategy (frequent posts, quick rebuttals, emotional appeals) can substantially boost a candidate's profile – e.g., Orce Gjorgjievski's savvy social media use helped galvanize youth turnout.

Other Platforms: Instagram was used more for image-building (campaign photo-ops, infographics of promises). TikTok, while not heavily utilized by every candidate, demonstrated potential – a few viral TikTok videos (like a humorous clip by a younger candidate in Gostivar) showed how quick visuals can engage first-time voters. YouTube served as a repository for longer content (debates, full speeches) and for live streaming on election nights by some local media and party channels. The interplay of these platforms means voters could cherry-pick their information sources. Those deeply interested could find a wealth of detail (for example, watching a 2-hour local debate on YouTube), whereas a casual observer might only catch a flashy 30-second Facebook video. This fragmentation of the media requires more effort from citizens to get a balanced picture.

- **Television and Traditional Media Influence:** TV still played a role, especially for broad audience reach and for legitimacy (major candidates going on national TV for interviews conferred a sense of importance). But one notable dynamic is that TV content often ended up being discussed on Facebook, essentially amplifying or distorting it. A pointed comment from a TV debate could become a meme on social media in minutes, overshadowing the rest of the discussion. In that sense, traditional media now often set the initial agenda, but social media amplifies or alters narratives in real-time.

- **Risk of Echo Chambers:** The platform-driven dynamic risked creating silos – supporters of one camp primarily consuming that camp's content and vice versa. The coverage did have some cross-cutting elements (like widely reported facts on results, or shared concerns about low turnout), but by and large, people following only partisan pages would have gotten a very one-sided view (e.g., one where their side's victories were hailed and losses downplayed or attributed to fraud, as some partisan pages did allege without evidence). This polarization could lead to a less shared reality, complicating post-election community cooperation.

In conclusion, the 2025 local elections media landscape was rich in information but required discernment. Voters were not starved for data – if anything, they were inundated – but making sense of it needed critical thinking. Those who sought multiple sources likely got a comprehensive picture, while those who stayed in one information bubble might have received a skewed version of events.

For democracy, the encouraging sign is that important stories (like result outcomes, major promises, and major scandals like silence violations) did surface and become known. The concern is that distortions and shallow coverage elements might have misled some and that not all citizens were equally served by the available information. The next section on recommendations will address how to improve on these fronts, especially in bolstering media literacy and ethical standards.