

Safeguarding Europe's 2024 Elections: a Checklist for Robust Enforcement of the DSA

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Over 50 civil society groups urge the European Commission to rigorously enforce the Digital Services Act in a critical year for democracy.

Democracy is in crisis and 2024 will be its biggest test yet. With critical elections due to take place across the world amid the wrecking ball of viral disinformation and deepening polarisation, the choices made by social media companies – and those who regulate them – will have profound consequences for years to come.



As Europe faces crucial elections, and alarmed by the backward slide of our democracies, 56 organisations are urgently calling on European leaders

to meet this challenge head on. We ask you to take decisive action to safeguard the integrity of the election information environment, protect people's rights as voters and set a global standard that others may follow.

The critical first step is for the European Commission to use its new powers under the Digital Services Act to require Big Tech companies to publish robust and comprehensive election plans - outlining publicly how they intend to mitigate “systemic risks” in the context of upcoming national and EU elections.

As a minimum, election plans must include meaningful transparency and mitigation measures to:

1. Deamplify disinformation and hate

Tech platforms have shown they can switch on measures to make content less viral at critical moments. They must, as a matter of course:

- Make their recommender systems safe-by-design, by default and all the time (not just during election periods), including measures to suppress the algorithmic reach and visibility of disinformation and hate-spreading content, groups and accounts.
- Implement meaningful user control features, including giving users clear options to choose over which types of data are used for ranking and recommending content and the ability to optimise their feeds for values other than engagement.

2. Ensure effective content moderation in every European language

The tragic impacts of viral hate speech in Ethiopia, Myanmar and countless other places show content moderation is worthless if not properly and equitably resourced. Tech platforms must:

- Properly resource moderation teams in all languages, including both cultural and linguistic competency
- Make content moderation rules public, and apply them consistently and transparently.
- Pay moderators a decent wage, and provide them with psychological support.

3. Stop microtargeting users

The potential to exploit and manipulate voters with finely targeted election disinformation is an existential danger for democracy. The solution is to:

- End processing of all observed and inferred data for political ads, for both targeting and amplification. Targeting on the basis of contextual data would still be permitted.
- Enforce the ban on using sensitive categories of personal data, including data voluntarily provided by the user, for both targeting and amplification.

4. Build in transparency

Elections are for the people, not social media companies. Tech platforms must not be allowed to shape the fate of elections behind closed doors – instead, they must:

- Be fully transparent about all measures related to political content and advertisements, including explanations of national variations in the measures they put in place, technical documentation about the algorithms used to recommend content, publication of ad libraries and their functionality (as well as ad financing) and full disclosure of content moderation policies and enforcement including notice, review and appeal mechanisms.
- Allow researchers and wider civil society to independently monitor the spread of dis/misinformation and potential manipulation of the information space by sharing real-time, cross-platform data, including: content meta-data; information on content that is demoted, promoted and recommended and tools to analyse data.
- Provide training for researchers, civil society, independent media and election monitors to monitor activity on the platforms.
- Facilitate independent audits on the effectiveness of mitigation measures adopted in the context of elections and publish their results.

5. Increase and strengthen partnerships

Companies are not experts in elections. They must work with those who are.

- Companies must meaningfully engage with partners such as fact-checkers, independent media, civil society and other bodies that protect electoral integrity, taking into account partners' independence and reporting on their engagement in a standardised format.

Alongside the European elections, over 50 other countries will be going to the polls in 2024 – and even in the remainder of this year, several crucial elections are due to take place. Very large online platforms pose significant global risks if they fail to safeguard people and elections in the coming year. In making full use of its powers, the European Commission has a critical opportunity to lead the way globally in demonstrating that platforms can bring their operations in line with democracy and human rights.

Signed, the following organisations active in the EU,

AI Forensics
AlgorithmWatch
Alliance 4 Europe
Association for International Affairs (AMO) in Prague
Avaaz Foundation
Centre for Peace Studies
Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO)
Checkfirst
Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)
Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)
Cyber Rights Organization
CyberPeace Institute
Defend Democracy
Delfi Lithuania
Democracy Reporting International gGmbH
digiQ
Digital Action
Donegal Intercultural Platform
Doras
Ekō
Epicenter.works
European Federation of Public Services Unions (EPSU)
Eticas
EU DisinfoLab
European Digital Rights (EDRi)
Federación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
Global Witness
Gong
HateAid
Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)
Irish Council for Civil Liberties
Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies
LGBT Ireland
'NEVER AGAIN' Association
Panoptikon Foundation
Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
SUPERRR Lab
The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation

The London Story
The Rowan Trust
Transparency International EU
Uplift
Waag Futurelab
Women In Journalism Institute - Canada
#jesuisla
#ShePersisted

Endorsed by the following global organisations;

Accountable Tech
ANDA - Agência de Notícias de Direitos Animais
Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)
Fair Vote UK
Full Fact
Global Action Plan
Legal Resources Centre
Open Britain
Rede Nacional de Combate à Desinformação-RNCD BRASIL
Tech4Peach

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<https://peoplevsbig.tech/safeguarding-europes-2024-elections-a-checklist-for-robust-enforcement-of-the-dsa/>