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TECHNOLOGIES FOR TRUST: INNOVATING FOR ELECTION INTEGRITY IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

CONCLUDING DOCUMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

Organized in cooperation with European Parliament's Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). Supported by the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

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Against the backdrop of intensifying digital interference and rising authoritarian influence, FURIC 2025 focused on measures to ensure transparency, accountability, and public trust in elections. Building on past recommendations, the conference set concrete priorities: enhancing collaboration among stakeholders, countering disinformation and foreign interference, and addressing emerging risks such as algorithmic manipulation and hybrid threats. With the EU positioning itself as a global standard-setter through frameworks such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act, the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising Regulation (TTPA), and the Democracy Shield, participants emphasized that implementation of these laws and policy initiatives must apply for global platforms and that the EU Commission should enhance implementation and enforcement of the laws as well as support independent oversight to protect elections from malign interference and disinformation.

Participants analyzed how AI-driven disinformation, digital authoritarianism, misuse of personal data, and opaque political advertising are affecting electoral processes. While these technologies pose significant risks, they also offer valuable opportunities to enhance transparency by enabling more effective monitoring and fostering broader, responsible access to information for citizen observers and oversight actors. Citizen and international observers should further strengthen their methodologies and tools to effectively assess these evolving dynamics. Strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions and the integrity of elections requires coordinated action by electoral authorities, regulators, observers, civil society, journalists, and technology companies, supported by independent oversight and robust legal frameworks.

KEY FINDINGS

1. PROMOTING AI LITERACY AND RULE-SETTING

AI-enabled disinformation is an evolving threat. Governance frameworks remain uneven, and large technology companies continue to shape public debate, highlighting the need for enforceable regulations and policies such as the EU's AI Act, DSA, and TTPA. Stronger systemic risk investigations by the EU Commission are essential to ensure consistent and credible enforcement of these frameworks across member states. Public confidence also depends on media literacy, independent media, transparent communication, and safeguards against foreign interference and opaque political advertising.

Key priorities to strengthen societal resilience against these trends include building AI literacy among election management bodies and observers, establishing rapid verification and reporting mechanisms, monitoring social media and political advertising, and strengthening partnerships with fact-checkers, researchers, and platforms. Combined with cross-border cooperation, systematic incident documentation, and clear rules for AI in campaigns, these measures will help democratic institutions respond effectively to AI-driven risks while leveraging technology to support transparency and trust in elections.

2. BUILDING RESILIENT ELECTORAL ECOSYSTEMS

International and inter-agency partnerships are essential for countering cross-border digital threats, but institutional independence must be preserved. Even when resources or formal mandates are limited, genuine commitment and collaboration often determine success.

> **Resilience requires collaboration across borders and sectors: electoral commissions, regulators, fact-checkers, civil society, and technology companies.**

Civil society plays a crucial accountability role but faces growing pressures, while government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) may distort civic engagement and weaken authentic oversight. Technology companies must engage early and transparently, particularly around political advertising, algorithms, and content moderation. Choosing credible partners and applying due diligence is key to legitimacy. EU-level legal initiatives are advancing digital resilience in elections, but implementation remains uneven, highlighting the importance of peer learning, harmonized practices, and structured collaboration across member and candidate states.

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3. IMPLEMENTING MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

Effective AI governance in elections requires coordination across global, regional, and national levels. At the global level, elections should be explicitly considered within technology governance discussions and framed within a human rights perspective. At the regional and national level, robust laws, regulations, and data governance frameworks must be established as a foundation for electoral cycles, supported by political will and technical enforceability.

National and regional election administrations, often resource-constrained, need technical support and stronger connections to global and regional governance discussions to ensure practical applicability and mutual feedback.

4. USE OF OSINT AND DISINFORMATION MONITORING

Open-source intelligence (OSINT) has become an essential tool for tracking electoral disinformation. Effective OSINT relies on prioritizing relevant data, defining key narratives, actors, and networks, and coordinating roles among international and citizen election observers, and analysts. Combining technological tools with local expertise, manual verification, and collaboration with journalists, civil society, and fact-checkers enhances reliability while maximizing limited resources.

Key challenges include funding constraints, language and regulatory barriers, restricted access to platform data, and the rapid pace at which disinformation spreads. Despite these obstacles, notable successes have emerged: new monitoring tools, strengthened partnerships with civil society organizations, and independent media outlets better equipped to counter false narratives. Strategic investment in long-term OSINT capacity, standardized reporting methodologies, and rapid-response mechanisms is critical to transforming citizen election monitoring into actionable insights.

5. PROTECTION OF DATA PRIVACY

Abuse of personal data continues to undermine electoral fairness. Political actors, campaigns, data brokers, election management bodies, and governments may exploit personal data, including through misuse of administrative resources or by utilizing non-transparent techniques like micro-targeting, geofencing, or psychometric profiling, creating an uneven playing field and eroding voter trust. Campaigns' and election administrators' use of personal data should be systematically analyzed, including protection protocols, targeting methods, and the integration of election technologies. Open, transparent, and privacy-compliant election data should be promoted, and collaboration with data protection authorities and civil society can help define ethical standards and limit manipulative practices.

Protecting citizens from covert data exploitation ensures that elections are decided by informed choice rather than hidden, manipulative targeting.

Data privacy should be reframed not just as an individual right but as a collective tool to safeguard electoral integrity.

Observers should focus on electoral integrity while distinguishing ethical campaigning from exploitative use of personal data. Expanding monitoring to include state resource abuse, carefully managing access to sensitive data, and reinforcing transparency without overburdening civil society are critical for maintaining trust and accountability in the digital electoral environment.

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6. TRANSPARENCY IN ONLINE POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Transparency in online political advertising remains one of the most urgent and complex challenges. Voters need to know who is influencing them, through which channels, and how much is being spent. Modern digital campaigns often obscure this information, using algorithms, AI, and platforms to microtarget voters and enable hidden actors — including third parties, influencers, and foreign entities. While the EU has established a robust regulatory framework, implementation challenges persist: limited access to platform data, capacity constraints, and insufficient specialized staff make oversight difficult. Decisions by Meta and Google to suspend political ads highlight the complexity of compliance, as advertising is often displaced rather than eliminated. Paid ads are only part of the picture; coordinated inauthentic behavior, off-platform payments, and AI-generated content create further vulnerabilities.

With smart technology, proactive oversight, and shared commitment, democratic societies can safeguard electoral integrity against evolving digital threats.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, evidence-driven approach. Minimum common guidelines for political finance regulations in online advertising should be developed, and monitoring should aim to build a comprehensive evidence base for advocacy. Regulators, election management bodies, platforms, observers, civil society, and journalists must act collectively, staying strategic rather than reactive. Observers play a vital role, but their effectiveness depends on strong laws, empowered regulators, and accountable platforms. With smart technology, proactive oversight, and shared commitment, democratic societies can safeguard electoral integrity against evolving digital threats.

7. COUNTERING DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

Authoritarian actors are increasingly using digital tools to restrict civic freedoms, suppress dissent, and undermine electoral participation well before elections. Civic actors are responding with innovation, leveraging digital platforms, secure communication, and peer-to-peer initiatives to mobilize participation, counter disinformation, and create safe spaces for engagement. Civil society organizations are increasingly being targeted and labelled as “foreign agents,” highlighting the urgent need to protect civic space and safeguard the role of independent watchdogs in defending electoral integrity. Trust, agency, and collective action are essential for resilience, while collaboration with international and regional partners can amplify efforts and provide protection for activists.

Strengthening electoral integrity in this context requires enabling easier, more inclusive voter registration, particularly for youth, promoting media literacy and digital resilience, and enabling secure, youth-led civic engagement. Simplified and transparent digital systems, combined with creative civic tech approaches, can reduce barriers, enhance participation, and help counter early-stage digital repression.

8. ADDED VALUE OF TECH-DRIVEN OBSERVATION AND INCLUSIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Technology can significantly enhance electoral transparency, citizen participation, and accountability through AI tools, open dashboards, and state- and citizen-driven platforms, while the use of standardized voter data helps reduce risks of manipulation and multiple voting. Digital tools can also lower barriers for youth, women, rural populations, and persons with disabilities, and youth-friendly platforms with accessible language help increase engagement. Increased citizen oversight further discourages malpractice.

However, these opportunities are constrained by persistent challenges, including the gender digital divide, the need for human verification of AI outputs, risks of digital silencing, widespread misinformation, limited political will to counter disinformation, insufficient content moderation by technology companies, and funding gaps for civic initiatives.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

TO GOVERNMENTS / ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES (EMBS)

1. Build AI literacy and strengthen integration across governance levels. Offer training for election administrators, regulators, and observers to identify AI-generated content, use AI responsibly, and apply standardized methods. In parallel, promote media literacy and critical thinking among voters.

2. Set up rapid response protocols. Develop clear systems to detect and counter AI-generated disinformation campaigns or suspicious content. Clearly define the roles of EMBs, observers, fact-checkers, and platforms to enable coordinated action.

3. Promote cross-border cooperation. Create regional frameworks for sharing information, documenting AI-related incidents, and coordinating responses to foreign interference and platform practices.

4. Monitor personal data exploitation. Expand oversight to cover misuse of personal data, profiling, and targeting. Apply data protection measures to strengthen transparency in electoral processes.

5. Regulate AI use in campaigns. Implement rules requiring transparency in AI-driven campaign tools, including mandatory labeling of ads and AI-generated content, disclosure of automated targeting practices, and an integrated approach to online political advertising.

TO EU INSTITUTIONS / EU MEMBER STATES

6. Encourage peer learning and the adoption of standardized and innovative methods for EMBs across EU member states, while safeguarding EMB independence and responding to practical operational needs. Establish feedback mechanisms between global, regional, and national actors to ensure technology governance standards reflect operational realities, while providing election administrators with guidance and technical support aligned with these frameworks.

7. Strengthen structured partnerships among citizen election observers, civic education programs, and election and tech experts. Facilitate collaboration among EMBs, fact-checkers, CSOs, and platforms to enhance accountability. At the same time, empower citizens to actively demand credible elections.

8. Invest in trust and credibility. Foster ongoing dialogue among regulators, political parties, platforms, and observers. This helps strengthen cooperation, address foreign interference strategies, and maintain the integrity of the electoral space throughout each cycle.

9. Recognize domestic election observers as human rights defenders. Ensure protection in contexts of shrinking democracy and provide inclusive access for youth, women, rural populations, and persons with disabilities.

TO DONORS / INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

10. Support youth-led digital civic engagement and innovation. Encourage secure online participation by promoting digital literacy, online safety, and cybersecurity, peer-to-peer education, and civic tech initiatives to enhance resilience against digital repression. Additionally, fund research and the development of tools that improve election monitoring and oversight.

11. Provide sustainable, long-term, and strategic core funding for relevant organizations and actors for capacity building, protection of election integrity, and cross-border collaboration. Offer resources for training programs, technological tools, and partnerships. These efforts could strengthen the combined ability of EMBs, civil society, and election observers to detect, prevent, and respond to electoral manipulation and disinformation.

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TO ELECTION MONITORING COMMUNITY / OBSERVERS

12. Further improve election observation methodologies. Consider introducing new tools, such as software to track and analyze election data, mobile apps for reporting irregularities in real time, and dashboards that visualize election campaign trends and foster collaborations with international experts and tech companies to strengthen monitoring, reporting, and the overall effectiveness of election observation.

TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND COMPANIES

13. Enhance transparency and accountability. Adhere to the relevant EU legislation and policies such as the DSA, the AI Act, and the TTPA. Collaborate with EMBs, fact-checkers, election observers, and regulators to provide clear labeling of AI-generated content, share advertising data, and support rapid-response mechanisms for disinformation, particularly during election periods.

14. Improve access to political advertising data. Require online platforms to provide timely, detailed, and standardized data on political advertising, including targeting, funding sources, and reach.

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More information about FURIC 2025 and further resources:

https://epde.org/furic/

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