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# INTRODUCTION

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Between 9 November 2020 and 9 January 2021, MEMO 98, a Slovak non-profit specialist media-monitoring organization, monitored social media in the run-up to the 10 January parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan. The monitoring included 48 different actors (political parties, politicians, media, and authorities) with accounts on Facebook and Instagram who produced a total of 29,342 posts on Facebook and 12,287 on Instagram. The posts generated as many 1,345,710 interactions on Facebook and 11,067,258 on Instagram.

The main purpose of the monitoring was to determine the impact of social media on electoral integrity and the extent to which social media provide important information that voters need in their decision making.[1] While in general, for most people, television remains to be the primary source of information about politics, the growing relevance of social media inspired us to focus on Facebook and Instagram in our monitoring.[2] Such monitoring of social media was done for the first time in the context of the Kazakh elections.

The monitoring also focused on how selected media report on candidates in their Facebook accounts and what topics and issues are discussed by political parties and selected media in the context of elections. As for the actual social media sample, we focused on official pages of political parties, individual politicians, media, and authorities on Facebook and Instagram.

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1) 2020 World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders ranks Kazakhstan as 157 (out of 180 countries), assessed as a country with 'very serious situation' (which is the worst category).

2) According to the Digital 2020, a research conducted annually by We Are Social and Hootsuite, there is 51 per cent of social media users in the country.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Almost 80 per cent of Kazakh citizens have access to the internet, and every second Kazakh is a social media user.

The interaction rate on Instagram was remarkably high, in particular in the case of media (9,055,532). Instagram posts saw more than 8 times as many interactions as Facebook's posts. From 9 November 2020 till 9 January 2021, monitored actors - political parties, politicians, media, and authorities - generated 29,342 posts on Facebook and 12,287 on Instagram. Almost 95 per cent of these posts on Facebook and some 87 per cent on Instagram were generated by media.

All six parties allowed to register for the elections had public accounts on Facebook and all but one on Instagram. It should be mentioned that none of the five contesting parties represented a real opposition to the ruling Nur-Otan party as they all claimed to have supported the reform agenda of the incumbent president who is linked with the ruling party. The most active party on Facebook was the ADAL party (with 307 posts), followed by Nur-Otan (with 275 posts), and Auyt People's Democratic Patriotic Party (255 posts). Nationwide Social Democratic Party decided to boycott the elections and generated only 15 posts.

The posts of the People's Party of Kazakhstan on Facebook attracted the highest number of interactions (53,026) to its 170 posts, followed by Auyt People's Democratic Patriotic Party (45,281) and the ADAL party (24,801).

While residing in France where he received political asylum, the fugitive former head of Kazakhstan's BTA Bank and an opposition politician Mukhtar Ablyazov is the most popular Kazakh politician on Instagram where he received 799,732 interactions (mostly likes) in connection with his 301 posts. Only the second most popular politician was the incumbent president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (449,406 interactions) who however generated only 5 posts. The second most active politician was another opposition-minded politician Mamay Zhanbolat and the leader of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan with 136 posts who generated 293,062 interactions.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The most active party on Instagram was the ruling Nur-Otan Party with 271 posts, followed by Auyt People's Democratic Patriotic Party with 194 posts and the People's Party of Kazakhstan with 72. The boycotting Nationwide Social Democratic Party produced only 6 posts.

When it comes to popularity on Instagram, Nur-Otan received 83,363 interactions, followed by Democratic Party Ak Zhol (with 30,489 interactions) and Auyt People's Democratic Patriotic Party (with 19,683 interactions).

The monitoring focused on 26 official pages and accounts of traditional media, with 25 of them having a presence on both platforms. On Facebook, the online publication Kazinform was the most active (4,973 posts), followed by Express (2,501 posts) and Nur.kz (2,037 posts). On Instagram, the official account of Express was the most prolific (2,363 posts), followed by Channel One Eurasia TV (1,739 posts) and Qazaqstan TV (1,475 posts). The most popular media on Facebook was the state-funded Qazaqstan TV with 330,307 interactions, followed by Radio Azattyq (199,362), whereas on Instagram it was Tenginews.kz with 4,129,568 interactions, followed by Qazaqstan TV with 1,111,499 interactions.

Two most important official Kazakh institutions - the president and the parliament - were also active on social platforms; the press service of the presidential administration Akorda generated 96 posts (with 14,186 interactions) on Facebook and 59 on Instagram (53,703 interactions), whereas Majilis (the lower chamber of parliament) only 11 posts on Facebook (1,657 interactions). On the other side, the Senate (the upper chamber) was highly visible with 94 posts on Facebook and 165 posts on Instagram.

While the elections took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, this topic was not mentioned prominently by the monitored political parties on Facebook. Instead, they mainly focused on elections and social issues.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Interestingly, Qazaqstan and Khabar, both state-funded TVs, acted as if there were no elections in the country, both putting most of their attention to the culture which was the most covered topic. More specifically, they focused on cultural events in connection with public holidays and anniversaries, such as the Day of the First President (1 December), Independence Day (16 December), and New Year's Eve. The Russian-funded Sputnik Kazakhstan adopted a similar approach by focusing more on these cultural events than elections which was only the sixth most mentioned topic.

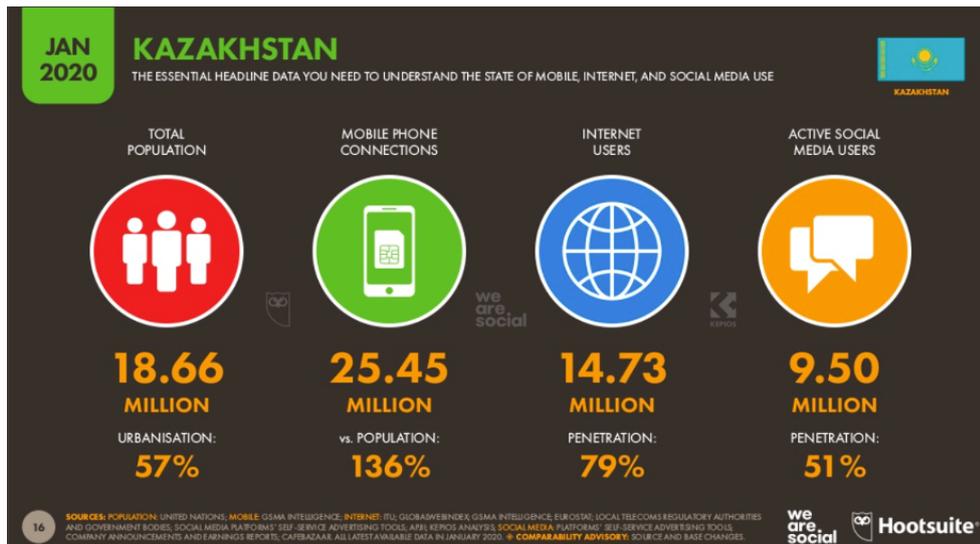
When it comes to the coverage of political parties and politicians, Radio Azattyq demonstrated independent editorial policy by providing critical coverage to the authorities, including former president Nazarbayev, ruling Nur-Otan under his de facto control as well as the incumbent president Tokaev. By contrast, Qazaqstan, Khabar, and Sputnik provided mainly neutral or positive coverage to registered political parties and the former president Nazarbayev.

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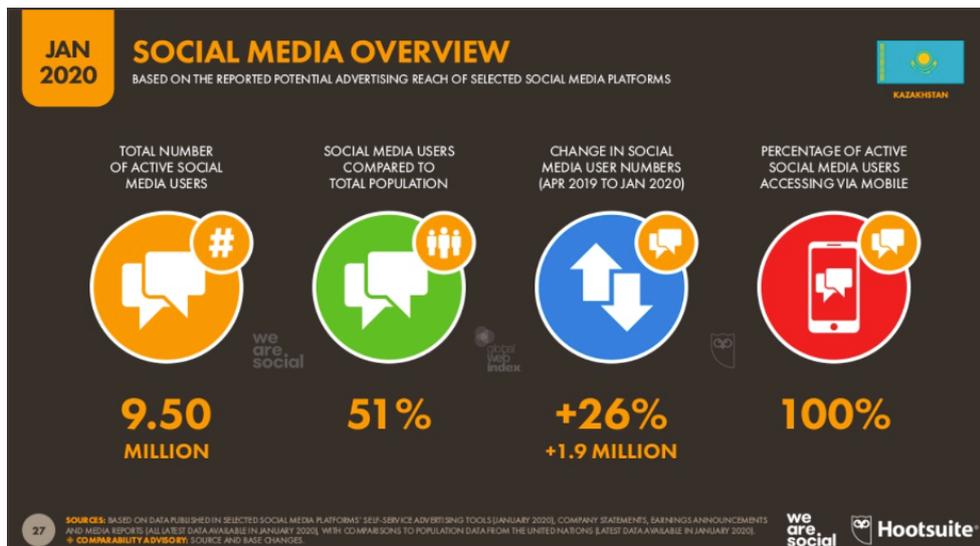
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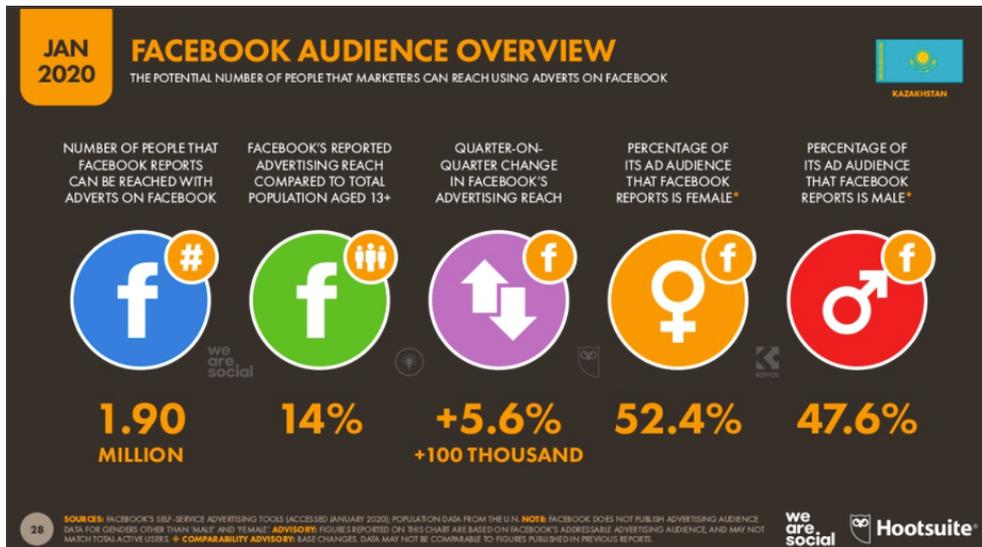
# SOCIAL MEDIA IN KAZAKHSTAN



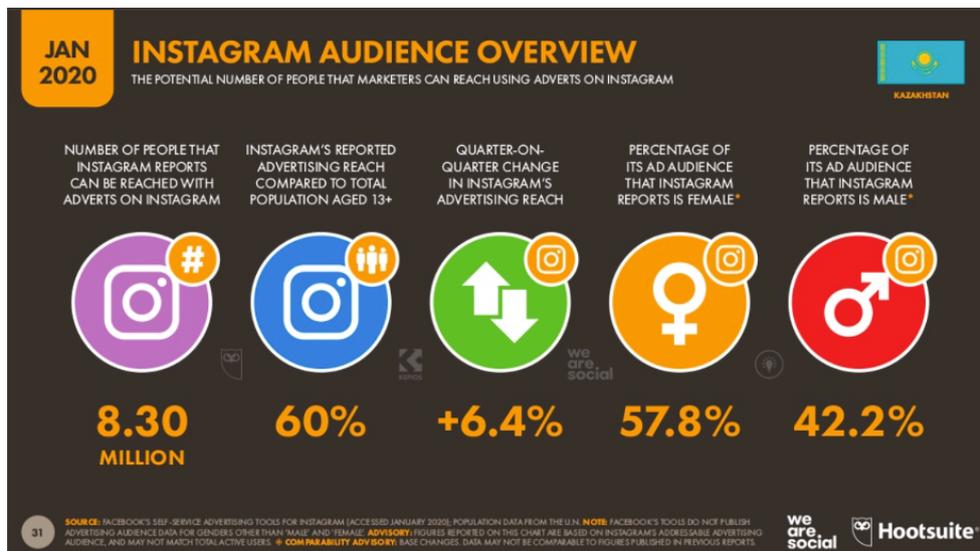
According to a Digital media report published by DataReportal, there were 14.73 million internet users in Kazakhstan in January 2020 with a total population of 18.66 million (79 per cent penetration). The number of internet users increased by 637 thousand (+4.5 per cent) between 2019 and 2020.



According to the same report, there were active 9.50 million (51 per cent) social media users in Kazakhstan in January 2020. The number of social media users in Kazakhstan increased by 1.9 million (+26 per cent) between April 2019 and January 2020.



Instagram is the most popular social media platform in the country followed by Facebook. The number of people that can be reached with adverts on Facebook is 1.90 million (according to Facebook).



The number of people that can be reached with adverts on Instagram is 8.30 million (according to Instagram). Unlike in Kyrgyzstan (where elections were also held on 10 January) where Facebook made Ad Library available in August 2020, Kazakhstan still has to wait until it is added to the list of countries where this service is available.

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## BACKGROUND

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In 2016, the Ministry of Information and Communication adopted new rules for the monitoring of media, including social media, using the planned Automated System of Monitoring the National Information Space to uncover illegal content online. The automated system – in development since 2017 – had been expected to be in use by the end of 2019. It is unclear if the system, which reportedly cost \$4.5 million, has been introduced. The authorities have continued to conduct manual monitoring.

In 2019, the government rolled out its national security certificate, a machine-in-the-middle (MITM) technology, which would enable it to monitor users' online activities. International providers, including Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Mozilla, united to block the "root" certificate on their browsers. Facing domestic and international outcry, President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev halted the certificate's rollout after a few weeks, but its basis in legislation remained untouched, which means that it can be reintroduced at any time.

On 21 October 2020, president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who was elected in 2019, issued a decree calling for elections to Majilis (the lower chamber of parliament) to take place on 10 January 2021. The lower chamber of parliament consists of 107 deputies out of which 98 deputies are elected in a nationwide constituency on the basis of proportional representation for a five-year term (the remaining 9 members of the Majilis are elected by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, an advisory body formed by the president and representing the various ethnic groups of the country).

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# BACKGROUND

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There are currently only six registered political parties in Kazakhstan and only these parties are entitled to nominate candidates for the elections.[3]Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) was a political movement banned in 2018 when it was declared by a court to be an 'extremist' organization. The leader of this party is Mukhtar Ablyazov, the fugitive former head of Kazakhstan's BTA Bank and an opposition politician. In early 2020, there was an attempt to have a founding congress of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan led by Zhanbolat Mamai, who was detained along with a number of activists. Similarly, the Koshe Party, which, according to a court had links to DCK, was banned in 2020.[4]Nationwide Social Democratic Party (NSDP) on 27 November decided to boycott the elections, leaving a pool of 312 candidates nominated by the five remaining parties to compete in the polls.[5]

The elections took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures, including special sanitary protective measures for election day. The election campaign commenced on 10 December and ran until 8 January (with a campaign silence on 9 January as well as on election day). The topics discussed during the campaign included social policies, healthcare system, support to businesses, as well as anti-corruption efforts. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, parties had to shift some of their campaign activities to the Internet and social media. There are no special rules for online campaigning and Facebook has not yet included Kazakhstan on the list of countries where the Ad Library has been made available. When it comes to campaign finance, political parties could fund their campaigns from their own resources and from private donations. Foreign and anonymous donations, as well as contributions from state sources, were prohibited.

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3) This is due to administrative obstacles on the side of the Ministry of Justice which requires a number of documents and very detailed data on at least 1,000 members of the initiative groups and to have 40,000 members for the party to be founded. There have been at least two attempts to create new political parties since 2013, both of which failed.

4) <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/6/475538.pdf>

5) The decision to boycott the elections was done after Mukhtar Ablyazov from exile called on his supporters to vote for the NSDP.



## CHARTS

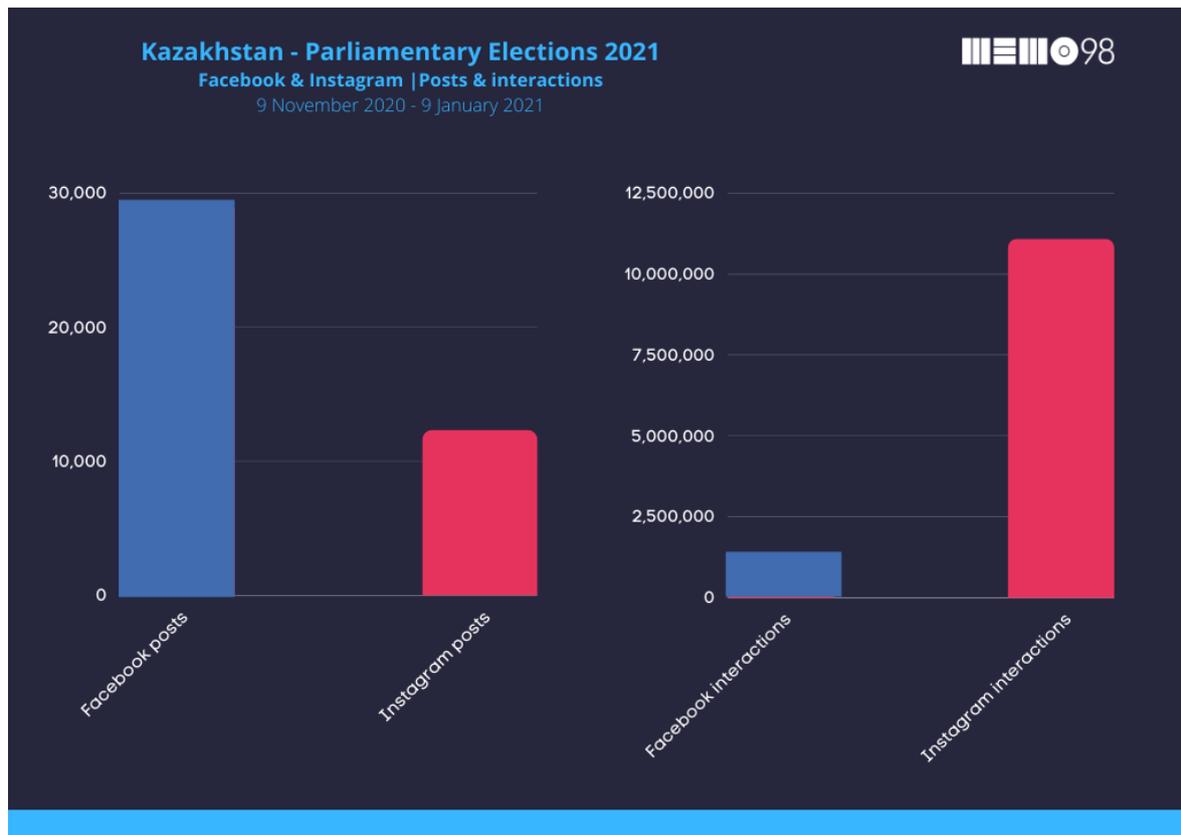


Chart 1

# FACEBOOK

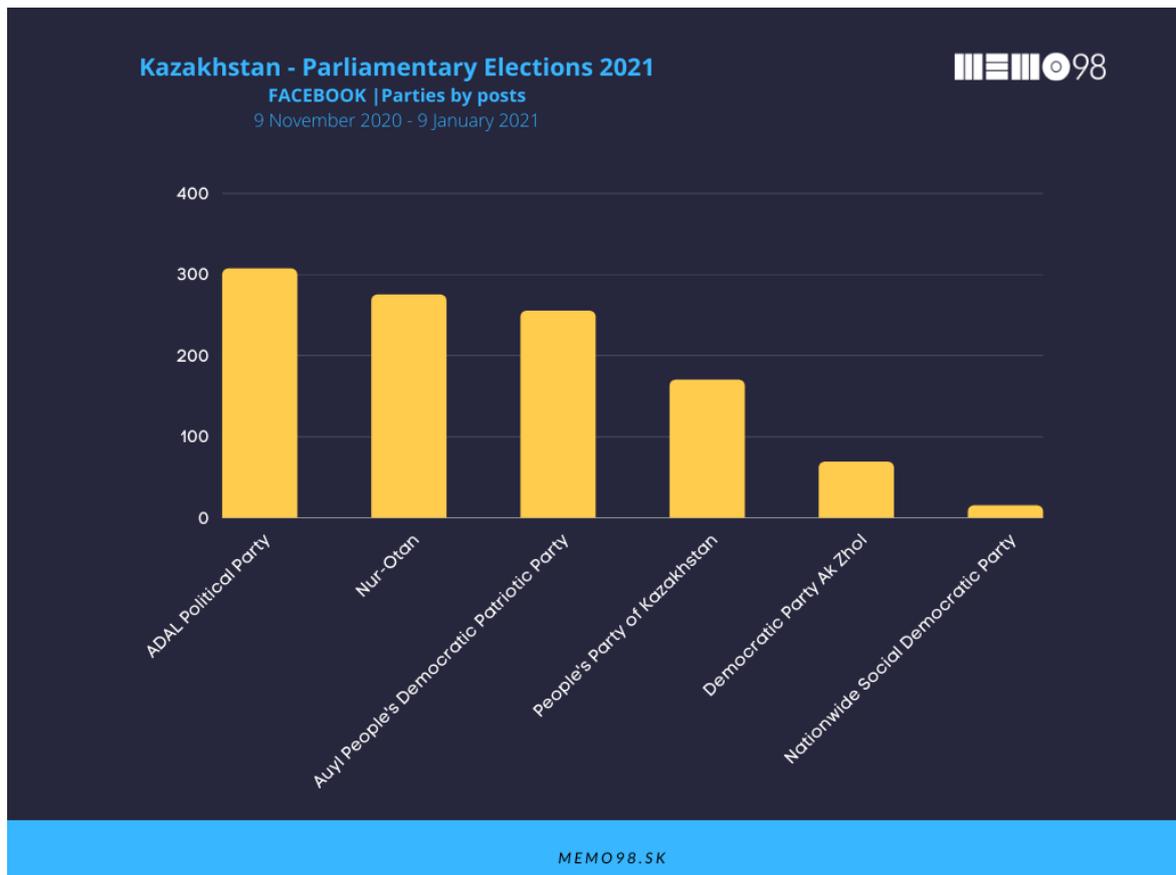


Chart 2

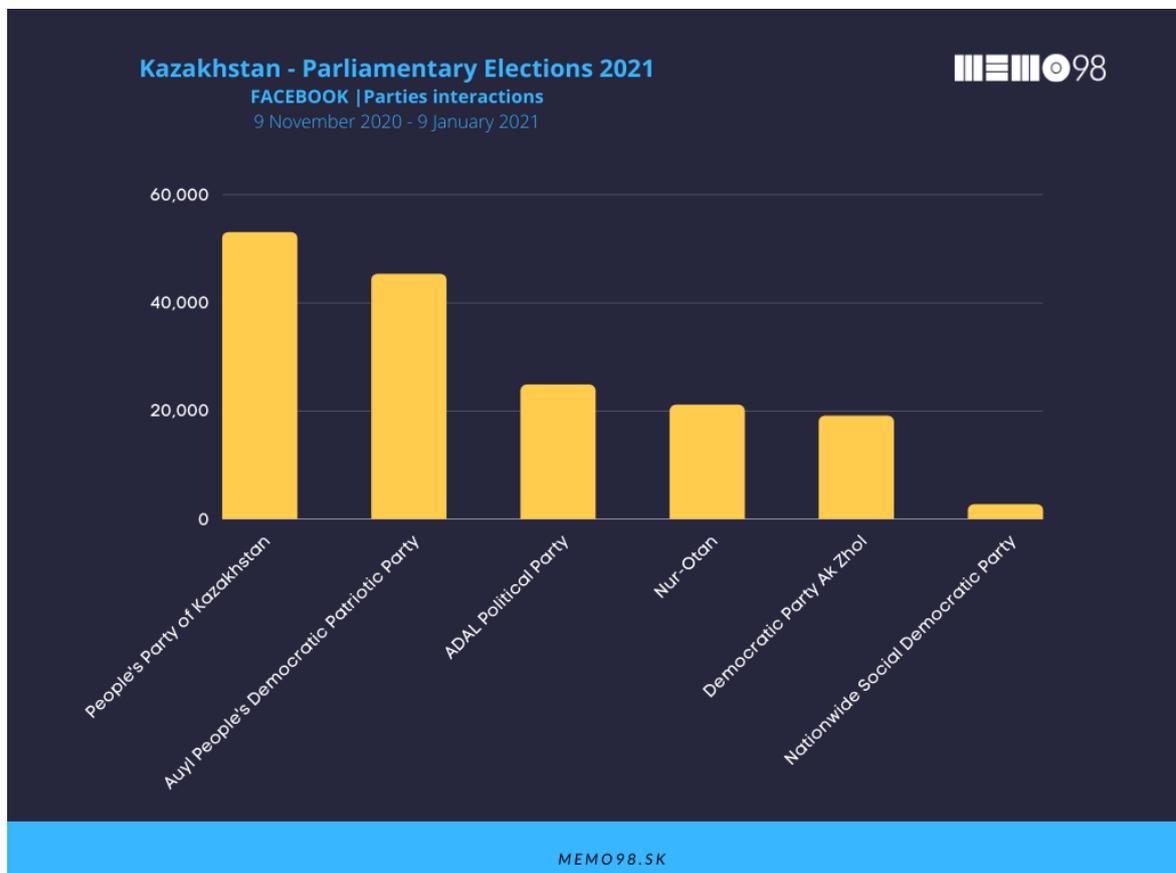


Chart 3

# FACEBOOK

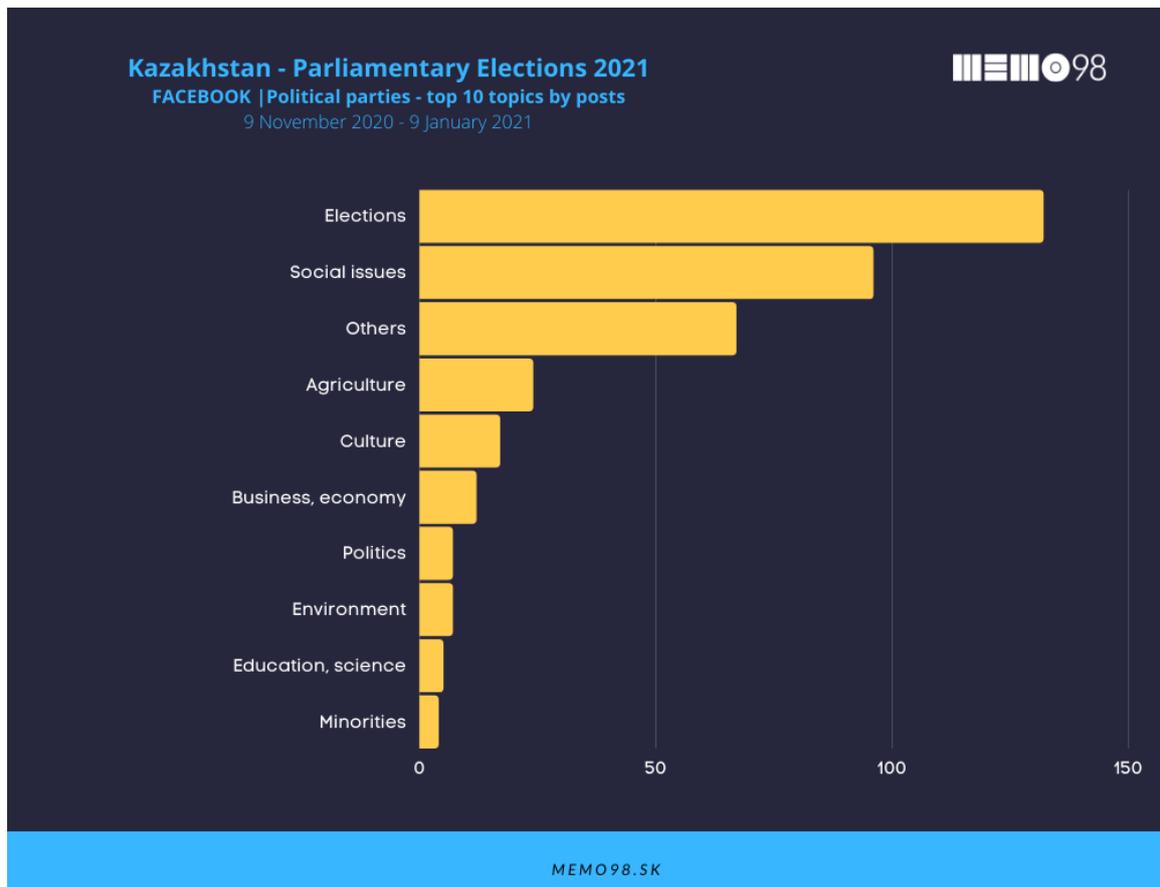


Chart 4

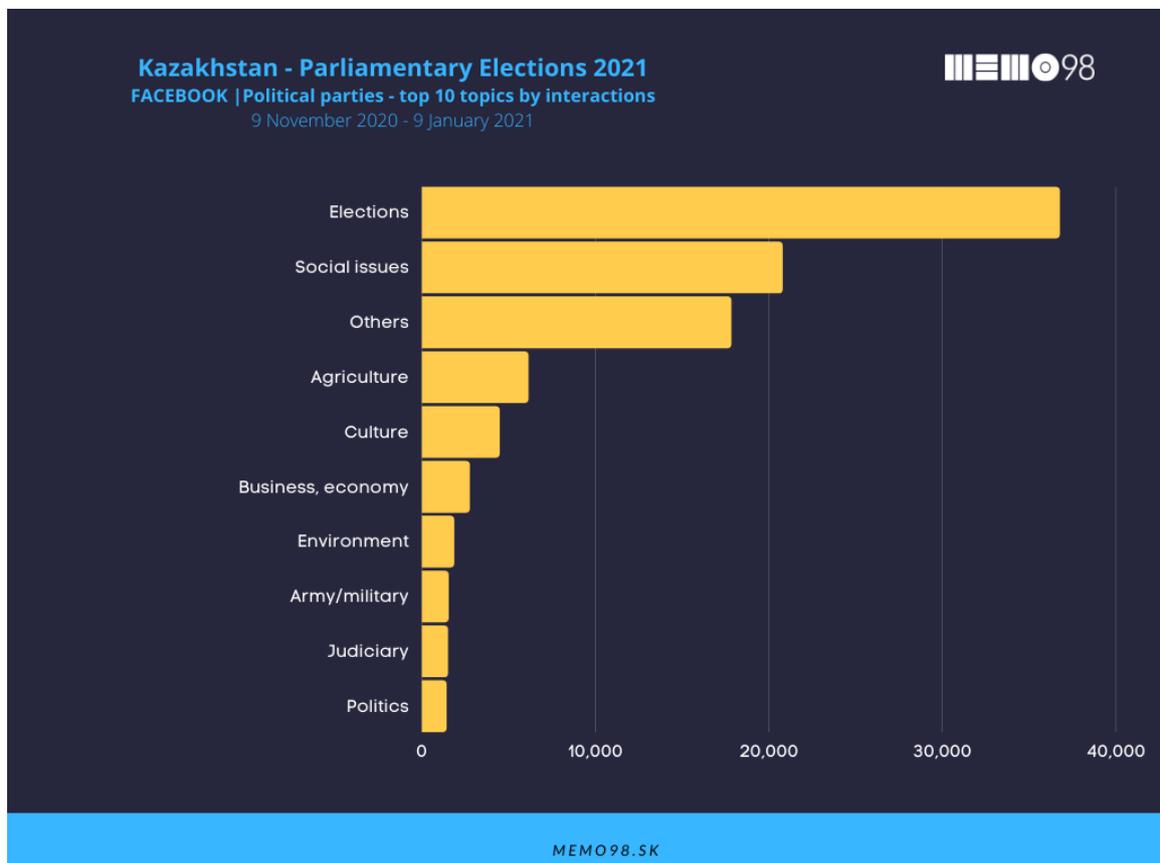


Chart 5

# FACEBOOK

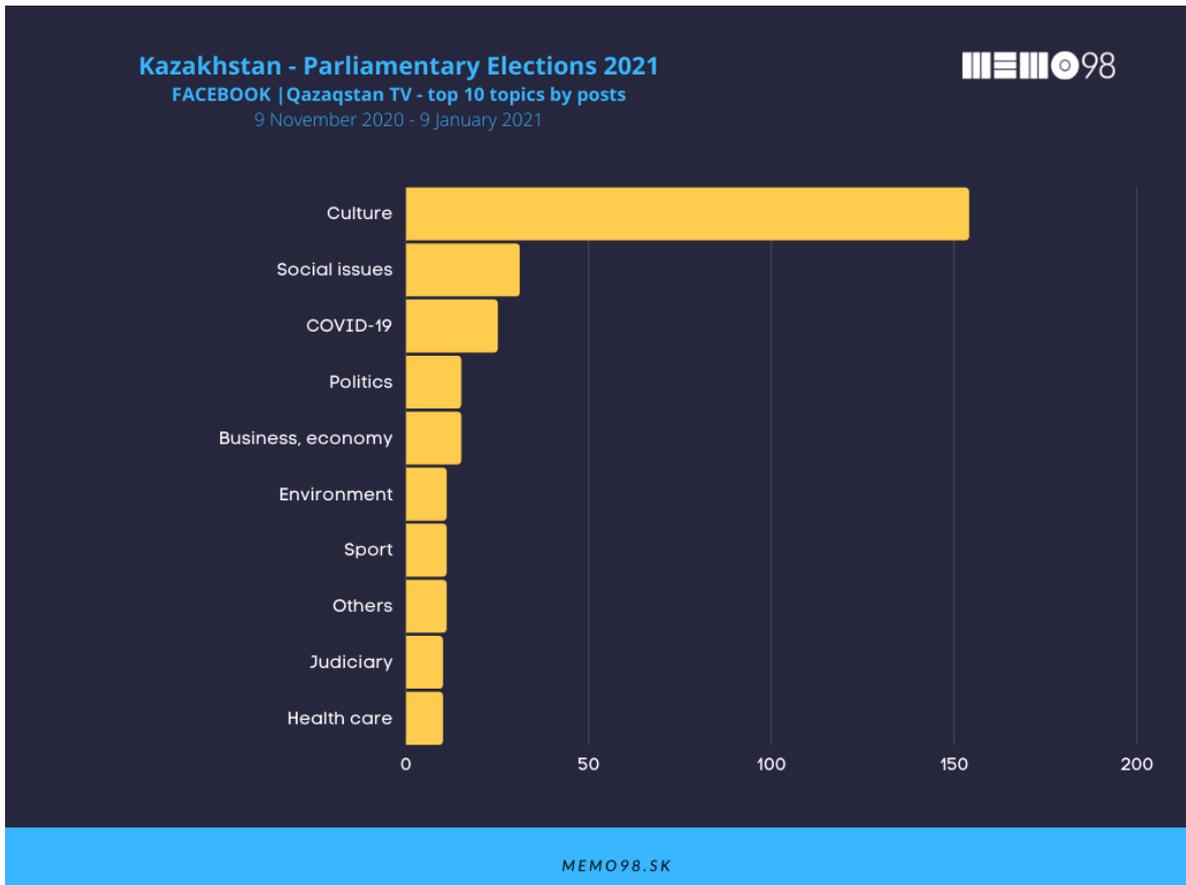


Chart 6

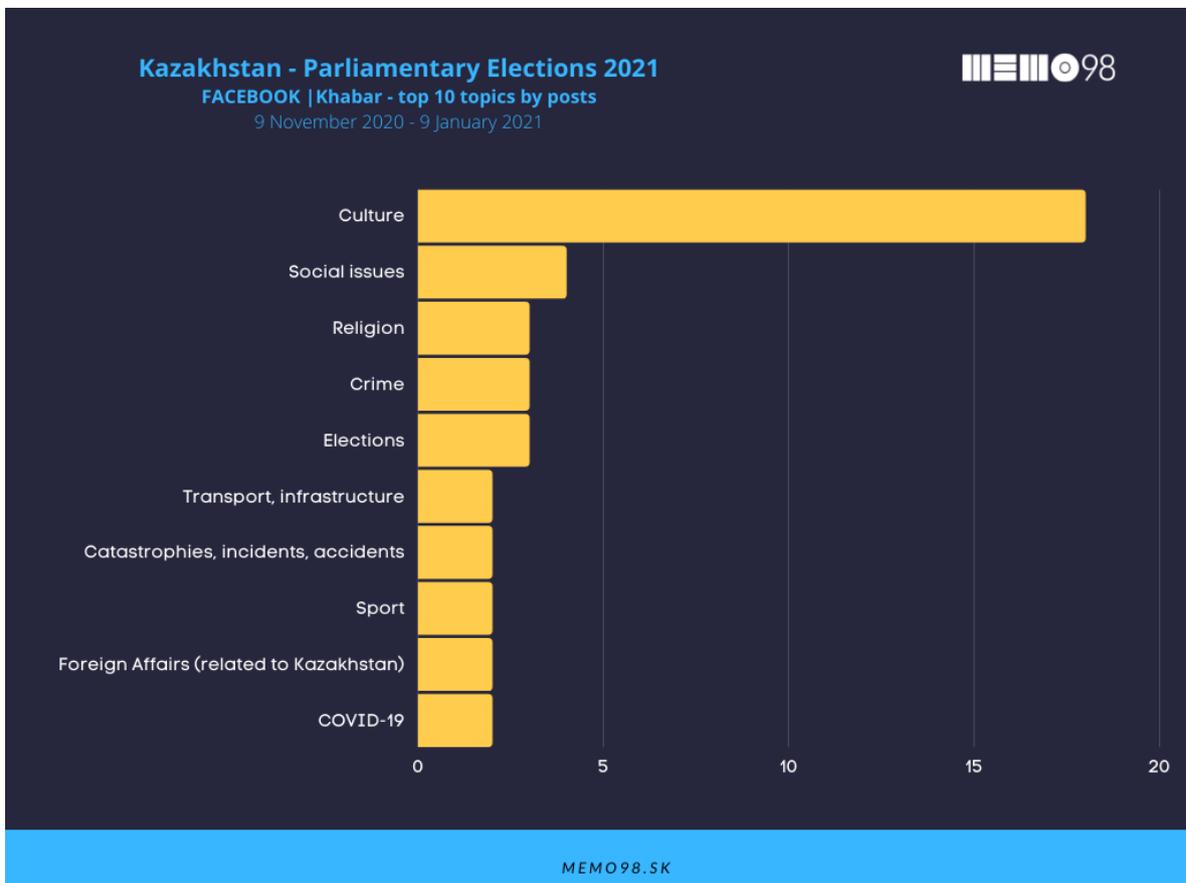


Chart 7

# FACEBOOK

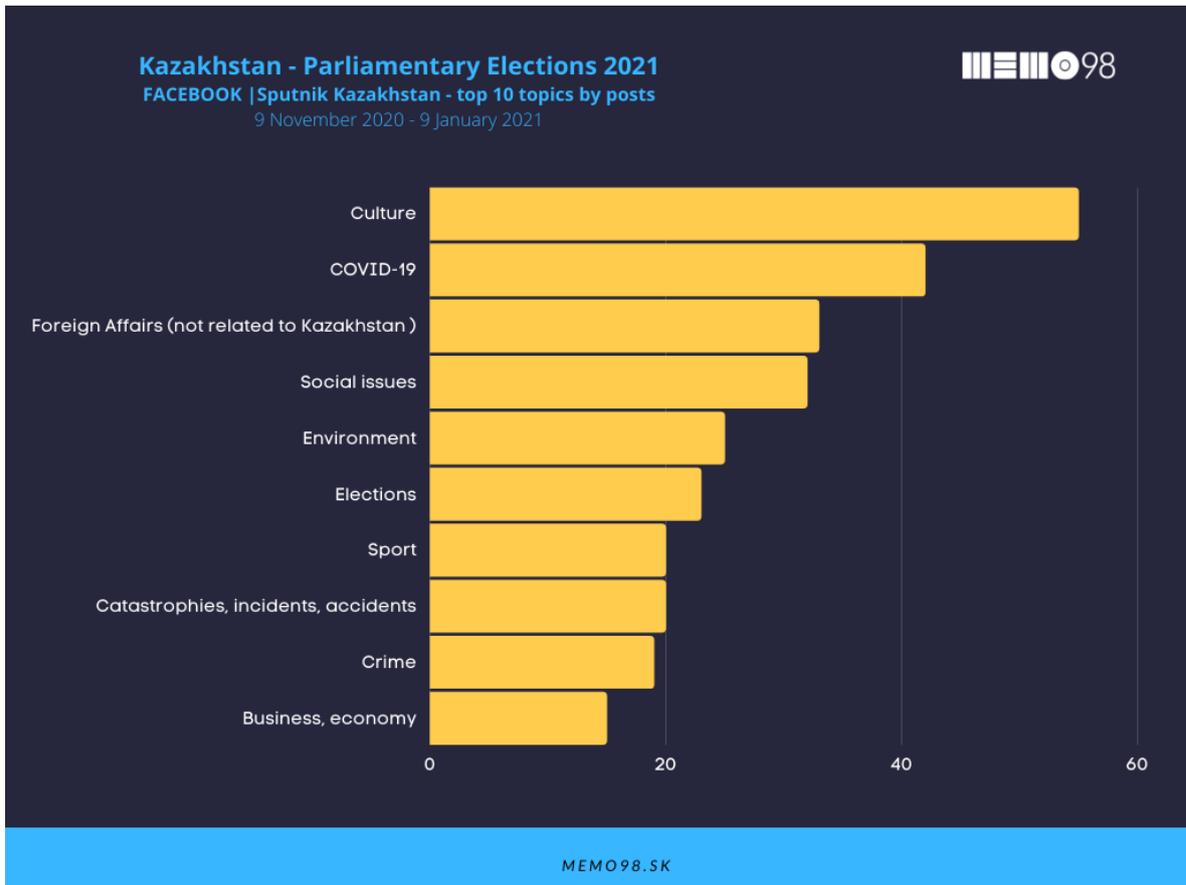


Chart 8

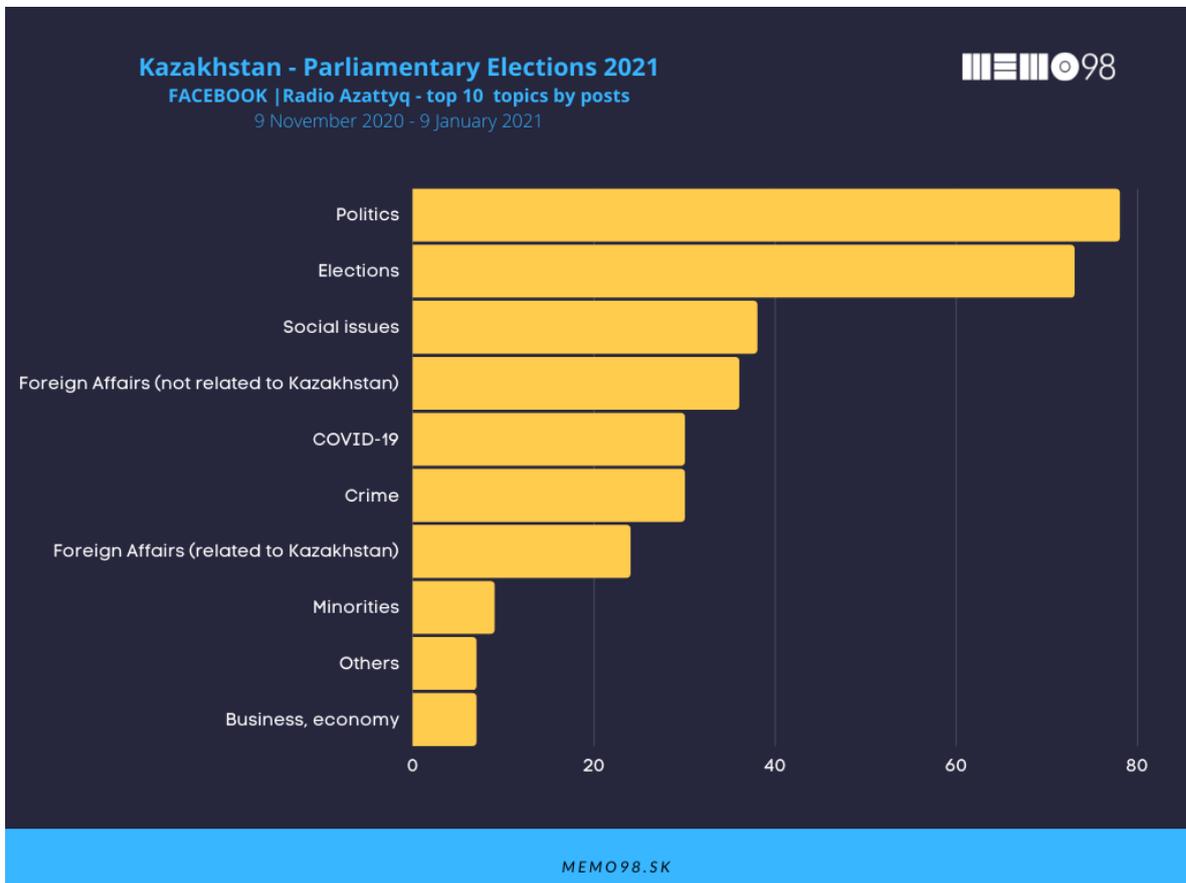


Chart 9

# FACEBOOK

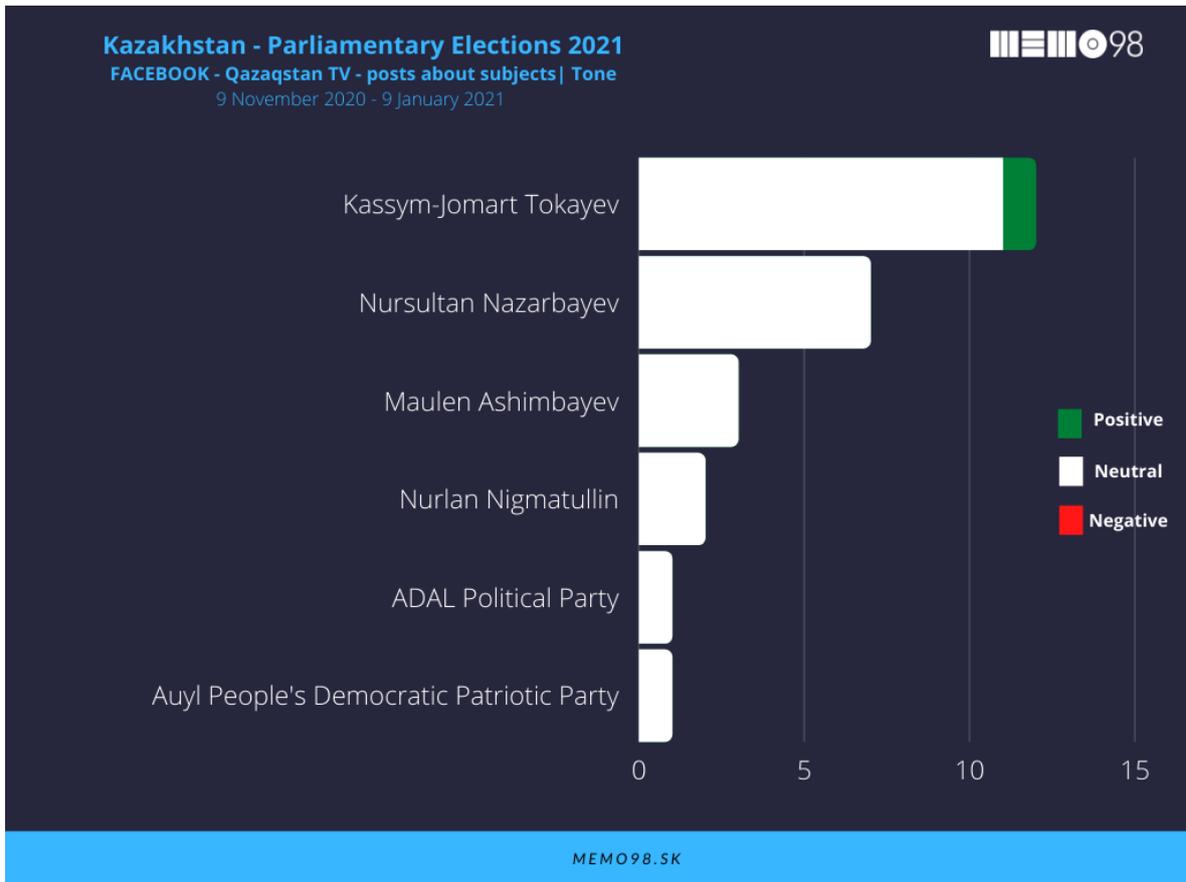


Chart 10

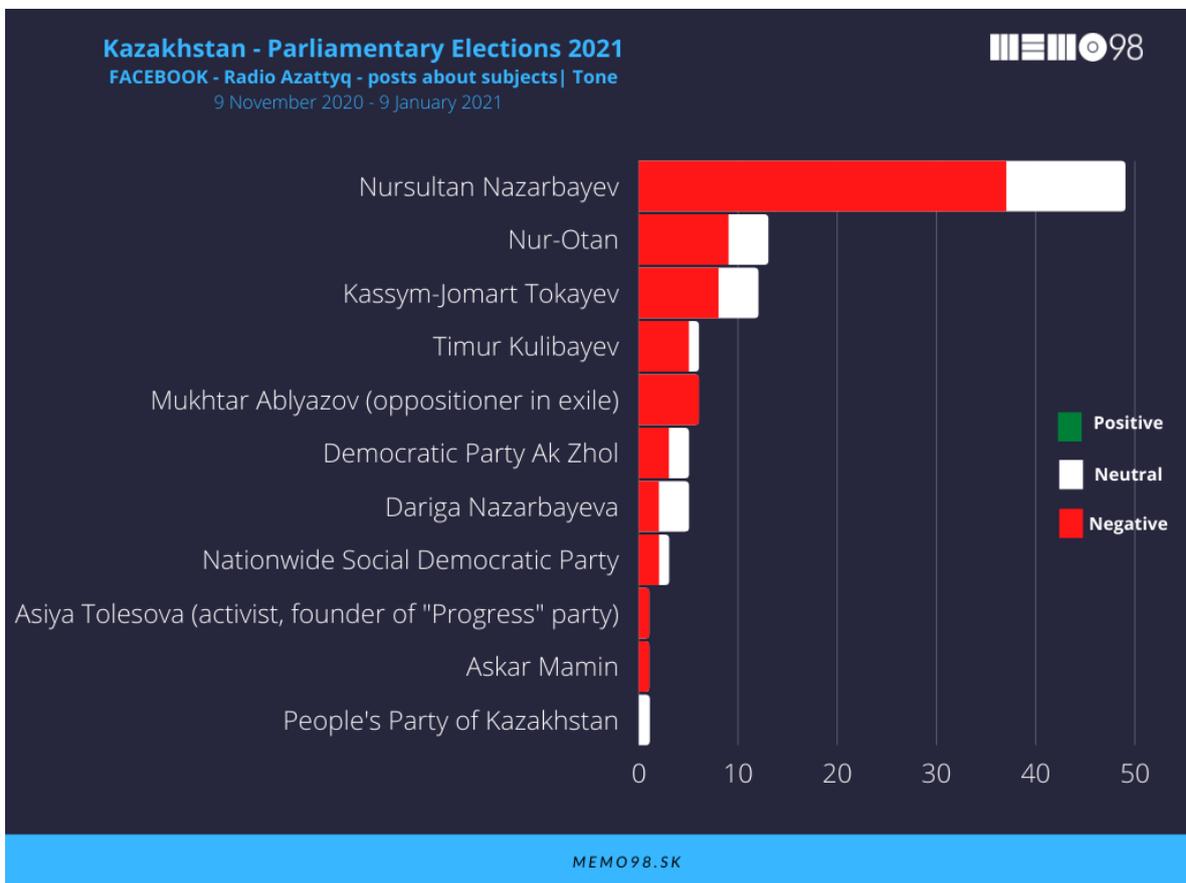


Chart 11

# INSTAGRAM

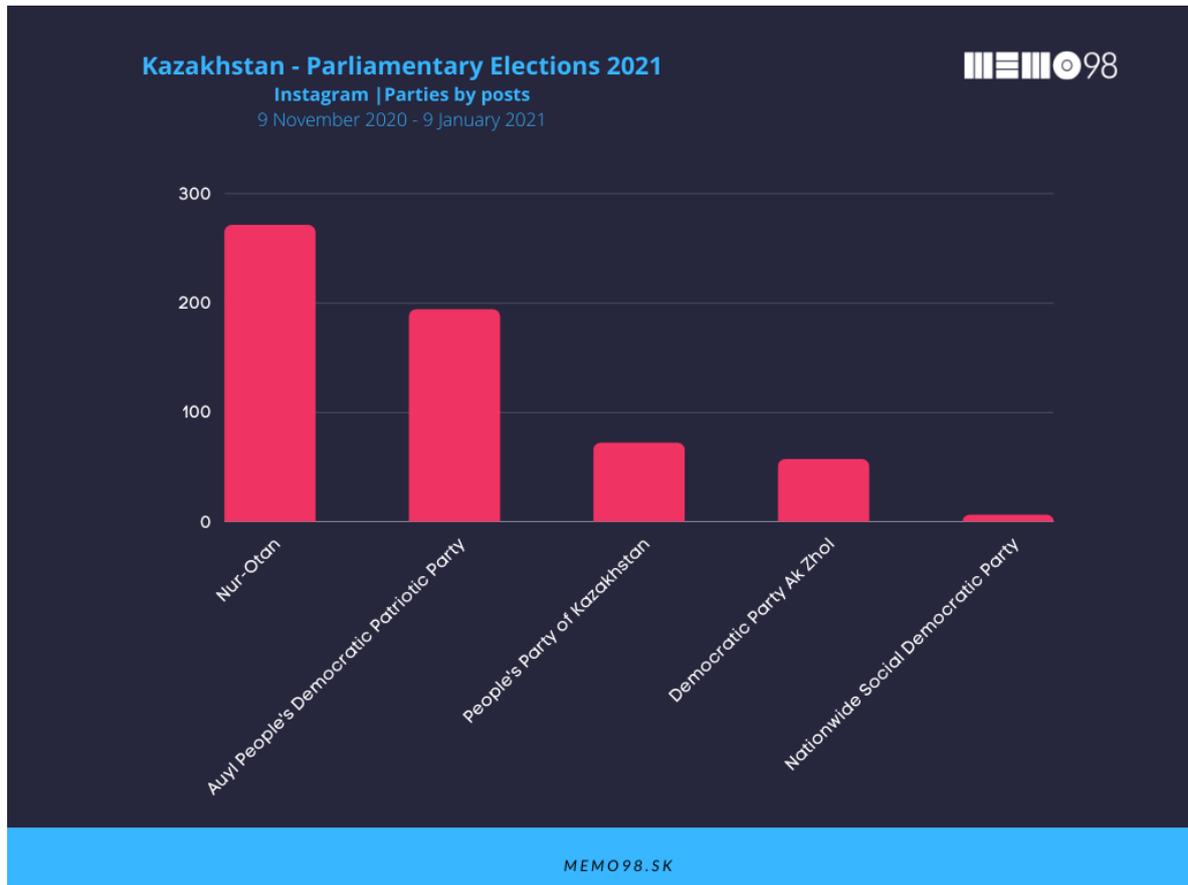


Chart 12

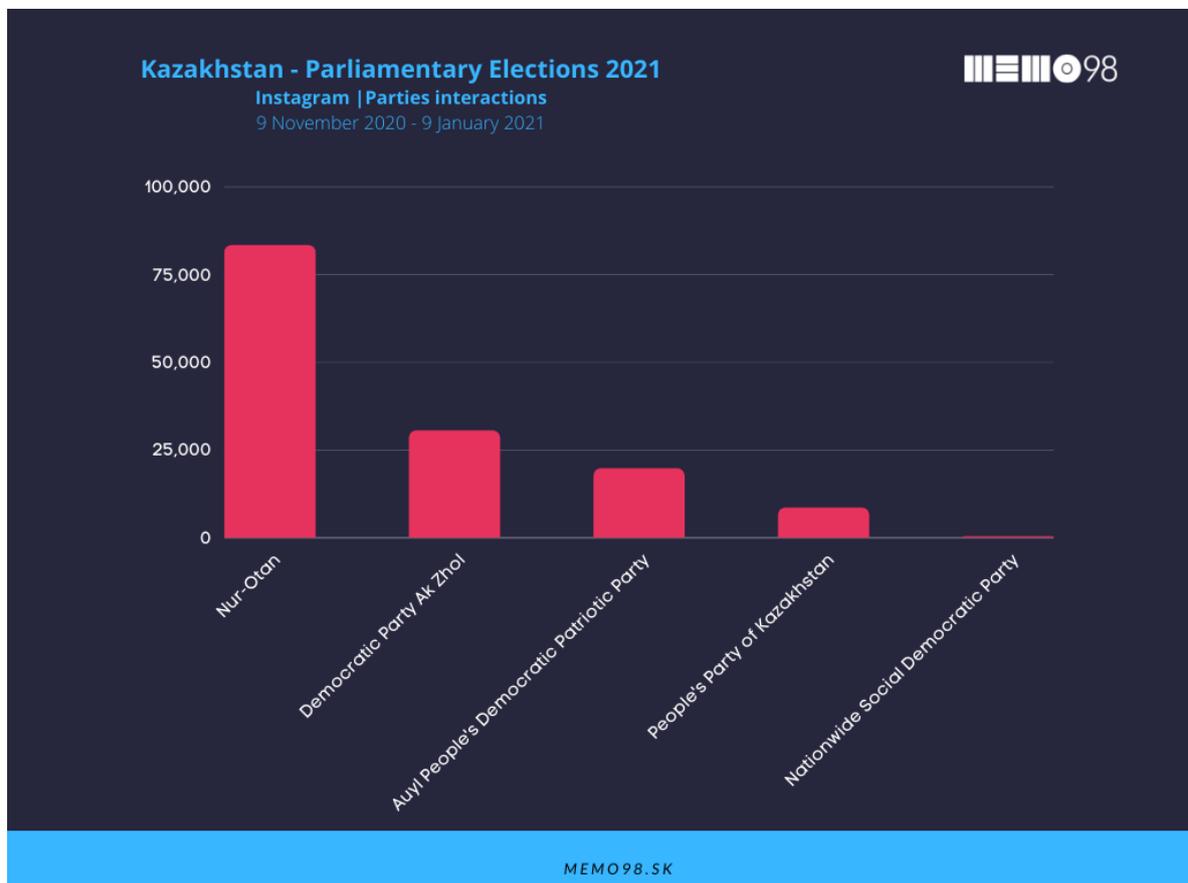


Chart 13

# INSTAGRAM

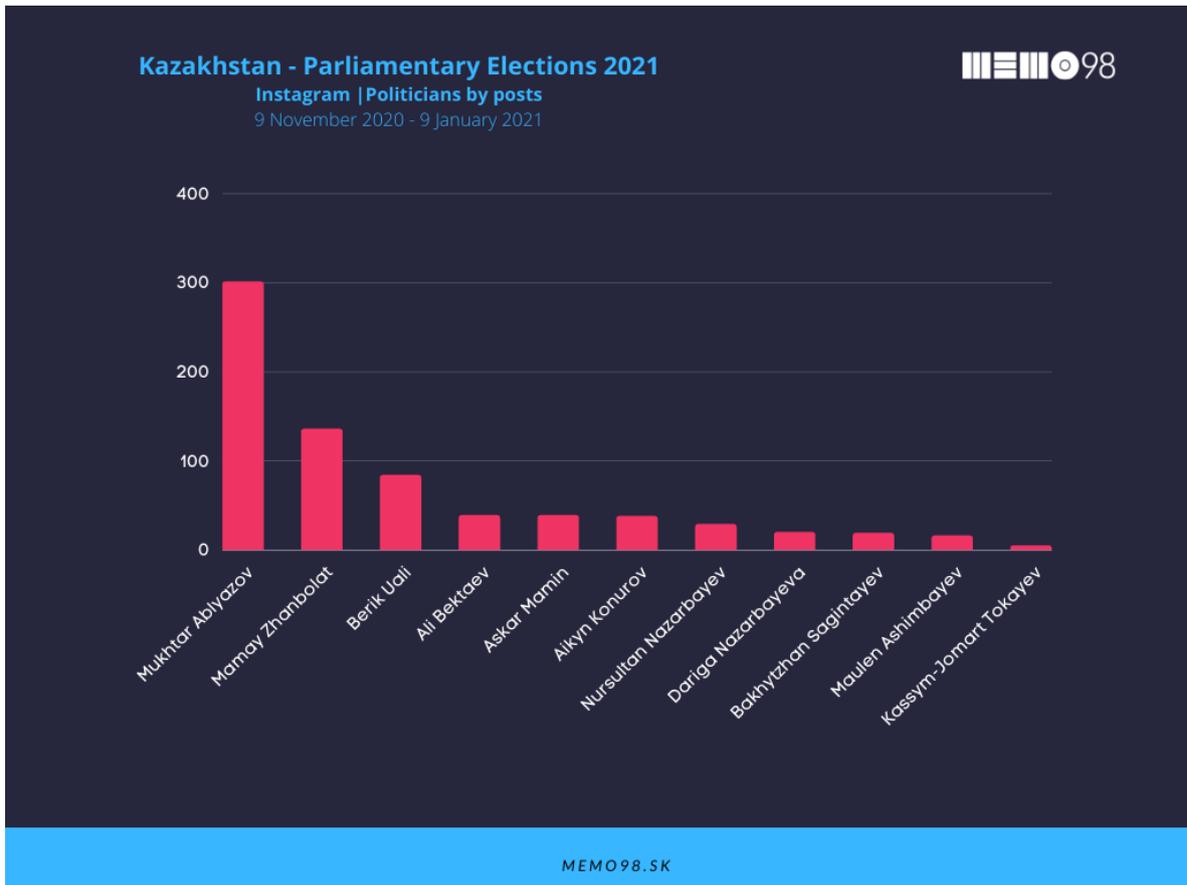


Chart 14

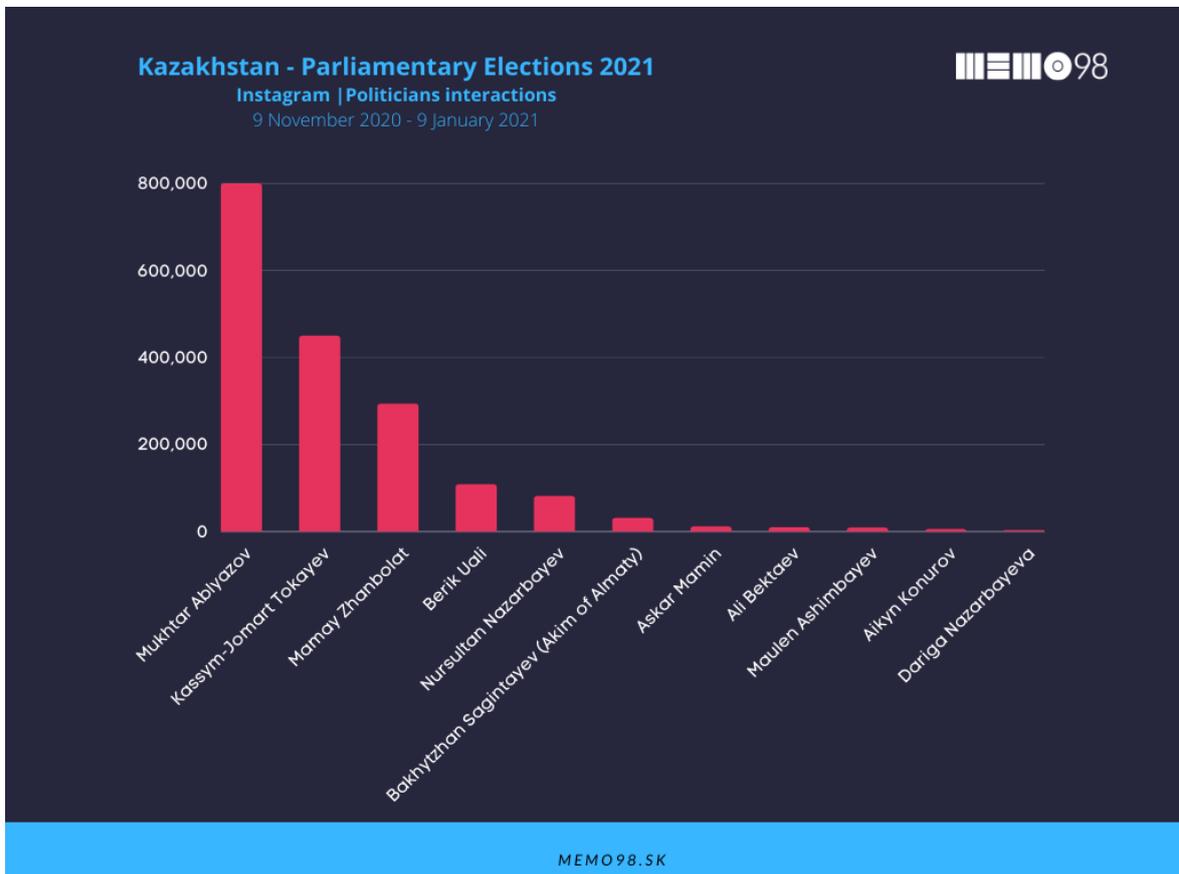


Chart 15

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# METHODOLOGY

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The applied methodology consists of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the selected media content.

The quantitative analysis focuses on the number of posts generated by political actors (parties as well as politicians, with the assistance of CrowdTangle<sup>[1]</sup>, CT) or other monitored entities and the tone of the coverage in which they pursue selected stories and issues. In case they promote them, we track it as positive; in case they criticize them, we track it as negative. In case they only introduce these issues or stories without stating their positions, we track it as neutral. The monitoring also focused on the thematic structure of the posts. These results can be found in Charts 4-11. We used CT to export the metadata which was further analyzed by a human coder. The data in these charts represent a sample of the posts retrieved by CT in the period from 9 November 2020 till 9 January 2021. A social media post served as a reference and monitoring unit. As such, in order to preserve the total amount of posts, in instances with various topics or issues contained in one post, these posts were divided by a number of topics or issues.

## List of monitored parameters

Political parties (6)	Presence at the platform
Nur-Otan	FB, INST
Democratic Party Ak Zhol	FB, INST
ADAL Political Party	FB
People's Party of Kazakhstan	FB, INST
Auyl People's Democratic Patriotic Party	FB, INST
Nationwide Social Democratic Party	FB, INST

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<sup>6</sup>CrowdTangle (a social media analytics tool owned by Facebook) "tracks public posts on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, made by public accounts or groups. The tool does not track every public account and does not track private profiles or groups, so this data is not representative of performance across the entire platform. The numbers shown here reflect public interactions (likes, reactions, comments, shares, upvotes and three second views), but do not include reach or referral traffic. It does not include paid ads unless those ads began as organic, non-paid posts that were subsequently "boosted" using Facebook's advertising tools. Because the system doesn't distinguish this type of paid content, note that some high-performing content may have had paid distribution. CrowdTangle also does not track posts made visible only to specific groups of followers."

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# METHODOLOGY

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## Politicians (13)

Nursultan Nazarbayev (former president)	FB (2), INST
Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (incumbent president)	FB, INST
Askar Mamin (Prime Minister)	FB, INST
Maulen Ashimbayev (speaker of the senate, the upper house of Parliament)	INST
Bakhytzhan Sagintayev (Akim of Almaty)	FB, INST
Dariga Nazarbayeva	INST
Baurzhan Baibek (First Deputy of the Nur-Otan Party Leader)	FB
Berik Uali President's Spokesperson	FB, INST
Aikyn Konurov – People's Party of Kazakhstan leader	INST
Äli Bektaev – Auyt Party leader	INST
Daniya Yespayeva – Ak Zhol deputy party leader	INST
Zhanbolat Mamai (opposition; founder of Democratic Party of Kazakhstan)	INST
Mukhtar Ablyazov (opposition in exile)	INST

## Media (26)

Radio Azattyq	FB, INST
Sputnik	FB, INST
Kazakhstan	FB, INST
Qazaqstan TV	FB, INST
Khabar	FB, INST
Nur.Kz	FB
Tengrinews.kz	FB, INST
Kazinform	FB, INST
Zakon.kz	FB, INST
Kazpravda.kz	FB, INST
365info.kz	FB, INST
Steppe	FB, INST
YVision	FB, INST
Informburo	FB, INST
Khabar24	FB, INST
KazakhTV	FB, INST

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# METHODOLOGY

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El Arna (TV)	FB, INST
Vlast.kz	FB, INST
Caravan	FB, INST
Time.kz	FB, INST
KTK (TV)	FB, INST
Liter.kz	FB, INST
Express	FB, INST
31Channel (TV)	FB, INST
Channel One	FB, INST
Eurasia (TV)	FB, INST
Egemen Kazakhstan	FB, INST
Factcheck.kz	FB, INST
Authorities (3)	
AkordaPress (White House)	FB, INST
Senate	FB, INST
Majilis	FB
Topics	
Agriculture	Health care
Army/military	IT, digitalization
Business, economy	Judiciary
Culture	Media
Catastrophes	Minorities
incidents, accidents	Politics
Charity	Referendum
Corruption	Religion
Crime	Social issues
Civil society	Sport
COVID-19	Transport, infrastructure
Education, science	Others
Environment	
Elections	
Foreign Affairs (no relevance to Kazakhstan)	

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# ABOUT

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## MEMO 98

An internationally recognized, independent, and non-profit specialist media institution with 22 year-long experience of in conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. Using tested and approved methodologies and tools, we provide media analysis and media monitoring with tangible results, in particular during election periods. Having participated in more than 120 election observation missions and about 150 media & election-related projects and training in more than 55 countries (in the Commonwealth of the Independent States and the Balkan countries, but also in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East), our experts provide assistance on media & electoral and other democratic arrangements.

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