PERCEPTION OF THE USE OF HATE SPEECH DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN: REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, 2020 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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Hatred presents an attitude towards the external group that contains cognitive representation for the target group. What contributes to this issue is the perception of conflicts among groups regarding the achievement of basic goals of the group and also the inequality of values and ideology of groups. (Halperin, 2008). Hatred is also associated with the perception that members of the external group are bad, have malicious intent, and feel powerless to withstand possible future offensives by the external group (Fischer et al., 2018; Halperin, 2008). When expressing hate speech, its content includes assessment of the target as a whole, its consistent provisions, the innate nature of the target, the motives and characteristics of the target (Fischer et al., 2018). During the use of the hate speech, its users express what they think about the members of the target group. This may contain different labels, nicknames or group features related to the group name.

Bilewicz&Soral (2020) underline the fact that the frequent use of derogatory language leads people to create the impression that hate speech is a norm and they do not consider it as a delinquent behavior. According to them, the process of normalization comes as a consequence of the rapid change of the source from where the information is consumed mainly related to politics and social problems from traditional media to social media. Winiewski et al. (2017) have stated that around 95% of Polish citizens encounter hate speech on the Internet, while about 66% of citizens have found it on television. However, the source of hate speech exposure in different channels, depends mainly from the hours that individuals spent in front of a particular medium. Nevertheless, the research done in different environments shows that hate speech is most common on social networks as well as on TV (Winiewski et al., 2017; Oksanen et al., 2014; Hawdon, 2017).

In general, individuals who consume information from different sources are more exposed to hate speech. Specifically, people who are more active on social networks and have more virtual friends (Hawdon et al., 2017) are even more exposed to materials that contain hate speech and the same ones are the

victims of the same phenomenon (Oksanen et al., 2014; Winiewski et al., 2017), also they perceive the social fear at a higher level (Oksanen et al., 2018).

The hate speech and its contents on social networks are found mainly in the part of the comments expressed by citizens on the profiles of the leaders of the political parties and on different media news. (Meza et al. 2018). According to some authors, the comments that contain hate speech are present mainly in posts that are related with topics that contain antagonistic speeches for certain target groups. In this part, individuals have the chance to remain "unknown" for the reader because social networks enable it, exactly here we can find comments and materials that incite hatred.

Previous research has shown that being anonymous affects an individual's behavior. Anonymity promotes antisocial behavior respectively; negative emotions are expressed online toward the target group. (Wang, 2018). Contents that incite hatred and crime are predominantly posted by anonymous people and mainly on racial grounds (Mondalet al., 2017).

The most frequent comments that contain hate speech are related to political topics, in the context of elections, public expenses, corruption and theft (Meza et al., 2018). However, the use and being exposed to is different in different states because this issue is treated taking into account measures arising from the legislation.

The hate speech based on racial grounds is mostly used in (Mondalet al., 2017) and then we can find it in Finland, Germany and Britain (Hawdon et al., 2017). According to the authors, incontrast to the laws that ensure the freedom of speech, the strict laws that prohibit this phenomenonhave the function of the warder related to the intensity of the use of hate speech on social media.

The use and intensity of hate speech varies according to the characteristics of the users, on the grounds of gender, their level of education and on their sympathy toward particular political parties. Women and people which possess a higher level of education perceive hate speech as more offensive towards refugees (Winiewskiet al., 2017). Right-wing political parties (Mihajlov et al., 2014) as well as individuals that have right-wing preferences (Winiewski et al., 2017) use more hate speech and perceive it as less offensive,

in this regard they tend to support less the prohibition of the use of hate speech towards minorities and refugees.

Methodology

The aim of this research is to identify the perception and the presence of the use of hate speech during the 2020 parliamentary election campaign by the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Participants: Out of the total number of 641 participants, 392 (61.15%) are Albanians and 249 (38.85%) are Macedonians. By gender, out of the total who answered this question, 394 are males and 246 are females, meanwhile by place of residence 411 (64.22%) are from the city and 229 (35.78%) are from rural areas. The average age of the subjects who participated is 32.10 years with a standard deviation of 11.10 years, respectively starting from the minimum age of 18 and the maximum age of 70 years. The number of participants by constituencies is shown in Graph 1.
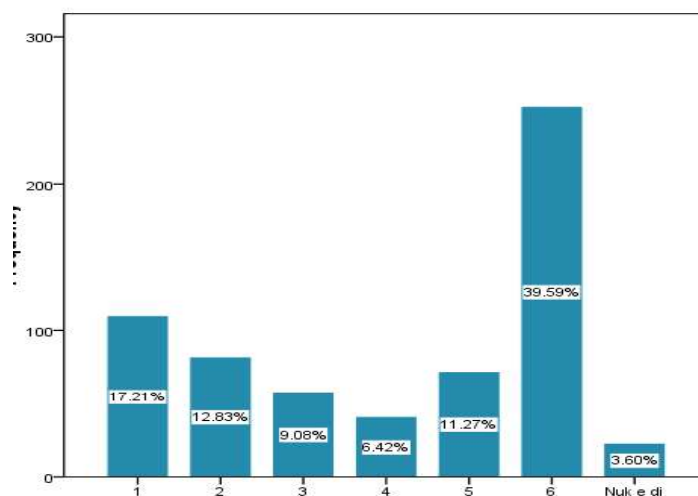
Graph 1. Participants according to electoral zones

Instrument. Hate speech during the 2020 parliamentary election campaign was measured through statements framed mainly for the purposes of this study, they are oriented towards finding how political parties blame political opponents for betrayal, national and ethnic disaster, e.g. "Opposition parties are accused for disloyalty (betrayal) to the state/nation. "Participants were asked to answer on a scale from 1 to 5 how much the parties are to blame for

this phenomena, 1 stands for 'never' while 5 stands for 'every time". After each statement, participants had the opportunity to mark/describe in one word/sentence the form of hate speech expression included in the statement.

Subjects who declared that they noticed hate speech during the election campaign had the options to choose where did they perceive the hate speech for example in: 'portals' or 'debate shows', they were also asked to perceive the most common form of hate speech and labels used, e.g.: 'ethnic' or 'political party'.

Social distance was measured according to Bogardus scale which is consisted of five assertions. For each statement the participants had to answer on a scale of 1 'not at all' to 4 'completely'of how much they would like to have certain contact with the external group, e.g. "I would like to live with Macedonian/Albanian neighbors."

The orientation for social dominance was measured through eight assertions. The participants stated how much they agree with each statement on a scale from 1 'not at all' to 4 'completely'. (e.g. "A state can be considered as ideal when one ethnicity is more powerful than other ethnicities".)

Realization and ethical criteria

This study was conducted during the pre-election campaign of the parliamentary elections in North Macedonia from the July 1 till July 13, 2020.The data collection was carried out through a page on the social network Facebook named "Center for Peace-University of Tetova". The publication of the questionnaire on this page is presented in Macedonian and in Albanian with the title *"Questionnaire for the perception of the election campaign 2020"*.

At the beginning the questionnaire was collective, respectively in the same link there was an option for choosing the Albanian/Macedonian language in order to complete the questionnaire. But after the first week, we found out a low turnout in the questionnaire of the Macedonian language. As a result, the questionnaire was published only in Macedonian language, and we realized a great interest to complete the questionnairefrom the Macedonian participants. The questionnaire was sponsored with maximum capacity by accurately selecting constituencies (electoral zones) and cities, in accordance with the sampling methodology and was randomly displayed on a given sample. For

an even wider coverage, the questionnaire has also appeared on other social networks and portals within various news.

During the data-collection phase, the working team continuously responded in electronic communication for different ambiguities which the participants may phase during the questionnaire and giving them relevant instructions and details.

Participants were accurately informed about the ethical criteria of the study, maintaining anonymity and the purpose of the study. All participants received clear instructions for completion and provided a declaration of consent for voluntary participation.

The publication of the questionnaire was stopped the moment the pre-election silence began.

The format of the online questionnaire was in full compliance with the study methodology and professional research ethics. All participants who did not respond to the constituency were determined by the research team taking into account the place of their residence.

Results

When asked if they are members of any political party, 174 participants answered yes, while the majority of 390 answered no. In other alternatives such as "I've been once" 39 participants answered, 15 answered that they plan to join and 22 did not give answer to this question. Table 6a shows that the number of Albanians who are not members of any political party is 236, while 107 have stated yes, while among Macedonians the number of those who aren't members of any political party is 154 and 67 participants have declared their membership particular in political parties (table 1).

Table 1. Membership in political parties

	N	%	Valid %
Yes	174	27.1	27.2
No	390	60.8	60.9
I've been once	39	6.1	6.1
Plan to join	15	2.3	2.3
No answer	22	3.4	3.4
Total	640	99.8	100.0
Incomplete	1	.2	
Total	641	100.0	

Regarding the issue of where do citizens follow the event of the election campaign, the majority of participants of 285 (44.5%) stated that social networks (portals) are the place where they are mostly informed and follow the election campaign in social networks - portals, in the second place we have 174 who do not follow any of these events at all, while 69 follow electoral campaigns in TV debates, 56 from TV news and 25 in party rallies. 6 of the participants did not want to answer to this question (graph 2.).
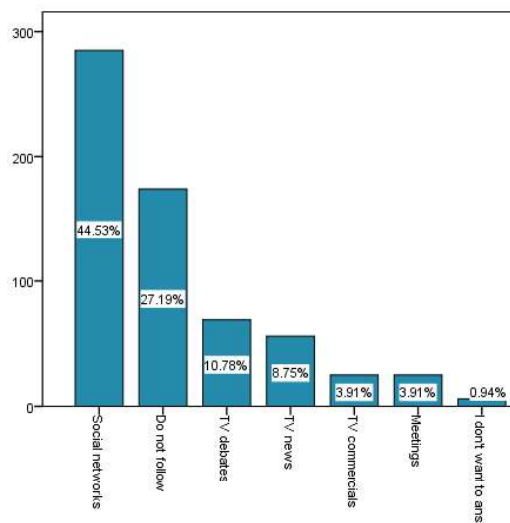
Graph 2. Campaign tracking sources
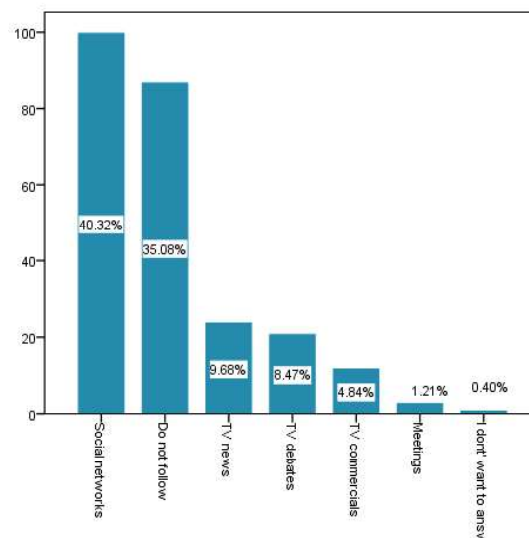
Graph 3. Campaign tracking sources, Macedonian participants

Table 2. I have noticed the use of hate speech by political parties in:

	N
Debate show	244
Portals	221
Posts/comments on social networks	275
Advertisement on TV	109
Spots on TV, YouTube, social networks	122
Not observed	25

Table 3. During the campaign, hate speech is mainly oriented on the basis of:

	N
Ethnic	226
Gender	51
Party orientation	387
Religion	75
Not observed	34

For the use of hate speech by political parties, Macedonians state that they have noticed it mostly on social networks (115 answers), while in the second place are listed the debate shows (81), 75 claim that they identify it in spots and 77 replied for portal option (table 3), whereas Albanians state that they have noticed the same in debate shows with (163 answers), in the second place they list the option posts and comments on social networks (160), while a great number claim that they identified it in the portals (144 answers), while 45 are for TV advertisement and 47 for social media and TV spots (table 4).

Table 4. I have noticed the use of hate speech by political parties in (Macedonian participants)

	N
Debate shows	81
Portals	77
Posts/comments on social networks	115
Advertisement on TV	64
Spots on TV, YouTube, social networks	75
n Not observed	4

Table 5. I noticed the use of hate speech by political parties (Albanian participants)

	N
Debate shows	163
Portals	144
Posts/comments on social networks	160
Advertisement on TV's	45
Spots on (TV, YouTube, social networks)	47
Not observed	21

The participants that identified the use of hate speech during the election campaign 2020, state that this phenomenon was oriented based on political parties, this is declared by both ethnic groups Albanians (240) and Macedonians (147) (table 7 &8). Ethnically oriented hate speech is more pronounced by Albanians (153), while Macedonians (73). The same phenomenon on the basis of gender (39) and religion (47) is observed more among Macedonians, while less to Albanians (12 and 28).

Table 6. The hate speech during the campaign based on:

	N
Ethnic	73
Gender	39
Political party	147
Religion	47
Not observed	5

Table 7. The hate speech during the campaign based on:

	N
Ethnic	153
Gender	12
Political party	240
Religion	28
Not observed	29

In general, the most common words that Albanian participants hear during the election campaign of how the opponents are described by political parties' representatives are: thief (64), liar (28), and traitor (23). While the Macedonian participants underlined the term criminal (36) (Appendix 1, Table 1).

Regarding the question that how much political parties blame their opponents for the disasters that occurred, the majority of the participants stated that: 263 (41%) answered with 'always' and 130 (20.3%) with 'often' (table 8). According to the data reflected in the graph, it is noticed that both Albanians and Macedonians share the same opinion, where the Macedonian side is dominated by the opinion 'Always' with 66.05% and the Albanians 51.15%.

Table 8. During the campaign, parties blame their opponents for disasters that occur in the state:

	N	%
Always	263	41.0
Often	130	20.3
Sometimes	46	7.2
I don't want to answer	21	3.3
Never	7	1.1
Total	467	72.9
No answer	174	27.1
Total	641	100.0

When blaming their political opponents for the disasters that occur in the country, the participants (Albanians and Macedonians) often blame for the economic difficulties. For mounting political cases, migration and corruption are the phenomena that Albanian participants highlight when blaming their opponents. Macedonian participants mostly blame the opponents for economic crisis and difficulties that arose with Covid-19 pandemic and also the agreement with Greece. (Appendix 1, table 2).

In terms of the use of a particular vocabulary during the election campaign to blame political opponents for the difficult situation of their ethnicity, the largest number of participants answered with 'often' (180, 28.1%) and with 'always' (159, 24.8%) that this phenomenon occurs during the campaign. According to the graphic representation of the differences between Albanians and Macedonians, it can be seen that 19.06% of Albanians claim that political parties always blame their opponents for the difficult situation of their ethnicity, while Macedonians claim it with 14.99% (Chart 4). At the "often" level, the number of Albanians (25.48%) versus Macedonians (13.06%) is higher.

In general, regarding this phenomenon during the campaign, there are significant differences between Albanians and Macedonians, where the Macedonian side shows a higher presence of compliance (Hi = 28.69, df = 2, p = .00).
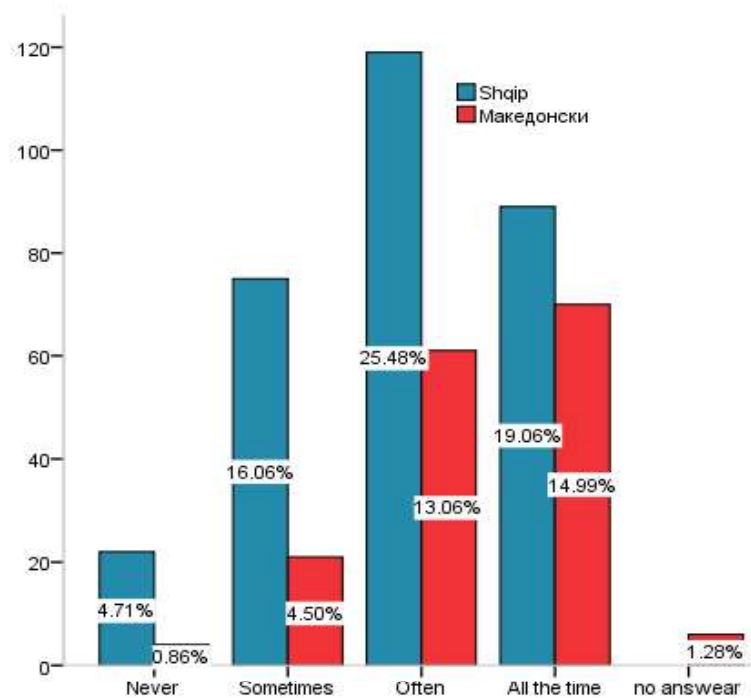
Graph 4. The proportion of subjects who perceive that the representatives of political parties blame their political opponents for the plight of their ethnicity

Regarding the question that how many party opponents are labeled with different nicknames and labels or offended in different ways, a total of 137 participants out of the total number stated that they have always heard different offensive words and labels among party opponents, while 176 or 37% more often, 106 or 22.7% sometimes and a small number stated that they have never heard these words with 23 or 4.9%.

The comparisons between Albanians and Macedonians regarding the use of labels, nicknames and insults of party opponents during the election campaign (Chart 5), show that among Albanians this vocabulary of political parties is more dominant at all levels of compliance (Hi = 31.48, df = 4, p = .00).
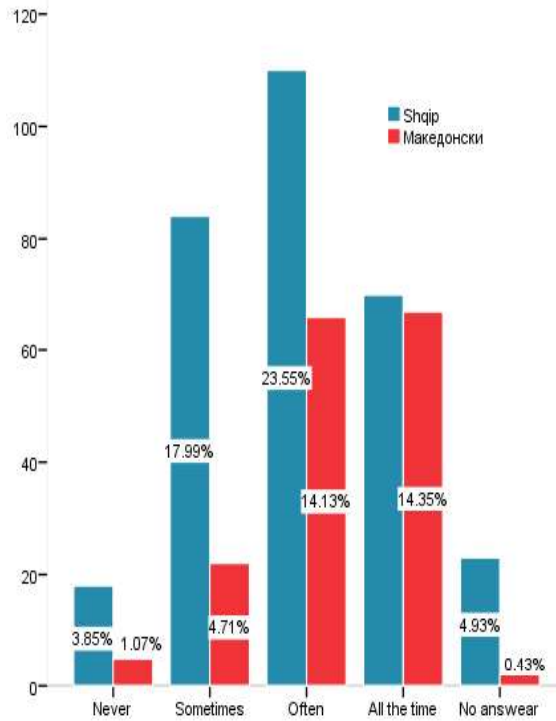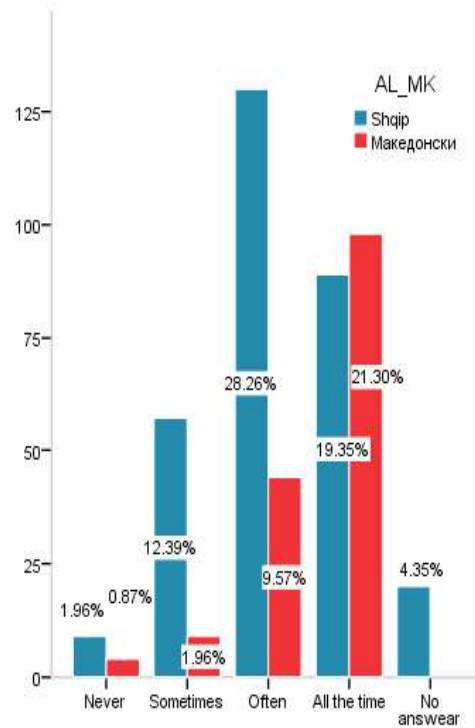
Graph 5. The proportion of subjects who perceive that representatives of political parties are offended in various ways, including nicknames.

The most common labels and nicknames that Albanian participants have noticed are the names such as: thief, traitor and criminal, while Macedonian participants said that they noticed labels and nicknames such as: traitor, criminal and 'zajko' (appendix 1, table 3).

Out of the total number of participants who follow the election campaign, most of them claim that they always hear accusations from the party opponents for national treason (187, 40.7%), while those who responded with 'often' make a total of 174 or 37.8%, while those who responded with 'sometimes' are 14.3 % and 'never' 2.8%.

Significant differences between Albanians and Macedonians are presented at all levels of compatibility for the accusation of national treason during the campaign, where we always have the same number 21.30% Macedonians and 19.35% Albanians, we often have a higher number of Albanians with 28.26% compared to Macedonians with 9.57 (Chart 6). In general, the blame for national treason is easily reported by the Albanian electorate (Hi = 56.90, df = 4, p = .00)

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Graph 6. The proportion of subjects who perceive that representatives of political parties blame their political opponents for disloyalty (betrayal) to the state and nation

The participants show that the representatives of the political parties blame their political opponents for the betrayal of the nation and state regarding the issue of the change of the name and the betrayal for the Albanian language, while the Macedonian participants, in addition to changing the name, blame the actions of the criminals (appendix 1, table 4). The majority of the respondent's report that political parties during the campaign are more focused on what is not achieved, (158, 34%) answered with completely and 151 or 32.5% with more (Table 9).

***Table 9. During campaign, parties focus on the issue which is not executed until now:***

		Albanians	Macedonians	N
Not at all	N	32	15	47
	% e Total	6.9%	3.2%	10.1%
Slightly	N	52	31	83
	% e Total	11.2%	6.7%	17.8%
More	N	103	48	151
	% e Total	22.2%	10.3%	32.5%

Completely	N	92	66	158
	% e Total	19.8%	14.2%	34.0%
No answer	N	26	0	26
	% e Total	5.6%	.0%	5.6%
	N	305	160	465
Total				
	% e Total	65.6%	34.4%	100.0%

In both ethnic groups (Albanians and Macedonians), there is a common opinion regarding the election campaign that the focus of political parties is what has not been achieved so far, where Macedonians were answered with 'completely' 14.19%, there is a percentage that stands for 'a lot' 10.32%, for less 6.67% and 'not at all' 3.23, while among the Albanians we have 19.78%, with 'a lot' 22.15%, with less we have 11.18% and 'not at all' 6.88%. According to these data on both sides during the campaign in most cases the focus of political parties is focused on the non-fulfillment of promises (Chart 7).

The Albanian participants highlight that the representatives of the political parties during the campaign focus on what has not been achieved so far and to a greater extent they underline the issue of infrastructure, employment and bilingualism. Macedonian participants in this regard point out that the focus for non-realization so far is mainly on infrastructure, health and EU membership (appendix 1, table 5).
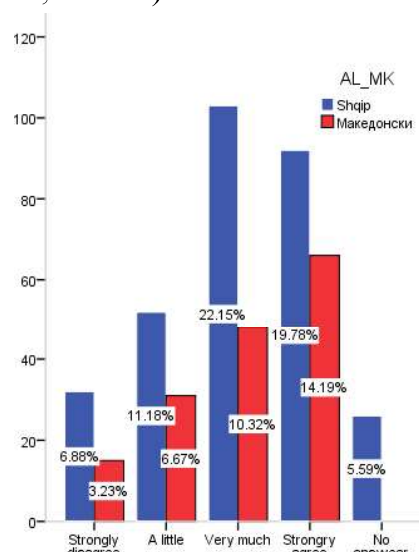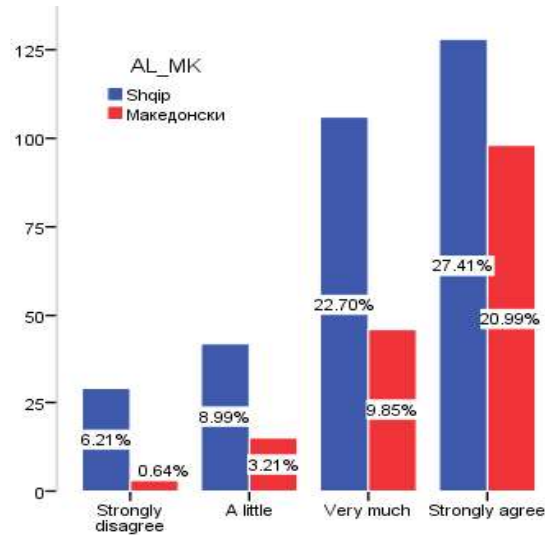

Graph 7. The proportion of subjects who perceive that the representatives of political parties during the election campaign focus on what has not been achieved so fa

How much the campaign of political parties is oriented to the actions of the opposing parties and not to its election program, the results show that the majority of participants answered with completely (226, 48.4%) and very much (152, 32.5%), while with slightly (57) and not at all with 32 participants (table 10.).

Table 10. Parties' campaign is oriented more toward the actions of the opponents and less toward their party.

		Albanians	Macedonians	N
Not at all	N	29	3	32
	% of Total	6.2%	.6%	6.9%
Slightly	N	42	15	57
	% of Total	9.0%	3.2%	12.2%
Very much	N	106	46	152
	% of Total	22.7%	9.9%	32.5%
Completely	N	128	98	226
	% of Total	27.4%	21.0%	48.4%
Total	N	305	162	467
	% of Total	65.3%	34.7%	100.0%

Based on the answers given by the Albanians and Macedonians regarding how the campaign of the political parties is focused on the political opponents and not on their program, there is a similar movement on both sides, where the majority completely and very much agree (graph 8). According to this result declared by the participants, the political parties in both camps focused more on political opponents during the campaign, than on their election programs (Hi = 19.63, df = 3, p = .00).
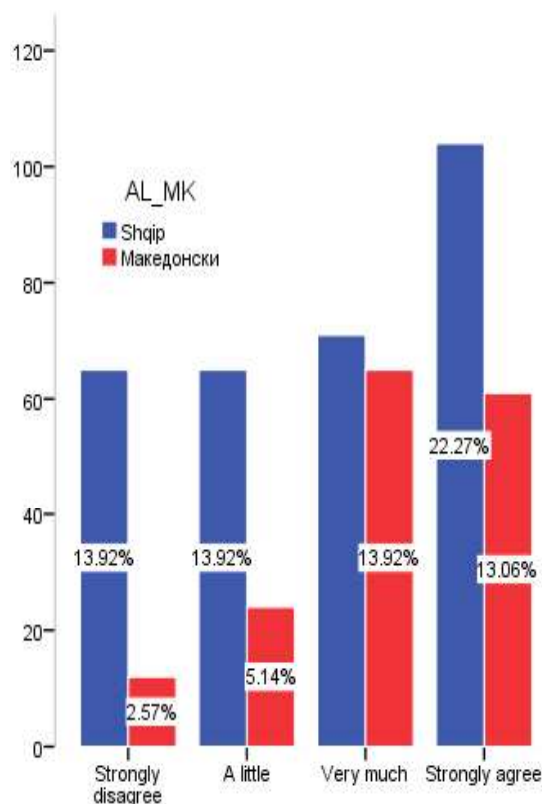
Graph 8. The proportion of the subjects who perceive that the campaign of the political parties is oriented more toward the actions of their opponents and less toward their own party program.

During the election campaign, the majority of the participants who follow this campaign answered: (Completely = 165 and very much = 136), claim that political parties oppose political opponents without arguments and concrete facts for not fulfilling their promises so far (Table 11.).

Table 11. During the campaign, parties blame their opponents without having arguments and facts for (non) fulfillment of their promises so far.

		Albanians	Macedonians	N
Not at all	N	65	12	77
	% e Total	13.9%	2.6%	16.5%
Slightly	N	65	24	89
	% of Total	13.9%	5.1%	19.1%
Very much	N	71	65	136
	% of Total	15.2%	13.9%	29.1%
Completely	N	104	61	165
	% of Total	22.3%	13.1%	35.3%
Total	N	305	162	467
	% of Total	65.3%	34.7%	100.0%

The answers to this question have a different tendency among Albanians and Macedonians. There is a significant difference in the answers of the Macedonian participants, where the dominant majority is focused on the positive agreement that the objections between the political parties are vague and do not contain arguments and facts (13.92% and 13.06%). The Albanian participants, there are no significant differences in the first three levels which are presented with approximate values, with a slight difference with completely agree 22.27% (Hi = 25.43, df = 3, p = .00). In general, there are differences between the nationalities in the answers given (Chart 9).
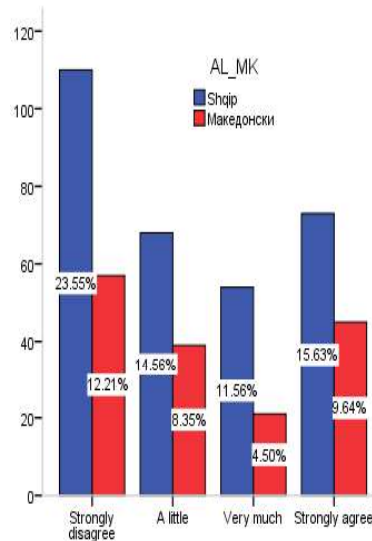

Graph 9. The proportion of the subjects that perceive that the representatives of political parties blame their opponents without having arguments and facts.

Despite the fact that the participants reported the use of hate speech during the election campaign, when asked how much they experienced hate speech, a great number of subjects (167) reported that they did not experience it at all (Table 12), while those who completely experienced hate speech are 118 (25.3%), those with very much (75, 16.1%), while those who have experienced slightly are presented with this percentage:107 (22.9%).

Table 12. Experiencing hate speech

		Albanians	Macedonians	N
Not at all	N	110	57	167
	% of Total	23.6%	12.2%	35.8%
Slightly	N	68	39	107
	% of Total	14.6%	8.4%	22.9%
Very much	N	54	21	75
	% of Total	11.6%	4.5%	16.1%
Completely	N	73	45	118
	% of Total	15.6%	9.6%	25.3%
Total	N	305	162	467
	% of Total	65.3%	34.7%	100.0%

The same opinion is expressed among the both ethnic groups (Macedonians and Albanians), whereas the data sheet shows, the largest number of subjects of 23.55% Albanians and 12.21% Macedonians show that they have not experienced hate speech at all (Chart 10). In general, the given results do not have any statistical difference between the given answers (Hi = 2.26, df = 3, p = .518).
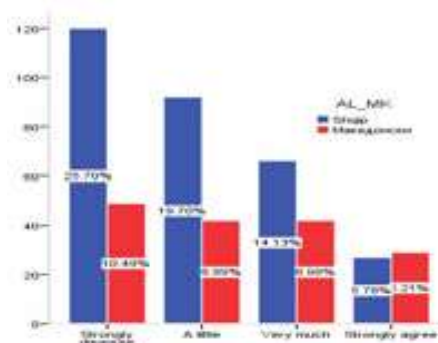

Graph10. The proportion of subjects that declared that they experienced hate speech during the election campaign.

Are the promises of political parties during the election campaign real? This question is answered by the majority of participants with 169 (36.2%) that they are not real at all (table 13), with less real we have 134 subjects or 28.7%, with very real 108 (23.1%) and completely real a small number of subjects 56 (12%).

Table 13. The promises of the political parties during this campaign are real and true.

		Albanians	Macedonians	N
Not at all	N	120	49	169
	% of Total	25.7%	10.5%	36.2%
Slightly	N	92	42	134
	% of Total	19.7%	9.0%	28.7%
Very much	N	66	42	108
	% of Total	14.1%	9.0%	23.1%
Completely	N	27	29	56
	% of Total	5.8%	6.2%	12.0%
Total	N	305	162	467
	% of Total	65.3%	34.7%	100.0%

The overall opinion of Albanians is more emphasized that the promises are not real at all (25.70%), while 19.70% think that they are slightly real, 14.13% very real and 5.76% completely real. Macedonians think that there is no difference between the levels of compliance, where 10.49% think the promises are not real at all, while 8.99% are very real, while 6.21% are completely real (Chart 11). In general, it is noticed that the promises of the parties during the election campaign are slightly real to the Albanians (Hi = 11.147, df = 3, p = .01).

Graph 11. The proportion of the subjects that perceive that the promises of the political parties during the election campaign are real and true.
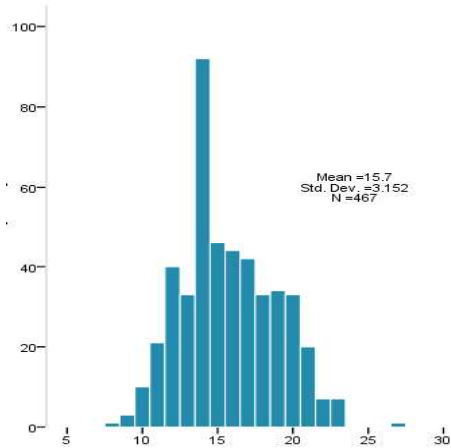
Group dominance and social distance

This study is aimed at finding the relationship between the tendency of one ethnic group to dominate the other and the social distance between ethnic groups in North Macedonia.

Out of a total of 467 participants who attended the election campaign, the degree of dominance of one ethnic group over another is shown as average (M = 15.70, SD = 3.152), with a minimum of 8 and a maximum value of 27. Based on the value for the symmetry of this phenomenon it is observed that a negative tendency of distribution is present (Skw = .321), which means that the majority of the participants have a negative attitude towards the domination of an ethnic group and with distribution within the normal limits of freedom 5.

The degree of social distance between ethnic groups results in an average as it follows: (M = 13.98, SD = .397), with a minimum value of 5 and a maximum of 20. The distribution of values is normal at the level of 5 and with more concentration of subjects on the positive side of values, i.e. above average (Skw = -. 296). The result obtained means that the social distance between the Albanian and Macedonian ethnic groups is low and below the average, also between the ethnic groups the social distance is not highlighted (Table 14).

Table 14. Descriptive Data regarding the group domination and social distance

	Group domination	Social distance
N Answers	467	467
No answers	174	174
Average	15.70	13.98
Std. Error of Mean	.146	.184
SD	3.152	3.970
Skewness	.321	-.296
Std. Error of Skewness	.113	.113
Kurtosis	-.383	-.525
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.225	.225
Minimum	8	5
Maximum	27	20

Graph 12. The distribution of group domination
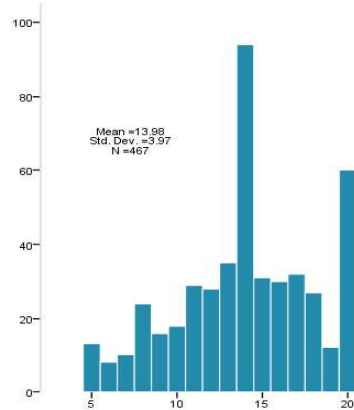
Graph 13. The distribution of social distance

The relationship between group dominance and social distance is shown to be statistically significant and with a weak positive coefficient (r = .220, p = .00), which means that as the dominance of one ethnic group over another increases, so does the social distance between ethnic groups. Although we have a weak coefficient, again from a statistical point of view these two phenomena are interrelated with each other. (Table 15).

Table 15. Correlation between group dominance and social distance

		Group domination	Social distance
Group domination	Pearson Correlation	1	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	467	467
Social distance	Pearson Correlation	.220**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	467	467
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Discussion and conclusions

In this part of the study, the purpose was to track the perception of citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia about the use of hate speech during the 2020 parliamentary election campaign. According to the reports of the participants, a great number of them followed the election campaign on portals and social networks approximately (44%). As a result, hate speech is most often evidenced by participants in posts and comments on social networks. The same channel of information consumption as a follower of hate speech is underlined by other authors and in other countries, as the use of hate speech against minorities but also against other categories of marginalized groups (Winiewski et al. 2017, Oksanen et al, 2014).

The social networks offer the possibility of being anonymous and as a result the use of hate speech is very common, because anonymity offers the convenience of irresponsibility for expressing hatred but also inciting destructive actions. Moreover, Wang (2018) has evidenced that online anonymity has promoted destructive behavior. According to the participant's hate speech during this campaign was oriented on the grounds of party orientation and ethnic grounds as well. The findings correspond to data from tracking and other previous analyzes conducted in our Republic both during the election campaigns (group of authors, 2014) but also in the post-election period (Marolov&Stojanovski, 2016; Popovska &Stojanovski, 2016; Stojanovski, 2017). The high perception of the presence of hate speech by citizens on ethnic grounds, but especially on the basis of party orientation, not only during the period of election campaigns but also in the period between elections is an indication that in addition to a clear division into bases ethnic we also increase the politicization of society in the country.

The presence of hate speech during the election campaign is declared by over half of the participants involved in the research study. Respectively, over 60% of the participants claimed that they have always and often identified this phenomenon mainly by blaming the opponents for the disasters that occurred in Republic of North Macedonia. Over 50% of the participants claimed that during the campaign it was evident that the political opponents blamed even the members of their ethnicity. In this regard, Albanian entities unlike Macedonians emphasize that such a phenomenon is present during this election campaign. Differences between the two ethnic groups are also related to the presence of labeling party opponents with different offensive

nicknames. In this regard, the percentage of Albanian participants, in contrast to Macedonians, is higher in terms of highlighting the presence of the use of labels during this campaign. In general, the participants state that the accusations made by the representatives of the political parties about the opponents are not based on arguments and not supported on facts.

According to the participants that took part in this research study, this campaign is characterized by speeches which were focused mainly on the non-implementation and the lack of achievements of activities so far. This phenomenon is underlined by 60% of respondents. An even higher percentage of subjects (about 80%) claimed that during this campaign the narrative of the representatives of political parties focuses on the actions of the opposing parties and not on their election program. A significant majority of the participants (about 36%) claimed that they have never experienced, respectively have not been a victim of the use of hate speech, butthe percentage of participants who say that they have been victims of abuse of hate speech is slightly higher (about 40%).

The participants also expressed concern about the (in) desirability of having different relationships with members of the Macedonian and Albanian ethnic group. The data show that the distance of both ethnic groups in regard to each other is very low. Some findings taken from other studies (Popovska &Stojanovski, 2016) are indicative that over the years the mutual social distance between Albanians and Macedonians tends to decrease.

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