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Evaluation Report D2.4: Critical legal analysis of the application of European election disinformation regulation to community-governed platforms

October 2025

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1. Introduction

This Evaluation Report (D2.4) comprises a critical legal assessment of the application of European regulatory frameworks on disinformation during elections to community-governed platforms, using Wikipedia as a guiding lens, particularly given its designation as a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP) under the EU’s Digital Services Act (DSA).¹ It is the third legal report of the DEM-Debate project (Building an Enabling Environment for Democratic Debate: Insights from community-governed platforms to cultivate a resilient election information ecosystem in Europe), an interdisciplinary research project examining how to increase resilience of the online information ecosystem to safeguard informed civic participation. In particular, the DEM-Debate project examines how certain community-governed platforms tackle election disinformation, including through a case study of Wikipedia during the 2024 European Parliament elections. Based on this research, the DEM-Debate project seeks to develop new policy approaches to contribute to ensuring the information ecosystem surrounding elections in the EU is sufficiently insulated from the harmful effects of disinformation, with the research seeking to contribute to building an “enabling environment” for democratic debate.²

As noted in the first Mapping Report (D2.1),³ European legal research has mainly focused on the role of large commercial online platforms, operating a centralised-governed model (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X), in the dissemination of disinformation during elections, and current European legal policy is mainly focused on these online platforms.⁴ However, there has been less

¹ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act). See generally, J. van Hoboken et al., *Putting the DSA into Practice* (Verfassungsbooks, 2023), https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/vHoboken-et-al_Putting-the-DSA-into-Practice.pdf; and M. Husovec, *Principles of the Digital Services Act* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

² See Council of Europe Steering Committee for Media and Information Society, *Guidance Note on countering the spread of online mis- and disinformation through fact-checking and platform design solutions in a human rights compliant manner* (Council of Europe, 2023), p. 35, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/internet/11885-guidance-note-on-countering-the-spread-of-online-mis-and-disinformation-through-fact-checking-and-platform-design-solutions-in-a-human-rights-compliant-manner.html>.

³ R. Fahy, I. Toepoel, and J. van Hoboken, *European regulatory frameworks on election disinformation applicable to community-governed platforms* (Dem-Debate, 2025), https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/European_regulatory_frameworks_on_election_disinformation.pdf.

⁴ See, for example, OECD, *Facts not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity* (2024), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/03/facts-not-fakes-tackling-disinformation-strengthening-information-integrity_ff96d19f.html; M. Husovec, “The Digital Services Act’s red line: what the Commission can and cannot do about disinformation” (2024) *Journal of Media Law*, 16(1), 47; S. Galantino, “How Will the EU Digital Services Act Affect the Regulation of Disinformation?” (2023) *SCRIPTed*, 20(1), 89; A. Strowel and J. De Meyere, “The Digital Services Act: transparency as an efficient tool to curb the spread of disinformation on online platforms?” (2023) 14 *JIPITEC* 66; and J. van Hoboken and R. Ó Fathaigh, “Regulating Disinformation in Europe: Implications for Speech and Privacy” (2021) 6 *UC Irvine Journal of International, Transnational, and Comparative Law* 9.

in-depth European legal analysis given to examining (non-commercial) community-governed platforms, and how they tackle disinformation during elections in the EU, and how European disinformation regulation applies to these platforms. Building on work by scholars such as Grimmelmann,⁵ Rozenshtein,⁶ and Seering,⁷ community-governed platforms broadly encompass those online platforms where content moderation is *generally* not undertaken in a centralised “top-down” approach, but rather is “user-led moderation” undertaken by a community of users of the platform in a generally decentralised manner.⁸

The DEM-Debate project’s legal research proceeds in four phases: first, a mapping of the EU regulatory frameworks on online disinformation during elections that are applicable to community-governed platforms; which resulted in Mapping Report D2.1, published in February 2025.⁹ Second, an examination of Wikipedia’s policies on tackling disinformation during elections in the EU, and its risk mitigation measures targeting election disinformation under the DSA; which resulted in Mapping Report D2.3, published in June 2025.¹⁰ Third, a critical assessment of the application of EU regulatory frameworks on disinformation during elections to community-governed platforms, using Wikipedia as a case study; which is the subject of this Evaluation Report (D2.4). And fourth, developing policy recommendations for specific legislative and regulatory reforms of the EU regulatory framework to better counter disinformation during elections, building upon the findings of previous phases in relation to community-governed platforms’ approach to disinformation; which will be published in February 2026.

As such, the purpose of this Evaluation Report (D2.4) is to integrate the findings of Mapping Report D2.1 and Mapping Report D2.3, and using normative legal analysis, critically assess the application of EU regulatory frameworks on disinformation during elections to community-governed platforms, using Wikipedia as a guiding lens. This legal analysis is twofold: first, it

⁵ J. Grimmelmann, “The Virtues of Moderation” (2015) 17 *Yale Journal of Law and Technology* 42.

⁶ A. Rozenshtein, “Moderating the Fediverse: Content Moderation on Distributed Social Media” (2023) *Journal of Free Speech Law* 217.

⁷ J. Seering, “Reconsidering Self-Moderation: the Role of Research in Supporting Community-Based Models for Online Content Moderation,” (2020) *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 4, 1. See also, J. Seering & S. Kairam, “Who Moderates on Twitch and What Do They Do?: Quantifying Practices in Community Moderation on Twitch”, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 7, 1.

⁸ A. Rozenshtein, “Moderating the Fediverse: Content Moderation on Distributed Social Media” (2023) *Journal of Free Speech Law* 217.

⁹ R. Fahy, I. Toepoel, and J. van Hoboken, *European regulatory frameworks on election disinformation applicable to community-governed platforms* (Dem-Debate, 2025), https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/European_regulatory_frameworks_on_election_disinformation.pdf.

¹⁰ R. Fahy, G. Trogrlić, L. Koraki, and J. van Hoboken, *Policies and risk-mitigation measures on election disinformation by Wikipedia* (Dem-Debate, 2025), https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/Policies_and_risk-mitigation_measures_on_election_disinformation_by_Wikipedia.pdf.

assesses how disinformation regulation applies to, and may impact upon, how community-governed platforms tackle disinformation during elections, including on policies, mechanisms and risk-mitigation measures adopted by such platforms. This will also include the enforcement of disinformation regulation, and its impact upon freedom of expression on community-governed platforms. Second, it assesses how mechanisms adopted by community-governed platforms, such as Wikipedia, may have potential to inform policy making on election disinformation regulation in the EU.

The Report is structured as follows: first, Section 2 begins with a brief overview of important current regulatory developments relating to European election disinformation regulation, the Digital Services Act, and Wikipedia, since the first Mapping Report (D2.1) was published; Section 3 contains an assessment of the application of EU regulatory frameworks on disinformation during elections to community-governed platforms, using Wikipedia as a case study. Section 4 then assesses how policies and mechanisms adopted by community-governed platforms, such as Wikipedia, may have potential to inform policy making on election disinformation regulation in the EU. Section 5 concludes.

2. Recent developments on the DSA, election disinformation regulation, and Wikipedia

Before analysing the application of EU election disinformation regulation to community-governed platforms, it is important to first set out a number of recent developments which are relevant for the discussion below. The first introductory point relates to recent European Court of Human Rights case law that has been delivered since the first Mapping Report (D2.1). Notably, in spring 2025, the European Court of Human Rights delivered its first judgment on disinformation laws enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Crucially, and fully consistent with its earlier judgments on similar false information laws before the pandemic,¹¹ the Court unanimously held a violation of freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR, over legislation prohibiting the dissemination of information “known to be untrue,” and which “created a risk” of harming life or health or property, or undermining public security.¹² And in particularly trenchant language, the Court held that sanctioning an individual for Instagram posts “expressing scepticism about official information” appeared “more calculated to discourage open debate about matters of public concern” than to “protect public health.”¹³ Indeed, in late summer 2025,

¹¹ Avagyan v. Russia, Application no. 36911/20, 29 April 2025.

¹² Avagyan v. Russia, Application no. 36911/20, 29 April 2025.

¹³ Avagyan v. Russia, Application no. 36911/20, 29 April 2025, para. 37.

the Court delivered a second judgment, following an application from Google and YouTube, holding that penalising an online platform for hosting content “presenting alternative views on military actions,” and classed as false information, strikes at the “very heart of the Internet’s function as a means for the free exchange of ideas and information”.¹⁴ Thus, the European Court of Human Rights continues to express serious concern over legislation which prohibits false information and disinformation.

Second, since the first Mapping Report (D2.1), it must be mentioned that during 2025, U.S. government policy in relation to the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the European regulatory framework on disinformation regulation in particular, has become quite pronounced and critical. For example, in February 2025, the Chairman of the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) issued a letter to a number of U.S.-headquartered Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), stating that the DSA required VLOPs to “censor content in violation of free speech principles,” and described the EU Code of Conduct on Disinformation as an “Orwellian measure[.]”.¹⁵ Notably, the FCC invited various VLOPs, including the Wikimedia Foundation, for briefings over how these VLOPs were “planning on reconciling the DSA with America’s free speech tradition,” and the “predicament” that violating the DSA would “risk European regulators imposing exorbitant fines of up to six percent of [VLOPs’] annual revenue”.¹⁶ The FCC suggested “geofencing” the EU may be a possible mitigating option to be implemented for these VLOPs.¹⁷

Indeed, in July 2025, the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives issued a highly critical 145-page Report on the Digital Services Act, describing it as the “EU’s comprehensive digital censorship law”.¹⁸ It argued that EU member states and the EU “weaponize” the term “disinformation” to “censor their political opponents and criticism from their constituents”.¹⁹ Notably, the report also singled out the EU Code of Conduct on Disinformation as an “additional censorship obligation[.]”.²⁰ As such, this new U.S. government policy of criticism of the DSA, and the EU Code of Conduct on Disinformation in particular, is an

¹⁴ Google LLC and Others v. Russia, Application no. 37027/22, 8 July 2025, para. 80.

¹⁵ Federal Communications Commission, Letter to Mr. Sundar Pichat et al., 26 February 2025, p. 2., <https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/Chairman-Letter-to-Big-Tech-on-Digital-Services-Act.pdf>.

¹⁶ Federal Communications Commission, Letter to Mr. Sundar Pichat et al., 26 February 2025, p. 2.

¹⁷ Federal Communications Commission, Letter to Mr. Sundar Pichat et al., 26 February 2025, p. 2.

¹⁸ Committee on the Judiciary of the US House of Representatives, Interim Staff Report: The Foreign Censorship Threat: How the European Union’s Digital Services Act Compels Global Censorship and Infringes on American Free Speech (2025), p. 1, https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/2025-07/DSA_Report%26Appendix%2807.25.25%29.pdf.

¹⁹ Committee on the Judiciary of the US House of Representatives, Interim Staff Report: The Foreign Censorship Threat: How the European Union’s Digital Services Act Compels Global Censorship and Infringes on American Free Speech (2025), p. 1.

²⁰ Committee on the Judiciary of the US House of Representatives, Interim Staff Report: The Foreign Censorship Threat: How the European Union’s Digital Services Act Compels Global Censorship and Infringes on American Free Speech (2025), p. 3.

important broader context when analysing the application of European disinformation regulation going forward; including any U.S. government pressure on VLOPs over DSA (non-)compliance.

A third broader, and related, new development in 2025 was that current U.S. government policy has also been increasingly examining the operations of Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation over alleged “disinformation” and “propaganda”. For example, in early April 2025, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia sent a letter to the Wikimedia Foundation, alleging that Wikipedia was “allowing foreign actors to manipulate information and spread propaganda”, and Wikipedia was “permitting information manipulation on its platform”, including in relation to rewriting of key “biographical information of current and previous American leaders”.²¹ Further, the letter noted that search engines “prioritize” Wikipedia results, and argued that if content contained in Wikipedia articles is “sourced by entities who wish to do harm to the United States,” search engine prioritisation of Wikipedia will only “amplify propaganda to a larger American audience.”²² The Attorney General sought various information from the Wikimedia Foundation, including what mechanisms the Wikimedia Foundation had in place to “safeguard the public from the dissemination of propaganda”.²³

Then in late April 2025, a number of members of the U.S. Congress also sent a letter to the Wikimedia Foundation, communicating concern over “potential abuse of Wikipedia by coordinated actors,” and alleging “deliberate effort to inject antisemitic bias and propaganda, raising concerns that some of these editors may be pro-Hamas or even acting on behalf of foreign state actors.”²⁴ The U.S. Congress members sought various documents from the Wikimedia Foundation, including “[w]hat safeguards are in place to prevent coordinated editing campaigns by foreign actors, and how does Wikipedia detect and mitigate disinformation sponsored by state and nonstate actors,”²⁵ and how does Wikipedia “verify the identities and affiliations of editors,” including those making “frequent or high-impact edits on politically sensitive topics,” to ensure that “foreign adversaries are not abusing the platform to spread misinformation or propaganda;” and whether Wikipedia or the Wikimedia Foundation was considering using additional “AI or data-related tools” to “better enforce its policies.”²⁶

²¹ United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, Letter to Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. AKA Wikipedia, 24 April 2025, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e0/Letter_from_interim_US_attorney_for_DC_Ed_Martin_to_Wikimedia_Foundation_2025.pdf.

²² United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, Letter to Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. AKA Wikipedia, 24 April 2025, p. 1.

²³ United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, Letter to Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. AKA Wikipedia, 24 April 2025, p. 2.

²⁴ Letter from Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Member of US Congress, et al., to Maryana Iskander, 30 April 2025, https://wassermanschultz.house.gov/uploadedfiles/final_letter_to_wikimedia_foundation_may.pdf.

²⁵ Letter from Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Member of US Congress, et al., to Maryana Iskander, 30 April 2025, p.1.

²⁶ Letter from Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Member of US Congress, et al., to Maryana Iskander, 30 April 2025, p. 2.

Indeed, in late August 2025, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives announced that it was investigating Wikipedia over “organized efforts,” undertaken in “violation of Wikipedia platform rules,” to “influence U.S. public opinion” on “important and sensitive topics” by “manipulating Wikipedia articles.”²⁷ This included efforts to “manipulate information” on Wikipedia for “propaganda” aimed at Western audiences.²⁸ The Committee sought “documents and communications” regarding “individuals (or specific accounts”) serving as Wikipedia volunteer editors” who “violated Wikipedia platform policies”, including “[r]ecords, communications, or analysis pertaining to possible coordination by nation state actors in editing activities on Wikipedia,” and [r]ecords showing identifying and unique characteristics of accounts (such as names, IP addresses, registration dates, user activity logs) for [certain] editors.”²⁹ While, in early October 2025, the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation also sent a letter to the Wikimedia Foundation over political “ideological bias” on Wikipedia, including over certain “blacklisted” and “deprecated” sources that Wikipedia’s editors have determined “promotes disinformation.”³⁰ The Chairman sought “all documents and communications—including emails, texts, or other digital messages—between any officer, employee, or agent of the Wikimedia Foundation and any officer, employee, or agent of the federal government since January 1, 2020”.³¹

As such, current U.S. government scrutiny of Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation relating to propaganda and disinformation rapidly intensified during 2025. While not taking a position on the criticism levelled against Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation, these developments do demonstrate how a government can in a sense rapidly turn against an online platform in relation to supposed disinformation, propaganda, and foreign interference. It can also be argued that it demonstrates the importance of a model of online platform regulation under the DSA, which seeks to set down clear procedures which are “prescribed by law” (to use Article 10 ECHR language), and is designed to address the “societal risks” that the “dissemination of disinformation” may generate.³² The developments also demonstrate the importance of an independent body being the regulator in relation to VLOPs and the DSA’s systemic-risk provisions

²⁷ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Comer and Mace Investigate Efforts to Manipulate Information on Wikipedia,” 27 August 2025, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/comer-and-mace-investigate-efforts-to-manipulate-information-on-wikipedia/>.

²⁸ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives, Letter to Ms. Maryana Iskander, 27 August 2025, p. 1, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/082725-letter-to-Wikimedia.pdf>.

²⁹ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives, Letter to Ms. Maryana Iskander, 27 August 2025, p.2.

³⁰ U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Letter to Ms. Maryana Iskander, 3 October 2025, p. 1, <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/17E95BA8-1E93-48B4-A3F4-ECDE04FB5E4>.

³¹ U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Letter to Ms. Maryana Iskander, 3 October 2025, p. 2.

³² Digital Services Act, Recital 9.

relating to protecting against negative effects on “electoral processes”,³³ which may stem from the dissemination of disinformation (and insulating enforcement from member-state policies).³⁴ Finally, it also contrasts sharply with regulatory activity under the DSA, where Wikipedia is the only sole VLOP, out of a total of 25 VLOPs, that has not been subject to any regulatory activity by the European Commission under the DSA, as of October 2025.³⁵

A final point that should also be mentioned is that the Wikimedia Foundation recently initiated legal proceedings in the UK,³⁶ over the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA), which adopts a model of online platform regulation not too far removed from the DSA’s risk-based approach (although quite distinct and not fully comparable).³⁷ In particular, the Wikimedia Foundation challenged how the UK Secretary of State made a regulation under the OSA, which sets out the criteria for so-called “Category 1” online services under OSA, which are made subject to certain statutory “duties” under the OSA. Notably, the Wikimedia Foundation argued that the criteria were “intended” to capture “large profitable social media companies” where “anonymous content can ‘go viral,’” but were “drawn too broadly” with the result that “Wikipedia is likely to qualify” as a Category 1 service “even though that was never the policy intention.”³⁸ This would mean Wikipedia would have to comply with “duties that are not reasonably manageable and which are incompatible with the way in which Wikipedia operates.”³⁹ While ultimately the High Court dismissed the Wikimedia Foundation’s claim, the Court did make a number of notable findings which are relevant for the discussion below. This included that the Court found that a) Wikipedia is a tool that provides “significant value for freedom of speech and expression”, particularly the right “to receive and impart information and ideas without interference”; and (b) Wikipedia does so “without giving rise to any substantial threat to the public interests,” listed under Article 10 ECHR, including national security, public safety, prevention of disorder or crime, protection of health, or protection of the rights of others.⁴⁰ Indeed, the Court explicitly held that Wikipedia’s

³³ Digital Services Act, Article 34(1)(c).

³⁴ On the role of the European Commission as the regulator of VLOPs under the DSA, see Ilaria Buri, “A Regulator Caught Between Conflicting Policy Objectives: Reflections on the European Commission’s Role as DSA Enforcer,” in J. van Hoboken et al., *Putting the DSA into Practice* (Verfassungsbooks, 2023), pp. 77-87.

³⁵ See, European Commission, “Supervision of the designated very large online platforms and search engines under DSA,” <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>.

³⁶ Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin).

³⁷ Online Safety Act 2023. See generally, Elena Abrusci, “The UK Online Safety Act, the EU Digital Services Act and online disinformation: is the right to political participation adequately protected?” (2024) 16 *Journal of Media Law* 440.

³⁸ Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 2.

³⁹ Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 2.

⁴⁰ Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 17.

operating model had “been shown to be effective in promoting freedom of expression whilst promoting a high quality of content”.⁴¹

3. Application of European disinformation regulation to community-governed platforms

Having set out the introductory points, this section now seeks to critically assess the application of EU regulatory frameworks on disinformation during elections to community-governed platforms, using Wikipedia as a case study. In other words, it seeks to assess how disinformation regulation may apply to, and impact upon, how community-governed platforms tackle disinformation during elections; while also examining the enforcement of disinformation regulation, and its impact upon the freedom of expression on community-governed platforms. Importantly, this section draws upon the results of the first Mapping Report (D2.1) on the EU regulatory frameworks on online disinformation during elections that are applicable to community-governed platforms; and the second Mapping Report (D2.3), which examined Wikipedia’s policies and risk-mitigation measures that are applicable to disinformation during elections in the EU. As such, and for the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed the reader has read both of these earlier reports.

3.1 Legal definition of disinformation and election disinformation regulation

The first major issue to consider in terms of the application of European regulatory frameworks on election disinformation to Wikipedia is the definition of disinformation, and the implications of this for how Wikipedia tackles election disinformation. It is important to note that for community-governed platforms, EU legislation, including the DSA, does not set out a legal definition of disinformation, and no legal definition of election disinformation is contained in EU legislation. While there are certain policy definitions which are used by the European Commission, and in the 2025 Code of Conduct on Disinformation,⁴² for the purposes of legal obligations applicable to community-governed platforms, there is no legal definition that community-governed platforms are required to adopt. Indeed, in 2025, for the first time in EU

⁴¹ Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 125

⁴² See Code of Conduct on Disinformation 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/code-conduct-disinformation> (“false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm”); which cites Commission Communication, On the European democracy action plan, COM(2020) 790 final (“false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm”).

legislation, the European Media Freedom Act now states that disinformation is “harmful content,” not illegal content, but without providing a specific definition.⁴³ As such, community-governed platforms do seem to have some discretion, as do centralised-governed platforms, to define election disinformation in their own terms. On the other hand, the lack of a legal definition does raise a distinct issue under Article 10 ECHR, especially where any interference with freedom of expression must be “prescribed by law”, and a “norm cannot be regarded as a “law” within the meaning” of Article 10 unless it is formulated with “sufficient precision as to enable a person to regulate his or her conduct”.⁴⁴ Indeed, international human rights bodies have emphasised that difficulties with defining disinformation can provide authorities with “excessive discretion to determine what is disinformation, what is a mistake, what is truth.”⁴⁵

However, there are specific policy definitions that are used by EU institutions and regulatory bodies, such as the European Commission. And for the purposes of this Evaluative Report, a widely-adopted definition is that of the European Commission, which defines disinformation as “false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm”.⁴⁶ Notably, this definition is used in the Code of Conduct of Disinformation, which has recently in 2025 taken on a new significance, as the Code was officially recognised as a Code of Conduct under Article 45 DSA (and explicitly becomes part of the DSA regulatory framework).⁴⁷ And from July 2025, the Code became applicable.⁴⁸ As such, this definition of disinformation is arguably the most applicable under the EU regulatory framework on election disinformation.

A crucial feature of this definition (“false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm”) is the element of “intention,” which distinguishes disinformation from misinformation, which lacks the element

⁴³ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act), art. 19.

⁴⁴ See, *NIT S.R.L. v. the Republic of Moldova* [GC], Application no. 28470/12, 5 April 2022, para. 159.

⁴⁵ See, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Elections in the Digital Age, 30 April, <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/451150>.

⁴⁶ European Commission, Communication on the European democracy action plan, COM(2020) 790 final. See also, European Commission, Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM/2018/236 final, (“verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm”).

⁴⁷ European Commission, “Commission endorses the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the Digital Services Act”, 13 February 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-endorses-integration-voluntary-code-practice-disinformation-digital-services-act>.

⁴⁸ European Commission, The Code of Conduct on Disinformation, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/code-conduct-disinformation>.

of intention (where false content is shared without intent to harm, and is shared in good faith).⁴⁹ And a notable point on the application of this definition is that English Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation's policies on false information actually overlap with the EU definition. Crucially, the Wikimedia Foundation's Terms of Use specifically prohibit "engaging in false statements," including "posting or modifying content with the intent to deceive or mislead others".⁵⁰ While the Wikimedia Foundation's Universal Code of Conduct also prohibits "deliberately" introducing "false", or "inaccurate content", including "deliberately false rendering of sources and altering the correct way of composing editorial content."⁵¹ Notably, English Wikipedia's rules on vandalism and "accidental misinformation" include that a user who, "in good faith," adds content to an article that is "factually inaccurate in the belief that it is accurate," is trying to "contribute to and improve Wikipedia, not vandalize it."⁵² And where editors "believe inaccurate information has been added to an article in good faith," editors should "remove it once you are certain it is inaccurate, and consider discussing its factuality with the user who has added it."⁵³

Thus, an important finding is that Wikipedia and Wikimedia Foundation policies also place "intention" as a central notion in policies targeting false information, and very much align with the European Commission's definition and Code of Practice 2025 definition of disinformation. Thus, it can be argued that EU regulation of election disinformation does not currently mean that Wikipedia needs to adopt a specific definition of disinformation to comply with EU disinformation regulation, but rather, its current rules are very much aligned with the EU definition. Indeed, a possible broader policy learning (discussed further below) from Wikipedia could be informing and explaining to users who share "misinformation" about the lack of accuracy of the information that the user has shared.

3.2 Election disinformation regulation and the nature of information on Wikipedia

The second major issue that must be mentioned, and a crucial point that follows from the foregoing paragraph, is how Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation's content rules really

⁴⁹ European Commission, Communication on the European democracy action plan, COM(2020) 790 final. See also, European Commission, Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM/2018/236 final, sec. 4 ("alse or misleading content shared without harmful intent though the effects can still be harmful, e.g. when people share false information with friends and family in good faith).

⁵⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use", section 4, https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Terms_of_Use.

⁵¹ Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikimedia Foundation Universal Code of Conduct", section 3.3, https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Universal_Code_of_Conduct.

⁵² See, English Wikipedia, "Wikipedia:Vandalism", "<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Vandalism>.

⁵³ See, English Wikipedia, "Wikipedia:Vandalism", "<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Vandalism>.

reveal how election-related information published on Wikipedia is of a wholly different nature to information disseminated on other commercial Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) designated under the DSA. Indeed, the election-related information permitted to be published on Wikipedia is arguably so far removed, and fundamentally different, to election-related content posted on social media VLOPs. Indeed, information published on election-related Wikipedia pages, including political candidate pages, political party pages, and election pages, is arguably more akin to information on “matters of public interest” or “public concern,” which enjoy the highest level of protection under the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR.⁵⁴

This is readily apparent when actually considering what can and cannot be published on Wikipedia: for example, information published on Wikipedia cannot contain “original research,” which means a user’s own “ideas,” “opinions,” or “allegations,” cannot be published on Wikipedia, and Wikipedia does not publish “original thought”.⁵⁵ Similarly, information can only be published on Wikipedia if it is “verifiable”, meaning that each fact or claim published must be accompanied by the citation of a reliable source,⁵⁶ and such sources must be “reliable, independent, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy”.⁵⁷ And on top of this, information published on Wikipedia must be written from a “neutral point of view,” meaning representing “fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without editorial bias, all the significant views that have been published by reliable sources” on a topic.⁵⁸ Indeed, Wikipedia is explicitly “not a newspaper”, and Wikipedia “should not offer first-hand news reports”.⁵⁹

Thus, when actually considering the range of information related to elections that can be published on Wikipedia, it is in fact extremely narrow and limited, and only extends to well-sourced facts, described in a neutral manner, and cannot contain any opinion. This extremely limited type of allowable information on Wikipedia means it is a fundamentally different type of platform to, say, social media platforms, where users are generally allowed to publish a wider range of alleged facts, claims, allegations, or opinions, so long as they are not, in principle, illegal, or violating a platform’s specific terms and conditions. This also means that arguably the margin for election-related information to be disinformation on Wikipedia is a lot less, as all opinions, allegations, or comments, are, in principle, prohibited, and all facts or claims without a reliable source are also, in principle, prohibited. Indeed, while Wikipedia is not a media organisation, it must be noted that the type of election-related information published on Wikipedia is very much

⁵⁴ See, for example, *Arvanitis and Phileleftheros Public Company Limited v. Cyprus*, Application no. 49917/22, 3 July 2025, para. 31.

⁵⁵ See, Wikipedia:No original research, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research.

⁵⁶ See, Wikipedia:Verifiability, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability>.

⁵⁷ See, Wikipedia:Reliable sources, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.

⁵⁸ See, Wikipedia:Neutral point of view, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view/.

⁵⁹ See, Wikipedia:What Wikipedia is not, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not.

aligned with the hallmarks of well-sourced journalistic content under case law of the European Court of Human Rights, in that it is “public interest” content based on “accurate and reliable information”.⁶⁰ This is also consistent with the finding from UK courts that Wikipedia’s operating model had “been shown to be effective in promoting freedom of expression whilst promoting a high quality of content”.⁶¹

3.3 Foreign government disinformation

The third point about the application of European election disinformation regulation is how Wikipedia rules and mechanisms around “reliable sources,”⁶² and “deprecated sources,”⁶³ on state-controlled media outlets that disseminate disinformation actually mirrors that of current EU regulation of state-controlled media outlets engaging in disinformation. Notably, since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Council of the EU has issued various Decisions and Regulations,⁶⁴ prohibiting the broadcasting and distribution of content by various Russian media outlets in the EU, including Russia Today, Sputnik, EurAsia Daily, SouthFront, and NewsFront, for engaging in “disinformation” by a state-controlled media outlet.⁶⁵ Crucially, Wikipedia has also deprecated these media outlets as reliable sources, including Russia Today, for engaging in “propaganda and disinformation”; Sputnik, for being a “a Russian propaganda outlet that engages in bias and disinformation”; EurAsia Daily, which “frequently produces false claims to advance their Kremlin-aligned viewpoints”; SouthFront, as it publishes “Russian propaganda”; and NewsFront, for publishing “Russian propaganda”.⁶⁶ Thus, Wikipedia’s measures targeting sources that engage in disinformation and false information very much mirror EU disinformation regulation that targets state-controlled media outlets engaging in disinformation.

⁶⁰ See, *Fressoz and Roire v. France*, Application no. 29183/95, 21 January 1999 (Grand Chamber), para. 54.

⁶¹ *Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology* [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 125

⁶² See, “Wikipedia:Reliable sources,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.

⁶³ See, “Wikipedia:Deprecated sources,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

⁶⁴ See Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/351 of 1 March 2022 amending Decision 2014/512/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine; and Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 of 1 March 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. See also, *RT France v Council* Case T-125/22 (General Court, 27 July 2022).

⁶⁵ For a full list, see Council of the European Union, “EU sanctions against Russia”, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>. See generally, R. Ó Fathaigh and D. Voorhoof, “Freedom of Expression and the EU’s Ban on Russia Today: A Dangerous Rubicon Crossed,” (2022) 27(4) *Communications Law* 186.

⁶⁶ See, “Wikipedia:Deprecated sources,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

Notably, many of these sources were deprecated by consensus by the Wikipedia community before the EU ban, including SouthFront in 2020. Further, it should also be noted that Wikipedia's deprecated sources list includes other state-controlled media outlets not currently banned in the EU, such as HispanTV, for publishing "outright fabrications" and "Iranian propaganda"; Press TV, being an "Iranian government propaganda outlet that publishes disinformation"; and China Global Television Network, for publishing "false or fabricated information," and a "propaganda outlet".⁶⁷ A final point to note, and a possible policy learning from Wikipedia, is the procedure for a source to become deprecated, which is arguably quite transparent: deprecation can be proposed with a "request for comment" (Rfc) at a specially designated page called the "Reliable sources noticeboard,"⁶⁸ and the restrictions are only applied if there is "community consensus."⁶⁹ The proposal is debated by the community, and a public "RfC decision" issued, which can be appealed.⁷⁰ It can be argued that this process strives for transparency and fairness. Further, the examples and evidence in these public decisions by the Wikipedia community could be used as a template for the broader online ecosystem in terms of determining whether various sources of information are reliable.

3.4 Specific DSA obligations and community-governed platforms

Fourth, and a further point about the European regulatory framework on election disinformation, and the DSA in particular, is that most obligations placed on centralised-governed platforms under the DSA are also applicable to community-governed platforms, including Wikipedia. This is because the definition of online platforms is quite broad,⁷¹ meaning that community-governed platforms are captured by the definition, and no distinction is made based on how moderation is undertaken. As such, in principle, most obligations under the DSA which are applicable to centrally-governed online platforms are also applicable to community-governed platforms (unless a platform qualifies as a micro enterprise). Notably, the DSA did not adopt an approach similar to the Digital Single Market Directive, where there is an explicit exemption for "not-for-profit online encyclopedias" from the definition of "online content-sharing service provider".⁷² Similarly, the definition of an "online content-sharing service provider" under the Digital Single

⁶⁷ See, "Wikipedia:Deprecated sources," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

⁶⁸ See, Wikipedia:Reliable sources/Noticeboard, "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard".

⁶⁹ See, "Wikipedia:Deprecated sources," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

⁷⁰ See, for example, "Daily Mail RfC," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources/Noticeboard/Archive_220#Daily_Mail_RfC.

⁷¹ See, DSA, Article 3(1)(i).

⁷² Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC, Article 2(6).

Market Directive includes a for-profit element, so it only includes those providers with “profit-making purposes”.⁷³ And a consequence of the foregoing point is that community-governed platforms are not generally exempt from DSA obligations because they operate a community-based content moderation framework. This is also the case for Wikipedia.

Crucially, in relation to specific obligations under the DSA, and as demonstrated in the first Mapping Report (D2.1), it should be emphasised that there is no specific provision in the DSA requiring online platforms, including community-governed platforms, such as Wikipedia, to remove or prohibit election disinformation. However, an important point is that where election disinformation qualifies as illegal content under EU member state legislation, the DSA does contain provisions (e.g., Article 9), where platforms may be ordered to remove certain illegal content. While the Wikimedia Foundation has not reported an Article 9 order being issued against it in relation to disinformation, it should be noted that other VLOPs have reported being subject to Article 9 orders under national laws applicable to disinformation.⁷⁴

And a very important point is that under Article 16 DSA, online platforms, including Wikipedia, have the obligation of putting in place “mechanisms in place to allow any individual or entity to notify them of the presence on their service of specific items of information that the individual or entity considers to be illegal content”.⁷⁵ And platforms should process any notices and take their decisions in a “timely, diligent, non-arbitrary and objective manner”, depending on the type of illegal content being notified and the urgency of taking action.⁷⁶ Crucially, it should be noted that the Wikimedia Foundation did receive a number of Article 16 DSA notices relating to disinformation in 2025, including 2 from France (Negative effects on civic discourse: Misinformation/disinformation); 3 from Germany (Negative effects on civic discourse: Misinformation/disinformation); 1 from Romania (Negative effects on civic discourse: Misinformation/disinformation); 1 from Spain (Negative effects on civic discourse: Misinformation/disinformation); and 1 from Sweden (Negative effects on civic discourse: Misinformation/disinformation).⁷⁷ The Wikimedia Foundation reported that none of these notices resulted in office actions.⁷⁸

⁷³ Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC, Article 2(6).

⁷⁴ See those mentioned in R. O Fathaigh, D. Buijs, and J. van Hoboken, “The Regulation of Disinformation Under the Digital Services Act” (2025) 13 *Media and Communication* 1, at 4.

⁷⁵ See, DSA, Article 16(1).

⁷⁶ See, DSA, Recital 52.

⁷⁷ See, Wikimedia Foundation, Transparency report - January to June 2025, EU Digital Services Act information, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/who-we-are/transparency/2025-1/eu-digital-services-act-information/>.

⁷⁸ See, Wikimedia Foundation, Transparency report - January to June 2025, EU Digital Services Act information, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/who-we-are/transparency/2025-1/eu-digital-services-act-information/>.

Similarly, in January to June 2024, the Wikimedia Foundation reported that it received Article 16 DSA notice and action requests relating to “illegal content” concerning disinformation, including 4 from Germany (Misinformation) and 1 from Spain (Misinformation).⁷⁹ Thus, while these Article 16 DSA notices do not seem to be resulting in Wikimedia Foundation office actions to remove content, it does demonstrate that the DSA provisions highlighted in the first Mapping Report applicable to illegal content are being applied to Wikipedia in EU member states. This does of course raise a broader issue about the compatibility of these national laws with the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR; however, this is a separate issue to the application of the DSA, and has been explored elsewhere.⁸⁰

3.5 VLOP obligations and community-governed platforms

Fifth, and turning to the specific provisions in the DSA applicable to so-called Very Large Online Platforms, it should be mentioned again that Wikipedia has been designated as a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP) by the European Commission.⁸¹ This means that Wikipedia is subject to the special systemic-risk provisions (Article 34 and 35) under the DSA, which require VLOPs to assess any systemic risks stemming from their services, including relating to negative effects on “electoral processes”,⁸² which may stem from the dissemination of disinformation; and for VLOPs to put in place “mitigation measures” to address these systemic risks.⁸³ In this regard, VLOPs must publish a risk assessment and risk-mitigation report, which is, importantly, subject to an independent audit, with the auditor publishing an audit report, and an audit implementation report, with recommendations for the VLOP.⁸⁴ As such, Wikipedia (and the Wikimedia Foundation) is subject to a unique legal obligation under EU legislation to publicly disclose risks relating to election disinformation stemming from its system, and publicly disclose the risk-mitigation measures it has in place to mitigate these risks; and all subject to an independent audit.

⁷⁹ See, Wikimedia Foundation, Transparency report - January to June 2024, EU Digital Services Act information, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/who-we-are/transparency/2024-1/eu-digital-services-act-information/>.

⁸⁰ See R. O Fathaigh, D. Buijs, and J. van Hoboken, “The Regulation of Disinformation Under the Digital Services Act” (2025) 13 *Media and Communication* 1.

⁸¹ See European Commission, Commission Decision designating Wikipedia as a very large online platform in accordance with Article 33(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 24 March 2023, C(2023) 2742 final.

⁸² Digital Services Act, Article 34(1)(c).

⁸³ Digital Services Act, Article 35.

⁸⁴ Digital Services Act, Article 37.

A crucial point about Wikipedia's VLOP designation is how Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation is viewed under the DSA. Importantly, the European Commission in its VLOP designation Decision considered that Wikipedia is a "hosting service" within the meaning of Article 3(g)(iii) DSA, that "stores and disseminates information to the public at the request of recipients of its service," and is therefore an "online platform" within the meaning of Article 3(i) DSA.⁸⁵ Of significant note, the Commission considered that the Wikimedia Foundation is the legal entity "which alone operates" Wikipedia, and as such the Commission's designation was addressed to the Wikimedia Foundation.⁸⁶

Notably, in late 2024, the Wikimedia Foundation published its first DSA risk assessment,⁸⁷ which sets out "the Wikimedia Foundation's assessment of systemic risks linked to the use of Wikipedia in the EU", and "require[d] the Foundation (as the hosting provider of Wikipedia) to not only assess risks, but also determine what risk mitigations are appropriate".⁸⁸ This risk assessment includes important risks and mitigation measures relating to Wikipedia and disinformation and electoral process in the EU. Further, the independent audit report,⁸⁹ and audit implementation report,⁹⁰ have been published, which also specifically address mitigation measures for election disinformation risks. These risk assessments, risk mitigation measures, audit and audit implementation reports have already been analysed in the second Mapping Report (D2.3).

However, in assessing the impact of the application of the systemic risks provisions of the DSA to Wikipedia, certain points are of particular note: first, and crucially important, the auditors noted that the only actions within the scope of the audit "are those conducted directly" by the Wikimedia Foundation, and "not the actions of the volunteer community."⁹¹ Thus, in relation to election disinformation, the auditors focused exclusively on the measures the Wikimedia Foundation had in place, and the audit did not seek to specifically examine (or interfere with) the mechanisms of the volunteer community applicable to election disinformation. This was crucial,

⁸⁵ European Commission, Commission Decision designating Wikipedia as a very large online platform in accordance with Article 33(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 24 March 2023, C(2023) 2742 final, section 1.

⁸⁶ European Commission, Commission Decision designating Wikipedia as a very large online platform in accordance with Article 33(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 24 March 2023, C(2023) 2742 final, section 6.

⁸⁷ Wikimedia Foundation, "WMF 23-24 approved DSA SRAM (Risk Register)", [https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WMF_23-24_approved_DSA_SRAM_\(Risk_Register\).zip](https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WMF_23-24_approved_DSA_SRAM_(Risk_Register).zip).

⁸⁸ Wikimedia Foundation, "2023 EU Systemic Risk Assessment - Cover note", 31 August 2023, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/5/5a/Wikipedia_DSA_SRA_submission_cover_note_31Aug2023.pdf

⁸⁹ Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023-24 Public.pdf", https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wikipedia_DSA_Audit_Report_2023-24_Public.pdf.

⁹⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikipedia DSA Audit Implementation Report 2023-24 Public.pdf", https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wikipedia_DSA_Audit_Implementation_Report_2023-24_Public.pdf.

⁹¹ Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023-24 Public.pdf", p. 9.

and contrasts with the litigation the Wikimedia Foundation initiated against the UK's Online Safety Act, where it was argued the legislation would “fundamentally change the way [Wikipedia] operates”.⁹²

Further, the audit report for Wikipedia was “positive with comments” in relation to its compliance with Article 34 and 35, and was generally positive about the measures that are in place to tackle election disinformation. Two notable recommendations were made which were applicable to election disinformation: first, the audit report recommended that the Wikimedia Foundation “provide more information on the effects of regional and linguistic aspects on the risks identified, and Member State-specific assessments, if available”.⁹³ The Wikimedia Foundation initiated this recommendation in its second risk assessment in 2025, and noted that it provided “additional analysis in its second systemic risk assessment regarding how minority linguistic communities may be disproportionately impacted by specific risks”.⁹⁴ In particular, language versions of Wikipedia representing minority linguistic communities, “which typically have fewer active editors than those representing larger linguistic communities,” may be “more vulnerable” to risks relating to the propagation of disinformation “due to the inherent challenges of having fewer people contributing to, editing, and patrolling pages”.⁹⁵ The second risk assessment acknowledges the “unique risks” faced by “linguistic minorities” in the EU and cites a known example of when such risks materialised in an EU member state, namely a report in which this phenomenon was evaluated on Croatian Wikipedia in 2021⁹⁶ (described as a unique situation in which the contributors to/audience of a single language version of Wikipedia are relatively heavily concentrated in a single country).⁹⁷

3.5.1 Code of Conduct on Disinformation 2025

However, a particularly thorny, and arguably quite difficult question, was the recommendation in relation to the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The audit report noted that the Wikimedia Foundation “is not a signatory to the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation and does not refer

⁹² Wikimedia Foundation v. Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [2025] EWHC 2086 (Admin), para. 2.

⁹³ Holistic AI, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023–24 Public’, p. 80.

⁹⁴ Wikimedia Foundation, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Implementation Report 2023-24 Public.pdf’, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Wikimedia Foundation Inc, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Implementation Report 2023–24: Pursuant to DSA Article 37(6)’, p. 21.

⁹⁶ See Croatian WP Disinformation Assessment - Final Report EN, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Croatian_WP_Disinformation_Assessment_-_Final_Report_EN.pdf; and Wikipedia, “Croatian Wikipedia”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian_Wikipedia.

⁹⁷ Wikimedia Foundation Inc, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Implementation Report 2023–24: Pursuant to DSA Article 37(6)’, p. 21.

to it in relation to the mitigation measures concerning disinformation or collaboration”.⁹⁸ Of particular note, the audit report recommended that the Wikimedia Foundation “monitor the developments surrounding the 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation and other potential codes of conduct to be issued in accordance with DSA as well as participate, if applicable”.⁹⁹ This language of “participate, if applicable” arguably fell short of recommending that Wikipedia join the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation; and in the audit implementation report, the Wikimedia Foundation stated that “[f]or now, [the Wikimedia Foundation] sees the 2022 Code as part of an evolving body of good practice that informs our approach to a global challenge, and that it therefore merits close monitoring, and ongoing exchanges with its formal adherents”.¹⁰⁰

Crucially, one important matter has now changed the calculus around the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation, and that is that the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation was recently in 2025 officially recognised as a Code of Conduct under Article 45 DSA (and explicitly becomes part of the DSA regulatory framework).¹⁰¹ Indeed, Recital 104 DSA now becomes of crucial importance, where it states that “adherence to and compliance” with a given code of conduct by a VLOP may be considered as an “appropriate risk mitigating measure” under Article 35 DSA. Indeed, the “refusal without proper explanations” by a VLOP to “participate in the application of such a code of conduct could be taken into account, where relevant,” when determining whether the VLOP “has infringed the obligations laid down by” the DSA.¹⁰² And Article 35(1)(h) explicitly mentions cooperation through codes of conduct as a risk-mitigation measure.¹⁰³ It should be noted that the commitments under the Code become “auditable” from July 2025, and independent audits under Article 37 DSA would include “any commitments undertaken pursuant to the codes of conduct referred to in Articles 45”.¹⁰⁴

The question thus arises whether Wikipedia is obliged to join the Code of Conduct, and what are the benefits and drawbacks. First, under Article 45, it explicitly mentions “voluntary” codes of conduct;¹⁰⁵ while Recital 103 also mentions the “voluntary” aspect of these codes of conduct, and

⁹⁸ Holistic AI, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023–24 Public’, p. 95.

⁹⁹ Holistic AI, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023–24 Public’, p. 95.

¹⁰⁰ Wikimedia Foundation Inc, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Implementation Report 2023–24: Pursuant to DSA Article 37(6)’, p. 34, https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wikipedia_DSA_Audit_Implementation_Report_2023-24_Public.pdf.

¹⁰¹ European Commission, “Commission endorses the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the Digital Services Act”, 13 February 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-endorses-integration-voluntary-code-practice-disinformation-digital-services-act>.

¹⁰² See DSA, Recital 104.

¹⁰³ DSA, Article 35(1)(h) (“initiating or adjusting cooperation with other providers of online platforms or of online search engines through the codes of conduct and the crisis protocols referred to in Articles 45 and 48 respectively”).

¹⁰⁴ See DSA, Article 37.

¹⁰⁵ See DSA, Article 45(1).

emphasises that any implementation of the codes “should not impair the voluntary nature of such codes and the freedom of interested parties to decide whether to participate.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Recital 104 is also premised on the idea that the Commission will first give an “invitation to participate” in a code of conduct, and the “refusal without proper explanations” by a VLOP of the Commission’s invitation to participate in the application of a code of conduct “could be taken into account, where relevant,” when determining whether the VLOP has “infringed the obligations laid down” by the DSA.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it seems arguable that there is no strict obligation to join the Code of Conduct on Disinformation, and if there is an invitation to join from the Commission, this could arguably be refused, with “proper explanation”. As such, is there a proper explanation of why Wikipedia would not join? And on joining the Code, there are a number of considerations. First, one notable feature of the Code is that platforms have discretion to choose which measures to adopt, and can opt out of certain measures not applicable to a community-governed platform’s system. As such, were the Wikimedia Foundation to join, and adopt an approach similar to the DSA’s risk assessment provisions and audit, where measures within scope would be “those conducted directly” by the Wikimedia Foundation, and “not the actions of the volunteer community,”¹⁰⁸ it could be an option. Other civil society organisations are part of the Code.

However, it should be noted that the Code is arguably very much premised on a considerable amount of “reporting commitments” and “key performance indicators”, which is very much focused on tables of data for content removed or demonetised under the Code, which arguably may not transfer that neatly to Wikipedia’s community-moderated mechanisms for dealing with election disinformation, where reducing actions to simply a number of removals might prove difficult. And a third overarching point is that the actual purpose of the Code is to bring “transparency” to online platforms’ actions around disinformation, as recognised by the European Commission in its Opinion on the Code,¹⁰⁹ and set out “transparent Measures” by online platforms in tackling disinformation.¹¹⁰ And all this is premised on targeting online platforms that have not been transparent about their operations, which are mainly those commercial social media VLOPs.¹¹¹ However, as demonstrated in the second Mapping Report, the Wikipedia measures

¹⁰⁶ See DSA, Recital 103.

¹⁰⁷ See DSA, Recital 104.

¹⁰⁸ Wikimedia Foundation, “Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023-24 Public.pdf”, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Commission Opinion on the assessment of the Code of Practice on Disinformation within the meaning of Article 45 of Regulation 2022/2065, C(2025) 1008 final, para. 24.

¹¹⁰ Commission Opinion on the assessment of the Code of Practice on Disinformation within the meaning of Article 45 of Regulation 2022/2065, C(2025) 1008 final, para. 26.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Council of Europe Steering Committee for Media and Information Society, Guidance Note on countering the spread of online mis- and disinformation through fact-checking and platform design solutions in a human rights compliant manner (2024). <https://edoc.coe.int/en/internet/11885-guidance-note-on-countering-the-spread-of-online-mis-and-disinformation-through-fact-checking-and-platform-design-solutions-in-a-human-rights-compliant-manner.html>.

applicable to disinformation are premised on the notion of transparency, where all measures are sought to be taken in a transparent way, through the community-moderated model, with all edit history and discussion history visible. Wikipedia's measures applicable to disinformation are arguably very much open to the public already. Thus, the added value may not be so apparent.

3.6 Enforcement of election disinformation regulation

A further crucial aspect of EU election disinformation regulation is of course the actual enforcement of this regulatory framework. As mentioned in the first Mapping Report (D2.1), there has been considerable regulatory activity pursuant to the DSA by the European Commission, especially around election disinformation.¹¹² It is thus important to understand the implications of this regulatory enforcement for community-governed platforms, and the application of the DSA to platforms such as Wikipedia.

3.6.1 Non-VLOP obligations and DSA enforcement

Taking a broader view, the primary factor in determining the regulatory body enforcing the DSA, the outcome being either the European Commission or the Country of Origin Digital Services Coordinator (DSC), is whether or not the infringer is a VLOP.¹¹³ For platforms that are not VLOPs, the DSC in the country of origin is the enforcement body.¹¹⁴ When considering VLOP infringements, the nature of the obligations breached must be taken into account. If the infringement relates to any of the specific obligations listed in Articles 33–43 of the DSA, responsibility for enforcement lies automatically with the European Commission. However, breaches of the standard obligations in Articles 11–32 DSA by VLOPs require an assessment of the significance of the infringement and if the breach is individual and non-systemic, the Digital Services Coordinator (DSC) in the country of origin is responsible for enforcement of VLOPs. In the case of systemic breaches of standard obligations, however, enforcement lies with the European Commission again.

For Wikipedia, the above is relevant for identifying the enforcer in cases of breaches of standard obligations, either individual or systemic, given that Wikimedia is classified as a VLOP under the DSA. The applicable DSC for Wikimedia is the Dutch Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM).¹¹⁵ As such, the application of DSA obligation such as Article 9 orders for illegal content, or Article 16 notice and action mechanism, which are being operationalised around member state

¹¹² See, R. Fahy, I. Toepoel, and J. van Hoboken, *European regulatory frameworks on election disinformation applicable to community-governed platforms* (Dem-Debate, 2025), pp. 20-22.

¹¹³ As defined in Article 33 of the DSA.

¹¹⁴ Article 49(1) DSA

¹¹⁵ For more information, see the EDRI Digital Services Coordinators Database: <https://dscdb.edri.org/DigitalServicesCoordinators/Netherlands>

laws that criminalise false information and disinformation, would be subject to oversight by the ACM. Additionally, In terms of recent action, last July the ACM sent a letter to twelve major online platforms, including Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok and X, to alert them to the upcoming parliamentary elections in the Netherlands taking place in October 2025 and to remind them of their obligations under the DSA.¹¹⁶ The letter referenced, among other things, the DSA Election Toolkit published on 21 February 2025.¹¹⁷

3.6.2 Election related enforcement action by the Commission

In November 2024, the Commission sent a request for information (RFI) under the DSA to TikTok, asking for more information on how TikTok manages the risk of information manipulation.¹¹⁸ This RFI followed an earlier request, sent on 2 October, regarding the design and functioning of recommender systems in relation to elections, which was sent to TikTok, as well as to Snapchat and YouTube.¹¹⁹ As mentioned in the first report, on 5 December 2024, the Commission issued a significant retention order, requiring the platform to “freeze and preserve data” relating to the potential systemic risks that its services could pose to electoral processes and civic discourse, until 31 March 2025.¹²⁰ Shortly afterwards, on 17 December 2024, the Commission opened formal proceedings against TikTok for suspected breaches of the DSA.¹²¹ These proceedings were said to focus on management of risks to elections or civic discourse, linked to its recommender systems and “notably the risks linked to the coordinated inauthentic manipulation or automated exploitation of the services” and TikTok’s “policies on political advertisements and paid-for political content”.¹²² As stated by the Commission, this process of formal proceedings empowers them to take further enforcement steps, such as interim measures and non-compliance decisions, while also enabling them to accept any commitment made by TikTok to remedy the matters

¹¹⁶ See: <https://www.acm.nl/system/files/documents/brief-aan-platforms-in-het-kader-van-tweede-kamerverkiezingen.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ ‘DSA Elections Toolkit for Digital Services Coordinators | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future’, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/dsa-elections-toolkit-digital-services-coordinators>.

¹¹⁸ ‘Commission Sends Additional Request for Information to TikTok under the Digital Services Act | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future’ <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-sends-additional-request-information-tiktok-under-digital-services-act>> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹¹⁹ ‘Commission Sends Requests for Information to YouTube, Snapchat, and TikTok on Recommender Systems under the Digital Services Act | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future’ <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-sends-requests-information-youtube-snapchat-and-tiktok-recommender-systems-under-digital>> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹²⁰ ‘Commission Has Stepped up Its Monitoring of TikTok’ (*European Commission - European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6243> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹²¹ ‘Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok under DSA’ (*European Commission - European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6487> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹²² ‘Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok under DSA’ (*European Commission - European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6487> accessed 8 October 2025.

subject to the proceedings.¹²³ The Commission also states that the DSA does not set out a legal deadline for ending formal proceedings.¹²⁴

In December 2023, the European Commission opened formal infringement proceedings against X based on an earlier request for information,¹²⁵ their transparency report¹²⁶ and their risk assessment report from 2023.¹²⁷ This was to determine whether X had breached the DSA in areas linked to risk management, content moderation, dark patterns, advertising transparency and data access for researchers.¹²⁸ In July 2024, the Commission informed X of its preliminary view that X was in breach of the DSA in these areas.¹²⁹ Within the course of these proceedings, the Commission issued a retention order against X in January 2025.¹³⁰ This order applied during the German elections and required X to preserve internal documents and information regarding future changes to the design and functioning of its recommender algorithms between 17 January and 31 December 2025.¹³¹ Outside the scope of formal investigations, the Commission engaged in correspondence with X in August 2024 concerning the risks of disinformation, prompted by incidents such as riots in the United Kingdom and a live-streamed interview between Elon Musk and Donald Trump, who was then a US presidential candidate.¹³²

These recent enforcement actions illustrate an emerging pattern in how the European Commission exercises its supervisory powers under the DSA in electoral contexts. As can be seen in this, Requests for Information (RFIs) often constitute the first formal step in the Commission's

¹²³ 'Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok under DSA' (*European Commission - European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6487> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹²⁴ 'Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against TikTok under DSA' (*European Commission - European Commission*) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6487> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹²⁵ European Commission, 'The Commission Sends Request for Information to X under DSA', https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4953.

¹²⁶ Transparency Report X, see: <https://transparency.x.com/dsa-transparency-report.html>.

¹²⁷ DSA Risk Assessment Report X, see: <https://transparency.x.com/en/reports/dsa-risk-assessment-report>.

¹²⁸ European Commission, 'Commission Opens Formal Proceedings against X under the Digital Services Act', <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-opens-formal-proceedings-against-x-under-digital-services-act>.

¹²⁹ European Commission, 'Commission Sends Preliminary Findings to X for Breach of DSA', https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_3761.

¹³⁰ European Commission, 'Commission Addresses Additional Investigatory Measures to X in the Ongoing Proceedings under the Digital Services Act', <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-addresses-additional-investigatory-measures-x-ongoing-proceedings-under-digital-services>.

¹³¹ European Commission, 'Commission Addresses Additional Investigatory Measures to X in the Ongoing Proceedings under the Digital Services Act', <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-addresses-additional-investigatory-measures-x-ongoing-proceedings-under-digital-services>.

¹³² See: Ronan Ó Fathaigh, Doris Buijs and Joris van Hoboken, 'The Regulation of Disinformation Under the Digital Services Act', <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/9615>, and see: Thierry Breton: <https://x.com/ThierryBreton/status/1823033048109367549>.

enforcement workflow under the DSA.¹³³ The requests are used to collect evidence on systemic risks, content moderation practices, advertising transparency and data access before deciding whether to issue retention orders, conduct investigation or open formal proceedings.¹³⁴ Information obtained through RFIs has already led to several formal proceedings against VLOPs, including X, TikTok, AliExpress, Facebook, Instagram and Temu between December 2023 and December 2024.¹³⁵

In addition to more formal enforcement mechanisms, roundtable discussions on elections are organised to ensure implementation readiness in the context of the DSA ahead of EU elections. For example, in the run-up to the 2025 German elections, the European Commission and Germany's Digital Services Coordinator organised a roundtable with VLOPs in January 2025 to "highlight" the responsibilities of VLOPs under the DSA with regard to systemic risks and elections.¹³⁶ The European Commission also conducted a "stress test" with VLOPs to "test to see whether they are doing enough to counter disinformation in the run-up" to the German elections".¹³⁷ Similar roundtable discussions were held in November 2024 in the run-up to national elections, where the Romanian Data Protection Authority, the Commission, online platforms, and relevant state authorities and civil society organisations discussed and shared information regarding the Romanian presidential and parliamentary elections.¹³⁸ Likewise, similar exchanges took place in the context of the European elections in June 2024.¹³⁹

Also, despite its central role, the Commission publishes very little of the legal and evidentiary material underpinning these steps, applying a "general presumption of confidentiality".¹⁴⁰ This practice has been criticised in academic literature as well as by the European Ombudsman, who

¹³³ Article 67 DSA.

¹³⁴ Matteo Fabbri, 'The Role of Requests for Information in Governing Digital Platforms Under the Digital Services Act: The Case of X' (2025) 6 *Journalism and Media* 41, pp. 1–2.

¹³⁵ Matteo Fabbri, 'The Role of Requests for Information in Governing Digital Platforms Under the Digital Services Act: The Case of X' (2025) 6 *Journalism and Media* 41, p. 3.

¹³⁶ European Commission, "Digital Services Coordinator for Germany hosts roundtable with online platforms", 24 January 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/digital-services-coordinator-germany-hosts-roundtable-online-platforms>.

¹³⁷ See, "EU to test Facebook, X and others on disinformation ahead of German election", Reuters, 24 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/meta-tiktok-x-join-eu-stress-test-german-election-2025-01-24/>.

¹³⁸ See: European Commission, "Commission convenes very large online platforms and search engines to monitor election readiness for the Romanian Presidential and Parliamentary elections", 30 November 2024, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-convenes-very-large-online-platforms-and-search-engines-monitor-election-readiness>.

¹³⁹ See: European Commission, "DSA Election Readiness - Roundtable with Platforms, Search Engines, and Digital Service Coordinators", 5 June 2024, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/dsa-election-readiness-roundtable-platforms-search-engines-and-digital-service-coordinators>.

¹⁴⁰ Matteo Fabbri, 'The Role of Requests for Information in Governing Digital Platforms Under the Digital Services Act: The Case of X' (2025) 6 *Journalism and Media* 41, p. 3.

in a letter of 14 November 2024 challenged the Commission’s refusal to disclose X’s systemic risk assessment report and argued that the presumption of confidentiality constituted maladministration.¹⁴¹

Finally, it must be remembered that while there is considerable regulatory activity under the DSA, Wikipedia is the only sole VLOP, out of a total of 25 VLOPs, that has not been subject to any regulatory activity by the European Commission under the DSA as of October 2025.¹⁴² As such, following two years of the DSA’s provisions being applicable to VLOPs, Wikipedia has not (yet) come to regulatory attention; while none of the post-European Parliament election reports by the European Commission published in June 2025 mention Wikipedia.¹⁴³

4. Community-governed platform mechanisms on election disinformation and informing policy

Having discussed the application of European disinformation regulation to community-governed platforms, this section now turns to assessing how mechanisms adopted by community-governed platforms, such as Wikipedia, may have potential to inform policy making on election disinformation regulation in the EU. Notably, the points below are a tentative discussion, and will be further built upon for final policy recommendations that will be made in the final Policy Recommendations (D2.5) report.

And the opening point to be made is that there are arguably two major features of Wikipedia which contribute to tackling election disinformation: (a) first, Wikipedia’s detailed content rules, which mean, in effect, only accurate, unbiased and well-sourced election related-information can be published on Wikipedia; and (b) second, the sophisticated volunteer community-based moderation and oversight process, which seeks to ensure false and misleading information is not published on Wikipedia, or is removed (e.g., Wikipedia’s “recent changes” page, which is

¹⁴¹ Matteo Fabbri, ‘The Role of Requests for Information in Governing Digital Platforms Under the Digital Services Act: The Case of X’ (2025) 6 *Journalism and Media* 41; European Ombudsman, ‘The European Ombudsman’s Preliminary Views on the European Commission’s Refusal to Give Public Access to the Risk Assessment Report of a Large Social Media Company on Its Compliance with the Provisions of the Digital Services Act’ (*European Ombudsman*, 18 February 2025) <<https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/doc/correspondence/en/199731>> accessed 8 October 2025.

¹⁴² See, European Commission, “Supervision of the designated very large online platforms and search engines under DSA,” <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>.

¹⁴³ See, European Commission, Report on the 2024 elections to the European Parliament (2025), https://commission.europa.eu/publications/report-2024-elections-european-parliament_en.

monitored by so-called patrollers,¹⁴⁴ and editors monitoring certain pages for edits, and protecting pages from edits; the “new pages patrol” where volunteer editors patrol newly created pages;¹⁴⁵ or specific patrols for edits to certain political party leader pages, certain politician pages, mayor pages, and political party pages). In the following sub-sections, these overarching features of the Wikipedia model are teased out, and related to possibly informing policy on election disinformation.

4.1 Wikipedia’s content rules in the context election disinformation

As discussed in the second Mapping Report (D2.2), the “Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view” (NPOV) policy forms one of the five pillars that guide Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation and which have “informed how and why Wikipedia grows and develops”.¹⁴⁶ NPOV entails that all articles should aim to be verifiably accurate by citing reliable sources and should not reflect the personal experiences, interpretations, or opinions of editors.¹⁴⁷ These reliable sources should come from independent, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy, although the reliability of a source still depends on the context.¹⁴⁸ Some sources are “deprecated,” meaning they are deemed highly questionable and editors are discouraged from citing them in articles because they almost always fail the reliable sources guideline.¹⁴⁹ Such rules concerning deprecated sources may vary per language version as they are set by the Wikipedia communities. Moreover, deprecating a source differs from “blacklisting,” which is a separate mechanism whereby websites are usually blacklisted if they are involved in spam-related issues, such as external link spamming.¹⁵⁰ Within the context of NPOV violations, there is a high level of awareness of systemic bias in Wikipedia pages arising from the demographics of the editing community.¹⁵¹ It is important to note the strong emphasis placed on categorising

¹⁴⁴See, Wikipedia, “Recent changes,”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:RecentChanges?hidebots=1&hidecategorization=1&hideWikibase=1&limit=50&days=1&urlversion=2>.

¹⁴⁵ See, Wikipedia, “New pages feed,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:NewPagesFeed>.

¹⁴⁶ Wikimedia Foundation, ‘2021-2022 Annual Report: Pillars That Inspire’, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/about/annualreport/2022-annual-report/pillars/>.

¹⁴⁷ Wikipedia, ‘Five Pillars’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars.

¹⁴⁸Wikipedia, ‘Reliable Sources’, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Reliable_sources&oldid=1290893500.

¹⁴⁹ Wikipedia, ‘Deprecated Sources’, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources&oldid=1276030532.

¹⁵⁰ Wikipedia, ‘Deprecated Sources’, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources&oldid=1276030532.

¹⁵¹ ‘Wikipedia:WikiProject Countering Systemic Bias - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Countering_systemic_bias.

certain sources as reliable, as well as the transparent mechanism behind this categorisation, as this can be used to inform policies aimed at improving the veracity of information online.

In addition, the Neutral Point of View policy does not mean the exclusion of certain points of view, but rather including all verifiable points of view which have sufficient “due weight.” Giving due weight and avoiding undue weight implies that articles should not “give minority views or aspects as much of or as detailed a description as more widely held views or widely supported aspects”.¹⁵² To determine proper weight, a viewpoint’s prevalence in reliable sources is considered, rather than its prevalence among Wikipedia editors or the general public.¹⁵³ This means that, in order to be neutral, articles must “represent all significant viewpoints published by reliable sources, in proportion to the prominence of each viewpoint in those sources”.¹⁵⁴ The clear link with content being discussed and presented in reliable sources ties in with what is stated in the policies of “No original research,” and “Verifiability,” which, alongside NPOV, are Wikipedia’s three core content policies.¹⁵⁵

Also, in relation to election disinformation, there is a specific {{Political POV}} template for cases where the political neutrality of an article is called into question.¹⁵⁶ This template alerts readers that the neutrality of an article is disputed and that it may contain biased or partisan political opinions about a political party, event, person or government, which are presented as facts.¹⁵⁷ It invites readers to consult the talk page for further context and any relevant discussions.¹⁵⁸ In the context of election-related disinformation, transparent labelling acts as an internal warning mechanism while preserving open editorial debate, which is something that could inform policy surrounding the labelling of information flagged as “misleading” information in the context of election disinformation in the broader online information ecosystem.

¹⁵² ‘Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight.

¹⁵³ ‘Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Wikipedia:No Original Research’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:No_original_research&oldid=1315785306 and ‘Wikipedia:Verifiability’, *Wikipedia* (2025).

¹⁵⁶ ‘Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Template:Political POV’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Political_POV&oldid=1315311512.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Template:Political POV’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Political_POV&oldid=1315311512.

The principles of No original research (NOR) and Verifiability (V) have their origins in the NPOV policy and all three should be interpreted in combination with one another.¹⁵⁹ The prohibition of original research means that all material added to articles must be verifiable.¹⁶⁰ This means that an editor must be able to find a reliable published source that directly supports the material in question.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, a statement can be verifiable even if it is not verified.¹⁶² However, in some situations, an explicit in-line citation to a reliable source must also be provided, namely for “all direct quotations, contentious matter about living people, and for anything challenged or likely to be challenged”.¹⁶³ The policy on “Biographies of Living People” falls under the category of “contentious matters” concerning living people, and notably, applies to politicians, and will be discussed further below.¹⁶⁴ In cases of disagreement between reliable sources, the expectation is to “maintain a neutral point of view and present what the various sources say, giving each side its due weight”, which also ties back to the NPOV policy.¹⁶⁵

Crucially, material about living persons that is added to any Wikipedia page is subject to “strict” adherence to the principles of verifiability, neutrality and the avoidance of original research, as well as to “all applicable laws in the United States” and the Biographies of Living Persons Policy.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, a specific noticeboard exists for reporting issues related to particular biographical content.¹⁶⁷ As will be elaborated on below, biographies of living persons are also one of the “contentious topics,” as designated by the Arbitration Committee.¹⁶⁸

Overall, Wikipedia’s content rules, and in particular its stricter application of core policies to biographies of living persons, illustrate how, for example, treating information about politicians and political actors with heightened care can help prevent election-related disinformation, and can provide learnings for broader regulation in the online environment.

4.2 Wikipedia’s community-based moderation and oversight and election disinformation

¹⁵⁹ ‘Wikipedia:Neutral Point of View - Wikipedia’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view#Due_and_undue_weight.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Wikipedia:No Original Research’.

¹⁶¹ ‘Wikipedia:Verifiability’.

¹⁶² ‘Wikipedia:Verifiability’.

¹⁶³ ‘Wikipedia:Verifiability’.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Wikipedia:Biographies of Living Persons’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Biographies_of_living_persons&oldid=1314937930.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Wikipedia:Verifiability’.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Wikipedia:Biographies of Living Persons’.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Wikipedia:Biographies of Living Persons’.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Template:Contentious Topics/Table’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Contentious_topics/table&oldid=1314203826.

Having outlined Wikipedia's content policies and their relevance in addressing election disinformation, this section turns to the platform's moderation and oversight mechanisms. It examines how compliance can be achieved and how these mechanisms could help prevent the spread of false or misleading election-related information, by looking at mechanisms such as the Recent Changes Patrol and other patrolling systems, as well as dispute resolution processes governed by the Arbitration Committee.

4.2.1 Live edits, Recent Changes and patrolling

A defining feature of Wikipedia's community-based moderation system is the Recent Changes Patrol, which consists of volunteers dedicated to checking various articles for edits that are inappropriate.¹⁶⁹ This is done via the Recent Changes list, which shows all live edits made to Wikipedia articles.¹⁷⁰ This list can be filtered to display articles by various criteria, such as featured articles,¹⁷¹ good articles,¹⁷² articles about living people, contributions from new accounts, contributions from IP addresses, contributions from mobile users as these are more prone to vandalism, and by likelihood of being damaging or in bad faith.¹⁷³ In addition, due to the high volumes of edits occurring each second, several tools have been created to facilitate this process.¹⁷⁴ With approximately 4,694 active Recent Changes patrollers on the English Wikipedia, this mechanism is a notable example of the transparency of Wikipedia's moderation process, in that all edits are not only reviewable by the community, but also made visible and remain so.¹⁷⁵

The Recent Changes Patrol forms part of Wikipedia's wider patrolling infrastructure. These patrols are a specific WikiProject,¹⁷⁶ meaning a group of contributors who collaborate to improve Wikipedia, and are responsible for monitoring a class of pages and taking action where necessary.¹⁷⁷ In general, individual Wikipedia editors perform most of the patrol actions, while some involve computer programs or pre-programmed scripts that perform automated edits.¹⁷⁸

¹⁶⁹ 'Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Recent_changes_patrol&oldid=1316996550.

¹⁷⁰ 'Recent Changes - Wikipedia', <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:RecentChanges>.

¹⁷¹ 'Wikipedia:Featured Articles', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Featured_articles&oldid=1317044954.

¹⁷² 'Wikipedia:Good Articles', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Good_articles&oldid=1273668498.

¹⁷³ 'Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol'.

¹⁷⁴ 'Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol'.

¹⁷⁵ 'Category:Wikipedian Recent Changes Patrollers', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Category:Wikipedian_recent_changes_patrollers&oldid=1292178531.

¹⁷⁶ 'Wikipedia:WikiProject'.

¹⁷⁷ 'Wikipedia:Patrols'.

¹⁷⁸ 'Wikipedia:Patrols'.

Another important distinction is between patrolling single projects, where patrolling can take different forms across different Wikimedia projects, and cross-project patrolling.¹⁷⁹ Cross-project patrolling involves several tools built into the platform. These include the global block logs,¹⁸⁰ where IP addresses causing disruption and blocked globally are logged, and global user rights.¹⁸¹ The community has also developed various cross-project patrolling and vandalism prevention mechanisms, including the Counter Vandalism Network¹⁸² community and the spam blacklist, implemented as a countermeasure to spam.¹⁸³ Here, spam generally refers to one of three main types: promotional articles disguised as encyclopaedic content, the addition of excessive or inappropriate external links, and citation spamming intended to promote authors or works rather than provide relevant references.¹⁸⁴

The working methods of patrollers are influenced by various factors, including the type of vandalism or disruptive editing being targeted, or the availability of specialised patrolling tools beyond those implemented by default across all Wikipedias.¹⁸⁵ Within the English Wikipedia, there are different subgroups of patrols. In addition to the above-mentioned Recent Changes Patrols, there also are, for example, the Articles for Deletion Patrols,¹⁸⁶ who moderate deletion discussions with constructive comments; the New Pages Patrols,¹⁸⁷ who patrol newly created pages to improve them and provide assistance with edits made by new users who are unfamiliar with Wikipedia's policies and guidelines; and the aforementioned WikiProject New Zealand/Vandalism Patrol, whose shared watchlist is intended to "better organise information in articles related to New Zealand",¹⁸⁸ and includes political party leaders, certain politicians, mayors, and parties.

The large number of patrollers is in proportion to the fact that large projects such as the English Wikipedia are specific targets for various forms of vandalism due to the high exposure in terms

¹⁷⁹ 'Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta'.

¹⁸⁰ 'Global Blocks - Meta-Wiki', https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Global_blocks.

¹⁸¹ 'Global Rights - Meta-Wiki', https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Global_rights.

¹⁸² 'Countervandalism Network - Meta-Wiki', https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Countervandalism_Network.

¹⁸³ 'Wikipedia:Spam Blacklist', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Spam_blacklist&oldid=1290431420.

¹⁸⁴ 'Wikipedia:Spam', *Wikipedia* (2025), <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Spam&oldid=1315472299>.

¹⁸⁵ 'Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta-Wiki', https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Patrolling_on_Wikipedia/Report.

¹⁸⁶ 'Wikipedia:AfD Patrol', *Wikipedia* (2023), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:AfD_Patrol&oldid=1174418180.

¹⁸⁷ 'Wikipedia:New Pages Patrol', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:New_pages_patrol&oldid=1315743198.

¹⁸⁸ 'Wikipedia:WikiProject New Zealand', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:WikiProject_New_Zealand&oldid=1306646134.

of the large number of articles, the large number of readers, and the high search engine rankings.¹⁸⁹ Types of vandalism or disruptive editing, which have been recognised here, can range from persistent disruption for disruption's sake to long-term disinformation campaigns coordinated externally by well-resourced interested parties, such as ideologically motivated interest groups, corporations or even potentially nation states.¹⁹⁰ In the case of large projects such as the English Wikipedia, it is interesting to consider that the use of Wikipedia for fact-checking controversial, user-generated content on other commercial social media VLOPS (e.g., Facebook and YouTube) can result in articles receiving a high volume of traffic and edits from IP addresses or newly registered accounts, potentially indicating coordinated vandalism or coordinated attempts to manipulate information.¹⁹¹ This issue could also arise through social media sites such as Reddit where forums have been used in the past to coordinate large-scale vandalism.¹⁹²

Wikipedia's patrolling system is a notable example of how, through community-based oversight, accountability and transparency can be operationalised. The idea of setting up patrols for political and election-related pages can also inform the wider online information ecosystem, demonstrating how targeted monitoring can help prevent the spread of election-related disinformation.

4.2.2 Dispute resolution and the Wikipedia Arbitration Committee

When conflicts between Wikipedia editors cannot be resolved in any other way, the Arbitration Committee (ArbCom) is responsible for resolving them through a Wikipedia arbitration process.¹⁹³ This committee is elected annually by the community and is governed by the arbitration policy (ARBPOL).¹⁹⁴ The Committee has jurisdiction within the English Wikipedia and has the power to for example grant or revoke CheckUser,¹⁹⁵ and Oversight permissions.¹⁹⁶ Understanding the role of the Arbitration Committee is particularly important in the context of tackling election disinformation, as it is the highest body in the community for resolving disputes and setting standards, including on determining contentious topics, as will be discussed.

¹⁸⁹ Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta'.

¹⁹⁰ Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta'.

¹⁹¹ Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta'.

¹⁹² Research:Patrolling on Wikipedia/Report - Meta'.

¹⁹³ 'Wikipedia:Arbitration', *Wikipedia* (2025), <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Arbitration&oldid=1305343481>.

¹⁹⁴ 'Wikipedia:Arbitration/Policy'.

¹⁹⁵ 'Wikipedia:Checkuser'.

¹⁹⁶ 'Wikipedia:Oversight'.

Additionally, the Arbitration Committee can designate topics that have attracted more disruptive editing than other areas of the project as contentious topics, to which a special set of rules applies.¹⁹⁷ Here, it is held that, when editing a contentious topic, "Wikipedia's norms and policies are more strictly enforced and Wikipedia administrators have additional authority to reduce disruption to the project".¹⁹⁸ Designated topics include areas of conflict relating to living or recently deceased individuals, as well as edits relating to the subject of biographical articles about such individuals. Crucially, this applies to politicians and other political figures, and is designed to support the application of the "Biographies of living persons" policy.¹⁹⁹ Another designated contentious topic includes the results of any national or sub-national election.²⁰⁰ In practice, it holds that "administrators have the ability to set editor restrictions (restrictions on editing by particular editors) and page restrictions (special rules on how particular pages can be edited)". Also, both of these restrictions may be appealed.²⁰¹ To illustrate this here, examples of measures that can be taken include page protection, as well as "consensus required," which entails that "an edit that is challenged by reversion may not be reinstated without affirmative consensus on the talk page".²⁰² Another possible measure is the "BDR measure," where an "edit that is challenged by reversion may not be reinstated by the editor who originally made it until the editor (a) posts a talk page message discussing the edit and (b) waits 24 hours from the time of the talk page message".²⁰³ Of particular note, these measures hold for both contentious topics of biographies of living persons as well as historical elections.²⁰⁴ In addition to the Recent Changes mechanism, the Arbitration Committee's activities demonstrate that transparent and accessible decision-making is integral to Wikipedia's governance processes.

Further, in terms of other broader policy learnings relating to the Digital Services Act, the obligations relating to statements of reasons and appeals mechanisms are also quite relevant.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁷ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics', *Wikipedia* (2025),

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Contentious_topics&oldid=1316711013.

¹⁹⁸ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics', *Wikipedia* (2025),

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Contentious_topics&oldid=1316711013.

¹⁹⁹ 'Wikipedia:Biographies of Living Persons', *Wikipedia* (2025),

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Biographies_of_living_persons&oldid=1314937930.

²⁰⁰ 'Template:Contentious Topics/Table'.

²⁰¹ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics'.

²⁰² 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics', *Wikipedia* (2025),

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Contentious_topics&oldid=1317008124.

²⁰³ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics', *Wikipedia* (2025),

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Contentious_topics&oldid=1317008124.

²⁰⁴ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics/Historical Elections - Wikipedia',

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contentious_topics/Historical_elections, and 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics/Biographies of Living Persons - Wikipedia',

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contentious_topics/Biographies_of_Living_Persons.

²⁰⁵ See: Article 17 and Article 20 DSA

Wikipedia's transparent approach to content moderation could arguably offer valuable insights in this regard. While Article 17 of the DSA requires online platforms to provide a statement of reasons for each restriction of content or account, the statements currently issued by many VLOPS have been criticised for being somewhat superficial.²⁰⁶

Similarly, the DSA's out-of-court dispute settlement mechanisms have been criticised over a lack of transparency, as most decisions are not publicly available.²⁰⁷ By contrast, Wikipedia, through integrating openness into its moderation structure, making every editorial action public and accessible, and addressing disputes through open discussion and, where necessary, through (also publicly-available) arbitration, makes transparent moderation an ongoing process, which offers valuable lessons relevant to the implementation of the DSA for other platforms.

4.3 Issues with community-based moderation: Croatian Wikipedia

One difficult instance that is worth mentioning here is related to the Croatian Wikipedia. Here, a group of administrators of the Croatian-language Wikipedia held control over the project from at least 2011 to 2020 in an undue manner.²⁰⁸ An evaluation stated that the Croatian Wikipedia had been dominated by ideologically driven users structurally misaligned with Wikipedia's five pillars.²⁰⁹ They "selectively enforced and broke rules to manipulate Wikipedia's community institutions and conflict resolution mechanisms - elections, RfCs, and local Arbitration Committees".²¹⁰ The report on this issue states that Wikipedia's factual accuracy and resilience against disinformation and bias depends on the existence of a functional and diverse editing volunteer community. However, in this case, the separation of projects allowed one diverse editorial volunteer community to be split into nation-state-based projects.²¹¹ This led to the rise of nationalist bias resulting in one of the recommendations being to encourage the affected communities to discuss the possibility of re-merging the Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian language

²⁰⁶ See: Rishabh Kaushal and others, 'Automated Transparency: A Legal and Empirical Analysis of the Digital Services Act Transparency Database', *Proceedings of the 2024 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (Association for Computing Machinery 2024), <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3630106.3658960> and Charis Papaevangelou and Fabio Votta, 'Trading Nuance for Scale? Platform Observability and Content Governance under the DSA' (17 September 2025), <https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/platform-observability-and-content-governance>.

²⁰⁷ Article 21 DSA, and see for an example of an overview of cases from such a body: <https://www.appealscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Appeals-Centre-Europe-Transparency-Report.pdf>.

²⁰⁸ 'Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021 - Meta-Wiki', https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Croatian_Wikipedia_Disinformation_Assessment-2021.

²⁰⁹ Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

²¹⁰ Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

²¹¹ Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

projects with the original Serbo-Croatian language project.²¹² Other pluricentric languages with unified Wikipedia projects include Chinese, English, German, Spanish, Tamil, Korean and French.²¹³ It was also recommended that the affected language communities hold unified elections for administrators and other roles across the Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian Wikipedias to prevent this from happening again.²¹⁴

4.3 Further learnings from the Wikipedia model and election disinformation

First, Wikipedia relies on a system of multifaceted community moderation, content rules, and guidelines and intervention possibilities at the level of the Wikimedia Foundation in order to address election-related disinformation. Indeed, Wikipedia policies on false and misleading information apply directly to election disinformation. The foundational content policies, such as Neutral Viewpoint, Verifiability, and No Original Research, govern editorial activities and support the aim of providing accurate, reliable, and unbiased information on Wikipedia. These foundational policies are applied particularly strictly in politically sensitive contexts, such as biographies of living persons, which relates to election-related content of for example politicians. Also, relevant to election disinformation, there is a specific `{{Political POV}}`²¹⁵ template for cases where the political neutrality of an article is called into question.

Second, these principles are mostly enforced through moderation practices guided by the community, involving transparent editing processes, discussion pages and deletion procedures. Such moderation is supported by automated tools, which are thought of as functioning as a first layer of moderation in addition to manual review. These include bots, which can reverse obvious vandalism (including false content) without human intervention, and systems, which generate edit scores to assist in prioritising for manual review. Additionally, oversight mechanisms such as the patrolling groups, including the Recent Changes Patrol, with approximately 4,694 active Recent Changes patrollers, as well as the Arbitration Committee, play an important role in ensuring that edits are in line with these editorial policies. Patrollers can continuously monitor new edits through a live feed, which makes all actions traceable and reviewable in real time. The Arbitration Committee acts as the body responsible for dispute resolution, and its decisions and procedures are publicly accessible. Additionally, the Arbitration Committee can designate topics that have attracted more disruptive editing than other areas of the project as contentious topics, to which a special set of rules applies. Designated topics include areas of conflict relating to living or recently deceased individuals, as well as edits relating to the subject of biographical

²¹² Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

²¹³ Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

²¹⁴ Croatian Wikipedia Disinformation Assessment-2021

²¹⁵ See, Wikipedia, “Template:Political POV,” [“https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Political_POV”](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Political_POV).

articles about such individuals. This applies to politicians and other political figures, and is designed to support the application of the 'Biographies of living persons' policy and include the results of any national or sub-national election.

Third, as follows from the second report, in addition to community-led and technical moderation efforts, Wikipedia's approach to election disinformation is supported by behavioural standards and rules established by the Wikimedia Foundation, most notably the Universal Code of Conduct and the Terms of Use.²¹⁶ The Terms of Use and the Code of Conduct provide the formal basis for a range of intervention options by the Wikimedia Foundation, also known as office actions, which the Wikimedia Foundation could deploy if for example community action has proven ineffective, or if legal considerations demand intervention by the Wikimedia Foundation, such as for example page protection and range blocks. Most of these actions can also be carried out by the community. For example, as discussed with regard to contentious topics, one measure that administrators can take is page protection.²¹⁷

Fourth, as also follows from the second report, regarding unacceptable behaviour, the Universal Code of Conduct identifies a range of unacceptable behaviour relevant for election disinformation. This includes deliberately introducing "biased, false, inaccurate or inappropriate content", and the hindrance, impedance, or other obstruction of content creation as well as its maintenance.²¹⁸ Including arbitrarily and unexplainably repeatedly removing content and systematically manipulating content to favour specific interpretations of facts or points of view, including by means of unfaithfully or deliberately falsely rendering sources and altering the correct way of composing editorial content.²¹⁹ Similarly, the Terms of Use prohibit engaging in false statements, specified as "posting or modifying content with the intent to deceive or mislead others".²²⁰ Other prohibited actions include impersonating individuals, concealing affiliations where disclosure is required by the terms, or using the name or username of another person with the intent to deceive, and engaging in fraudulent behaviour.²²¹

Fifth, as detailed in the second report, as promotional editing was identified as a concern during the 2024 European Parliament elections, the provisions in the Terms of Use on paid contributions

²¹⁶ See: Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikimedia Foundation Universal Code of Conduct", https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Universal_Code_of_Conduct and Wikimedia Foundation, "Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use", https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Terms_of_Use#introduction.

²¹⁷ 'Wikipedia:Contentious Topics', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Contentious_topics&oldid=1317008124.

²¹⁸ See: Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Universal Code of Conduct', Section 3.3.

²¹⁹ Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Universal Code of Conduct', Section 3.3.

²²⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use', Section 4.

²²¹ Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use', Section 4.

are also relevant in this context of election disinformation.²²² These provisions require contributors who receive, or expect to receive, compensation for their edits to disclose the organisation or individual on whose behalf they are contributing.²²³ This disclosure may be made on the user page, the relevant discussion page or in the edit summary. These measures are intended to promote transparency and enable the community to understand the context in which edits are made, particularly in politically sensitive areas. Moreover, promotional editing is incompatible with Wikipedia's own definition as “not an advertising platform”, as set out in its Five Pillars.²²⁴ In addition, in terms of rules on user conduct on Wikipedia, paid editing is strongly discouraged and represents a form of financial conflict of interest.²²⁵ For cases that would fall under the policy on matters relating to living people, it is allowed for “very obvious errors to be fixed quickly, including by the subject”.²²⁶ If an editor is suspected of having a conflict of interest and an ordinary talk page discussion has failed to resolve the issue, the matter can be flagged on a specific Conflict of Interest Noticeboard.²²⁷

Sixth, also discussed in the second report, it seems quite clear that the Wikimedia Foundation has taken significant steps to protect Wikipedia from election-related disinformation. This includes a disinformation task force which has been established to protect the integrity of the elections.²²⁸ Indeed, during previous elections, around 2,000 election-related pages were protected, meaning they could only be edited by users with certain access rights, depending on the level of protection applied. In addition, these pages were monitored in real time by over 56,000 volunteer editors.²²⁹ Furthermore, the Wikimedia Foundation's disinformation task force recorded and evaluated 18 relevant events, and in addition the community reversed an estimated 800 edits on election-related pages between 3 and 7 November 2020.²³⁰ Notably, neither the task

²²² Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use', Section 4.

²²³ Wikimedia Foundation, 'Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use', Section 4.

²²⁴ Wikipedia, 'Five Pillars', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars.

²²⁵ Wikipedia, 'Wikipedia:Conflict of Interest', https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest&oldid=1320093915#Paid_editing.

²²⁶ Wikipedia, 'Wikipedia:Conflict of Interest', https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest&oldid=1320093915#Paid_editing.

²²⁷ Wikipedia, 'Wikipedia:Conflict of Interest/Noticeboard', https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest/Noticeboard&oldid=1322681742.

²²⁸ Ryan Merkley, 'What Wikipedia Saw during Election Week in the U.S., and What We're Doing next' (*Wikimedia Foundation*, 17 December 2020), <https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2020/12/17/what-wikipedia-saw-during-election-week/>.

²²⁹ Ryan Merkley, 'What Wikipedia Saw during Election Week in the U.S., and What We're Doing next' (*Wikimedia Foundation*, 17 December 2020), <https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2020/12/17/what-wikipedia-saw-during-election-week/>.

²³⁰ Ryan Merkley, 'What Wikipedia Saw during Election Week in the U.S., and What We're Doing next' (*Wikimedia Foundation*, 17 December 2020), <https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2020/12/17/what-wikipedia-saw-during-election-week/>.

force members nor the Wikipedia administrators detected any large-scale state-sponsored disinformation during that period.²³¹

5. Concluding remarks

In light of the foregoing, there are a number of concluding points to consider from this Evaluative Report assessing the application of European election disinformation regulation to community-governed platforms, and Wikipedia in particular. First, recent third-country government criticism (e.g., U.S) of Wikipedia in relation to alleged disinformation and foreign interference is concerning from a freedom of expression point of view, especially under Article 10 ECHR freedom of expression, where written warnings issued by public authorities may constitute an interference with freedom of expression.²³² However, the view can be taken that it demonstrates the importance of a model of online-platform regulation under the DSA, which seeks to set down clear procedures which are “prescribed by law” (to use Article 10 ECHR language), and is designed to address the “societal risks” that the “dissemination of disinformation” may generate.²³³ The developments also demonstrate the importance of an independent body being the regulator in relation to VLOPs and the DSA’s systemic-risk provisions relating to protecting against negative effects on “electoral processes”,²³⁴ which may stem from the dissemination of disinformation (and insulating enforcement from member-state policies). It also contrasts sharply with regulatory activity under the DSA, where Wikipedia is the only sole VLOP, out of a total of 23 VLOPs, that has not (yet) been subject to any regulatory activity by the European Commission under the DSA.²³⁵

Second, and on the specific application of European election disinformation regulation, and the legal definition of disinformation, for the purposes of legal obligations applicable to community-governed platforms, there is still no strict legal definition that community-governed platforms are required to adopt. However, there are specific policy definitions that are used by EU institutions and regulatory bodies, such as the European Commission. A widely-adopted definition is that of the European Commission, which defines disinformation as “false or

²³¹ Ryan Merkley, ‘What Wikipedia Saw during Election Week in the U.S., and What We’re Doing next’ (*Wikimedia Foundation*, 17 December 2020), <https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2020/12/17/what-wikipedia-saw-during-election-week/>.

²³² See, for example, *Karastelev and Others v. Russia*, Application no. 16435/10, 6 October 2020, para. 74.

²³³ Digital Services Act, Recital 9.

²³⁴ Digital Services Act, Article 34(1)(c).

²³⁵ See, European Commission, “Supervision of the designated very large online platforms and search engines under DSA,” <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>.

misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm”.²³⁶ Notably, this definition is used in the Code of Conduct of Disinformation, which has recently in 2025 taken on a new significance, as the Code was officially recognised as a Code of Conduct under Article 45 DSA (and explicitly becomes part of the DSA regulatory framework).²³⁷ And from July 2025, the Code became applicable.²³⁸ As such, this definition of disinformation is arguably the most applicable under the EU regulatory framework on election disinformation.

And a notable point on the application of this definition is that Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation’s policies on false information actually overlap with the EU definition. Crucially, the Wikimedia Foundation’s Terms of Use specifically prohibit “engaging in false statements,” including “posting or modifying content with the intent to deceive or mislead others”.²³⁹ While the Wikimedia Foundation’s Universal Code of Conduct also prohibits “deliberately” introducing “false”, or “inaccurate content”, including “deliberately false rendering of sources and altering the correct way of composing editorial content”.²⁴⁰ Thus, an important finding is that Wikipedia and Wikimedia Foundation policies also place “intention” as a central notion in policies targeting false information, and very much align with the European Commission’s definition and Code of Practice 2025 definition of disinformation. Thus, it can be argued that EU regulation of election disinformation does not currently mean that Wikipedia needs to adopt a specific definition of disinformation to comply with EU disinformation regulation, but rather, its current rules are very much aligned with the EU definition.

The third point about the application of European election disinformation regulation is how Wikipedia rules and mechanisms around “reliable sources,”²⁴¹ and “deprecated sources,”²⁴² on state-controlled media outlets that disseminate disinformation actually mirrors that of current EU regulation of state-controlled media outlets engaging in disinformation. Notably, since

²³⁶ European Commission, Communication on the European democracy action plan, COM(2020) 790 final. See also, European Commission, Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM/2018/236 final, (“verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm”).

²³⁷ European Commission, “Commission endorses the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the Digital Services Act”, 13 February 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-endorses-integration-voluntary-code-practice-disinformation-digital-services-act>.

²³⁸ European Commission, The Code of Conduct on Disinformation, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/code-conduct-disinformation>.

²³⁹ Wikimedia Foundation, “Wikimedia Foundation Terms of Use”, section 4, https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Terms_of_Use.

²⁴⁰ Wikimedia Foundation, “Wikimedia Foundation Universal Code of Conduct”, section 3.3, https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Policy:Universal_Code_of_Conduct.

²⁴¹ See, “Wikipedia:Reliable sources,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.

²⁴² See, “Wikipedia:Deprecated sources,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Council of the EU has issued various Decisions and Regulations,²⁴³ prohibiting the broadcasting and distribution of content by various Russian state-controlled media outlets in the EU, including Russia Today, Sputnik, EurAsia Daily, SouthFront, and NewsFront, for engaging in "disinformation."²⁴⁴ Crucially, Wikipedia has also deprecated these media outlets as reliable sources, including Russia Today, for engaging in "propaganda and disinformation".²⁴⁵ Thus, Wikipedia's measures targeting sources that engage in disinformation and false information very much mirror EU disinformation regulation that targets state-controlled media outlets engaging in disinformation.

Fourth, and a further point about the European regulatory framework on election disinformation, and the DSA in particular, is that most obligations placed on centralised-governed platforms under the DSA are also applicable to community-governed platforms, including Wikipedia. This is because the definition of online platforms is quite broad,²⁴⁶ meaning that community-governed platforms are captured by the definition, and no distinction is made based on how moderation is undertaken. As such, in principle, most obligations under the DSA which are applicable to centralised-governed online platforms are also applicable to community-governed platforms (unless a platform qualifies as a micro enterprise).

Crucially, in relation to specific obligations under the DSA, it should be emphasised that there is no specific provision in the DSA requiring online platforms, including community-governed platforms, such as Wikipedia, to remove or prohibit election disinformation. However, an important point is that where election disinformation qualifies as illegal content under EU member state legislation, the DSA does contain provisions (e.g., Article 9), where platforms may be ordered to remove certain illegal content. Crucially, it should be noted that the Wikimedia Foundation did receive a number of Article 16 DSA notices relating to disinformation in 2025, including 2 from France; 3 from Germany; 1 from Romania; 1 from Spain; and 1 from Sweden.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ See Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/351 of 1 March 2022 amending Decision 2014/512/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine; and Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350 of 1 March 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. See also, *RT France v Council* Case T-125/22 (General Court, 27 July 2022).

²⁴⁴ For a full list, see Council of the European Union, "EU sanctions against Russia", <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>. See generally, R. Ó Fathaigh and D. Voorhoof, "Freedom of Expression and the EU's Ban on Russia Today: A Dangerous Rubicon Crossed," (2022) 27(4) *Communications Law* 186.

²⁴⁵ See, "Wikipedia:Deprecated sources," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Deprecated_sources.

²⁴⁶ See, DSA, Article 3(1)(i).

²⁴⁷ See, Wikimedia Foundation, Transparency report - January to June 2025, EU Digital Services Act information, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/who-we-are/transparency/2025-1/eu-digital-services-act-information/>.

The Wikimedia Foundation reported that none of these notices resulted in office actions.²⁴⁸ Thus, while these Article 16 DSA notices do not seem to be resulting in Wikimedia Foundation office actions to remove content, it does demonstrate that the DSA provisions highlighted in the first Mapping Report applicable to illegal content are being applied to Wikipedia in EU member states. This does of course raise a broader issue about the compatibility of these national laws with the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR.²⁴⁹

Fifth, and turning to the specific provisions in the DSA applicable to so-called Very Large Online Platforms, it should be mentioned again that Wikipedia has been designated as a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP) by the European Commission.²⁵⁰ This means that Wikipedia is subject to the special systemic-risk provisions (Article 34 and 35) under the DSA, which require VLOPs to assess any systemic risks stemming from their services, including relating to negative effects on “electoral processes”,²⁵¹ which may stem from the dissemination of disinformation; and for VLOPs to put in place “mitigation measures” to address these systemic risks.²⁵² And in assessing the impact of the application of the systemic risks provisions of the DSA to Wikipedia, three points are of particular note: first, and crucially important, the auditors noted that the only actions within the scope of the audit “are those conducted directly” by the Wikimedia Foundation, and “not the actions of the volunteer community.”²⁵³ Thus, in relation to election disinformation, the auditors focused exclusively on the measures the Wikimedia Foundation had in place, and the audit did not seek to specifically examine (or interfere with) the mechanisms of the volunteer community applicable to election disinformation. Further, the audit report for Wikipedia was “positive with comments” in relation to its compliance with Article 34 and 35, and was generally positive about the measures that are in place to tackle election disinformation.

However, a particularly thorny, and arguably quite difficult question, was the recommendation in relation to the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The audit report noted that the Wikimedia Foundation “is not a signatory to the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation and does not refer to it in relation to the mitigation measures concerning disinformation or collaboration”.²⁵⁴ Of

²⁴⁸ See, Wikimedia Foundation, Transparency report - January to June 2025, EU Digital Services Act information, <https://wikimediafoundation.org/who-we-are/transparency/2025-1/eu-digital-services-act-information/>.

²⁴⁹ See R. O Fathaigh, D. Buijs, and J. van Hoboken, “The Regulation of Disinformation Under the Digital Services Act” (2025) 13 *Media and Communication* 1.

²⁵⁰ See European Commission, Commission Decision designating Wikipedia as a very large online platform in accordance with Article 33(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 24 March 2023, C(2023) 2742 final.

²⁵¹ Digital Services Act, Article 34(1)(c).

²⁵² Digital Services Act, Article 35.

²⁵³ Wikimedia Foundation, “Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023-24 Public.pdf”, p. 9.

²⁵⁴ Holistic AI, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023–24 Public’, p. 95.

particular note, the audit report recommended that the Wikimedia Foundation “monitor the developments surrounding the 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation and other potential codes of conduct to be issued in accordance with DSA as well as participate, if applicable”.²⁵⁵ Crucially, one important matter has now changed the calculus around the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation, and that is that the 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation was recently in 2025 officially recognised as a Code of Conduct under Article 45 DSA (and explicitly becomes part of the DSA regulatory framework).²⁵⁶ And this Evaluative Report examined the question of whether Wikipedia is obliged to join the Code of Conduct, and what are the benefits and drawbacks of joining.

Sixth, and in terms of how Wikipedia tackles election disinformation and informing policy on election disinformation, a crucial point is how Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation’s content rules really reveal how election-related information published on Wikipedia is of a wholly different nature to information disseminated on other commercial Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) designated under the DSA. Indeed, the election-related information permitted to be published on Wikipedia is arguably so far removed, and fundamentally different, to election-related content posted on social media VLOPs. Indeed, information published on election-related Wikipedia pages, including political candidate pages, political party pages, and election pages, is arguably more akin to information on “matters of public interest” or “public concern,” which enjoy the highest level of protection under the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 ECHR.²⁵⁷

This is readily apparent when actually considering what can and cannot be published on Wikipedia: for example, information published on Wikipedia cannot contain “original research,” which means a user’s own “ideas,” “opinions,” or “allegations,” cannot be published on Wikipedia, and Wikipedia does not publish “original thought”.²⁵⁸ Similarly, information can only be published on Wikipedia if it is “verifiable”, meaning that each fact or claim published must be accompanied by the citation of a reliable source,²⁵⁹ and such sources must be “reliable, independent, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy”.²⁶⁰ And on top of this, information published on Wikipedia must be written from a “neutral point of view,” meaning representing

²⁵⁵ Holistic AI, ‘Wikipedia DSA Audit Report 2023–24 Public’, p. 95.

²⁵⁶ European Commission, “Commission endorses the integration of the voluntary Code of Practice on Disinformation into the Digital Services Act”, 13 February 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-endorses-integration-voluntary-code-practice-disinformation-digital-services-act>.

²⁵⁷ See, for example, *Arvanitis and Phileleftheros Public Company Limited v. Cyprus*, Application no. 49917/22, 3 July 2025, para. 31.

²⁵⁸ See, Wikipedia:No original research, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research.

²⁵⁹ See, Wikipedia:Verifiability, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability>.

²⁶⁰ See, Wikipedia:Reliable sources, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.

“fairly, proportionately, and, as far as possible, without editorial bias, all the significant views that have been published by reliable sources” on a topic.²⁶¹

Thus, when actually considering the range of information related to elections that can be published on Wikipedia, it is in fact extremely narrow and limited, and only extends to well-sourced facts, described in a neutral manner, and cannot contain any opinion. This extremely limited type of allowable information on Wikipedia means it is a fundamentally different type of platform to, say, social media platforms, where users are generally allowed to publish a wider range of alleged facts, claims, allegations, or opinions, so long as they are not, in principle, illegal. This also means that the margin for election-related information to be disinformation on Wikipedia is a lot less, as all opinions, allegations, or comments, are, in principle, prohibited, and all facts or claims without a reliable source are also, in principle, prohibited. Indeed, while Wikipedia is not a media organisation, it must be noted that the type of election-related information published on Wikipedia is very much aligned with the hallmarks of well-sourced journalistic content under case law of the European Court of Human Rights, in that it is “public interest” content based on “accurate and reliable information”.²⁶²

Seventh, in terms of mechanisms adopted by community-governed platforms such as Wikipedia which have potential to inform policy making on election disinformation regulation in the EU, a number are highlighted. These include a defining feature of Wikipedia’s community-based moderation system being the Recent Changes Patrol, which consists of volunteers dedicated to checking various articles for edits that are inappropriate.²⁶³ This is done via the Recent Changes list, which shows all live edits made to Wikipedia articles.²⁶⁴ This list can be filtered to display articles by various criteria, such as featured articles,²⁶⁵ good articles,²⁶⁶ articles about living people, contributions from new accounts, contributions from IP addresses, contributions from mobile users as these are more prone to vandalism, and by likelihood of being damaging or in bad faith.²⁶⁷ In addition, due to the high volumes of edits occurring each second, several tools have been created to facilitate this process.²⁶⁸ With approximately 4,694 active Recent Changes patrollers on the English Wikipedia, this mechanism is a notable example of the transparency of

²⁶¹ See, Wikipedia:Neutral point of view, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view/.

²⁶² See, *Fressoz and Roire v. France*, Application no. 29183/95, 21 January 1999 (Grand Chamber), para. 54.

²⁶³ ‘Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Recent_changes_patrol&oldid=1316996550.

²⁶⁴ ‘Recent Changes - Wikipedia’, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:RecentChanges>.

²⁶⁵ ‘Wikipedia:Featured Articles’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Featured_articles&oldid=1317044954.

²⁶⁶ ‘Wikipedia:Good Articles’, *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Good_articles&oldid=1273668498.

²⁶⁷ ‘Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol’.

²⁶⁸ ‘Wikipedia:Recent Changes Patrol’.

Wikipedia's moderation process, in that all edits are not only reviewable by the community, but also made visible and remain so.²⁶⁹

Finally, the above points will be taken into account as the DEM-Debate project proceeds to develop Policy Recommendations for specific legislative and regulatory reforms of the EU regulatory framework to better counter disinformation during elections, building upon the findings in relation to community-governed platforms' approach to disinformation.

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²⁶⁹ 'Category:Wikipedian Recent Changes Patrollers', *Wikipedia* (2025), https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Category:Wikipedian_recent_changes_patrollers&oldid=1292178531.