

HOW TO SELL**DEMOCRACY****ONLINE [FAST]**

Executive Summary

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This study consists of an AI-supported content analysis of some 31,000 short videos posted by political actors and influencers on Instagram and TikTok in the time ranging from June to December 2024, a representative online survey, as well as four focus groups comprising 27 young people between the ages of 16 and 27, along with a quantitative selection experiment in which young people were surveyed on their selection criteria for video features.

Instagram and TikTok are the most important spaces for young people to engage with politics

- When young people take to their smartphones, they use Instagram (81%) almost as often as messenger services (84 %). TikTok (60 %) is also used very frequently. Social media (74 %) is, by far, the place where young people acquire their political information – even coming out ahead of family (58 %), school (60 %) and friends (54 %). Newspapers and TV lag behind (46 %).
- 38 per cent specifically follow accounts owned by political parties or politicians, while 60 per cent follow political influencers. Half of young users state that they frequently view political content through algorithmically selected feeds.
- 64 per cent of young people believe that social media platforms are a good place to reach their generation. Around half of them

state that they appreciate the low-threshold contact options on social media (e.g. asking questions, hearing other perspectives). However, only 17 per cent actively participate in online discussions themselves, and only one in five likes or comments on political posts.

Most videos revolve around the political process itself, with young people playing a subordinate role.

- Over one in three political videos on TikTok or Instagram in the second half of 2024 focused on actions undertaken by the government and administration (21%) or on elections (17 %).
- Just under a quarter of all videos contain a specific reference to young people or future generations. This share is lower (-5 percentage points) when it comes to the top trending topics mentioned above. When the topic of education is addressed (3 %), which is

rarely the case, explicit references to young people exceed the average (+9 percentage points). That being said, videos about education achieve a significantly lower reach (-17 %).

- Youth organisations of political parties in particular establish a connection to young people and future generations (48 %); political parties (21 %) and politicians (20 %) do so much less frequently; the AfD comes in last here (14 %).
- Videos that include references to young people generate greater reach and tend to attract more interest among young respondents.

Whilst acclaims prevail, it is the attacks that generate reach

- Almost 70 per cent of all posts contain some form of acclaim. 35 per cent contain attacks on political opponents (ranging from criticism to insults). Self-praise is employed almost 20 percentage points more often on Instagram than on TikTok, while attacks occur 15 percentage points more frequently on TikTok.
- At just under 90 per cent, Volt and SPD post acclaims most frequently, with the AfD (63 %) coming in last. In terms of attacks, the picture is reversed, with the AfD accounting for the largest share at 73 per cent, followed by BSW (60 %) and The Left Party (48 %). The SPD (23 %) and Volt (13 %) attack the least.
- Video clips containing attacks are viewed around 40 per cent more often on average than those without. That being said, "views" do not equate to approval. An acclaim significantly reduces the level of reach (-12 %). However, our surveys show that young people take a critical view of verbal attacks and reject the idea of disparaging others in short videos. Videos containing acclaims are not well received.

Addressing migration increases reach; environmental and social issues do not

- Videos concerning migration are viewed around 11 per cent more often on average. It should be noted that the attitude expressed in this regard was not recorded. Posts on elections (+8 %) and videos without a political reference (+9 %) also significantly increase reach. However, in an experiment involving young people and their preferences, only the former was well received, while videos without a political context or containing election references tended to be rejected.
- By contrast, any focus on social policy (-7 %), the environment (-18 %) or education (-17 %) had a detrimental effect.

Selfies perform well in terms of reach; dancing and infographics do not

- Videos are frequently recorded in selfie mode (17 %); this occurs more than twice as often on TikTok than on Instagram. While political influencers record almost half of their videos this way, only 13 per cent of politicians do so. The overall evaluation demonstrates that videos in selfie mode have a positive effect in terms of views.
- Infographics are most frequently employed by the Greens, The Left Party and Volt (9–11 %), with the CDU/CSU and FDP employing them much less frequently (4 %). Videos incorporating infographics achieve a lower reach on average. Based on the experiment, they do not make an impression on young people, even though half of them explicitly state that they want more figures and statistics.
- Dancing appears in two per cent of all short political videos. Youth organisations (6 %) and political

influencers (4 %) lead the way. However, dancing in political videos has a significantly negative effect (-45 %) on young people: they swipe away.

Calls to action: offline rather than online

- All actors surveyed address the majority of their audience directly (e.g. using the informal or formal “you”) – political influencers most often (66 %); politicians least frequently (55 %). While the form of address has no influence on views in the overall evaluation, it has a significantly positive effect among young people.
- In just over two out of five videos, recipients are urged to take action. At 26 per cent, calls for online action (e.g. commenting or sharing) dominate, whilst having a negative impact on reach. This is followed by offline actions, such as calls for demonstrations (17 %) and calls to vote (8%). These have a positive effect. Centre-left parties call for offline actions more often than centre-right parties.

- Calls to join parties (topping the list: youth organisations 8 %) or donate (topping the list: political influencers 4 %) are rare. Politicians are the most cautious when it comes to calls of any kind.

Technically flawless and in simple, honest language

- Young people want short political videos that are free of technical glitches or flaws, i.e. professional camera work and clear sound. They are not looking for elaborate editing; only 17 per cent want visual filters or effects to be used in the videos.
- Of particular importance to them is that the videos contain simple and clear language (68 %), that the messages are honest (81 %) and that politicians show their human side (62 %).

