


# D64

Zentrum für  
Digitalen Fortschritt

## Code of Conduct for digital Campaigning

D-64.ORG

An abstract network diagram consisting of several blue circular nodes of varying sizes connected by thin, light blue lines. The nodes are scattered across the lower half of the page, with some forming a dense cluster in the center and others more isolated. The lines represent connections between the nodes, creating a web-like structure.

# DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

Fair political competition means fighting over political ideas out in the open. Before making their election decision, voters must be able to inform themselves. Transparency is thus essential for fair democratic competition. Political opponents need to be able to position themselves, to present their ideas and solutions as well as to defend themselves against unjustified accusations. Transparency is the foundation for trust in our political system.

However, when the political competition takes place in the dark, independent monitoring (e.g. by the media) finds it harder to shed light on misuse and false promises. Election interference and deliberately misleading communication are no means of a transparent political discourse. Such methods must therefore be refrained from. Past election campaigns, unfortunately, show bluntly: digital campaigning urgently needs clear regulation.

For this reason, D64 requests:

1. A legal framework for all political actors that ensures full transparency of digital campaigning.

*Until this framework is in place:*

2. A common Code of Conduct for all democratic parties, in which they commit to fair communication online.

3. Training measures for full-time and voluntary supporters in the spirit of the Code of Conduct.

For achieving these goals step by step, we hereby present a proposal for such a Code of Conduct. The following self-commitment is intended to provide an impulse for all democratic parties and to spark a discussion about civil society self-regulation. Our goal is clear: digital political communication must serve the formation of public opinion – instead of obstructing democratic discussion. This is the only way for parties to meaningfully extend existing analog forms of dialog by new digital possibilities. To achieve this, all parties running in the 2021 federal election should publicly commit to the following aspects and adopt the Code of Conduct:

# PROPOSAL FOR A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

## 01 WE STAND FOR A FAIR ELECTION CAMPAIGN

We will use the possibilities of online election campaigning consciously and respectfully to preserve the integrity of elections. Therefore, we will not spread misleading content, hate speech or calls for violence.

## 02 WE STAND FOR TRANSPARENCY IN COMMUNICATION

We ensure that in all digital communications practiced by party affiliates, or funded directly or indirectly by them, the party is clearly and visibly identified as the sender. In addition, we are transparent about possible connections to organizations and supporter networks that publish political messages and election advertising. Furthermore, we advocate that they also abide by this Code of Conduct.

## 03 WE ADVOCATE COMPREHENSIBLE TARGETING

Comprehensibility is essential for digital communication. We, therefore, refrain from social media communication that is not visible to the public. This also applies to content spread via party-owned messenger channels. In addition to the transparency registers of the individual platforms, we assure that all advertisements and posts, advertising budgets, target group selections and agency partners are collectively and transparently named online. No data based on people's political attitudes is used for targeting. This includes data provided by the platforms, our own data and the purchase of data, so-called second- or third-party data. In general, we refrain from using psychographic characteristics that allow for conclusions to be drawn about political attitudes to target in political online advertising.

## 04 WE PROVIDE SOURCES TO OUR INFORMATION

We assure to be able to provide publicly available sources upon request to all published articles, figures, pictures and facts. If sources are not freely available, we will mark this. We will publish easily accessible subsequent corrections corresponding to the previous format in the case of incorrectly disseminated facts.

## 05 WE ONLY RELY ON BOTS TO A LIMITED EXTENT

Our goal is to use bots to provide information to voters quickly and efficiently. Therefore, appropriate bots meet the following criteria: They appear individually, they are always labeled as a bot, and they delete the user's information after the termination of use. If these criteria are not met, we reject the use of bots.

## 06 WE REJECT THE USE OF INAPPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGIES

We guarantee that we will not use technology to unfairly influence discussions or debates. Therefore, we refrain from using distorting, intentionally misleading visual media or audio-visual media, especially defamatory deep fakes. We do not buy fans or followers, as we do not consider this a legitimate way of communication. In addition, we pledge not to directly or indirectly maintain fake accounts or extensive bot networks as well as to use or support fake mass movements (astroturfing). If such technologies are applied by third parties for our benefit, we distance ourselves from them.

## 07 WE SET CLEAR LIMITS TO NATIVE ADVERTISING

We assure not to disguise editorial content created (or commissioned) by us directly or indirectly as journalistic articles (native advertising) but to label it as political messages. This also applies to cooperation with influencers. We will also provide references to the responsible persons for self-created images, texts and videos.

## 08 WE STAND UP FOR COPYRIGHT

We ensure that we uphold the applicable copyright law for contributions of all kinds.

## 09 WE GUARANTEE A RESPONSIBLE USE OF PERSONAL DATA

We guarantee that we abide by the GDPR and that we do not obtain any personal data through data theft or data purchase. Voluntary as well as full-time campaigners will be trained accordingly for the responsible use of such data. In addition, we publish all sources from which we have obtained our data transparently online for all interested third parties.

# 10 WE ADVOCATE RESPECTFUL INTERACTION WITH ONE ANOTHER

We are committed to implementing a comprehensible and transparent netiquette. We condemn the contradictory actions of our followers. For false accusations, we apologize to the persons concerned in the spirit of good democratic cooperation. In addition, we advocate the exchange of information and hints on disinformation campaigns and hacker attacks across party lines.

# IMPRINT

**ABOUT D64** D64 is the center for digital progress.

D64 is the center for digital progress. We see the digital transformation as a great opportunity to improve our coexistence in modern society. We want to influence social, ecological, technological and political development constructively, critically and creatively.

Our goal is to realize the fundamental values of freedom, justice and solidarity through a progressive digital policy. To this end, we act with the help of the wide-ranging expertise of our more than 600 members as an independent association that thinks ahead and provides impetus in all areas of digitization.

[d-64.org](https://d-64.org)

**CONTRIBUTION** This position paper was developed in an internal working process at D64 with the collaboration of René Bosch, Martin Erber, Andreas Kernke, Judith Klose, Konrad Krämer, Felix Kröner, Philipp Marten, Patrick Runte and Sebastian Steinbach.

We would like to thank all those who helped us with their advice and comments during this Code of Conduct development.

**ADDRESS** D64 – Zentrum für Digitalen Fortschritt e.V.  
Co-Chairman: Henning Tillmann  
Co-Chairwoman: Marina Weisband  
Gipsstr. 3  
10119 Berlin

**CONTACT** Judith Klose and Philipp Marten  
Coordinators of the working group digital democracy

[info@d-64.org](mailto:info@d-64.org)

April 2021