PUSH*BACK*LASH

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Integrated report on Online Anti-Gender Equality Mobilisations and Counter Strategies

WP4 Lead: University of Amsterdam (UvA)

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Authors

Norah Schulten, Liza Mügge and Rebekka Kesberg

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About Push*Back*Lash

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Project summary

The goal of PUSH*BACK*LASH is twofold: (1) Firstly, to systematically inquire into the present-day contestation of gender equality issues and policies at both elite and citizen levels. Approaching democracy from a global feminist perspective, we employ a rigorous, comparative, multi-method design (e.g., experiments, surveys, interviews, participatory theatre). Our project enables: (a) identifying anti-gender strategies as well as best practices in counteracting them across space and time; and (b) assessing the effects of anti-gender discourses by focusing on parties, social media, and public opinion. Secondly, to (2) develop and test strategies that can effectively counteract anti-gender and anti-feminist discursive strategies. Aiming at supporting the quality of democratic governance in more inclusive European societies, we acknowledge intersections between gender and other social categories at all stages of the project (composition of consortium and advisory board; theory formulation, empirical investigation, and policy recommendations) and thus engage with stakeholders. To develop sustainable solutions, we bring together gender activists, EU experts, and researchers from several fields of political science (political theory, public policy, political parties, public opinion, political behaviour), anthropology, communication and media, philosophy, sociology, and social psychology. PUSH*BACK*LASH is a transdisciplinary, gender-diverse consortium aiming at equipping pro-equality actors with practical toolkits for responding to anti-gender equality and anti-feminist discursive strategies and backlash tactics.

Keywords

- Backlash
- Feminism
- Gender
- Gender equality
- Harassment
- Hate speech
- Online
- Social media
- Violence

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1	31.10.2025	The authors	
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About this document

This deliverable summarises the key findings of Work Package 4 and provides policy advice and recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, political actors, and civil societal organisations. The report describes the spreading of issues, framing, and interactions of pro-gender and anti-Gender actors online, offering a typology of mobilisation and counter-strategies on X. Table 8 (Appendix A) displays the main objectives and subtasks of WP4. The findings are based on multi-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods analysing social media data (X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok) and interviews. This report includes concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online. The findings in this report support democratic processes and resilience on social media, and policy development for an inclusive European society.

List of abbreviations

Table 1 includes definitions of how to abbreviate commonly used terms and names:

Table 1. List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	**Full title/Meaning**
AI	Artificial Intelligence
EC	European Commission
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
LGBTQIA+	Is an abbreviation and collective term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersexual, and asexual people. There are also other variants of the abbreviation, such as LGBTQIA*, LGBTQ+, or LGBT+. All these collective terms aim to describe a group of people that cannot be classified within the heteronormative, binary system of sex and gender.
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PBL (project acronym)	Push*Back*Lash
UN	United Nations

Definition of key terms [1]

Anti-gender movement/ actors: Anti-gender movements oppose gender equality policies, LGBTQIA+ rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and broader understandings of gender as a social construct. A common thread of the movements is their opposition of "gender ideology" or "genderism" (Özkazanç, 2020).
Cyber (online) harassment: Harassment by means of email, text (or online) messages, or the internet (EIGE, 2016).
Cyber (online) violence against women and girls: Gender-based violence that is perpetrated through electronic communication and the internet (EIGE, 2016).
Feminism: Political stance and commitment to change the political position of women and promote gender equality, based on the thesis that women are subjugated because of their gendered body, i.e. sex., (EIGE, 2016).
Gender: Social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and to the relationships between women and men, girls and boys, as well as to the relations between women and those between men (EIGE, 2016).
Genderism: Hostile readings of gender ambiguous bodies (Browne, 2004, p. 332).
Gender-based violence: Violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, gender identity, or gender expression, or which affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately (EIGE, 2016).
Gender equality: Equality of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities between women and men, girls and boys. Gender equality is a matter of human rights, a prerequisite, and an indicator of sustainable development and healthy democracy (EIGE, 2016).
Gendered harassment: Degrading images and sexist language (online) that "produce or reproduce distinctions in gender identities" (EIGE, 2016)
Gender ideology: A derogatory term that is used to imply that gender identity is not real but is instead a totalitarian belief system that is imposed on others (SPLC, 2023).
Gender stereotypes: Preconceived ideas whereby females and males are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender (EIGE, 2016).
Harassment: Unwanted conduct related personal characteristics, such as the sex of a person, occurring with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of that person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (EIGE, 2016).
Hate speech: all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as "race", colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation (ECRI, 2025).
Homophobia: Irrational fear of, and aversion to, homosexuality and to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people based on prejudice (EIGE, 2016).
Prejudices: Attitudes and feelings – whether positive or negative and whether conscious or non-conscious – that people have about members of other groups, which may be based on preconceived ideas and influenced by elements such as gender, race, class, personal characteristics or other factors (EIGE, 2016).
Pro-gender movements/ actors: Actors who endorse a progressive understanding of gender as social constructs and advocate for inclusive gender equality.
Queer: All individuals who fall outside of the gender and sexuality norms (EIGE, 2016).

[1] Key terms are derived partly from other PBL integrated reports to promote consistency amongst Work Packages (e.g. Gender 5+ Deliverable D7.3 and University of Salzburg Deliverable D8.1).

Semiotic violence and harassment: A violent act that mobilizes semiotic resources to discipline, injure and subjugate other groups (Krook, 2022, p. 372).
Sex: Biological and physiological characteristics that define humans as female or male (EIGE, 2016).
Sexism: Actions or attitudes that discriminate against people based solely on their gender (EIGE, 2016).
Trans: People whose gender identity does not match the social expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth (Currah, 2022).
Transphobia: Irrational fear of gender non-conformity or gender transgression, such as a fear of, or aversion to, masculine women, feminine men, cross-dressers, trans genderists, trans people, and others who do not fit into existing gender stereotypes about their birth gender (EIGE, 2016).
Violence against women: Violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women including all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological, economic or semiotic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Krook, 2022).

Executive summary WP4

Work Package 4 investigates how violence, hate speech, and harassment related to gender equality are mobilised and experienced in online spaces. Focusing on social media platforms, it explores how marginalized groups, especially women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, are targeted and how such online violence threatens democratic participation and undermines efforts towards gender equality. The work builds upon the European Commission's strategic goals, including the Digital Services Act, aiming to make digital environments in Europe safer and more inclusive.

Work package 4 describes the spreading of issues, framing, and interactions of pro-gender and anti-gender actors online, offering a typology of mobilisation and counter-strategies on X. It also provides concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online. Central questions are: 1) Which anti- and pro-gender equality narratives are spread online? 2) How are the narratives mobilised and which actors formulate counter strategies? 3) How is anti-gender equality harassment framed online in well-established democracies? 4) How do politicians cope with online gendered harassments? 5) What are concrete strategies to deal with online harassment?

The study consists of two components. First, a network and discourse analysis maps how anti- and pro-gender narratives circulate on X. Analysing ~60,000 tweets from ~110 actors this study identifies recurring harmful themes—such as transphobia, misogyny, and anti-abortion rhetoric—disseminated by transnationally connected actors using memes, derogatory language, and misleading framings. These narratives target not only individuals but also broader social and gender equality policies, portraying gender equality as a societal threat. Second, a political ethnography of the 2024 European Parliament elections in the Netherlands and Germany includes an analysis of campaigns of 20 candidates and eight interviews. This shows that both men and women politicians can experience gendered harassment. Yet the form perpetuates inequality for women, undermines credibility on polarizing topics for all politicians, and leads to reduced social media interaction of politicians, negatively impacting their campaigns.

Drawing on these findings, this report offers four policy recommendations.

1. EU-wide recognition of hate speech based on gender and sexual orientation within legal frameworks and content moderation guidelines.
2. Rethink automated hate speech detection in favour of contextual and human moderation.
3. Enhance institutional support for political figures to manage and respond to online harassment.
4. Promote civic education and bystander training to foster respectful and inclusive online discourse.

1. Introduction

Anti-gender serves as an umbrella term to describe the rejection or opposition to ideas, laws and movements relating to gender equality, gender identity, and women's and LGBTQIA+'s rights (McEwen & Narayanaswamy 2023a; Paternotte & Kuhar 2018). Groups or organizations can be labelled as anti-gender actors when they oppose concepts of gender equality and promote traditional patriarchal gender roles. These actors differ in multiple aspects including how accepted and embedded they are within society. The common thread of the actors is their opposition of "gender ideology" or "genderism" (Özkazanç, 2020). Anti-gender movements are on the rise across the world and pose a threat to democratic governance and gender equality (GATE, 2023; McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023b). These movements seem well-networked, influential and financially secured. For instance, the European Parliamentary Form (2025) proclaimed that anti-gender movements in Europe raised an estimated $1.18 billion from donors in Europe, the US and Russia between 2019–2023. In recent years, these movements have increasingly used online spaces to advocate for their cause. Online backlash against gender equality creates hostile online environments, especially for women and other minoritised groups (Krook, 2022). Work Package 4 aims to understand how online spaces are used by political actors who mobilize for or against gender equality. These actors range from online social media accounts, voters, politicians to activists who operate on the national level.

Work Package 4 builds on the theoretical framework of semiotic violence against political actors in politics. This theoretical framework aids our understanding of how online spaces are used by political actors who mobilize for or against gender equality. Online spaces can contain semiotic violence particularly for women and LGTBTQ+ people. Semiotic violence is defined as a violent act that "mobilizes semiotic resources to injure, discipline, and subjugate women" (Krook, 2022 p. 372) and other societal groups. In online spaces this takes form in the use of language and images to oppose, exclude and bash 'gender' (Ghosh, 2023). Within the political arena, semiotic violence is used to deny rights and equal participation of women and other structural underrepresented groups. Often these attacks are trivialized, not acknowledged, or the target is seen as too sensitive (Krook, 2022).

Semiotic violence is widespread. A wealth of studies and reports demonstrate that women face more sexist online harassment, intimidation and bullying than men (Dovi, 2025, Greenwood et al., 2020; Håkansson, 2023; Southern & Harmer, 2021; Vrielink & Van der Pas, 2024). Examples include, sexist comments, sharing home addresses online (i.e., doxxing), or sharing the names

of relatives and children. The prospect of becoming a target of online semiotic violence negatively influences the online mobility and visibility (Mügge & Özvatan, 2025).

The purpose of this report is to describe the spreading of issues, framing, and interactions of pro-gender and anti-gender actors online, and to offer a typology of mobilisation and counter-strategies on X. It provides concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online. The analysis is guided by five research questions:

1. Which anti- and pro-gender equality narratives are spread online?
2. How are the narratives mobilised and which actors formulate counter strategies?
3. How is anti-gender equality harassment framed online in the well-established democracies Germany and the Netherlands?
4. How do EP candidates cope with online gendered harassments?
5. What are concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online?

To study these questions, we draw on a mixed method design including network analysis, political ethnography and interviews with politicians who were targets of online semiotic violence. Based on the findings we developed a toolkit with strategies to deal with anti-gender narratives and gendered harassments.

This integrated report summarises the key findings of Work Package 4, and provides policy advice and recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, political actors and civil societal organizations. Semiotic violence is widespread, often trivialized and used to delegitimate, vilify and humiliate groups. Online narratives are characterized by language and images that disqualify discussions about gender. They create a phantasm of gender (cf. Butler, 2024) by dehumanizing, belittling, vilifying, and humiliating pro-gender equality efforts. Drawing on political ethnography and interviews regarding online violence, we find that both male and female politicians experience gendered harassment. Yet the form perpetuates inequality for women, undermines credibility on polarizing topics for all politicians, and leads to reduced social media interaction, negatively impacting their campaigns.

Reading guide of report

This integrated report is organized around the key tasks of WP4 (see Appendix A). Section 2 covers the research findings, organised by the findings of the network and narrative analysis, the political ethnography on online harassment and the interviews on coping strategies. Section 3 summarizes our recommendations for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online. Section 4 covers policy advice and recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, political actors, and civil societal organizations. Section 5 describes the conclusions.

2. Research findings

The research findings are structured around the research questions, and WP4 tasks listed in Appendix A. Section 2.1 focuses on the outcomes of the quantitative study to understand the spread and mobilization of anti- and pro-gender equality narratives online. Additionally, it delves into strategies that actors develop to counter harmful narratives. Section 2.2 studies how anti-gender equality harassment is framed online and how EP candidates cope with online gendered harassments.

Ethics approval was granted for all empirical studies in this report that conducted research on publicly available social media and interviews, via the ethics committee of the AISSR, University of Amsterdam (Code FMG-3737_2023). We deleted references to individual persons and accounts to keep them anonymous for privacy purposes.

2.1 Issues, framing and mobilization on X

One of the key aims of Work Package 4 is to identify the central narratives of anti-gender and anti-feminist actors on X that oppose to at least some extent gender equality policies, LGBTQIA+'s rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and broader understandings of gender as a social construct. These actors are part of movements that typically reject the idea that gender is distinct from biological sex and target what they call "gender ideology" or "gender theory" (Butler, 2024; McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023a). They frame "gender" as a threat to traditional family structures, national identity, and religious or cultural norms. They mobilize against comprehensive sexuality education, trans rights, abortion rights, and anti-discrimination laws. In comparison, anti-feminist movements reject or resist feminist principles and efforts to achieve gender equality. These movements may deny the existence of structural sexism or argue that feminism undermines traditional values, men's rights, or societal order (Khan, Tant & Harper, 2023; Rothermel, 2020; van Wormer, 2008). They often overlap with or feed into anti-gender discourse, but their primary focus is on the opposition of women's rights and gender equality activism. Both terms capture a broad range) of actors and movements, use similar strategies and present in both grassroots and institutional forms (e.g., political parties, media platforms, academic forums). We contrast these anti-gender and anti-feminist actors with pro-gender

equality actors. We define them as actors who endorse a progressive understanding of gender as social constructs and advocate for inclusive gender equality.

2.1.1 Method

Sampling strategy: To identify relevant actors, we first created an initial of actors based on literature (e.g., McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023b) and watchdog reports about anti-gender movements (Datta, 2021). The list was checked by Push*Back*Lash consortium members who added additional actors. First, we dropped all actors that did not have an X account. Then, as we aimed to cover multiple countries of origin based in the EU or UK, we selected the most prominent accounts based on number of followers. We did not implement a specific threshold for number of followers as the popularity of X differs widely between countries which influences number of followers.

After scraping a total of 35,000 tweets, we reevaluated the list of actors. That is, we explored which actors are commonly referred to by the other actors (seed accounts) and then added those accounts to our list. The final list includes a total of 104 actors who had an active X account during June 2023 to December 2023. This includes political and public institutions, non-governmental institutions and public individuals like activists or politicians whose area of responsibility is associated with gender and sexuality issues (e.g., a minister for gender equality). While the final list includes a wide variety of actors, it is not exhaustive or representative of anti- or pro-gender equality actors and movement. Instead, it provides an insight into this diverse and dynamically changing field.

X implemented changes in API accessibility for academic research in March 2023. Access was no longer free. This restricted the collection of historical tweets and reduced the number of tweets that that we could collect dramatically. Due to financial restrains, paying for API access limited the number of accounts and actors we were able to scrape. This limits our data in the sense that other actors might have implemented different narratives that cannot be detected in this research. While our findings might therefore not extend to smaller and/or more extreme accounts, our data shed lights on the narratives among salient and influential actors. Furthermore, actors within our data set like ‘CitizenGo’ are explicitly named as “a leader of anti-gender ideology globally” in a working paper by the United Nation research institute (McEwen & Narayanaswamy 2023b, p.11; see also section 2.1.2.1). The list of actors is provided in the appendix C. This list excludes accounts by prominent individuals to protect their anonymity. For

each actor, we sampled up to 1500 tweets. Due to the API restrictions, we sampled different time periods for each account which renders comparison about number of tweets and tweet frequencies meaningless. Appendix C does however include the number of tweets and collected time period. The final dataset consisted of ~60,000 tweets from 104 actors. In line with the X terms of service, parts of the collected data are publicly available: https://doi.org/10.7802/2677.

Analytical approach: In a first step, the central issues of each tweet was manually single coded. That is, we coded *what* the actors speak about for example abortion or gender self-identification. We combined a reflective thematic bottom-up approach with empirically informed themes that we expected to emerge. The results are reported in section 2.1.2, which focuses on salient issues on X. In a second step, to understand the frames and narratives we coded *how* the actors speak about the topic. This included identifying strategies based on previous research (see table 2) and narratives building on the Narrative Policy Framework. These strategies were developed through a combination of deductive and inductive coding. We built on previous research (e.g., Hunt, 2021) and created categories based on the data. To identify tweets that are relevant for this research, we included all tweets that were coded as gender-related in the first step. Additionally, we conducted an automated content analyses in R (Benoit et al., 2018) to detect the most frequently used terms and the prevalence of hate terms. In section 2.1.2, we report on which issues are salient on X. In section 2.1.3, we zoom in on how Gender is portrayed by anti-gender actors analysing statements and visual content posted on X by 16 different anti-gender actors within the last five years.

Table 2. Anti-gender strategies and narratives

Label	Description	Example
Self-Promotion	Tweets highlight actor's achievements.	*CitizenGO delivers at Disney's Florida headquarters 500,000 signatures against* LGBTQIA+ *indoctrination in its series and films. #Disney #LGTBI #Indoctrination.*
Call for Action	Tweets call for action like support of the receiver.	*Please sign this petition to prevent the next gay pride parade and similar events from happening in any Disney park. #Disney #Adoctrination #MickeyMouse.*
Education	Tweets provide educational and/ or statistical information.	Representation matters. Yet, only 26.5% of members of parliament are women globally. More needs to be done to work towards gender parity!

Demotion/ Exposure of others	Tweets highlight the failings/misconduct of others.	*This is a deceptive move to push the* LGBTQIA+ *political agenda and expose children and families to lewd behaviour. #Disney*
Role Model Showcase	Tweets highlight the success of specific others.	*a great pro-life campaigner against abortion throughout the world. Her speech at the Republican convention in the USA.*
Policy Influence	Tweets advocate for the implementation or abolition of a law/regulation/institution.	Today, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security launches our annual policy brief, assessing the implementation of the WPS agenda in the work of the #UNSC in 2019.
Co-opt public narrative	Tweets are intended to impact the societal perception of an issue.	*Many in favour of abortion claim to advocate for "women's rights." Meanwhile, they're murdering their baby girls.*
(Raising) Awareness	Tweets make an issue salient.	*First, demographic changes include rapid aging, which systematically leads to a decline in the working-age population. Immediate consequences are significant challenges for our economies, our social and health systems, and the general well-being of our societies.*
Credibility	Tweet aims to establish or undermine the credibility	*Experts from around the world call for the universal abolition of #surrogacy: A hundred specialists on the subject will sign the* [redacted] *a text calling for the universal repeal of this practice.*
Deflection/ Ad-hominin argument	Tweets raise a counterargument/counteraccusation or attack the person who made the argument instead of focusing on the argument itself.	*The Bible has over 600 laws, and a lot are civil. You should actually inform yourself on something before you try to lecture others on it. Under liberal secular law, people murder babies for convenience and call it "abortion."*
Effort/Effectiveness	Tweets aim to highlight (the lack of) effectiveness of existing or suggested laws/regulations/ institutions.	*Blood donation eligibility should not be determined by methods that are based on sexual orientation!* *We call for an inclusive blood donation process that treats all potential donors with #equality and #respect.* *#PrideMonth2023* *?? #LGBTIrights are #HumanRights!*
Selection Bias	Tweets emphasise single stories or rely	*"I soon discovered the pregnancy that would ultimately save my life." A pregnancy resource*

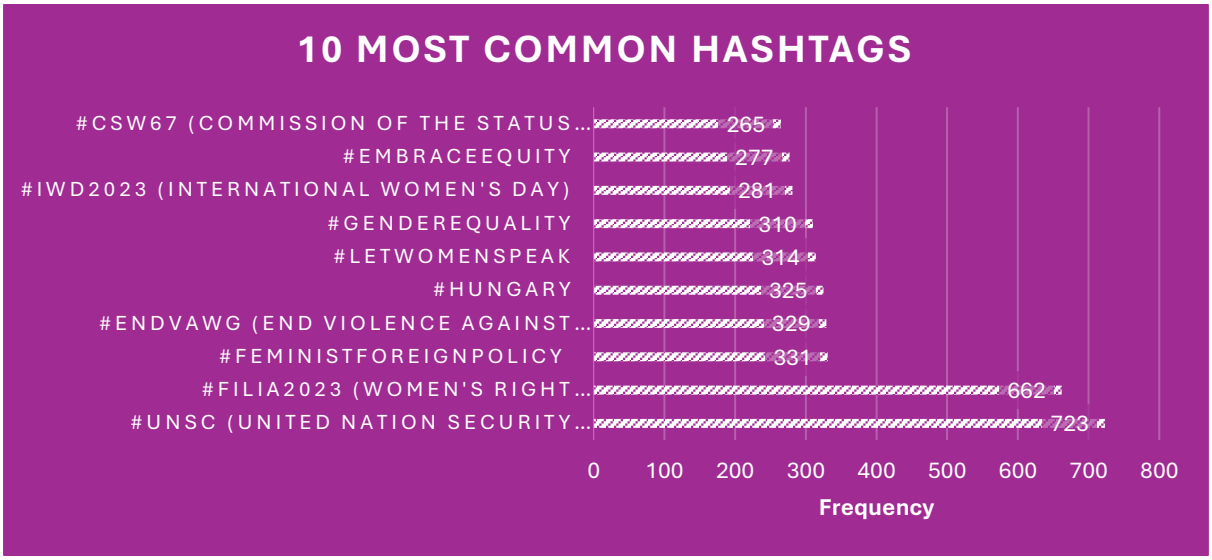
	on overgeneralization or claim that a majority of people support an idea or tell part of an issue, but not all of it.	*centre helped save Jean Marie Davis and her unborn child; now she runs her own centre to help other women and children.*
Oversimplification	Correlation versus Causation; Post-hoc ergo propter hoc; Circular Reasoning.	*"The aggressive promotion of gender ideology has coincided with a sharp rise in children identifying as transgender."* *We must put an end to this social contagion and stop experimenting on America's children.*
False Dilemma	Tweets display arguments/ solutions as a dichotomy or indicate there are only two opposing ways to see an issue.	*There is no such thing as a safe abortion. Abortion always kills the baby.*
Identity and Value	Tweets invoke a collective identity or appeal to a shared cultural value.	*Remembering 2019: CitizenGO delivered nearly half a million signatures to Disney's Orlando headquarters. This 2020, we will continue to fight for our values. If you haven't done so, sign up and join in!*
Emotional Appeal	Tweets incite basic emotions or evoke a perception of threat or safety.	*@CitizenGO_USA: Transgenderism is a Satanic attack against God's image! @CitizenGO*

2.1.2 Issue salience and strategies of anti-gender and pro-gender equality mobilization online

To get an indication which issues are salient in the discourse on X we looked at hashtags (i.e., searchable and categorising keywords on social media platforms). Overall, 50,752 hashtags were used, with the most prominent ones referring broadly to gender identity and sexual orientation (n = 3,108; e.g., #LGBTI), gender-based violence (n = 1,734; e.g., #16DaysofActivism) and reproductive rights (n = 1,544; e.g., #Pro-Life). The single most used hashtag was #UNSC referring to the United Nation Security Council (n = 723) and followed by the #filia2023 (n = 662)

referring to the Women's Right Conference organized by FiLiA[2]. The ten most common hashtags are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Ten most common hashtags of anti- and pro-gender mobilization online



While hashtags offered a first insight in the data, actors' use of them varied widely with many tweets not containing any hashtags. Further, these hashtags are influenced by the time period of the data collection and the amount of collected tweets per actor. Thus, they only represent the most common hashtags in our data set. To obtain a deeper understanding of which issues were salient, we manually single-coded the main theme and subthemes of the collected tweets. We identified four broad main themes: (1) Freedom, (2) Gender, (3) Reproductive Rights and (4) Society, Politics and Religion. Themes, subthemes and descriptions are displayed in table 3. Additionally, we had an "Other" category which captured tweets like "Merry Christmas" or job adverts. All categories are present in the posts of anti-gender and pro-gender equality actors; however, their prevalence varies widely between actors. One reason is the existing diversity within the actors. We collected data from accounts like CitizenGo or UN Women which focus on multiple issues. We also collected data from single issue accounts like *TransFuzja* or *Article 6* who focus predominately on trans rights and right to abortion respectively. This means that the prevalence of issues is shaped by our selection of actors. Further, the prevalence of issues depends on the collected time frame and frequency with which actors tweeted. Therefore, averaging issues across actors is not very meaningful. Instead, we report three cases focusing

-[2] FiLiA is a "Women-led Volunteer organisation and part of the Women's Liberation Movement": https://www.filia.org.uk/about-filia (accessed on 11-12-2025).

on individual actors in the following sections. We report the most salient issues per actor combined with their most prevalent strategy.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes and descriptions of gender issues on X		
Category	**Classification**	**Subcategory**
Freedom	Freedom is central in these tweets. For example, tweets about freedom of expression focus on individuals' right to express beliefs, e.g., about gender identity. The tweets do not explicitly focus on rejection or endorsement of gender identity.	Attacks
		Bodily Autonomy
		Speech/ Expression
		Religion
		Sovereignty
		Other
Gender	Gender is central in these tweets. For example, tweets about gender identities or gender roles highlighting the sender's standpoint.	Family
		Gender-Based Violence
		Gender-Affirmative Care
		Gender-Inclusive Language
		Gender Roles
		Gender Studies
		Gender Identity
		Gender Ideology
		LGBTQIA+
		Self-ID
		Same-Sex Marriage
		Sexual Orientation
		Single-Sex Spaces
		Transgender Individuals
		Women's Sport
		Other
Reproductive Rights	Reproductive Rights are central in these tweets. For example, tweets about the sender's perception of abortion rights.	Abortion
		Adoption
		IVF
		Single Parents
		Surrogacy
		Other
Society, Politics and Religion	The relationships between society, politics and religion are central in these tweets. For example, tweets about national elections.	Assisted Suicide
		Children
		Christianity
		Demographic Change/ Aging Society
		Elections
		Elites/ Institutions
		Environment
		EU Structure

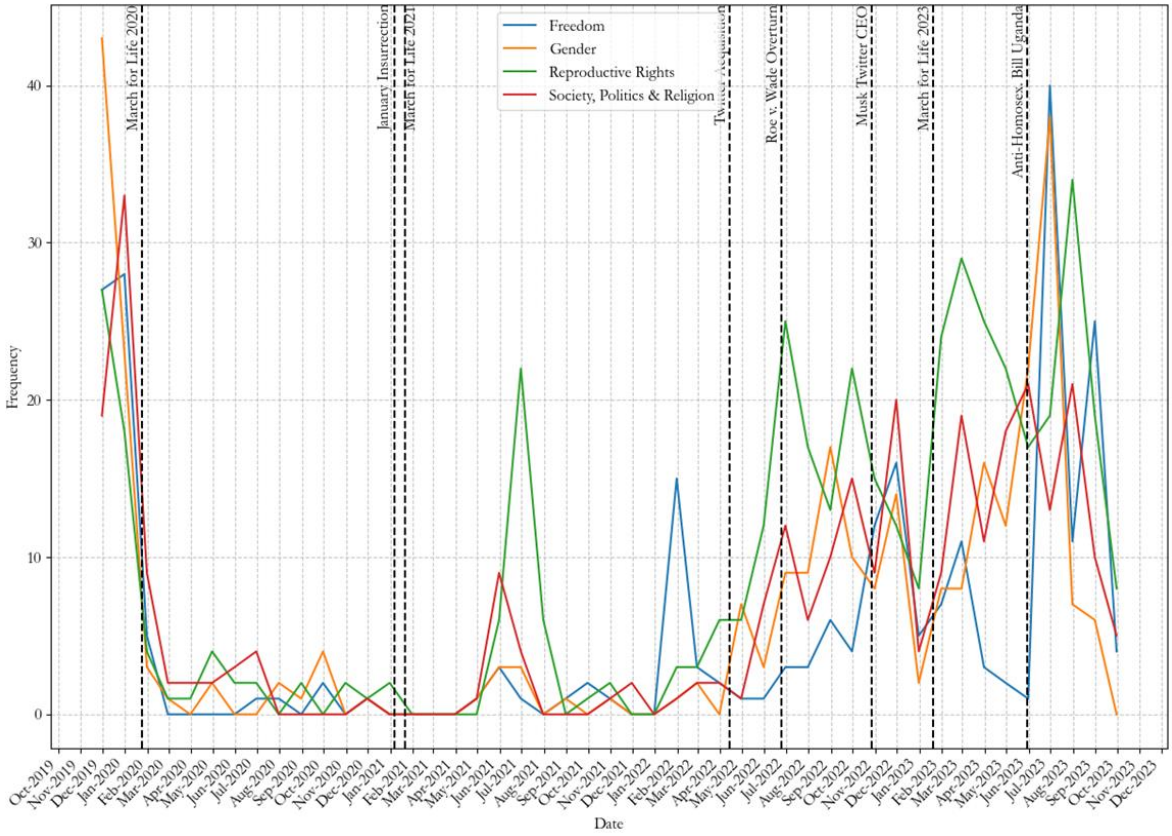
		Health
		Human Rights
		Media
		Political Ideologies
		Pornography
		Racism
		War
		Other

2.1.2.1 Case I: Issue salience CitizenGo

CitizenGo is an advocacy group which emerged in in Spain in 2013 as the international platform of the Spanish organization HazteOir. The group promotes online petitions worldwide as a way to increase citizen participation in politics. According to its website, CitizenGo operates in 50 countries and aims to defend "life, family, and liberty." Its main areas of focus are opposition to same-sex marriage, abortion, and what it calls "gender ideology." The organization presents itself as a grassroots movement, encouraging citizens to launch their own petitions and drive change at local, national, and international levels. While CitizenGo claims to be funded solely by private donations according to the FAQs on their website. In short, CitizenGo enables low-cost, low-effort digital activism and plays an active role in the global anti-gender and anti-feminist movement (Katsiveli & Coimbra-Gomes, 2020; Righetti, 2025; Rivera, 2019). In their 1,499 tweets analysed, the most frequent topics were Abortion (n = 439, 31.7%), Freedom of Speech (n = 155, 11.2%), and LGBTQIA+ issues (n = 148, 10.7%). Their most common strategy was demotion, that is creating negative portrayals of opposing groups, often by questioning their motives (for example: "Why do drag queens never want to read to old people, but only to children?"). Another frequent strategy was a call to action, with nearly one-third (31.2%) of tweets linking to a CitizenGo petition. In terms of timing, CitizenGo's tweets about abortion rose sharply before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in July 2022, peaking around that decision. Activity remained high afterward, especially around the March for Life 2023. A smaller spike occurred in July 2021, when discussions about abortion rights were reignited ahead of the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization hearing. Tweeting activity also increased after Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter, though the data do not allow any causal inference connection. Finally, tweets about LGBTQIA+ issues increased following the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda in June 2023 as can be seen in Figure 2. The Anti-Homosexuality Act regulates penalty for "promoting homosexuality", sharing homosexual pornography, and sexual acts between two

people of the same biological sex in Uganda. Penalties include life imprisonment and the death penalty. The bill was condemned by members of the European Parliament.

Figure 2. Frequency of tweets by CitizenGo related to main topics across time (October 2019 to October 2023).

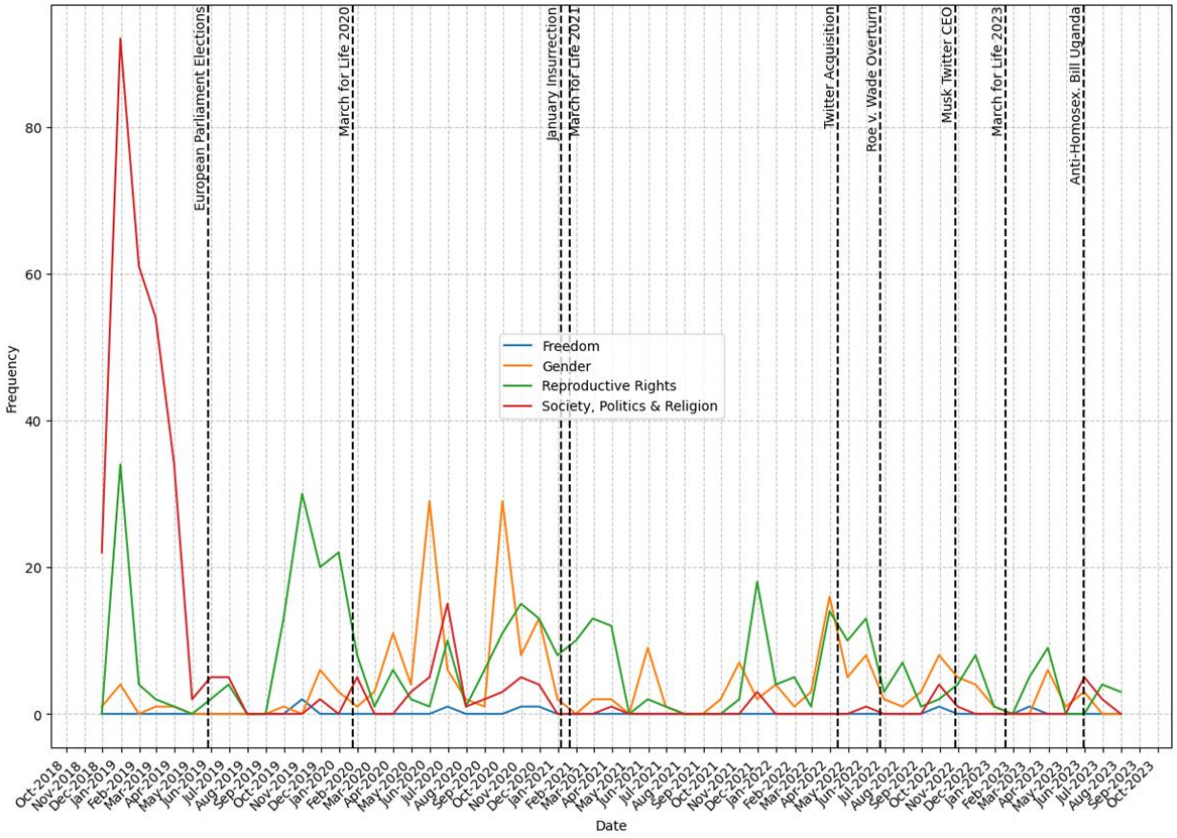


2.1.2.2 Case II: Issue salience Europe for Family

Europe for Family is a non-governmental organization registered in the EU Transparency Register since 2015. The group promotes and defends the family as the foundation of society, focusing on topics such as family policy, marriage, and parenthood. Based on its stance on gender equality, Europe for Family is also classified as an anti-gender actor. The organization's most frequent tweet topics were Surrogacy (n = 333, 34.5%) and the European Elections (n = 245, 25.4%). Like CitizenGo, Europe for Family often used demotion—criticizing opposing ideas—but their second most common strategy was co-opting public narratives. Rather than calling followers to immediate action (such as signing petitions), they aimed to reshape debates to align with their values. For instance, they portrayed surrogacy as a form of exploitation of women, arguing that banning it would protect women's rights. Tweets about society, politics, and religion were especially common before the 2019 European Parliament elections, often including information

about EU structures, polling data, and implicit voting preferences. After the elections, these topics became less frequent (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Frequency of tweets by Europe for Family related to main topics across time (October 2018 to October 2023).



2.1.2.3 Case III: Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGO WPS) is a coalition of 18 international NGOs, coordinated under the Tides Centre. It works to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the United Nations and beyond. Between November 22, 2022, and September 14, 2023, the group published 500 posts (422 tweets, 51 retweets, and 27 quotes). Based on its work, the NGO WPS is classified as a pro-gender equality actor. The most frequent topics were women's participation in politics (n = 73; 14.6%), violence against women (n = 44; 8.8%), and women's rights (n = 38; 7.6%). Their main communication strategy was education and information-sharing. However, instead of posting key information directly on social media, they often shared links to their monthly reports on their website (for example: "Our Monthly Action Points for April are now available…"). While this approach maintains credibility, it may reduce

engagement since users are less likely to leave the platform. On average, these posts received fewer than ten likes and no retweets, suggesting that while the organization addresses vital issues, its online reach and visibility remain limited.

2.1.3 Framing 'gender' in anti-gender online mobilization

Focusing on the main theme 'Gender' in the online discourse of 15 anti-gender actors, we identified five frequently reoccurring narratives. These narratives are not contained in one specific tweet but are built over multiple tweets by the same actor to advocate against progressive gender equality ideas. They are further supported by graphics like memes, links to external websites like blogs or newspaper articles, photographs or short videos. The common thread of these narratives is that they portray 'Gender' as a threat, but they differ in what exactly is threatened.

1) *Gender as a threat to achieved equality and women's rights*. In this narrative, Gender is portrayed as threatening women's right achievements. For example, the use of gender-neutral language is criticized as a way of 'erasing' women. Conservative actors complete this narrative by postulating that traditional and religious values related to the family are in general erased. Trans-exclusionary groups, in contrast, complete the narrative by claiming that gender is used to reinforce patriarchal structures and oppose women's hard-won rights.

2) Gender as a threat to women's safety. In this narrative, Gender is portrayed as threatening women's physical safety. The content predominately focuses on debates of single-sex spaces like toilets, changing rooms, prisons, women's shelters and women's sport. Trans-exclusionary groups also depict transgender women as sex-offenders who misuse gender self-ID to harass cis-gender women by for example demanding transfer to female prisons. There is notable absence of the broader discussion of male violence and transgender men.

3) Gender as a threat to homosexuality. In this narrative, Gender diversity and especially transgender individuals are portrayed as an expression of homophobia and the erasure of same-sex attraction. This is expressed through claiming that gender affirmative care are hidden conversion practices. The narrative claims that by enabling individuals to change their gender, same-sex attraction is devalued and erased. This narrative is prominent amongst trans-exclusionary groups.

4) Gender as a threat to children. In this narrative, Gender is portrayed as a threat to children's safety. This is expressed through claiming that transgender individuals and people who promote a progressive gender idea are paedophiles, sex offenders, and immoral people who disrupt societal norms. It is claimed that gender and sexual education is misused to groom and hypersexualize children.

5) Gender as a threat to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and democracy. In this narrative, Gender is portrayed as a threat to an individual's freedom of speech and freedom of expression. This is supported through reporting incidents in which individuals faced backlash and legal consequences due to their gender-critical views. These incidents are always framed as innocent individuals being wrongly accused, while neglecting the hate speech and discrimination accusations which the legal consequences are based on. Within the same context, Gender is additionally portrayed as signs of totalitarian regimes and labelled as a form of oppression.

2.1.4 Conclusion

Overall, we found widely diverse online landscape in both terms of actors as well salient issues. The three cases show clear contrasts in how anti-gender and pro-gender equality actors use social media: CitizenGo and Europe for Family, both anti-gender actors, effectively use social media to mobilize supporters and shape public debates. CitizenGo focuses on direct action through petitions and emotionally charged messages, while Europe for Family takes a more discursive approach, reframing issues like surrogacy in ways that appear aligned with women's rights. Both groups show responsiveness to key political events, such as the overturning of Roe v. Wade or EU elections, demonstrating strategic timing in their communication. Zervoulakou and colleagues (2025) offer a more detailed analyses of these two cases. In contrast, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security takes an institutional and informational approach, sharing credible resources and policy recommendations. However, its more formal communication style results in lower engagement levels, suggesting that while pro-gender equality actors maintain authority and trustworthiness, they are less effective at leveraging the fast-paced, emotionally driven dynamics of social media. Overall, these findings highlight a central challenge: Anti-gender actors are more agile and visible online, using emotionally engaging and mobilizing strategies, while pro-gender actors often rely on institutional

communication styles that may limit their digital impact despite the importance of their advocacy.

The in-depth analysis of anti-gender actors' narratives about 'Gender' shows that a diverse range of anti-gender actors, including established organizations and citizens movements, spread similar narratives focusing on eliciting threats around gender equality. Stories and narratives are strategic tools to empower and uplift individuals and groups, but they can also be used to demonize, suppress, and harm groups. The stories told by influential individuals and institutions about gender and gender identity shape the way society engages with it and supports or opposes progressive gender ideas and policies. Our findings show that anti-gender movements use narratives that portray the LGBTQIA+ community and their supporters in a harmful way as well as to mobilize against gender progressive concepts or ideas like gender self-ID. Within these narratives, anti-gender actors refrain from using explicit hateful terms. However, the narratives themselves aim to depict a group repeatedly in negative, stigmatizing, and stereotypical ways. Thus, these narratives fit into the broader conceptualization of hate speech by the EU commission which includes negative stereotyping and stigmatization.[3]

2.2 Frames of online harassments against European Parliament candidates in The Netherlands and Germany

One aim of Work Package 4 is to compare how gendered harassments are framed in online social media campaigns of Dutch and German European Parliament (EP) candidates during the 2024 elections. Additionally, Work Package 4 seeks to investigate how politicians cope with gendered online harassments. In political campaigns, politicians use online social media platforms to increase political visibility and to facilitate open democratic debate and deliberation (Geise, Maubach & Boettcher, 2025; Gora & De Wilde, 2022; Jennings, Suzuki & Hubbard, 2021). Social media platforms are also hotspots for harassment that especially target politicians from marginalised groups, such as women, or politician's views about gender equality (Krook, 2020; Theocharis et al., 2016; Van Der Vegt, 2024). Online gendered harassment refers to unwanted degrading images and language in online comment sections that link to the sex, identity or personal characteristics of politicians. The purpose or the effect is that the politician's dignity is

[3] https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/ecri-glossary (accessed on 16-12-2025).

violated and that distinctions in gender identities are produced or reproduced (European Institute for Gender Equality; EIGE, 2022). These distinctions in gender identities tend to delegitimise women politicians over men politicians. Such gendered harassment has a negative impact on the presence of women in politics and the views about gender that they bring to the table (Dovi, 2025). While most public debate and studies focus particularly on the effect of abuse on women, men also may experience gendered harassment (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2023).

2.2.1 Method

To explore the nature of gendered online harassment against Dutch and German European Parliament candidates, we employ political ethnography and interviews. In the online space, this can be called a netnography—a method that leverages researchers' own experiences and reflections in digital environments to gain a deeper understanding of the cultures and qualitative interactions within online communities (Kozinets, 2020; Reid & Duffy, 2018). In this study, we investigate how harassment is gendered and manifests, including its forms, targets, and impact on politicians' ideas and democratic debate. The researchers Norah Schulten (for the Dutch case) and Michael Hunklinger (for the German case) engaged themselves in the online social media space during the European elections as a passive participant-observer. They used their own human experience as a tool to understand the deeper qualitative meaning behind these gendered harassments (Kozinets, 2020). All gendered harassing comments, including visuals and memes, were manually monitored and analysed in reflective memos, enabling the research team to describe community experiences, meanings, and visuals.

For our case selection of specific politicians, we followed online campaigns, including the comment sections, of ten Dutch EP candidates (five women and five men) and ten German EP candidates (five women and five men) of left-wing, centre, and right-wing parties. For selection purposes, we screened the online interactions of the first two men and women EP candidates from all Dutch and German parties for the duration of two months. Candidates who received the most online gendered harassment were selected, while parties whose EP candidates did not campaign online were excluded. Hence, we did not investigate how often gendered harassment takes place against which political actors, but rather what the form is once it is present. To ensure gender representation, we also included the first EP candidate of the opposite gender from the same party as those selected candidates who experienced the highest levels of harassment. For privacy reasons, we do not include our list of the politicians. The sample consists of national

politicians running for the European Parliament who are relatively less known to the Dutch public compared to established national politicians (IPSOS and I&O, 2024). As a result, gendered harassment against these less-known politicians is less influenced by their prior public history and is therefore likely linked to their gender, the content of their posts, or the party they represent.

Our analysis consists of 1) a manual thematic analysis of all gendered harassments in comment sections against campaign posts of EP candidates on their X accounts (and Instagram and TikTok if available) and 2) interviews with politicians and/or their social media coordinators. For the manual thematic analysis of gendered harassing comments, Norah Schulten (NL) and Michael Hunklinger (GER) categorised all harassing comments via a code book. This code book was developed through two rounds of iterative coding. In this codebook, we categorise forms of gendered harassing comments (see table 4). A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to understand the meaning of these gendered harassing comments.

For the interviews, all Dutch and German EP candidates were invited after the EP elections. Invitations were sent to the personal email addresses of all 20 EP candidates or we approached their supporting staff multiple times if no personal email addresses were publicly available. Five EP candidates and one social media assistant of an EP candidate of the Netherlands and two German candidates responded and were willing to conduct an interview. The no show rate was high. This was to be expected, because politicians are well known for not wanting to discuss their online harassments or because they agendas do not allow the time for an interview. The interviews lasted one hour or more. Via thorough reflection with the interviewees, we were able to identify themes and patters about the online mobilisation of gendered harassments, coping strategies and risk management strategies. Finally, only politicians of left-wing and centre parties accepted to participated in an interview, while EP candidates from the entire spectrum were invited. Hence, politicians from right-wing parties might experience gendered harassments differently than identified in this study.

The semi-structured interview covers three themes. The first theme assesses how the candidates experienced the online coverage of them during the elections, and after the elections. With their approval, we specifically use examples from our online data and ask the EP candidates to reflect on these harassing comments they received. How did it impact them, and how can it impact politics? The second theme asks whether they experienced any online harassments, what kind online comments they interpret as negative, and how this impacted them. The third

theme covers how the candidates cope(d) with online negative coverage, and what worked or did not work according to them.

Table 4. Gender pushback codebook to categorise online gendered harassing comments on X, Instagram and TikTok
Undermining and othering insults
○ Allegations of sincerity (liar/hypocrite)
○ Allegations of privilege/elitism
○ Attention seeker
○ Being a mis-informer
○ being a sexist
○ being a whiner / a "do-gooder"
○ Being an explainer with an arrogant tone
○ Being arrogant
○ Being crazy
○ Being dumb
○ Being infantile
○ Being naive and unaware
○ Being radical / extremist
○ Being scary
○ Being disgusting
○ Being sour and whiner
○ Comments about race
○ Insult of being a paedophile (or a supporter of paedophiles)
Sexualised harassments
○ Reference to sexual actions
○ Reference to (implied) sexual preference
Appearance-based insults
○ Physical appearance
○ Reference to body of politician

Note that these categories are not the only existing categories that fall under gendered harassments theoretically, but they are the categories that were found in our data.

2.2.2 Online gendered harassments against EP candidates and their coping strategies

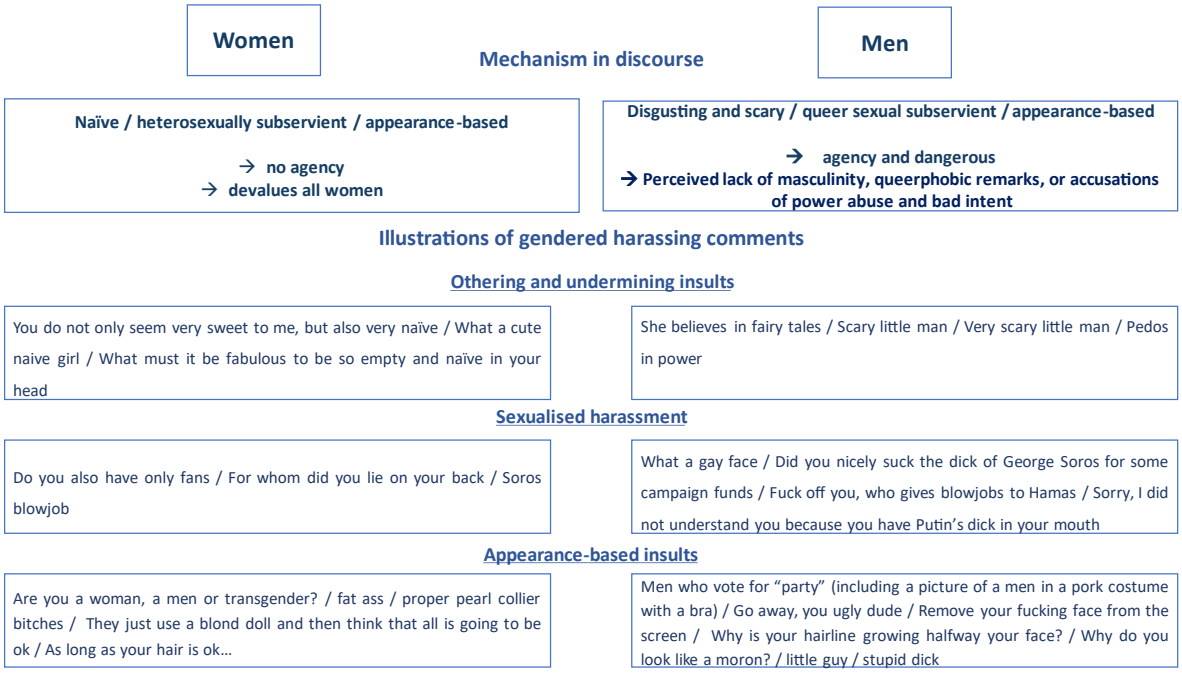
Overall findings show that harassment of Dutch and German European Parliament (EP) candidates during the 2024 European election campaign is gendered in the sense that many harassing comments are built on shared cultural knowledge about gender stereotypes. Therefore, we argue that these harassments imply truth behind gendered prejudices and therefore reinforce gender inequality and hinder open democratic debate on complex societal issues. We first discuss how harassment towards men and women candidates is directed at their personal characteristics. Second, we discuss what types of gendered harassment men and women candidates encounter when they address politically sensitive issues. Third, we discuss which coping strategies were mentioned by the EP candidates themselves in both countries.

2.2.2.1 Gendered harassments against the characteristics of politicians

The findings from The Netherlands show that both men and women politicians experience gendered harassment in the form of personalised, queerphobic, and appearance-based microaggressions. Our findings do align with existing literature on violence against women in politics (Dovi, 2025; Krook, 2020), reinforcing the idea that even subtle forms of harassment perpetuate gender inequality —regardless of the target's gender. For women, the frames in the harassments essentialize femininity as inherently incompatible with politics. In contrast, while men also face gendered harassments, the frames do not seem to reinforce the idea that men as a group are unsuitable for politics. Instead, harassment toward men tends to focus on perceived lack of masculinity, queerphobic remarks, or accusations of power abuse and bad intent. As such, gendered harassment continues to uphold narratives of inequality, affecting women more systematically. In figure 4, we illustrate the mechanisms through which gendered harassments make political identities appear unsuitable via 1) othering and undermining insults, 2) sexualised harassments, and 3) appearance-based insults.

Findings from Germany show that women are more directly targeted with gendered harassment. In the context of growing digital political engagement, social media platforms serve as sites of participation and arenas for exclusion. A reoccurring insult in the German case that illustrates how gendered harassment is used to ridicule a broad range of women EP candidates is "*who is this man*".

Figure 4. Mechanisms through which gendered harassing comments against Dutch women and men politicians reinforce gender inequality.



Note that comments have been adapted slightly to make them non-traceable. The essence of the messages has remained the same.

The findings show that digital platforms often serve as arenas for misogynistic attacks that delegitimize women's political participation rather than neutral spaces for democratic engagement. These attacks include appearance-based insults, gender mischaracterization, and sexualized harassment. This targeted abuse is not ideological debate, but rather, it is rooted in patriarchal efforts to question women's political legitimacy. The findings reveal how anti-gender narratives online reinforce structural inequalities, suppress marginalized voices, and ultimately undermine democratic representation and inclusion. Harassment of female candidates can range from hostility and ridicule to sexist instrumentalization. Gendered hate and harassment can add to the inequality of political participation due to the fact that women face hate and harassment online.

2.2.2.2 Gendered harassments against political views and ideas of politicians

Building on theories of semiotic violence against political actors (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2023; Krook, 2020) and political expression (Phillips, 1995), we find that for the Dutch case gendered harassment can also delegitimise politicians' views—not just their identity. This extends Dovi's (2025) work by emphasizing the importance of analysing the meanings behind these negative

gendered narratives. Such harassment does not occur solely when politicians address gender equality, such as the call for more women in politics; it also surfaces when politicians speak about polarising and complex topics like migration or international conflicts. While the form of harassment may vary by gender, it attacks the substance of political discourse for both men and women. Figure 5 illustrates the mechanisms through which implied gender prejudices in insults can align to politician's views to undermine their credibility, portraying them as unsuitable to express these political views.

Figure 5. Illustrations how implied gender prejudices in insults can align to politician's views to undermine their credibility, portraying them as unsuitable to express political views.

Note that while this example in Figure 5 illustrates a post of a man and woman about international conflicts, similar mechanisms can be identified in comments to posts about other issues, such migration and gender equality. The difference is that the implied gender prejudice in the insult adapts to the theme (e.g. women who speak about migration are too feminine and nice for human beings, which make them appear unsuitable to make a call about migration; when political actors state that more women should become active in politics, women are being called explicitly unsuitable for politics).

The findings in The Netherlands thus suggest that the aim of gendered harassment may go beyond silencing individuals from marginalised groups. It may also serve to devalue the broader range of political ideas they represent. Future research should therefore not only examine the intersectional identities of politicians (e.g. gender, sexuality, race), but also analyse the content of their thematic messages, particularly those outside the domain of gender equality.

2.2.2.3 Coping strategies and risk management

Findings of the interviews show that gendered harassment can drive politicians to avoid engaging with social media comment sections altogether. As a result, their campaign posts about complex societal issues are often met not with genuine dialogue or critical engagement, but with dismissive and prejudiced attacks. This can lead to the emergence of non-democratic "parallel worlds", where online spaces lack critical debate and citizen engagement—essential elements of liberal democracy (Gora & De Wilde, 2022). Politicians reported feeling more distant from citizens and unable to engage critically or safely with them due to persistent harassment. This paradox limits not only open debate for politicians but also for citizens who wish to engage constructively. Many of the interviewed politicians now prefer using alternative spaces, such as offsite political cafés or other platforms, to have more meaningful exchanges with engaged citizens.

Both Dutch and German EP candidates mentioned similar coping strategies in how to deal with online gendered harassments on social media. Below, we show a summary of how politicians and their social media teams implemented several coping strategies to manage the impact of online gendered harassment:

1. Engaging with comments directly to establish positive norms.
2. Training staff on how to identify and respond to online gendered harassment.
3. Promoting constructive norms among social media observers through targeted advertising.
4. Receiving support from social media staff to monitor and mitigate negative comment storms.
5. Seeking mental support from friends, family, and partners.
6. Accessing institutional support from political parties and security services.

2.2.3 Conclusion

The findings reveal that in for the Dutch case, both women and men politicians experience online gendered harassment in the form of personalised microaggressions. For women, prejudices essentialize femininity as inherently incompatible with politics. In contrast, gendered

harassment directed at men does not imply that men as a group are unsuitable for political life. Instead, it typically questions an individual man's masculinity, includes queerphobic remarks, or involves accusations of power abuse and ill intent. Additionally, gendered harassment occurs when both men and women politicians address gender equality—such as advocating for more women in politics—but it also emerges as a tactic to devalue both men and women politicians' policy statements on polarizing and complex issues, including migration and international conflicts.

For the German case, insults were rather characterized by mainly targeting women, their simpleness and by their non-relation to the political ideas of EP candidates. The attacks rather include appearance-based insults, gender mischaracterization, and sexualized harassment. This targeted abuse is not ideological debate, but rather, it is rooted in patriarchal efforts to question women' political legitimacy.

Consequences of online harassment are real. Disengagement is a key coping strategy to deal with harassment. As a result, politicians' posts about complex societal issues are often met not with genuine dialogue or critical engagement, but with dismissive and prejudiced gendered attacks. Taken together, these dynamics deepen our understanding of how gendered harassment harms democratic debate and representation.

3. Safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online

In this section, we build on the Toolkit (T4.7) on concrete strategies that actors can use to continue gender equality work safe and effectively. First, we will discuss how political actors can protect themselves by safeguarding themselves and their work. Second, we will discuss how political actors can respond to attacks, and handle and recover from them.

Protection: Safeguarding Yourself and Your Work: This section aims to equip you with protective strategies to ensure that they are prepared for potential threats and backlash. We will focus on different aspects including digital security and mental health protection. The listed recommendations should be seen as a starting point for conversations and actions related to safeguarding in your organization. They do not provide a full list, need to be adapted to your context and be updated in line with technological and legal changes.

To protect yourself and your work effectively, it is important to first conduct an internal audit to understand which security measures you currently have in place. Focus on different areas like technical security (e.g., Is your software protected?), physical security (e.g., Who can enter your workspace?) and mental health protection (e.g., Is support available?). Identify your current strengths, gaps, and blind spots. Complementing the internal audit, use surveys, focus groups or other approaches to understand (a) the extent to which your team is aware of these security measure, (b) how the measures are perceived and used (e.g., are the working effectively? Are incidents reported?), and (c) which risks (e.g., psychological, economic or reputational) your team is concerned about. Building on your findings, develop and implement a protocol to deal with (online) harassment and attacks. In table 5 is an example action plan you can adapt to your own needs.

Table 5. Action plan example to Protect: Safeguarding Yourself and Your Work

Step 1: Protective measures online before an attack

- Individuals and organizations should calculate time for overall 'safety work' in their planning. It often is an add on to an already very packed schedule, and this prevents exhaustion.

Individual

- Use strong, unique passwords and multifactor authentication to protect your accounts.
- Use a VPN to hide your IP address when posting.
- Use different accounts for private and personal activities and avoid linking them
- Check your digital footprint: Run your name, usernames, and emails through search engines. Remove or lock down old posts that could be used against you.
- Choose the right privacy setting for your accounts that includes checking who can see your post, your friend lists and location tags.
- Store sensitive docs and files in encrypted folders.
- Remove home addresses from public records if possible.

Network and organisation

- Check your physical workspace: Who is allowed in, is your work address public, and who could help in an emergency.
- Make colleagues, friends and family aware to not share any personal data when requested.
- Create a support network that can help you monitor and response to attacks.
- Identify the appropriate bodies within your organization to deal with and support you in case of harassment.

Step 2: Monitoring and early warning

- Set-up Google Alerts on your name, username(s) and organisation to receive an early warning if you are targeted.
- Regularly audit social media for exposed info (photos, tagged locations, comments).

Response: Handling and Recovering from Attacks: In this section and table 6, we cover what to do after an attack. We end this section with an overview of the resources and support mechanisms that are available in case of an online attack.

Table 6. Action plan example what to do after an attack.

What to do after an attack?

Even with the good prevention practices, attacks can occur. The following lists some steps you might want to take to respond to an attack.

Step 1: If harassment begins

- Report the harassment to your superiors and/ or the appropriate bodies within your organisation.
- Do not engage with harassers. Instead mute them if possible. Unlike blocking, muting them enables you to collect further evidence.
- Take screenshots with timestamps to document the abuse. Do not minimize the abuse, it is better to document everything, including microaggressions and vague/ ambiguous comments.
- Change account settings to temporarily private and/ or turning off location sharing, tagging, or open DMs.
- Limit your own exposure to the abuse by stepping away from platforms during harassment waves and delegate monitoring to allies.
- Involve your support network to help monitor, report, or even temporarily manage accounts.

Step 2: Escalation response

- Report threats to platforms' official channel as harassment violates the Digital Services Act and platforms should respond.
- Consider filing a police report using the documented abuse.

Step 3: Long-term safety and recovery

- Consider community and professional support to process the events and share experiences.
- Refresh your action plan if threats evolve.

Resources to support political actors after gendered online attacks

In this section, we list some of the available resources on national and international level. However, this list of resources does not replace enquiring which procedures and resources are available within your organization. This resource section should be seen complementary to the internal audit mentioned in the prevention section.

Reporting:

- If the attack is consider a cybercrime, you can directly report it Europol: https://www.europol.europa.eu/report-a-crime/report-cybercrime-online
- For any comments on online platforms, you should report it to the platform directly. You can report content (e.g., single posts or videos), but also profiles, channels, ads and events. You can also report harmful content that is targeted at others. Most social media networks have an in-app reporting feature, meaning that you can report abuse directly underneath/ near the content.
    - Facebook instructions here
    - YouTube instructions here
    - TikTok instructions here
    - Instagram instructions here
    - X instructions here
    - Bluesky instructions here

  If the platform does not react, you have the option to further complain in line with the EU digital services act. Each member state has its own Digital Services Coordinator and you can report to the one in which country you are residing. Find the full list here: Digital Services Coordinators. You can also report the platform the platform to 'trusted flaggers'. These are expert platforms that are responsible for detecting illegal and harmful content. Find a list of EU recognized trusted flaggers here: Trusted Flaggers. In the United Kingdom, you can report harmful content directly to a national reporting centre.

Support Websites:

- Right to be: A non-profit organisation that aims to create harassment-free, safe and inclusive spaces: https://righttobe.org/. They offer resources, trainings and also the possibility to share your story: https://hateandhope.righttobe.org/stories/new. They also have a special section for women journalists facing online abuse. Learn more here: https://expesrtvoicestogether.org/
- The Everyday Sexism Project collects stories of sexism in daily life and enables you to share your story. Learn more here: https://everydaysexism.com/
- UniSAFE provides a comprehensive list of counselling and helplines within Europe: https://unisafe-gbv.eu/national-support-resources-counselling-and-helplines/

- The Humorarium: Toolkit for the use of feminist Humour to combat sexism and resistances to gender equality in academia: https://gearingroles.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Humorarium-Toolkit.pdf
- Enforcement Toolkit: Toolkit to tackle disability-based discrimination: https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/edfs-enforcement-toolkit/
- 'Mission Possible': A Gender and Media Advocacy Toolkit: https://global: https://global.comminit.com/content/mission-possible-gender-and-media-advocacy-toolkit
- Toolkit on gender-sensitive language: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/toolkit-gender-sensitive-communication?language_content_entity=en
- CYBERSAFE Guide for Workshop Facilitators Addressing the issue of online violence against girls in a classroom setting: https://stoponlineviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CYBERSAFE-Guide-for-workshop-facilitators_FINAL-with-design.pdf
- Violence Against Women and Girls Code of Practice: https://glitchcharity.co.uk/our-work/violence-against-women-girls
- Addressing Violence against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region: https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/530272
- Fix the Glitch 3.0: Digital Misogynoir: https://glitchcharity.co.uk/our-work/black-women-general-election

4. Recommendations

The findings of study raise the question how to effectively engage with and counteract anti-gender narratives. First, it is essential to recognize that narratives matter, and the semiotic violence embedded within them can cause real harm. Whether a statement qualifies as hate speech cannot be reduced to the mere presence or absence of specific words.

Studies on stereotypes consistently show that low-complexity narratives—those that offer overly simplistic representations of groups—tend to reinforce exclusion (Leader, Mullen & Rice, 2009). Both self-reports from marginalized individuals (Matsuda et al., 1993) and experimental research (Steele, 1997) illustrate the psychological harm of encountering such stereotypes. Additionally, research on the nature of hate suggests it often stems from perceiving individuals or groups as having a stable, inherently negative disposition (Fischer et al., 2018).

We argue that the narratives propagated by anti-gender actors function to reinforce group stereotypes and foster outgroup hatred. Semiotic violence, however, is too often normalized and trivialized (Ghosh, 2023; Krook, 2022). Taking it seriously is a necessary step in effectively countering anti-gender narratives. Table 7 provides an overview of our main policy recommendations.

Table 7. Policy recommendations

- **EU-wide recognition of hate speech.** Member States should acknowledge and extend hate speech definitions in national law and in the Code of conduct+ to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Code of conduct+ should explicitly name incitement of hatred based on sexual orientation and gender identity as illegal hate speech. The hate speech definition of the Council of Europe provides an excellent example for an inclusive definition.
- **Rethinking automated detection.** Our research demonstrates that harmful content is not restricted to specific expressions in single online posts. Harm emerges and hatred is incited through repeating a narrative over time using seemingly everyday expressions. The harmful potential of messages further depends on existing power structures and contexts. Who speaks to/about whom in what context and with what motivation should be considered when detecting hate speech.
- **Support (EP) politicians with coping strategies**. Institutions and employees can provide aid to politicians who experience (gendered) hateful and undermining comments online. Coping strategies include awareness raising, facilitation of personalised and collective support, monitoring threats, and activate bystanders to set positive norms in the protection of politicians.
- **Education and training.** Social media users play a key role in flagging harmful content as is acknowledged in the Code of Conduct+. Civic education on gender hate online is critical to ensure that (bystander) users recognize harmful content and can flag it or can counteract upon it by setting positive norms on non-hateful communication.

5. Conclusions

Work package 4 maps and analyses the spreading of issues, framing, and interactions of pro-gender and anti-gender actors online. It offers a typology of mobilisation and counter-strategies on X. It also provides concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online. Five research questions guide this research: 1) Which anti- and pro-gender equality narratives are spread by pro-gender and anti-gender actors online? 2) How are the narratives mobilised and which actors formulate counter strategies? 3) How is anti-gender equality harassment framed online in well-established democracies? 4) How do EP candidates cope with online gendered harassments? 5) What are concrete strategies for safe and effective work for those involved in gender equality activism online?

Combined, the network and narrative analyses, political ethnography and interviews with EP candidates reveal that anti-gender narratives and gendered harassments are widely mobilised on social media. Anti-gender narratives are spread actively through social media channels by independent actors and reactionary via commenter reactions to electoral campaigns of politicians.

Established and transnational connected influential groups spread harmful anti-gender narratives. Anti-gender actors utilize social media to promote their views, influence the societal climate and policies linking it with petitions, donation requests, and event promotions. Conservative, trans-exclusionary and anti-gender groups spread anti-gender narratives via transphobic, misogynist, and anti-abortion language and images (e.g., memes) on social media platforms. These narratives target not only individuals but marginalist groups and broader social policies, portraying gender equality as a societal threat. Within these narratives, anti-gender actors refrain mostly from using explicit hateful terms, however, the narratives themselves aim to depict a group repeatedly in negative, stigmatizing, and stereotypical ways. As such these narratives fit into the broader conceptualization of hate speech by the EU commission which includes negative stereotyping and stigmatization.

Reactionary, gendered harassments are mobilised via comments against EP electoral campaigns on social media. These gendered harassments add to the inequality of political participation due to the fact that women face misogynist harassment online. Findings are

different for The Netherlands and Germany. In The Netherlands both men and women politicians receive personalised, queerphobic and appearance-based gendered harassments. However, the implied and negative gendered prejudices in the insults make women in an essentialist way appear unsuitable for politics. Gendered insults against men tap into a lack of masculinity, queerphobia, or power abuse and wrong intentions. The motivation for gendered harassment may go beyond silencing individuals from marginalized groups in politics, such as women. It may also serve to devalue the broader range of political ideas they represent, ranging from political statements about international politics to visions on migration policies. In Germany, anti-gender narratives online reinforce structural inequalities, suppress marginalized voices, and ultimately undermine democratic representation and inclusion. Harassment of women candidates can range from hostility and ridicule to sexist instrumentalization. A reoccurring insult that illustrates how gendered harassment is used to ridicule a broad range of women EP candidates is "*who is this man*".

On social media and in interviews, Dutch and German EP candidates expressed similar coping strategies in how to deal with online gendered harassments on social media. Some coping strategies depend on the individual actions and therefore preferences of politicians. For instance, whether they engage with comments directly to establish positive norms or whether and how to seek mental support from friends, family, and partners. Other coping strategies are more universally suitable. These include:

1. Advocating for training staff on how to identify and respond to online gendered harassment.
2. Promoting constructive norms among social media observers through targeted advertising.
3. Providing the option to receive support from social media staff to monitor and mitigate negative comment storms.
4. Ensuring accessible institutional support from political parties and security services.

In conclusion, Work Package 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics between pro-gender and anti-gender actors online, revealing the widespread mobilization of anti-gender narratives and gendered harassment on social media. The findings highlight the urgent need for effective coping strategies and institutional support to combat these harmful narratives and harassment. With more support we can create a safer and more inclusive online environment

for those involved in gender equality activism. These strategies not only empower individuals but also contribute to the broader goal of achieving gender equality and safeguarding democratic participation.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Objectives and Tasks WP4

Table 8. Summery WP4 objectives and tasks
Objectives
O4.1. To develop empirical foundations for theoretical and normative framework for the study online mobilization in a rapid technological moving field O4.2. To analyse patterns in online anti-gender equality mobilization and counter strategies O4.2. To create a practical toolkit for individual and collective actors working in the field of gender equality
Tasks
T4.1 Codebook T4.2 Data retrieval and preparation: write program to scrape X posts on hot gender equality debates by actors working from core countries for 2021. Selection tools are hashtags and keywords in national languages from public X accounts in core countries. T4.3 Database: code X data and create database with background information on actors (e.g. voters, activists, politicians) who mobilize against or for gender equality and the gender+ issues that receive attention on X. T4.4 Network analysis: identify “hubs” of pro- and anti-gender equality actors on X. Identify how hubs attract followers and disseminate information. Analysis of posts to understand (1) spreading of issues, (2) issue framing, (3) interaction within and across hubs of pro-gender equality actors and anti-gender equality actors. T4.5 Political ethnography: in depth study of discourses on X about gender equality issues to provide in-depth understanding of strategies and counter-strategies of actors in Germany and the Netherlands. T4.6 Interviews: with central and peripheral actors: topics include mobilization, coping strategies and risk management. T.4.7 Toolkit: concrete strategies that actors can use to continue gender equality work safe and effectively.

Appendix B: Output WP4

Academic papers:

Brown, N., Mügge, L., Shah, P., Ritacco, C., & van der Zwet, M. (In press). Politics of intersectionality and the study of violence. *Elgar Encyclopedia of Gender and Politics,* Lefkofredi, Z. (ed.).

Hunklinger, M. (2025). 'Who's that man?' Gender-based online hate and harassment in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections in Germany. *European Politics and Society*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2025.2576703

Kesberg, R. (In press) Online spaces for feminist actors. *Elgar Encyclopedia of Gender and Politics,* Lefkofredi, Z. (ed.).

Kesberg, R., and Mügge, L. (In progress). The power of narrative: Anti-gender movements and their role in spreading semiotic violence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*. Revise & Resubmit.

Schulten, N., and Mügge, L. (In progress). Gendered harassment: a netnography of the European electoral campaign. *European Journal of Politics and Gender.* Under review.

Zervoulakou, M., Kesberg, R., & Mügge, L. (2025). Threat narratives in anti-gender movements' online presence: A comparative analysis between CitizenGo and Europe for Family. *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*, *59*(2), 57-90.

Database:

Kesberg, R., & Mügge, L. (2024). Online anti-gender equality mobilizations and counter strategies: Anti-gender discourses online. PUSH*BACK*LASH X Dataset. GESIS: Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences.

Policy brief:

Kesberg, R., Mügge, L., & Schulten, N. (2025). Anti-gender Violence on Social Media.

Cartoon series:

(Appendix D)

Toolkit:

Kesberg, R. & Mügge, L. (2025). *Resilience in action: A Toolkit for feminist strategies in times of backlash.* Push*Back*Lash, Funded by the European Union.

Appendix C: List of actors

Name	Number of Tweets	Time Period Covered	Top Hashtags
Aborcyjny Dream Team (ADT)	372	June 11th, 2023, till November 14th, 2023	# aborcja # aborcyjnypatrol #abortion
Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)	500	September 27th, 2023, till November 16th, 2023	#freedom #savewomenssport #parentalrights
Allout	481	April 20th, 2022, till November 17th, 2023	#lgbt #europride2022 #qatar
Amadeu Antonio Stiftung	699	May 7th, 2023, till September 14th, 2023	#rechtegewalt #hatespeech #rammstein
Artykul 6	53	September 16th, 2019, till January 28th, 2021	#abortion #abortionrights #article6
Bundesministerium fuer Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend	488	April 4th, 2023, till November 17th, 2023	#einsamkeit #gewalt #selbstbestimmungsgesetz
Heinrich Boell Stiftung	500	November 11th, 2022, till October 10th, 2023	#feminist #poweroffeministnarratives #gender
British Future	500	March 13th, 2023, till October 16th, 2023	#windrush #cpc #lab23
Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam/Friday Fax)	331	January 25th, 2019, till November 17th, 2023	#abortion #unicef #bslo
CitizenGo	1499	November 4th, 2019, till September 14th, 2023	#prolife #endabortion #uk
Count Me In	222	October 4th, 2023, till December 15th, 2023	#ffpcommunityfestival #feministforeignpolicy #shapingffp
Christian Network Europe	320	June 3rd, 2023, till November 17th, 2023	#germany #surrogacy #bible
COC	437	December 17th, 2021, till November 7th, 2023	#politiek #stemmen #lhbti
Council of Europe – Inclusion and Antidiscrimination	329	June 9th, 2022, till November 17th, 2023	#icccities #lgbti

			#diversity
Derecho a vivir	499	December 8th, 2020, till October 16th, 2023	#aborto #provida #euthanasia
Declaration on Women's Rights	500	August 22nd, 2023, till October 17th, 2023	#whyIsigned #letwomenspeak #filia2023
Council of Europe – Gender Equality	184	November 25th, 2021, till December 18th, 2023	#istanbulconvention #violenceagainstwomen #vaw
Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)	1000	March 31st, 2021, till August 7th, 2023	#equalityact #genderpaygap #socialcare
European Institute for Gender Equality	100	June 5th, 2023, till August 4th, 2023	#euyearofskills #genderequality #eusew2023
European Parliament Committee for Women's Right and Gender Equality	370	March 8th, 2022, till November 16th, 2023	#epgenderequalityweek #internationalwomensday #womenonboards
Equality Fund	202	April 21st, 2023, till December 12th, 2023	#wd2023 #COP28 #wvl
European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet)	274	January 2nd, 2023, till August 2nd, 2023	#equalitybodies #standardsforequalitybodies #aiact
Eurocentralasianlesbian*community (EL*C)	999	May 28th, 2020, till August 4th, 2023	#lesbianvisibilityday # lesbiangenius # elcbudapest2022
European Disability Forum (EDF)	849	May 23rd, 2023, till November 16th, 2023	#eudisabilityfund #accessibility #euaccessibilityfund
Europe for Family	999	November 23rd, 2018, till July 18th, 2023	#marchonsenfants #stopsurrogacynow
FairCop	494	October 4th, 2023, till November 18th, 2023	#twotierpolicing #breaking #nufc
Family Watch	167	March 2nd, 2022, till June 15th, 2023	NA
Feminist Foreign Policy	500	March 1st, 2023, till October 12th, 2023	#feministforeignpolicy #ffp #csw67
Filia	500	September 29th, 2023, till October 18th, 2023	#filia2023 #glasgow #sisterhood
Frauenrat	699	September 19th, 2022, till September 18th, 2023	#paritaetjetzt #sorgearbeit #kindergrundsicherung

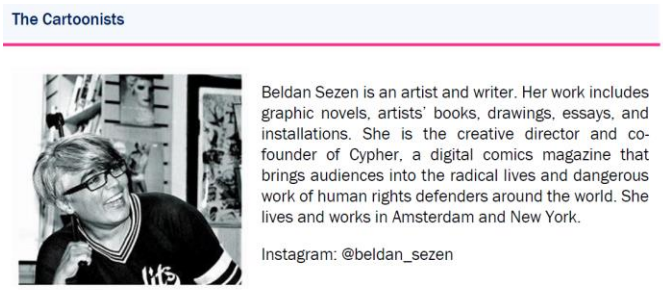
Frauenring	700	June 17th, 2022, till September 15th, 2023	#femizid #gewaltgegenfrauen #istanbulconvention
Fundacion Mujeres	499	July 23rd, 2023, till October 16th, 2023	#escueladeveranofm #madrid #cuidadanasfm
Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS Network)	259	October 11th, 2023, till December 18th, 2023	#gaza #ceasefire #palestine
Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE)	698	March 8th, 2022, till October 17th, 2023	#trans #intersex #aids2022
Gender and Development Network (GADN)	245	May 18th, 2023, till December 15th, 2023	#ceasefirenow #gaza
Genderpunt	125	September 4th, 2023, till December 18th, 2023	#transgenderwet #conversietherapie #DutchProtocol
Hate Aid	464	April 21st, 2023, till November 17th, 2023	#digitalegewalt #twittertrail #stophatemakelaws
Háttér Society	298	April 24th, 2020, till April 6th, 2023	#drop33 #hungary #lgbti
HazteOir	497	July 28th, 2023, till November 18th, 2023	#silavida #provida #sanchezdictator
Homosexuellen Initiative (HOSI) Wien	655	October 5th, 2020, till September 11th, 2023	#lgbtiq #viennapride #regenbogenball
ILGA	700	December 11th, 2022, till September 2nd, 2023	#lgbti #rainboweurope #equalityfundraiser2023
International Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation	412	February 2nd, 2023, till December 13th, 2023	#lgbtqi #mentalhealth #iglyogrants2023
International Women's Day	500	March 7th, 2022, till October 16th, 2023	#embraceequity #breakthebias #iwd2023
Krautzone	500	September 10th, 2023, till October 14th, 2023	#afdnee #Chrupalla #remigration
LGB Alliance	999	November 12th, 2021, till August 15th, 2023	#lbghistory #lgbaconference2022 #lesbianhistory
LGBTpl	263	March 26th, 2021, till November 13th, 2023	#marszrówności #lgbt #paradarówności

Lukreta	210	December 31st, 2022, till November 16th, 2023	#nurzwei #selbstbestimmungsgesetz #meldmichdoch
March For Life	465	May 2nd, 2021, till November 17th, 2023	#prolife #whywemarch #marchforlife
Men Are Human	500	September 18th, 2023, till October 18th ,2023	#russelbrand #feminists #feminism
Nederlandse Patiënten Vereniging (NPV – Zorg voor het leven)	699	September 21st, 2021, till September 11th, 2023	#zorgvoorhetleven #weekvanhetleven #abortus
One of Us	1001	February 10th, 2017, till July 29th, 2023	#oneofus #lifefirst #oneofusforum
Organisation Intersex International Europe/ OII Europe	224	July 30th, 2021, till December 8th, 2023	#intersex #intersexawarenessday #depathintersex
Ordo Iuris	465	October 3rd, 2023, till November 17th, 2023	#marszniepodleglosci2023 #jeszczepolskaniezginęła #gender
Ordo Iuris International	225	March 2nd, 2021, till November 17th, 2023	#intermarium #eu #poland
PACE	500	June 22nd, 2022, till September 18th, 2023.	#endvaw #lgbti #istanbulconvention
Political Network for Values	395	July 13th, 2022, till November 17th, 2023	#udhr75nysummit #nicaragua #nicaragualibre
Reality Now	500	October 13th, 2023, till October 18th, 2023	#filia2023 #forwomenandplanet #nodebate
Reduxx	499	November 25th, 2022, till October 18th, 2023	NA
Sex Matters	500	July 14th, 2023, till October 16th, 2023	#Filia2023 #isupportsinglesexservices #sexmatters
SOC	43	January 25th, 2023, till December 12th, 2023	#vaw #16daysofactivism #gbv
Sorgearbeit	212	May 24th, 2022, till December 15th, 2023	#sorgearbeit #sorgearbeitfairteilen #familienstartzeit
Speak Out Sister	897	September 14th, 2023, till September 18th, 2023	#dispatches #transrughtsarehumanrights #russellbrand

Standing for XX	488	October 9th, 2023, till November 16th, 2023	#letwomenspeak #partyofwomen #letwomenspeakliverpool
Stonewall	700	January 16th, 2023, till September 16th, 2023	#banconversiontherapy #takepride #rainbowlaces
Syndicat	500	March 2nd, 2023, till October 16th, 2023	#GPA #ludo #lsf
TGEU	292	August 1st, 2023, till December 14th, 2023	#transrights #transrightsarehumanrights #trans
The Center	1000	August 5th, 2022, till August 3rd, 2023	#Hungary #CPAC #unitedwestand
Triggerpoint	487	September 11th, 2023, till November 18th, 2023	#boycottbleecker #metpolice #endthenannystate
TransFuzja	166	December 8th, 2017, till December 20th, 2020	#transgender #transpłciowość #podsumowanie2018
UNSRVAW	295	July 4th, 2023, till December 17th, 2023	#gaza #women #afganistan
UN Women	1000	September 24th, 2022, till August 4th, 2023	#csw67 #16days #fundinggenderequality
UN Women Chief	299	May 23rd, 2023, till December 15th, 2023	#gaza #genderequality #unga78
Urgent Act	280	June 15th, 2023, till November 19th, 2023	#wd2023 #fundwhatworks #forfeministactivism
WAVE	417	October 10th, 2022, till November 15th, 2023	#endvawg #waveofchange #eudirective
WECF	353	February 4th, 2023, till November 16th, 2023	#sb58 #climate #genderjustclimatesolutions
WGC Climate	277	September 4th, 2023, till December 13th, 2023	#cop28 #feministclimatejustice #endfossilefuels
WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform	500	December 6th, 2022, till October 16th, 2023	#CSW67 #feministforeignpolicy #ffp
Women 7	494	May 25th, 2022, till July 21st, 2023	#g7ger #w7 #g7

Women Inc	700	July 12th, 2021, till September 17th, 2023	#equalpayday #stemgendergelijkheid #blikopener
Working Group on Women, Peace and Security	451	April 29th ,2020, till October 30th ,2023	#unsc #afganistan #southsudan
Women's Right Net	455	September 8th, 2023, till November 18th, 2023	#listentowomen #savewomenssport #behindthelookingglass
Working Group	500	November 22nd, 2022, till September 14th, 2023	#unsc #wpsin2020 #afganistan

Appendix D: Cartoons



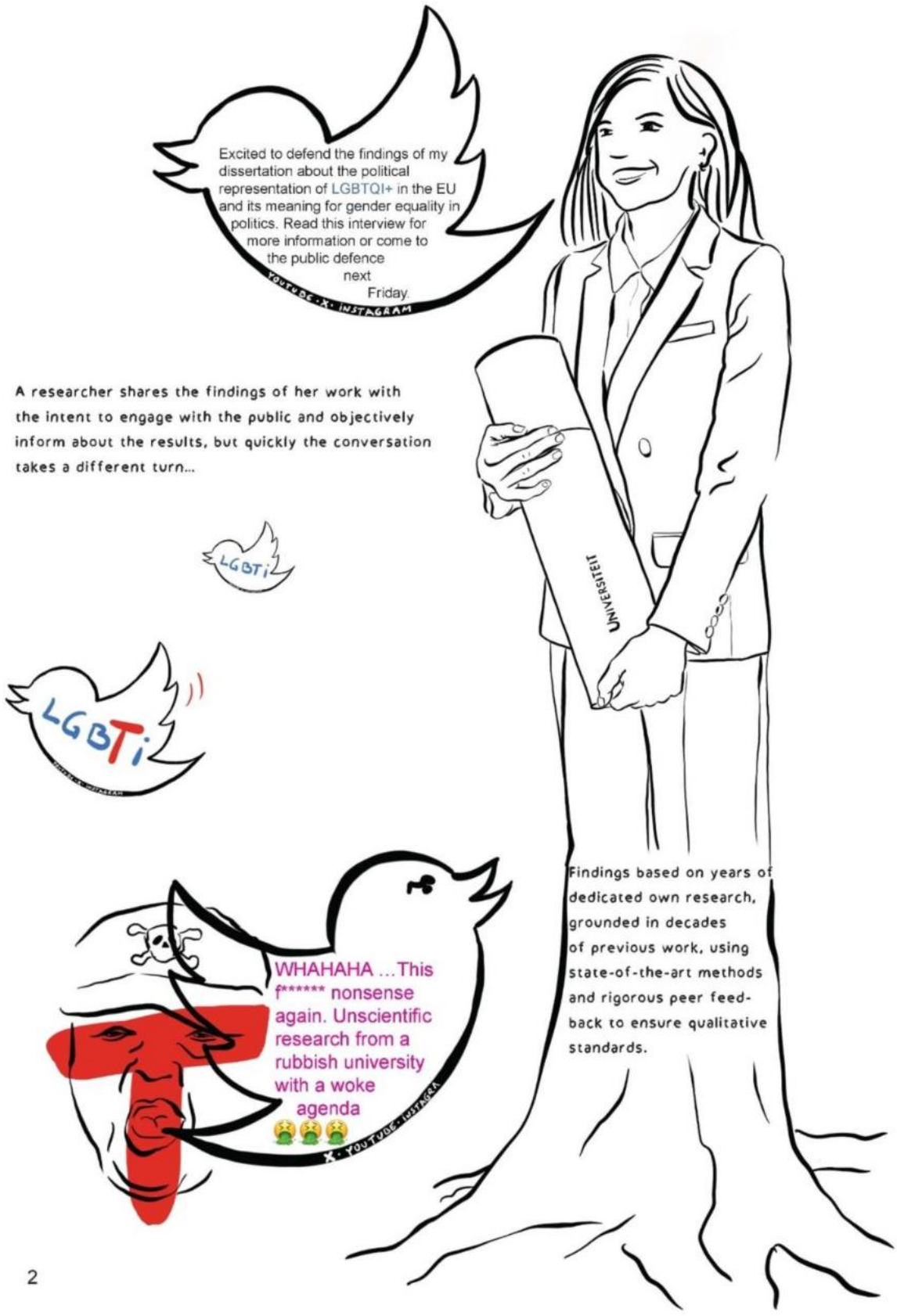
Caption Cartoon series 1 (page 56-66): Our first cartoon of the Push*Back*Lash series focusing on online hate. Based on our research and academics' real-live experiences the cartoon illustrates how statements related to gender equality can prompt hateful comments. Learn about your rights and how to report online hate if you receive or witness it

Caption Cartoon series 2 (page 67-68): Our second and third cartoon of the Push*Back*Lash series focuses on oversimplification and miscommunication in the digital space. Based on our research the cartoons illustrate how statements related to *Gender* are discussed. The cartoons highlight that there is a lack of conversation and common ground between groups, and that *Gender* is used as a scapegoat for other societal problems.

Let's Design Equality Together
The Push*Back*Lash Cartoon Series

Digital Violence

PUSH*BACK*LASH

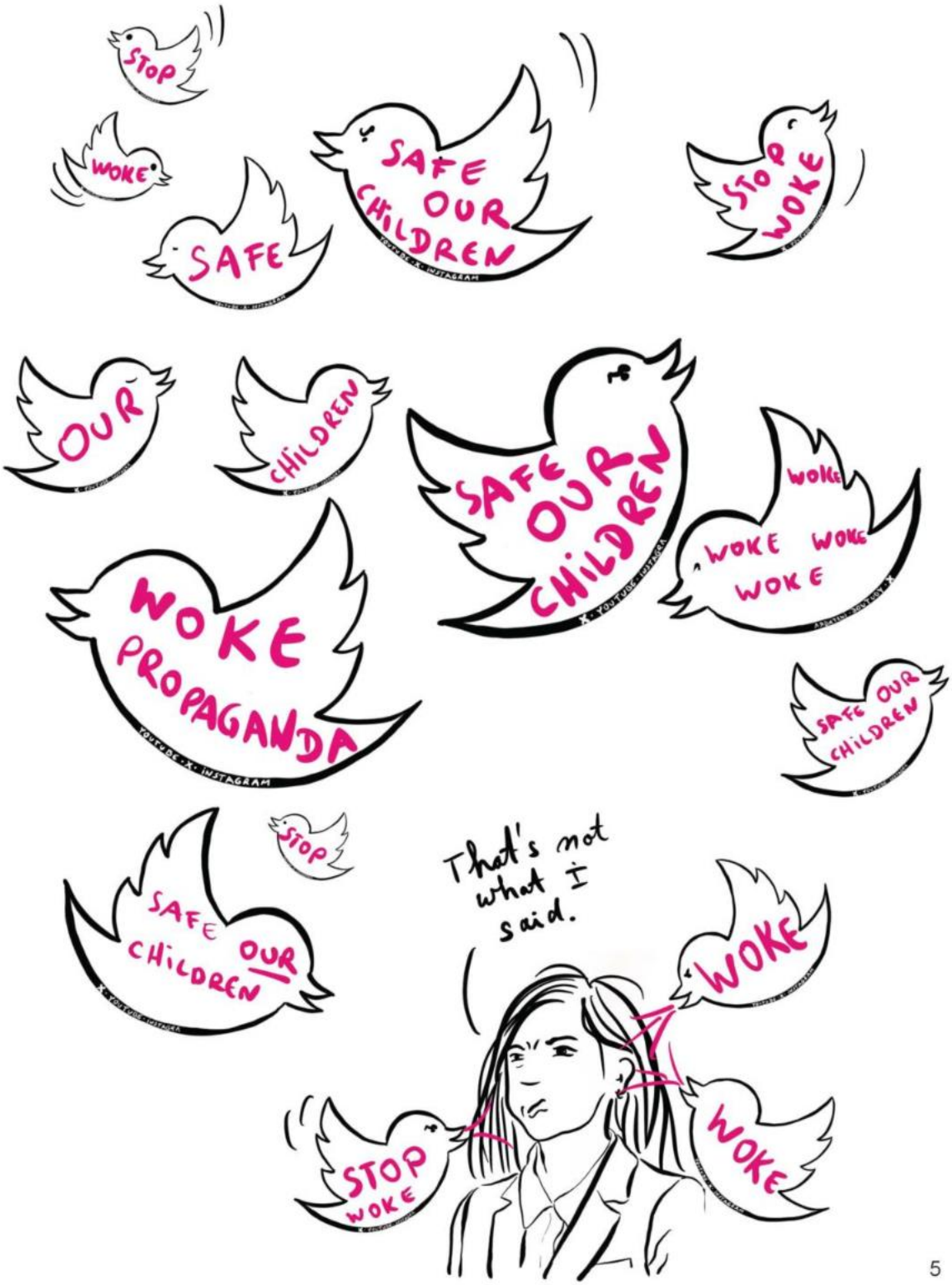

Excited to defend the findings of my dissertation about the political representation of LGBTQI+ in the EU and its meaning for gender equality in politics. Read this interview for more information or come to the public defence next Friday.
YOUTUBE · X · INSTAGRAM
A researcher shares the findings of her work with the intent to engage with the public and objectively inform about the results, but quickly the conversation takes a different turn...
LGBTi
LGBTi
WHAHAHA ...This f****** nonsense again. Unscientific research from a rubbish university with a woke agenda
X · YOUTUBE · INSTAGRAM
UNIVERSITEIT
Findings based on years of dedicated own research, grounded in decades of previous work, using state-of-the-art methods and rigorous peer feedback to ensure qualitative standards.
2

* The authors hereby state that offensive terms, such as the hurtful and incorrect term in this quote, do not express their views. The purpose of the cartoon is to problematize the use of such terms, which is why we have chosen not to remove the term from the quote.

3

The post took a life of its own and a simple sharing of findings resulted in massive backlash online and also offline...

4


STOP
WOKE
SAFE
SAFE OUR CHILDREN
STOP WOKE
OUR
CHILDREN
SAFE OUR CHILDREN
WOKE
WOKE WOKE WOKE
WOKE PROPAGANDA
SAFE OUR CHILDREN
STOP
SAFE OUR CHILDREN
That's not what I said.
WOKE
STOP WOKE
WOKE

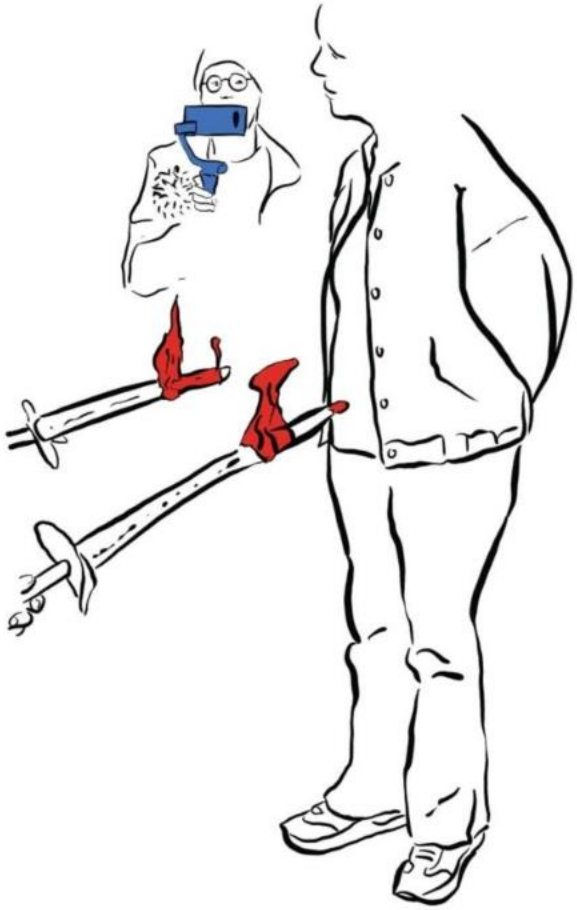
5

Question: How would you feel if others intentionally misunderstand you and attack you?

Question: What do you think the police can do? Do you think the tweets were illegal?

6

Question: What about public figures like politicians? Do you think they receive a lot of hate? Which role does their gender play?



Question: What about people who like or share hateful tweets? Or people who just watch, but do not engage? Why are they doing this?

Now Your Turn!

What is happening in the cartoon?

Describe what is happening in the cartoon. What situation are we in? Describe what the people are experiencing and how they might feel.

Online behavior

Which online platforms do you use (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) and why? Which content do you like to consume? Do you also post your own content? Describe your experiences.

Negative/ hateful comments

Do you think people post a lot of negative or hateful comments online? Have you yourself ever experienced negative or hateful comments online? How did that make you feel?

For groups: An anonymous survey. For each question participants either write “yes” or “no” on a piece of paper, fold it and toss it in a bowl. The moderator counts the vote for each question.

Question 1: I use online platforms.

Question 2: I have seen negative/ hateful comments online.

Question 3: I have received negative/ hateful comments online.

Question 4: I have posted negative/ hateful comments online.

Question 5: I know where I can get help if I receive negative comments online.

Question 6: It is illegal to post negative/ hateful comments online.

Question 7: I know what doxing is.

Question 8: I know what trolling is.

Now your turn!

Imagine that one of your friends experiences hate online. They share their experience with you. What do you think they should do? Should they talk to their parents/ teachers/ police? Should they engage with the perpetrator? Should they ignore it?

"Digital Violence" – Supporting Information

Many people use social media on a daily basis to connect with others, to share images of their life, to engage in conversations and share facts and opinions on current topics. Social media has the great potential to connect people from different places in the world and give voice to and empower people who are often unheard. But, there are also a lot of negative and hateful comments online which are damaging for those who are at the receiving end and can transcend into the real "offline" world. Everyone (private people and public figures) can be at the receiving end of hateful comments online, but often those who belong to marginalized groups are disproportionally affected.

The cartoon shows how a simple tweet of an early career researcher resulted in hateful comments online and swept over into the offline world.

Sharing information:

A PhD candidate tweets about the findings of her dissertation about LGBTQI+ representation in politics and invites her followers to her public defense of the thesis. She and her statement are grounded in previous research, state-of-the-art scientific methods and rigorous peer review. She is proud of the results of her hard work. The transported message through the birds is reduced to LGBTQI+ with the T getting bigger and bigger resulting in a tweet that ridicules her research and research topic.

Online reactions:

People who have not read her work nor been at the presentation comment about it. They insult her personally, her research and threaten her.

Offline reactions:

The harassment does not stay online. Instead people organize offline and the statements they are shouting on the street have nothing to do anymore with the original tweet. Instead they generally mobilize against "gender ideology".

Persons involved/ broader consequences:

How to deal with digital violence is an important question not only for the victim, but also for the police and lawmakers, for bystanders who observe digital violence and for politicians and other public figures who fight for gender equality and are frequently receiving hateful messages.

Further Reading

Digital Violence

Digital violence is an umbrella term for various forms of harassment, degradation, discrimination and social isolation on the internet or through other means of electronic communication (for example, through WhatsApp messages). A representative survey by HateAid and the Landecker Digital Justice Movement survey 2000 people from all EU countries found that one out of two of young adults are affected by hate online (HateAid, 2021). Especially, women report withdrawing from engaging online out of fear of being attacked (HateAid, 2021). Women also report being

more afraid to express their opinion online and that they feel online platforms do not do enough to prevent hate. While everyone can experience digital violence, historically marginalized groups like women, people of color or people with disabilities are more likely to be at the receiving end.

Find out by clicking through the **Hate Aid** website:
click here

Forms of digital violence

There are many forms of digital violence, the terms are often not clearly defined and the terms are not mutually exclusive.

Image-based violence: Misuse of images and videos like unauthorized publication or sending individuals offensive pictures like nudes.

Cyberbullying: Includes many actions that are intended to hurt, humiliate and ostracize individuals. For example, posting/ sending insulting and threatening messages.

Doxxing: Publication and collection of private data without consent. For example, publishing the private address or phone number of an individual.

Disinformation, Deep Fakes and Face Swap Apps: Disinformation refers to spreading intentionally false information. It is often accompanied by Deep Fakes potentially created with Face Swap Apps. They enable individuals to easily fake pictures and distribute them.

Hate Speech: Hate speech is an umbrella term for group-related expression of misanthropy like sexist or racist comments. It includes insults, incitement of violence and threats. A hail of hateful comments within a short period of time is often labelled a "shitstorm".

What are my rights?

The internet is NOT a legal vacuum. Many laws apply in the digital space and among other things insults, threats, and incitement of violence can be punished.

Doxxing. Since January 1st 2024 doxxing is a criminal offense in the Netherlands and may be punished by a fine of up to 22,500 Euros or imprisonment of up to 2 years.

Discrimination. Discriminating statements online can be report to the internet discrimination hotline (MiND Nederland). MiND evaluates the statement and if it is unlawful, it requests the removal of the statement.

Hate Speech: Article 137c and article 137d of the Dutch penal code prohibit insulting groups and inciting hate and violence. The law covers both online and offline offenses.

Digital Service Act 2022

The Digital Service Act was introduced by the European Commission in 2022 to regulate online platforms and digital services within the EU. It addresses a wide range of issues including online content moderation and removal of hateful content.

The key objectives are:

- Establishing clear rules and obligations for online platforms and digital service providers, particularly those with significant reach and influence.

- Enhancing user safety and protection, including measures to combat illegal content, harmful online activities, and disinformation.

- Promoting fairness and competition in the digital market by addressing issues such as platform dominance and unfair business practices.

- Strengthening the accountability and transparency of online platforms, including requirements for reporting and cooperation with authorities.

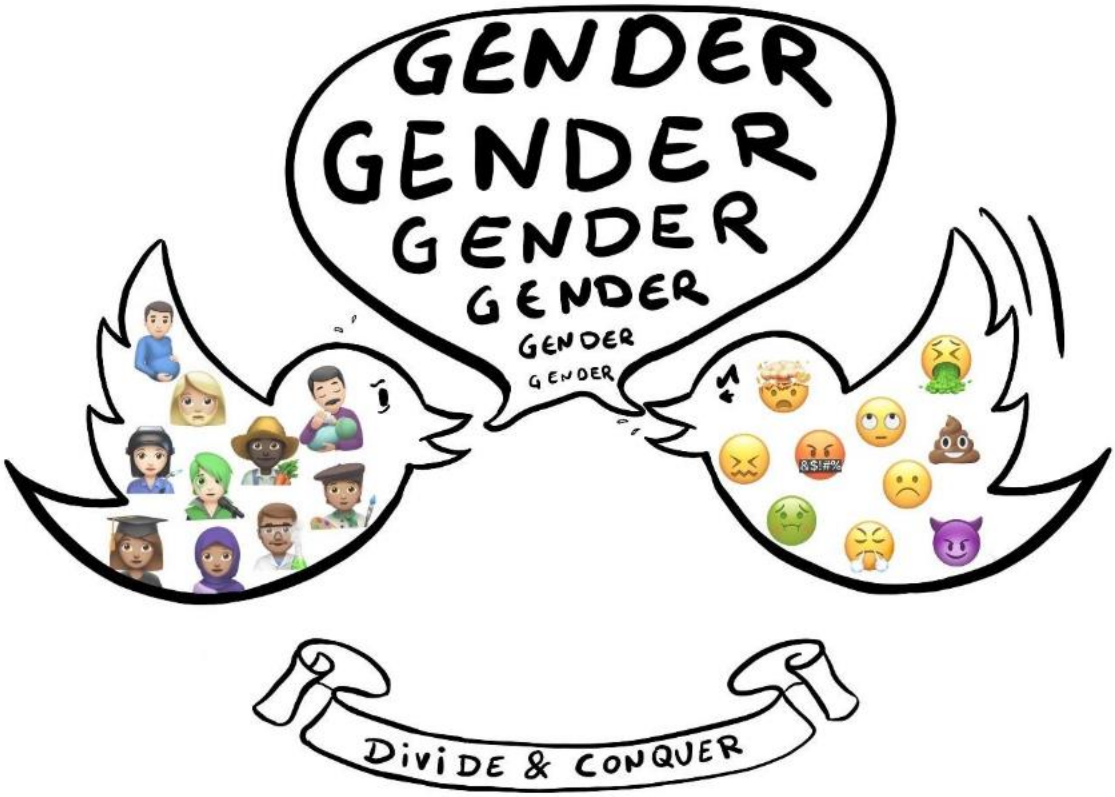
The Digital Service Act was an important milestone to hold big companies responsible and unburden individuals.

Read more: Digital Service Act

The Cartoonist:

Beldan Sezen is an artist and writer. Her work includes graphic novels, artists' books, drawings, essays, and installations. She is the creative director and co-founder of Cypher, a digital comics magazine that brings audiences into the radical lives and dangerous work of human rights defenders around the world. She lives and works in Amsterdam and New York.

Instagram: @beldan_sezen


GENDER
GENDER
GENDER
GENDER
GENDER
GENDER
DIVIDE & CONQUER

Digital Disconnect.