



# When Hoaxes Make the Headlines: The Spread of 'National Rape Day' on TikTok

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## Overview

In April 2024, TikTok users mobilised once again around a hoax known as 'National Rape Day'. The hoax, which has now spread across at least four countries and three languages, claims that rape would be legal for one day only (24 April). It first caused turmoil in both the US and UK in 2021 and trended in France at the same time. Following a flare-up in both English and French in 2023, the hoax reached German-language TikTok in April 2024.

ISD analysts found that after a government official of the State of Berlin issued a warning about the day to schools, German blogs and media outlets, ranging from far-right to right-wing populist and conservative, played a key role in spreading the already debunked hoax. Some right-wing blogs and far-right actors exploited misleading reports on the trend to wrongly blame migrant men. Moreover, by perpetuating the 'stranger danger' myth, this narrative continues to divert attention from the major causes and perpetrators of sexual violence. TikTok's response to the hoax has brought to light significant shortcomings in the company's content moderation strategy. Search results for this trend did not trigger any labels or warning messages about the spread of the hoax, nor were debunking posts promoted to mitigate the hoax's impact.

This briefing highlights the dysfunctional relationship between online and offline spaces, which contributes to the amplification of harmful narratives and their spread across both spheres. Implementing comprehensive and context-sensitive keyword detection mechanisms could lead to a more balanced and supportive strategy for monitoring and removing harmful content while providing necessary support to survivors, activists and experts. These approaches would also contribute to preserving online spaces where crucial conversations on sexual education and violence can take place.

This briefing is part of a series examining online gender-based violence (OGBV) on TikTok in English, German, French and Hungarian. It is part of the project Monitoring Online Gender Based Violence Around the European Parliament Election 2024, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

- The 'National Rape Day' hoax has appeared in at least four countries and three languages. Four years after first going viral on English and French-language social media, this hoax has resurfaced. Although no credible threats were identified, misinformation linked to the hoax led to real-world impacts. These included fears of sexual assault, heightened anxiety, reduced freedom of movement for women, transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people, and the perpetuation of harmful myths around 'stranger danger' in sexual violence narratives.
- Government officials, social media platforms, media outlets and blogs contributed to the spread of this hoax in 2024 in Germany, failing to learn from previous experiences in the US and the UK, where the 'Rape Day' hoax had spread prior to 2024. This shows that there still is an education gap when it comes to addressing disinformation, including gendered disinformation and forms of OGBV.
- Inconsistent moderation by TikTok allowed widespread circulation of the hoax. A prior report in this series found TikTok (over) blocks the term "rape" from its search function. However, searches for the term 'National Rape Day' were not blocked or moderated. This reflects a wider trend whereby social media platforms consistently overlook, inadequately moderate and fail to mitigate OGBV despite the substantial harm it causes.
- Political warnings, despite good intentions, inadvertently added credibility to the hoax and spurred its spread. German-language discussion on social media was minimal until an official warning made by a Berlin Senator, which was picked up by media.
- Media attention was crucial in the hoax's spread. Reporting on the hoax contravened established guidelines for reporting on gender-based violence and failed to effectively debunk misinformation.
- ISD found that both media and platforms need stronger, responsible guidelines when reporting on gender-based violence. Ethical, fact-based coverage and clear labelling of misinformation are critical to preventing harmful impacts. Similarly, policy makers and authorities need concrete guidance and strategic communication strategies.

Additional recommendations are available at the bottom of this article.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this briefing, ISD utilises the following definitions:

### Gender

Gender refers to a “system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics.” A person’s gender identity refers to “an individual’s internal, innate sense of their own gender.”

### Gender-based violence (GBV)

This term refers to “violence directed against a person because of that person’s gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.” Women and the LGBTQ+ community, including transgender and genderqueer persons, experience disproportionate rates of GBV.

### Online gender-based violence (OGBV)

OGBV is defined here as a subset of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), which refers to any “act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.” For a more detailed review and discussions of terms and definitions please refer to ISD’s report “Misogynistic Pathways to Radicalisation.”



## Introduction: 'National Rape Day'

In April 2024, mentions of a 'Rape Day' or 'National Rape Day' trended across social media platforms for the third time in four years. The hoax originated from a baseless rumour claiming that sexual violence would be legal on 24 April and that some men were planning to commit a series of sexual assaults. While the claims were thoroughly debunked in 2021 and did not resurface in 2022, they reappeared in 2023 and gained further traction in 2024. Researchers have labelled the phenomenon of debunked claims returning as "zombie misinformation."

This investigation analysed qualitative data from TikTok and quantitative data from other major social media platforms. Brandwatch was employed to collect data from X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, Tumblr, YouTube, blogs and forums, while CrowdTangle was used to gather data from Facebook and Instagram. BuzzSumo was used to assess the engagement of news articles based on social media. Analysts also conducted searches on multiple TikTok accounts across various devices and locations to investigate the 'National Rape Day' hoax in the four languages specified and to examine whether there were differences in content served to users depending on device and location.

Discussion of the day varied significantly across languages. In English, the hoax first went viral in 2021, peaking at 5,944 mentions in April on X. It gained little traction in 2022, with small flare-ups in 2023 and 2024 (figure 1).

In French, the hoax also gained most traction in 2021, with minimal pickup across platforms in 2022 and a smaller spike in 2023. At its peak in April 2021, French-language mentions of the hoax reached 832 mentions across platforms (figure 2).

In German, discussion of the hoax was asymmetric to French and English. It gained little traction between 2021-2023 (figure 3). However, it gained substantial traction in April 2024 after a policymaker from the State of Berlin had issued a public warning to schools and students. There was little to no traction for the term 'rape day' in Hungarian ('Nemi erőszak napja') over the past three years.

This asymmetry could indicate that some media and social media ecosystems are insulated from other geographies. It also possibly corroborates the argument that coverage from media and politicians can fan the flames of online misinformation.

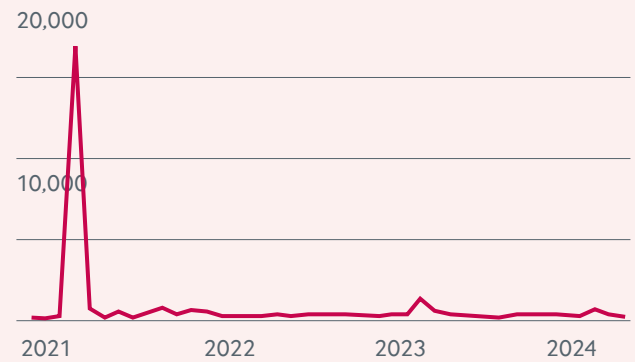


Figure 1. Monthly volume of 'Rape Day' mentions in English on X, forums, blogs, news sites, Tumblr, Reddit, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024.

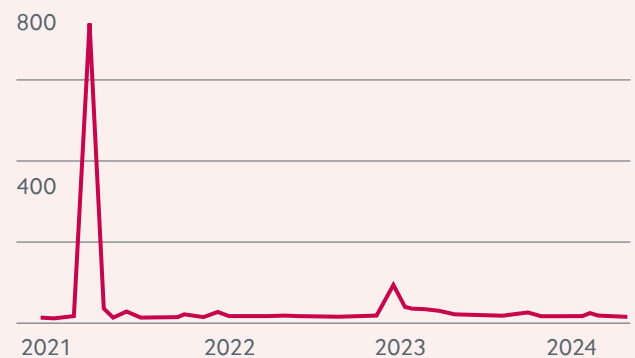


Figure 2. Monthly volume of 'Rape Day' mentions in French on X, forums, blogs, news sites, Tumblr, Reddit, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024.



Figure 3. Monthly volume of 'Rape Day' mentions in German on X, forums, blogs, news sites, Tumblr, Reddit, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024.

While the hoax first went viral on TikTok in March of 2021, references to it date back as far as 2010, according to the earliest available data from X. These references were generally vague or appear intended as jokes, with no specific date mentioned.

The first mention of 'Rape Day' being on 24 April comes from an entry posted in 2019 on Urban Dictionary. A user defined the day as "April 24th! The day when it's legal to rape people! So go ahead have sex with everyone, even your friends👉." Concerns about the purported day did not begin trending across social media platforms until March 2021, likely sparked by English-language content on TikTok and other platforms that has since been deleted (figure 4). An early X post from 19 March 2021 reads, "Everyone please stay safe on april 24th !!!! Its the so callee [sic] national rape day." The post, which features a screenshot of a TikTok video showing the Urban Dictionary definition, received 571 engagements and nearly 60k views.

From the end of March through April 2021, users across platforms continued directing attention to the issue. This led to media attention and amplified concern among social media users. According to data from BuzzSumo, only 4 out of the 10 most engaged English-language news and blog headlines indicated the day was a hoax. While some articles included this information in the body of the text, many headlines misleadingly framed the event as a credible threat. Uncritical sharing of these headlines may have increased the legitimacy and reach of the viral hoax via social platforms. Concerns about the day circulated at high volumes in both English and French, prompting warnings from local law enforcement which further fuelled anxiety among users (figure 5).

The level of discussion around 'Rape Day' declined rapidly after it first went viral in April 2021. There was scant mention of it throughout 2022, though it later re-emerged in early February 2023. Like the initial 2021 trend, this resurgence was driven by TikTok videos expressing concern over the day. An investigation by Media Matters for America found that the hashtag which drove early traffic to the trend (#April24) was removed; however, related hashtags like #april24th, #24april and #april24purge were key to the spread of misleading information about the alleged threat of sexual assault, receiving more than 100 million views collectively. Unlike the first year in which the hoax went viral, in 2022 and 2023 no significant law enforcement warnings or media coverage were observed discussing this hoax. This suggests that authorities and news outlets were potentially less susceptible to the previously debunked hoax.

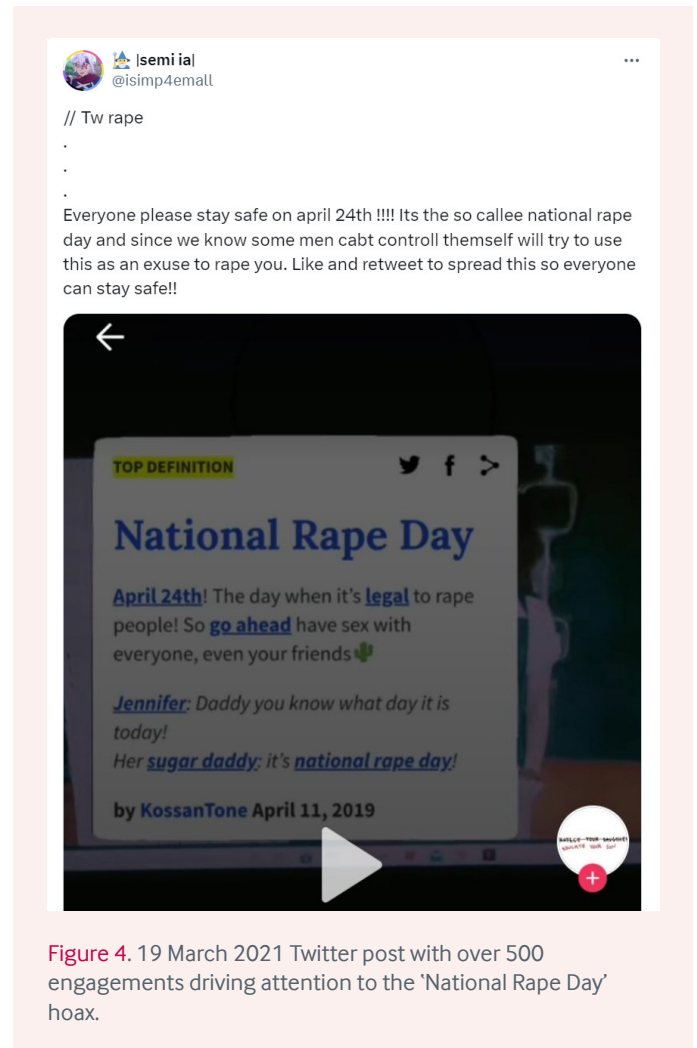


Figure 4. 19 March 2021 Twitter post with over 500 engagements driving attention to the 'National Rape Day' hoax.

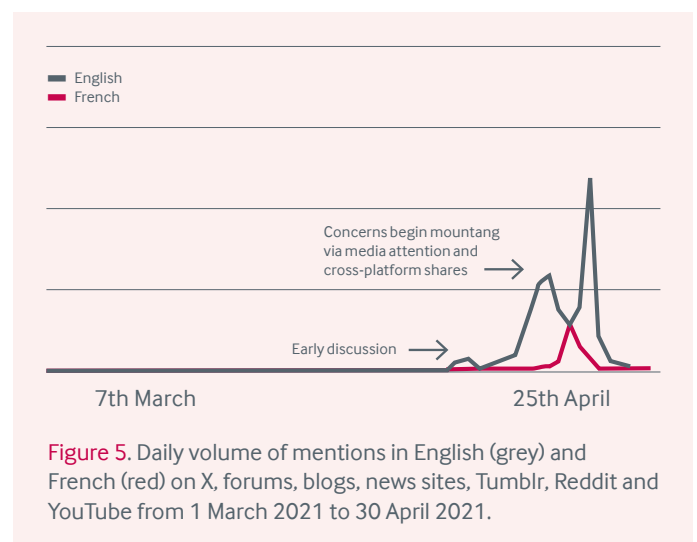


Figure 5. Daily volume of mentions in English (grey) and French (red) on X, forums, blogs, news sites, Tumblr, Reddit and YouTube from 1 March 2021 to 30 April 2021.



## 2024: The hoax goes viral in Germany

Even though online conversation about the hoax has decreased over time, discussion of 'Rape Day' trended on TikTok in Germany in 2024. This appears to be correlated with the State of Berlin's senator (i.e. minister) for education, Katharina Günther-Wünsch, issuing a warning about the day to schools despite there being no evidence of an actual threat of violence.

This mirrors the response to the earlier spread of the 'Rape Day' hoax in the US and UK, where attempts to inhibit its spread inadvertently lent credibility and momentum to the hoax. It also underscores how the unintended consequences of publicizing misinformation can backfire, as efforts to counter or debunk it may inadvertently widen its reach. Despite the well-intentioned nature of Günther-Wünsch's warning, data suggests that both the senator's letter and subsequent media coverage played a significant role in amplifying the trend.

Restrictive access via the platform's application programming interface (API) prevents analysts from verifying the senator's claim that the hoax trended on TikTok prior to her warning. Nonetheless, social media data from X, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, blogs, forums, Tumblr and YouTube shows that activity related to the hoax was relatively low before the Senator's warning and spiked significantly afterward (figure 6). This data corroborates the impact of her statement and subsequent media coverage which also included content from platforms other than TikTok. A manual review of posts during the spike showed that a majority were reactions to media reports. Consequently, the rise in media reports and blog posts, which picked up the story after the senator's letter, directly contributed to the hoax gaining traction and becoming a trending topic.

Given the major role played by blogs and media outlets in the revival of the 'Rape Day' trend in Germany, researchers at ISD collected and coded the top ten German news articles and opinion pieces (by engagement) referring to the hoax (table 1). Coding considered whether outlets and blog articles debunked the trend in their headlines, in the text, or neither. Further analysis was conducted on the language used and context given in discussing the trend, to understand any narratives presented alongside the 'National Rape Day' hoax.



**Figure 6.** Hourly volume of social media posts in German referencing 'Rape Day' on the day the Senator's letter was issued. As signalled on the graph, the peaks of social media interest align with media coverage of the issue.

Article	Title	Outlet	Wording	Engagement
1	"Verstörend" – Senat warnt Schulen vor Videos zu "Vergewaltigungstag"	welt.de	"Tik-Tok-Trend", "Vergewaltigungstrend", "National Rape Day"	530
2	Keine Übung: Berliner Schulsenatorin warnt alle Schulen vor Vergewaltigungstag	alexander-wallasch.de	Vergewaltigungstag, "Vergewaltigungstag"	427
3	Berlin: Senatorin warnt vor "Vergewaltigungs-Tag" an Berliner Schulen	bild.de	Gefährlicher TikTok-Trend, gefährlicher Internetaufruf, Werbung für einen "National Rape Day", Fake News, verstörender Trend, angeblicher "Vergewaltigungs-Tag"	394
4	Warnung vor "nationalem Vergewaltigungstag" als stilles Eingeständnis des Versagens	tichyseinblick.de	"nationaler Vergewaltigungstag", Trend, Fake News	259
5	Verstörender "TikTok-Trend" ruft zu "nationalem Vergewaltigungstag" auf	focus.de	"TikTok-Trend", "nationaler Vergewaltigungstag", Fake News, Falsch-Informationen	251
6	"National Rape Day": Senatsverwaltung warnt vor sexuellen Übergriffen an Schulen	apollo-news.net	"National Rape Day", TikTok-Trend	214
7	Berliner Senatorin warnt vor "Vergewaltigungstag" an Schulen	jungefreiheit.de	"Vergewaltigungstag", "TikTok-Trend"	145
8	Bildungssenatorin warnt vor "Vergewaltigungs-Tag"	bz-berlin.de	"Vergewaltigungstag", gefährlicher Internetaufruf, "National Rape Day", natürlich eine kriminelle Falschinformation, Fake News	128
9	Widerlicher TikTok-Trend – was steckt hinter dem "Vergewaltigungstag"?	rtl.de	Widerlicher TikTok-Trend, "Vergewaltigungstag", Fake News	101
10	"Nationaler Vergewaltigungstag" – Verstörender TikTok-Trend an Berliner Schulen	welt.de	"National Rape Day", der "nationale Vergewaltigungstag", "Trend"	81

**Table 1.** Top ten articles (ranked by total volume of engagement) mentioning 'Rape Day' in German, according to BuzzSumo.

Closer analysis reveals that four of the ten most engaged articles and blog posts were published by “alternative” media or blogger outlets that employ narratives and rhetoric associated with the populist right-wing political sphere in Germany.

- Tichys Einblick, which self-describes as an opinion magazine (“Meinungsmagazin”), has repeatedly spread disinformation. In 2016, the founder of the website falsely claimed that the Düsseldorf Carnival parade was cancelled not due to bad weather, but out of fear of an Islamist attack.
- Alexander-Wallasch.de is a blog set up by a columnist who previously wrote for Tichys Einblick amongst other outlets. Apart from “uncensored” articles, the blog now features a series of comments by the former Head of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg Maaßen, who has since been criticised for sharing nationalist and racist conspiracy theories. Another series on the blog focuses on knife attacks carried out by (presumed non-white) migrants.
- Apollo News is a youth-oriented Blog that was originally founded in cooperation with Tichys Einblick to provide training for “young journalists beyond the left-green mainstream.”
- Junge Freiheit is an explicitly far-right outlet. During the 1990s, the outlet was under state surveillance on suspicion of being a far-right extremist association. However, after practicing more “verbal restraint” in the early 2000s, authorities stopped monitoring the outlet. Today, Junge Freiheit propagates radical-nationalist positions in close proximity to the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

The six other outputs were published by the more moderate outlets Bild, RTL, Focus Online, B.Z. and Welt, which range from centrist to conservative.

Subtly misleading headlines can influence readers without being blatantly false. The differences in framing and use of language across the most engaged articles and blog posts in table 1 show how the reporting of different outlets and blogs can distort the reader’s understanding of the issue. Although the senator clarified in her letter that the ‘National Rape Day’ trend was a hoax that needed to be properly addressed, most news headlines did not pick up on this. In many cases, debunking the hoax was relegated to the body of the article or not addressed at all. In one case, the term ‘Rape Day’ was even used without quotation marks in the



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from the AfD's official X account. The tweet is in German and discusses a hoax about 'National Rape Day' (Vergewaltigungstag) in Berlin. It claims that the CDU-led government is spreading this hoax to hinder the deportation of illegal migrants. The tweet includes statistics on school violence and a graphic with the text 'IM CDU-REGIERTEN BERLIN: „VERGEWALTIGUNGSTAG“ DROHT AN UNSEREN SCHULEN!'.

Im #CDU-Regierten Berlin: Unseren Schulen droht ein „Vergewaltigungstag“!

In was für Zeiten haben die etablierten Parteien und gerade auch die CDU uns geführt? An den Schulen der unionsregierten Hauptstadt geht die Angst um, weil in verstörenden TikTok-Videos zu einem sogenannten „Nationalen #Vergewaltigungstag“ („National Rape Day“) aufgerufen wird. Das inzwischen gelöschte Video ermutigt dazu, am heutigen 24. April junge Frauen und Mädchen zu begrabschen und zu belästigen. Außerdem legt das Machwerk nahe, dass an diesen Tag keine strafrechtlichen Konsequenzen zu befürchten seien.

Bildungsministerin Günther-Wünsch (CDU) ruft die Schulen nun hilflos zu „Vorkehrungen“ auf – dabei hat ihre Partei unsere Frauen und Töchter überhaupt erst in Gefahr gebracht! Es ist die CDU, die in Berlin gemeinsam mit der #SPD einen Abschiebe-Stopp für illegale Migranten beschlossen hat. Es ist die CDU, die infolge der unkontrollierten Massenmigration allein in Berlin insgesamt 16 neue Asyl-Unterkünfte errichten will – für mehr als 6.000 Plätze.

Am selben Tag vermelden die Medien das Ergebnis einer repräsentativen Umfrage der Robert-Bosch-Stiftung, wonach 47 Prozent der befragten Lehrer mit Gewaltproblemen an ihrer Schule zu kämpfen haben. Die Zahl der sogenannten Rohheitsdelikte an Berliner Schulen stieg massiv – von 1133 Delikten im Jahr 2021 auf 2344 entsprechende Taten im Jahr 2022. Dabei handelt es sich zumeist um vorsätzliche einfache Körperverletzungen (2022: 1379), aber auch um zahlreiche gefährliche Körperverletzungen (370), Bedrohungen (361), Raubstrafaten (62) und Nötigungen (79). Mit der CDU wird es immer so weiter gehen – in Berlin und in allen anderen Bundesländern. Nur die #AfD wird durchgreifen: Wer Frauen belästigt, begrabscht oder vergewaltigt, der muss mit aller Härte bestraft und im Falle von entsprechenden rechtlichen Möglichkeiten sofort abgeschoben werden! #DeshalbAfD

Translate post

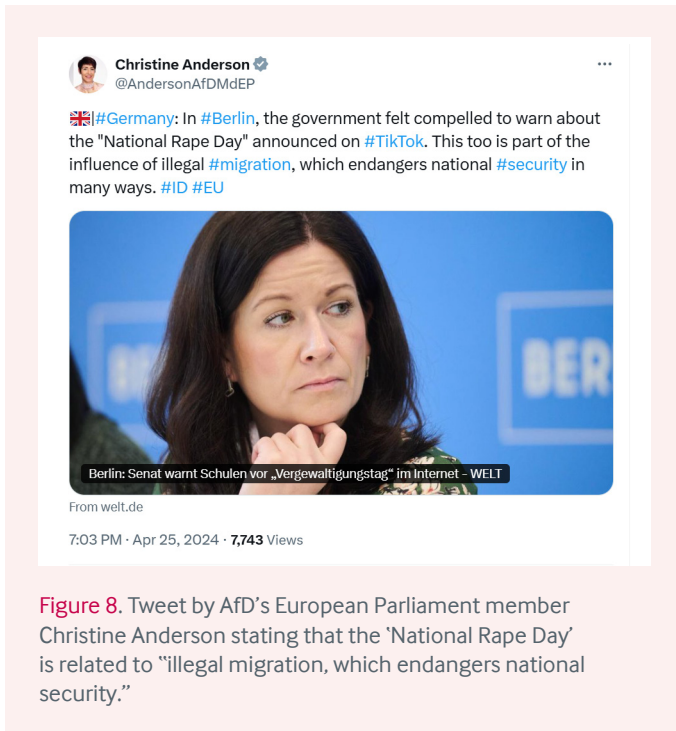
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Translate post

IM CDU-REGIERTEN BERLIN: „VERGEWALTIGUNGSTAG“ DROHT AN UNSEREN SCHULEN!

AfD

Figure 7. Posts by AfD’s official X account discussing the ‘National Rape Day’ hoax. The tweet claims the CDU-led government in Berlin “put our women/wives and daughters in danger” by “hindering the deportation of illegal migrants.”



headline, failing to indicate that the day was not an actual event (article 2 in table 1).

Across all ten articles and blog posts, the term "Vergewaltigungstag" (Rape Day) was used in quotation marks throughout the bodies of the texts to indicate that they were referring to a hoax rather than an established concept. However, the two articles published by tabloid outlets B.Z. and Bild, both written by the same author, sensationalise the trend without providing proper context. Two outputs (articles 2 and 4 in table 1) also falsely represented the senator's letter as an admission of political failure.

This inability to thoroughly debunk the hoax from the start reflects ongoing sensationalism in reporting on sexual violence. Multiple studies highlight that media has a tendency to spread "rape myths." Experts have also noted that journalists disproportionately report on high-profile and controversial cases of sexual violence, while underreporting everyday incidents or treating them superficially. Although rape is a pervasive issue that requires continuous attention, the 'Rape Day' hoax coverage by far-right blogs and conservative media perfectly exemplifies the stark contrast between sensationalistic reporting and minimal, inadequate coverage of everyday cases of sexual violence. This distorts the public's understanding of rape with the potential for more harmful myths surrounding sexual violence to prevail.

The 'Rape Day' hoax seems to have been successfully exploited by "alternative" and far-right media blogs, as well as conservative outlets, whose articles received the highest levels of engagement. Multiple articles and blog posts echoed myths about sexual violence such as the 'stranger danger' narrative. According to this myth, most victims of rape are attacked by strangers, which is inconsistent with the reality of sexual violence: statistics show that in 80 per cent of cases, attackers are people known to victims. However, improper coverage and false narratives as the 'Rape Day' trend perpetuate the portrayal of unknown men as the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse.

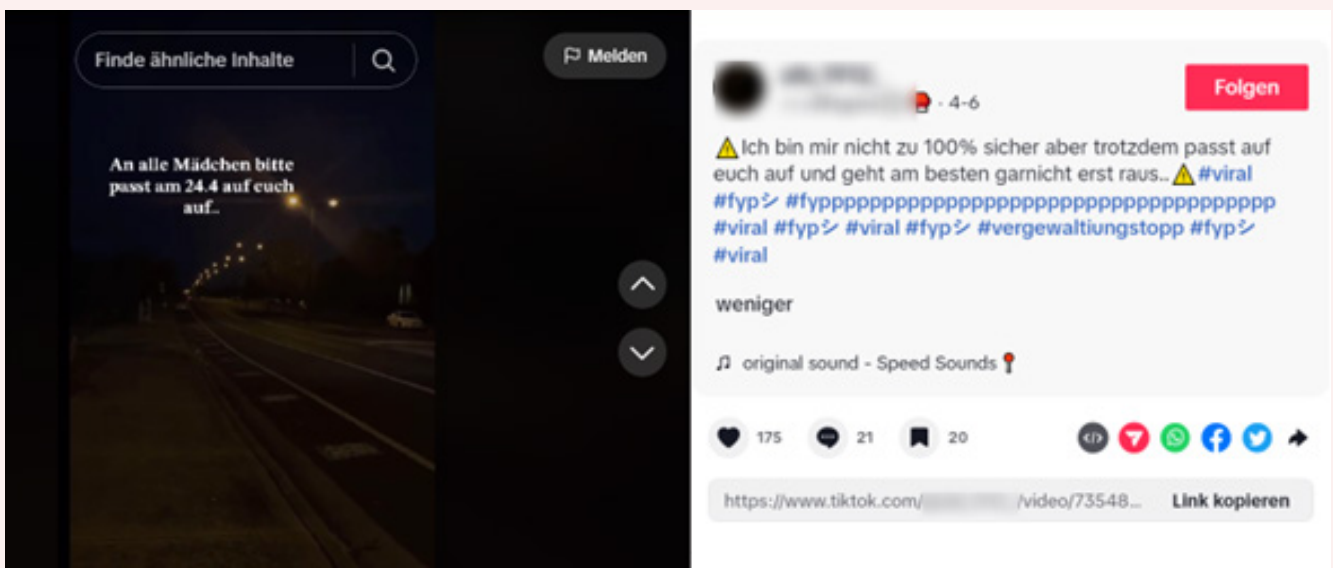
The hoax was also instrumentalised by some users to blame illegal migration. ISD analysis of Brandwatch data showed that several far-right accounts falsely claimed that 'Rape Day' reflected the "influence of illegal migration, which endangered Germany's national security" (figure 7 and 8). Notably, some of these posts and articles use the dehumanising term "Freiwild" (fair game) to refer to women in response to the idea that they are being targeted as part of 'National Rape Day'. White, European women are portrayed as perpetual victims in need of protection while racialized minorities and immigrants are cast as inherently threatening. This shows the intersectional nature of gendered disinformation and how disinformation can be exploited to advance a particular agenda or mission.

## Online Hoax & Real-World Harms

Even though no credible threats of sexual assault linked to the false trend were detected, ISD observed evidence of real-world harm caused by malicious online trolling and widespread uncritical sharing of the hoax. These harms stem from a lack of comprehensive reporting of the hoax, sensationalism and the political agendas of outlets. Women, transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer individuals face heightened vulnerability, as these groups are four times more likely to experience sexual assault compared to men. Research on women has shown that the fear of sexual violence oftentimes restricts their freedom and occupational opportunities, and affects their wellbeing.

In the case of the 'Rape Day' hoax, ISD analysts identified general expressions of fear and anxiety prior to 24 April. They also found reports of users staying home during the day out of fear and content compelling women to stay indoors, showcasing restriction of movement (Figure 9). In addition, people with a history of sexual trauma can be triggered by things that remind them of their sexual abuse. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the 'Rape Day' hoax may have amplified these people's fears and anxieties if they were exposed to it. In addition, ISD found that the perpetuation of harmful and persistent myths around sexual assault, such as the 'stranger danger' narrative outlined above, neglects the realities of sexual violence.

The 'Rape Day' hoax is a clear example of how gendered disinformation can lead to women, transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people feeling psychological distress, anxiety and fear. These experiences influence and restrict their offline behaviour and movement, which speaks to the wider set of harms falling under online gender-based violence and the complex relationship between physical violence and psychological harm. They also make social media platforms less equitable spaces for women, transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people.



**Figure 9.** Content in German warning women and girls to not go out on 24 April.



## Good Intentions and Unintended Consequences

The resurgence of the 'National Rape Day' hoax has exposed significant gaps in TikTok's content moderation strategy and its ability to effectively contain the spread of gendered mis- and disinformation. A prior report in this series found that TikTok blocks the term "rape" from its search function, which restricts reproductive health and sex education content, as well as victims and survivors in discussing their experiences freely. By contrast, searches for the term 'National Rape Day' were neither blocked nor moderated consistently. Inconsistencies were also observed regarding spelling alternatives to the blocked hashtag "#April24", which played a crucial role in the spread of misleading information. Searches for this trend failed to trigger any labels, warning messages or promotion of content that debunks and mitigates the spread of this hoax. TikTok's inability to tackle this hoax reflects a wider trend, where social media platforms consistently overlook and inadequately moderate the harms that disproportionately cause harm to women and girls as well as transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people.

Beyond TikTok, blogs and media also played a crucial role in the spread of the hoax. When comparing the evolution of the 'Rape Day' hoax in Germany with its trajectory in English-speaking contexts, a clear pattern emerged: in Germany, government warnings and media attention triggered spikes in the spread of the hoax online; in contrast, in the Anglosphere, the hoax first gained momentum on social media before being amplified by media and law enforcement. This suggests that German politicians and media failed to learn from previous experiences in the US and the UK and further failed to adequately address the spread of misinformation.

This is not an isolated incident: from COVID-19 to elections around the world, experts have identified that media can play an important role in amplifying disinformation. This can sometimes even mean bringing fringe beliefs into the mainstream – particularly in relation to "alternative" media and blogs. Reporting on gendered disinformation and sexual crimes is even more complex: the 'Rape Day' hoax is yet another example in which media outlets promoted inflammatory rather than nuanced reporting on sexual violence.

Building on this, ISD found that reporting on the 'National Rape Day' hoax contrasted with established guidelines for reporting on gender-based and sexual violence,

which highlight the importance of responsible, fact-based and ethical reporting. These guidelines urge media to avoid sensationalism, clearly differentiate between facts and misinformation, and ensure the use of accurate and neutral language. This was largely lacking in German media, where far-right outlets were able to co-opt the narrative for their own benefit; other articles also failed to make clear from the start that the story was a hoax.

This underscores a broader conclusion: there remains a significant educational gap in effectively moderating and reporting disinformation and hate speech, particularly when it takes on a gendered dimension (OGBV). As this investigation has revealed, addressing this gap requires greater commitment and coordinated action from stakeholders across the industry.



## Conclusion & Recommendations

Four years after first going viral, the 'National Day Rape' hoax has continued to reach a wide audience, including younger users on platforms such as TikTok. The content analysed revealed how the hoax incited fear, how targeted groups experienced emotional and psychological stress as a direct consequence of the hoax, and as such, how this constitutes the wider harms that OGBV may bring with it beyond physical violence.

This briefing demonstrates how key actors, from social media platforms to governments and media may improve their actions in future with the following recommendations:

### TikTok

To improve their moderation strategies when dealing with OGBV and gendered disinformation TikTok should:

- **Strengthen content moderation policies to address gendered disinformation and OGBV.** TikTok should update its policies to encompass the full range of OGBV harms and the variety of online content that perpetuates these issues, enabling a more effective response.
- **Invest in the empowerment of women, girls, transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people by offering accessible and comprehensive reporting mechanisms** that address the full spectrum of OGBV harms, including gendered hate speech, misinformation/disinformation, harassment and other forms of abuse.

### Governments and law enforcement

To avoid similar scenarios in future, governments and law enforcement should:

- **Provide training for politicians and their communication teams, particularly at the local and municipal levels,** on effective communication strategies for addressing gendered disinformation campaigns and OGBV. This can help prevent officials from unintentionally reinforcing harmful narratives.
- **Collaborate with traditional media regulators, such as the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in the UK and the state media authorities (Landesmedienanstalten) in Germany,** to develop guidelines for reporting on gender-based

violence and gendered disinformation. Ensure accountability mechanisms are in place for media outlets that fail to adhere to these standards.

- **Expand digital literacy training to equip schools, educators, public authorities and journalists** with the skills needed to critically assess and report on disinformation, with particular emphasis on gendered disinformation.

### Media

To live up to its own standards of factual reporting, media organisations should:

- **Provide specialised trainings for journalists on recognising gendered disinformation and OGBV.** These should focus on reporting such issues in a victim-centred, trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, accurate and factual way that avoids amplifying disinformation.
- **Offer comprehensive and solution-oriented coverage** that adequately captures gender-based violence. By collaborating with experts, journalists can properly contextualise isolated abuse cases as part of larger public health and security issues, addressing the systemic issues that foster gender-based violence.



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