



# Crushing Comments: Gendered Harassment During the 2024 EU Parliament Elections on TikTok

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Content Warning: This report contains mentions and examples of hateful content which some readers may find distressing.



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## Overview

In an analysis of comments made under TikTok videos published by French, German and Hungarian candidates for the 2024 European Parliament election, ISD found that women candidates received substantially more hateful, defamatory, and derogatory or discriminatory comments than their male counterparts. This builds on ISD's previous work which found that women candidates in the 2020 US election were especially at risk from abusive content online.

Harmful comments on TikTok largely followed common misogynistic tropes and tactics. These include disproportionately objectifying and demeaning women candidates regarding their ability, age, appearance, and gender expression or gender identity. One key strategy was the repeated and deliberate misgendering of women candidates perceived as gender nonconforming. Another was to scrutinise their abilities based on gendered double standards.

This disproportionate exposure to harmful speech forces women candidates to expend additional resources to safeguard their physical and mental well-being. This can lead to self-censorship, restricting women's freedom of expression and their participation in political discourse.

Our findings highlight that the persistence of normalised misogynistic language on social media platforms constitutes a significant systemic barrier to participation in political spaces. The analysis concludes with recommendations for TikTok to enhance its safeguards through a gender-sensitive lens.

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.

We would like to express our gratitude to Eva F Hevesi and Pauline Zaragoza for their contributions to this report.

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## Key Findings

- ISD found that women candidates for the 2024 European Parliament election received over 80 percent more harmful TikTok comments than their male counterparts across all geographies. This included explicit cases of hateful and defamatory speech.
- Just over 16 percent of all comments were derogatory and/or discriminatory in nature. This shows how users exploit TikTok to reproduce and reinforce widely prevalent racist, sexist and misogynistic stereotypes and beliefs. As a result, normalised misogynistic language constitutes a significant systemic barrier in political spaces including on TikTok.
- Compared to male candidates, women were disproportionately objectified and harassed based on their appearance, age, ability, and their gender expression and identity. Commentators scrutinised women's abilities based on gendered double standards, and deliberately and repeatedly misgendered women candidates to invalidate them.
- Among 296 leading candidates for the EU Parliamentary elections in France, Germany and Hungary, 102 candidates who maintained TikTok accounts, 45 women candidates and 57 male candidates, were identified. ISD collected 326,826 comments made under content published by them and analysed a representative random sample of 9,000 comments.
- The data shows that gender-based harm directed at women candidates also regularly appeared on male candidates' channels; in some cases, male candidates actively contributed in the spread of misogynistic hate. This was particularly evident in Hungary and France where around 15 percent of harmful comments were not directed at the male channel owners themselves but other women candidates. In contrast, fewer than 3 percent of harmful comments were not directed at woman channel owners but other male candidates.

# 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”. Gender identity refers to “an individual’s internal, innate sense of their own gender”. Their gender expression refers to how individuals present their gender through appearance and behaviour, incorporating elements of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny that influence others’ perceptions of their gender. For this analysis, candidates who did not explicitly express their gender identity are further referred to as women candidates or male candidates depending on whether they presented more feminine or masculine in their content.

## 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, especially transgender and gender-diverse persons, experience disproportionate rates of GBV.

## Gender minoritised individuals

This term refers to individuals with a gender identity that differs from that commonly associated with their sex assigned at birth. This includes but is not limited to intersex, transgender, agender, non-binary and genderqueer people.

## 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”.

## Harmful speech

In this report, harmful speech encompasses three categories of content: derogatory speech and/or discriminatory speech, defamatory speech and hate speech. All three are outlined below. It is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive and often overlap.

## Hate speech

Targeted hate speech is speech which seeks to dehumanise, demonise, harass, threaten or incite violence against an individual or community based on religion, ethnicity, ‘race’, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, national origin or migrant status.

## Derogatory and/or discriminatory speech

Derogatory speech refers to speech that causes emotional distress without reaching the threshold for legal action. Discriminatory speech promotes or supports unequal treatment based on personal characteristics, is often tied to institutional inequality, and can perpetuate practices that reinforce systemic discrimination.

## Defamatory speech

Potentially libellous statements published to deliberately damage an individual’s or group’s reputation. It is used in this report without implying a legal assessment in either of the three jurisdictions discussed here.



# Introduction

Despite the European Union's commitment to achieving gender balance in political representation and participation, structural and societal barriers continue to hinder women and genderqueer people from reaching equity. Harassment, threats and abuse both in person and online are often considered "the cost of doing politics".

A 2018 survey among women in European national parliaments confirms this, with a number of striking statistics:

- 58 percent of respondents reported that they had been the target of online sexist attacks on social media,
- 85 percent of women MPs said that they had suffered psychological violence in the course of their term of office,
- 33 percent of women parliamentarians felt that the violence they had been subjected to had affected their freedom of expression negatively,
- 21 percent did not want to pursue another term in office.

Misogynistic online discourse has a significant 'chilling effect' on political participation. This barrier exists across the globe and on all major social media platforms, as seen for example in the context of the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, the 2022 US midterms and the 2024 South Africa elections. While TikTok is a vital space for political expression, especially among youth, there is little research on how the platform is exploited to disseminate hate directed toward political candidates.

This briefing is designed to address this gap. It examines harmful TikTok content targeting French, Hungarian and German candidates during the four weeks leading up to the 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections on 9 June 2024. The analysis indicates that women candidates received a disproportionate number of derogatory or discriminatory, defamatory and hateful comments. Commentators largely relied on common misogynistic tropes and tactics such as the objectification of women, the reinforcement of sexist double standards and gender norms. These findings underscore the urgent need for systemic measures to improve equity in the online safeguarding of election candidates.

## Methodology

This analysis is based on comments made under TikTok content published by French, German and Hungarian

candidates around the 2024 EU parliamentary election. To produce the dataset, ISD analysts identified the 10 leading candidates for all French, German and Hungarian parties holding seats in the European Parliament in May 2024. For Germany's Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the leading candidates from each of their 16 state lists were included. The leading candidates of three parties who held no seats in parliament at the time but were judged to have significant political importance were also listed: the Hungarian Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA), the German Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) and the French Communist Party (PCF).

Based on the resulting list of 296 candidates from 29 parties, we identified 111 with TikTok channels. Between 15 July and 19 July 2024, ISD collected all first level comments (i.e. those written in direct response to the videos rather than to other comments) made under videos published by these channels between 9 May and 9 June 2024. Nine candidates did not publish content during this timeframe.

In total, 326,826 comments were collected from 1,448 videos published by 102 candidates. Of these, 45 were women candidates and 57 male candidates.

Two annotators per language (French, German and Hungarian) analysed a randomised sample of 3,000 comments each. This resulted in a dataset of 9,000 comments across 873 videos by 74 candidates. Comments were annotated as harmful if they contained derogatory and/or discriminatory speech, defamatory speech, or hate speech. All other comments, including non-hateful comments, conspiracist content and disinformation, were labelled "other/not harmful". For harmful comments, annotators also identified relevant attributes or characteristics that were targeted. These included but were not limited to (dis-)ability, age, 'race' and ethnicity, sexual orientation, appearance, and gender expression and/or identity. Annotations were not mutually exclusive, meaning comments targeting multiple characteristics or attributes were assigned multiple labels. Mismatches between annotators were resolved bilaterally. Harmful comments were also coded according to whether they were directed at the channel owner, other male or women candidates or third-party individuals or groups. As the sample was representative of the underlying dataset we will refer to percentages throughout the rest of this report.

## Harmful speech

Across all geographies, 13.6 percent of total comments made under content posted by male candidates included derogatory and/or discriminatory, defamatory or hate speech; for women, it was 24.5 percent, 80 percent higher. This finding corroborates previous research from the US political context which also found that women candidates are at higher risk of online abuse.

### Derogatory and/or discriminatory speech

Derogatory and/or discriminatory comments were identified significantly more often than instances of hate speech and defamatory speech, accounting for a total of 16.2 percent of comments; however, a fifth of these were also labelled as hateful and/or defamatory. Derogatory and discriminatory speech, even when legal, can have the same or similar impact as hateful or defamatory speech on those affected.

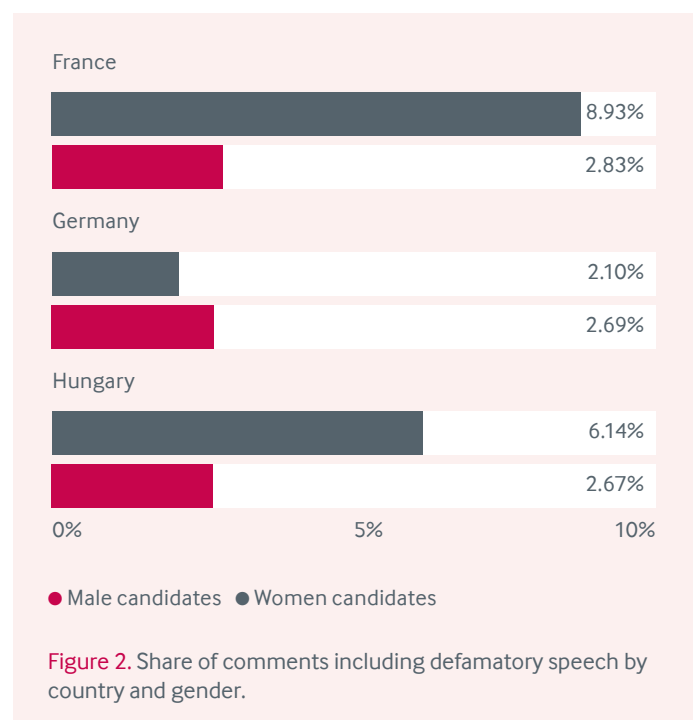
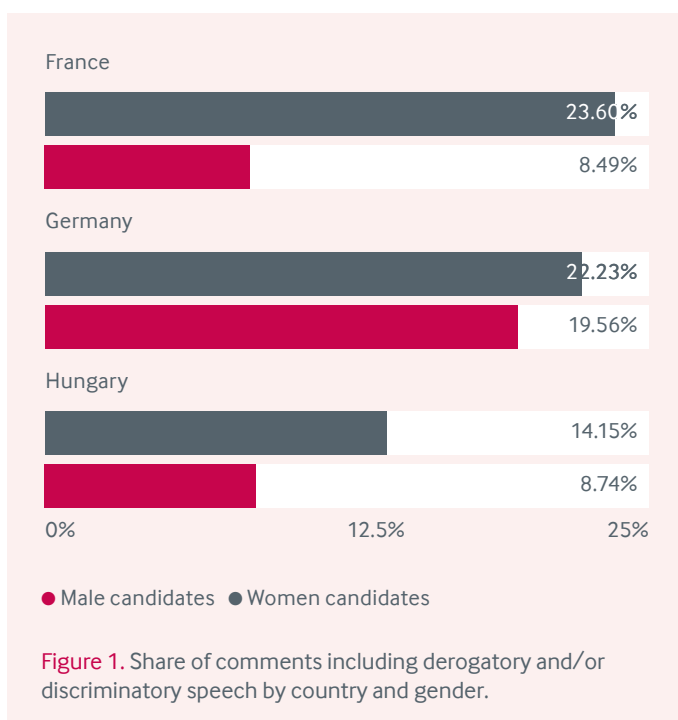
Some comments included explicit insults (e.g. “parasite”, “vermin”, “shithead”). These were sometimes personalised using characteristics related to specific candidates (e.g. “disgusting aunt”, “[this candidate is] a cancer, a brain tumor”). Additionally, ISD found the use of belittling language (e.g. “she’s a perfect little girl”, “ciao, ciao, bambina...”), racist remarks, and offensive stereotypes (e.g. “quota woman”, “I want you to resign and work as kitchen help!!!”).

In all three geographies, male candidates saw significantly less derogatory and/or discriminatory speech than their women counterparts. Comments targeting male candidates were mostly focused on perceived inexperience or privilege (e.g. “educational deadbeat”, “daddy’s little boy”). By contrast, women candidates faced attacks that were explicitly gendered. These included the use of misogynistic slurs to question their abilities, infantilisation (e.g. “poor little girl”, “go take a nappy-nap”) and accusations of being ‘hysterical’ (e.g. “you could see on her head that she was on the verge of a hysteria attack”), a term rooted in misogynistic stereotypes.

### Defamatory speech

Defamatory comments accounted for around four percent of all comments analysed and included a broad range of false accusations. These included claims of corruption (“you gave up your principle for Peti”, “Soros mercenary”), paedophilia, involvement in human trafficking, and other criminal activities (“pseudo drug dealer”).

Commentators frequently and repeatedly attacked candidates’ characters, for example by accusing them of lying. Defamatory remarks can have a marked impact due to the ‘illusory truth effect,’ by which “repeated





information is often perceived as more truthful than new information”. Consequently, when such content is left unaddressed, candidates’ reputations may be damaged with serious long-term consequences.

In Germany, defamatory remarks were slightly more commonly focused on male candidates. A qualitative assessment indicated that this was mainly due to the high volume of defamatory comments directed at candidates running for Alliance 90/The Greens (Greens), a party that is subject to general disdain among populist and far-right actors who label them as “public enemy No.1”. In France and Hungary, women candidates were targeted by defamatory speech more frequently than male candidates by large margins. Despite this disproportionate distribution, the nature of the defamatory attacks they endured was not particularly gendered in either language.

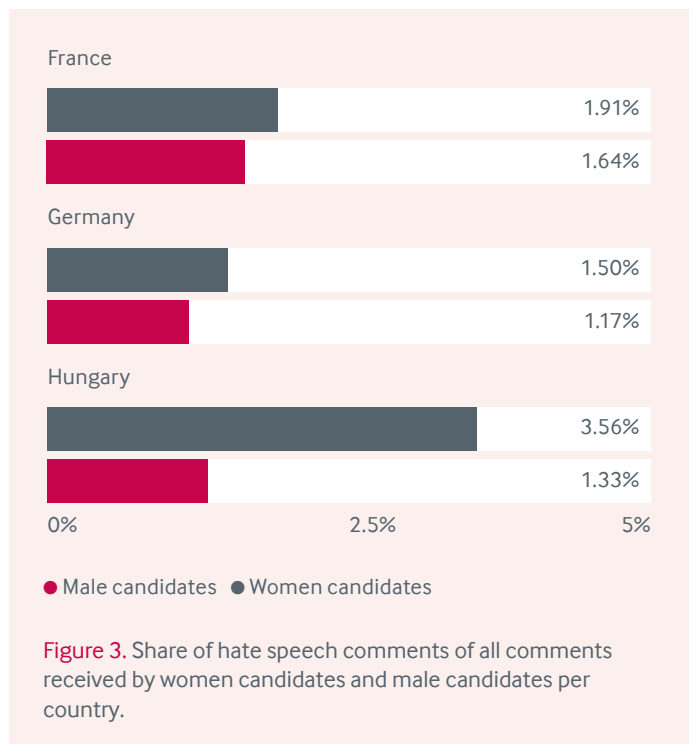
Political affiliation appeared to be a major factor influencing the volume of defamatory comments. Candidates from parties considered left-leaning, like the French France Unbowed (LFI), the German Greens and the Hungarian DK–MSZP–Dialogue Party Alliance received substantially more defamatory comments than candidates from other parties. These comments included statements such as “the Greens are corrupt” and “what’s it like to be in a party of paedophiles?”. Broader accusations often stemmed from these affiliations, alleging for example that the EU is “corrupt” and accusing politicians of “treason”.

This emphasis on candidates’ party or institutional affiliations meant that defamatory comments were generally less centred on aspects such as gender, appearance or cultural background, in contrast to hateful or derogatory and discriminatory comments.

### Hate speech

Although a total of 1.78 percent of comments were classified as hate speech, there were significant differences between countries. In Germany and France, women and male candidates received close to equal amounts of hate speech; by contrast, women candidates in Hungary experienced hate speech almost three times more often than male candidates.

Commentators who published hateful comments under candidates’ videos reinforced exclusionary ideologies, which can foster feelings of fear, hostility and insecurity. They dehumanised woman candidates by using gendered insults and likening them to animals. Further examples of targeted harassment included racist remarks similar to the discriminatory slur ‘go back to



where you came from’ (e.g. “go back to Asia/Ukraine/ the savanna!”) and hateful antisemitic and nationalist slogans (“Germany for Germans”). ISD also observed incitements to violence that referenced the Holocaust or detention camps such as Guantánamo Bay, direct threats of violence, explicit calls for candidates’ deaths and other attempts at intimidation (“jump into the septic tank”, “you are dead”, “let’s make sure he doesn’t accidentally suffer an accident”).

Commentators degraded women candidates by repeatedly and deliberately misgendering them, especially if they perceived that their gender expression did not conform with concepts stereotypically considered ‘feminine’.

ISD also observed cases of sexual harassment and frequent use of gendered and sexualised slurs (e.g. “witches worthy of burning down”). This included repeated suggestions of sex work as a potential source of income to women candidates.

## Themes

Independent of the type of harmful speech, the proliferation of these comments in online spaces fosters a hostile digital environment with implications for democratic principles and political representation. Candidates who are subjected to online harms often resort to self-censorship, withdraw from public social media platforms, or even abandon their political careers. This not only silences individual voices but also deters women and gender minoritised individuals from entering politics, reinforcing existing barriers to diverse political participation.

Building on these concerns, analysts examined how harmful comments under TikTok videos targeted specific personal traits or characteristics and how these attacks were distributed across genders. By assessing these patterns, we can better understand the ways online hostility reinforces systemic barriers in political participation.

### Gender identity and expression

A total of 13.9 percent of all harmful comments analysed were based on their targets' gender identity, gender expression or other conceptualisations of gender. Of these, 92.5 percent targeted women candidates, 2.1 percent at male candidates and 5.4 percent at other groups or individuals. Overall, these comments reflected classic misogynistic practices, such as (sexual) objectification and the use of specific slurs to express hateful and derogatory sentiments towards women in positions of power. Some comments also explicitly targeted trans, non-binary and genderqueer individuals (e.g. "vote for the RN, and at least France will be led by real men and real women").

Commentators repeatedly and deliberately misgendered women candidates using male or gender-neutral names and pronouns. In Germany, two candidates were frequently harassed using male or neutral pronouns or names. This included questioning their gender identities (e.g. "transitioned? 🤔") or dehumanising comments ("what is that?"). Commentators also alluded to the candidates being secretly transgender by referencing the deadname of a popular German transgender politician. In Hungary, users referenced the male comic strip character Aladár to misgender and belittle a candidate based on an alleged similarity of hairstyles. In France, ISD also found misgendering using masculine adjectives and pronouns.

### Harmful comments based on gender identity and expression

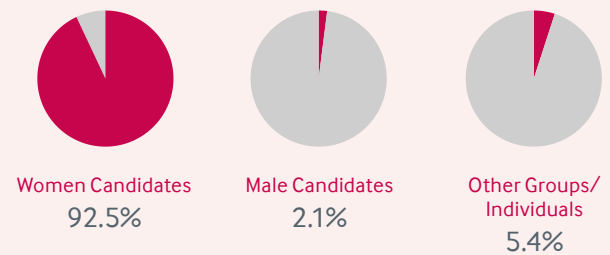


Figure 4. The share of harmful comments based on gender identity and expression that targeted women candidates, male candidates, or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

### Harmful comments based on ability

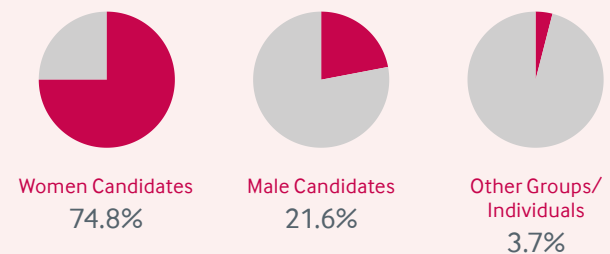


Figure 5. The share of harmful comments based on ability that targeted women candidates, male candidates or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

ISD also observed the frequent use of gendered and sexualised slurs, including cases of sexual harassment (e.g. "great tits", "you dirty whore"). This further included suggestions for candidates to engage in pornographic activity or sex work. Candidates were sexualised even while engaged in mundane activities such as riding a bicycle. In some cases, ISD found overt calls to violence including specific threats to invade a candidate's home to harm them.

Few gendered harmful comments targeted male candidates, all of which were also rooted in misogyny (e.g. "bitch"). As shown here, misogyny and sexism primarily affect women and genderqueer people but also impact cisgender men who are perceived to deviate from patriarchal norms.

### Ability, appearance, and age

A closer look at comments on a candidate's perceived ability, appearance, or age uncovers the gendered double standards contained in some of the criticism. While taken individually, some of these comments may be read as mean-spirited but not necessarily harmful. However, the volume of comments targeting women candidates compared to their male counterparts suggests a pervasive gender bias.

20.4 percent of all harmful comments alleged a lack of a candidate's ability. Of these, 74.8 percent were targeted at women candidates, 21.6 percent at male candidates and 3.7 percent at other groups and individuals. Evaluating a politicians' competence is a legitimate and important aspect of democratic discourse; however, this data points to a gendered double standard faced by women candidates, particularly regarding their mannerisms and professional backgrounds. The label 'ability' was not given to comments that voiced constructive criticism but was limited to those that were belittling, demeaning or objectifying in nature.

For example, comments frequently referred to women candidates as "actresses" or implied they lack the substance and knowledge required for serious political work (e.g. "all she can do is be blond and present wine", "reading off, that's all she can do").

A total of 9.4 percent of all harmful comments attacked candidates based on their appearance. Of these, 94.4 percent were targeted at women candidates, 2.5 percent at male candidates and 3.1 percent at other groups and individuals. This demonstrates how women politicians continue to be objectified and judged on the basis of superficial elements including appearance. These comments explicitly or implicitly suggest that a woman candidate's failure to meet supposed standards of beauty renders them unfit for office.

Commentators focused on candidates' hairstyle, body shape, clothing and mannerisms, referencing sexist, racialised and idealised beauty standards. For example, one woman candidate was frequently disparaged as "dirty" and dehumanised through comparisons with specific dog breeds with comments referencing her curly hair, skin, and overall appearance. Another woman candidate was frequently told to apply makeup or style her hair to fix her "shocking" appearance.

Many derogatory comments also referenced a candidates' looks to mock, sexualise and discredit them. Some labels used to describe candidates included dehumanising terms such as "creature" or "freak of

### Harmful comments based on appearance

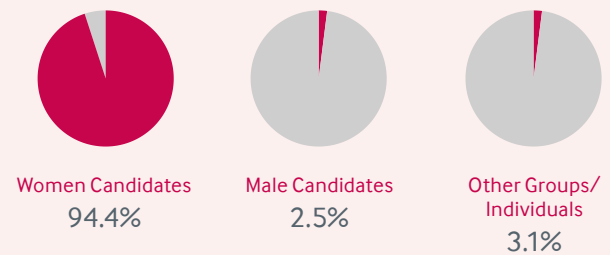


Figure 6. The share of harmful comments based on appearance that targeted women candidates, male candidates, or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

### Harmful comments based on age

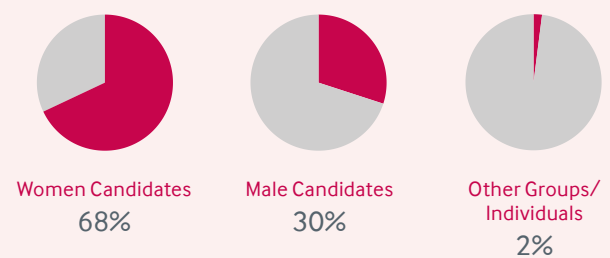


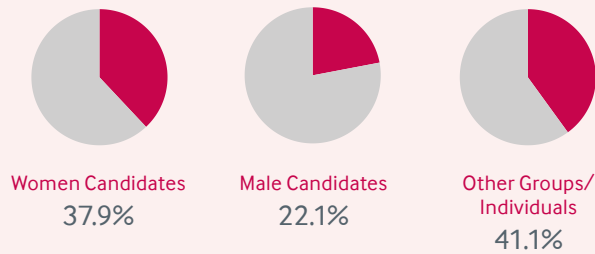
Figure 7. The share of harmful comments based on age that targeted women candidates, male candidates, or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

nature". Comments targeting male candidates were focused on facial features and expressions (e.g. "He has funny nostrils", "what a grin") and did not tend to dehumanise candidates in the same way as those targeted at women.

A total of 2.9 percent of all harmful comments targeted candidates for their age, frequently linking it to their ability. Of these, 68 percent were targeted at women candidates, 30 percent at male candidates and 2 percent at other groups and individuals.

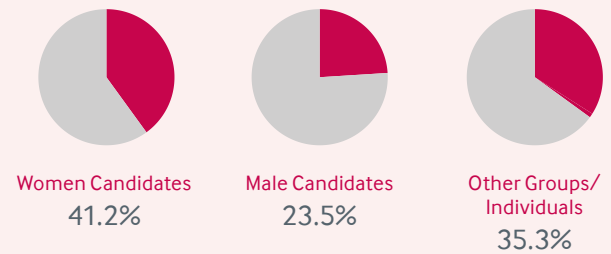
Multiple comments mocked and/or infantilised younger candidates and their supporters (e.g. "where's your snack, kid? 🍌", "she's such a child!!!", "is school over?"). Other comments alleged that younger candidates lacked education, worked insufficiently hard or failed to pay taxes. Ageism is by some considered a particularly socially acceptable prejudice and is often compounded by other forms of discrimination. For example, middle-aged or elderly women candidates were frequently

### Harmful comments based on 'race' and ethnicity



**Figure 8.** The share of harmful comments based on 'race' and ethnicity that targeted women candidates, male candidates or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

### Harmful comments based on sexual orientation



**Figure 9.** The share of harmful comments based on sexual orientation that targeted women candidates, male candidates or other groups and individuals (including non-candidates).

belittled using gendered terms such as “grandmas” or “war grannies”, which reflect the stigmata perimenopausal or menopausal women in politics experience.

#### 'Race' and ethnicity

A total of 5.6 percent of all harmful comments was based on their targets' cultural background or their history of migration (concepts of 'race' and ethnicity).

Of these, 37.9 percent targeted women candidates, 22.1 percent targeted male candidates, and 41.1 percent targeted other groups and individuals. Compared to other targeted traits and characteristics, gender played a less prominent role in these comments, partly due to a lack of representation: very few candidates running for the European Parliament in France, Germany and Hungary came from a migrant background or were otherwise subject to being racialised. Even fewer held one of the top ten spots on their party list and maintained a TikTok account. Consequently, commentators were found to use racist language mostly to attack groups rather than target individual candidates. Nevertheless, racist comments were directed at women candidates much more often than at male candidates.

Commentators attacked racialised candidates based on their history of migration or their family backgrounds (“she’s a hateful friend of the Syrian dictator.”, “and this is how the infiltration of Islam into the administration starts.”, “he looks at the monkeys 🐒 in the television for fear of seeing them face to face”). This also included denying candidates their right to citizenship and/or residence by urging them to ‘return’ to ‘their places of origin’.

ISD frequently observed commentators equating immigrants with criminality through racialised portrayals

and references, with a focus on people with Muslim, Arab or Turkish backgrounds. This included generalised allegations equating immigrants with “criminals”, assertions that they would “stab and beat up” others, and claims that they would “despise Christians, Jews, Homosexuals and Women”. Other commentators even called for “ethnic cleansing” and deportation measures, warned of impending civil war and suggested that if far-right candidatures failed, supporters should resort to violence.

A small number of harmful comments targeted queer people for their sexuality (1.2 percent). These included violent fantasies against gay men (e.g. “the rainbow boys can go to war”) and calls for the marginalisation of non-heteronormative relationships (e.g. “after all, what belongs within the four walls is still not for the streets, the news, and billboards”). The comparatively small number of comments falling under this label is likely influenced by the fact that very few candidates openly identified with a label other than heterosexual.

## Male candidates' channels

Male candidates' channels appear to have served as a platform for all three types of harmful speech (hate speech, defamatory speech and derogatory and/or discriminatory speech), with a large proportion of harmful comments directed at people other than the channel owner.

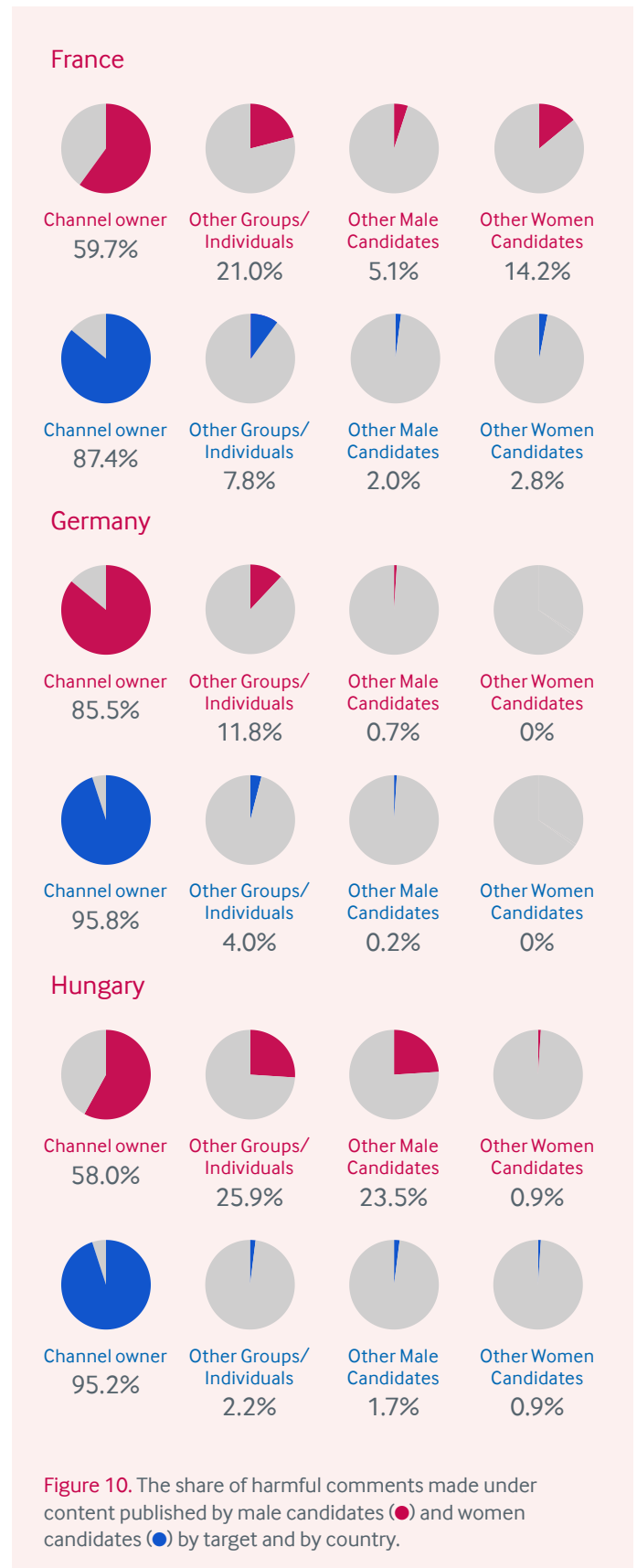
A disproportionate share of these comments was directed at women candidates, especially in Hungary and France, where 14.2 percent and 15.2 percent of harmful comments under male candidates' videos, respectively, were directed at other women candidates. This suggests that the comment sections under male candidates' TikTok videos played a significant role in platforming gendered harm, including gendered hate.

At least in part, the incitements against other (women) candidates stem from male candidates themselves.

In one video, a Hungarian far-right candidate insinuates that two women candidates running for other parties were lying and unfit for office (see figure 11). Users amplified these sentiments through comments using derogatory, defamatory, and hateful expressions (e.g. "They will do anything for a little ass-kissing, they will undermine anything, even at the expense of their own people", "disgusting bastards" and "she grins like a total idiot").

Another video features a news clip of a French far-right candidate targeting a Black working-class woman and former National Assembly Member. The male candidate criticises both the woman politician and her party for their stance against the French police, accusing them of "marching alongside the Islamists". In the comment section, racist and classist remarks were used to mock her cognitive and linguistic abilities (e.g. "she's illiterate") and to demean her background as a working-class foreign-born French citizen (e.g. "she should return to her savanna", "she should return to her broom").

**Figure 11.** Video showing Hungarian right-wing candidate's video with the title and caption "They [women candidates] lie, and they've lost their minds" (left); video showing a French far-right politician addressing his speech towards a former LFI woman politician (right).





## Conclusions and recommendations

This analysis identified a complex web of harmful content and behaviour that disproportionately affect women candidates. Not only were they more often targeted by hateful, defamatory and discriminatory or derogatory speech than male candidates; some male candidates also played a role in directing and platforming hate towards them. Ability, appearance and age were also used as proxies for gender, with women candidates disproportionately belittled based on these characteristics. Such comments reproduced and reinforced wide-spread sexist stereotypes and racist beliefs, contributing to maintaining patriarchal norms in politics.

The findings further corroborate that harassment aimed at women candidates often takes a gendered form — in its motives as well as its outcomes. Addressing these gendered dynamics requires a comprehensive set of measures that mitigate harm whilst at the same time tackling the multifaceted root causes of OGBV.

Normalised misogynistic language, which is often dismissed as minor or in “bad taste”, continues to constitute a significant systemic barrier in political spaces. This extends to social media platforms such as TikTok. A significant portion of comments which fell below ISD’s threshold for hate speech were derogatory or discriminatory in nature. Focusing on supposed objective factors like education provides a false sense of authority by which a comment can be framed and excused as ‘legitimate criticism’, which obfuscates the underlying misogyny it perpetuates.

The efficiency of this degradation in garnering support depends largely on its ability to connect to a baseline of deeply rooted “common-sense” misogyny in mainstream society. This demonstrates how the root causes of gender-based hate, misogyny, and other intersecting forms of identity-based hate and violence mirror a broader societal challenge that cannot be addressed or fixed by platforms alone. Consequently, tackling OGBV goes beyond digital regulation and requires a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach.

Despite TikTok’s pledge to “maximise the effectiveness” of their work in the context of the 2024 European Parliament election, gendered hate and harassment remained prevalent and disproportionately affected women candidates. ISD observed explicit cases of hate speech which the company failed to remove. Given the

time gap between the period of analysis and the time of data collection it is likely that more explicit comments were published and viewed than are accounted for here.

A key discursive strategy identified among hateful comments was the deliberate and repeated misgendering of women candidates who were perceived by commentators as nonconforming to their gender identity. Misgendering gender nonconforming individuals invalidates their gender identity and expression, which can negatively affect their mental health. Such penalisation of nonconformity has also been linked to physical violence and economic harms that affect transgender, non-binary and genderqueer people, as well as nonconforming heterosexual and cisgender individuals. TikTok should therefore expand its definition of misgendering, which is currently limited to prohibiting the use of a person’s “former name or gender”, to also consider misgendered individuals who identify with their gender and/or name assigned at birth. In addition, future research should consider multiple gender elements from a quantitative perspective, e.g. by including nonconformity as a data label alongside identity. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the role of gender in online harms.

The analysis also indicates that male candidates, particularly those running from far-right parties, platformed and in part incited harmful language during the 2024 European Parliamentary elections. Considering this, TikTok should work to close possible gaps in the enforcement of content and account restrictions, including those on Government, Politician, and Political Party Accounts (GPPPA). All candidates should also acknowledge the dynamics of online hate and harassment regardless of whether they are directly affected. They should develop appropriate coping and moderation strategies to ensure they do not perpetuate harmful language and stereotypes.

The toxic environment women candidates face online forces them to expend more resources and face a greater risk than their male counterparts. They often resort to self-censorship, withdrawal from public social media channels or even end their political career. The hostility of this environment also discourages other women, transgender men, non-binary and genderqueer individuals from entering politics, which undermines existing efforts to achieve equitable representation in European politics.



As a Very Large Online Platform (VLOP), TikTok is subject to several obligations under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA identifies gender-based violence (GBV) and negative impacts on electoral processes as systemic risks ([Article 34](#)). TikTok is required to identify, assess and demonstrate how it is mitigating these risks effectively.

To ensure it complies with the DSA, and to further mitigate the harms outlined in this report, TikTok should:

- **Address the spread of legal but harmful misogynistic content by moving beyond a strictly “content-based” approach to a broader “systems-based” framework for digital regulation.** We recommend that regulation is designed in a way that requires transparency from online platforms, and can compel them to demonstrate that their policies, processes and systems are designed and implemented with respect to the potential negative outcomes that could occur in relation to online harms. This might include requirements for algorithmic auditing, or data access for researchers and regulators to assess the effects of platform systems on harmful content and outcomes. This should prioritise user safety while upholding freedom of expression.
- **Apply a victim-survivor-centred Safety and Privacy by Design approach.** The development of user interfaces and tools should apply a gender- and trauma-informed lens throughout all stages. TikTok should adopt proactive measures that support user agency with tools that protect their privacy and reduce exposure to gendered harassment, reactive measures that allow efficient user reporting (where possible, across platforms) and accountability measures that deter and sanction perpetrators appropriately. The impact of these mechanisms should be included in the annual DSA transparency reporting and risk assessment.
- **Review content moderation policies, processes and systems to address election-related gendered harassment and hate speech.** TikTok should update moderation policies to more efficiently tackle veiled and coded harassment targeting women and gender minoritised candidates during elections, incorporating multilingual and culturally specific contexts and balance AI moderation with human oversight for nuanced handling. TikTok should further expand its community guidelines on misgendering to recognise and mitigate the effects of misgendering on individuals who identify with their gender and/or name assigned at birth.

- **Develop gender-disaggregated and standardised transparency reporting.** This would ensure that transparency reports enable researchers to track and analyse gendered harassment targeting political candidates and the enforcement of community guidelines over time. While Article 34 of the DSA lists GBV as a systemic risk, its current transparency templates do not require gender-disaggregated data. TikTok should address this gap by including gender inclusive, disaggregated statistics on community guideline violations, such as hate speech, which would enable intersectional analysis and support more effective mitigation of online harms during elections.
- **Act in a diligent, objective and proportionate manner in applying and enforcing the restrictions they outline in their terms and conditions in accordance with Article 14 of the DSA.** This also includes the enforcement of their [policies](#) for Government, Politician, and Political Party Accounts (GPPPA).

Further, candidates should:

- **Recognise the broader dynamics of online hate and harassment which affect women, gender-queer and non-binary candidates disproportionately, and act accordingly.** For example, candidates and their communication teams should prepare for possible online abuse by drafting appropriate response strategies. These should outline when to engage a platform's reporting mechanisms and/or law enforcement, and consider other resources that might be necessary for coping with such attacks (e.g. mental health professionals).
- **Foster a healthier discourse and reduce the risk of harm by developing and enforcing safekeeping strategies.** Candidates should assign clear roles and responsibilities, especially for large accounts managed by multiple people, and make use of the [content moderation tools](#) provided to creators by TikTok. Male candidates in particular should reflect on whether their content might amplify gendered hate.



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